

BORDER/LINES

CANADA'S MAGAZINE OF CULTURAL STUDIES
ISSUE NO. 32 1994 \$6.00



What Colour Is Your Underwear?
Midi Onodera on Queer Cinema
Avenging Homophobia

queer *Licks*





QUEER LICKS

This issue of *Border/Lines* emerged somewhere between the Queer Sites Conference held in Toronto in May 1993 and our own afternoon meetings over café au lait. From the start we experienced a tension between the rapid emergence of queer theory and research, albeit largely American based, and our own personal memories of political meetings and street demonstrations. There are only a handful a people doing queer studies in Canada, fewer still with the security of a university professorship. Queer Canadian writers have few places to publish and develop their ideas. At the same time, many queer activists have struggled to meet the challenges posed by severe economic hardship and the enduring AIDS crisis.

In this issue of *Border/Lines* we publish articles that take very different positions on issues of representation, subcultural styles, race and sexuality. We attempt to capture the spirit of cultural interventions made by lesbian and gays of colour who have challenged the dominance of white queer thought and organizational models. Indeed, the term 'queer' itself has become a site of contestation given its inferred white referent. Helen Lee's interview with Miki Onodera, karen/miranda augustine's meditations on lesbian smut, Courtney McFarlane's discussion of censorship and access to resources, and Vinita Srivastava on South Asian lesbian identities, all point to the efflorescence of such cultural practices. Other articles, such as those by Steven Maynard, Rachel Giese and Nicholas Packwood, bring into focus the current preoccupation with the politics of image production and consumption, both alternative and mainstream. We include poetry to convey our respect for this form of cultural expression as integral to the interrogation of identities and communities.

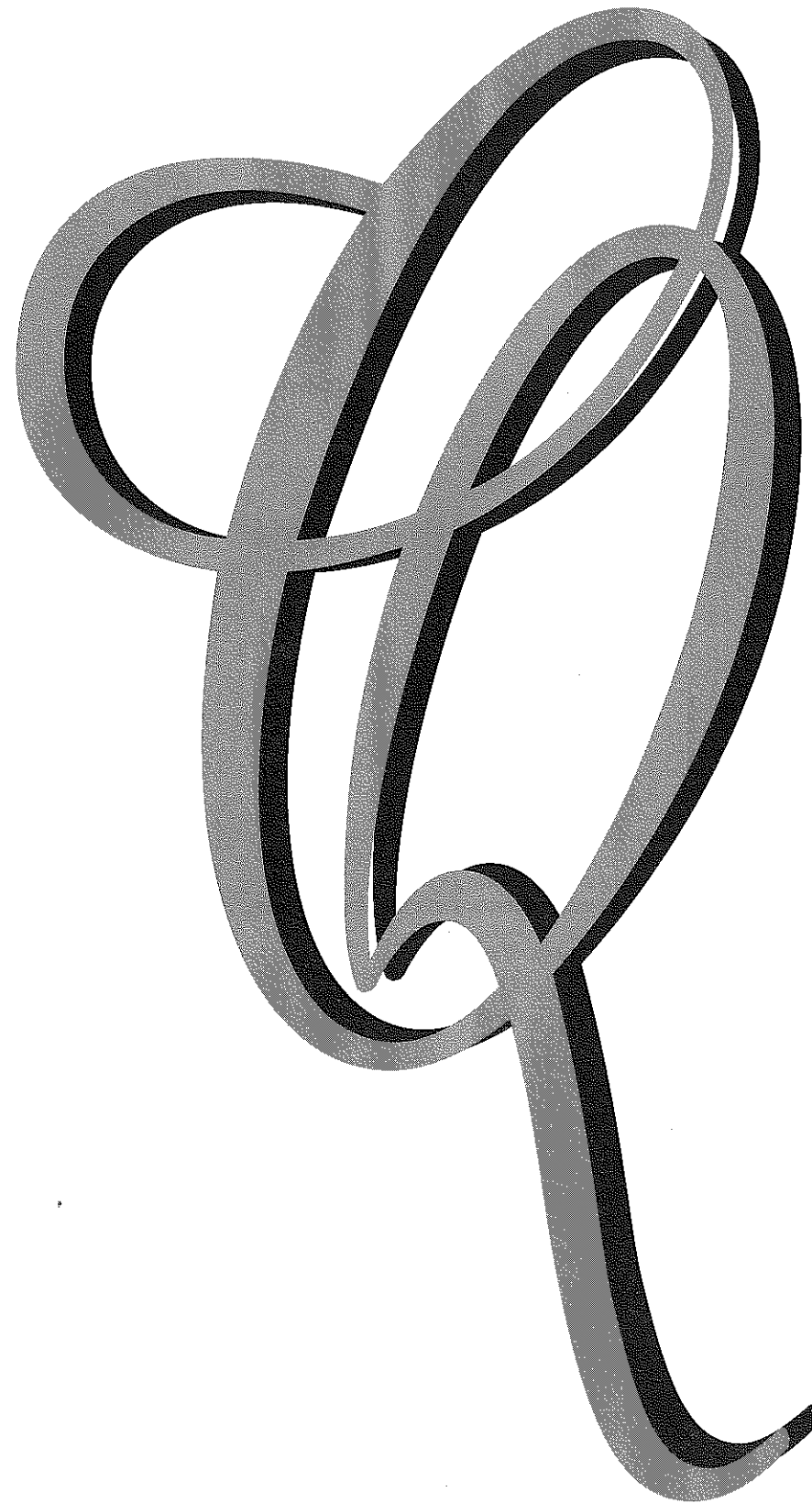
Many of our contributors bridge the gap between academic scholarship and grassroots organizing. Indeed, we believe the work represented here testifies to the productiveness of such nomadic positionings. As editors, we have solicited shorter, more immediate prose in recognition of the need for concise, useful and accessible writing from queer standpoints. Readers will not find a definitive or thematic framework in this issue. We have resisted imposing an overarching framework; in fact, we as editors have reservations about the political and conceptual closure that inevitably arises from such a practice.

Consequently, this issue is a veritable mélange; we hope it provides you with a delectable taste of queer culture.

The three of us would like to thank managing editor Julie Jenkinson for providing us with consistency and much appreciated guidance in the process of putting this all together.

Alison Hearn, Alan O'Connor, Becki Ross

On behalf of the Border/Lines collective, Alison and Alan would like to thank Becki Ross for joining us to edit this special issue. A busy teacher and tireless activist, her wide academic and political knowledge, amazing address book, sympathy and generosity of spirit are reflected in every page of this issue.



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Alison Hearn, Alan O'Connor,
Becki Ross

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Ellen Flanders



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Store Distribution:

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Editorial Address:

The Orient Building
183 Bathurst Street, Suite No. 301
Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5T 2R7
Telephone: (416) 360-5243
Fax: (416) 360-5412

Business Address:

Border/Lines
Bethune College
York University
4700 Keele Street
North York, Ontario
Canada M3J 1P3

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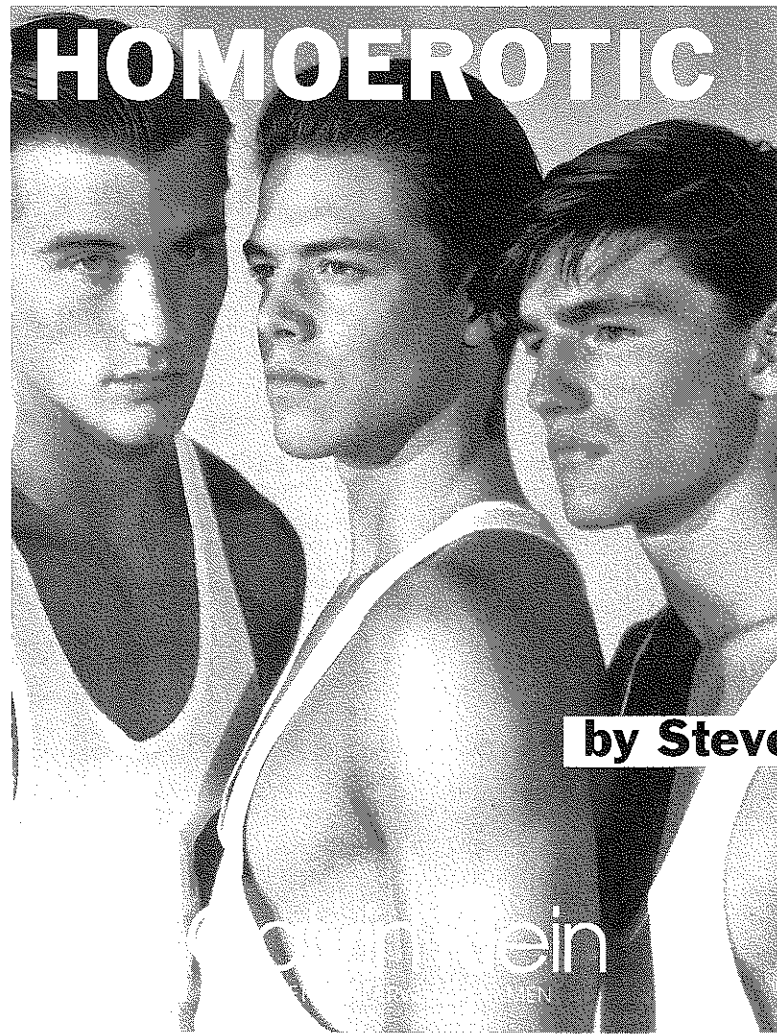
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what colour is your underwear?

Class, Whiteness & Advertising



by Steven Maynard

figure 1

“underwear goes way back. It has a history. It has an anthropology.”

(Drummer Magazine)

We are at the 1993 Toronto Festival of Festivals, at the Q & A session following the screening of Greg Araki's new film *Totally Fucked Up*. As he takes the questions from the audience, Araki casually, but deliberately lifts his black t-shirt several times to flash the waistband of his underwear. It was a case of life imitating art. For the alienated teenage boys in Araki's film, whether languishing on a bed or pouting in a corner, the costume of choice is underwear. In the filmmaking world, Araki is not alone in his obsession. I would not be the first to call attention to the scenes in Tom Kalin's *Swoon* that looked distinctly like Bruce Weber's commercials for Calvin Klein. More than a signifier in queer cultural aesthetics, underwear is everywhere.

With the emergence of specialty underwear stores, window displays of underwear have become a visible marker on the streetscape of many urban gay ghettos. The textual circulation of underwear — on everything from cards advertising the latest rave or warehouse party, to their ubiquitous presence in the lesbian/gay press — is virtually impossible to avoid. And it is more than a textual formation. In the bars, there are underwear parties and wet jockey shorts contests. As anyone who has cruised a phone-sex line or bathhouse will know, underwear plays an organizing role in the sexual scripts and practices of many gay men.

Underwear also figures prominently within homoerotic advertising. I am going to assume that I do not have to convince most people the ads that are the focus of my interest here are playing with homoerotic imagery (figure 1). Even in mainstream men's fashion magazines it is now commonplace to acknowledge that homoerotic imagery abounds in fashion. Even the *New York Times* has commented on the homoerotic context of Calvin Klein's ads.

To say this is not to suggest that the ads are somehow "gay". Photographs, of course, do not have inherent sexual identities but take on sexual meanings only in the complex relationship between image and spectator. It might be more profitable to look at men's underwear ads as an example of what Diana Fuss has recently called the "homospectatorial look," or the way in which the ads construct a momentary homoerotic glance regardless of the sexual identity of the male viewing subject. At the same time, I find it hard to resist claiming these ads as gay, particularly when I give the slide-show version of this text to audiences that include straight men. To do so confirms the existence of the homospectatorial look as it is easy to observe the straight men in the audience squirm with discomfort as they cross back and forth over that very thin line between identification with and desire for the bodies of the men in the ads.

While I am fascinated by the process of identification, desire and sexual subject formation in the pages of men's fashion magazines, that is not my focus here. Rather, I want to look at a few examples of recent homoerotic advertising to briefly raise some issues of class and race within queer studies and queer politics.

Let's begin by sketching the political economy of underwear ads. The appearance of homoerotic advertising is related to the more general and much-heralded emergence in the early 1980s of the male body within advertising. The symbolic birth date of this phenomenon is 1982, the year the famous billboard ad for Calvin Klein briefs appeared in Times Square. The new eroticization of men in advertising was, in part, a product of the shifts in gender

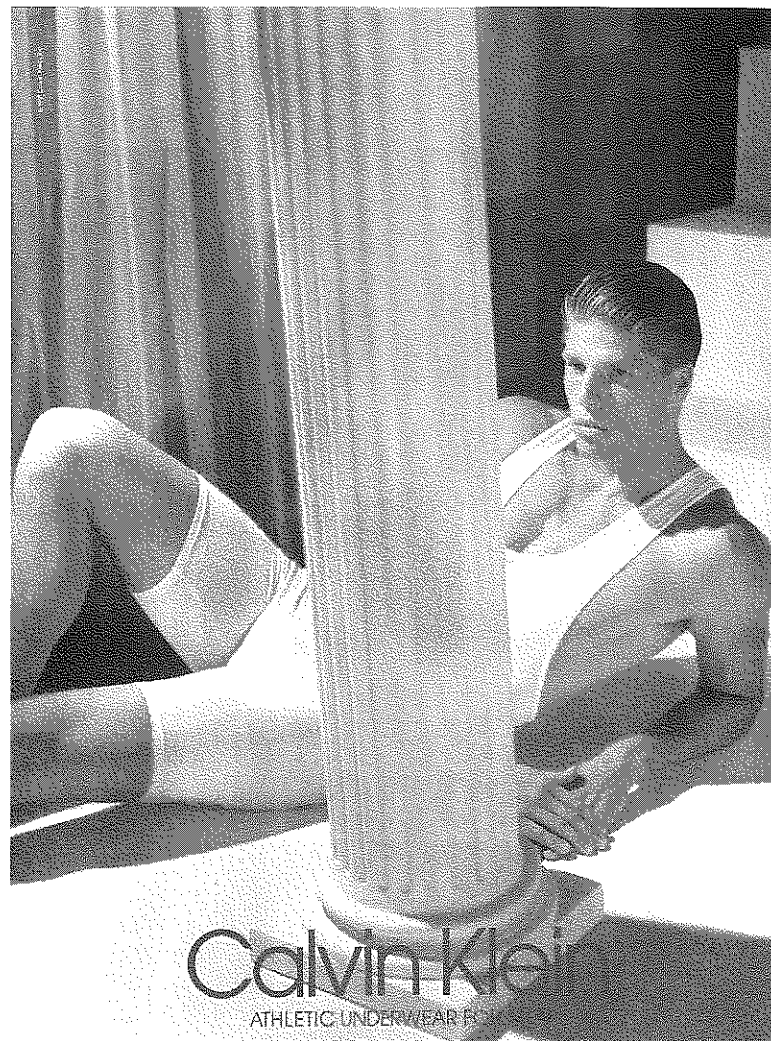


figure 2

relations spurred on over the past several decades by the feminist movement.

Homoerotic advertising also presumes a market for its message. In this regard, capitalism's never-ending ability to construct new markets and expand the range of consumer desires has been crucial. Largely the product of marketing research techniques and journalistic practices, the emergence of the "gay market" is a classic example of this process. Beginning in the mid-1970s, gay men were targeted as a specific consumer group, a decision based on marketing research which revealed that gay men supposedly had high disposable incomes and a high degree of product loyalty. A recent market-

ing survey conducted by the Angus-Reid Group for Toronto's *XTRA!* magazine revealed that 63% of *XTRA!* readers earned more than \$30,000 a year, and 26% took in more than \$50,000 annually. Summing up the results of the survey *XTRA!* boasted that its readers "are educated and affluent, cultured and well travelled." Using data generated by such marketing surveys, the media plays a key role in producing the gay market. A full-page article on gay marketing that appeared in *The Globe and Mail* is only one of the more recent in a long line of newspaper features alerting readers to the existence of the pink economy.

The ads themselves depend on recent trends within advertising design, particularly on what the industry calls "gay window advertising." Ads are created which incorporate elements of the targeted consumer group's subculture. Calvin Klein did not invent gay men's erotic interest in briefs and boxer shorts. Underwear of various descriptions appeared in gay porn magazines long before they did in *GQ*. What Calvin Klein ads tend to do is merge underwear with conventions of gay porn photography so that gay men can read subtextual meanings in the ads, but in a way that avoids any explicit reference to gayness. In the words of ad executive Karen Stabiner, it is an approach that "speak(s) to the homosexual consumer in a way that the straight consumer will not notice." The success of this marketing strategy can be measured in part by the way in which even traditional underwear companies, such as Stanfield's and Penman's, have homoeroticized their recent ad campaigns.

Most analyses of men's fashion ads tend to focus on the ads as an example of the process of cultural commodification and/or as representations of changing definitions of masculinity. In as much as these ads move within gay popular culture, and I think they do — how many of us have Marky Mark in his Calvin Kleins pinned up on our walls? — the Soloflex bodies in these ads reflect and reproduce the masculinization of gay men over the past two decades. But an analysis focused exclusively on commodification or gender overlooks that the ads are also about class and race.

To look at these images and the broader industries of which they are a part focuses our attention on the process of class formation within lesbian and gay communities. It is clear, for example, that while advertisers talk about the gay market, they are not actually talking about lesbians and gays in general, but about a particular class-, race-, and gender-specific segment of the lesbian/gay communities. Karen Stabiner claims that advertisers are interested in "the white single, well-educated, well-paid man who happens to be homosexual." Some would argue that a similar process of class differentiation is under way in lesbian communities. In addition to reflecting the recent trend of lesbian as chic within mainstream journalism, the appearance of lesbian imagery in *Vogue* fashion layouts and young women kissing in Banana Republic ads is evidence of an increasing number of professional lesbians who, earning significant incomes, have caught the attention of advertisers. Within lesbian popular culture more generally, the popularity of Victoria's Secret and J. Crew mail-order catalogues further signals the pleasure of consuming images among lesbians. While it is important to acknowledge that as women most lesbians still earn less on average than gay men, ads designed to appeal to well-heeled, white gay men and the Dinah Shore lesbian set are a reminder of the class differences within our communities. Essex Hemphill succinctly makes the link between class and underwear when he writes, "If I Simply Wanted Status, I'd Wear Calvin Klein."



figure 3

The point about class is a simple one, but I think it is important given that so much recent queer work within cultural studies erases class from view. This is particularly ironic because so many of the cultural forms taken as objects of study by queer theorists are the products of late capitalism. This contradiction is usually handled by authors by acknowledging at the outset of their articles that they are dealing with features of western, capitalist economies and cultures, but they then go on to write about their chosen subjects as if class did not exist or matter.

The case of underwear ads makes this kind of analytical manoeuvre problematic for there are so many material factors

to consider. When I say material here I mean this quite literally. All of the underwear in these ads are made from 100% cotton. Cotton manufacturers regularly advertise in men's fashion magazines, often employing the conventions of fashion photography in their ads. An ad for cotton, for example, might display a handsome man wearing a white, terry-cloth bathrobe, draped open to reveal his white underwear, the only text in the ad being the clothing industry symbol for cotton. By virtue of its focus, not on a specific brand or label, but on the cotton itself, the ad triggers in my mind the history of cotton production and slave labour even though the ad itself avoids all such references. In a more contemporary sense, I can look inside my own underwear and read the label to discover that the Calvin Klein empire rests on the exploitation of labour in Hong Kong and other developing countries. What I am suggesting here is that while we look at these ads as representations, we need to keep in mind the relations of exploitation embedded in the production of the actual material objects.

In addition to class I think these ads are also about race or, more precisely, about whiteness. They, therefore, provide an opportunity to begin the kind of analysis suggested by many lesbians and gays of colour. This analysis involves white lesbians and gays making our own often invisible and taken-for-granted whiteness visible, in order to bring it under critical scrutiny. The Calvin Klein underwear ads require more scrutiny. The advertisements were photographed by Bruce Weber. In addition to being well-

known for the creation of homoerotic imagery, Weber's commercial photography has also been described by critic Anne Russell as the "invention of a world of super Wasps." On the obvious level, we can note well that the models are all white and that, even though Klein dyes his garments several different colours, the product chosen for advertisement — be it a t-shirt, boxer shorts, briefs, or athletic underwear — is always white. Weber's characteristic black and white photography functions to emphasize, sometimes to almost illuminate, the whiteness of the fabric.

But these images work with whiteness in other ways as well. Note the often neo-classic allusions of the image (figure 2). This plays upon a long tradition of association between classical Greek society and homoeroticism. It is the same tradition that was taken up by many German photographers in the early twentieth century who were involved with the physical culture movement that emphasized the cult of the body. One of these photographers, Herbert List, is someone Bruce Weber credits as a major influence. We also know that the Weimar Republic gave way to Hitler and the rise of the Nazi Party. It is well documented that the Nazis incorporated the classical impulse within their art and culture, and that the cult of the body became associated with the physical perfection of the white body and the strength and superiority of the Aryan race. All this is not to say that Bruce Weber is a fascist. It is to suggest that in Weber's photography and in Calvin Klein ads I think a number of historical references coalesce in ways which produce a not so subtle slippage between homoeroticism and whiteness: homoeroticism comes to be defined as white.

Homoeroticism is not simply associated with whiteness in these images. It is wrapped up in notions of white racial dominance. This occurs partly through historical allusion, but also through the internal composition of the photograph. There is a focus in these images on the youthful, muscular, powerful body. It is not, however, a direct emphasis on the body as we only see the body through the product. If we take the underwear to be a marker of whiteness, then we are seeing through whiteness to power. All of these ads are implicated in racism through acts of exclusion, by the fact that men of colour do not appear, but they also do this through a definition of power as white.

Having gone over this ground, I want to turn briefly to the politics of underwear ads. As already mentioned, the ads bring into view a process described by cultural theorists in which elements of distinctive subcultures are commodified. To take one example, consider how "Gray Liberation: Once the Colour of Conformity" — the title of a fashion layout in *Details* magazine — harnesses gay politics to sell gray clothes in a mainstream magazine. Much of what Danae Clark says about style and commodification can also be said about politics: "Because style is a cultural construction, it is easily appropriated, reconstructed and divested of its original political or subcultural signification. Style as resistance becomes commodifiable as chic when it leaves the political realm and enters the fashion world." As one more example, Aldo shoes has recently taken to advertising its products alongside a red ribbon, although it's entirely unclear whether the "Also for Life" campaign involves AIDS fundraising or not.

While the ads tease us with homoerotic looks and meanings, few rarely go so far as actually representing something or someone as recognizably lesbian or gay. But with the ever-increasing visibility of queer culture and capitalism's need for queer money, this appears to be changing as some companies, such as Banana Republic, turn up the homoerotic heat in their ads (figure 3). The presence of this type of ad in mainstream magazines is a good reminder that commodification and appropriation are not the only processes at work. We need to recognize that these ads also represent an important queer claim on some significant spaces in the realm of popular culture. So in addition to analyzing the ads' tangled mix of class, whiteness and power, we must also be alive to the many visual pleasures homoerotic advertising may hold for the queer spectator.

In terms of the gay market, even though it is directed at a specific and narrow segment of the gay community, we all live with the way in which it identifies us as consumers and promotes a popular understanding of being lesbian or gay as a lifestyle. There was a reason that during Queer Nation actions we felt the necessity to remind lookers-on that "we're here, we're queer, and we're not going shopping." Alongside the increasing numbers of mainstream companies openly willing to court the queer consumer, specifically lesbian and gay marketing firms like Shocking Gray and H.I.M. continue to proliferate. They all define being lesbian and gay in terms of what we buy. Such a view of our sexualities may define us as consumers, but not necessarily as people with political rights.

The realm of advertising and consumption also becomes a contradictory arena for our political energies. Traditionally, this has most often taken the form of the boycott. We have used our power as consumers to force companies in particular directions. Some would argue that our much-vaunted product loyalty pays off in the end. Was it not, after all, gay men's preference for 501 button-fly Levis that convinced the Levi Strauss Corporation to pass non-discrimination policies, extend benefits to lesbian/gay employees, and to support a gay boycott of the Boy Scouts?

Sometimes the ads themselves become the focus of political action. A Benetton ad that depicts the letters "H.I.V." tattooed on a naked torso is only the most recent of several ads by Benetton that has angered AIDS activists. There was also the famous Toyota ad which pictured two white gay men, their dalmatian dog, a picnic basket and of course a Toyota with the caption "The Family Car." The ad angered fundamentalists, but even after much pressure, Toyota refused to pull the ad. It was not that Toyota had suddenly taken up the cause of protecting lesbians and gays from right-wing attacks, but as one commentator noted: "fundamentalists tend to have low disposable incomes, so they are less important than gays anyway." *The Globe and Mail* summed up the connection between consumption and politics this way: "waving gold credit cards at recalcitrant companies...may achieve for (lesbians and gays) what years of waving placards in the street failed to accomplish."

All of this raises important political questions. I think we need to ask ourselves if we are satisfied with the displacement of politics from the streets to the marketplace.

How does a politics rooted in consumption speak to the many lesbians and gays who are excluded from the world of queer consumption in the first place? Or, how does a politics of the marketplace tackle such institutions as the police or the legal system?

One of Banana Republic's recent queer ad campaigns, entitled "My Chosen Family," a series of photos of mixed-race, lesbian, gay and bisexual "families," captures the contradictions of homoerotic advertising (figure 4). (It should be noted that Banana Republic has run this and other campaigns in the lesbian/gay press, particularly in the stylish pages of *Out* magazine. Against the dominance of the heterosexual family form, the ads are a powerful affirmation of the right to choose a variety of family arrangements. Against the ascendancy of genetic explanations of queerness, the slippage within the ads between families and sexualities suggests that erotic preferences are also chosen. But on the question of how to change the world to look like the one represented in the photographs, the ads remain silent. Choosing one's family and living one's erotic life freely will not be achieved by buying a Banana Republic shirt or pair of boxer shorts.

For myself, I want real choice. I want underwear, style and popular culture in a way that recognizes their limitations and revels in their pleasures and sometimes subversive effects. And I also want my politics in the street. All of this is what I mean when I ask "what colour is your underwear?"

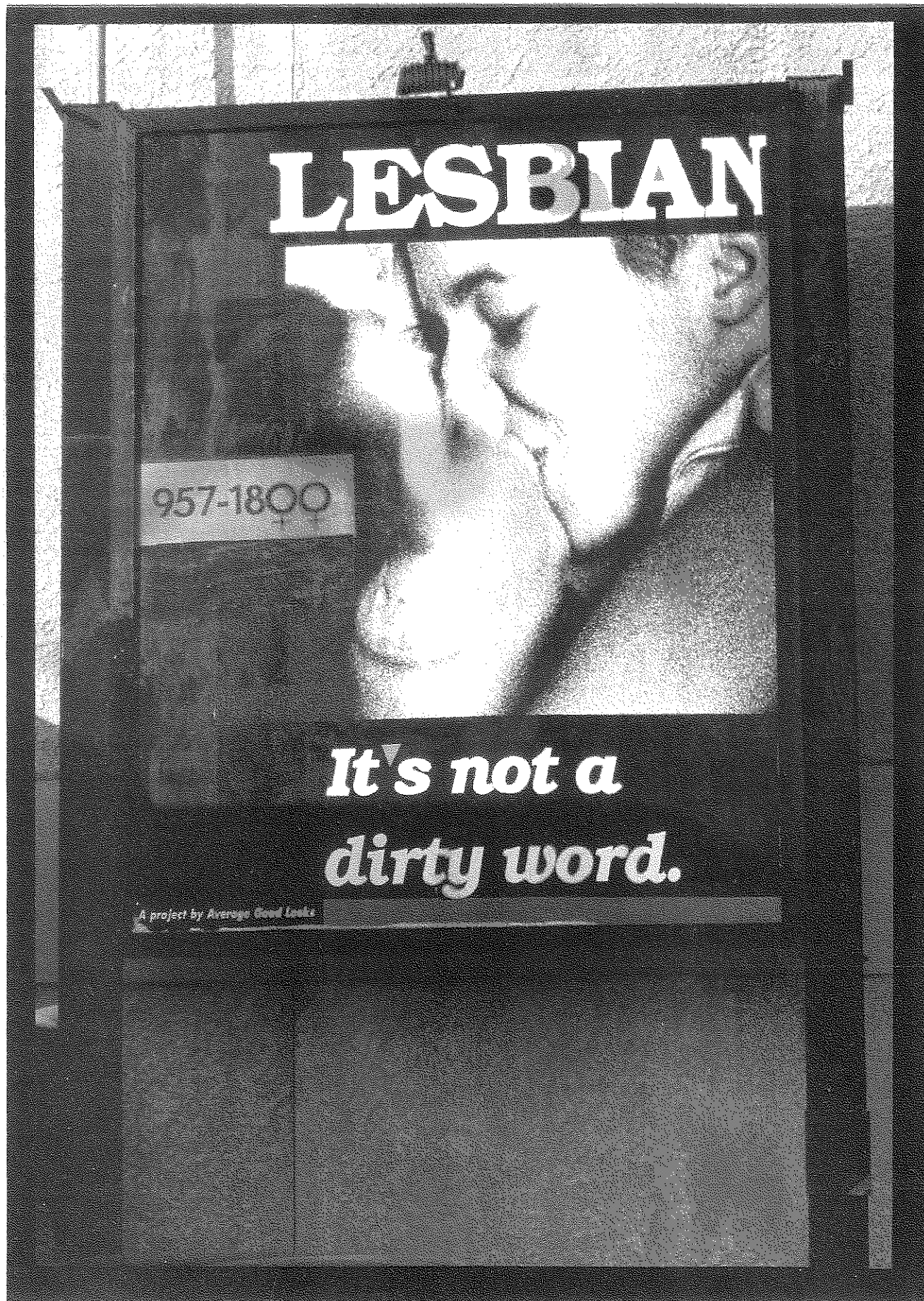
Steven Maynard is a gay social historian. He is completing a PhD thesis on urban space, policing and the making of homosexual subcultures in turn-of-the-century Ontario.

Works Consulted

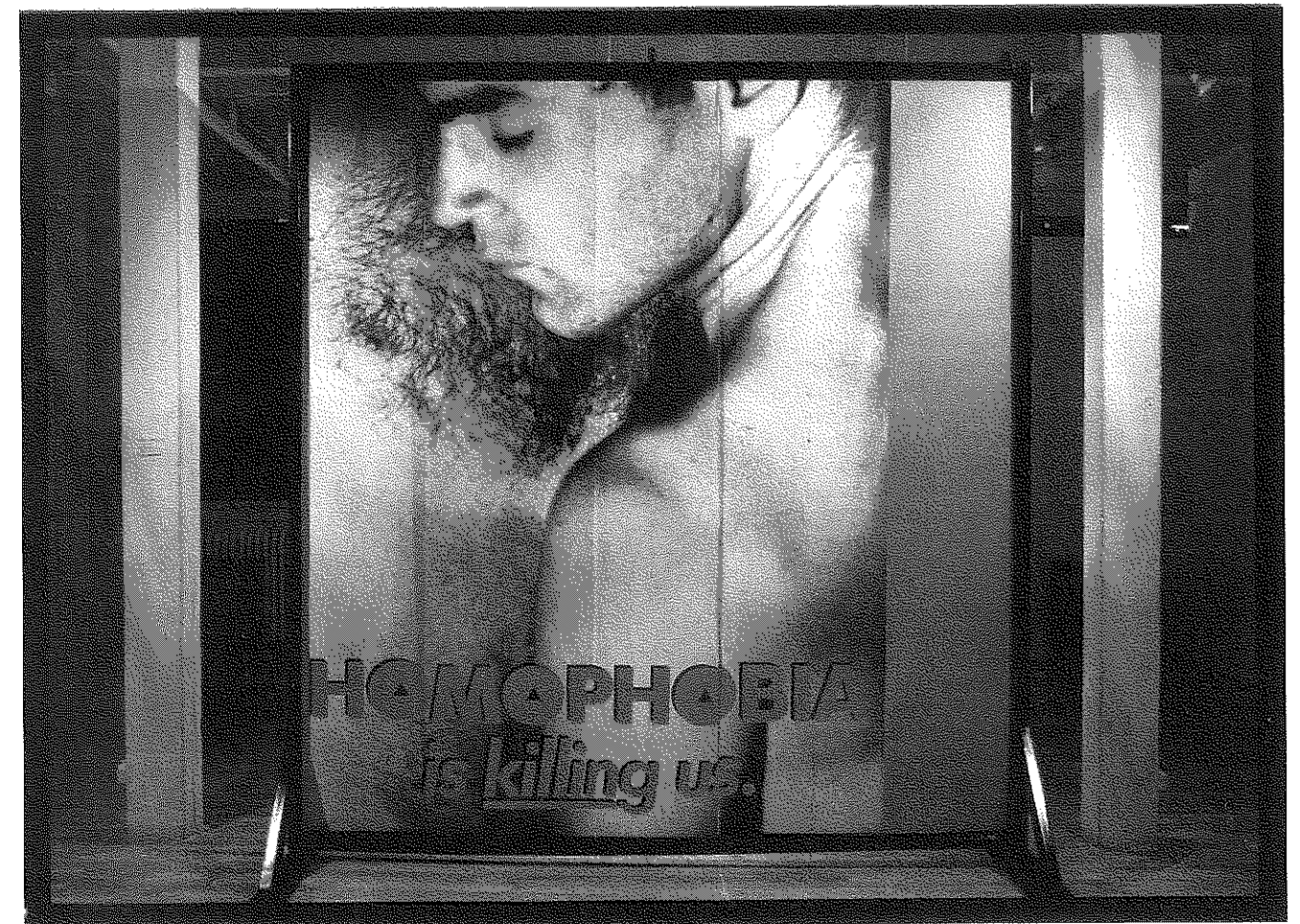
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figure 4





biLLBoARdING hoMo-ERoTiCa



**"Noreen Stevens, you are a menace to society.
You should be shot dead."**

(Answering machine message on my home phone, October 12, 1993.)

BY NOREEN STEVENS

When Sheila Spence and I tell the story of our visual arts collective, Average Good Looks, we tell it chronologically. I once thought this was for convenience, a way to make a complicated story more clear. Increasingly I understand that chronology - the linear march of time, one event methodically following another - is inherent to the nature of Average Good Looks.

Looking back I can speak conceptually about Average Good Looks as an entity and a body of work, as public art, activist art, advocacy advertising. But it began as one simple idea, one impulse, one project. Then one event followed another. We had no idea.

On Lesbian and Gay Pride Day 1991 a man was beaten and drowned in Winnipeg. There were witnesses on apartment balconies across the river who did nothing. Sheila wanted to respond to the incident, and in collaboration with Cal Asmundson and me, and with the support of Plug-In Gallery who funded the project and billboard space, the *Homophobia is Killing Us* billboard was developed. The only time I recall experiencing any foreshadowing of what was to come the three of us were sitting around Cal's living room. The finished design for the billboard lay on the table between us. Transfixed by the image, we were trying to anticipate people's responses to the billboard. Would they notice? Would they be upset? There had been very few art actions of this type ever made and certainly none had ever taken place in Winnipeg. We didn't know what to expect but I had a strong feeling that we just might be upsetting the proverbial apple cart.

And so the chronology begins. I faxed a mock-up of the billboard to Mediacom for a quote on printing and installation. They returned a quote as well as a comment on the tragedy of hemophilia. I sent the finished artwork to Mediacom and, for the first time, they got a good look at the photograph. They refused to print the piece, faxing a copy of the Taste and Public Decency Clause of the Canadian Code of Advertising Standards which says "advertising must not portray sexuality...in a manner which is offensive to generally prevailing standards."

We tried every approach we could think of but the Mediacom people were clearly not going to change their minds. A press release was issued and ironically the photo Mediacom didn't want the public to see was on the front page of the *Winnipeg Sun* the next day. The rejected billboard received a good deal of attention, locally and nationally. Mediacom was not being portrayed favourably.

Our biggest concern was trying to get the billboard up; no small feat in the midst of all this controversy. Our billboard had quickly become a hot potato. We did find someone; Freisco Boning, an artist/screen-printer who thought he could stretch the capabilities of his shop to accommodate something of this size and he knew a guy who would put it up.

At this point the story goes off in a couple of directions. We decided to file a complaint with the Manitoba Human Rights Commission against Mediacom for discrimination based on sexual orientation. At the same time, the billboard finally went up. Spurred by the attention it had already received, the installation was well covered by the press and the phone-line we had set up to record responses to the billboard was ringing off the hook. Four days after the installation the billboard was paint-bombed and the answering machine message was altered via remote control. We would later find out it was the work of the local Ku Klux Klan. Charges were dropped on a technicality.

Meanwhile the Manitoba Human Rights Commission offered to mediate a settlement between Average Good Looks and Mediacom. After a marathon seven hour meeting Mediacom agreed to install two more billboard projects for us, one on the Plug-In billboard and a larger campaign on Mediacom structures across Winnipeg. It was an enormous victory.

In June of 1992 we were invited to Passion Pink, an exhibition on the subject of homophobia at Gallery 101, in Ottawa. We mounted a clean copy of the billboard and the vandalized version which we had salvaged and edited the answering machine tapes for continu-



ous play in the gallery. I think it was beginning to occur to us that we were beyond one idea, one project. Average Good Looks was taking shape. We were onto something. We had **stumbled** onto something.

Homophobia exists because lesbians and gays are invisible and we choose invisibility because we fear homophobia. Or we choose to be visible. And in the high-tech, late 20th century world the mainstream media is the fast track to visibility.

Now we had a mandate: "Average Good Looks creates positive images of lesbians and gays for display in the public domain." And we were beginning to understand how our art could be a tool for social and political activism, how our ability to create visual images could be vital to a political movement that lacked visibility.

At Passion Pink we played our answering machine tapes for the first time and got a sense of their power and potential. Silence, like invisibility, is the enemy of the lesbian and gay rights movement. People don't understand homosexuality because they don't talk about it. It's taboo. It's systematically disallowed. With our phone-lines, Average Good Looks creates a framework which gives the diverse public permission to talk about homosexuality.

We had explored playing the messages in a gallery setting during Passion Pink, and the *Winnipeg Sun* had transcribed some of the calls for a story, but it wasn't until our second billboard campaign, *Lesbian. It's not a dirty word*, in December 1992 that we deliberately pursued the "dialogue". For example, we used the story of the billboard and the messages as a focus on call-in radio programs.

We understand, too, that the power of our banal images to provoke the obscenities, the death threats, the sheer rage that is conveyed on the answering machine is significant. Our choice to be deliberately unprovocative has, ironically, elicited the most absurd and irrational responses. Our third and most recent campaign, *gays and lesbians. our family, your family*, developed during a residency at the Banff Center for the Arts, perhaps best exemplifies our strategy. This effort, the final piece of our settlement with Mediacom, was installed in fourteen locations in Calgary, Edmonton, Regina, Saskatoon and Winnipeg in August 1993, with local phone-lines in each city.

Sheila and I have talked often of various ways to use the answering machine tapes, hours and hours of raw material and endless possibilities. Currently Margo Charlton, Artistic Director of the Popular Theatre Alliance of Manitoba is collaborating with video artist Hope Peterson and musician Marilyn Lerner on an experimental interactive theatre piece which builds upon the answering machine tapes. Called *Hangup*, it will debut November 27, 1993, as part of *Testing Ground, Venue VIII, Winnipeg*.

The Average Good Looks story is now up to date. I know things now I never thought I'd know three years ago. I know about the Ladies Auxiliary of the Ku Klux Klan. I know how to talk to the media and not get butterflies. I know it takes two days to hand paint an eight by ten foot billboard.

And I know that Average Good Looks is making a difference because, for all the jerks and zealots that call the answering machines, there are many others who say thank you.

Noreen Stevens is a Winnipeg-based visual artist, and a member, with Sheila Spence, of Average Good Looks.

MIDI ONODERA

Interview

Toronto-born and based, Midi Onodera makes films of uncommon ambition. As a project, her films involve explorations of race, gender and desire, motored by experimentations with the medium. Under the rubric of women and cinema, her work occupies a special, *shared* place (as Onodera later points out). Subtle and formally inventive films such as **Ten Cents a Dance (Parallax)** (1986) and **The Displaced View** (1988) — films in which Onodera herself appears — have mined this intersection where female authorship meets the unexpected contours and ironies of lesbian experience, representation and cultural history. Add influences such as early feminist film, new narrative and a queer punk aesthetic, and Onodera seems damn near unclassifiable. And she likes it that way.

Sadness of the Moon, Onodera's first feature film, is currently undergoing completion with anticipated release in 1994. The story involves Alex Koyama (played by Natsuko Ohama), as she embarks on making a film about tattooing where she meets the intense, enigmatic Chris Black (Keram Malicki Sanchez). Set in the downtown Toronto art scene, Alex becomes increasingly drawn into a world of body alteration, transsexuality and personal transformation. The film also stars Dana Brooks as Penny Loafer, Alex's close friend and confidante, and Melanie Nicholls-King as her misused assistant, Montana. In addition to making **Sadness of the Moon**, Onodera is also producing a Super-8 feature film, **Girls in the Band**, directed by Candy Pauker.

MO: Maybe I can start at the beginning. The reason that I got into film in the first place was the fact that film brings together all of the elements that I wanted to explore in photography, writing, and visual art. I guess what I was interested in was making art. There are all these terms that are thrown around in the industry like director, filmmaker and auteur, but I still like to think that I am an artist at the core. That's not to say that directors can't be artists, it's just that I feel that my approach to filmmaking is coming from an artistic background and practice rather than a commercial sensibility or motive

HL: HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN YOUR EARLIER FILMS AND THIS NEW FILM?

MO: In the very early days, I was really trying to figure out how film worked. So many of the early films are concentrated on one area, like the use of grain and the element of composition, very formal elements like that. Then I would lay a story on top of the visual component. I guess that's how I came to produce *Ten Cents a Dance*,

which had a formal, technical backbone and a narrative which augmented the theme of the film. That's how I see film working. I like to find a technical device which enhances the content or the theme of the piece.

HL: WHAT WAS THE TECHNICAL THING IN *SADNESS OF THE MOON*?

MO: The technical thing was the structure of a conventional drama. I realized that the things I wanted to say within that construction were very outside of a conventional narrative. So by engaging in a form that was already considered mainstream and accepted, I could bring in other elements that were completely foreign to that structure. So I hope that by using that kind of framework I'm being more accessible in terms of an audience that would actually see the film, and hopefully they will get something out of it because of the content.

HL: APART FROM THE FORMAL CHALLENGE OF MAKING A DRAMA, WHAT WAS THE ORIGINAL IDEA FOR THIS FILM?

with Helen Lee

Sadness of the Moon, Filmmaker: Midi Onodera
Photography: Candy Pauker

MO: Right after *The Displaced View* (in 1988), I wanted to do something that was in a way similar to the themes explored in *Ten Cents A Dance (Parallax)*. Something that dealt with sexuality and gender identity. So I started examining the links between sexuality and gender, specifically transsexuality. I did a lot of research, just because I didn't know very much about transsexuality and I really wanted to do a thorough job on it. Very early on I found out that female to male, and male to female philosophies, history and context were completely different from each other. So when you talk about transsexuality, you have to say, well, which gender to which gender are you talking about?

There's been quite a bit done on male to females, as one would expect in this culture. For instance, mainstream films like *Tootsie* and *Mrs. Doubtfire* comically explore the cross-dressing theme. But there has been very little done on female to males. It's a similar phenomenon in the medical world. Medical treatment for women is less advanced than it is for men, and a clear example of this is sexual re-assignment surgery. Men

have very little trouble transforming into women but women still have a difficult time going the other way. So I spent a lot of time on research, writing and re-writing and trying to figure out what the story was, and who the characters were.

HL: SO THE CORE OF THE FILM WAS AROUND TRANSSEXUALITY?

MO: Yeah, the ideas and the issues in the film have not changed since the beginning. If anything, I think they've grown and become more ingrained in the characters rather than a theoretical essay applied to something. So it becomes more of a character trait or a character insight than "this is my theory and I want to prove it." I think that part of the magic in a conventional drama is the power the characters hold for the audience. If an audience finds the characters interesting then the story will most likely be interesting.

HL: TRANSSEXUALITY AND TATTOOING ARE, TO DIFFERENT DEGREES, TABOO SUBJECTS, AND THEY ALSO HAVE, AS I'M SURE YOU'VE FOUND, VERY DEVELOPED COMMUNITIES. CAN

YOU TELL ME ABOUT THE REPRESENTATIONAL PROCESS OF RECRUITING "SUBCULTURAL" WORLDS INTO A THEATRICAL FEATURE, AN UNDENIABLY MORE MAINSTREAM CONTEXT. WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES WHEN DRAG QUEENS HAVE BECOME POP CULTURAL ICONS ON ENTERTAINMENT TONIGHT?

MO: I guess it's great that drag queens are getting recognition, or whatever, in the mainstream. But I think for the most part they are treated as oddities or social misfits. I still think that overall drag queens represent something that is too radical for the average person.

In film, I think again, it all has to go back to character. If you have a good handle on who the characters are, then I would hope it wouldn't matter who they represent in society. I mean, Penny Loafer is a very caring individual who happens to be a drag queen. She deals with all this stuff that the mainstream would consider wild, but the club is her home, and that's where she's comfortable. So I think that each of the characters in the film has a strong base to work from.

At one point, I remember I was talking to some transsexuals who are involved in the performing arts and one of them said to me, you know, you have a huge responsibility because you have the power to make a film and I don't, and therefore you have to represent me in this way. And I said, I understand that, but I can't simply present a character who is positive in a one dimensional way. All I can do is understand that position and hope to achieve something greater than positive imagery reinforcement. I don't like to portray flat characters in my films, I don't like to give people pat little answers because I don't think that they exist. I think that characters are more complex than that. They're not just a positive or negative stick figures. Characters and people are many different things, sometimes all at once.

HL: ON THAT LEVEL, I THINK THE FILM IS VERY AMBITIOUS BECAUSE IT DOES HAVE MANY COMPLEX CHARACTERS. CAN YOU DISCUSS WHAT YOU WANTED TO ACCOMPLISH WITH THE CHRIS BLACK CHARACTER?

MO: Chris Black was a fascinating character to create. The core of the character was rooted in gender identity. Not only how Chris saw herself but also how the other characters saw and interacted with her. Since gender is such a fundamental component of who we are, I found that I had to strip things down to an essential being of who that person was. Chris developed into someone who is not simply gender-confused but also someone who is complex and contradictory, affected by social norms and values. Chris is multi-dimensional, she is in some ways a victim of her situation, but she is also very strong and determined in what she thinks.

HL: WHAT ABOUT ALEX KOYAMA, WHICH I'M SURE OTHERS WILL BE TEMPTED TO SAY IS YOUR MOVIE ALTER-EGO. SHE'S TRULY A CHARACTER YOU'VE NEVER SEEN BEFORE, I THINK, ON SCREEN.

MO: Is it because she's Asian?

HL: PERHAPS. ALSO, AS YOU'VE SAID, SHE'S A BITCH. NOT A TYPICAL ASIAN WOMAN WE SEE ON SCREEN.

MO: Well I don't think I'm a bitch, but others may beg to differ. Alex is a bitch, but in a good way. And again, that's not all there is to her. She's working in the male-dominated world of film and she's very clear about what she wants and very determined to succeed. She's strong but vulnerable, personally. The fact that I decided to make her Japanese-Canadian has more to do with me than anything else. I want to see more Asian women represented in films. I think it's extremely important to see characters on the screen that are not white, middle class heterosexuals. As far as the character of Alex goes, her race is simply another component of her character, as is her sexuality. Alex Koyama cannot be pigeon-holed into the existing screen stereotypes of a geisha girl or a dragon lady. There is much more to her than that. Unlike some contemporary films which simply use People of Colour as a "colourful" addition to a white cast, Alex and Montana are informed and in a way shaped by their culture and sexual identity through the way they interact with themselves and the other characters.

HL: AND MONTANA...WHAT ABOUT THE BLACK/ASIAN PAIRING?

MO: Again, on the screen, the kind of representation in either gay films or lesbian films, is almost always geared towards white couples. I don't think there's been very much representation of a mixed-race same sex couple.

HL: THEY'RE RARE TO BEGIN WITH, NOT RARE...

MO: Rare even in the heterosexual world...

HL: RARE WHEN IT'S NOT A WHITE/OTHER PAIRING. IT'S VERY HARD TO FIND ON SCREEN. SO I WANTED TO KNOW HOW YOU DEALT WITH THE OVERDETERMINATION OF SOMETHING LIKE THAT, TO HAVE THE BLACK/ASIAN PAIRING

MO: I don't think that I really discussed it with the actors. We discussed it as far as the character point of view, but not what it means in a bigger racial and political context. Certainly I had a handle on what I was doing but it wasn't necessary for me to engage the actors in that kind of discussion. Montana is another person that Alex has completely used. If anything, she's one of the more positive characters in the film, I guess. She's very sure of herself, she knows exactly who she is and what she wants. She is very straightforward all the way through. Of course I am aware of the stereotypes of Black women on screen and like Alex, Montana was originally created to redress that negative and one-dimensional representation of Women of Colour which continues to exist in the media. But that was just a starting point for the character. Montana is much more detailed in the end.

HL: YOUR PRESENTATION OF THE TATTOOING IMAGERY IS REALLY INTERESTING. IT'S USUALLY MEDIATED BY BEING SHOWN ON A TELEVISION SCREEN, BREAKING AWAY FROM THE NARRATIVE REALIST STRUCTURE OF THE DRAMA, IN REALLY GRAINY, SUPER CLOSE-UPS. IN THIS WAY, IT SORT OF FUNCTIONS AS A PORNOGRAPHIC OR SPECTACULAR IMAGE, IN REVEALING A SOURCE OF PLEASURE OR DESIRE, OR A KIND OF "UNSPEAKABLE ACT."

MO: Initially, my interest in tattooing came about because I realized that it was a form of body alteration, just as piercing is or scarification. And it seemed to me that tattooing was the perfect visual metaphor for transsexuality. On a very superficial level there are links between a sex change operation and tattooing. There's pain in both of them, it's permanent, it's completely fixed and it's up to you to decide if you want to get it. I mean, no one forces a sex change operation on you, and no one forces you to get a tattoo, unless it's in a larger context. But the big difference between the two is obvious. If one gets a sex change operation it is because they want to right a wrong of nature. Transsexuality is not as much about the physical as it is about matching what a person feels inside with what they look like on the outside. Tattooing is an art form.

HL: DO YOU YOURSELF HAVE ANY TATTOOS? AND IF SO, WHERE?

MO: (nods) I'd rather not say.

HL: PERHAPS BECAUSE YOUR FILMS OPERATE IN MANY CONTEXTS (FOR GAY AND LESBIAN AUDIENCES, ASIAN VIEWERS, AND ALSO WITHIN FEMINIST CINEMA), YOU TEND TO BE AMBIVALENT ABOUT THESE IDENTIFICATIONS. STILL, AS A FILMMAKER, ONE IS DEPENDENT ON THESE COMMUNITY FORMATIONS.

MO: Personally I don't like to be labelled or categorized and I don't like my films to be either, but I understand that people like to keep things simple. As far as which community I am dependent on, I can't say that there is a specific one which I feel fully connected to. I think I travel on the fringe of things. I don't feel completely comfortable with any label except as an independent filmmaker. I feel that who I am informs my work but I am not catering to one specific community or agenda. If anything I guess I enjoy playing with people's preconceived notions of labels.

HL: HOW DO YOU ENVISION YOUR WORK, AND SPECIFICALLY THIS FILM, TO BE POSITIONED (IF AT ALL) IN THE NEW QUEER CINEMA, WHICH, AS LESBIAN FILM CRITICS LIKE B. RUBY RICH AND CHERRY SMYTH HAVE POINTED OUT, HAS BEEN ABOUT THE BOYS.

MO: They're right, New Queer Cinema is about gay men. I don't see that there are any women within that definition. But isn't that always the way? I mean if one looks at the gender split between men and women mak-

ing films, it's obvious. Women have a much harder time in the film industry. There are very few women in this country who are directing features and it's not because women are less talented, it's because women just have a more difficult time in all aspects of the film business. So if you understand that, then one can clearly see why there is a lack of lesbians producing films. Queer cinema is about men. It is not about women. And really much of the queer cinema that is being produced concentrates solely on sexuality rather than sexuality being part of a character interacting in a larger context. Personally I don't see a lot of queer cinema that I find incredibly interesting.

HL: REALLY? FILMS LIKE POISON (BY TODD HAYNES), AND SWOON (TOM KALIN)? OR THE LIVING END (GREGG ARAKI)?

MO: I think that it's really good that they're being produced but I still think that one has to question the absence of lesbian films. So if anything, I guess my sympathies would go more towards women filmmakers. I don't think that lesbians are going to make a big dent in Queer Cinema. But maybe I'm wrong, I don't know. The men who are producing films within Queer Cinema are doing so within the boundaries of conventional narrative and although I politically support their work I don't see anything terribly cinematically innovative.

HL: FIVE YEARS AGO, WHEN THERE WAS NO SUCH THING AS "THE NEW QUEER CINEMA," I DON'T THINK YOU COULD CALL THOSE FILMS CONVENTIONAL. CERTAINLY, THESE FILMS AND THEIR MAKERS HAVE ALL ACHIEVED HIGH PROFILES, AND HELPED TO CREATE A NEW-FOUND VISIBILITY AND REPRESENTABILITY. THEY'RE GAY AND MALE-CENTRED, BUT ALSO QUEER. DOESN'T THAT COUNT FOR SOMETHING?

MO: I suppose it counts for other gay men who are producing films or who want to. Maybe if we're lucky there will be some money left over for women to make some films. It comes down to simple economics. Distributors and some funders don't see that films produced by women have an audience. They are seen as marginal products with a narrow dollar return.

HL: COULD YOU CONJECTURE ON WHAT THIS NEW WAVE OF CINEMA IN THE 90S WOULD LOOK LIKE, CREATED BY LESBIAN DIRECTORS? IE, THIS FEATURE BEING PRODUCED BY CHRISTINE VACHON (PRODUCER OF POISON AND SWOON), MAYBE? OR OTHERS, LIKE CANDY PAUKER'S FILM WHICH YOU'RE PRODUCING?

MO: First of all I don't know if one can categorize films based on the sexual identity of the director or producer. If that is what a "new" lesbian cinema is about then I would not like to be categorized in that way. Once an audience starts expecting certain themes to continue in a filmmaker's body of work then it gets into a grey area of expectation and eventual censorship. There are a lot



*Sadness of the Moon, Keram Malicki-Sanchez
Photography by Candy Faulter*

of aspects that I want to develop through my films and not all of them directly relate to a specific sexuality. Again, my own sexuality is just a small part of who I am. I don't want to be limited to produce a certain type of film. I want the freedom to explore themes and issues that I find interesting, not ones that are "in" politically. The same goes for the form which I choose to engage in - for instance, *The Displaced View* was exploring the boundaries of documentary film and *Sadness Of The Moon* deals with a conventional narrative structure. I don't know what my next film will look like.

the most significant support has come from my partner, my producers, Phillip Ing and Mehernaz Lentin, my parents, friends and peers. This is extremely important to me because without the ongoing emotional support of those around me, it would probably be impossible to take risks in my work.

Helen Lee is a Toronto-based filmmaker, writer and critic.

HL: HOW MUCH HAVE FILMMAKERS LIKE SU FRIEDRICH OR CHANTAL AKERMAN, LESBIAN FILMMAKERS WHO ARE TRULY ICONOCLASTIC IN MY MIND, BEEN PRECEDENTS FOR YOU?

MO: Chantal Akerman was a major influence for me in the beginning. I found her work, especially her earlier work, extremely exciting. There was a raw energy and an aggressive exploration which flowed through her films that I could relate to. It wasn't that I wanted to produce work that was similar to hers, it was more about having the confidence to break down the barriers that existed for women during the formalism movement. By the way, Su spelled backwards is "us" and we all influence each other.

HL: HOW IS THIS CONTEXT DIFFERENT, FOR A CANADIAN FILMMAKER, NEVER MIND ALL THOSE OTHER SUBCATEGORIES: INDEPENDENT, WOMAN, ASIAN, LESBIAN, JAPANESE CANADIAN...DID I MISS ANY OTHERS? WHO SUPPORTS YOU — WHERE DO YOU FIND YOUR SUPPORT? WOMEN FILMMAKERS, ESPECIALLY, ARE NOT GETTING MANY OPPORTUNITIES IN MAKING FEATURE FILMS IN CANADA.

MO: I'm sure you missed a few categories, like meat-eating and pet-owning, but I don't know if it's specifically different for Canadian women making features as opposed to American women. Private film investment is still not as high as I believe it is in the States. There is very little foundation support for filmmaking in this country and just the population difference between Canada and the US makes a big difference in how we make our work. Here, there is a very big division between art films and commercial films whereas in the States and in Europe I think that these definitions are less rigid.

As far as support, financially I have been very fortunate to receive funding from the arts councils and smaller community organizations like the Toronto Lesbian and Gay Community Appeal. Personally, for this film,



CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

Tired that the black popular is always defined from a U.S. perspective?
Tired of the designation Asian, Afro, or Indo American while passing through the States?
Tired that the specificity of our Canadian experience is often lost?
Tired, at the same time, of simple 'multi-culti' celebration?
It's time to get down to critique.

Border/Lines seeks substantive, critical articles on our racialized cultures that are situated from "here," that's Canada. Pieces on specific Canadian cultural practices such as film and video, art, music, as well as everyday negotiated publics, ethnographic sites and archeological projects are especially encouraged. Articles can range from the vicissitudes of Dim Sum in Vancouver, to dance music in Scarborough, to Bathurst St.'s barber shops, to Inuit garage bands, race wars at funding agencies, on the streets, in the classroom, between the sheets, to black little league hockey in Halifax.

Please send inquiries, proposals or manuscripts to *Border/Lines*
183 Bathurst Street Suite No. 301 Toronto Canada M5T 2R7
Attention: Kass Banning and Rinaldo Walcott
Deadline for completed manuscripts
September 1, 1994

BORDER/LINES

if Silence = Death, how can you live without me?

R. M. Vaughan

As a faggot artist, I've grown used to being described as "too"—too loud, too angry, too graphic, going too far. I've had countless arguments with straight artists who claim my work is only valid as a kind of cultural Affirmative Action program. My personal position as an out faggot not only informs my work, they argue, it also supports the substance and reading of the work—intelligence, style, and talent being the exclusive property of "apolitical" straight artists. No matter what sort of work I do, no matter what subject matters entice me, I am, according to my straight colleagues, a "gay activist" first and an artist second. Ignoring my daily reality of dealing with bigoted publishers, cowardly art dealers, and timid grant juries, straight artists love to tell me how lucky I am—after all, I've got a ticket on the minority gravy train. I've got a schtick. If it's so simple (and profitable), why don't they just pretend to be fags and dykes? Constantly having my work read first as gay product makes me defensive, and probably a bit paranoid. It also, unfortunately, causes me to indulge in some naive illusions about the commonality, and community, of Queer artists. After some years of being told that I'm "too," I've just discovered that in some Queer art circles I'm not "enough."

Out and about OUT: whose self-representation is it, anyway?

Several months ago I submitted some work to a Toronto magazine in response to their upcoming All Queer issue. After a cursory glance at my slides, the art editor informed me that my work simply wasn't "gay enough" to be published.

I jokingly suggested I spray paint the word FAG over each of my paintings. "Hmm," he replied, in earnest, "That would be cool."

Thus, in the same spirit of reductivist art thinking (ahem), this faggot artist would like to offer to other underqueered artists (straights included) a simple:

12 STEP PROGRAM FOR FAGGOT ARTISTS WHO ARE NOT GAY ENOUGH FOR TORONTO ART MAGAZINES

or HOW TO MAKE OUT ART

1. Get naked.
2. Get some props—sports equipment, domestic utensils, hand puppets, a pair of heels, another naked fag. A cheap wig is the best way to up the Irony Odds.
3. Take a picture of yourself looking:
 - a) aggressive
 - b) coy and knowing, like you've been around
 - c) arty and banal, awash in harsh light (for black and white shots only)
 - d) bored with it all.
4. Apply the following words to the image of your naked body, covering your cock (for private liberal galleries) or your forehead (parallel galleries): Fag, Faggot, Queer, Queen, Boy, Toy, Boy Toy, Slave, Master, Danger (parallel galleries), Victim (private galleries), Man, Not Man, Dick, Cock, Suck, Fuck, Fruit, Fairy, Sissy, Butch...

5. Pose with one or more naked fags in a provocative, neo-surrealistic manner that cleverly hides the exact gender and/or genital identity of one or all of you. Reduce those re-contextualized bodies to angles and shadow and light—get clinical! (again, black and white shots only).

6. Project onto your body recent clippings from rightwing newspapers and/or the names of dead faggots from the nineteenth century (private galleries), or faggots killed by AIDS (also private galleries).

7. Shave your head.

8. Modify the nouns from number 4 with racist slurs appropriate to your ethnicity—everyone will know that you don't mean it 'cause you're a homo and you understand oppression.

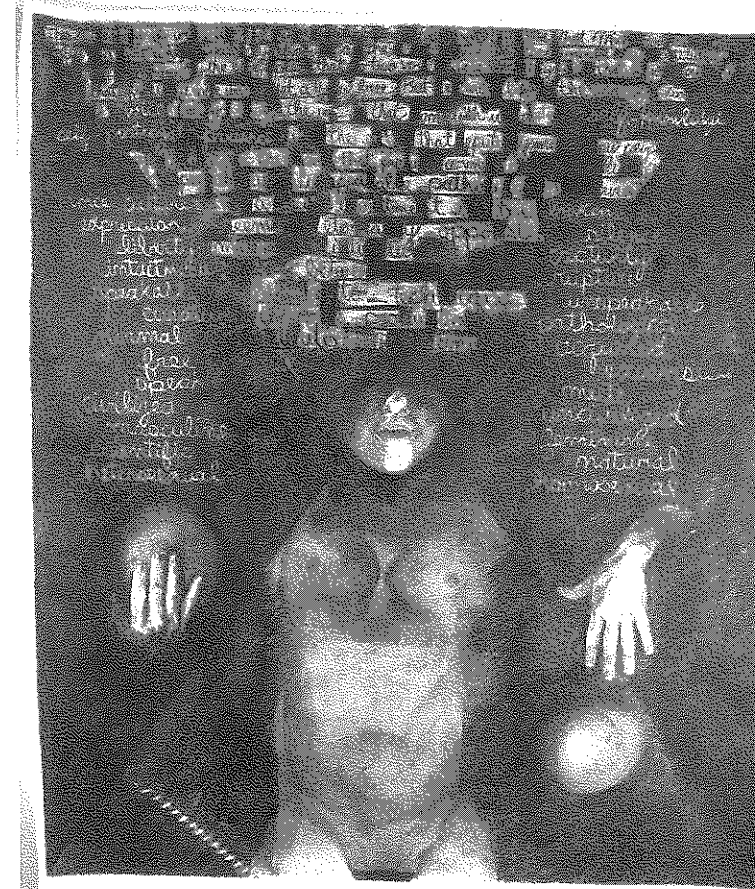
9. Type up some stories about getting the shit beat out of you in high school, put them in a glass vitrine, and position them next to the images of your newly liberated, naked Queer self.

10. Find a gentlemanly Gay art dealer and frighten him into exhibiting your work—he will invite other Gay gentlemen to his gallery and frighten them into buying your work.

11. Invest—remember what happened to all those graffiti artists with names like Zeno 2000 and Rico X13? Or Mark Kostabi?

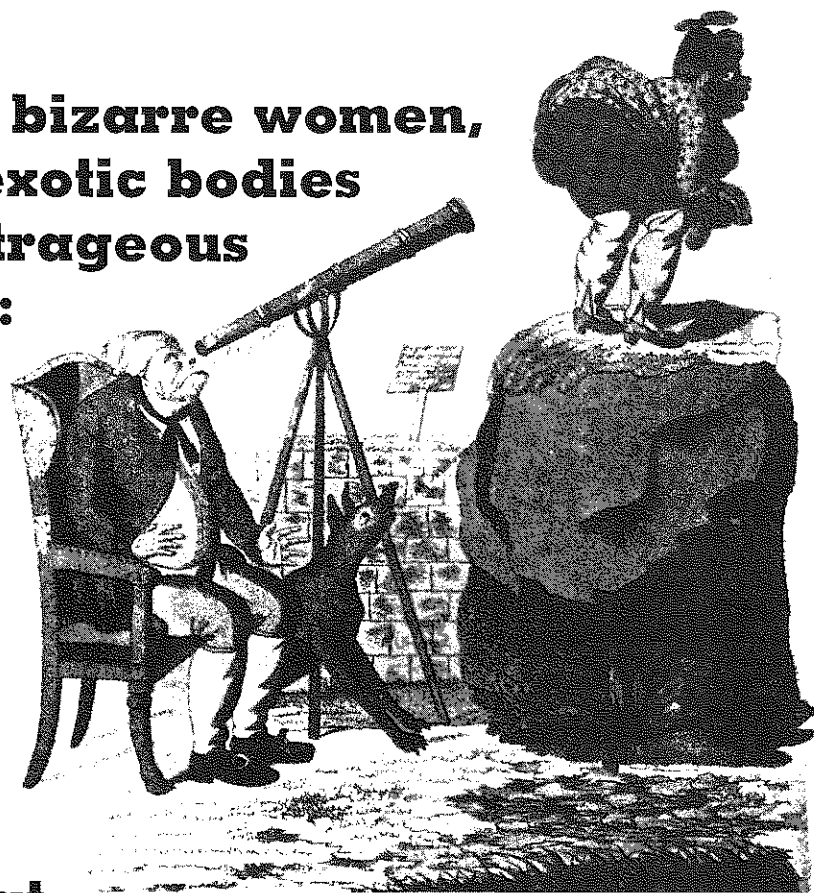
12. Finish your MFA. You can always fall back on teaching.

Detail from painting by R. M. Vaughan



Julia Patterson

**bizarre women,
exotic bodies
& outrageous
sex:
or
if annie
sprinkle
was a
black ho
she
wouldn't
be all
that**



by karen/miranda augustine

The new school of lezzie pro-sex activism has been pushed into the mainstream of queer political thought. Important as it is for women's issues to be placed at the centre, and particularly so since lesbians generally have little emotional or financial dependence on men, throughout the bulk of sex mags, porn, and the Modern Primitives trend, at heart is an unacknowledged presence of culture-vulturism dependent on racialized sex-drives of white queers.

As a queer-identified Black woman, I have felt unsatisfied by the sexual liberation rhetoric firmly anchored within lesbian and gay spaces. S/M, dyke representation, censorship, pornography, sexual fantasies: this cornucopia of women's sexual practice within the mainstream of the lesbian, gay and bisexual communities has conveniently disregarded the very complex issue of race—and where it all fits—within these discussions.

I'm not big on sexuality theories because the very things that swell my clit, when thrown into the whirl-

wind of lezzie political correctness, just don't figure. And depending on how strong I'm feeling, shame is often the outcome if what's turning me on is deemed degrading to my sex by the progressive elite. Put quite simply, I don't claim definitive politics on a lot of these issues, but I do understand what makes me wet.

I am a consumer of pornography. Het porn, that is. I have been so since the age of 11. *Cherie*, *Penthouse*...you name it, I hoarded it. What I realized then was that Black female porn stars (like their Asian, Latina, Arab and Jewish sisters) were left to the pages of fetish mags, aluding to themes of cannibalism, bestiality and slavery. What I understand now is that race is the distinguishing feature in determining the type of objectification a woman will encounter. And believe me, the sex-libbers of the queer scene need a wake-up call: this problem is alive and well and deeply embedded within our communities. This in mind, a historical briefing on Black sexual exoticization will bring me back to my case in point.

the 411

Links made between the eroticization of Black sexuality, myths surrounding "whiteness" and colonial culture are lacking in the bulk of queer sex-lib theories. In examining the supposed normality of "whiteness" and the colonial construction of Black sexuality—and more importantly, how to reconceptualize that image—a different impression of the interconnectedness of race, class, gender, sexuality, power and control would emerge.

The use of Black women's bodies as fetish and "entertainment" for Europeans has its roots within the colonization of Africa. In France during the 18th and 19th centuries, the sexuality of African slaves was studied by scientists, naturalists and writers. The results deemed the African woman as primitive and therefore more sexually intensive. Interestingly enough, these "studies" which separated the African/"them" from the European/"us"—not just physically, but morally—distorted African sexual agency, and pathologized women's sexuality on the whole. The cult of (white) womanhood was confined to notions of purity, chastity, passivity and prudence. Black womanhood was polarized against white womanhood in the structure of the metaphoric system of female sexuality—the Black woman became closely identified with illicit sex.



sarah bartmann's girlie show

The genitalia of selected African slave women—referred to as "Hottentots"—was examined in order to prove them a primitive species who most likely copulated with apes. According to Sander Gilman, one of many African women placed on display, Sarah Bartmann, referred to as the "Hottentot Venus," is but one example of Black female objectification during early 19th century Europe. Her display formed one of the original icons for Black female sexuality; Bartmann was often exhibited at fashionable parties in Paris, generally wearing little clothing, to provide entertainment. To her audience, she represented deviant sexuality. Reduced to her sexual parts, Ms. Bartmann was showcased for about 5 years until her death at age 25 in 1815. To add insult to injury, her genitalia were dissected and—is to this very day—put on display at the Musée de l'Homme in Paris.

Present day notions of "freed" and "open" sexuality rely specifically on this historically-specific interpretation of Black womanhood.

fuck lea delaria & her big black dildo jokes

question: which is more intimidating? a) a man, b) a big man, c) a big black man

question: rough sex—who are you most likely to get it from? a) an Asian, b) an African

question: what makes Latinos so "hot-blooded"?

The onslaught of dyke sex paraphernalia, in an attempt to overthrow the strictures of

(white) womanhood, reinserts itself by commodifying "otherness" within certain sexual/body practices:

- body piercing, tattoos and scarification are a part of the Modern Primitives (an offensive and loaded term) movement, forms of body adornment inherent within Indigenous and Eastern cultures;

- in *Leatherwomen*, a book of women's sex writings, a (straight-identified) white woman is gang raped by 1 Black and 2 Latina women (never mind that Blacks, Latinos and First Nations form the majority of those incarcerated) who are portrayed as being sexually "deviant" and violent;

- and, in *Love Bites*, a book of lez-sex photography, white dykes fuck each other with big, black dildos.

Talks regarding the representation of women in porn and erotic writings have for too long privileged white gender and sexuality. Unchallenged racism is reflected in both het and queer smut: Black men are reduced to the size and effectiveness of their penises, while Black, Asian, Latina, Arab and Jewish women are viewed as anomalies, exotic treats and fetishes. Stereotypical notions of a person-of-colour's body suggest intense sexual pleasure unknown to the vanilla experience.

cross-over vanillas

Reactionaries may claim censorship over my blatant observations of race and representation. And reactionaries from the pink third space may attempt to regulate how we, as queers-of-colour, should knock boots proper (read: no S/M).

Yet most needed is a level of acknowledgement and social understanding regarding the cultural specificities of sexual expression. Non-sexual examples include how dancehall, rap and Black speech are misinterpreted in the mainstream by non-Black audiences. And how, in porn and other sex-smut, the racialization of Black and Brown people is taken to the nth power and most extreme level. Perhaps what I'm trying to express most is that a lot of the debates presume that we are all white and that the confines of white body culture apply to us all. And this just isn't so.

Stressed here is not a simple trashing of lezzie-fuck culture, but the limitations and myopia of a sex-lib scene that is stuck in the rut of racial ambivalence. What one has the right to fantasize about or sexually impress is not the issue here. The question *How entrenched is that sexual fantasy/practice in the myth of progressive representation and the transcendence of white patriarchal expression?* is key.

Further Reading

Hazel V. Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (London: Harper Collins, 1990).

Sander L. Gilman, *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).

bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992).

karen/miranda augustine is a writer and visual artist; she is an editorial board member of Fuse Magazine and managing editor of At the Crossroads: A Journal for Women Artists of African Descent.

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for Doug Wilson

a wall fell down, a field
of muddy bootprints like scattered bricks,
in early spring

then again, clinched
by winter, hard and white as a public toilet

shocked by the headlong rush of green
never before seen, every year, the
spring that never comes, every year

exhausting itself to the bones
of a million wheat, the ochre carcass
asleep on the black earth

then shucked, in autumn filaments
stacked by a few archivists
filing for winter

and again, summer
and again, for us, spring

Something in my Eye

My era shifted like the lurch from safety
to sudden unwellness, or the penis
pushing further to an unexpected depth
without warning, the platform spongy
the mother unrecognizable in evening wear

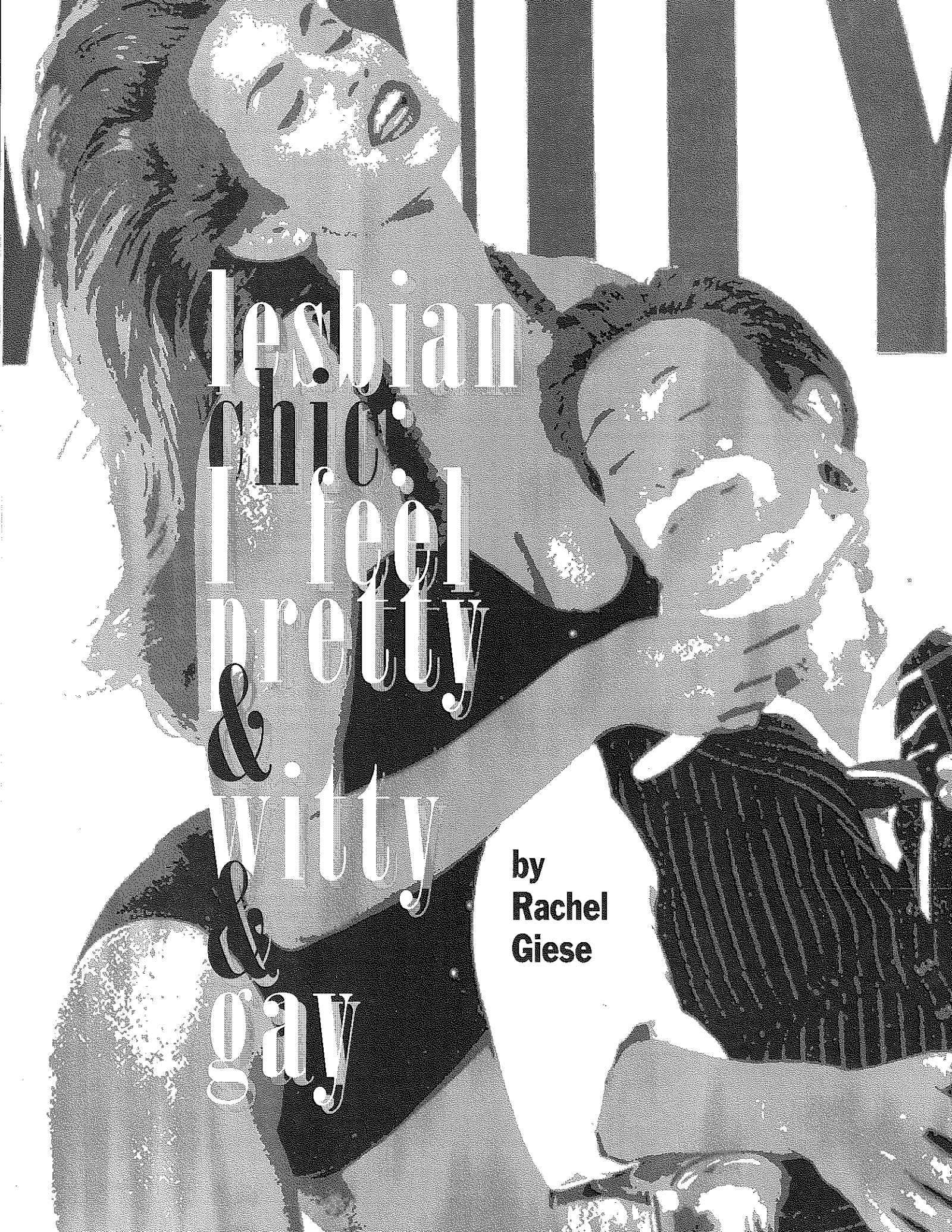
So my head tracks a cursive
swerve and spreads its reading
deeply across the dank wood
of this book, left through to
right against the grain, particles
floating to reach the eyes
in a splurge of scented sawdust
bearing physical memories
in letter form, hard inflections,
the crafted motes inhaled
in gulping osmosis.

And my eyes too casting off
not a vision precisely but a
fragrance, an outpouring of
every rational substance
once transcribed by time
with the elements of fovea,
iris, sclera, cornea...now
in heaping garlands, in sloppy handfuls
tossed into the disintegrating text
air-borne, chimerical
miasma of pulp and perceptive flesh.

Sleeping With the Enemy

The first lesion
does not appear for some time.
Its quiet mood ripples
below the thin velum
crackling a moment
unalarmed its message
hovering, static
giving way to defining flesh
and the horror of the body
speaking for the rest of me.
We mouth the taste of bodies
numbed and numbered.
We lie with the enemy
and dull the remembered flavour
of animal limbs
that arched our backs
with tidal shocks
receiving every pulse.
Our open mouths shun
the pleasure our pores speak of
delirious corners
and endless human corridors
leading to one place.
We miss the skin's vague contour.
We lie with the enemy
on restless sheets
damp with suspense
mealy with the erasures
of each recent session.
The body is on everything
humid breath through every fiber
the fluid exchange
of sentences, parsed or emended
down to a tender contract.
The push of flesh
furnishes this consoling aftermath.
We are left with this.
But the lambent body
articulates itself
irradiating nothing
leaving the night as chill,
as sanitary.
No one permeates its solitary
uninfected reflection.
You are left with me
and the touch of a rhythmic figure.

Stuart Blackley



lesbian
chic:
I feel
pretty
&
witty
&
gay

by
**Rachel
Giese**

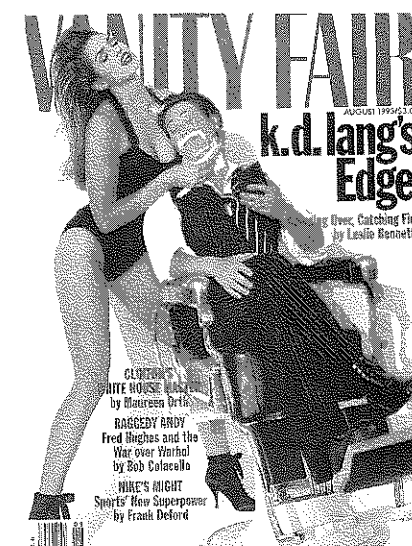
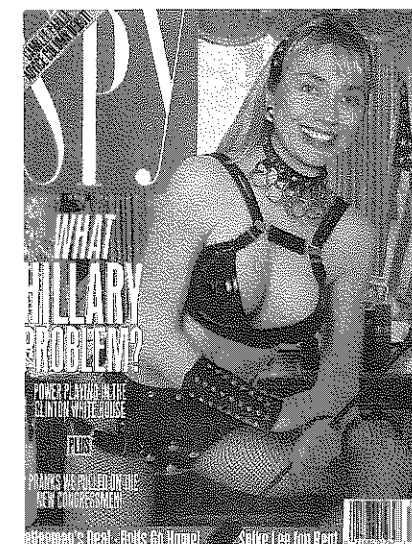
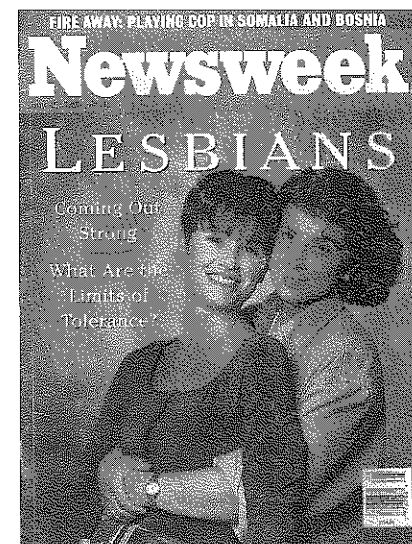
Once upon a time,

in the 1970s, gay men ruled. In the urban centres of San Francisco, New York and LA, they gave the best parties, designed the best clothes and choreographed the best shows. Modern day Noel Cowards, they could always be counted on for the wittiest remarks and the dishiest gossip.

Then came the 1980s and with the shadow that AIDS cast on them, gay men were no longer so attractive. Heterosexuality came back in with a vengeance. Women like Nancy Reagan and Joan Collins became the drag queens of choice. Straight people took over the clubs and started finding their own connections to cocaine. The decade was still about excess, but it was financial in nature, not sexual.

The high living of the 1980s gave way to the recessionary 1990s and the world needed a new sexual orientation to give meaning to the decade. The media seized upon lesbians. They were the perfect image for the scaled-down, nesting 1990s. Their sex was safe and their relationships were long lasting. According to the media, lesbians had shed the negative image that had plagued them in the 1970s—as man-hating separatists. In the intervening years, lesbians had apparently discovered sex, Nair and Armani. And the media was ready to discover them.

The beginnings of the Lesbian Chic phenomenon can be traced back to when Sandra Bernhard got together with Morgan Fairchild on *Roseanne*. Glued to our sets,



we barely made it out of our livingrooms to buy the *National Enquirer* with its story on Northampton, Mass., a town that "10,000 kissing and cuddling lesbians call home."

Then Lea DeLaria screamed "I'm a big dyke" on *Arsenio Hall* and won the hearts of America. *New York* magazine, already famous for breaking both the New Yuppie and the New Couch Potato trends, scooped again. This time with a cover story on the New Lesbian. "Lesbian Chic," shrieked the headline above the cover photo of k.d. lang, "the bold, brave new world of gay women."

Other media were quick to pick up on this trend. *Newsweek* magazine asked the burning question "lesbianism—what are the limits of tolerance?" Geraldo and Phil interviewed panels of "lesbians who don't look it" and Julia Phillips, author of *You'll Never Eat Lunch in This Town Again*, is about to release a book about the dykes who run Hollywood.

But the media's infatuation with us isn't over yet. *Vanity Fair* recently featured a cover photo of lang getting a shave from supermodel Cindy Crawford. *US* magazine ran another lesbian story and everyone is waiting for Gus Van Sant's film, *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues*, with its lesbian sub-plot, to be released.

On one hand, this sudden attention is welcome. While gay men have had to put up with public outings after wash-room raids and swishy hairdresser stereotypes in film and television, lesbians have suffered an opposite fate—a severe lack of exposure. For the first time in history not only does lesbianism have a high profile, it's also been getting positive coverage. Sexy, sapphic and media-friendly, today's dyke is a babe who can give good soundbites.

In fact, she's almost *too* good to be true. If reports are correct, the lesbian of the 1990s is highly educated (no doubt at Smith, Wellesley or the Parson's School of Design), liberal minded (a

friend of Bill's who has a wicked crush on Hillary) and earns \$48,000 a year (as a model, entrepreneur or lawyer). And, almost without exception, she's white. Linda Villarosa, the one black face in the sea of white chicness, is an editor at *Essence* magazine. She's beautiful, feminine, highly successful and very non-controversial. One wonders how she's managed to find time to do her own writing with all the media attention focussed on her. You can almost hear editors yelling "I want a story on dykes! Those new fashionable ones! And be sure to get an interview with the black woman!"

The Village Voice's Deb Schwartz calls this sanitized, media-version of lesbianism, "Homosexuality Lite." Devoid of any political or historical context, it's all style but very little substance.

The *New York* article, while it attempted to address some pertinent political issues, focussed mainly on fashion and social mores. A trip to a trendy lesbian bar reveals attractive Luppies (lesbian urban professionals) sipping wine spritzers and planning their holy unions. An interracial couple (Jewish and African-American) smooth over their differences by purchasing identical engagement rings at an upscale department store. And Madonna's and Sandra Bernhard's dirty dancing at a lesbian club gets far too much credit for bringing the lesbian movement to maturity. It was as though the Stonewall Riots, the feminist and civil rights movements and the creation of a rich feminist/lesbian culture of writing, film and music, never existed. Instead, a new generation of lesbians was presented, born of an Immaculate Conception, radically different from their foremothers, with no political or social issues more pressing than deciding on a shade of lipstick.

The *Newsweek* piece is equally as guilty of the twin sins of omission and sanitization. The cover features two well-accessorised babes (a denim shirt

with pearls) cuddling. The reader is later to find out that the pair are lovers and that one is a recovering alcoholic studying to be "a therapist for homosexuals." How perfect. How 1990s. For the lesbian-impaired, *Newsweek* provides a lexicon—giving definitions for "butch," "femme," and "vanilla." My favourite, however, is the one for "lipstick lesbian." This woman is described as "part of the Madonna aesthetic. Dolls up, wears makeup and skirts and has long nails." The whole article has the tone of an anthropological paper or a cheap pulp novel—*explore the strange twilight world of women who love women*.

Interestingly, no one in the mainstream covering the Lesbian Chic trend has identified herself as a lesbian. In fact, judging from the response in the lesbian and gay press, most lesbians are suspicious of the hype. Most are afraid we'll suffer the same fate as the new couch potato and the new yuppie—we'll soon find ourselves in another magazine on a list of the year's worst trends. *Out* in both senses of the word.

Perhaps it's just a matter journalistic objectivity that most of the reporters aren't lesbians. But it's another matter entirely when they try so hard to make it clear to readers that THEY'RE NOT DYKES. In the *US* story, the author points it out in the *first sentence*. She writes, "I'm standing alone, the only straight woman in motorcycle leathers, among a throbbing, grinding, drinking, smoking, dancing, kissing group of long-haired, red-lipped, perfect-bodied, little-black-dressed lesbians in Girl Bar in Los Angeles." Obviously the author has not kept up with the news, or else she wouldn't have made such a fashion *faux pas*. She must have been thinking of the *old* lesbians as she picked out her undercover get-up for the night. In dyke bars only the straight girl reporters wear leather, pants and no makeup. Unfortunately, what may be lurking beneath this objective facade is a nasty

case of homophobia. While lesbians may be cool to talk about, look like or even know, actually being mistaken for one fills most with trepidation.

But journalists aren't the only ones recognizing our current cachet. News of us has been selling magazines, but we're also being recognized as consumers. In the past few years, market research has shown that gays and lesbians have large incomes and expensive, well-educated tastes. Companies like Absolut vodka, Banana Republic and Toyota have targeted ads towards the lesbian and gay market (see Steven Maynard's article in this issue). Banana Republic even used a real lesbian in their "Chosen Family" campaign—Ingrid Cassares, the ex of both Madonna and Sandra. It's certainly flattering. And these ads may do more to increase our visibility than any number of marches on Washington. But again, it's our alleged financial clout, not any belief in our basic rights, which has inspired these ads.

To a certain extent, lesbians themselves may be responsible for the sudden hipness. There is some truth in the media revelation that the new generation of lesbians is different from the past. In the film, *Thank God I'm a Lesbian*, author Sarah Schulman explains that lesbians who came out in the late 1980s have an entirely different relationship and different expectations of popular culture than in the past. While Stonewall lesbians felt alienated from popular culture and 1970s feminist lesbians protested against it, younger lesbians are demanding a place in it, says Schulman. We buy Madonna CDs, we read hip lesbian and gay magazines like *OUT*, *10 Percent* and *Deneuve* and watch films by out lesbian and gay filmmakers. This might even be seen as a rebellion against the perceived prudishness of the old guard. Shaving legs, wearing lipstick, reading porn and calling each other girl (never womyn, wimmin or womon) has become the new way for lesbians to be radical.

A straight friend of mine told me she first heard of the Lesbian Chic trend on the Maury Povich show. Povich had on a lipstick lesbian couple who charmed the audience with their non-threatening attitude and good looks. Both of their fathers were in the house and they stood up and told Povich how proud they were of their daughters. However, Povich had also invited an old-school feminist lesbian who was practically booed off stage for her politics and, one can presume, tacky fashion sense.

My friend said it was a win-win situation for the lipstick lesbians and the audience. The audience could pat themselves on the back for their liberalness—sure they could accept homosexuals when they were as cute as these girls—and the lipstick lesbians could gain societal acceptance from distancing themselves as much as possible from the less desirable elements of the lesbian community. My friend said it was a perfect example of a controversial issue made palatable with the benefit of good packaging.

The loser of course, was the older feminist lesbian. Set up as a straw woman and an out-dated cliché, she was rejected even by members of her own community. This divide and conquer routine is often used on minority groups. And now we're seeing the good lesbian pitted against the bad lesbian, with the media lesbian screaming "These are the 1990s, accessorizing is in. Organizing is out." While for the time being she's winning hands down, in the end we all lose.

We lose our history of butch and femme women (dykes in the 1990s weren't the first to wear lipstick) and the history of radical and brave feminists of the 1970s. We lose the strength of diversity in our communities. And most importantly we lose the ownership of our own sexuality. The Lesbian Chic hype has turned our politics into t-shirt slogans and our sex into a soft-core *Playboy* spread. The "chic media lesbian" is sexy

but never has sex. And she never articulates the desire for women which has led her down an often dangerous, lonely and precarious path.

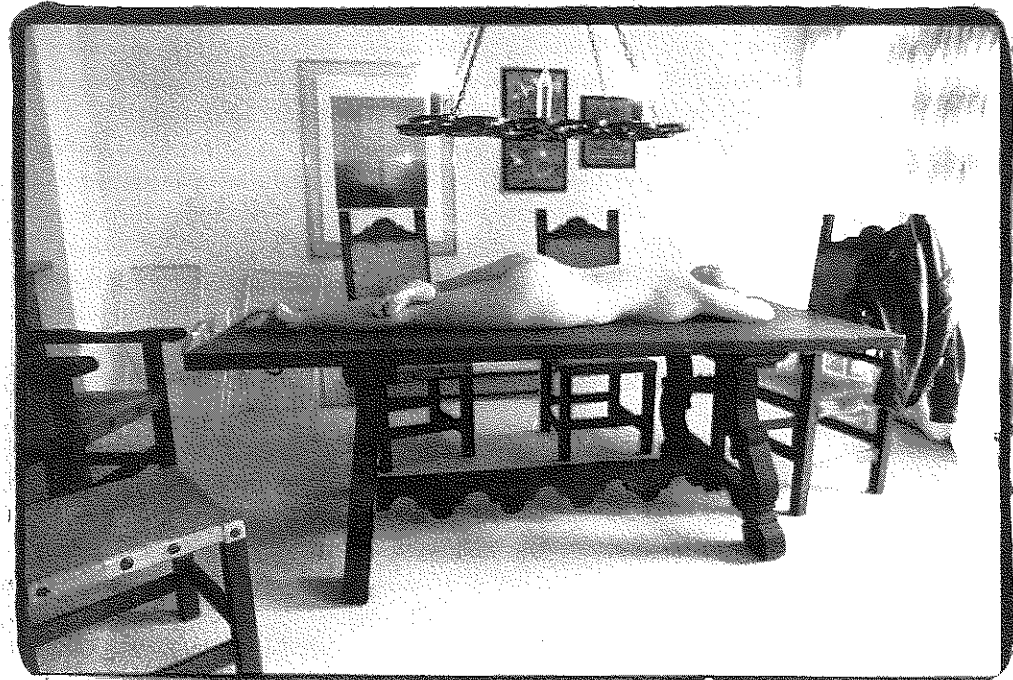
At a time when gay rights are being fought for in the military, in the courts, in Washington and Ottawa and on the streets, the "chic lesbian" is apolitical. While she is making the covers of mainstream magazines her own magazines are being stopped at the border.

Lesbian author Jane Rule once explained why she wrote for *The Body Politic*, a now defunct gay liberation magazine. While Rule had gained mainstream respectability she said she would continue to defend the controversial magazine because as long as one homosexual was marginalized and silenced, we all were. She refused to hide behind her reputation and allow others to be pushed to the fringes.

There is nothing wrong with being chic. There is nothing wrong with lesbians finally being able to move into the mainstream. And perhaps it is inevitable that in its first attempts to explore the lesbian experience, the media hasn't done a thorough job. Maybe that is a task best left up to lesbians themselves.

There is a cost, however, in the whirlwind romance the media is having with us. We're not always going to make good copy. And while the media may ignore our strengths, our politics and our community, we had better not. Or we'll be left, like brides at the altar, scratching our heads and wondering what happened, when we're no longer front page news.

Rachel Giese is a free-lance writer and she works at the University of Toronto's Varsity newspaper.



Ode to the Femme Mystique
by Lois Fine

Would that I could add those hours to my life
Spent pondering the femme mystique in all of its manifestations
For surely then I would live to be a ripe old butch.

Hear me now that this mystique casts its charms on many levels
From the sublime to the spirit
From the purest physical engagement to the deepest matter of
the heart.

For it is with a beckoning finger that my femme has called
And once so am I not but held fast to heed her
For though my mind may say what
Yet my body brings me forth.

To stand outside her door full of all smells sweet and heavy
And when asked the simplest question to lose sense of even
my name.
As when holding me with her potent eyes
Or smiling at me in the slowest of satisfaction
Can I be expected to know my own thoughts although what
would they be
But that there could be no place I would more like
to find myself.

And such is the fate of the butch perplexed
Left to wonder openly at how a resolve that seemed of steel
Can melt under her soft and summoning touch.
(For even those butches among us proud and protective of their
selves and their scars, still have they let their knowing femmes
touch them in places some would say had tuned to stone.)

For the femme mystique has prompted butches to perform
Unheard acts of ardor
Untold feats of physical accomplishment which the
bedroom walls
Have begged to divulge
Unrecorded tales of brave and daring courage
In manner of speaking and ways of dress.

So take heed ye butches out there
That you may know her when she calls.
Your femme will have this mystique in her favour
Yours but to surrender.

photograph by Ellen Flanders

SCIENCE ^{as} CULTURE

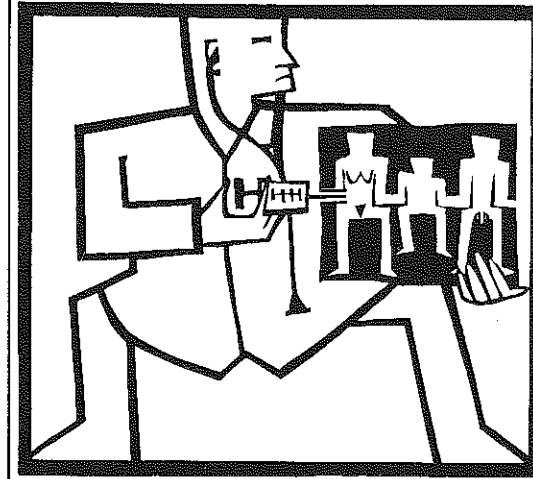
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LESBIAN

ONE CATASTROPHE An interview with Sarah

Sarah Schulman writes novels about the Lower East Side and lesbian sub-culture in New York City. Like a good punk band (*Fugazi, the Mekons, Poison Girls*) every book she releases is quite different. How you think about her depends on which novel you just finished reading. Cities change and they don't change. There are always homeless people in her New York, contemporary political events such as American wars, low-paid women's jobs, and there's always sex. Over the last ten years she has written five novels, including *Girls, Visions and Things, People in Trouble*, and most recently, *Empathy*. In *After Delores*, the main character drops by CBGB's, a punk palace, and comments that the petrified hardcore kids need to get hip to something new. But then she still reads punk poet Patti Smith aloud to her friends.

If you want to talk to Sarah Schulman about New York and Toronto, and about her new non-fiction book on lesbian and gay life, you phone her New York number between eleven and noon. It's the only way she gets any writing done. On the telephone, she's friendly and practical. Sure, she'll do a taped interview. "Let's do it right now, you just keep firing questions at me." In the summer of 1993, Alan O'Connor asked the questions.

AO: *Is there any single theme in your book on lesbian and gay politics during the 1980s?*

SS: Well, it was just one catastrophe after another, wasn't it? I don't think anyone ever could have imagined what was coming next. So the book is an analysis of strategies and tactics we used in the 80s, and which ones worked and which ones didn't. And I think that it is pretty obvious that single-issue organizing does not work; that trying to use the language of the right wing, words like pro-family and things like that, does not work; and that trying to make changes behind the scenes, working inside political parties does not

work. The thing that has worked the best has been when we have been very authentic about who we are and as radical as we really are and used direct action. That seems to have been the most effective actually, when you analyse the period from 1981 to 1992, the Reagan-Bush years here in the United States.

AO: *What do you mean by single-issue politics?*

SS: In the early 80s in the United States there was a very strong anti-abortion movement. That was a very wide coalition of everything from the Catholic left to the completely insane religious right. And they united on one issue, which was to make abortion illegal. So we tried to build huge coalitions on single-issue politics. We spent the whole 80s imitating the tactics of the right. But that doesn't work if your vision is freedom. You can't make these tactical decisions to eliminate half of your worldview in hopes of having coalitions. So, for example, the women's movement tried to have a single issue campaign for the Equal Rights Amendment in which they excluded all mention of abortion rights and lesbian issues, and failed miserably because you end up not really standing for anything.

AO: *Can you point to a coalition that is an example of what we should be trying to do?*

SS: I think ACT UP is a very good example. It was always a coalition. It had and still has every kind of person. There's people who want revolution tomorrow and there's people who just want to work inside the Democratic Party. There's the whole spectrum. And yet, the way it has operated when it has been most successful, is that people are allowed to be where they are at. There is no forced consensus. So if you want to participate in a particular type of action you can, and if you oppose that action you don't have to be a part of it. But that doesn't mean that you have to leave the group. There is a certain ideological flexibility which allows a lot of very different people to work together.

AO: *How has the relationship between men and women worked in ACT UP and similar groups?*

AFTER ANOTHER Schulman in New York

SS: ACT UP has always been primarily men. Though I would have to say that of all the different AIDS organizations, whether it is issues of the pharmaceutical industry, the government, social services, or community-based groups, ACT UP is really one of the organizations that has been in the forefront of advocating for people who are not necessarily represented in the group, or who are represented in a minority way. We had prison projects, we had needle exchange, we had school condom distribution, we had an incredible amount of activism on behalf of women with AIDS, pediatrics, tax-reform, every issue of access has been addressed by ACT UP. So I feel that it has been a very good relationship. There was faction-fighting in ACT UP, as in any other organization, but I don't think it ever was around gender. Nor was it about positive or negative HIV status. It was always ideologically divided.

AO: *There is a new generation of activists who define themselves as queer rather than as lesbian or gay. Does this represent a shift in politics?*

SS: I don't want to be too simplistic but "queer" represents people who have been able to have a place both in the gay world and in the world of popular culture. Pre-liberation gay life took place underground. The more we have achieved, the more we are able to have a place in the world as well as within our world. That is what queer represents. It is happening and it is an inevitable change. It is not for everybody but that is an actual evolution of the movement.

All of these questions: are we queer, are we gay, do we need lesbian separatism, do we need gay and lesbian separatism, bisexual separatism, there is not one answer to this. The point is to create an environment where the largest number of people can participate in political rebellion. And that means providing the greatest range of options for people to participate. So if there are lesbians who want to be in lesbian-only organizations there is a need for them to be there. If there are lesbians and gay men who want to work together those organizations need to be there. And bisexuals, if they want their own organizations... What I'm saying is that we need to have the widest range possible. Not to have a closed, dogmatic definition of what it means to be politically active.

AO: *Can you say something about Lesbian Avengers? A new organization you're involved with...*

SS: Okay, I'm also still active with ACT UP, by the way. Lesbian Avengers was started a year ago by six women, lesbians, all of whom had a huge amount of political experience. At this point I think we have ten to fifteen chapters in the US and in Europe. The New York chapter has over two hundred people in it. And we just had our greatest moment. We organized the dyke march, the night before the march on Washington, in which 20,000 lesbians marched to the White House, and we believe this is the largest lesbian event in the history of the world. From six people to 20,000 in one year is pretty good. It is on a Queer Nation or ACT UP model, a lesbian direct-action movement. It is not separatism. It is a post ACT UP lesbian movement. Lots of people in the group are in other organizations, in mixed groups, in non-gay groups, whatever. There is not an ideology of separatism. But lesbians have been in the forefront of every movement for social change on the face of the earth but not as lesbians and not on our own behalf. And that is what this is about. So we only do direct action. It is not a theory group, it is not a therapy group. It is a direct action group and our actions have been very clearly focused on the right wing. We don't go after other movement groups or other liberal organizations. New York City's religious right has battled the multicultural curriculum in the high school system. And we have been involved in contesting their moves. We were very much involved with the Irish lesbian and gay organization when they took on the Catholic Church and tried to march in the St. Patrick's Day parade. We zapped the mayor of Denver after Colorado passed Proposition 2. And we were in Tampa Florida when a lesbian with AIDS had her trailer burned and the city of Tampa refused to classify it as a bias-crime. So 31 Lesbian Avengers from Atlanta, New Jersey and New York went to Tampa and did all these actions, had a motorcade and demonstrations and got the mayor to come out and speak on her behalf. So that's what we're doing. We're national and we're willing to go on location. It's really very exciting.

Sarah Schulman's book, My American History, will be published by Routledge in June 1994 for the 25th anniversary of Stonewall. This interview with Alan O'Connor was first broadcast on CKLN 88.1 FM.

Censorship, Passion & Identity

by **Courtney
McFarlane**

I want to say something about censorship as it relates to other issues of identity and difference. The debates about censorship rage on. When I hear the word, I hear meanings about self-censorship, social censorship, community censorship. I hear the myriad ways that we as people of colour internalize the oppressive attitudes of our society, our community and stifle the work we produce, we create. I don't first hear about the state-sponsored censorship that most people talk about. Most anti-censorship activists rarely address the issues of censorship that I experience directly.

Censorship is actually not an issue I feel very passionately about. The language used in discussing it is basically outside my experience. In order to participate in a panel discussion on this issue I had to do some basic research. I was somewhat ashamed to admit my ignorance of the Butler decision. I was aware in a peripheral kind of way of the harassment of lesbian and gay bookstores, customs seizures of queer images and other incidents around the city. However I had not personalized the issue. What I knew did not lead to any action or even outrage. I have recently finished four years at the Ontario College of Art, as insulating an educational institution as any other. Perhaps that explains some of my ambivalence about the issues.

As someone with a double consciousness, as a gay man and a Black man, I rec-

ognize that the issue is often framed and defined by people who are relatively privileged by this society. Censorship is often only viewed as the suppression of cultural productions related to sex and sexuality by the state, institutions of the state, and conservative elements of society. This limited definition is something I feel very outside of. Yes, there should be freedom to create, exhibit, distribute work of any nature and I should support that, but I am not passionate in that support or defence. I certainly have difficulties with that narrow definition of censorship. It often does not recognize the other subtle ways in which censorship is practiced: the forms of social censorship that exist even within the queer artistic communities.

We should all fight to defend freedom of expression, but recognize that we aren't equally free to express, create, exhibit, publish, perform, be picked, panned, critiqued, recognized and be paid.... much less be censored. Within a white, supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal, heterosexist society (I might have forgotten something) freedom is distributed unequally. Even though we as lesbian and gay artists have struggles that interconnect, they are not identical. The effect of censorship differs with one's position in society, one's place in the hierarchy. My struggle is about creating a community to support my expression, my cultural productions, to access resources from organizations or communities that don't necessarily see my silence or invisibility as a priority. Institutions continue to

value and privilege the way others represent me rather than the way I choose to represent myself. That defines art and culture in a manner that continues to marginalize my expressions and critiques my works by standards by which I will always be found lacking. I am coming from a space where there often isn't the luxury of time to create when energy is diverted in the fight for access to resources and in developing these communities to support and nurture my work.

That is basically where I am coming from in terms of this issue. So I would like to ask how much of this work that we are so passionately defending is by people of colour? How much of this work speaks to issues that are outside of your experiences? That takes positions with which we disagree? Any movement to combat censorship must recognize social censorship, marketplace censorship and, by extension, personal censorship. Not only censorship that directly affects us and those like ourselves, but the censorship that we participate in. As gay and lesbian activists, as artists, we are censored by the state and society but despite our sexual identity, those of us who are privileged whether it be by race, gender or class, have to acknowledge that privilege. So any struggle against censorship for me has to adequately address not only the state-sponsored censorship, the social censorship, but also the censorship I feel I live and breathe everyday. Unless censorship includes that struggle I will continue to be dispassionate about the anti-censorship movement.

While writing the original version of this article I went to a dub poetry festival in Toronto. Many of the people who support the black artistic productions such as this festival are lesbians and gays. So as we watched the performances that went on well beyond closing time, one of the performers, a well-known dub poet in the city, slipped in the world "lesbian" and within that space we heard it. The word.... yeah we caught it, sort of like dog hearing right, we heard it and thought it was so quick no one else would hear. Talking to a lesbian filmmaker on the way home, she described how this woman up front was saying "Oh yeh nuf respect, me like all that except for the lesbian part." Where I'm coming from within the Black community, lesbians and gays don't exist. The issue of homosexuality is never addressed and often we as Black lesbian and gay artists within these spaces are pressured to remain invisible and silent. In this culturally conscious queer milieu that is predominantly white, we continue to be marginalized and silent. Both of these realities are forms of censorship that I experience, that are real for me. Finally, I recognize that all forms of censorship limit all our struggles and that these links/connections have to be made.

Courtney McFarlane is a Black, gay male, Jamaican born, Canadian raised and African identified. He is a multi-disciplinary artist and poet and a member of AYA, an activist organization for Black gay men.

Censorship, Passion & Identity



One angelic kiss

Brenda Brooks

Though mostly you ignore me never bringing gifts that amount to more than a small tin of artichoke hearts and I would never be ridiculous enough to love you (though I am still ridiculous enough to love) there are nights filled with I don't care and so what anyway we're all going to die maybe sooner and hopefully more adventurously than we think and the sun's got to fizzle sometime and there's a world-class loopy tyrant ordering a new set of epaulettes even as we speak or

preferably,

even as we make a pragmatic date to get together for one last long angelic kiss which may be one of the few pure gestures left to aspire to aside from the kind of gesture made by the real lover to the truly loved when she raises a thin blue porcelain bowl so fine you can see every storm happening on the moon through it to the other's lips and tips thirty-six drops of rain individually collected just after dusk onto her tongue saying nothing because that kind of angelic kiss speaks for itself.

Local honey

Must be gathered slowly, at first, the tongue's tip, the fingertips,

are everything in this sweet, precocious business we set our bodies to.

The gatherer must love and live for honey (the faintest scent of slow nectar) from her fluted centre, and learn to say so, make it rise

with a touch implied and gestures sweetly unfulfilled

until they are fulfilled,

in the gatherer's own wild measurement of dripping time,

at the hurting moment honey becomes too heavy for itself.

But it must be slowly, at first;

the tip of such things being all -

the intense intent before the fact,

the near touch, the almost word, the ingenious, honey eye

that turns the gatherer into the gathered deeply in.

YOUTH STRETCH

photos: ka yin Fong



by Vinita Srivastava

There is a story that is told about the dhobi's (washer's) dog: The dhobi leaves his community with his dog every morning to go to the river to wash clothes all day. Playing with the river dogs, the washer's dog becomes almost but never quite at home by the river. Every night, the washer's dog runs, looking forward to going home. Only to realize he is not home there anymore either. His ways have changed. He is part river now.

Pratibha Parmar cautions us against the use of the term "exile;" she warns that the use of the word must be specific, for even though we may be "treated as exiles" or feel exiled in some sort of "psychic or cultural way," we are "not exiles, but settlers."

Remembering the half awakens of my breasts and
the stretch of your
black back
in the
black night
and the incredible softness of your lips - the cloud-like-texture
of
your
lips
so that when I go to kiss you
my lips meet the
soft
wet
cloud

this morning as I wake up,
I turn to squeeze you hello
turn to fall into your body. but instead.
I work hard to catch myself from falling down the empty
cliff at the edge of my bed.
Your sandalwood smelling skin sticks to my sheets.
frozen are quick moments of seriousness when I look into
your eyes and find you.
Your hand touches my neck.
At the airport, people stand around
mingling
there are two little girls running back and forth through the
luggage, the carts, the harassed faces, the hidden tears
They scream with delight.
An angry man comes to tell them to shut-up as he slaps
the younger girl who bursts into tears.
Her delightful screams stop.
I watch her sister, older, taller come to caress her cheek.
They stand con soul ling each other.
makes me think of my sister.
I need con soul ling right now.
Where are you?

The flight number is announced.
I feel your sandalwood skin, your back, your shoulders.
Your hand touches my neck.

At the airport, with screaming kids
A group of South Asian men walk by
staring
disbelieving
trying to determine;
which one of us is the woman, which, the man.
I am tired now, and I just want to be with you.
my goodbye.

And I lean in to kiss you.
smiling, you say, with your
ever working/activist voice,
we should make a video: gay and lesbian good-byes
at the airport

I pull you in closer.
I kiss you harder.
Listen up Toronto, Vancouver, Denmark, Austria.
I will kiss my woman lover.
smiling again, you say,
I hope you're not queer bashed on your way home.
Your hand touches my neck.

Many of us who identify as "queer" and South Asian
work hard to self-define. We do this through making
spaces in the arts communities, in the media, in academic
texts, in literature, and in airports. I believed from as
young as the age of seven that writing was going to make
me visible, was going to make people listen:

"Sun. June 12 1977:...My day was a tereble day..."
(sic) *Mississauga

*"April 3, 1981: Moira's an idiot. She was making fun of
our names..."* *Toronto

*"Sunday, July 18, 1982:...Meeta — girl — one year
older than me — black hair, brown eyes. Tall and skin-
ny. Smart. Browneyes. Pretty. Tomboy (?) Wearing
jeans and white top. Nice. My first time meeting her.*
*Toronto

*July 21, 1985:...I've spent many restless nights over
the Flight 182 plane crash, where 329 Indian people
were killed when the plane suspiciously crashed over
the Atlantic Ocean...A girl I really liked, Meeta Gupta,
was on the plane. I remember sharing our problems
together..* *Toronto

*"March 18, 1987: It won't work anymore. Because I
don't know what to write down. I don't know what is
bothering me...I feel...angry — no — I feel help-
less...yes?..."* *Toronto.

I never cry in public
And if someone were to have told me that I would get
on this airplane and cry I would have laughed because it is
too unbelievable.

I take my seat amongst all the *matajis* and *mausis* and
suddenly become overwhelmed at the thought of what I am
really doing. Which is leaving, returning.
Leaving you.

I busy myself with my luggage, my coat. The *mataji* next to
me smiles and tells me it will be a long flight, so didn't I
want to put my coat with hers — above us, in the carry-all?

She, the *mataji*, smiles. Asks me if I am missing my
friends and family. Tells me she understands how hard it
is to leave loved ones behind.

I am wishing
I
I am wishing
I
I am wishing

I was still looking at your red shirt.

The man sitting across from me has large hands. It has
been a while since I have looked at a man's hand up close.
They seem so large and big and clumsy.

Mataji next to me purses her lips, smiles and takes her
glasses off. I see her curiosity, looking at my tears. I am
glad I have worn my pink *Kurta*, because, at least in some
way, you *mataji* seem to feel connected to me; is it my
Indian shirt that smells like the perfumes that I sprayed on
at the duty free shop? All these perfumes, but I can only
smell yours. I walk into your space and the scent immedi-
ately finds me, sinking into my skin.

Anger and books and peers and older women taught me
how to express my feelings, how to fight for my rights, and
my communities' rights, how to live in this society that
wants to squash 'us' down so.

Writing down our lives, recording our worlds is a radical
act where so many wish us ill. Where so many want to erase
the lives of women who love women, of women who struggle
against racism, and of women who succeed.

It is important to remember that we are living in a pre-
sent where the histories of our lives have been erased or
manipulated. We are living a present in which we must cre-
ate images of ourselves which are not distortions of our bod-
ies.

Organizations like the Toronto-based Sister Vision Press
work hard to publish the voices of lesbians, bisexuals, and
feminists of colour. When I read Makeda Silvera's words of
greeting in *"Piece of My Heart: A Lesbian of Colour
Anthology"* I feel as if I am one of the silent women she
speaks of. She speaks of nourishment, and the need to
nourish each other. As 'silence' was, and often still is, a
political act for many black women, the writing down of black
women's lives by black women is one step towards taking all
the defining out of the hands of a white male hegemony.
Lesbians of colour who have created their own theories or
space, or have added to/manipulated existing ("white")
"queer" theories, have been an inspiration to lesbians of
colour coming out in an entirely different political context.

(right now I wish I were three years old) I think of you.
Your name sounds off my imaginary silent tongue. who are
you? want you to build sandcastles with me and go eat
candy and do somersaults with play games with race in the
park with fly a kite with lose sweaters with throw hats in
trees with chase the birds with skip rope with play house
with run with hopscotch with kiss with line up with get wet
with skate with draw with paint with complain with swing with
slide with trick or treat with grow with dance with
would I, at three years old?

Organizing Dosh Pardesh, an annual festival/conference
of South Asian cultures and politics in the West, not only put
me in contact with other South Asian lesbian, bisexuals and
gay men (from the diaspora), but it also gave me a place to
discuss and challenge issues which pertained to our lives in
an environment that I could almost always be assured had
an awareness of homophobia, classism, racism, sexism,
racialism, and communalism.

Unbreakable. A fuck-you festival.
We work together in this colossal task of community

building we have set up for ourselves.

My "third world" airplane is a comfort: there is comfort
here beyond the extreme luxury of the British Airways
Executive class. The people next to me carefully separate
what is left from their meals to offer to fellow passengers —
preserved unused sugar packets, milk cartons — we're not
gluttons.' They give back their trays in two parts: used and
unused. The older man next to *mataji* speaks a Hindi we
can't quite get our tongues around. He wants to know: "will
it be snowing in Canada? Do we have mountains? Is that
Disney World (pointing to the ground)?"

We can only give him short answers: Cold? yes.
Mountains. not really, but some. Disney World. no.

He asks for a little bit of coffee. When the steward
returns with a full cup, he is upset—a waste. Pouring some
coffee into a preserved paper cup (from his last cup of
water), he offers me half a cup of coffee and a saved,
unopened sugar packet.

The third Dosh Pardesh (1993) festival/conference
sought to bring together people of diverse communities and
backgrounds. The programming, which contained
material/work by "South Asian" lesbians and gays, proved
our diversity, yet many sought to build a united international
South Asian lesbian and gay movement on the basis of a
South Asian "queer" identity. Historian Nayan Shah believes
that the desire for this kind of community "has led to the
creation of a global South Asian queer identity, an identity
that has fought silence and invisibility to emerge." Creating
and building one South Asian queer identity does not seem
possible; however, organizing around this new identity in the
face of racism and homophobia helps to build skill-sharing
networks, resources, support organizations, and a sense of
belonging.

And
now,
without the short spurts of space, and arrogance, we scat-
ter, unaided by each other.
A brief cloud of your smell sometimes dances over my head
and I feel your hands on my waist.

I let my
mind, my body slide and wiggle into your insides so that I
can see you again. For a moment, I take you on—hear your
voice coming out of my mouth instead of mine. I look down
at my body and notice the shape has changed. I feel like
wearing your colours. I struggle to gain myself back as I
panic for a moment thinking you will be with me forever.
I try and remember the way we came together that night. The
loud breathing music that we heard in the bedroom woke us
up from our dream. To comfort. To rock. To sleep. I cradle:
you soothe me. My hands run by your warm and small ear —
on the edge between your hairline and face. I don't remem-
ber when the soft bristles of your hair became erotic, or
where you placed your soft kiss before you went to sleep.

I try and remember fighting with you: Fighting until there
was nothing left of us but our hands. (We ate the rest away.)
But we never fought.

We jump from the bed onto the floor — my legs curled —
wrapped inside your body.

YOUTH



Last night the bed sinks in, swallows us. First there is just a small depression in the centre of the bed, and then slowly, it is larger.

The bed caves in, creating a room for us.

Now the bed throws us out again. Spitting almost.

Laying us only on top.

on the flat surface.

Facing racism makes it difficult to talk publicly about the rifts we have. Instead we place impossible, incredible expectations upon ourselves and each other to fulfil our needs socially and politically as lovers, family, friends, and community organizers.

This ends up ripping us apart.

As we dig down

into what makes us Joyful, we find some sorrow, and when we find sorrow is it because we remember the joy in our lives?

We need to talk openly and comfortably about our religious, class, caste, racial, sexual, and gender differences.

The discussion of bisexuality which took place within the 1993 Desh Pardesh working collective made me bury my head in the sand. The argument about opening the term "queer," about allowing bisexual feminists either to form their own caucus or to join the existing lesbian caucus disrupted our identities, our places and our relationships to one another. I just wanted to fit in. Here. Somewhere. I wanted

"our community" to be cohesive. I didn't want to disturb it.

Clumsily I run through the joy and pride that I feel for the work that my peers have done before me and for the work that I contributed to the Desh Pardesh festival/conference. I can point to many wonderful discussions that happened and to coalitions that were formed. I want everyone to know about the amazing surge of energy and confidence I gain from attending and working on Desh Pardesh as well as working with other "South Asian" community organizations.

These groups and events provide us Asians with badly needed support and give us a forum to address the issues that are not always addressed in both the Asian or gay and lesbian communities. One of the issues that has begun to be addressed is the oppression of racism in the gay and lesbian mainstream. In the United States, our history has been excluded from lesbian history, our literature from gay and lesbian literature, and our images from our community's media.

(Sharmeem Islam, "Towards a Global Network of Asian Lesbians," 1993)

I feel odd about Sharmeem Islam's comment above. Can we be calling any gay and lesbian movement (even white) "mainstream"? Like her, I see the invisibility of and racism toward South Asian, East Asian, Latin, and African dykes and bisexual-feminists in predominantly white "queer" groups. The objectification and exoticization of our colour, bodies, and culture, and trivialization and reduction of our

rethink Me

culture to food, music, and clothing (this is all important, but not the sole definition of who we are as South Asians) leaves many of us feeling like we need to organize autonomously. However, deciding to call a white lesbian and gay movement 'mainstream' does not address the homophobia that we all face as lesbians, gays, and bisexuals.

As South Asian lesbian, gay and/or bisexual groups form in New York, in New Delhi, in London, in Toronto, the isolation felt by Pratibha Parmar twelve years ago has begun to be tackled. "There were very few South Asian lesbians and gays around," she says, but "we knew we were around and we would travel hundreds of miles to meet. Now, in Britain, we have Shakti." The New York South Asian Gay Association explains the reason they formed:

to address issues of concern to us which include the complex racial politics of gay and straight American life, the threat posed by AIDS to South Asians the world over, and the pressures and pleasures unique to our own situation: family expectations, migration and integration, and negotiating between the different roles that we play in working, living and loving.

("Dupattas on Fifth Avenue," *Trikone*, 1991)

In a recorded discussion, South Asian feminist Ravida Din explains this duality of identity by describing her conflict about which aspects of herself to hide: "that heterosexual,

middle class collective [women of colour] is still 'safer' for me than an all white lesbian group. It's a constant trading off—homophobia or racism."

now

my heart still skips a beat when I think of somersaulting with, flying kites with, eating candy with, and chasing birds with

you.

my hands open fingers stretch palms up flying into the air

this is how I feel when I dance

glorious I think.

"what?" she asks.

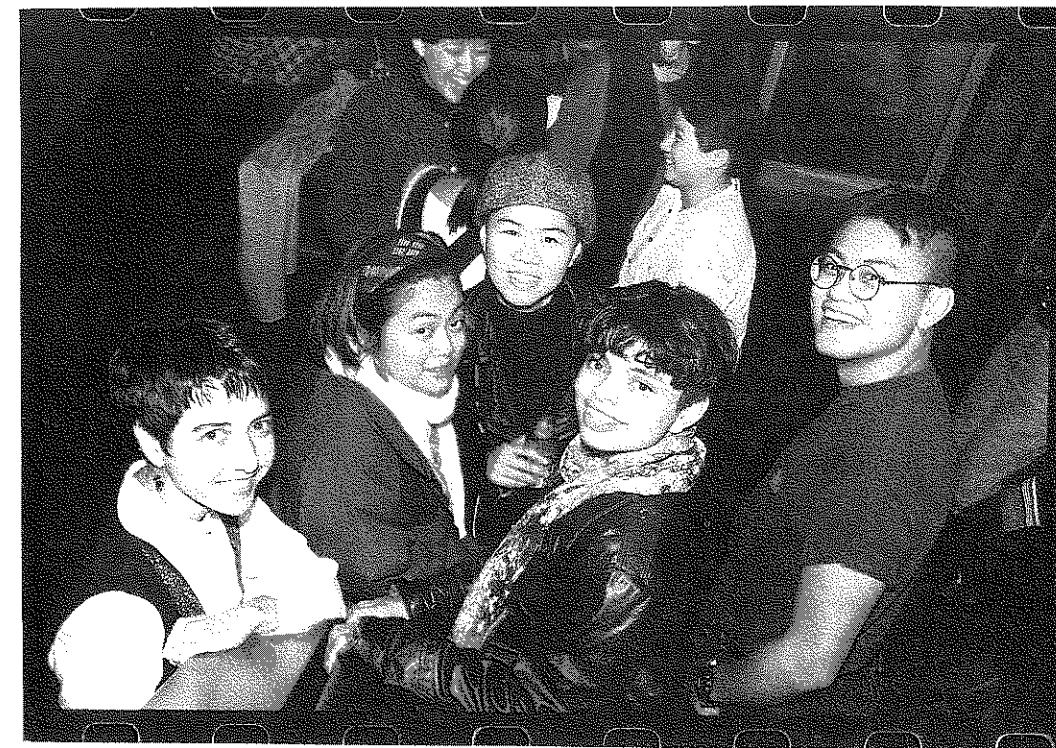
(she can always hear me think)

life I think.

"You" :

I say outloud. just in case she misses my thought.

Newsletters and books such as *Khush Kayal*, *Sami Yoni* (Toronto), *Shakti Khabar* (Britain), *Bombay Dost* (India), *Trikone*, *Shamakami*, (U.S.A.), *Shakti Report* (Britain), *Lotus of a Another Color* (U.S.A.) are creating spaces for "private" discussions in safe places. Too often, South Asian women are seen to be in need of rescue by 'white' feminists. In the case of arranged marriages, any public discussion leaves the South Asian communities open to judgements from the racist discourses of sociology, anthropology, social work, and even feminist organizing.



The risk of ostracism from one's family is something that many South Asian lesbians/gays/bis face; in a society that does not validate our culture, our families often become the only source of cultural asylum and resistance. The need for social mobility of "people of colour" emphasizes marriages; the importance of marriage in South Asian cultures creates a point of conflict for many lesbians, gays and bisexuals who fear "letting down" their families, as well as the rejection of a community that offers them a refuge from a racist society. This community can also be an economic cushion, as well as a source of political power for an individual otherwise marginalized. Urveshi Vaid, former head of the Gay and Lesbian Task force sends a message to South Asian lesbians and gays who fear family reaction:

One thing we have going for us Indians is that there is a very strong commitment to the family. I feel very committed to my parents and my sisters. It doesn't matter if I am gay, I know I am going to be part of their lives. Of course there are moments of awkwardness and pain, but you have to go through that. (Urveshi Vaid, *Trikone*, 1989)

While Urveshi Vaid's experience with family may speak to some of us, for many South Asian queers, lesbians in particular, arranged marriages pose a unique and volatile problem. As an unnamed contributor to *Shakti Report* states: "Great suspicions are aroused when a family member does not get married, or refuses to get married. Such an act is seen as wilful disobedience, an adoption of western values, a rejection of Asian customs." For many South Asians, maintaining their sexuality means losing connections to their family, and risking future prospects for younger siblings: one marries the family and the family's reputation. Asian lesbians often face very tough choices.

I ran away from home on the night before my wedding. I was nineteen. My parents had chosen this man from India, who I hardly knew at all. I just couldn't go through with it. I knew I was a lesbian. I ran off to live with my girlfriend. She was Asian and had also separated from her family. It was good to be with her, sharing the same background so to speak.

My family found out where I was staying a couple of months later. I don't know how. Somebody must have told them they saw me and then they must have watched me and followed me around. Anyway, they turn up to where we were staying at 1:00am. Four car loads of them. Smashed the door down, screaming and yelling at me, slapping me around and my girlfriend, shouting all sorts of bad names at us. They began dragging me out of the flat towards the car. Luckily a neighbour had called the police when she heard the noise. They were around there pretty quickly. They were really good.

Anyway in the end I had to get an injunction on them to stay away from me. My girlfriend and I had

to move away, get another job. I just kept my fingers crossed that they don't find me again.

(Anonymous, *Shakti Report*, 1992)

I think of corny love songs and the words and messages they send us. heart love deep believe never one day one day ya dream get you woman baby hip hair hey but still those love songs sometimes make the middle of my palms burn and tingle. a beautiful tiny burning sensation that starts in the centre of my hand and endearingly and slowly stretches out to my finger tips. you make me high sometimes.

Our self-definition as "settlers" must not be exoticized. We must not simply explain our differences to each other; we need to work with them. There is an overwhelming movement to reclaim history, create language, and put forth positive images that will allow us to discuss, politically and theoretically, issues with us defining the agenda. In all my debates surrounding the politics of identity, I have never been able to throw out a concept of identity that borders on essentialism. But we must be clear that there is no one South Asian "queer" identity; we must be clear as to why we are organizing together. And then we must go out and do it.

Thanks to Andrea, Amita, Julia, Vashti.

Vinita Srivastava is a writer/dreamer living in Toronto.

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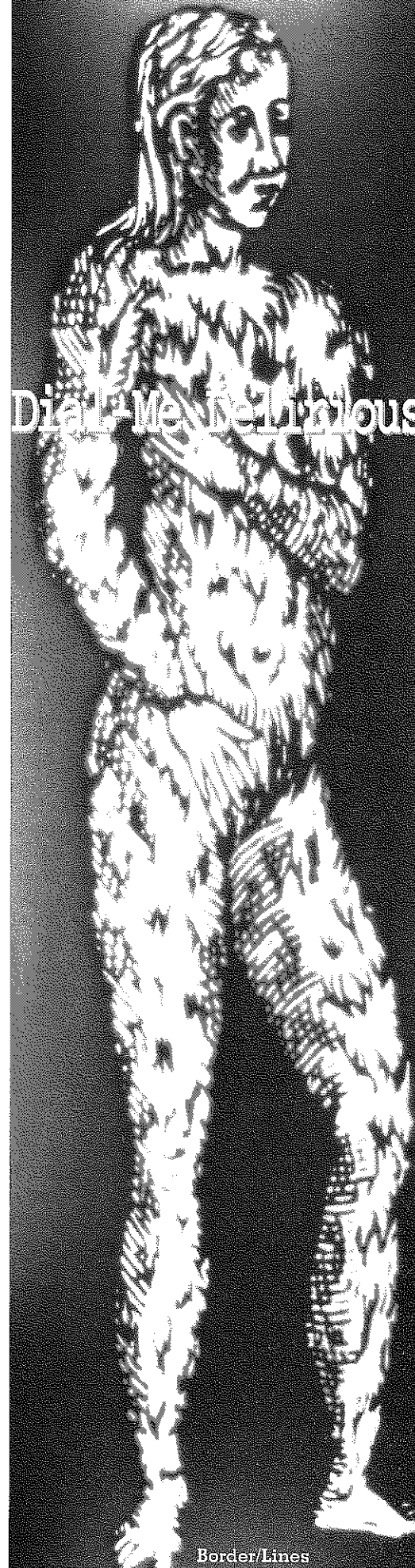
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Shonagh Adelman is a Toronto-based visual artist who has exhibited in galleries across Canada for over ten years. In other work, "Larger Than Life" and "Skin Deep," Adelman explores themes of the body, femininity, lesbian sexuality and fantasy. Her most recent project, "Tele Donna," was on view at A Space Gallery in Toronto, January 8 - February 19.

"Tele Donna: Dial-Me-Licious Doll-Face"

An installation of eleven enormous black light boxes (8' high) arranged in the V formation of a family portrait, *Tele Donna* features bold line drawings of female figures from diverse historical periods. Among them are a nineteenth century Italian prostitute, a Doris Day-styled woman in a 1950s bird-cage bathing suit who sports boxing gloves, and a (thickly-matted) "hairy woman" from Medieval mythology.

The darkened gallery space and the eery purple hue emanating from each box suggest secrecy and erotic intrigue more commonly associated with scenes from a house of horrors or commercial peep shows along Yonge St. ("the sin strip") in the 1970s. Mounted on the side of every phonebooth-like box is a telephone receiver. Picking it up in public, in the company of other gallery-goers, one is startled to hear a very private and very explicit, three-minute phone sex message. Quite unexpectedly, I found myself slinking surreptitiously behind the box, receiver in hand, safely out of view: I was acutely discomfitted by Adelman's crafty deconstruction of "appropriate" public and private activity. At the same time, I experienced the thrill of being both a voyeur and a (turned on) participant in a compelling range of female-centred fantasy scenarios. I wasn't alone. Viewer responses recorded in the comments book included: "Great, now we have to cancel grocery shopping and go home and fuck," "Made me hot," "I'm tingling,"



and "This show's the next best thing to being there."

At the vertex of the angled arrangement, stands an image of two women performing a ballroom waltz in 1950s garb of wide, knee-length skirts and stiffly starched blouses. They trigger my sweet memory of Miou Miou and Isabelle Hupert in Diane Kurys' homoerotic classic, "Entre Nous" (1985). The

accompanying phone sex monologue plays with the butch/femme orchestration of dominance and surrender. The unsettling image of a turn-of-the-century murderess brandishing a knife suggests a portrait of Angelina Napolitano, a 28 year old Italian Canadian mother of four who sliced up her husband in their rented quarters in Sault St. Marie, Ont., in 1911. "Angelina's" violent yet liberatory act is matched by the breathless, taped description of one woman greedily fist fucking another to loud groans, the burbling of lube, and the snapping of latex. Another box features a stocky German girl, a Gretel from the Grimms' fairy tale, in leather harness and lederhosen. On the taped phone message, a 30-something sextpert arouses her caller by pretending she's an eleven year old who likes "girl chicken," pierced pussy, getting spanked and dressing up her playmate in "little girl clothes." This show is not for the sex pessimists at large. The bold, arresting juxtapositions of visual and aural stimuli explode age-old notions of feminine passivity and propriety. In the midst of a full-blown, reactionary moral panic about gender and sexuality, Adelman's "Tele Donna" re-centres the lusty and inextinguishable female spirit. I'd love to claim each and every one of the eleven "Donnas" as coveted members of my family tree.

Becki Ross

"LOOKING HOT: Gay Performances of Masculinity"

by Nicholas Packwood

A wholesale appropriation of skinhead iconography has taken shape in queer punk. These images are linked through a self-consciously performative aspect of gay masculinity. This masculinity is reflexive, ironic and camp. It relies on codes which identify gay men with one another in a society where most articulations of affection between men are forbidden. For gay men to be masculine despite exclusion from the category by virtue of a "feminizing" desire involves a form of masquerade. Gay men, just like everyone else, are playing a game of gender. We are simply more likely to be aware of it. This performance is about looking hot. Oscar Wilde, in his obsession with art and appearance, expresses this sensibility clearly: "It is better to be beautiful than to be good. But... it is better to be good than to be ugly." Gay men have been accused of being "apolitical." On the contrary, there is a politics of looking hot.

At the spring 1992 symposium of Carleton University's Centre for Research in Culture and Society Susan Douglas presented her analysis of "The Finest Young Men..." by Attila Richard Lukacs. This work depicts a group of naked skinheads lounging in Doc Marten's. Conference goers expressed discomfort, even a sense of threat, in their apprehension of muscular naked skins. Imagine their surprise that this image, a work of the gay Lukacs, would be of compelling interest, could even be found comical, to some gay men.

How could skinheads - a youth culture often linked with violent racism and, specific to this case, virulent homophobia - be of sexual interest to gay men? How could they be amusing? There was a logic to the surprise of my straight colleagues: how could gay men relate to an image of masculinity which is not a stereotypical "feminized" representation of gay men?

We need to examine the limitations placed upon the performance of the self when a gay man cannot be muscular and virile without participating in the oppression of others and, by extension, the oppression of himself. The skinheads of Lukacs' painting are perceived as threatening, racist, violent and unequivocally masculine. But gay? Gay men, by virtue of a desire which does not fit, are denied participation in masculinity. As a result we can be incredibly resourceful and creative in the performance of ourselves. Yet members of the gay male community continue to valorize our exclusion from more 'conventional' codes of masculinity. After all, who would want to look like this masculine oppressor? Who could desire a skinhead?

The visual cues that signal the skins' participation in a specific youth culture also emphasize their masculinity. Heads are shaved. Faces grimace. Bulging biceps are emblazoned with militaristic tattoos. Their nakedness underscores the "shitkicker" footwear. These fine young men are emblematic of unrestrained masculinity - unreasoning and aggressive. But queer punk men are not considered perplexing because they have shaved heads, combat boots and an aggressive aesthetic: powerful symbols of masculinity. They are perplexing because of their seemingly inconsistent desire for men. This play on expectations can be troubling to many gay men. It may be perceived as a betrayal of the "feminine" constructs which have differentiated straight and gay masculinities. A gay man with a shaved head? How can we reconcile this symbol of aggressive masculinity with "being gay?" Symbolic inclusion and exclusion is not limited to a determining straight society. Many gay men also engage in the policing of a correct masculinity.

Two gay friends come to mind: one an androgynous queer fairy, the other a truck driver. Most people have no trouble identifying the first as gay. Slim and svelte in flowing clothes and make-up with a campy bite in his speech, he is a fire hazard. The second stands in contrast, the epitome of the butch top man with rugged jaw and plaid flannel work shirts. He has been thrown out of gay bars for not looking gay enough.

These two have never met. They would not be able to stand each other. For the one, androgyny is the only recourse for a male who does not wish to participate in codes which reproduce hierarchical relations of domination and submission. Also, he is not straight but gay and wants to signal that he fucks men. For the other it is a rugged masculinity to which he is attracted. His leather and denim signify the Marlboro man he wants, and the one he wants to perceive in himself. Also, he is a man who wants to have sex with men and they should know he is a real man!

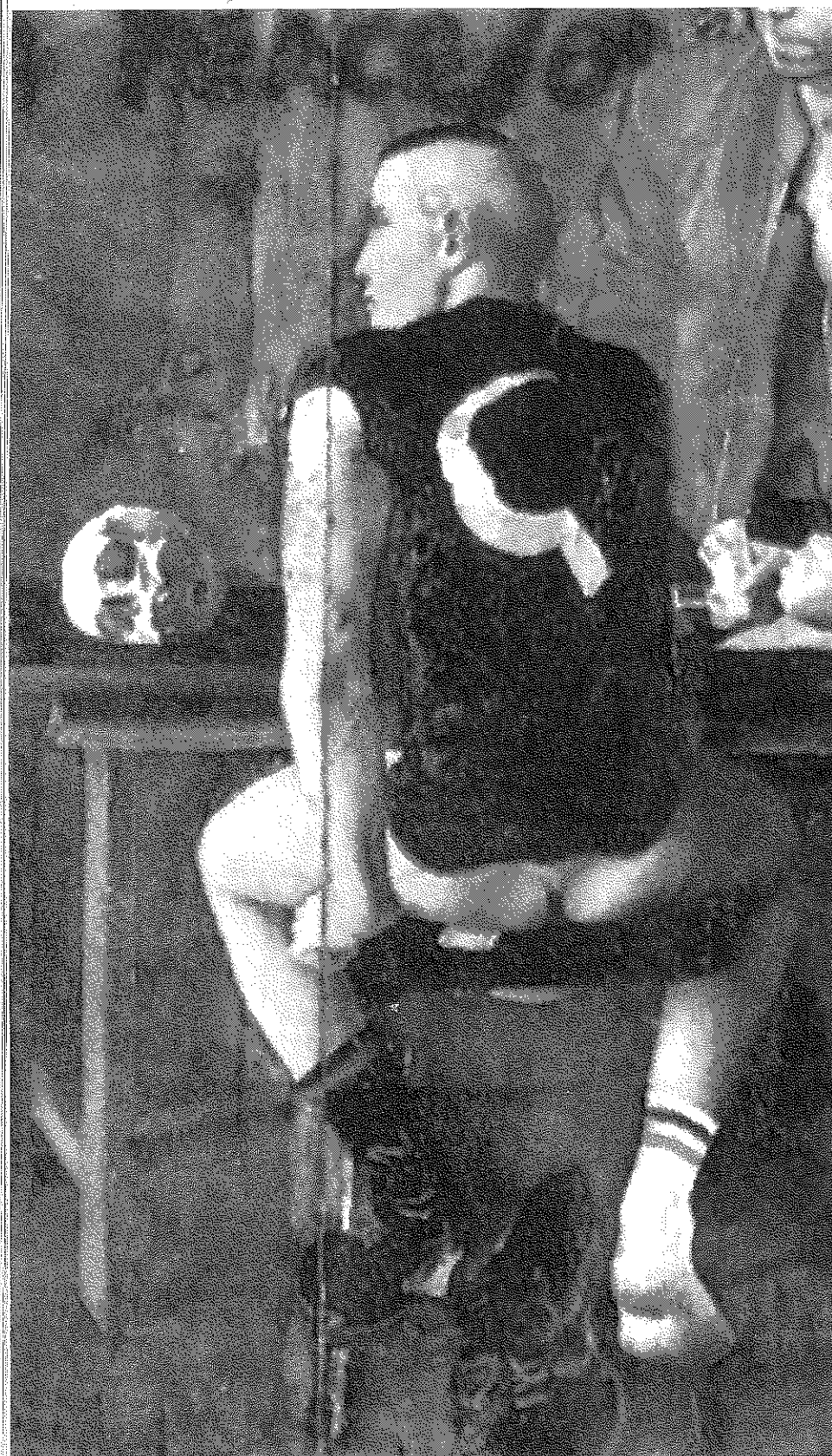
Both of these friends are gay. Both could identify each other across a busy street as gay. And yet their performances of masculinity are very different and mutually repellent. One performance appears to deny or contradict conventional styles of masculinity while the other appears to embrace those styles.

Both my friends should know better. And they cannot claim ignorance as an excuse. Here is a community whose disciplined desire insists on further compartmentalizing itself. This is a result of living a life in dread of being exposed as a fraud and in fear that someone may see behind the mask. Here, Oscar Wilde offers guidance: "I hope you have not been leading a double life, pretending to be wicked and really being good all the time." This may be the case with Lukacs' skinheads. Most skinheads I have met are of the queer variety and have been resolutely anti-racist and pro-feminist. When I laughed out loud at "The Finest Young Men..." I was laughing with Lukacs' camp sensibility. These hunky boys look so tough but rarely are. My friend David summed it up when I told him I would be discussing Lukacs' work: "Lukacs' naked skinheads...those paintings are so fucking hot!"

Nicholas Packwood is the editor of AIDS and Culture.

Works Cited

Susan Douglas, "Sizing it Up: (Male) Homosexuality as a Signifying Practice is Aesthetic Discourse," unpublished manuscript, Corcordia University, 1992.



Detail from Attila Richard Lukacs' painting "The Young Spartans Challenge The Boys To Fight," 1988



1.

In London, the seat of empire
 (underwear showing through now)
 I eat mangoes, sliced
 see the cayenne
 sprinkled, machine-gunned through raw
 honey-coloured
 flesh.

Then I ride my lover high
 and marvel at my fortune:
 this projection screen of back
 so white and vacant, so long, capable
 of holding so many of my moments.

Saturated, I arch
 onto waxy shine of bum
 shot through with pimples, teeth-marks
 that remember a mango-splintered smile.
 Smiling bits of yellow applause.

2.

I need a new name.
 I'll take back my second
 or maybe just speed it up past my first
 or maybe call myself something else
 that will make people angry:
 Shabani or Giles, or Mango Boy

I'll grow over-ripe mango messy-lazy
 offend like an unremovable stain
 mango legacy, mango regret

Live up to this reputation
 peel for free
 make propositions, lie:
 like try me in the water, so sensuous...
 and tidy

or
 squeeze the mango boy and watch
 it all comes out then
 then think of a name then
 then tell me

3.

Maple syrup on mango
works, you are
a Canadian child
 I'm told

and so
 I dunk it all in yogurt
 pour cardamum
 and pistachio
 (yes, some mint)
 whip it in
 defiant.

One clove.
 Cinnamon.



The Heat Yesterday

Ian Iqbal Rashid

The heat yesterday gets a hold of my head,
 becomes an absent presence: the memory of a
 crown. Heat aggravates everything, bullies you
 into a little less alive. The inverse of an
 echo, the man you are about to become. Heat
 peels back the wild, gamey smell of boy, which
 is always there, waiting like curtains.

Heat erodes the gravelly bits that complicate
 your voice, that confuses the air—a constant
 static sound. Sound that has scored the last
 angry days with you, our horrible misstepped
 dance out of synch: every expression a glare,
 every touch a threat. And my two hands always
 struggling, working a pocket-sized game.
 Nothing I could do was right: the tiny silver
 balls never never in their nooks all at once in
 the heat yesterday.

In the heat yesterday I leave you impoverished,
 embarrassed feeling foolish, misspent. (As time
 goes into one of its own long toffee like
 stretches.) I am amazed that I can leave, as if
 this was an early emergence from an afternoon
 film. To turn the corner chased by so much
 runny yellow noise. So much that had been
 allowed to go on and on now on for so long now
 without me.

The heat yesterday slices through today like
 cellophane. Today is an unused shellacked
 smell. And I am back again still. Still touch
 the complicated bones of knee that peek out
 from under a sheet. "The heat yesterday..." You
 can not hear me. A love song seeps out from the
 headphones that cup your innermost face....

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.

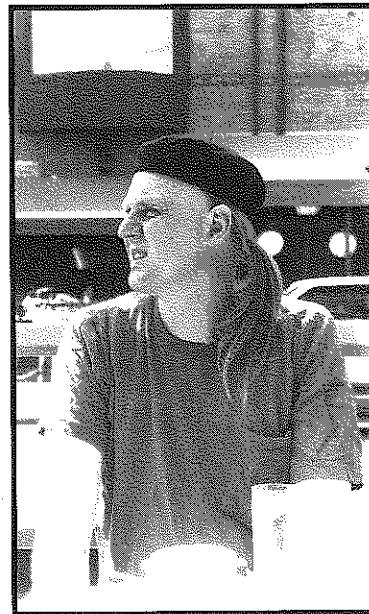
Allan McGill, *Prophets of Extremity: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida*

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

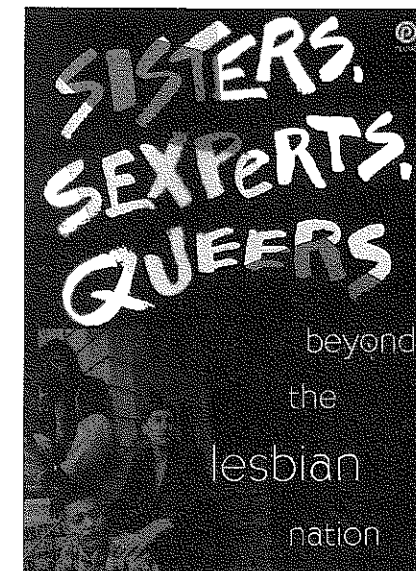
Arlene Stein, ed., *Sisters, Sexperts, Queers: Beyond the Lesbian Nation*. New York: Plume, 1993.

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-

ject involved gays and lesbians writing and submitting "reports on a wide range of issues pertinent to gay and lesbian life." Written material for the volume was apparently obtained by sending out "quarterly directives...(comprised of) a series of suggestions of areas the volunteers might care to cover within a given topic." The editors then claim to have been successful in collecting the "feelings and opinions of persons in the street on major issues." Once collected the written texts sent by "volunteer authors" were "logged and placed in the collection," "no censorship was exercised," and the editors state that they made "no attempt to draw conclusions."

The methodology employed in the collection of information for this volume betrays an authoritarian form of editorial control, control that runs the risk of being exploitative of those who participate in the project. There are many questions left unanswered: who controlled the production of textual material? Who determined what topics were addressed? Why were these topics of special interest or importance? We are reassured that "(the editors) have attempted to make the material as assimilable as possible." Assimilable? Who did they have in mind? The excerpts have been selected, chopped and arranged according to a few individuals' criteria. Usually lesbian and gay work works toward the ideal of democratic praxis. This praxis is sorely lacking here. Indeed it seems the authors feel more indebted to traditional social scientific method than to any kind of empowering political praxis. This project, intended to be the formation of an archive "so that researchers of the future might understand what it was like to live as a (white, English?) homosexual in the late twentieth century," pursues its goal rather clumsily, overburdened as it is with unexamined methodological assumptions.

Proust, Cole Porter... contributes greatly to the confusion between biographies, autobiographies, memoirs and testimonials. Let's look at one aspect of this confusion: biography tends to be defined as a literary genre that deals with the lives and deeds of

individuals considered interesting, influential or unique. As Doris Sommer notes in her essay "Rigoberta's Secrets" it "is precisely that genre which insists on singularity." Subjects of "bios" might claim that they truly represent their type or class, but, eventually, they have to face the simple limit(ation) of singularity: the fact that a peer can say "I don't look or act like that at all!"

The difference between biographies and testimonials is more one of *intent* than *form*. Biographies (with their ghost writers) are the result of individual work and their intent is largely self-serving. Bios may be exemplary (like the lives of catholic saints), but they are not necessarily "representative" in the politically queer sense of the concept. Testimonials (used interchangeably but not unproblematically with testimony, oral history, life history and autobiography) are a result of some form of (self) enquiry conducted within various contexts (e.g. feminist research, critical ethnography, anthropology) generally between individuals who are situated in symmetrical positions of power. The intent of testimonials is didactic (like the *Odyssey* and the *Illiad* were) and political (to advocate, denounce, demand). Testimonials crack open the tragic capsule of the binary between private/public. They subvert its apparent determinacy. Personal narratives like the well-known *I...Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala* (Burgos-Debray, ed. 1984) maintain a delicate balance between explaining personal circumstances and feelings and having them stand for some universal experiences of oppression and liberation. Sommers explains that "(Rigoberta's) singularity achieves her identity as an extension of the collective. The singular represents the plural not because it replaces or subsumes the group but because the speaker is a distinguishable part of the whole" (1988: 108). Paul Monette partially achieves this "effect" in *Borrowed Time* (1988) and *Becoming a Man* (1992). Michael Kalin works within the testimonial tradition in *Surviving AIDS* (1990) in which he interviews other "witnesses."

One could say that testimonials are politically aware biographies. They are not to be confused with confessions in which the writer/speaker usually occupies a subordinate position. Testimonials are likely to be precedent-setting experiences, what Paulo Freire calls "speaking the world and the word." They are informed by raw experiences. They are likely to have been "performed live," many times before the interest or conditions were energized to give them written form. In AIDS prevention education this format has shown many educational possibilities: it can be a moment of reflection and awareness-raising in which contents, attitudes and behaviours are reflected and acted upon.

Differences between biographies and testimonials may have significant impact on queer representation and in the ongoing saga of our "becoming". A number of written texts that clearly "bear witness" to the difference across the sexual, gender, ethnic and class axis have been widely recognized. Works such as *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Colour* (Moraga and Anzaldúa, eds., 1981), *In the Life: A Black Gay Anthology* (Beam, ed., 1986), and *Gay Men's Life Stories* (Hall Carpenter Archives Gay Men's Oral History Group, 1989) come to mind. And there is much, much more, new and old, black and white, individual and collective (see Abelow, Aina Barale and Halperin, eds., *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader* 1993). But *Proust, Cole Porter...* does not fit comfortably into any of these categories. It does not contribute to breaking silences. *Proust, Cole Porter...* does not encourage a better understanding of who gays are. It almost exclusively presents the voices of white English males. This renders the collection of "reports" culturally unintelligible and unable to effectively travel across the ocean to North America and across cultures to many readers.

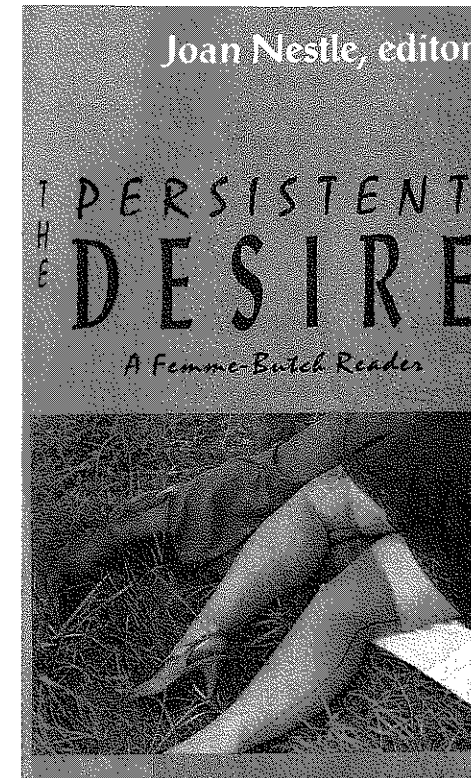
Finally, and just so you understand how bitter I am about this book, I have a comment to make about the "Virus" section of this volume. As usual, the issue of AIDS becomes the necessary addition, appendix, and accessory to any queer

piece. I cannot tell you how many T-Cells I burn squirming through pages like these. In my work in the AIDS community I have observed that many gay men find AIDS stories tedious. The courage and tragedy of the epidemic among gay men is legitimate but it is wasted in objectionable formats. In biographies the author has the opportunity to explain in detail how, why, and when the virus entered his body and his life. In testimonials emphasis is given to the universal aspects of one person's individual experience. Themes such as "contamination", "fear of intimacy", "second coming out", and others are endlessly repeated. They come to function as mnemonic devices for audiences as we search our social memories for the meaning of the AIDS tragedy and attempt to identify the important things to remember and pass on to the next generation. But in *Proust, Cole Porter...* the stories about the "virus" seem to function more as confessions than anything else. The confusion between testimonials and confessions has been detrimental in the area of AIDS education and politics. Confessions create victims that are either innocent or guilty (read: men who get it up the ass). Cindy Patton, in her essay "Tremble, Hetero Swine!", cautions us to be wary of the identities created by the "new right" that "cloister self-revelation" and "reinterpret proud gay speech as confessions to the distinctive perversion that gay liberation's reversal ought to expose as fraud." AIDS confessions are a luxury that we cannot afford any longer if we want to break free from systemic clinical and legal oppressions. As Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub point out in their collection, *Testimony*, "through the illusion of understanding [confessions] provide, (allow us) to forgive and forget."

Unfortunately, *Proust, Cole Porter...* can easily be misread as a trivial book of fag stories. It resembles night-time radio talk shows where "troubled" night owls' misfortunes are packaged in a pop-psych, diminishing format. It is not that we have had enough stories of gay men. The point is that we queers need to be

very aware of how we are telling our stories, how we are being made into "text" and sold to ourselves between the covers. This is not an easy task; as we well know, minorities have to work extra hard to be heard and not be misunderstood.

Francisco Ibañez-Carrasco is a freelance writer and AIDS educator living in Vancouver.



Dykes and Dicks

BY Gretchen Zimmerman

Ed. Joan Nestle, *The Persistent Desire: A Femme/Butch Reader*, Boston: Alyson Publications, 1992.

The one consistent refrain in *The Persistent Desire* is if it feels good, do it, or rather, if the dildo fits, wear it. The other recurring motif coincides with the queer notions, "we're here, we're queer, get used to it," or "we're

femme, we're butch, fuck you very much." *The Persistent Desire*, subtitled *A Femme-Butch Reader* by Joan Nestle, (*femme extraordinaire*, lover of butch women, and co-founder of the Lesbian Herstory Archives in New York) offers a refreshing, reassuring 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 profundity, and a renewed sensibility. This new awareness includes a rejection of the heteropatriarchal notion that a butch wants to be a man, and is therefore a dysfunctional wo/man, and a firm denial that femmes are misplaced 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 in the 70s. Far from welcoming what it saw as heterosexual 'role reproduction', the re-emerging women's liberation movement rejected outright, silenced and un/intentionally marginalized butch/femme pairings and displays. Even though the work boot clad, flannel shirted dyke represented an "in your face" rebuttal of patriarchy and capitalism (which was seen as positive), if she bedded down with a femme (read: a female cop-out), then she betrayed her feminist sisters in the worst possible sense. The mostly straight, white, able-bodied feminist movement judged butch-femme relations as a direct mirroring of the inequitable heterosexual dynamic. But of course this was not really what was happening.

These 50s butch/femme women were surviving the best 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 Nestle writes on being a 50s femme: "Oh, we had our styles - our outfits, our perfumes, our performances - and we could lose ourselves under the chins of our dancing partners." Partners indeed.

Just as disruptive, but not as well represented in *The Persistent Desire* are the voices of butches and femmes of colour. An article from *Jet* magazine in 1954 describes lesbians as 'part-time' men, who "for various reasons reject feminine roles and, while retaining female trappings, compete with men for jobs - and other women." Countering this historically interesting, yet judgemental article, is an excerpt from "Tar Beach" by Audre Lorde. Lorde writes of the way 'gay-girls' dressed and 'semi-dressed,' claiming that "Clothes were often the most important or only way of broadcasting one's chosen sexual role." Other contributing women of colour include Chea Villanueva, Kitty Tsui, and Jewelle L. Gomez. Tsui writes: "Sure, I wrote love poems, but I never wrote about sex. I was, after all, a nice Chinese girl and we didn't talk about things like that." Now she does.

Butch/femme women are once again at the lesbian forefront, claiming as Arlene Stein does that "roles are enjoying a renaissance among younger dykes, women who never fully parted with their butch and femme identities." Current butch-femme identities are being reclaimed by younger dykes with a new sense of erotic play - a departure from the 50's-style rebellion and survival.

The new butches and femmes are adopting signifiers more out of play than necessity. This play involves a more fluid definition of what it means to be a femme or a butch. 50's femmes would likely never have been caught dead switching roles with a butch, or going out of the house without the proper shade of passion pink lipstick. A 50's butch would not willingly wear a dress (in any comfortable manner), unless per-

haps she had to go to court to defend the charge of impersonating a man. Today's butch/femme lesbians are more comfortable with transgressing dress codes, switching roles, playing the 'other' part, the top, the bottom, or playing both roles at once

Likewise with today's new role adaptation one might find two butches pairing off or two femmes together trying to 'outfemme' the other.

Upon reading *The Femme/Butch Reader*, one could also say that there is a deconstruction of the 50's butch/femme by the new butch/femme which takes place through what Arlene Stein calls "refusing ghettoization, acknowledging internal group differences, and affirming the value of individual choice when it comes to style and political and sexual expression." Sounds like a lesbian utopia. The downside of this, however, says Stein, is the potential to 'depoliticize' lesbian identity, thus blurring the boundaries of the 'what it is' (the thisness) of being lesbian.

For 50's butch-femme women, blurring the boundaries was a way of life. Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madelaine Davis chronicle this blurring: "They was no one to mess with": The construction of the butch role in the lesbian community of the 1940s and 50s." They argue that while there were similarities between butch-femme pairings and heterosexual unions, mainly in terms of gender polarity, there were also many unique aspects to butch-femme. One aspect of this uniqueness included the way in which women were allowed to be sexual. "In the 1950's, lesbian culture, and lesbians' resulting consciousness and sense of pride had developed sufficiently to enable all of its members to leave their traditional women's upbringing and embrace new sexual attitudes and practices." Kennedy and Davis also discuss the absence of camp among 50's butch-femme women. One hears so much about gay men camping it up, but very little about a lesbian camp tradition. In answer to the question of why lesbian

camp never took hold, the authors write: "The structures of oppression were such that lesbians never really escaped from male supremacy. In lesbians' actual struggle in the bars or on the streets, authority was always male." Fighting for one's life as a woman did not square neatly with sending up masculinity for laughs.

Each essay, poem, taped interview and short-story in *The Persistent Desire* recalls the strength, courage, pride and determination of each individual femme and butch. All the contributions describe the struggle to define a lesbian way of life, and to invent new forms of culture. By rejecting society's strict definition of femininity and womanhood in the 1950s and 1960, butches and femmes defined what it meant to be a lesbian, and redefined what it meant to be a woman. Today, butch/femme individuals are also redefining how feminine and masculine roles are appropriated and played-out, by affirming that women can be one or the other, or neither or both, or any variation thereof, along with the affirmation that both roles are equal.

An aspect of lesbian culture that the femme/butch reader touches upon and intends to challenge is the notion that a dyke wearing a 'dick', a dildo, is still a dyke, and not a wanna-be man. In "Sex, Lies And Penetration: A Butch Finally Fesses Up," Jan Brown discusses the "dildo dilemma" in terms of her own past experience. She speaks of the taboo that many lesbians in the 90s place on penetration between two women, claiming, as the myth declares, that there is an obvious heterosexual copy-cattling. The underlying premise is that "penetration equals oppression." As Brown tells us, these are all lies. Lesbians have been using dildos for longer than most can imagine, more than we care to admit, and will not stop under accusation or threat.

According to more than one author, women who wore dildos or who slept with women who wore dildos kept the secret to themselves and the dildo well hidden under the bed,

or in the closet. But closets are for clothes, not dildos. Suddenly, bravely, dildo strapping lesbians were coming out of the closet, quite literally: dildo in hand—or is that on hip?—they were proud. They were also wondering why some of their sisters turned both eyes and ears away, leaving the honest dildo wearing dykes to fend for themselves. (As if they hadn't done this already). Dildo wearing dykes were no longer confused or embarrassed, they were free, proud and relieved; they were also unwillingly placed in the position to answer a lot of (dumb) questions, like is a dildo a penis substitute?

With respect to 'explaining' the difference between a dildo and a real live penis (assuming that this is difficult to discern), Brown says: "Our answer was to explain that dildos were absolutely lesbian. They were our heritage and history, a link with those who had bravely gone before. Dildos did not represent the penis.

Couldn't we take ours off and put it in the drawer? It was a removable object purely for pleasure and did not endow its wearer with any innate ability to keep its recipient barefoot, in the kitchen and oppressed." Perhaps the sound of a dildo being strapped on is what Radclyffe Hall really meant to write about when she wrote, in "The Well of Loneliness," "that night they were not divided." Brown says it more directly: "Because we are dykes, we want a dyke on the other end of that cock."

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, fellate their own cocks attached to someone else's body, take their cocks off, put them in a drawer and forget about them - all this and not bleed to

death?" Indeed.

There are many voices in *The Persistent Desire*: many stories, many memories (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. These stories and the women behind them are living proof that, in Joan Nestle's words, "Butch/femme relationships (are) complex erotic and social statements, not phony heterosexual replicas." They (are) filled with a deeply lesbian language of stance, dress, gesture, love, courage, and autonomy.

Gretchen Zimmerman is a writer and bookstore worker in Waterloo, Ontario.


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BOOKNOTES

Henry Ablove, Michèle Aina Barale, David M. Halperin, *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader* (Routledge, 1993).

This collection of 42 articles is intended as a guide for university courses in lesbian and gay studies. It's a monster book (the same weight as a city telephone book) and good value for the money. The list of further reading is very helpful. The selection of articles seems to be excellent, from Gayle Rubin's "Thinking Sex" to Kobena Mercer's second thoughts about Robert Mapplethorpe's portraits of black men. Many of the more recent articles are quite difficult. There is a noticeable lack of history of the lesbian and gay movement(s), but a serious attempt to include racial and ethnic diversity. Several days after portaging my copy of the book home, I was still browsing though it discovering other articles and books I want to read. It's hard to expect a university course book to do much more than this.

Sarah Schulman, *Empathy* (Plume, 1993).

Just out in paperback, Sarah Schulman's latest novel includes the

characters Anna O., Dora and a post-Freudian psychiatrist. It's set in New York's Lower East Side in the early 1990s economic depression, crack economy, AIDS emergency and the Gulf War, and also includes a side trip to Indonesia. Much of the novel is about people trying to figure out what they want. The Doc specializes in affordable (ten bucks a session) good sense but is also searching. The speeches at the anti-war demonstration bored the protesters as well as the riot cops. And what about those yellow ribbons?

Steve Abbott, *The Lizard Club* (Autonomedia, 1993).

The narrator works on coding questionnaires about the American Dream but knows that he is really a lizard. He has a quick tongue and a tendency to eat dogs, street boys and dinner guests. He hangs around San Francisco's queer underground clubs and gets into a recovery program.

The Lizard Club is like a queer 'zine in a book. It includes a three-page cartoon (Hopeless Love), a neat map of counter-cultural stuff (make your own map), extracts from the

Green Book of Count Lesard, results of a questionnaire sent in 1991 to 60 'zine editors and other assorted human trash, and much-much-more. It's a sort-of collectively-written fantasy and reminds us that collective fantasies are as real as anything else.

The author died of AIDS in December 1992.

Michael Warner (ed.) *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory* (University of Minnesota, 1993).

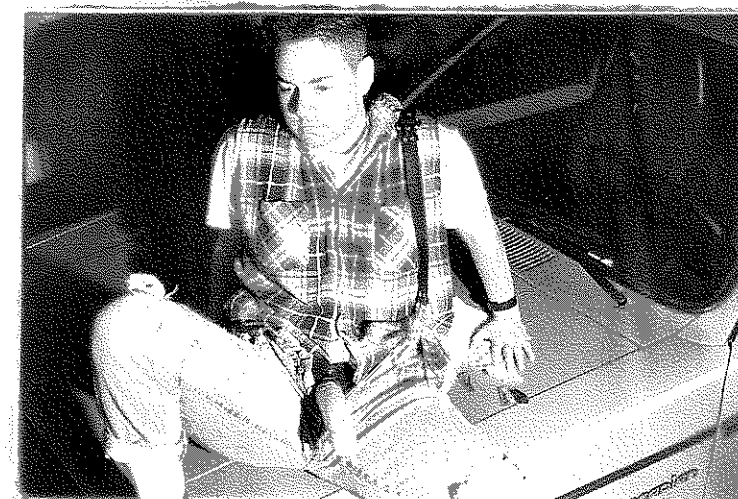
Another well-edited collection from the *Social Text* journal of literary and cultural studies. The major argument in the volume is that identity politics in the United States is a losing strategy because it plays into the hands of conservatives who now define themselves as a minority whose culture and values are everywhere attacked and misunderstood. The theoretical take involves reading cultural practices as texts. Queer culture is not who you are—it's what you do. It is unclear how relevant some of this is to Canada with its very different political, judicial system, its health system and

state-funded "multiculturalism." "Queer Nation" and postmodern politics are not the same in Illinois and Ontario.

Martha Gever, John Greyson and Pratibha Parmar (eds.) *Queer Looks: Perspectives on Lesbian and Gay Film and Video* (Between the Lines and Routledge, 1993).

A wide-ranging book as one would expect from editors based in Toronto, London and New York. The project originated in Canada (where there is no queer cultural magazine) and some of the articles are a bit dated. The one on Greg Araki is two films behind. Throughout, Canada is not mentioned very often. Someone might tell Matias Viegner not to believe everything he sees at the movies—his remarks about Toronto are hilarious. Nonetheless *Queer Looks* is packed with interesting articles, three photo-stories, a cut-and-paste lesbian-visibility lampshade and enough hot pics that most people will like something.

Alan O'Connor



Photograph by Ellen Flanders. Part of *Lesbian Peep Show: A Tragic Narrative*