

GAY LEFT

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HAPPY FAMILIES?
Pædophilia Examined-

Happy Families?

PAEDOPHILIA EXAMINED

By the Gay Left Collective

THE CHALLENGE

It is striking that over the past two or three years conservative moral anxiety throughout the advanced capitalist countries has switched from homosexuality in general to sexual relationships between adults and young people. In America Anita Bryant's anti-homosexual campaign began as a crusade to 'Save Our Children'; *the Body Politic* in Canada was raided following an issue on paedophilia; in France as in this country a moral panic has been stirred up over the issue of child pornography and "exploitation". And in Britain this has led to the rapid passage through Parliament of a restrictive Child Pornography Bill which received no proper scrutiny and very little principled libertarian opposition from MPs. Even the recent *Gay News* trial had as a significant undercurrent the issue of paedophilia, a topic and stigma with which the prosecution made strenuous efforts to tar *Gay News*. The attacks on lesbian parenthood are obviously related to similar questions, while those organisations which counsel young homosexuals and help them to meet one another seem to be coming under increased surveillance.

There has, it seems, been a clear extension of concern, from adult male homosexual behaviour, which dominated debates of the fifties and sixties following the Wolfenden Report, to the question of paedophilia and childhood. In 1952 the *Sunday Pictorial* published a series of articles on adult homosexuality called "Evil Men". By 1975 "The Vilest Men in Britain" (*Sunday People* 25th May 1975) were members of the Paedophile Action for Liberation (PAL) and the *News of the World* in 1978 (11th June) enjoined the members of PIE (Paedophile Information Exchange) to "Keep Your Hands Off Our Children: We expose the truth about this pack of perverts." "Child Molesters" and "exploiters of children" are the new social monsters.

Why is this so? Firstly it seems clear enough that few moral conservatives are prepared publicly to campaign for making male homosexuality illegal again, or for that matter proscribing lesbian relationships. There might be police raids on clubs and saunas and harassment in pubs; chief constables will campaign against pornography (and some weak-kneed liberals might support them); Ian Paisley might try to Save Ulster from Sodomy; Mary Whitehouse might recommend us to pray and exercise restraint; and Leo Abse might prefer us to "come out but not freak out", but as this latter phrase suggests it is not so much private, consensual adult homosexual behaviour which is of primary concern, but so-called *public* decency, and the related question of "corruption of minors".

Realistically, the moral right wing cannot get much support out of campaigning against homosexuality as such. But they *can* hope to build up a new moral consensus around the issue of protecting childhood, particularly in the context of the current political emphasis on the family. Adult homosexuals can be dismissed as unfortunate historical deviations to be pitied, with all efforts being put into preventing any more children 'falling' into such a way of life. Here they can build out from their traditional evangelical core, which rejects all sex outside marriage, building a coalition with various people from disillusioned libertarians to confused progressives.

Moral reactionaries can serve their cause better by building alliances on easy issues such as the protection of childhood. Their success in pushing through the Child Pornography Act is proof of this. At the same time gay opposition is minimised because of the wish to dissociate ourselves from the traditional public image of being "dirty old men". A

moral panic can be drummed up over childhood because it is an area of such easy controversy. If the child is the father (sic) of the man as bourgeois morality informs us, then it is of major concern to a conservative stratum that children are protected, cossetted and channelled in the right direction — towards heterosexual familial patterns. We have all been brought up from infancy in such patterns, and know the scars we suffer in endeavouring to emerge with our own gay identities. Childhood is a battlefield that gay militants have to be concerned with. And to that degree the moral right is correct. Homosexuals *are* a threat; we can, in their language, "corrupt". Gay socialists cannot afford to avoid these issues.

PAEDOPHILES, PARENTS AND POWER

The question of paedophilia raises a multitude of issues, from those of simple civil rights to matters of sexual theory. As socialists we can join with other libertarians in defending the right of organisations such as PIE to put forward their point of view without harassment from press and police, or violence from the National Front. Socialists and gay groups must support the freedom of speech and the right of paedophiles to associate and organise to raise social awareness about the issue.

The Gay Left Collective, like many others in the gay movement, has had many discussions about paedophilia. We do not feel it would be a justified position to discuss adult/child sexual relationships simply on libertarian grounds. It is no good merely to say, people feel like that, feeling is valid, let it all happen, right on. We know that feelings are socially constructed and we must view all feelings with great suspicion and scrutiny.

There is an argument that has been developed from some quarters of the gay movement and the left which suggests that children are sexual beings like adults and that since they are oppressed by parents, teachers etc and no paedophile experience could be any more harmful, therefore paedophilic relationships are alright. This is a false and idealist argument. It likens childhood sexuality to the experiences of adult sexuality, an equation that cannot be made as children cannot be read back as small adults. Paedophile relationships raise the question of power too sharply for us to treat them glibly. A radical approach to the question can only come through the interrogation of two areas:

- a) the question of the dominance in our culture of certain categories of sexuality, of which 'homosexuality' and 'paedophilia' are examples. Is it, in other words, valid to think through the questions of sexuality *as* if these are pre-given, determined and firm? Do they clearly enough embrace the varieties of behaviours which they seek to pull together within rigid definitions?
- b) the question of childhood sexuality specifically, the real focus of the debate, and the key to the issue. Conservative thought dismisses any idea of childhood sexual feelings and experiences and much public opinion is reticent in acknowledging their existence. At the other extreme are those who see childhood sexual feelings as being identical to adult ones. Both are wrong. We began our own discussion of this area with Freud's essays on children's sexuality. Whatever the limitations of Freudian categories, they are valuable in indicating the existence and diversity of childhood sexuality. But our present limited knowledge of children's sexual development still makes discussion of paedophile relations very difficult.

WHAT IS PAEDOPHILIA?

One definition would embrace all sexual activities between 'adults' and those under the age of consent. In countries like ours, however, where the age of consent for male homosexuals is so high (21), such a definition would be meaningless. An age of consent, in theory at least, would seem to be meaningful only in the context of an entry into social and sexual maturity, which in turn suggests a relationship to puberty. The problem is that puberty is a process rather than a particular age, occurring roughly between the ages of 11 and 14, though individuals differ greatly in their physical and emotional development at this time. Together with the

WORLD CUP EXCLUSIVE



Scot vice-captain walks out on Ally



BACK PAGE SPECIAL

THE 12^P ONE

KEEP YOUR HANDS OFF OUR CHILDREN

WE EXPOSE THE TRUTH ABOUT THIS PACK OF PERVERTS

is loving relations of "equals" living types of relationships

different but not alien to heterosexual. Children have been seen as needing protection from going down the homosexual road because of the potent challenge it poses to the family, and to protect them a whole battery of ideological devices have been employed. The major one has been the notion of corruption; of forcibly diverting the innocent child from the paths of righteousness to those of deviance. The use of this imputation has been an important method of control of adult homosexuality. We can already see that the campaigns such as those of Anita Bryant and Mary Whitehouse, ostensibly for the protection of children, become vehicles for assaults on all lesbians and gay men.

THE HOMOSEXUAL CATEGORY

The category of the "homosexual" is, as we have argued before, a historical creation, a cultural attempt to describe and control a variety of sexual behaviours between members of the same sex. The emergence of love or sexual desire by one person for another is pretty near universal. The attempts to describe this within rigid categories is relatively new, and did not take off dramatically until the late 19th century. The definitions of homosexuality have varied during the past 100 years; its origins variously described (genetic, environmental, "corruption"); its manifestations outlined (abnormal sized bottoms, wide hips, inability to whistle); its likely effect delineated (unhappiness, suicide). But those thus defined have fought back. We have created our own sense of identity or identities; we have begun to assert and impose our own sense of ourselves, our own definitions ("gay"). The gay movements throughout the West, the great sub-cultural expansions, are all part of this process of self-definition. But even today a high proportion of those who engage in some forms of homosexual activity (eg in public lavatories) do not define themselves as gay. And many would fall into the cultural category of "heterosexual" by their usual patterns of behaviour (marriage etc).

These cultural categories are, in other words, arbitrary, only partially describing what they are supposed to, and are artificial divisions of sexual desire. They have a reality because they have social institutions backing them (the family, the law, medicine, psychiatry) and because they set the parameters within which we set out to live our various lives. But even for those of us who define ourselves as gay there is no essential identity, no single identifying pattern of behaviour. There is not a single "homosexuality" but various "homosexualities". It is politically vital for gay people to organise to defend our right to our own sexualities, but we should be clear that a radical perspective does not mean defending a gay ethnicity (the equivalent of a national or racial identity). It means defending the validity of homosexuality and beyond that the many faceted nature of sexuality in general. It is not so much an oppressed minority that the gay movement is about as an oppressed sexuality. Freedom for gay people will not come simply when we have better facilities, freedom to marry or inherit property; it will develop as rigid cultural categories are broken down. It is a

sexual development of the body it implies a growing awareness of the social world, particularly through greater contact with peers and older children as sources of education and experience. Most of the Gay Left Collective recognise that puberty is a useful framework. For convenience we define a paedophile as someone who is emotionally and sexually attracted towards children, that is towards pre-pubertal people.

In their pamphlet *Paedophilia: Some Questions and Answers* PIE define it as "sexual love directed towards children" and they refer to "children" "both in pre-puberty and early adolescence." In practice, they state that the age group that attracts paedophiles is "usually somewhere in the 8-15 range". From our definition it is clear that we find this equation of adolescence and childhood confusing. Another issue with which we have to deal is that sexual/emotional relations between adults and children need not be between members of the same sex. In fact the majority of such relationships are heterosexual, and in practice between heterosexual men and young girls, usually in the context of the family. But it is also true that the (relatively tiny) number of people who have identified themselves as paedophiles are usually male and boy lovers. The vast majority of members of paedophile organisations seem to fall into this area. This already suggests the complexity of the issue: a yawning distinction between behaviour and identity immediately appears. But once we recognise the very different context in which heterosexual and homosexual sexual relations take place, and the traditional invisibility of female sexuality, the 'yawning distinction' becomes yet another example of the inequalities of conventional roles and relationships. The collective feels that male heterosexual and homosexual paedophilia raise different questions.

The whole imagery of adult/child relationships is fraught with contradictions which reveal the symbolic differentiations between men and women, adults and children in our society. Whereas a male homosexual is invariably seen as a potential child molester, and a lesbian paedophile identity is socially non-existent because it presupposes an autonomous female sexual identity, the image of an older woman initiating youths fits in with traditional male fantasies of woman. At the same time the deflowering of the young virgin has a special place in male mythology. Given these factors and conditions it is not surprising that the less common forms of adult/child relationships, involving homosexuality, receives wider publicity and hostility than the much more common heterosexual pattern. And it is for this reason that a distinct male paedophile identity emerges within the range of homosexualities.

Paedophilia centrally touches on the question of homosexuality precisely because of the question of "corruption". The terror of homosexuals corrupting minors into their way of life has been a sub-text of opposition to adult homosexuality at least since the 19th century, and behind it of course has been the terror of homosexuality. In certain ways homosexuality greatly overlaps with the heterosexual norm;

paradox that the only way for this to happen is through using these categories, organising within them and bursting their bonds.

THE PAEDOPHILE CATEGORY

Paedophilia, like homosexual behaviour, has existed universally, and has been variously treated in different societies. 'Boy Love' particularly has often played an important and even socially approved role in some cultures — eg pedagogic relationships in Ancient Greece; in puberty rites in various societies. In the 19th century, even in Britain, it was possible to have sentimental and even physical contact with children without social disapproval. During the past century the category of the corruptor emerged, so that today almost any non-familial contact between adult and child can become suspect. Partly as a defensive measure, paedophiles themselves have in recent years begun to assert their identity, a few openly in organisations such as PIE and other equivalents in Europe and America. But just as for adult homosexuality there is little uniformity of behaviour, so with paedophilia. Paedophilia in many cases is a matter of identity rather than actual sexual activity, and many of those adults who have sexual experiences with children would not in fact identify themselves as paedophiles. For instance a German survey suggested that among 200 cases of men sentenced for indecent assault on children "there was not even a single one preferring children to adult partners". (Quoted in *Childhood Rights* Vol 1 No2, published by PIE).

Just as assault or rape by a man on a woman cannot be defended so no paedophile would defend assault or rape of children, or any alleviation of laws relating to these. Nor would they approve of the conscious use of power to 'persuade' children. (PIE for instance apparently disapproves of parent/child incest.) The issue then comes down to the question of an *affectionate* relationship between a child and an adult which involves sex.

Three issues immediately emerge: 1. the legitimacy of childhood sexuality; 2. the adult fetishisation of a particular age group; 3. the changing meaning and significances given to different parts of the body throughout an individual's life. The problem in discussing paedophile sexual relationships revolves around the prioritisation of certain parts of the body along adult lines in relations with pre-pubertal children who may not have such priorities. Can paedophile relationships ever be justified and what should the attitude of socialists and feminists be towards them?

Some issues seem fairly clear. It seems unlikely that youthful sexual activity rigidly determines later orientation, (object choice and emotional structuring seem to take place much earlier in life) and we see a homosexual choice as equally valid as a heterosexual one. We must reject the dominant idea that it is an issue whether a child is influenced into a homosexual rather than a heterosexual life. We must demystify sex. The notion that sex is the great secret, the ultimate mystery, is at the root of the worship of childhood innocence. It is the puritans who elevate sex into the embodiment of holiness. We should argue for sex as pleasure not sacrament. If it is pleasurable on what grounds can we deny it. We must also recognise that it is often the young person who initiates sexual activity. It is the intrusion of the law or panic stricken parents which often causes misery and guilt in the child in a caring paedophile relationship rather than the relationship itself.

But of course there are difficulties. There are practical questions such as potential early pregnancy in girls, and the problems connected with VD. A more rational attitude in society towards contraception, a realistic attitude to VD and better sex education would help. But it still leaves the question as to whether children have the emotional resources to deal with paedophile relationships and the emotional crises that can happen. It is important to stress that the paedophile issue is not one of molestation. No-one can defend sexual violence in any situation where one party is unwilling. It is in a crucial sense an issue of consent — an appallingly difficult concept to define in this particular context. This raises two related issues. In the first place, 'consent' has different meanings for children and adults and



takes different forms. And secondly specific sexual acts have different meanings, and a specific sexual act will have a different meaning for the adult and the young person. In this context what does it mean for a 'child' to 'consent' to 'sex' with an 'adult'?

Fundamentally these are issues of disparity of experience, needs, desires, physical potentialities, emotional resources, sense of responsibility, awareness of the consequences of one's actions, and above all power between adults and children. This is the crux of most opposition by feminists and gay socialists to paedophilia.

CHILDHOODS

We must recognise that 'childhood' is itself a historical category, and like other cultural categories we have mentioned, is a fairly recent one (its evolution is traced in *Centuries of Childhood* by Philippe Aries, Peregrine Books). Only since the 18th Century have we reified the position of young people into our particular embodiments of 'innocence'. The intervention by the State to 'protect' children often flowed from economic and political pressures which led to Acts controlling child labour and extending the period of schooling for example. But it was also tied to concern with the family and so laws controlling prostitution and homosexuality contained age of consent regulations. This all aided the construction of the longer period of 'childhood' we know today. Emotional relationships have been largely confined within the family and the independence of the young has been seen as a threat.

Only since the last century have we so paradoxically both denied the existence of childhood sexuality *and* been preoccupied with curbing its manifestations, such as in childhood masturbation and sexual games. Even today, while our moralists rush to protect children, the capitalist system they support constantly incites sexuality, (including childhood sexuality) at all levels to sell its wares. But people will say that there is a difference between a child having sexual experiences with someone of the same age and having them with a more experienced, potentially exploitative adult. There probably is, but how is this difference to be recognised. Should a line be drawn and if it is how should it be enforced? A legal age of consent is an arbitrary fiction. Emotional ages vary and someone of 10 might be more able to 'consent' than someone of 16. An age of consent in law does not prevent the sexual activity taking place and serves to perpetuate the myth that most, if not all adults can *and always do* 'consent'.

Sexual expression between adults and children need not harmful and so cannot be condemned just because it takes place. But it is problematical because it raises issues of disparities of power. How can we safeguard the child's right to consent? PIE answers this in four ways: (From *Some Questions and Answers* pt 27)

- a) by suggesting that we overdramatise the question of moral choice involved in accepting a pleasurable act. "All that matters is whether the act is pleasurable."
- b) the child is quite capable, from infancy, of showing reluctance. "If the child seems puzzled and hesitant, rather than relaxed and cheerful, he (the adult) should assume that

he hasn't (the child's consent)."

c) the best way to encourage choice is by encouraging different attitudes to sex. "A healthier attitude would make it easier for the child to speak up, without feeling embarrassed about it."

d) if the adult persists and enforces his will on the child "The adult should then be liable to legal action and social condemnation."

It seems to us that (a) and (b) are vague and circular. Enjoyment is not necessarily a sign of having consented (an argument often used against raped women) and is not a justification in itself for accepting a particular act. One may be hesitant but consenting. An adult can manipulate consent almost unconsciously.

Points (c) and (d) are the keys but they need to be closely defined. This means two strategies which need to be developed and discussed in the gay movement. Firstly we need to be clearer about the implications of using legal action. We need to find means of protecting young people's rights which do not patronise, introduce the arbitrariness of an age of consent, or destroy with a blunderbuss.

At present we have a situation where adults have supreme power over children — economic, physical, intellectual and emotional. So it is at least problematical whether in this situation relationships of some equality can be formed which involve sexual expression. In an ideal situation where such relationships took place in the context of mutual agreement and without major social consequences for both parties this may be possible. But some paedophiles stress that the sort of relationships they want with children can take place in the existing framework.

However, we have to take account of the real social situation in which we live, with the vulnerability of children and the relatively effortless way in which an adult could manipulate the situation in pursuing their desires to the point of ignoring the interests, wishes and feelings of the child. Children may not be equipped, either experientially or physically for adult-defined sexuality. Children are very sensual and enjoy physical contact, but they may not have the same conceptual categories as adults about sex. With such a low level of children's autonomy and awareness, their inability to say no should not necessarily be taken for agreement. For this reason it would seem that paedophile relationships are likely to be unequal, though in this they only parallel other adult/child relationships in our society.

To sum up this point, it would appear that the criteria exist for recognising the validity of relationships when there is some approximation of meaning. This does not imply identity of age or interest, but it does imply an ability on the part of the child to recognise some of the significance in social and sexual terms of her/his actions. We are inclined to believe that this does not usually happen before puberty. The problem becomes, then, how do we socially recognise this?

In the present climate some members of the collective support proposals that the 'age of consent' should be reduced to 14 as the only realistic possibility and that this age should be enforced outside of criminal law in special children's courts which would deal with all sorts of children's rights outside the bureaucratic disaster of present legal interventions in this area.

Other members of the collective, believing that any age of consent is unjust and unworkable, want the repeal of all legislation relating to the age of consent in the field of sexuality. Offences would be considered on the basis of the use of violence, force or pressure rather than an arbitrary age. The concept of consent would have to be used on a pragmatic basis, each case being judged on its particular circumstances rather than the straightjacket of present legislation. This would mean removing criminal sanctions from non-violent sexual activity but providing the maximum social means for protecting the child. In this situation the responsibility of paedophiles would have a major part to play.

CARE AND CONTROL

As a long term issue we have to debate the whole question of changing attitudes to sexuality. We can all agree that we need better sex education, advice on contraception, VD etc, but how do we fundamentally transform social mores? How in the end do we ensure that the young person is allowed to grow at his or her own pace, untrammelled by over-rigid categorisation of childhood, protected from abuses of power, and yet able to grow in caring relationships with other (perhaps older) people?

Part of the difficulty is in the way we have defined and constructed the problems. If we ask "How can we safeguard the child's right to consent?" we are already relegating to second place, if not totally ignoring, the ability of the child to safeguard that right for him or herself. At present we find ourselves as third parties entering into a dialogue between unequal sides. The dialogue is one-sided because the children involved or potentially involved are not seen or felt capable of presenting their own case. Moral crusaders, and even people like ourselves, in intervening may serve not to decrease the power imbalance but to perpetuate it by totally excluding children from the debate. An essential part of adult responsibility is the recognition of the limitations of children's ability to be responsible for themselves and to act accordingly. But children still need to gain more autonomy within new social relations in which adult responsibility is not synonymous with parental authority. An important step towards this would be the strengthening of organisations such as the *National Union of School Students* and *School Kids Against the Nazis*. It is there, as well as in the sphere of adult life, that issues such as children's sexuality and their rights should be discussed and fostered.

It is paradoxical that it is in the area of sexuality that there is so much uproar about the power imbalance between adults and children. Where is the debate around the gross economic differences between adults and children, the intellectual and physical advantages adults have, all of which can and are used to exploit and 'corrupt' children. It is paradoxical because it is in the sphere of sexual/physical pleasure that children could have the relatively least disadvantage. It is the one currency of social relationships that children are best versed in — we operate on the 'pleasure principle' from birth. We do not deny that even on this level there are difficulties, but it is crucial that the debate has centred on child *sexuality* to the exclusion of other aspects of adult/child relations. What we must avoid is a totally 'adult-centred' solution.



GAY LEFT EDITORIAL ON PAEDOPHILIA: A PRELIMINARY RESPONSE

Tom O'Carroll, chairperson, PIE, has sent the following response.

Gay Left's considered view on paedophilia may strike some as an exercise in fence-sitting, but insofar as questions are left open, I believe there has been a welcome acceptance that there is a real case for the admissibility of child-adult sex, as well as one against. That, to my mind, is progress, and I feel GL is to be congratulated on taking the public discussion of paedophilia to a higher plane of debate than hitherto. I agree with many of the points made and also welcome the fact that views with which I fundamentally disagree have been put so clearly — I hope that in my reply in the next issue I will be

able to reject them with equal clarity!

The essence of my reply will lie in four points: (a) GL's thoughts on child sexuality started with Freud, sensibly enough, but unfortunately they appear to have finished with him too; (b) analysis of our conceptualisation of 'homosexuality' and 'paedophilia' as categories was useful, and even more useful would have been to challenge our conceptualisation of 'consent'; (c) the key issues of power and inequality have more positive implications than those which have been put; (d) it is an illusion that opposition by feminists and gay socialists to paedophilia is based on these issues of power and inequality — important as they are, the paramount importance attached to them solely in a sexual context requires explanation, and this is the key to the paradox outlined in GL's final paragraph.

Gay Art

by Emmanuel Cooper

The emerging gay subculture and its clear identity is affecting, however slightly, gay artists. Art traditionally reflects contemporary, mainstream ideas and only occasionally do artists extend this to introduce different ideas. Since the war, art has been primarily concerned with themes which refer only to art itself — to its conventions, to its highly developed language — and it ignores, for the most part, either political, social or sexual statements which in any way question existing ideas. Gradually gay artists are beginning to introduce evidence of their own sexuality and their relationship to the world; this not only manifests their presence but also deals with their emotions and feelings. This is important for two reasons — it provides gay people with positive affirming images and in so doing it introduces into art ideas about sexuality which the concentration on, and cultivation of, 'aesthetics' have largely precluded.

Homosexual artists are of course not new, nor are homosexual themes totally absent from history. It is worth while looking at these aspects of art for they have much to say about attitudes to homosexuality as they have developed in western society over the last 150 years, for they are an important and positive affirmation that art and gay artists have a useful contribution to make to the gay identity.

Gay History

In other cultural areas socialists have been able to use writings and ideas from established theorists who have had much to say about class, culture and society. However neither Marx nor Engels had much to say about visual art, but their remarks on literature seem equally relevant to the visual arts. They pointed out that artists who were not necessarily socialists could reveal truths about ourselves which we can still accept. Equally painters and sculptors who comment on human feelings and emotions provide us with insights which cannot be dismissed merely because they do not fall into today's socialist categories, or because they worked in a bourgeois society. To benefit from these works we need to look at them from a socialist perspective. For example, argument over whether or not Courbet, Blake or Goya were true 'socialists' pales into insignificance by the side of the radical critique they made of society in their pictures.

Classical studies and reference books mostly written in the 19th century, lay the basis for the established art history approach to studying art; these sources rarely mention homosexuality. To all intents and purposes it did not exist.

Only one new study by Margaret Walters (*The Male Nude*) deals with homosexuality in detail. She not only refers to artists' sexuality but also refuses to separate the work from the social and political conditions of the time. She rightly points out though how when looking at art history, the use of the term homosexuality is dangerous. As a term it has



Greek vase painting (from *The Male Nude*)

been used for little more than 100 years and must be carefully defined. Homosexuality has, she says, no more precise definition than masculinity or femininity. For example in 5th century Greece love and even sex between older and younger men was ritualised into much cultural life and meant one thing, but in Renaissance Italy, centuries of Christian disapproval forced its expression underground — a repression which reached its peak during the 19th century when homosexuality was seen as an unthinkable perversion for any 'normal' man and never for any woman. Artists like Leonardo da Vinci, Michaelangelo are known from contemporary letters and documents to have had homosexual experiences and had a main homosexual orientation, but it was expressed in a society very different from our own. From the point of view of gay artists today, it is the artists who worked in the 19th century who shed much more light on today's attitudes — for both the public and the artist.

Commerce, Art and Bohemianism

First some general points need to be made about the period which deeply affected both the artist and the themes they painted. During the 19th century the identity of the artist, as we know it today, emerged. The growth of a prosperous, educated middle class helped to create an open market for artists but it was one which demanded firm convention. There was no room for sexual radicalism of any sort. Commissions were still made and patrons still supported artists, but an open market for painting was being established and artists could compete in it. With the minimum of resources the committed artist, in the proverbial garret, could paint away and offer work for sale either in the enormously

popular Royal Academy Summer Exhibitions, or in other similar institutions. It was a system which encouraged conformity. Artists had to live and therefore must not show work which would deprive them of their livelihood.

The 19th century revolutionary changes and developments in society also brought changes concerning ideas about sexuality, the main one being the rigid and polarising definitions of what constituted male and female. Women became enthroned as, on the one hand the Virgin Mary pure, motherly, acquiescent and obedient, on the other the wayward and available sex object (Mary Magdalene?). Men were strong, decisive, industrious and brave. Male nudes almost totally disappeared while women in both their roles were freely portrayed.

Protests against the rigid stereotypes were made by a few artists, who though able to travel abroad and sample other life styles (the Near and Middle East were favourite haunts), and live Bohemian lives in fashionable London districts, were still limited by convention. To show a sensual boy was far more scandalous than a provocative female. Homosexuality was heavily disguised; this was often achieved by making the picture ambiguous in meaning and also remote, such as by placing it in a different period of history. Some artists escaped into the past — either mythological, classical or romantic. They then painted into their pictures beautiful muscular male bodies, using such themes as 'The Archery Lesson' in which an older man teaches a younger man the various skills which involved much physical contact. In other pictures two young boys were often shown grasping each other and were used to symbolise Love and Death. While artists like Tuke painted scenes of handsome naked youths diving into the sea. Picturesque genre figures showed scantily clad Italian peasant boys.

Closets and Cottages

But there was a limit to the rules of convention which must not be over reached, a principle amply demonstrated by Simeon Soloman. His paintings of limpid men and women were much admired by aesthetes like Swinburne and Wilde. Yet when Soloman was arrested for soliciting in a lavatory his friends disowned him and he ended his days as a pavement artist in bitter poverty.

Towards the end of the 19th century the mix of Kitsch and humour often identified as 'camp' was developed and provided a useful outlet for homosexual artists, recognised by the informed but equally capable of being read 'straight'. Photography was popular and nude shots of coy Sicilian boys in Studio magazine for example were acceptable effeminate whilst appealing directly to a homosexual audience. Beardsley was an exception but his drawings of open and explicit homosexual fantasies were shown to only a very small and select audience. In the mainstream of art, dominated by the French schools, most of the great leaders of the modern movement seem to be anything but homosexual.

The Neutered Nude

The Renaissance had made the study of the male form respectable, and this tradition was continued during the 19th century. The concept of beauty was still rooted in the classical concept of the handsome male, though he was either shown in suitably discreet poses or with tiny genitalia. It was, nevertheless, a legitimate subject. This enabled artists, like Lord Leighton, who mostly painted straightforward scenes, to dwell lovingly on the male nude when sculpting, giving it a strong homo-erotic element.

Towards the end of the 19th century androgeny became fashionable, particularly among the symbolist painters who were concerned to show ideas and feelings as well as reality. Clearly, they still felt unable to express homosexual feelings, and these became subverted into androgenous figures almost totally asexual in appearance. They also continued the tradition of asexual figures started earlier in the century by the pre-raphelite painters.

Classical and religious themes also offered artists means of conveying homosexual overtones. David and Jonathan, St. John the Baptist, the Martyr St. Sebastian, and the openly



Gluck. *Self Portrait*. (By kind permission of Fine Arts Society)

homosexual myth of The Rape of Ganymede, who was caught up by the God Jupiter disguised as a great phallic eagle, are some examples.

Homosexual Themes and Women

Emphasis so far has been almost entirely on men. Though there were women artists — and very excellent ones — it was very much a man's world, created for other men. For example during the 19th century love between women was a particularly acceptable theme. Not only were these scenes acceptable but they reinforced the popular concept of masculinity. It is doubtful whether such scenes, painted by artists like Ingres and Courbet were thought to involve anything other than affection. Artists towards the end of the century like Toulouse Lautrec further removed the sexual possibilities by showing the women as prostitutes.

During the 20th century artists felt more able to explore different concepts of sexuality in their work though the 19th century ideas were firmly established. Women artists for example were more able to establish themselves and the French painter Rosa Bonheur was awarded the Legion of Honour.

Victor Gluck who started painting during the First World War chose subjects who were often her lesbian friends. Many were arch 'butch' stereotypes showing women with short hairstyles, collars and ties and men's suits. It says a great deal for the sexuality of women that these open expressions of lesbianism were quite acceptable. It is surprising that Gluck's work has found no place in the two recent books on 'Women Artists' neither of which make any reference to lesbianism. The sexuality of women who dressed as men, or painted such explicit themes could still be ignored and their 'mannish' looks and mannerisms accepted as mere eccentricity.

Bloomsbury and Paris

Men were slower to make such public statements, though the intellectual and artistic societies of Paris and Bloomsbury were anything but prudish in their displays, or acceptance of, unusual sexual expression; yet artists like Duncan Grant or Pavel Tchelitchew felt only able to exhibit ambiguous portraits of male bodies though they did paint explicit homosexual pictures. In contrast the Surrealist movement on the continent led by Andre Breton was rampantly anti-homosexual and a member of their group was publicly put on 'trial'

and expelled for being homosexual. Women were fetishised as the 'sex object' and no room was allowed for exploration of different forms of sexual expression.

Until the '50s artists who were homosexual had an overwhelming tradition of secret, privatised sexuality and closet society in which the closest homosexual images have come to public expression was through the concept of respectable classical Greece or the male, but neutered, beauty of ancient Rome. Little wonder that this attitude dies hard.

Post War Freedoms

It has only been since the '50s that artists have dealt with male homosexual themes with any clarity. Perhaps one of the most famous examples is 'Two Men on a Bed' painted by Francis Bacon in 1953, which is a clear pointer to a particular sort of sexual relationship.

Despite there being numerous homosexual artists, few felt able to express this in their work and many denied (and still deny) the link between their sexual orientation and their painting. David Hockney was an exception. While fellow students in the early '60s stuck up pin-ups of women he put up photographs of his hero Cliff Richard and painted a series of pictures based on his pop hit *Living Doll*. One picture shows an unhappy man who bears the label 'Queen'. The whole series explores and expresses doubts and fears of a man discovering his own sexuality — an aspect of his work given little critical attention in favour of his later and more respectable male nudes.

In America Andy Warhol almost created the pop world yet none of his paintings deal with homosexuality. On a recent visit to London Warhol claimed never to think about politics nor to have heard of *Gay News*. Other pop artists were concerned with rampant sex stereotypes in which images of Marilyn Monroe and Brigit Bardot were (and still are) endlessly repeated. Symbolism for sex such as lipsticks and lips, sausages on a plate bring the act to our attention, yet rarely seek to extend our awareness of it. Now gay artists are beginning to express ideas about themselves in their work. The *Gay Times Festival* had a gay art exhibition and gay themes are not now taboo. There seems a real possibility that gay art might emerge.

Feminist Artists

Artists in the women's movement have been concerned with establishing themselves and their presence as women, dealing with the way they are ignored and slotted into convenient stereotype roles. They have made statements about themselves and their lives which fall into no preconceived 'art' mould and use art in its widest sense. Their work not only challenges the concept of 'femininity' but also popular ideas about art. The artists in the gay movement have a long way to go before they make this sort of analysis yet there are already moves in this direction.



David Hockney. *Doll Boy*.

Gay Art

The gay identity in art seems to be expressed in four major ways, though many overlap. First, artists like David Hockney convey it through a process of highly personal self discovery. They pass on to us sensitive insights into their own feelings and emotions which are quiet and thoughtful, and demonstrate the relationship between the artist and the world in which they live. Other artists seek to demonstrate the gay presence which identifies and legitimises, often through the use of aggressive naturalism. Michael Leonard is such an example. His super realistic paintings which almost have the clarity of photographs, graphically testify to their homosexual themes. Third, is the protest and rebellious art, which not only asserts the gay identity but shows it in all its aspects — sexual and political. Here the work of Denis O'Sullivan shown at the *Gay Times Festival* is a good example. The theme of the work 'Toilet Piece' was explicitly voyeuristic and dealt with sex in a public lavatory, using photographs and mock-ups of the lavatory walls.

Finally, the largest group of all, is the erotic and pornographic. With so many repressions on homosexuality in conventional painting, it is not surprising that it took flight underground. As gays we are defined by our sexual acts — by what we do in bed — and all too often gay art concentrates only on this part of our lives. If Tom of Finland is popular, he is not so because of his highly accomplished pencil drawings but because he reflects every prejudice in the book. Real, super butch men having lustful, effortless proper sex! Numerous imitations have produced even worse work and many rely on the 'art' context to legitimise pornographic or sexist imagery.

The new and emerging gay identity is one which challenges and asserts. It rejects the traditional ambiguous role it usually has thrust upon it but it can learn a little from the struggles of earlier homosexual artists. Now, as never before, is there a need for gay naturalism and it will produce work to which we can all respond.

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Margaret Walters, 'The Male Nude'.
David Hockney by David Hockney



Michael Leonard. *Sneakers Engloutie I 1977*.

Spotlight on Greece

SPOTLIGHT ON GREECE — An Interview with a member of the Greek Gay Movement AKOE.

The situation of gay people in countries like Greece, the Soviet Union, Northern Ireland etc, where gays are not only oppressed but also have very limited space to manoeuvre politically, led to the recent formation of the International Gay Association (IGA) as an expression of solidarity between gays. An initial focus of concern and activity has been the proposed legislation of the Greek Government.

In Greece homosexuals now face the prospect of a year's imprisonment simply for cruising if the notoriously anti-gay clauses of the draft-bill 'On the protection from Venereal Disease and the Regulation of other relative matters' gets passed by Parliament where discussion of the Bill is quoted by Government sources as being 'imminent'. The law defines prostitutes and homosexuals as 'indecent persons' and recommends that women prostitutes register with the police and undergo medical examinations twice weekly. Failure to do this, soliciting or 'improper and provocative behaviour offending public shame and decency' will be punished by up to one year's imprisonment. Male homosexuals are subjected to the same penalty, however, just for cruising 'in streets, squares, public centres ... with the evident purpose of attracting men to perform on them sexual activities *lewd and against nature*' and for 'improper and provocative behaviour etc ...' If the police have been informed in writing that a male homosexual has indulged in a 'sexual activity' which has caused the contagion of a venereal disease, then he has to undergo the respective medical tests and therapy. We publish here an interview with a member of the Greek Gay Liberation Movement AKOE.

What is the present situation regarding this Bill?

First, on behalf of everyone in AKOE, I want to express my deepest thanks to all those who organised and demonstrated in solidarity with Greek Gays in the face of this Bill. These demonstrators showed representatives of the Karamanlis regime that their resuscitation of a law concocted by the fascist military Junta is equally unacceptable to people outside Greece.

The latest situation is that the Government is very undecided about what to do. Last year's protest petition in which 250 signatures of Greek personalities were collected forced them to postpone the Bill's reading, but they never expected a wave of international response like this, not for a 'few thousand queers'. I would say that it has thrown them slightly off balance, but they still seem determined to get the Bill passed, though with what they describe as 'radical amendments'.

What do they mean by 'radical amendments'?

As yet this is not clear but I imagine it might be a lessening of the penalties or a change in the circumstances in which homosexuals would be liable to imprisonment. At any rate the responsibility for the Bill has been transferred from the Ministry of Public Order to the Ministry of Social Services.

Did the international demonstrations get widespread press coverage?

No, unfortunately. It was only a week later on October 7th that Eleftheroyppia, a non-aligned progressive daily, carried an article which said that the demonstrations, as a culmination of international protests (including the Dutch Parliament's denunciation of the Bill and threats to bring the Greek Government before the Council of Europe's Committee of Human Rights) had been successful insofar as the Government had withdrawn the Bill for amendments.



Do you think the Bill will get passed?

It is very difficult to say. There are the opposition parties who, hopefully, would not allow such a Bill to get through but since they have not said anything publicly against it so far I would not rule out the possibility of their not considering it important or serious enough for action. However there is also a general reactionary swing in process here. For example, conscription of women for military service on a 'voluntary' basis has been legalised, and often laws get passed without warning! One instance is the recent law which limits the number of years students can spend on university courses. One fine day the newspapers declared that this was now law, taking the entire educational establishment by surprise.

The Bill could of course be withdrawn until Greece was safely in the EEC and then suddenly reappear, blessed by, Parliament, and ruthlessly applied. Even if it is thrown out by Parliament it would not mean that we could relax, there are still many other problems to be confronted.

You mention the EEC. Does European public opinion play an important role in determining policies?

Yes it does. The Karamanlis regime is very frightened of West European public opinion. The Government is constantly stressing that Greece belongs to the West and it is desperate to get Greece into the EEC, therefore it has to be sure that we are acceptable to the West. That is why it is now so confused by the unexpected international protests about the Bill.

In Greece has anything been done by the left-wing groups?

Unfortunately, it is only during the last couple of weeks that the more progressive groups have started to voice their opinions officially. On the 6th October, a week after the international demonstrations, the youth groups of several left-wing parties protested officially against the proposed law. EKON Rigas Ferraios, the Young Communist Party of the Interior, along with the 'Socialist Advance' and 'Democratic Change' youth groups characterised the Bill as 'unacceptable' and its title 'misleading' because in reality its aim was the 'persecution of' homosexuals, their banishment from public life and their social ostracism'. Their communique added that the Bill was a 'flagrant violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international agreements to which the Greek State is constitutionally bound.'

For some time the EKON Rigas Ferraios group has at least not been hostile towards our aims and objectives and members have often supported us on a 'personal basis'. The main party has not made any statement but they too are not hostile. So the reserved support we have been given comes only from the youth groups whose power is limited. Significantly, the declarations of support came after the inter-



national demonstrations. Various Trotskyist and Anarchist groups have occasionally published pro-gay articles in their journals, but everywhere on the left the taboo against homosexuality seems far from broken. Even worse, the KKE, Communist Party of the Exterior, and the Maoist groups still consider homosexuality as a symptom of bourgeois degeneracy, destined to disappear with the advent of socialism.

Recently, outside the structure of political parties, came a protest from a group of 35 psychiatrists and 20 other 'specialised' doctors from the Athens area who stated that the Bill contravenes basic human rights by penalising sexual relations between adult males and indicates an ideological regression. This is very significant because the Bill, by linking homosexuality and V.D., tries to project gays to the public as a medical as well as a moral menace, so it is necessary to have the more progressive sectors of the medical world challenge such propaganda.

What about AKOE itself? Have you organised any demonstrations or protest campaigns inside Greece?

First of all, no demonstrations can be organised without the permission of the police. Sometimes demonstrations and rallies are banned but have gone ahead anyway, because of the vast numbers of people who have been present. Usually there are violent confrontations with the police. So it is unthinkable that we would be allowed to demonstrate and if we did so, the handful of gays would be mercilessly crushed by the police and also by neo-fascist thugs who are not averse to attacks on gay people. Also the publicity would mean that most of the demonstrators would lose their jobs and would find it very difficult to find others. It is not for nothing that the articles in our journal AMFI are all anonymous.

Because of this bad internal situation we asked for and got much international support. The Dutch Parliament denounced the Bill and threatened to bring the Greek Government before the Council of Europe Human Rights Tribunal in the event of it being passed; petitions were signed by 20 French intellectuals and various Italian public figures; Danish protests were made and of course the IGA co-ordinated demonstrations.

Could you describe the AMFI journal?

AMFI, the title means 'Both', is the first ever Greek journal for homosexuals and the first issue came out in April. It contained articles on our activities, the proposed Bill, some abstract and literary items and a manifesto of our aims. The second issue will be out soon.

How has it been received? Does it have a wide circulation?

Generally it has been criticised for being too intellectual and theoretical. An anarchist review characterised it as being written for heterosexual intellectuals. However, some people liked it very much. At present it is the only periodical in Greece which is putting across really progressive and new ideas. But its 'theoretical' nature is a problem because it is not reaching large numbers of gay people and circulation tends to be limited to intellectuals interested in sexual politics.

Distribution is also a major problem. Many distribution agencies and shops will not stock it and it is impossible to obtain in many cities. Selling it ourselves in the streets is also dangerous both the threat of arrest and attack by fascist thugs.

The survival of AMFI is a major issue at present. AKOE itself could become demoralised and even disband. The second issue of the journal has involved such immense problems — financial, political, organisational and so on — and there is disagreement over policy. Some say it should be simplified and made more accessible, others maintain that it reflects the producers' position correctly. Then there is the very name of the movement, should it be 'Liberation of Homosexuals' or 'Liberation of Homosexual Desire' and so on.

I believe that AMFI will and must survive because the very nature of society is challenging us to keep it alive. We need more people and money and I think its content needs broadening to appeal to a wider cross-section of gays and the differing situations that we face.

Why would you want to change your name to 'Liberation of Homosexual Desire'?

Because here in Greece as in other Middle Eastern countries, the oppression of women by men is so extremely polarised in comparison with the West that the bi-sexual male animal prevails in society. The 'homosexual' is the passive partner. The active partner is not considered homosexual because he is still a 'man', he is still 'on top', he still screws, whereas 'the Queer' is the despicable creature who has betrayed his masculinity and identifies with the basically despised female. Of course it is not considered wonderful to screw another man but it is certainly not shameful as is playing the passive homosexual role. While in the West, in England for example, an average heterosexual male would be deeply offended if we made advances to him and would be liable to react violently to vindicate his 'threatened masculinity', such proposals here in Greece actually flatter their masculinity because the active male will not be culturally seen as losing his manhood by screwing a 'queer' but on the contrary he will be reinforcing it. The fact that these men will do this both for money and pleasure and often for pleasure alone, indicates that they are capable of fulfilling a homosexual desire which they have. They do not consider themselves as 'homosexuals' and would not identify with gays or the Gay Movement. The problem we have is to show them that they too are 'homosexual' and that they have good reasons to identify with the Gay Movement. In the West an active homosexual is homosexual and the division is between straight and gay, here it is between fuckers and fucked.

Do you work with the Women's Movement in Greece, and what is the position for gay women?

There are several women's groups around the country and there is the Movement for Women's Liberation in Athens. It is a small group which has been split over several issues such as women's military service and also over support for gays. Because public opinion is so unused to sexual politics, to feminism or to homosexuality as an acceptable alternative existence and the Women's Movement is so new and small that some women are afraid of alienating the public and destroying the chances of expanding by identifying feminism with socially unacceptable causes such as homosexuals.

However, in general our relations are very good and they give us whatever help they can and we understand each other's problems. The topic of lesbianism has been largely taboo within the Women's Movement, neither of the two issues of their periodical has contained anything on the subject. The Gay Movement itself is entirely male which means the same old story of lesbians' oppression by invisibility. Some lesbians have said that they will contribute to AMFI which is encouraging. The tragedy is that lesbians as women and gays should be able to identify openly with both groups. This is another huge problem that we must confront.

FOR interpretation ~ Notes Against Camp

by Andrew Britton

"Genet does not want to change anything at all. Do not count on him to criticise institutions. He needs them, as Prometheus needs his vulture."

— Sartre, *Saint Genet*

One

It almost seems at times to have become a matter of common acceptance that camp is radical; and the play *Men* by Noel Greig and Don Milligan provides a convenient example of the process by which I imagine that to have come about. *Men* offers itself as a polemic against 'the straight left' — an abstraction which it embodies in one of its two central gay characters, a shop steward in a Midlands factory and, in secret, the lover of Gene, a camp gay male for whom the play attempts to solicit a besotted and uncritical reverence. Their relationship is seen to be continuous with the dominant patterns of heterosexual relationships, and is presented as a synonym for them, though there is no attempt to consider, or even to acknowledge, the social pressures which have gone to produce the similarity. The play concludes that the political struggle in which Richard, the shop steward, is engaged at work can be assimilated to 'phallic' power-drives (we are not allowed to forget that he is known to his fellow-workers as 'Dick'), and offers, in Gene's plangent cry of "Socialism is about me", what it takes to be the corrective emphasis. How "socialism" is to be defined, or in what way, exactly, it can be said to be about Gene, are not matters which the play finds it proper to discuss, although it becomes clear enough that Richard's activities (from which women workers are pointedly excluded except, in one instance, as the 'victims' of a strike-action) lie beyond the pale. Indeed, Gene's intimate relation to "socialism" is very much taken as given. His ignorance of, and indifference to, politics is repeatedly stressed, yet he is somehow instinctively in tune with the proper ends of political action; and in the final scene becomes the medium not only for a series of vague and tendentious aphorisms about patriarchy ("Men, like Nature, abhor a vacuum"), portentously delivered in a spotlight, but also for the savage, cruel and self-righteous scapegoating of Richard, who is endowed with the moral responsibility for his oppression. *Men* concludes that Richard should allow himself to become "nervous, sensual and effeminate" — as dubious a set of Moral Positives as any one could reasonably demand — and indulges itself in a *Doll's House* ending which we are asked to take as a triumph of radical intelligence. Richard's confusion, desperation, self-oppression, are neither here nor there. It is all "his fault", and we can take due satisfaction in his come-uppance; his guilty secret has been discovered by his workmates, and his just deserts are at hand.

The point I wish to make is that Gene's camp is taken as an automatic validation of the character. He has nothing to recommend him beyond a certain facile charisma and a few slick epigrams, yet his five-minute *tour de force* telephone monologue at the end of the first act is considered sufficiently impressive to 'place' the portrayal, in the preceding thirty minutes, of Richard's political involvement. *Men* arrives at its assessment of camp by a simple process of elision. The Richard/Gene relationship is 'like' a man/woman relationship. Therefore Gene's camp is continuous with woman-identification — is 'like' a feminist discourse against patriarchy. Therefore, camp is the means by which gay men may become woman-identified = radical = socialist, and we can carry on camping and 'being ourselves' with perfect equanimity (camp, of course, is always 'being oneself'), in the serene assurance that we are in the vanguard of the march towards the socialist future. The play does not seek at any point to *demonstrate* the validity of this spurious set of propositions. They are simply data, and as such relate significant-



ly to certain characteristic assumptions of bourgeois feminism. Juliet Mitchell has argued, for example, that the 'political' and 'ideological' struggles are conceptually and practically distinct, the one to be fought by the working-class and the other by the women's movement, and even goes so far as to suggest, in *Woman's Estate*, that the revolution must now come from within the bourgeoisie. Gene, while ostensibly working-class, is very much a mouthpiece for bourgeois aspirations; and *Men* compounds Mitchell's fallacy in its uncritical assimilation of camp to feminism, and its implicit assertion that there is no conceivable form of organised political activity which would not surreptitiously reiterate patriarchal power-structures.

Two

Camp always connotes 'effeminacy', not 'femininity'. The camp gay man declares — "Masculinity is an oppressive convention to which I refuse to conform"; but his non-conformity depends at every point on the preservation of the convention he ostensibly rejects — in this case, a general acceptance of what constitutes 'a man'. Camp behaviour is only recognisable *as* a deviation from an implied norm, and without that norm it would cease to exist, it would lack definition. It does not, and cannot, propose for a moment a radical critique of the norm itself. Being essentially a mere play with given conventional signs, camp simply replaces the signs of 'masculinity' with a parody of the signs of 'femininity' and reinforces existing social definitions of both categories. The standard of 'the male' remains the fixed point, in relation to which male gays and women emerge as 'that which is not male'.

Three

Camp requires the *frisson* of transgression, the sense of perversity in relation to bourgeois norms which characterises the degeneration of the Romantic impulse in the second half of the nineteenth century, and which culminates in England with Aestheticism and in France with the *decadence*. Camp is a house-trained version of the aristocratic, anarchistic ethic of transgression, a breach of decorum which no longer even shocks, and which has gone to confirm the existence of a special category of person — the male homosexual. Camp strives to give an objective presence to an imaginary construction of bourgeois psychology. The very term 'a homosexual' (of which, finally, the term 'a gay person' is only the recuperation, albeit a progressive one) defines not an objective choice of which any individual is capable, but a type with characteristic modes of behaviour and response. Sartre has analysed, in relation to Genet, the process by which a determinate social imperative ("I have been placed in such-and-such a role") can be transformed into existential choice ("Therefore I will take the initiative of adopting it"); and that process describes the fundamental complicity of what may appear to be an act of self-determination. Camp is collaborative in that sense.



Four

'Subversiveness' needs to be assessed not in terms of a quality which is supposedly proper to a phenomenon, but as a relationship between a phenomenon and its context — that is, dynamically. To be Quentin Crisp in the 1930s is a very different matter from being Quentin Crisp in 1978. What was once an affront has now become part of life's rich pageant. The threat has been defused — and defused because it was always superficial. Camp is individualistic and apolitical, and even at its most disturbing asks for little more than living-room. Susan Sontag's remark that "homosexuals have pinned their integration into society on promoting" the camp sensibility¹ seems to me exact, and in its exactitude quite damning. It is necessary, in making such a judgement, to dissociate oneself from any simple form of moralism.

Clearly, until very recently the ways of being gay have been so extraordinarily limited that the possibility of being radically gay has simply not arisen in the majority of cases. But in a contemporary context, gay camp seems little more than a kind of anaesthetic, allowing one to remain inside oppressive relations while enjoying the illusory confidence that one is flouting them.

Five

The belief in some 'essential' homosexuality produces, logically, Jack Babuscio's concept of "the gay sensibility", of which camp is supposed to be the expression. "I define the gay sensibility as a creative energy reflecting a consciousness that is different from the mainstream; a heightened awareness of certain human complications of feeling that spring from the fact of social oppression; in short, a perception of the world which is coloured, shaped, directed and defined by the fact of one's gayness".² This formulation contains two false propositions: (a) that there exists some undifferentiated "mainstream consciousness" from which gays, by the very fact of being gay, are absolved; and (b) that "a perception of the world which is ... defined by the fact of one's gayness" necessarily involves a "heightened awareness" of anything (except, of course, one's gayness). I would certainly accept that oppression creates the *potential* for a critical distance from (and action against) the oppressing society, but one has only to consider the various forms of 'negative awareness' to perceive that the realisation of that potential depends on other elements of one's specific situation.

It is clearly not the case that the fact of oppression entails a conceptual understanding of the basis of oppression, or that the fact of belonging to an oppressed group entails ideological awareness. 'Consciousness' (which is, in itself, an unhelpful term) is not determined by sexual orientation, nor is there a "gay sensibility". The ideological place of any individual at any given time is the site of intersection of any number of determining forces, and one's sense of oneself as 'gay' is a determinate product of that intersection — not a determinant of it. It seems strange, in any case, to cite as exemplary of a gay sensibility a phenomenon which is characteristically male, and with which many gay men feel little sympathy.

Six

The failure to conceive of a theory of ideology is continuous with an untenable theory of choice. Susan Sontag, adopting a surprisingly crude behaviouristic model, remarks that "taste governs every free — as opposed to rote — human response",³ and associates "taste" with an ethereal individuality which transcends social 'programming'. Jack Babuscio develops the same line of argument: "Clothes and decor, for example, can be a means of asserting one's identity, as well as a form of justification in a society which denies one's essential validity. ... By such means as these one aims to become what one wills, to exercise some control over one's environment".⁴ Neither writer seems aware that "identity" and "freedom" as used here are problematic terms. In order to explain the fact that gay men gravitate towards certain professions, one has to adduce the "discredited social identity"⁵ of gays as the determining factor of the choice rather than suggest that the choice alleviates the discredited social identity. The professions in which male gayness has been traditionally condoned (the theatre, fashion, interior decoration, and so on) are also those in which women have been able to command a degree of personal autonomy without threatening male supremacy in the slightest, since 'real men', by definition, would despise to be involved in them. It is scarcely permissible to explain the association of gay men with the 'luxury' professions in terms of a collection of individuals who discover, by some miraculous coincidence, that the assertion of their identity leads them to a single persona.

Seven

Whatever differences they may have on other points, the three most fully elaborated statements on camp to date are all agreed that camp taste is a matter of 'style' and 'content', ignoring the fact that 'style' describes a process of meaning. The camp attitude is a mode of perception whereby artifacts become the object of an arrested, or fetishistic, scrutiny. It does not so much "see everything in quotation marks"⁹ as in parentheses; it is a solvent of context. Far from being a medium for the "demystification" of artifacts, as Richard Dyer asserts,¹⁰ camp is a means by which that analysis is perpetually postponed. The passage from 'determinate object' to 'fetish' preserves the object safely and reassuringly in a vacuum.

Eight

All analysts of camp arrive eventually at the same dilemma. On the one hand, camp "describes those elements in a person, situation or activity which express, or are created by, a gay sensibility"¹¹ (i.e. camp is an attribute *of* something). On the other hand, "camp resides largely in the eye of the beholder"¹² (i.e. camp is attributed *to* something). The latter seems to me in most cases correct, and the generalising tendency indicates very clearly camp's essential facility. Camp attempts to assimilate everything as its object, and then reduces all objects to one set of terms. It is a language of impoverishment: it is both reductive and non-analytic, the two going together and determining each other. As a gay phenomenon, it is a means of bringing the world into one's scope, of accommodating it — not of changing it or conceptualising its relations. The objects, images, values, relations of oppression can be recuperated by adopting the simple expedient of redescribing them; and the language of camp almost suggests, at times, a form of censorship in the Freudian sense. There is, of course, a certain mode of contemporary aestheticism which is aware of the concept of camp, and whose objects are constructed from within that purview; but as a rule the conception of camp as a property either begs the question or produces those periodic insanities of Susan Sontag's essay, whereby Pope and Mozart can be claimed for the camp heritage as masters of rococo formalism.

Nine

According to Richard Dyer, John Wayne and Wagner can be camp. To perceive Wayne as camp is, on one level, simply too easy, and doesn't make any points about 'masculinity' which would not instantly earn the concurrence of any self-

respecting reader of the *Daily Telegraph*. Of course Wayne's "way of being a man" is a social construct, as are all "ways of being a man", including the camp one — and to indicate as much doesn't seem particularly significant. On another level, which 'John Wayne'? The Wayne who advocates, on screen and off, Johnson's policy in Vietnam and McCarthyism, or the Wayne of Ford's westerns? Wayne 'means' very differently in the two cases, and while those meanings are intimately related, they cannot be reduced to one another. To perceive Wayne merely as an icon of "butchness" which can be debunked from, apparently, a position of ideological neutrality, is either complacent or philistine. Similarly, to regard Wagner as camp is, on one level, only silly, and no more to be tolerated than any other kind of silliness because it masquerades as critical analysis. On another level, it pre-emptly the discussion of the real problems raised by Wagner's music and the cult of Bayreuth (the discussion initiated by Nietzsche), and ends by corroborating the vulgar bourgeois critique of Wagner's 'overblown romanticism'. The 'camp insight', in these and many other cases, is little more than a flip variant of the worst kind of right-on liberalism.



Ten

In his essay, Jack Babuscio attempts to construct a relationship between camp and irony which, it transpires, turns on the same unresolved contradiction as that which afflicts the definition of camp itself. "Irony is the subject matter of camp, and refers here to any highly incongruous contrast between an individual or thing and its context or association".¹³ By the end of the paragraph, the irony has become a matter of the "*perception* of incongruity". One should note, first, that irony is badly misdefined: it does not involve incongruity, and it is not, and can never be, "subject-matter". Irony is an operation of discourse which sets up a complex of tensions between what is said and various qualifications or contradictions generated by the process of the saying. Furthermore, it is difficult to see in what way any of the "incongruous contrasts" offered as exemplary of camp irony relate either to camp, irony, or "the gay sensibility". Are we to assume that, because "sacred/profane" is an incongruous pair, a great deal of medieval literature is camp? Most importantly, Jack Babuscio ignores the crucial distinction between the kind of scrutiny which dissolves boundaries in order to demonstrate their insubstantiality, or the value-systems which enforce them, and the kind of scrutiny which merely seeks to confirm that they are there. As a logic of 'transgression', camp belongs to the second class. If the transgression of boundaries ever threatened to produce the redefinition of them, the *frisson* would be lost, the thrill of "something wrong" would disappear.

Eleven

Jack Babuscio quotes Oscar Wilde — "It is through Art, and through Art only, that we can shield ourselves from the sordid perils of actual existence" — and adds, approvingly: "Wilde's epigram points to a crucial aspect of camp aestheticism: its opposition to puritan morality".¹⁴ On the contrary, the epigram is a supreme expression of puritan morality, which can almost be defined by its revulsion from the danger and squalor of the real. Puritanism finds its escape-clause in the aspiration of the individual soul towards God, in a relation to which the world is at best irrelevant and at worst inimical; and Wilde simply redefines the emergency-exit in aesthetic terms. Sartre remarks of Genet that "beauty is the aesthete's dirty trick on virtue". I would rephrase him to read — "the isolation of style is the aesthete's dirty trick on the concept of value, and the constant necessity to analyse and reconstruct concepts of value".

Twelve

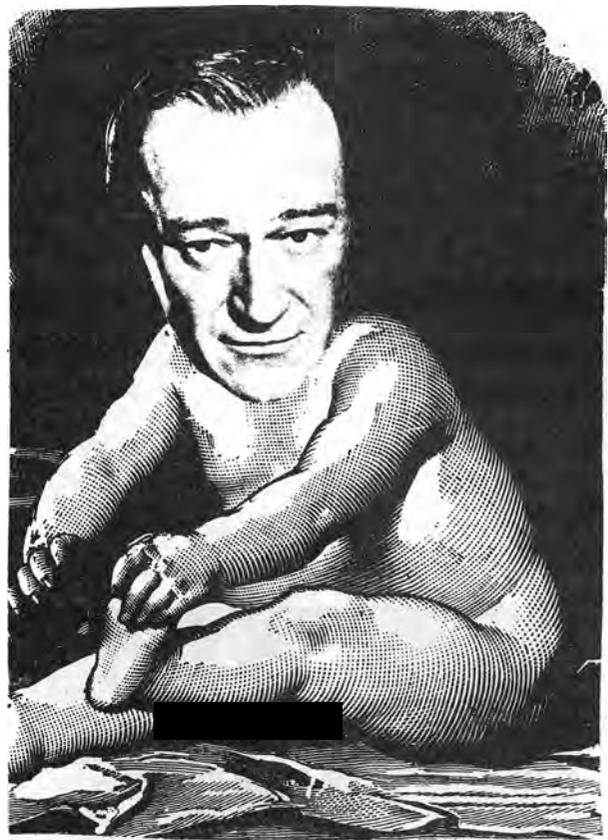
Camp is chronically averse to value-judgements, partly by choice (evaluation is felt to involve discrimination between various 'contents', and thus to belong to the realm of 'High Culture', 'Moral Seriousness', etc.) and partly by default: the obsession with 'style' entails both an astonishing irresponsiveness to tone and a refusal to acknowledge that styles are necessarily the bearers of attitudes, judgements, values, assumptions of which it's necessary to be aware, and between which it's necessary to discriminate. "The horror *genre*, in particular, is susceptible to a camp interpretation. Not all horror films are camp, of course; only those which make the most of stylish conventions for expressing instant feeling, thrills, sharply defined personality, outrageous and 'unacceptable' sentiments, and so on".¹⁵



What is "instant feeling"? — or, for that matter, feeling which is not instant? And what are "stylish conventions"? The conventions of the horror movie are complex and significant, and cannot be discussed in terms of a *chic* appendage to a content which is somehow separable from them. Certainly, horror films express "unacceptable sentiments" — indeed, they exist in order to do so — but to read them as "outrageous" in the camp sense is to protect oneself from their real outrageousness, to recuperate them as objects of "good-bad taste" (which is what bourgeois critics do anyway). Once one has effected the impossible and meaningless distinction between "aesthetic and moral considerations",¹⁶ it becomes perfectly feasible to associate the critical intelligence of Von Sternberg movies with the coy, vulgar, sexist fantasising of Busby Berkeley musicals, or to confuse the grotesque complicity of the Mae West persona with the "excess" of Jennifer Jones's performance in *Duel in the Sun* or Davis's in *Beyond the Forest*,¹⁷ where "excess" is a function of an active critique of oppressive gender-roles. While ostensibly making demand for new criteria of judgement, camp is all the while quietly acquiescing in the old ones. It merely takes over existing standards of "bad taste" and insists on liking them.

Thirteen

Camp has a certain minimal value, in restricted contexts, as a form of *épater les bourgeois*; but the pleasure (in itself genuine and valid enough) of shocking solid citizens should not be confused with radicalism. Still less should "the very tight togetherness that makes it so good to be one of the queens", in Richard Dyer's phrase,¹⁸ be offered as a constructive model of 'community in oppression'. The positive connotations — an insistence on one's otherness, a refusal to pass as straight — are so irredeemably compromised by complicity in the traditional, oppressive formulations of that otherness; and 'camping around' is so often little more than being 'one of the boys' by pink limelight. We should not,



pace Richard Dyer, feel it incumbent on us to defend camp, on charges of 'letting the side down' or wanting to be John Wayne. Camp is simply one way in which gay men have recuperated their oppression, and it needs to be criticised as such.

Notes

- 1 Susan Sontag, 'Notes on "Camp" ' in *Against Interpretation* (Dell Publishing Co. Inc., 1970, p.292).
- 2 Jack Babuscio, 'Camp and the Gay Sensibility' in *Gays and Film* (BFI 1977, p.40).
- 3 Sontago; op.cit. p.278.
- 4 Babuscio; op.cit. p.44.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Sontag and Babuscio, *ibid*; and Richard Dyer, 'It's Being So Camp As Keeps Us Going' in *Body Politic* (September 1977).
- 7 Sontag; op.cit. p.289.
- 8 Dyer; op.cit.
- 9 Sontag; op.cit. p.281.
- 10 Dyer; op.cit.
- 11 Babuscio; op.cit. p.40.
- 12 Ibid. p.41.
- 13 Ibid. p.41.
- 14 Ibid. p.42.
- 15 Ibid. p.43.
- 16 Ibid. p.51.
- 17 Ibid. p.45.
- 18 Dyer, op.cit.

NEW GROUP

North London GAYS against the NAZIS, contact Box GAN, Tottenham Community Project, 628 High Road, London N17.



Gay Lit

The Gay Journal — a new gay literary/intellectual magazine comes out in December 1978, founded by Anne Davison, Ian David Baker and Roger Baker. The new journal will not be a sex magazine. There will, for example, be no photographs and the erotic content of any writing or illustration will be part of the greater whole rather than there for its own sake. Good writing, good design and good graphics are the aim. We see no reason to be frightened of being intellectual, serious or literary. We hope that the journal will reflect the experience of gay people and our response to the world we live in. There is scope for fiction, poetry, analytical articles, satire, humour and autobiographical experience. We can cope with politics and plays, tub-thumping and even music.

The journal will be quarterly and will have 64 pages in each issue. Price 75p a single issue +20p post (students and OAPs 50p). Subscriptions £4 p.a. for 4 issues.

B.B.D. Publishing, Flat F, 23/24 Great James St, London WC1N 3ES.

Homosexuals Fight Back

THE GAY ACTIVISTS ALLIANCE

by Stephen Gee

The GAA was formed in February 1978. Its impetus was the recent demonstration in London organised by the National *Gay News* Defence Committee. The demonstration was the largest gay protest seen in this country, signified a regeneration of the gay movement. This has happened alongside another important development, the growth of the anti-fascist movement. The gay demonstration and the two great Anti Nazi carnivals of 1978 have begun to fight the despair of the previous two years, when the unrelieved crisis spawned more and bloodier NF marches, racist killings, Whitehouse's blasphemy case and the murder of Peter Benyon. About a week after the *Gay News* trial in July 1977 a gay man, Peter Benyon, was beaten to death by a group of men armed with chair legs. He had just left 'The Rainbow', a gay club in North London.

The new fight back mood has been characterised by countless simple slogans, such as Stop the Nazi National Front, Gays and Women Fight Back, Stop Mary Whitehouse etc. Punk and New Wave Rock music have also articulated this urgency. The music and the politics have become strong allies. This upsurge has also prompted anxious scepticism on certain sections of the Left and out of that GAA faces a challenge to both the political basis of its activism and to its existence as an autonomous body.

Origins and Structure

The politics and organisation of the GAA are inherited from those of the National *Gay News* Defence Committee. At the time of the NGNDC a few Gay socialists questioned whether the *Gay News* of today with its male bias and conservatism was defensible. Most people, however, recalled the Old Bailey, with the intense Saint Whitehouse praying for the prosecution counsel as he railed against buggers and buggery

to the obvious approval of the judge and in the end with the endorsement of the jury. Gay oppression became redefined that summer with an almost medieval resonance. The concept of Blasphemy, like the name Mary Whitehouse, was no longer a joke. The anger it provoked united gays of different political persuasions in the common view that we were all under attack by the *Gay News* trial. The committee used the trial as a focus for an increasing number of anti-gay attacks: the murder of Peter Benyon, the attempt by her constituency Labour Party to sack Maureen Colquhoun MP, police harassment, custody cases — the same catalogue of oppression as in Tom Robinson's *Glad to be Gay*. Affiliations to the NGNDC were invited from a range of groups including CHE, women's groups and trade unions. CHE co-operated fully and provided generous publicity in its broadsheet and even *Gay News* welcomed and supported the new group. That broad-based support continues with the GAA and the resolution passed at the CHE conference reflects this:

'That CHE become a sponsor of the Gay Activists' Alliance and co-operate fully at national and local level in initiatives taken by GAA in defence of gay people.'

The theme of 'defence' is expressed in the short policy statement GAA adopted at its first meeting:

'to co-ordinate at a national level the fight against the increasing number of attacks being made on homosexuals and homosexuality. We see our struggle as part of that of other oppressed people and therefore seek the active participation of the maximum number of gay and non-gay organisations in this aim.'

Some people thought this was too rhetorical and ambitious, others thought a more explicitly socialist perspective should be adopted. Clearer ideas of the direction of GAA have emerged since the conference and there is continuing discussion at meetings and in the newsletter. The structure of the GAA was and remains an important debate. The bureaucracy of CHE was as inappropriate as the inspired amorphousness of early GLF. So far it has been resolved that

'The GAA is not the whole of the gay movement: at a national level it brings together lesbians and gay men, whether independent or as members of other gay groups . . . to work on specific issues. All groups involved in GAA are independent. National conferences, held every six weeks, enable co-ordination and planning to take place, and give us a chance to get to know one another. There is no formal leadership or membership but a secretariat, based on a local group, helps co-ordinate the spread of information by newsletter and telephone tree.'

Between February and September there have been four national conferences in Manchester, Oxford, London and Edinburgh, attended on average by 60 people. Ideas and proposals are generated in small workshops and a general plenary makes decisions. Three main campaigns have emerged; a campaign against police harassment, anti-fascist work and a campaign against W.H. Smiths. In addition, local groups have specific issues related to their area. This has put great demands on the people involved. The stress on activism threatens to exhaust some groups and leaves insufficient time for theoretical reflection on our work. The activist emphasis however began to involve new people. The Manchester group, in particular, has been successful in involving people from the gay clubs, which have been threatened with prosecution, under an old bye law, for licentious dancing!

Personal As Political

Although ambitious, the GAA does recognise certain limitations — 'the GAA is not the whole of the gay movement'. I feel we will also need to look back however and reflect on earlier groups, particularly GLF, if we are to achieve much. For example, how does the concept of the personal is political, so central to GLF and the women's movement, operate within GAA? It is instructive to look at an early GLF critique of 'gay activists':



'Gay activists are not apologetic about their homosexuality, so they can be more militant and defiant. But they refuse to think politically. Gay activism is generally for men, often hostile to women. It wants rights for gay people as they are; it does not challenge butch or femme stereotypes or examine ways of relating.'

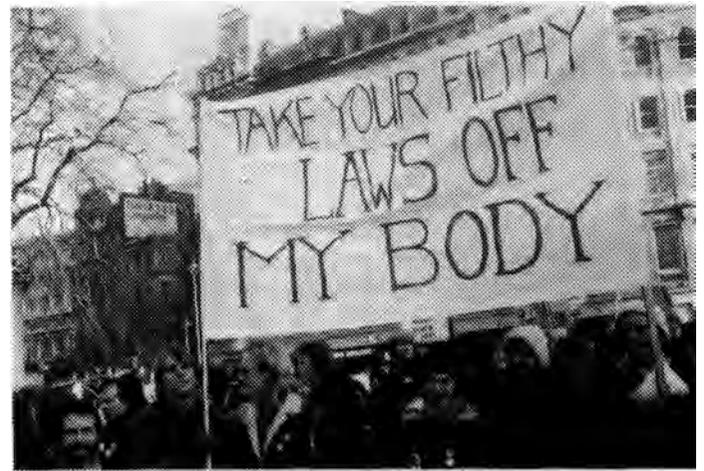
Gay activists are now, of course, in a different social and political context. Many have roots in earlier GLF groups and communities such as the London gay centres. There, people took up the personal political challenge in squatting and consciousness-raising groups. These communities grew in a more liberal climate at a more economically abundant time. With the onset of austerity these 'gay alternatives', as they were conceived, are vulnerable and are no longer the open communities they once were. It is not possible for me for example to relate exclusively to Brixton gay community. Although it is still apersonal, even private focus it is no longer a political one. London GAA provides for me the political focus. This apparent dichotomy between the personal and the political describes the way I perceive my activism and my relationships rather than an objective or a theoretical ideal. For other people too, at least in London GAA, their primary sphere of personal relationships is not within the GAA. This exposes GAA to the criticism that it is evading the personal/political question. Indeed if it is to grow and maintain its momentum GAA will have to find ways of integrating the two. It cannot simply be a co-ordinating body. It is for this reason that the GAA was, I think, wrong to state in its first newsletter that it was not a consciousness-raising group.

If the personal/political practice is abandoned then we are, in the words of the GLF critique, fighting for the rights of gay people 'as they are'. The illusion that we can fight for our rights *as we are* is a particular drawback in CHE. At every conference ambitious resolutions are passed, which are then referred to the executive or another bureaucratic body set up for the purpose. Individuals are relieved of the necessity to do anything. In terms of gay liberation, the concrete expression of that personal/political practice is simply coming out. GLF established it, GAA finds itself defending it in its campaigns in a very basic way. The police, the Festival of Light and the National Front are all behaving in ways to drive us back into the closet — the NFoL explicitly so, it recently floated the idea of a campaign to make it illegal to publicly declare one's homosexuality. GAA is a renewed expression of coming out and reflects the gay community's determination to stay out.

Alliance Not Party

A number of people working in GAA are socialists. Many of us however, even those who describe ourselves as such have an uneasy relationship with the left. The consensus in GAA is that we are an autonomous group and that we therefore need to organise *as* gays principally outside political parties. The reason, at least partially, is that parties organise around issues not immediately related to their own lives. For many men on the left the politics of their feelings and identity is often completely unchallenged. This means that the urgency of gay and women's issues is not perceived. The CP and the IMG have begun to realise this by at least recognising the validity of autonomous movements. The internal changes in the parties is not yet such, however, that a significant number of gays have identified with any one of them. Part of the problem is that we have not arrived at any meaningful analysis of gay oppression as it relates to class. It is even more problematic and alien to gay people when the 'class struggle' is projected, particularly by the SWP, with a stark male aggressive vanguardism.

'Alliance' rather than homogeneous 'party' structure is then the most viable way forward at present. There are also increasingly points at which the alliance of gays can become an alliance with other oppressed groups. The most obvious example is in fighting police harassment: GAA therefore has to build an alliance within the gay world as well as out to other groups. Many gays, apparently content with the scene, see activism as irrelevant to their lives. Too much of it in the past has perhaps been characterised by short-lived campaigns.



Also, GLF gays often separated themselves from the scene dismissing it as a sexist rip-off. We must not repeat the mistake of making unconditional sacrifices of leather jackets or drag or keys or suits for the redemption of political souls.

Keeping Together

Having laid the basis for an alliance we may be faced with possible splits. We have to prevent this without at the same time avoiding controversy. The newsletter has so far been a good vehicle for conveying thoughts and ideas which help define the alliance. On this particular question of political divisions and possible splits the newsletter carried the following contribution: 'I think that splits sometimes happen (in the old GLF again) because people are saying, in effect, "we should use such and such a tactic and I won't work with you if you don't agree".' We should try to avoid these kinds of needless ultimatums. We must also guard against regarding people you disagree with as the enemy. I think this was and is very bound up with not understanding or trying to understand where people are coming from, the origin of people's ideas. There are large numbers of political persuasions within the GAA now, reflecting the diversity within society as a whole. All the main positions have pretty deep roots in history and in the present. This means that, not only is GAA going to have to deal with these ideas in one way or another but also that each political group will contain well-meaning and sincere people. This means a certain degree of respect for people however objectively damaging one may think their opinion. Our deepest differences don't originate in malice and so we need not personalise them. We should keep the real enemy in sight.' (Jamie Gough)

The alliance has so far allowed a fairly consistent policy on anti-fascist tactics to emerge. A handbook which describes how Nazi ideology dealt with homosexuals has been produced. This has been taken up by Gay Sweatshop in its recent anti-fascist production 'Iceberg', and so the discussion about fascism can grow outside GAA groups.

The campaign against W.H. Smiths has been a long one and has drawn in many new people. It is a clear cut issue and is a useful campaign in that it brings people into contact with the more complex issues.

The anti-police harassment campaign is proving to be the most difficult. Assembling information and presenting a case to groups in and outside of the gay movement on this issue is the most important and long term issue facing us. Police activity against us, as against blacks, is as threatening as the NF. If we become demoralised by state harassment we will have less strength to fight the fascists should they or their ideas gain more ground.

GAA's continued effectiveness will be in its ability to co-ordinate and initiate diverse campaigns within the gay movement. It should promote a number of single issue but linked campaigns as a united gay political organisation. This includes people interested in law reform and those engaged, for example, in anti-fascist work. The resulting federation of campaigns could give gay politics the continuity and impact it needs and has so far not achieved.

Gays At Work ~ No Complaints

by Shauna Brown

This is the second article in a series which looks at the strategies and problems for lesbians and gay men who come out at work. We would welcome contributions from anyone who has had experience of coming out at work and we hope these articles will both help and encourage others in this struggle.

I came out at work after having been there for a year. I joined three years ago, working in the complaints department of a holiday company with fourteen women and three men. I suppose that the people I work with are fairly regular London office staff. Most of the women are in their late teens or 20s, some are married and all are avowedly heterosexual. There are some unusual factors, such as my boss being a woman and two of the men being gay and out. The two gay men joined the company after I did and their predecessors were two heterosexual men.

I was not willing or prepared to go into the job saying I was a lesbian. I wanted to be acceptable, to make my life easier and get some sort of contact with the people that I was going to have to be with five days a week nine till five, at that time I did not think I would be able to if I was out. I never said much about my personal life. I might say I had been to a film or a disco but I wouldn't elaborate. I never made up boyfriends' names or joined in general discussion about whether the new bloke in accounts was dead sexy or not. If I was asked I'd try to be terribly objective or dismissive depending on the situation.

I think that through the first couple of months the other workers thought I was shy and later on they thought I was just a very private person and perhaps a bit strange. I found it very depressing not being able to share my life with the other women in the office as they shared theirs with me. There were times when I wanted to say to them that I felt lousy because — but I was never able to because if I had that would have meant coming out, and I didn't know how they would have responded.

I did make it clear from quite early on that I was a feminist. I think this acted as a guard against suspicion, almost as if they thought that feminism equalled being asexual or that the men I knew were obviously too boring for words and who would bother talking about them anyway. My office personality and the fact that I was not 'one of the girls' set my opinions on things apart from the norm. In conversations about sexism, abortion, education etc. they had my line of argument down to a tee. They still do and sadly I don't think that my feminism has given them a different perspective, it's probably ridiculous to think that this slightly strange, isolated voice ever could. It is not that they don't sympathise with feminism they just see it as unrealistic and whilst they might agree with me on many issues they can't see the point in fighting to change things.

My boss knew less about me than any of the other women in the office yet I came out to her first. I was feeling down and exhausted mainly due to some problems with a relationship I was having at the time. Had one of the heterosexual women in the office been in the same situation my boss would probably have given her a couple of days off or at least appreciated that she could not ask her to work consistently hard in the circumstances. She called me in to her office to find out why I hadn't been doing much and I told her half-heartedly, using the word 'person' instead of 'woman'. I was not intending to tell her that I was a lesbian but there came a point in the conversation where any pretence seemed ridiculous and I said I was gay. She responded very calmly and said she'd thought so without giving any clues as to why.

The phrase 'I thought so' when you come out to anyone has always seemed to me more like an 'I'm just taking this in' response rather than someone having any real idea. My boss confirmed that this was the case later, but at the time I was grateful that she had said it as I didn't really want to go into an explanation about it. I stressed that I was quite happy being gay and that that was not the problem. We talked for a while about the relationship and although the conversation didn't really provide any insights I felt relieved to be able to discuss my personal life with someone I worked with. At the end of our talk she asked me not to tell the girls in the office as she didn't know how they would take it. I felt ambiguous about this as I really wanted to tell the others after getting a favourable response from my boss, but I didn't tell them until about two months later.

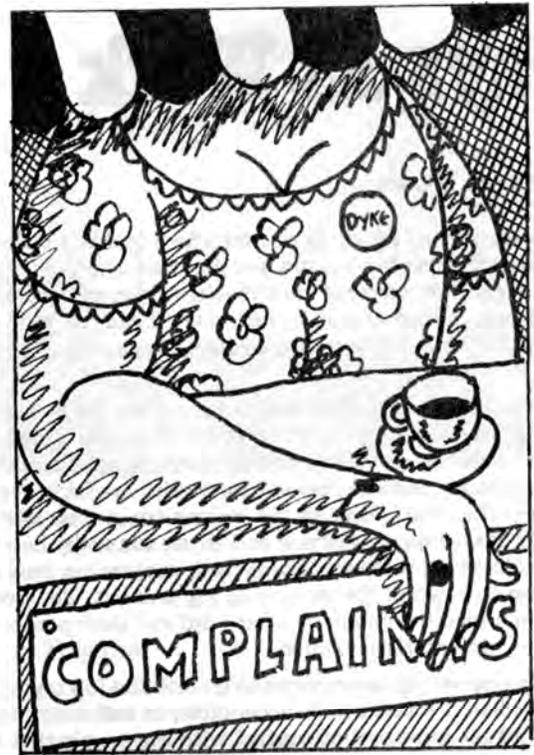


I was invited to the wedding reception of one of the women in the office. I was having a chat with her when she asked me, out of the blue, if I was bisexual. I must have taken a long minute to decide what to say and finally said "No, I'm a lesbian". We talked for what seemed hours, other women from the office came and joined us. They asked whether I role-played, did I REALLY fall in love, did my prents know and how did they react, was I happy being gay and every other question connected with the lesbian stereotype presented in the media. At the end of it I walked out feeling happy at their response but also shattered and in need of everyone I knew to be there and say it had been okay; I hadn't compromised, they had understood and thought it was fine.

The next day in the office was okay although I felt then and for quite some time after that I could only deal with individual conversations about my sexuality. Even now, sometimes, when we have a group conversation and the topic involves lesbianism I still feel a little shaky after, always hoping I've said the right thing, although not for them but

for me. It's very hard to get away from the 'representative' role. The women in the office view the two gay men very differently from me. The men aren't political and I think they see being gay as a slight handicap which with a bit of luck people will accept enough to let them become managing director. Both are always making remarks about other men's physical appearance and constant sexual innuendoes. The women are clear that I don't share their attitudes towards things and talk to me about how pissed off with a lot of the men's remarks they are. On these occasions they are not thinking about my lesbianism and I feel that I have much more in common with them as women than I do with the men as homosexuals.

The main reason I have stayed in the job is the women that I work with, the friendship and support we have for each other and the fear that it won't be so easy starting from scratch again. In retrospect I think that coming out after having been at work a **while** gave me time to be known as a woman as opposed to a lesbian first, person later. On the other hand they did think I was rather an odd woman and I spent the first year being depressed and isolated. The result of coming out was to improve things socially to a great extent, for this reason, if I moved to another job now I wouldn't be prepared to keep quiet about my sexual identity. Altogether I feel that coming out at work has been a very positive experience.



Odds and Sods

HOMOSEXUAL DESIRE

by Guy Hocquenghem

Reviewed by Philip Derbyshire

Had Hocquenghem's book been translated six years ago it would have produced much more of a storm than it does now. So many of his concerns are now common currency, his problematic is that of the contemporary Women's and Gay movements: the nature of sexuality, the construction of sexed and sexually oriented individuals, the relation between the autonomous movements and other forms of political struggle, etc. It is in the clear recognition of this problematic that the value of *Homosexual Desire* lies. Hocquenghem's observations and questions are of more interest than the solutions and theory he offers.

Jeffrey Weeks' introduction gives a succinct account of Hocquenghem's intellectual precursors and itself gives one of the most lucid accounts of recent theoretical innovations in sexual politics. One might almost recommend the book for its introduction, for the main body of the text is often irritating, obscure and, in the end, profoundly unsatisfying. Hocquenghem has an unnerving habit of introducing concepts and fragments of theory with no explanation, assuming an intimate acquaintance with the work of Lacan, Deleuze and Guatarri and using these notions to construct an account radically underdetermined by empirical material, which he draws mostly from literary accounts of homosexuality. A mode of presentation that Freud got away with, in Hocquenghem's hands becomes infuriating and needlessly gnomic.

Hocquenghem picks out particular features of the public representation of homosexuality, the juxtaposition of the homosexual and the criminal, the homosexual as invalid, and constructs an account of the expression of desire through Oedipalisation, and the construction of the perverse. So far, so good, but underlying his account is a very specific, if unanalysed conception of desire which owes more to the Romantic tradition of will and authenticity than to Freud.

Originally, Desire (metaphysically capitalised) was polyvocal and untied to objects but through the acquisition of the Oedipal Complex, Desire succumbs to the rule of the Phallus, and the unity of Desire is broken. For Hocquenghem, the homosexual is as partial an identity as the heterosexual: an identity of repression. Yet, though Hocquenghem wants to maintain that there is no such thing as a homosexual desire, he falters and certain homosexual desires and practices are seen as 'the mode of existence of desire itself'. It is as though Hocquenghem is torn between a despair at the total repression accomplished through the family and Oedipus, and a sincere belief that male homosexuals are already revolutionary: sodomy and cruising somehow prefigure the world without Oedipus. This tension forces him into a frenzied over-romanticisation of male homosexual practice whilst ignoring the real world of homosexuals: closetry becomes a mysterious but profoundly vocal moment of being of a hypothesised Homosexuality Desire, instead of a boring, deeply miserable isolation. Similarly, cruising takes on the character of a 'voyage of self discovery' akin to that of the schizophrenic; again real homosexuals, the reality of police oppression, the often unhappy consequences of being arrested for importuning, vanish in the glow of the idealising metaphor.

This ambiguity of despair and frenetic optimism generates some of the more peculiar stances of Hocquenghem's book: the rigorous anti-humanism resulting from the description of



the ego and self as alien and repressive implantations, and the utter distrust of organisation and explicitly of the Left. In each case, authentic Desire bubbling away from the roots of Being permits only spontaneous connection unmediated by rationality, or interest or even language. All language is under the rule of the Phallus and is suspect. All previous forms of opposition are inevitably corrupt, tied to the evils of Oedipal succession.

It is at these points that Hocquenghem becomes absurd and utopic and psychologistic. It is as though the long 19th century search for authenticity, always enmeshed in a schismed vision of the individual and society (Rousseau onwards) finds its apogee in a grand conflict between Desire, individually located, if not in the ego, and the social, the realm of the Phallus, as demiurge and demon. History, as a creation of the Phallus, vanishes and revolution is seen as almost an instantaneous consequence of sodomy. Fourier and Sade are quoted approvingly, yet it is hard to take seriously

this vision of sodomy as the grave digger of capitalism.

All this is coupled with a total ignoring of women and lesbianism. On his first page Hocquenghem dispatches lesbianism to the realm of the unsayable, on the grounds that he, a mere man, in men's language can say nothing about it. But this false modesty becomes slight of hand sexism when the role of an autonomous women's sexuality attacking patriarchal capitalism is ignored.

So in the long run, Hocquenghem yields nothing save a justification of the voluntarism and separation that characterised the movement then: and poor justification too. But perhaps it is a measure of the creativity of the gay movement that we have transcended those positions. As a part of our history, Hocquenghem's book is still pertinent, even if it leaves all the questions still to be answered.

Up Against The Law

THE LAW AND SEXUALITY — HOW TO COPE WITH THE LAW IF YOU'RE NOT 100% CONVENTIONALLY HETEROSEXUAL

(Grass Roots/Manchester Law Centre £1.00)

Reviewed by Bob Cant

The relationship between the law and the development of our emotional-sexual relationships is an immensely complicated one. Since the 1967 Act legalised some male homosexual acts a whole generation of gay men has come to believe that the law will not interfere with them if they are not too flamboyant. With the rise of both the women's and gay movements an increasing number of women have rejected heterosexual lifestyles and then found that, although lesbianism may not be illegal, it is considered sufficient grounds to take their children away from them. But, whatever one's circumstances, most people are totally unprepared for the intrusion of the law into the most intimate part of their lives. This handbook recognises the widespread ignorance about the law and sexuality and is designed to help us all cope with the legal jungle.

It does not attempt to analyse the role of the law nor is it a manifesto of legal reform. As a result of this approach there is no discussion of the law as a repressive agency. The law is after all designed to serve the interests of one class in society and the closer one's relationship to that class the better a chance one has of winning through. The white, middle-class defendant starts off with an advantage before she/he has entered the court room. That apart, the book is excellent. It is designed to help individuals win their cases and it is hardly the responsibility of the authors that there is no large movement for sexual law reform.

Each chapter deals with particular themes — for example, custody, transvestism, young people, and gives very specific advice on how to respond to police interest in these situations. The chapters end with a series of useful hints; the most important of which is probably the fact that one does not need to answer any police questions. Given the sophistication of police questioning techniques it is, in fact, very difficult for anyone to remain totally silent. But it is not only in Northern Ireland that convictions are often obtained largely on the basis of conversations between the police and the accused.

Otherwise the most important part of the book is probably the discussion of the way one's sexuality becomes a determining factor in cases which are apparently not concerned with sexuality. The judge's view of normality can play an important part in the resolution of cases which involve gay defendants. Such prejudice is not pronounced in cases involving lesbians. The silence of the law on lesbianism certainly does not mean that it is a factor ignored by those in judgement. When Louise Bovchuk lost her job for wearing a badge

which said "Lesbians Ignite", her dismissal was upheld by an industrial tribunal which quoted the old testament on Sodom and Gomorrah in its judgement. More commonly quoted than the Bible is the opinion of psychiatrists. The psychiatric report in one case where the mother lost custody of her child said: "The mother practises statistically abnormal sexual acts which can be looked upon as a deviation from the normal and is frankly perverted. It will be difficult to imagine that this young boy could go through his adolescent period of development without feeling shame and embarrassment at having a mother who has elected to engage in sexual practices which are statistically abnormal."

The underpinning of prejudice is clearest in cases involving lesbians but cases involving gay men are certainly not free of it. It is common in gross indecency cases for the prosecution to argue that proof of the defendant's homosexuality adds to the likelihood of his guilt. But the case that in my opinion illustrates most strongly the ignorance and prejudice which operates in cases involving gay people concerns a male bus conductor. He had been sacked following a gross indecency conviction and appealed to a Leeds industrial tribunal against his dismissal. The tribunal supported the employer, however, and said: "It really cannot be argued in our view that a conviction for an offence of gross indecency does not reflect on the suitability of the applicant as a bus conductor ... There would be an understandable concern in the minds of the public, who are aware of this conviction, if they had to put their children on the bus, including girls." It is extremely difficult to imagine just what they thought homosexuality was.

These and many other examples of devious, irrational and prejudiced operations of the law with regard to the sexually unconventional, illustrate all too clearly the need for such a handbook. Until such time as the law stops interfering in our relationships we need to go on fighting it as often and as well as we can. This book makes an important contribution to that struggle. We should all have a copy of it for it costs only £1 and none of us knows when we next may need it.



You Can't Be A Socialist Perfume Maker

Meetings with Tom Robinson
by Derek Cohen and Hans Kladders

If we had been interviewing any ordinary gay worker we would not have had the expectations that we did that Tom Robinson would be an interesting person with 'insightful' things to say about his situation. As it was, we came away feeling that in some ways he is quite ordinary; in fact he has an ordinariness and unsophisticated side to him that leaves you rather suspicious. This is because, like it or not, Tom Robinson is a S*T*A*R. He is someone whom we might not have interviewed had he not been a 'nearly famous person'; *Gay Left* would classify our interview as "Gays at Work" rather than "Gay Culture". That he is a star, or at least some way up in that hierarchy, is evidenced both by his own aspirations, and the reactions of other people to him, ourselves included.

"Show me a boy who doesn't want to be a Rock'n' Roll Star and I'll show you a liar."

First and foremost Tom Robinson wanted to be a rock and roll star. He wanted to play rock and roll music and be successful. We can forget any ideas that Tom took to a musical career because he wanted to propagate certain ideas. As he sees it, he has followed a musical career, being openly gay, and committed to some left-wing principles all along. He was an out gay man in Cafe Society, but the band did not take off, and he realised that if he wanted to do what he wanted he would have to form his own band. Entering into the hierarchical, competitive world of musical fame is a very dubious occupation politically, and the career that Tom is following is little different from most other capitalist 'careerists', a competitive structure based upon commodities, usually treating people as such. That his roots are in the gay movement may be some reassurance, for example his involvement in Gay Switchboard, but 'stars' can never maintain that sort of involvement in the same way.

Thus when Tom Robinson goes down to the Icebreakers disco at the Prince Albert or goes on a Gay Pride or Right to Work march he is there not as any ordinary gay man or worker but as a celebrity. This means that people will come up and talk to him in a familiar way, even when they've never met him before; they will stand around and look at him as someone special. He has a special position. He is on the stage while we are in the audience. He has an access to the media that most people do not. He can have his homosexuality accepted while many gay workers lose their jobs because of it.

While attempting to maintain some sort of contact with everyday gay people, Tom Robinson behaves in certain ways which accentuate his being a star. Not even just a member of a famous or successful band, but a star in his own right. The band was originally called the *Tom Robinson Band* though efforts are now being made to get the band seen as *TRB*. But this attempt is thwarted by things like his introducing every number in the concert. He tends to do all the singing standing alone, even when other members of the band sing as well. The audience relates to him much more than to the band as a whole. The paradox for us as gay people is that if, with the same structure of the band, it were a less prominent member who was gay, that fact would have a lot less impact and influence on the audiences.

A Saleable Product

If Tom Robinson is trying, through his music, to convey certain political messages, then the process by which he does this, involving the music business and the music promotion world as well, must necessarily affect the content and the context of that message. It is doubtful that *Glad to be Gay* would have had as many plays as it did if Tom Robinson hadn't personally talked to the EMI reps. But it is equally

doubtful that it would have succeeded if it had been released as a single on its own rather than tucked safely among some less contentious material. This is a tribute both to Tom Robinson's promotional ability, after all *Glad to be Gay* did get lots of plays on the radio, and to the music business's ability to accommodate itself to most things in order to make profits.

An important part of this process is the way that Tom Robinson's sexuality becomes just another interesting saleable exploitable part of him. It would be treated almost identically were it that he sang songs in bare feet (Sandie Shaw) or had unusual length hair (The Beatles) or could dance in a new way (John Travolta).

By presenting his homosexuality as part of the package, the music business makes it acceptable within conventional terms. *Glad to be Gay* may have been directed against the smug middle class patrons of the Hanover Grand, but Tom Robinson is presented as extremely respectable, not as someone who might go cruising, or cottaging, or have a number of lovers. The sexual aspect of his being is hardly ever mentioned. He has a neutered identity.

"... if you want to play rock'n'roll and you want to reach an audience beyond the number of people that fit into a concert hall, then you have to make records, and then you have to sell records, and then you might as well sign with the best record company there is and that's EMI ..."

Tom Robinson has been hugely successful in changing people's attitudes on a number of important issues and this must be heartily applauded. However we must not expect him to be leading any 'revolutionary' changes. If he was singing about people picking up guns and going on the rampage through the Houses of Parliament (or for that matter the EMI headquarters) instead of urging people to stop beating up gays and black people, there is no doubt he would not be where he is today. He is not threatening to the status quo, and seems not to want to be. In becoming involved with a vast capitalist machinery such as the record industry he has become part of the establishment. Sure enough an establishment made slightly more bearable by his presence, but an establishment nevertheless.

If you are committed to a goal of selling lots of records and getting your music across to as many people as possible you have to start compromising. If you want the widest distribution for your records you go to one of the biggest record companies in the world, and considerations such as EMI's investments in South Africa or its development of guidance systems for missiles become much less important. The second time you arrive at a foreign airport you almost stop thinking about why you are being driven around in a large limousine rather than taking a taxi. A careerist musician has to take the music business largely on its own terms, because the end justifies the means time and again.

But there are alternatives. You don't have to be part of this machinery to reach a wider audience, as has been amply demonstrated by the countless independent record labels that have been set up over the last 1½ years. The main problem is that of distribution. Your record does not go into the record shops with the EMI rep as part of a package for which the shop has a standing order. There is no money for publicity on the scale that the big record companies are used to.

Yet in Scandinavia there are many successful alternative record companies which put out feminist and socialist records and distribute them on a national basis. They are



"It's Sunday night at the Hammersmith Odeon and our brains are warm with Southern Comfort. When we ask the bouncer where our seats are he gives us a long hard look and takes our tickets with a tattooed hand on which the veins stand out like little streams. When we've found our seat and convinced the people sitting in them that the numbers on the chairs don't correspond to those on their tickets, the curtain rises to reveal a large fist in yellow on black. We look around. These are die-hard fans, they've dutifully taken the stencils from the album covers and emblazoned their old clothes with the symbol. The guy behind me hits his friend with the same clenched fist."

co-operatively run, they work, the records are cheap, and the small profits are equally shared.

So why not in Britain? TRB's music is *not* political in the same way as the Scandinavian groups, but nevertheless it could have been the starting point for a similar operation. If radical publishers can set up their own distribution service why not musicians? There would be no limousines at the airport, no gigs in 3,500 seaters, no letters from isolated lesbians in Japan. And that is the paradox.

Tom Robinson wants to see change but in a very limited way. To say that it was necessary to make those compromises in order to reach a wider audience, *as if* there were no alternatives, as if there weren't numerous bands and artists who were trying to make changes from the bottom up, is to ignore the roots of political music, where commitment weighs heavier than the front page of the *New Musical Express*.

A Honk from a Passing Limousine

"I feel frightened watching this strange spectacle. Every time Danny Kustow, the TRB guitarist, takes a solo he hits the front of the stage, face contorted into a scream, legs wide, and Tom joins him in a classic male rock and roll stance."

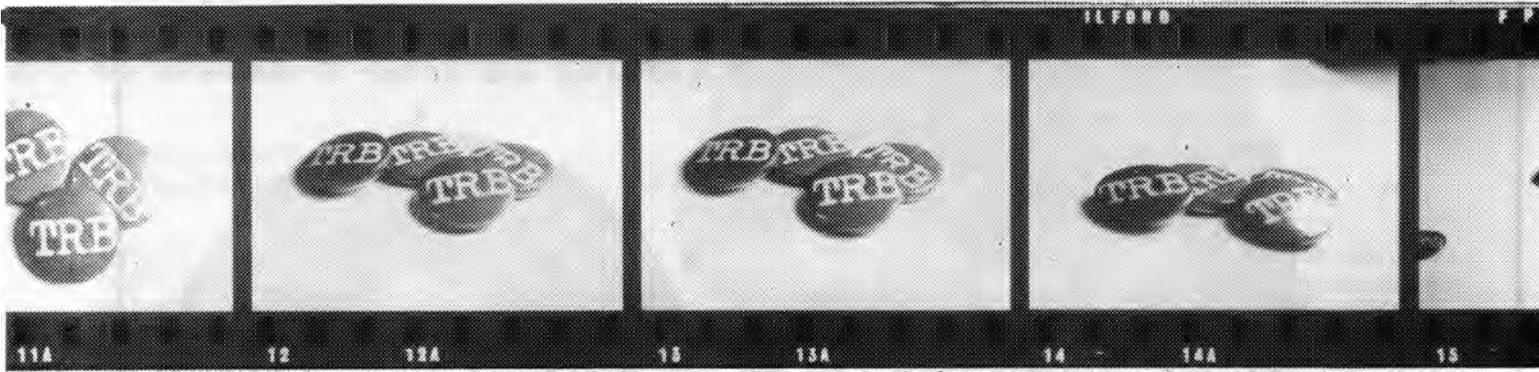
Right On Sister came in at the very end of the gig. In the midst of all this machismo was a song about and in support of of feminism. It is amusing to think that we thought the interview we did with him would have had an effect. Some of our main criticisms of him centred around that song. He had expressed the fear that his songs could become like honks from a passing limousine. We had argued that *Right On Sister* was exactly that in a way that *Glad to be Gay* was not. He said he felt the need to express his support of the women's movement. But a far more supportive thing would have been/

is to write a song about men, a group of people he is part of, to write about traditionally male behaviour, machismo and so on, so as to get the men he reaches with his music to think about their behaviour, which is so oppressive of women, and perhaps to re-examine it and change it. Instead he and Danny Kustow reinforce it by their behaviour on stage and yet sing a song 'supportive' of the women's movement.

Coming from someone who is a star, and so is seen as separate from everyday life, TRB's songs seem separate from everyday experiences. They are about the future (*Winter of '79*) or other sorts of people (women in *Right On Sister*) or exhortative of others (*Don't Take No For An Answer*). The personal experiences of the band members do not come through, and we are left being encouraged by people who don't have the same material circumstances as ourselves, but are just passing by our part of the struggle. Tom Robinson's politics *would* seem much more real if he and the rest of the band were to sing songs not just about what is happening to blacks or women or gays (which are important issues to sing about in themselves) but also about what it is about being white, male and heterosexual that needs to change.

Letters to the Boy Next Door

But if the music business is using TRB and in particular Tom Robinson's homosexuality to bolster its own commercial ends, it is also clear that Tom Robinson attempts, and often succeeds, in using his position to change his audiences, the record companies, the media. Perhaps the most outstanding effect has been the way he has become a focus for young emerging lesbians and gay men, not just in this country but as far away as Japan and the USA. He has become a focus for young people who are coming out, a positive image to identify with that resonates with their own sexuality. Tom's mail includes vast numbers of letters from gays writing about their



own experiences of oppression; he uses the programmes at his concerts and his album sleeve to publicise gay facilities such as Gay Switchboard and Icebreakers. He presents a public image of gayness that is equated (albeit in bourgeois terms) with success rather than failure. Gay counselling and befriending services have recorded a great increase in calls from young people since his increased prominence. That Tom Robinson *does* come across as unsophisticated and accessible means that there is an ever greater possibility of identification with him by his fans than with many more 'glossy' rock stars.

Glad to be Gay has become a very acceptable tune to sing along to, and there has been a danger that the content of the song would get lost. Thus it was reassuring at a recent concert that the band stopped playing in the middle of this song and Tom Robinson acknowledged the fact that everyone could easily sing along mindlessly. He showed the real significance of the song by giving the organist a long full kiss. There were many straight faces in the audience afterwards. Tom Robinson had used his power as a performer to confront his audience. He is able to use this influence to affect the 'machine' as well. There has been a plethora of TRB badges on sale, so to counter this exploitation Tom persuaded EMI to give away free badges at the concerts; the stencil outfit with the album enables people to make their own T-shirts and posters rather than having to pay for them; concert tickets are kept deliberately low.

The fact is that when you look around at a TRB gig TRB *has* had an effect on all those people. He has made his audience think about racism and fascism. They wear Anti Nazi League badges on the same lapel as their TRB badges. If you asked any of the thousands of people who bought the records and go to the concerts about the National Front you would get very clear answers and he has, to some extent, confronted them with their attitudes to gays.



Hard Facts/Soft Soap

It is difficult enough for most of us to try to avoid compartmentalising our lives: personal/political/work/play/culture ... It is even harder to do this when 'work' takes place in a context which stresses individuality. The music business thrives on 'individuals'. They can be marketed, manipulated, shaped and packaged, eventually to be discarded. Someone who tries to avoid this separateness from the more real world is necessarily self-limiting. Gays may be able to go so far, but

Abba can certainly go further. Tom Robinson is trying to keep in touch with his roots, by visiting gay events, by going on political demonstrations, by taking an interest in the people who write to him, by mingling with the crowds at his own performances. Yet because he is a professional musician there is suspicion, an inability of ordinary people to respond to him except in his role, and yet without that role they wouldn't respond to him at all.



"I'm involved in a massive compromise that can't be resolved because you can't be a socialist perfume maker, because you're dealing in a totally consumer luxury product."

The paradox for us as gay socialists is that we do not want to support the commercial capitalist music business, but it has succeeded in getting a song about being gay, and a self-identified gay man, in the public eye far more successfully than we could ever hope to do at present... We need to work out how best we can exploit the total situation both before it has got too successful at exploiting us, and without exploiting people like Tom Robinson himself. To do this successfully we must work *with* people like Tom Robinson. We must be neither seduced nor totally repelled by the 'star' image, failing to see him as someone we can affect directly and who is open to being influenced and supported by us. *We* must not be fooled and deterred by the pedestal Tom Robinson has been helped onto.

So what happens next? At Hammersmith it became clear that, having achieved his aims, Tom Robinson could be ready to become less 'angry' and settle into a comfortable middle age like the rest of them, perhaps recording a solo album of love songs as he said he might when we talked to him. A foretaste of that came with *You Turn Me On*, a love song in which there is no mention of another man, which he performed at Hammersmith, and which might well be the next single:

*"You turn me on, You turn me on
One Hell of a lot
I don't want no heavy situations
Getting high on you is all that I need . . ."*

Tom Robinson goes Joan Armatrading?

Two Letters on Freud

by David Fernbach and Simon Watney

Dear *Gay Left*,

Thanks for inviting me to reply to Simon Watney's remarks on my article 'Towards a Marxist Theory of Gay Liberation'. Could I start by saying a bit about myself, so that the discussion isn't conducted simply at an abstract level? I came into Gay Liberation in 1970 as a Marxist, very much under the spell of the student movement of the late 1960s. In the three years that I spent heavily involved in gay politics, I went through all kinds of changes, in ideas and in lifestyle, but after the collapse of GLF I could no longer find a viable way of combining gay politics with socialism, and went back into the straight left — not that I ever rejected my belief in gay liberation or the new things I'd learned from the gay movement. Maybe I expected too much of the gay movement, and wrongly believed that the civil rights struggle could be bypassed, and the original GLF spirit of a radical gay movement kept permanently alive. But as ever more socialists of the 1968 generation are having to admit, it's far more difficult to change social relations than we originally thought, and on all fronts we have to find more gradual ways of advancing a step at a time. At least, having failed to find 'the revolution' elsewhere, I feel drawn back to the gay movement once again, and the fact that some of my ideas are being discussed in *Gay Left* provides a useful starting-point.

The first thing I couldn't help noting about Simon's review was that it was neither comradely nor brotherly in tone. I'm referred to in the academic style as 'Fernbach', and in general the review seems more concerned to score polemical points in an individualistic and competitive way than to discuss in the spirit of seeking truth together. That said, I'm very willing to accept several of Simon's criticisms, and add a few of my own from looking back on this article five years on; though as I'll go on to explain, I still see my attempt at a Marxist theory of gay liberation as basically pointing in the right direction.

As Marxists, we start out from the belief that human history is an objective process in which certain general tendencies of development can be traced. We also start out with a fairly well-tested understanding of the economic structures that play such an important part in human evolution, and at least some rudimentary ideas of how political and cultural phenomena are articulated to this 'economic base'. All this comes under the heading of 'historical materialism', the only even half-way scientific approach so far developed for studying the network of human social relations. What this Marxist science of history cannot give us, however, though it is highly relevant for the Marxist goal of human liberation, is an understanding of the inner workings of the human mind. This can only be approached in quite other ways than the social relations that can be objectively charted in terms of such graspable entities as movements of goods and money, of voters and soldiers, newspapers and tv transmissions.

Now the basic direction of my article was to take what is fairly well established by Marxist theory, i.e. an understanding of how capitalist relations of production impose a certain patterning on relations between women and men, and to try and carry this line of argument forward to see what precisely are the limits that this system of capitalism/family imposes on homosexuality. In this way we can begin to get a clearer idea of the possibilities opened up for homosexuality by the changes in the capitalism/family system that are taking place today (in particular on the basis of effective and quasi-universal birth control), and those further changes that we can expect from a socialist transformation of the relations of production. Any Marxist intervention in the gay movement must base itself on some such conception of the connections.

The basic reason why any theoretical development of this kind needs an injection of psychoanalytic concepts is that gay people, unlike blacks, women or workers, are not definable simply or primarily in terms of external characteristics (e.g. 'what we do'). It is the homosexual desire inside our heads which sets us apart - and not because 'we were born that way' either. Homosexuality, i.e. the choice of a person of the same sex as sexual object, is as open a possibility to every human being as heterosexuality. No true liberation for gay people is possible in terms of changing external social relations between 'gays' and 'straights'; true liberation demands the liberation of the homosexual desire, so that this can flourish on an equal basis with heterosexuality, in which case the fact that there will always be a certain spectrum of preference will no longer be of social importance.



A theory of gay liberation must then try to show how the prevailing social relations, which historical materialism can analyse, repress or sublimate the homosexual desire relatively successfully in most individuals, and fail to do so, often even to the point of repressing heterosexual desire, in the gay minority. And it is only the tendency in psychology deriving from Freud — for all his, and its, inadequacies — which is able even to talk of such things, to see the human mind as a material system with a force of its own, reducible neither to biology nor to external social relations, and their 'conditioning'. As soon as we talk of such things as homosexual desire, rather than just homosexual behaviour, we are using psychoanalytic concepts. These concepts are absolutely necessary, which is not to say that they need no further development, nor that the specific theories put forward within this conceptual framework are always correct.

Because I introduce certain basic psychoanalytic concepts, Simon calls me a 'dogmatic Freudian', who 'assumes a universality of sexual forms'. But on this very point I specifically criticize Freud, i.e. for presenting the view children form of the presence or absence of the penis, as a natural 'discovery', rather than a social ideology retailed to them by parents and educators. Later, I specifically argue that as women gain social independence, 'they will gradually stop forcing their children through the castration complex, and instead will teach their little girls how to use their clitoris, and

teach the little boys that their penis, though bigger, is by no means better, and also has its disadvantages....The abolition of the castration complex will finally allow male and female children to develop both their homosexual and heterosexual trends in a non-compulsive and non-male-dominated way'. However imperfect, my attempt is precisely to show sexual forms as the product of changeable social relations.

Further on the subject of Freud, I willingly concede that the orthodox Freudian theory of the mechanism of gender differentiation is over-simple. Let us then go on to study more recent developments in psychoanalysis, particularly the work of theorists with some understanding of the historical character of social relations and in particular of women's oppression. But let's not throw the baby out with the bath-water. Simon feels that part of my 'dogmatic Freudianism' is to locate the genesis of female and male homosexuality 'solely on the terrain of some purely genital consciousness — penis envy, etc.' I agree absolutely that homosexual desire, which itself can take different forms, involves more than the classical Freudian theory takes into account. But for better or worse, we *are* defined by our distinct 'genital consciousness' — I can't see any way out of that!

The weakest part of my article is undoubtedly the attempt to show the changing economic relations of capitalist development affected state policy towards homosexuality via the requirements placed on the family. The reasons why state repression of homosexual behaviour has varied so greatly in intensity are undoubtedly far more complicated than I presented them. But even here, I would stand by my basic theme that it was the difficulty of heterosexual marriage (economic burden of children in a situation with no effective birth control) that required particularly strong sanctions against homosexuality, whereas today, when heterosex can so easily be practised without any economic cost (which is why the traditional moral proscriptions are breaking down here, too), the homosexuality that lurks outside the gates of the family is that much less of a threat to the reproduction of the population. 'The state can step out of the arena of sexual orientation, for sexual orientation is no longer relevant to the reproduction of labour-power'. If Simon disagreed with this, let him argue the point. But please don't present me as holding the ridiculous position that this is a universal law of human society, rather than a connection in the specific history of Western capitalism. Of course, in many societies 'pre- and extra-marital homosexual activity [is] successfully institutionalized and contained', rather than being simply proscribed, as in the West. But these are all societies where heterosexual marriage is tightly welded into the relations of production and binding on all individuals, quite different to the situation of industrial capitalism where male workers can live and work quite happily without getting married.

Finally, on the question of strategy, I'm glad Simon agrees that 'gay people can [not] be organised against the capitalist state and for socialism on the basis of civil rights'. But again he distorts my position. Of course gay people's lived experience of the family is crucial for us, as for everyone else. But a movement of gay people for civil rights, etc. is nevertheless a movement of people who, in their great majority at least, are not living in a family situation, nor are involved in bringing up children. (Not that gays should not strive to be more involved in this.) There is a serious tension between the spontaneous direction taken by a movement of gay people the minority in whom the proscribed homosexual desire is dominant, and the direction of gay liberation in the sense of the liberation of the homosexual desire for everyone. At its extreme, we see this in the American gay male movement's explicit attempt to win the full privileges enjoyed by men in the present society, while being free of straight men's family responsibilities. And we see it at the cultural level in the ever stronger 'macho-ization' of gay society.

While I can no longer see the transition from capitalism to communism, as I still did in 1973, as a revolutionary explosion in the classical sense, I still believe that gay Marxists have a particular contribution to make in helping to fuse our specific critique of the present system of social relations together with the traditional socialist critique — not just in theory, but also in terms of a practical movement. I gladly

take back my 'depressing Leninist railings against 'opportunism', 'reformism', etc.' But from a gay Marxist perspective, i.e. one that sees gay liberation as dependent on the dissolution of gender roles and the reorganization of child-rearing and domestic living to fit in with a reorganised economy, there is a real problem of how to relate to the gay rights movement, particularly for those of us who cannot point to any existing Marxist grouping as the vanguard of human liberation. Here I don't claim to have any answers; this is what I've come in from the cold to look for.

Love and solidarity,
David Fernbach

Simon Watney replies:

David Fernbach takes exception to the tone of my review (Gay Left 6) of a recently republished edition of his 1973 paper, *Towards a Marxist Theory of Gay Liberation*. Before going on to discuss the major arguments in his letter, as they appear to me, I should like to consider his point concerning the use of surnames, which is not without significance. I myself find it rather odd to be addressed as Simon by anyone I don't actually know. This may well be aspective of my own social construction as a man, but at the same time the use of Christian names in our society does imply an intimacy which, especially in print, is all too often spurious. I shall therefore continue to refer to "David" as "Fernbach", and to "Karl" as "Marx", employing a straightforward conventional abbreviation which, whilst it is not intended to sound "uncomradely", does not suggest a misleading and to my mind rather liberal notion of some ineffable and universal "brotherhood" to which I simply don't subscribe.

Having got that much off my chest I should like to dispute Fernbach's claim that Marxism provides us with no means to an understanding of the "inner workings of the mind". In so far as I accept the validity of these terms to begin with, we seem to have a direct disagreement. Further, I think that "an injection of psychoanalytic concepts" is the very last thing we need, at this or at any other time.

I am highly sceptical then about Fernbach's (and Freud's) subjectivist assumption that the mind has mysterious and autonomous "inner workings". Such an assumption can only be based upon an a priori acceptance of the ideology of Psychoanalysis which, as V.N. Volosinov argues, (*'Freudianism: A Marxist Critique*. Moscow 1927. London 1976.) has at its heart a "sui generis fear of history, an ambition to locate a world beyond the social and the historical, a search for this world in the depths of the organic". He goes on to quote from the sixth of Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach*: "The essence of man is not an abstraction inherent in each individual. In its reality it is the ensemble (aggregate) of social relationships." Psychoanalysis is one of those pseudo-scientific philosophies which, to paraphrase Marx on Feuerbach again, urge theory into mysticism rather than towards rational studies of human practice.

In this context it seems to me that David Fernbach is turning the contemporary emphasis on the historically constructed nature of desire on its head. An emphasis is merely shifted from what we as individual homosexuals "do", to what we "want" to do. This is not the point of Deleuze or Foucault or Hocquengham's arguments, all of which are attempts to re-write human history in terms of its basic modes of discourse and communication, such as sexuality, without the inconvenient intervention of actual human beings. It is not a question of being oppressed for what we think, (who can tell?), rather than for what we "do", but of establishing the relations between the two practices within the material matrix of history. We all know that social relations under capitalism oppress homosexuals. What is much less clear is how they also contribute to the creation of a whole range of identifications gathered together in the one word "Gay".

I fail to see how Psychoanalysis or Freud-Maxism, is supposed to help us in all this. For Psychoanalysis is rooted in a particular ideological concept of the individual which is totally inimical to any such enquiry. It is no more "Marxist" to accept this picture than it is to try to theorize away all notions of the individual altogether, in the manner of Deleuze, Foucault et al. David Fernbach appears to be attempting to do both at the same time.

The entire theology of Psychoanalysis, from Freud to Lacan, is founded upon a particular and at first sight seductive analysis of an all-determining infant sexuality. However, this "analysis" merely projects judgements and values onto infancy and childhood which are surely the exclusive products of adult behaviour, rooted in adult social and productive relations. It is the objectivity of these relations, and their mediation through the family, upon which Marxists should locate and theorize the conflicts and crises of the mind. I don't intend to take issue with individual points of Freudian dogma used by Fernbach in his letter, but rather to the crude assumption that "penis-envy" or "the castration-complex" are actual pragmatic "facts". It is precisely this strong positivist aspect of all Freudianism, mistaking an ideology for a description of concrete reality, which leads me to reject the entire caboodle.

It is also my belief in the objectivity of class and of social relations which leads me to strongly disagree with David Fernbach's flat assertion that "the choice of a person of the same sex as sexual object is as open a possibility to every human being as heterosexuality". This is sheer voluntarism, suppressing or ignoring all issues of race; class, or culture (or psychology for that matter!), and it is a voluntarism shored up by both Freud's picture of the mind as a quasi-autonomous mechanism operating independently of material reality, and the Freud-Maxists vision of a nebulous world populated by material Desires and Discourses, but with people somehow abstracted away elsewhere!

Our sexual politics are not aided by passively relecting the wholesale sexualization of social relations which has taken place in the name of Freud over the last fifty years. In conclusion, I still fail to see how gays can possibly be seen to occupy their (our) own social world independently of the values and institutions of the bourgeois family. The ghetto remains neither that wonderful nor that grim.....

Why I Joined Gay Sweatshop.....

Gay Sweatshop is a theatre company composed of lesbians and gay men who produce and perform plays, most of which they have written or developed themselves, which are about the experiences of being gay. Their shows have toured both this country and abroad, playing to audiences of gays and non-gays. We have often referred to them in our *Gay Left* editorials as being an important part of gay culture and a means of people coming in contact with positive images of homosexuality. We asked them if they would like some space in the magazine to write about themselves, in whatever way they wanted. What follows is their contribution — a number of personal perspectives.

The most political statement that a man who works as an actor could make is to say that he's doing it because he enjoys dressing up and pretending.

But No! comes the cry:

"I want to perform Great Art" (Classical Actor)

"I want to perform Great Art to the People" (Socially Committed Classical Actor)

"I want to bring Enjoyment to humdrum lives" (Rep. Actor)

"I want to bring Reality to humdrum lives" (Fringe Actor)

"I want to bring Enlightenment to humdrum lives" (Socially Committed Fringe Actor)

"I want to create a Revolutionary Base in the Established Theatre (Revolutionary Classical Actor)

"I want to create a Revolution" (Revolutionary Fringe Actor)

Me: What about the sequins, my dears?

Under our present system of values, any form of work that is 'feminine' (ie about fun, fantasy, that is not about the production of material commodities) is not 'proper' work, and is therefore 'un-manning'. To be a man is to suffer the insufferable; to struggle; to provide. Any pleasure in work is dubious, particularly those things we all took pleasure in as children, things that have no place in the harsh adult world, except as indulgences for 'the weaker sex'.

The actor who says that his prime motive and pleasure in his work is putting on frocks and showing off to his friends is, quite simply, Blowing the Gaff. The other things (Art, Social Commitment, Politics) may come into it; but I maintain that the statement of simple, self-ish pleasure as the prime mover is *the* most political statement, for a man to make. But most



Mary someone or other (Alan Pope) with her American visitor, a Ms Bryant (Drew Griffiths) in 'Manmad'

actors would run a mile before they'd made it; and that's because, although the Theatre does have many 'out' or 'semi-out' Gay *men* amongst its workers, it is a terribly Straight industry. It's basically run by a team of men in suits; women don't get a look in; it's presented as a respectable part of the Economy, or the National Culture, or the Working Class Struggle (depending if you're in Shaftesbury Avenue, the South Bank, or a meeting hall). The notion that creative activity is a means of personal fulfilment and enjoyment is given a very low profile indeed. And it's very, *very* strict about this. That's why all those Gays who are supposed to infest the woodwork of every theatre (never statistically proven in a comparison with other industries) do so at the price of silence; the theatre may have provided some refuge for us in a hostile world, but only at the cost of colluding in

our own stereotyping. And of course, Lesbians don't even have that dubious option. They don't exist in the theatre.

Now, to Gay Sweatshop. I've long had the suspicion that GS is heartily disliked, and I don't just mean by all the prejudiced and the officious around the country; but by people in the same industry as ourselves. And I think that's because we *have* Blown the Gaff: the Gaff being the myth that Gays feel all safe and cosy in the Straight Male theatre world, where we are occasionally thrown a titbit (a play by a non-Gay writer, say, in which we all end up murdering each other). And what's really interesting is that, although the notion of autonomous Women's or Black groups has taken root, the same recognition has not been extended towards Gay men and Lesbians. The cry of "Ghetto" goes up from those very people who coo over the idea of autonomous Black theatre.

Is it that they can't make the connections as far as Gays are concerned? The real reason for their disdain, horror, or *cool* support is, I suspect, that the Cissies have come out on the shopfloor. We've put all those big butch numbers (whether on the stage of the National, or in a touring Left group) in a nasty situation, and their response is to be even Bigger and Butcher. They don't like Gays in the theatre going public; they're scared stiff of being associated with one of the cissies who'd much rather put on a cossy and some slap, than clock in at Fords every day.

I'm in Gay Sweatshop because, after working in the theatre for 12 years (Rep, West End, Community, Political and Fringe) I know it's only with Gay people that I can begin to draw my sexuality and my politics together in creative work. I don't want to work with people who are busy re-creating the alienation between what you are and what you do; who think that the best way to woo the People towards Change is by claiming that the business of acting is as drab and slogging as the lives they imagine their audiences lead. I know that in GS, no-one is labouring under the delusion that there is a split between the political objectives and the personal dreams and fantasies of the individual members of the company.

NOEL GREIG



Homosexuality doesn't exist in North Devon, where my family has a small, rather ramshackle farm. I always knew I was a cissy, because I didn't like "going out on the farm"; I preferred to stay at home playing with my sister's doll, making cakes, or dressing up as 'beautiful ladies'. I heard the word 'homo' on the school bus at the age of eleven and it all began to dawn on me. I spent the next ten years trying to straighten myself out; putting myself through rigorous 'normalising' programmes: looking at pictures of female nudes while masturbating and censoring all fantasies about sexual contacts with other boys or men. Despite this, I think I sensed it wouldn't work, and that one day I'd have to escape from the family and North Devon.

At Barnstable Grammar School, my two main interests were academic achievement and acting. My early training in performing had been at the Methodist Chapel, where I began speaking 'recitations' at the age of three. I always wanted to be an actor, but felt that it was a bit of a 'good for nothing' and effeminate profession, and that the way to 'social security' was through University (how right I was). I thought I'd really made it when I got a place at Oxford. I was still very diffident about acting, but was also discovering that I couldn't be the star of my college modern language course. I was still trying to be heterosexual: all my friends were very

'normal' mathematicians. It wasn't till my last ditch attempt to have a relationship with a woman failed that I finally began to think that I had to come to terms with being Gay. I'd still run a mile if I saw anyone wearing a Gay badge (rare in Oxford even in 1973) but I did allow myself to start having sexual fantasies about men. I also started to do a lot more acting in College productions at about this time. I didn't tell anyone I was Gay until I left university. Then, I began to reject the uncommitted, liberal intellectual stance that places such as Oxford encourage, and to become just a weeny bit socialist; though I'd not made any connection between politics and Gayness. So when I joined a left wing theatre group called Mayday, I kept very quiet about being Gay. It wasn't the sort of theatre I wanted to do, and my heart wasn't entirely in the politics, so, having accepted that I wished to be an actor, I obtained a place at a drama school. I'd started going to Gay discos at this time, and made no secret of my Gayness at the school. Just as I was about to leave, Gay Sweatshop advertised for actors and I went along very apprehensively, because:

1. I was still scared of being publicly identified as Gay.
2. I didn't know what I'd tell my family if I got the job.
3. Drama school had made me feel that "You just have to go into rep. for the next five years, darling".
4. It might not be theatrically exciting enough.

I couldn't have been more wrong about the last point: I was employed to take a part in "As Time Goes By". At first I told my parents I was in a group called plain "Sweatshop" (I'd considered and rejected "Happy Sweatshop") but eventually came out to my mum and the rest of them. Working with Sweatshop, my apologetic attitude towards my Gayness has disappeared (I also became quite distant towards my straight friends for a while); I've felt incredibly lucky to be able to work with other Gay people and what's more to be 'doing theatre' with them. This summer I went to Aberystwyth for nine weeks to be in "Joseph and his Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat", and at times, being one of those eleven brothers was like being back at school in a rugby team: it made me realise I didn't want to do just anything in order to be working ("It's all experience, darling" is the drama school maxim). However, I do feel the need to do

Stephanie Pugsley, Sandra Lester, Noel Greig and Philip



work outside Sweatshop, in spite of my commitment to the company and the Gay movement. Perhaps I have an ambivalent attitude towards my "acting career" in that I'm quite ambitious as an actor. But if I do work outside the company I would want to return because you don't "move on" from something that has become so much part of your life and your personal development.

PHILIP OSMENT

I joined Gay Sweatshop at a time in my life when I felt very much at a loose end with regard to my acting career. During the previous three or four years my political awareness and commitment to Gay politics were beginning to crystallise, leaving me feeling somewhat high and dry with regard to my function as an actor and director within both conventional and fringe theatre.

My concern for positive media images of Gay people, and the potentials of Gay culture and alternative relationships meant that I could no longer make the conventional compromises Gay performers have to make in order to work at all, ie by either condoning heterosexist behaviour, by playing heterosexual stereotypes, or by performing anti-Gay material (playing homosexual stereotypes). This effectively means either turning down, or not even bothering to apply for, practically 100% of work in theatre, film, television and radio.

Conventional theatre offers little in general, and practically nothing positive in terms of either a critical approach to heterosexist behaviour, or the exploration of serious alternatives. Fringe theatre occasionally tries, but since even left wing theatre companies still function under sexist ethics, they have not come very far, and any involvement they may have with a critique of sexism is usually only tokenistic.

The opportunity Sweatshop provides, is a context and environment in which we (Gay people) can explore and present our perceptions and philosophies of Gay politics, lifestyles and potentials, IN OUR OWN TERMS, and the relationship between the politics of sexuality to existing political ideologies, without the interference of those groups who do not take our politics seriously.

My personal, primary concern, is towards the Gay community and those Gay people for whom coming to terms with their sexuality is still a problem. I want to see Sweatshop performing, and holding discussions in secondary schools, I want to see Gay teenagers working with Sweatshop telling the Gay and non Gay community their stories ... why are we *not* doing that? Ask Mary Whitehouse.

PHILIP L. TIMMINS

When I left drama school, eighteen months ago, my first concern was to find any job as an actor: to persuade someone, anyone, actually to pay for dressing up and pretending to be somebody else in front of lots of people. Gay Sweatshop was the first company to make me such an offer — an offer I couldn't refuse. So for me a more pertinent question would be "Why did I decide to stay with Gay Sweatshop?"

Prior to drama school I had spent three years in the balmy quadrangles of Cambridge where theatre was a leisure activity, chosen in preference to rowing or croquet on the Fellows lawn. True, I had also joined the university Gaysoc, but never in my most fitful dreams had it occurred to me to incorporate these two areas of my life.

Drama school reinforced this separateness. At the Webber-Douglas Academy the gospel of professional non-involvement was preached. An actor should be a well-oiled machine capable of miming all emotions, but of feeling none; acting as a job of work. A season in local rep was our shared ambition there, the first step towards shimmering stardom.

Ten weeks with the women's company of sweatshop therefore sent me reeling. It was a baptism of fire. I was the only man in a company of women whose feminism was not only the keystone of day to day living, but also, more specifically, the avowed reason for their being in this production. For a long time I could not reconcile myself to the separatism the women considered so fundamental to their continued strength. At university and drama school this had not existed, and I found it painful to be constantly reminded that my masculinity, a concept I never felt I had represented, had become a barrier between me and the other members of the company.

However over this period I came to understand the importance of women establishing their own lives away from men,

and in thinking this through I became aware of the link between society's attitude to women and its attitude to gay men — both were treated as lesser beings. But I also began to see how necessary it was that lesbians and gay men unite to present two different, but two complementary attacks on those forces which would have us all, gay and straight, conform to the dreary stereotypes peddled by the advertisers of beer and washing powder.

In short I too had concluded that actors could not negate their responsibility to the political content of their play, whether it be "Hamlet", "Blithe Spirit", or "As Time Goes By". But on a more personal level I was surprised and delighted to find that this responsibility also made acting ten times more exciting. And that is why I decided to stay with Gay Sweatshop.

MARTIN PANTER



Jill Posener, Patricia Donovan and Martin Panter in 'Care and Control'

As a child I wept at movies when a woman suffered at the hands of a man or when the pit fell in and the miners were killed because of the owners' greed: it was natural for me to weep at human suffering. Self-sacrifice was also an occasion for tears; the unmarried mother whose daughter never called her 'Mamma'; the giant ape who held the heroine aloft in his palm as the island sank and the waters closed over his head. I wept at bravery in the face of hardship ("As God is my witness, I'll never go hungry again") and single-minded determination achieving the impossible (The children marching into the village singing "Nick, nack, paddy wack, Give a dog a bone, This old man came rolling home.") But what moved me most of all was hope, when individuals representing collective consciousness express the hope that the future will be better than the present or the past because it is within our power to make it so: the crippled child taking its first few faltering steps across the sun-drenched valley; Scarlett O'Hara saying "After all, tomorrow is another day."

To quote Michael Davidson, "There are, I suppose, three kinds of rebelliousness: the bread-and-butter sort, kindled when people who see they're getting a raw deal try to bash authority; the philosophic, which brings academics, Karl Marx or Bertrand Russell for example, to an intellectual conclusion; and the romantic or emotional." From the foregoing it's obvious that I belong in the last category: I grasped the ideology long after the emotional commitment was made. That happened in ... well, a brief history... From 1967 to 1974 I was busy pursuing a career in the straight theatre. I'd heard somewhere about painted freaks in the South wearing silly clothes and saying ridiculous things and assumed it was part of the queenery I found so unappealing. When I arrived in London in 1973 I saw them for myself and decided what they represented was definitely not for me. But there was a nagging doubt: perhaps these people were having a better time than I was; perhaps my weekend gay status was incompatible with the hardworking, asexual, professional actor image I presented during the rest of the week. The doubt remained until I joined Gay Sweatshop in 1975. I joined with great fear and trepidation — after all, I could be ruining my career (I remember vividly the first press call when I delib-

erately dissociated myself from the group, sat with my back to the cameras, afraid of being publicly identified as homosexual) but somehow found the courage to direct two of the plays in the first season. At the end of the first six months I knew that the previous seven years had been a preparation for this.

It's now nearly four years later. Some of the people I dismissed as painted freaks are my friends, everyone I know knows I'm gay, and yes, probably, I have ruined my career as far as straight theatre goes — though it's remarkable how little I care. Presently I am working on a play with Noel Greig called *Only Connect*. It was because of my experience in Gay Sweatshop that I began to do just that. Of course I am aware that there are an infinite number of connections still to be made: for example, though pledged to it I still find the collective method of working extremely difficult; I internalise attacks upon the group as attacks upon me personally and find it almost insupportable when these come from other gays; I sometimes wonder whether acting in plays — albeit gay plays for gay audiences (vacuously denigrated by many as 'preaching to the converted') — is not akin to fiddling while Rome burns. But the hope remains that someday the conditions will have altered sufficiently to make these connections possible. And I am aware that it is only through our own efforts that the present conditions will be altered. The last sentence ties in the child weeping at the movies with the emotional rebel and who I am now.

Who I am now went to the theatre the other night to watch *The Lady from the Sea*. At the end of the play Dr. Wangel has no alternative but to give his wife, Ellida, her longed-for and warranted freedom. Ellida — free at last to choose her own destiny, entirely responsible for her own actions, having gained the right to self-determination — becomes mistress of her own fate and decides what is best for her. I wept again.

If Gay Sweatshop is about anything then, as far as I'm concerned, it's about that: we must claim for ourselves what Ellida demanded and finally won.

DREW GRIFFITHS

why i worked with gay sweatshop and why i've just left.

i didn't have very idealistic reasons for joining gay sweatshop 2½ years ago. i soon became a burning idealist, gay sweatshop had the corner on my life. i haven't very idealistic reasons for leaving. maybe burning idealists just burn themselves out. i wrote a short play about my life growing up as a lesbian, it was a very tentative piece of writing politically and theatrically but it was true and somehow it worked. the three of us who had put on the first production of the play were invited to perform the play during gay sweatshop's season at the ICA. mary, kate and i joined sweatshop still very unclear about our own feelings about being suddenly elevated to the position of 'spokespeople'. 2 years later i think i'm just recovering from that, finding out i'm not the extrovert, catalytic, heavy, clear, dynamite dyke of the press image. mind you, i was called plump, pretty by "ms london" magazine so at least someone saw the truth!

i do know that people have been afraid of me, i know that i've been aware of that and maybe used it. the sweatshop machine has afforded me a certain licence.

some really great things have happened, for me the best was this year, gay pride week and our benefit performance when we shared all that is best about being part of sweatshop with some of the gay community — the cohesion—the supportiveness—the creativity—the pride and the energy.

but tiredness, and the chaos of my life has become too much. i've left sweatshop with some trauma anger and pain, but i've left knowing that it has been the most extraordinary experience i've ever had, and sometimes the most marvellous.

i'll never forget it
jill posener

Gays and the Phoney War in Northern Ireland

by Jeffrey Dudgeon

There is nothing complex or unusual about Northern Ireland. Nothing about the level of gay oppression here that cannot be easily understood. At its closest Great Britain is hardly ten miles away whilst Belfast is in a direct industrial line from Leeds through Manchester and Liverpool. Some thirty miles south and west of Belfast there is a frontier zone where the culture and industry of reformation and later capitalist Britain met Catholic and undeveloped Ireland. Like any frontier area life is rough and old values die hard. Change is unwelcome for it can be seen as weakness in any period of retrenchment. Since the turn of the century the dominant attitude in British thinking has tended toward withdrawal from Ireland. Only the instinct of economic self interest in Protestant Ulster has curbed the completion of the process. Even the Conservative government deserted Stormont and their Unionist allies in 1972.

For fifty years the Irish nation has had independence, asserted its dignity and diverted radical and socialist effort into aggressive nationalism. Change therein is also unwelcome, for the new bourgeoisie is hardly two generations in control and no national sentiment can tolerate new ideals. That sentiment is firmly based in ultramontane Catholicism and a land based community. Dublin has never ruled Ireland.

The Communist Party, the Trotskyists and the Official Republicans are only given a heavy media gloss whilst their primary pursuit is "re-integration" of the national territory. And the last group are heading outside the pale, literally, because of increasing doubts on that score.

Any dim progressive light that has flared in the north, like the Northern Ireland Labour Party in the 1940s and 1960s has been crushed by a pincer movement from first the Unionists scenting a breaking of the ranks and Republicanism secondly, sensing an opening for a programme of "socialist anti-imperialism" amongst Protestants.

Those days are now over. Since the abolition of Stormont and the advent of European Free Trade, the Unionist need for power and the Catholic Nationalist grip on ideology have withered. The present ten year war is but a warp, a last and horrendous chance to interrupt that progress. Its strength and length are in direct proportion to the seeming willingness of the British establishment to consider withdrawal. From 1969 to 1976 through a ceasefire negotiated by Mr. Whitelaw (1972), the Provisionals' greatest triumph, to a year and a half of as yet unrescinded truce organised by Merlyn Rees (1975/1976) the prospects of withdrawal were bright. The emergence of the Peace Movement and the advent of Roy Mason (late 1976) have reversed the process. In reality none of this matters since the Protestant community has been quite total and intransigent in its opposition to unity, as the 1974 UWC strike and the hundreds of murdered Catholics make quite plain.



So far in ten years we have wasted two thousand lives. If anything, Irish unity is further off than ever for Northern Ireland is being inexorably re-integrated into the United Kingdom. Without a devolved legislature Westminster has direct control, and the benefits of progressive law are filtering through. Divorce law reform is on the statute book ten years after England and Wales. Gay law reform seems possible in 1979, twenty-two years after the Wolfenden committee reported. None of these improvements were at all possible with a devolved legislature and it is to be hoped one never returns. Indeed it would be in the best interests of gay and progressive people in Scotland and Wales to vote against their legislative assemblies in the referenda next year. Provincial politics are inevitably dominated by the more conservative elements.

Independent Ireland provides a further example — divorce is prohibited in the constitution, the import but not sale of contraceptives has just been legalised by judicial appeal. The last Prime Minister Cosgrave voted against his own government's bill to allow married couples only to have access to birth control devices! Male homosexuality is totally forbidden. In the south despite the high incidence of visible and vocal radicals social change is strictly determined by non-governmental processes. Events not people are in charge there. In the north there is a traditional reactionary bias in

the Protestant community since radical and socialist politics have been largely in opposition to their right of self determination. The reverse is the case amongst northern Catholics. But these generalisations though correct are shallow and superficial outside of the national question and consequential side-issues like attitudes to law, the police, and the traditional British symbols of loyalty and chauvinism.

Thus the dominant influence on the lives of emancipated gays cannot be their native communities, which do not recognise or consider their position. Rather they are influenced by the same Anglo-American cultural factors that predominate amongst *Gay Left* readers. All of Northern Ireland and the eastern coast of the Republic receive BBC and ITV. London newspapers circulate throughout the island. Sylvester throbs through the gay discos, not the showband sound so popular in country dance-halls. A thousand people turned up for the TRB on October 15th and cheered his references to the anti-gay laws here. A Belfast Punk group, "Stiff Little Fingers", did support and were wildly received for their anti-(para)military lyrics.

Religion, the war and the arrogation of radicalism to Republicanism are the three factors peculiar to Northern Ireland, over and above a provincialism proportional to prosperity and distance from London. A 1968 opinion poll survey on church attendance produced the following statistics, startling in their differences:

	CATHOLIC	PROTESTANT
At least weekly	95%	46%
Monthly	1%	18%
Seldom or never	4%	36%

There is no reason to believe the Catholic percentages are significantly altered ten years later. To miss weekly Mass is still a matter of great stress for even young and British oriented Catholics. The momentum away from church attendance amongst Protestants is likely to have been maintained over the decade. There has been no evangelical revival in Protestantism emerging out of the war except from a small group of ex-paramilitaries on whom standard Protestant guilt and shame have been working, eroding the certainty and pride which legitimised so many blood-curdling killings. (Since late 1976 the UDA and UVF have been largely dormant.)

These different levels of piety and participation may be misleading. Most gay Protestants except the Anglo-Catholic variety have easily abandoned their faith but their Protestant ethic does not abandon them. The fewer gay Catholics (and straight) who reject the church tend to have a period of crisis and are then freed of religion and the attendant socialisation. In Cara-Friend, the local befriending and information service, there is a proportion of callers with religious problems, but the answer is the same as would be given in England. Only in Belfast and Dublin are there gay bars and clubs, which makes for a small enclosed and friendly gay community in the island. The city of Belfast has a population of half a million people and is 70% Protestant. Sectarianism is a rare and unpopular phenomenon amongst gays. We are few enough in number, in most cases dislodged from the parent community and pointedly uninvolved in working class prejudice and paramilitary activity. Most gays are single and therefore richer than their peers, living in flats or buying houses they become declassé or bourgeois.

Around the beginning of July there is however tension, restlessness in bars. Fights become more frequent, sectarian remarks can be heard being muttered. Whispering is noticeable. Often it is designed to be inoffensive, people not wishing the full extent of their national attachments to be known to their opposite religion friends. It is not a question of gay consciousness superceding sectarianism, rather it is a mixture of middle class values and sex. That "the penis is not prejudiced" may be the starting point but it certainly releases gays from the traditional suspicions and segregation of Belfast.

There have been two trolling murders in the city over the last six years. Both occurred on the 11th July near the river. Both victims were Protestant and their deaths were bizarre and revolting. One was strangled with wire, the other muti-

lated and stabbed. The riverbank trolling zone edges on Catholic areas. The 11th July is a night of Protestant triumphalism which in turn appears to evoke a ritual response in some psychopathic Republicans. What better victim than a "degenerate" Protestant to bring out macho violence.

An opinion poll in January 1978 which asked 1009 people whether they favoured homosexual *and* divorce law reform showed the province as evenly divided with a sizeable majority in favour in the middle class, Belfast, Protestant and young groups. The future looks brighter.

ALL ADULTS	16-34	35-44	45-	Caths	Prots	ABC-1	Greater Belt
For	57	41	29	33	47	56	54
Against	32	45	52	53	37	33	29
D/Know	12	13	50	14	16	11	16

Such opinions give the lie to the theory that Northern Ireland is rampantly reactionary and would compare favourably to the north of England. Perhaps the gay organisations in the province can take credit for their monumental efforts in public education. They will get little or no credit from the gay community which is naturally resentful of boat-rocker, talent snatching student types as the gay leadership is characterised here and indeed elsewhere. Support for NIGRA during the Gay Raids was muted in the community. Some plainly believed we had brought the police activity upon ourselves as indeed we had, for the RUC stated openly it was their intention to break the gay organisations, and luckily concentrated on the twenty most open and committed gay men in the province. The Director of Public Prosecutions concurred when he ordered charges to be laid against the Director, Secretary, and Treasurer of Cara-Friend and one other (two couples, ail over 21). A year after the first arrest Sam Silkin, the Attorney General, finally put a stop to the

farce and ordered the DPP off. At that time we were in receipt of no support from local political groups, our major allies were journalists here and in England. The Northern Ireland Office under Merlyn Rees was indifferent to our pleas and was only prompted into reply by Liberal MPs Beith and Freud.

Direct rule has been a liberating experience in many ways and the introduction of more aspects of Labour legislation like the Abortion Act must be fought for. Ironically during the police persecution Cara-Friend was in receipt of a £750 grant from the Department of Health and Social Services, since increased to £1,300. This was a civil service decision, later underwritten by Lord Melchett, the Minister of State, which would have been unthinkable in the days of devolved parliament.

As the level of violence diminishes so does the tension in the city. Once gays were the majority population in the centre of Belfast at night. Both gay clubs were located in the enclosed gated area, and most other pubs and clubs closed at 9pm. But the night-life is returning, pedestrians are no longer rarities. The NIGRA/Cara-Friend gay centre, a three storey terraced house in the university area, is being used more and more. Women's groups and the radical feminist section of the movement are gaining strength partly as radicalism abandons the dead-end of Republicanism.

Even in England, people must be beginning to doubt the efficacy of support for nationalism. Though Ireland is an island and all those who live thereon are Irish, sea water does not constitute nations, people do, and there are self-evidently two national tendencies in Ireland both with their own fiefs. To support one or other is to support aggressive nationalism not national liberation. Rampant nationalism is literally the death knell for gay liberation.

The Making of 'Nighthawks'

by Bob Cant

Anyone who went to see the *Images of Homosexuality* season at the National Film Theatre in 1977 hoping to see positive gay-identified images would have come away disappointed. The images were largely of isolation, despair, suicide and various forms of homophobia. But even where the images were more positive they still tended to be images which objectified gays. The film makers had looked at gayness from a straight point of view — as something alien.

Although films made since the emergence of the gay movement have often been more sympathetic to gays than those made previously, mainstream films have never broken with the heterosexist ideology which is implicit in the traditions of both Hollywood and Soviet Mosfilm. We know that the good guy will get the beautiful girl. There's never any doubt that Humphrey Bogart will get Lauren Bacall; in *Casablanca* when he gives up Ingrid Bergman he takes on noble, tragic characteristics. Even in more modern films which have been influenced by feminism such as *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore* the woman still gives up her hard-won independence for a man. Heterosexual monogamy — or its tragic absence — is essential to the representation of personal relationships in most mainstream films which are around today.

The Context

The commercial films which have examined gay relationships have not veered from acceptance of this particular tenet. *Boys in the Band* encourages us to feel sorry for all those gays who can't get it together in couples; *The Killing of Sister*

George suggests that the problems of being in a lesbian couple are insuperable; even a liberal film like *Sunday, Bloody Sunday* attempts to make us admire the stoicism of the Peter Finch character in the face of his gayness. I am not saying that these films are totally insignificant or dreadful, but none of them poses any real possibility of a gay life-style on gay terms.

For such films we can really only look to film makers who are part of the gay movement. The early 70s saw the production of Rosa von Praunheim's *It is not the Homosexual who is Perverse* . . . This encapsulated the optimistic atmosphere of the period as the central character rejects various forms of the closet and opts for liberation in a Marxist-oriented commune. *Saturday Night at the Baths* is of a later period and looks at gay liberation capitalist style. It was made with the participation of some of the gay community in New York. It takes the idealistic/individualistic view that anyone can be gay if they want but the gayness examined is really limited to sexual practice rather than any wider identity. But all the films that have been made with any level of gay consciousness have been so few that they tend to be discussed to death. It is still very difficult for any such film to be seen on its own merits. Expectations are therefore very high for the recently produced *Nighthawks*; so high that they cannot really hope to be met.

Paid Pipers Play Own Tune

The idea for this film was first publicly posed by the director, Ron Peck, in 1975. He had himself been a school teacher in



Ron Peck on set.

London and he wanted the film to be about the split life of a teacher who leads a closeted gay existence and then takes the first steps towards coming out. Another dimension was added to this theme by the impact of the case of John Warburton. He was a gay teacher who was effectively sacked by ILEA for answering his pupils' questions about his gayness. The central character of *Nighthawks*, Jim, finds himself in a similar situation and he, too, comes out in the classroom.

In the intervening three years Ron Peck has been largely concerned with two tasks — working around the film in the gay community, and raising money. He has spoken to hundreds of gay men who have shown interest in the film either because their experience was relevant to it or because they wanted to appear in it. From this he eventually hewed out a script which ran along the lines of 'All You Need to Know About Gay Oppression And How To Fight It In London In The 1970s'. The final script — or perhaps it would be clearer to call it a shot-by-shot outline — was the product of endless interchange between Ron, his co-director Paul Hallam, and many members of the gay male community. This outline was in the nature of a cinematic manifesto of gay liberation including, as it did, scenes from the Brixton Gay Community Centre and the alternative disco at the Prince Albert in North London. Both these scenes were later dropped as the film evolved a story-line rather than a panoramic view and they were felt to be incompatible with this narrative.

Ron's other task, raising money, was pushing him in a rather different direction from his contacts with the gay community. He was trying to convince various potential sponsors that the film he intended to make was a film that people would flock to see. The British Film Institute turned down the film for reasons which were never fully explained but seemed largely aesthetic; the National Film Finance Corporation said (and this is a generous interpretation) that it was too small for them. In fact the only official organisation which actually supported him financially was ZDF, a West German television channel. Otherwise, the money was raised from wealthy individuals. But this created another problem for Ron now found himself under various pressures to show Jim develop in a conventionally hopeful way. Such an approach could easily have been seen as A Happy Ending and any mechanistic solution of Jim's situation would have created ideological problems with the gay movement. Fortunately, he resisted these pressures. By December 1977 the necessary money (£60,000 — the same as the cost of a TV commercial) had been raised or was confidently expected and filming began.

A Triangular Relationship

Once filming began, however, the problems did not come to an end; they simply changed their form. Ron was the director but he was committed to a style of film-making that precluded any traditional directional role. The uncertainty of his role in relation to the collective activity does seem to have heightened tensions between at least three interest groups involved in the making of a film.

(1) Four Corner Films — Ron had been one of the four original founding members of this team along with Jo Davis (camera), Wilfried Thust (lighting), and Mary Pat Leece (editing). They had worked together for several years and had made two documentaries, *On Allotments* and *Railman*, together. Their approach had broken considerably with many of the established traditions of film-making and they used, for example, almost no cutting or close-ups. Although their treatment of subjects appears simple, their planning of shots is a highly complex process. Nevertheless, their films are free of much of the heavy manipulation that one finds in mainstream cinema. In *On Allotments*, for example, the camera spent a lot of time looking at the kind of vegetables that are grown there. Afterwards I realised that my perception of allotments had been totally altered. I began to notice them in places where I had never previously registered their existence. A similar approach was used in *Nighthawks*. There was no cutting from one character to another and few close-ups. By striving not to create dramatic effects by the use of these techniques, they were attempting to let the audience participate in forming their perception of the image on the screen.

This approach caused real problems in the camerawork in the disco scenes. Jo Davis's camerawork for the pilot which had been made in 1976 had been much criticised by some gay men because it failed to capture the selectivity of the cruising eyes of the central character. Much of this was attributed to the fact that she is a woman who identifies herself as heterosexual. But in my opinion, the problem was actually rooted in the practice of Four Corner Films rather than in the socio-sexual identity of the camera operator. The problem of the cruising eye had been overcome by the time filming began and the way the camera was used in the disco scenes was quite different from the other scenes. The cutting technique used in these scenes enables the audience to feel the erotic atmosphere of the club.



Paul Hallam, Keith Cavanagh and Richard Krupp discuss a scene.

(2) The 'Professionals' — some of the others involved in the production, sound, lighting etc were people who had become involved much nearer the period of shooting. The main actor, Ken Robertson, would also come into this category. Some were gay and some were not; none of them had been dragged from the local Job Centre but however supportive they were to the wider aims of the film their involvement was different from that of the gay activists and the Four Corners team. They have to continue to earn a living after the completion of *Nighthawks* and their concern for the technical quality took precedence over the politics. They were also uneasy, on some occasions, about their role in relation to the director and to the gay activists involved. Some felt that the film was too collective while others felt that it wasn't collective enough.

(3) Gay Community — most of us who appeared in the film saw it as 'our film' in some sense. The fact that gay men rather than professional actors were portraying themselves was just one indication of this. The ongoing discussions about the script and the donations made by many gay people

towards the pre-production costs were other features of the same involvement. Most of us, however, had no previous experience of filming and we were often unclear about why we needed two sets of clothes on one evening, about why we had to wait four hours for a two minute shot at 2.30am, and all sorts of problems of continuity. Our involvement with the film induced an atmosphere of intensity and high expectations of a kind probably not often found on film sets. This affected our attitudes particularly towards the director — some of us wanted total direction down to every last flick of the wrist; others felt they had a far better perception of events than he did; and others thought the very idea of a director was redundant, if not patriarchal and oppressive. But we were all agreed in that we wanted the film to give positive support to gay liberation, in some form or other.



Ken Robertson and Clive Peters waiting for a shot to start.

Cut! Cut! Cut!

But apart from these tensions there were other problems in the making of the film. The budget was the most obvious one. Normally a feature film of this length (just under two hours) would cost at least £400,000 to make in Britain. The tight budget meant that mistakes and delays could not be afforded. Diana Ruston, the sound recordist, had been asked at first to do the sound along the lines of an Altman film with lots of overlapping and background noise. To do this, however, she would have needed an eight-track mixing deck and a number of radio mikes to scatter around the set. This was well beyond the capabilities of the budget and she had to use directional mikes which cut down the background noise. This meant that various scenes such as those in the pubs and the restaurant had to be shot when they were not in regular use. Although the result was fine, technically the representation in realistic terms was somewhat different from that desired. The scenes were much more like film sets than locations and thereby much more akin to the narrative norms than the work of most other independent British film-makers. This kinship with the mainstream was not entirely accidental. The whole question of how far narrative is a valid form for any radical film is a matter of heated debate and can't really be discussed adequately here.

Another budgetary consideration was the ratio of film shot to film used. On *Nighthawks* it was 10 to 1 which is much less than the 30 to 1 ratio which is standard in commercial films. It is, however, much more than the average ratio of other similar low-budget independent films.

The main reason for this relatively high shooting ratio was the use of improvisation. The political importance of allowing gays to speak for themselves, as well as the cinematic practice of *Four Corners* really made the use of this technique inevitable. But there were scores of problems as a result. Many people were just intimidated by the cameras; there was frequent confusion between the two main actors, Ken Robertson and Rachel Nicholas James whose approach to their roles was a professional one, and the others, who saw their roles as being much nearer themselves. Such different interpretations of the character structure led to different

problems of direction and script planning. One of the central scenes in the film, when Jim and Judy drive out on the motorway after the disastrous school dance, was first filmed using improvisation; it *was* felt to be so unsatisfactory that a line-by-line script was written; it was then filmed again with the script to everyone's satisfaction. This particular scene caused other problems too in terms of the director's role. Most of the crew thought that the drive should have been done on a set, but Ron's opinion won out and it was filmed in a moving van. The crew consequently agreed that this was a correct decision.

The Story So Far ...

The final version of the film which has been shown at the Edinburgh Film Festival and will soon be shown by its distributors, Cinegate, at the Gate Cinema in Notting Hill Gate, London, has been cut down from seven hours to just under two. It is essentially a narrative dealing with the split life of a teacher, Jim. We see him in a continuous rhythm, alternating between school and the gay scene. He is a geography teacher in a large London comprehensive who clearly cares a lot about his pupils although he doubts the value of much of the content of what he teaches them. A new supply teacher, Judy, a married woman with two children, comes to the school and they become close. Parallel with the development of a friendship between them we see him going to a small club, not un-reminiscent of *The Catacombs*, where he gets off with a series of men. These friendships are affectionate enough but short lived and, as far as many of them are concerned, Jim might as well have no independent existence outside of the pick-up situation. He presents himself rather negatively, anyway, and much of the conversation he has with these other gay men is really only to fill in the silence. As his relationship with Judy develops, she tells him of her marriage which allows her almost no independence and gradually he gets around to declaring his gayness and then explaining its meaning. He tries to show her that his gayness is not simply an imitation of heterosexual monogamy. As his openness increases the pupils begin to notice and ask him if he's 'bent'. There is no going back and he answers their questions.

His life is becoming more integrated both in terms of coming out in the classroom and of spending time together with Judy, and John, a gay friend. He could be about to slip into *True Love* and a *Happy Ending* when he and John go to Glades. There is a sense of excitement which we can feel in Jim as they enter the disco where hundreds of available gay men are enjoying themselves. But even in the midst of all this enjoyment there is a claustrophobic sense that it goes no further than the walls of the club. Glades is just one of the larger commercial gay clubs that have become common in the country's larger cities over the last few years. Jim remains with John but we sense it is not for long. Despite the kind of stability he could find with him, Jim still sees cruising and picking up as a central part of his way of life and they are inherent within the gay scene as it is represented by Glades. This scene highlights the contradictions felt by so many gay men between the search for a lasting relationship and the search for casual sex. As Jim finally moves away from the camera his place is taken by another man. The camera moves into his cruising eyes just as it had moved into Jim's earlier in the film. And so it all goes on.

Isolated Gay Finds Selfless Shoulder

Many gay liberationists have argued that the film is too cautious and depressing. We never see him with other gay men except in pick-up situations; we never see him in a gay political setting; he doesn't ring Icebreakers or even read *Gay News*; it's not clear that he might lose his job; there is little humour in the film. All of this is true and, in fact, scenes which did involve some of these aspects were cut from the film because they were not close enough to the central narrative. Inclusion in the film might then have made the film much more didactic than it was ever intended to be. Such a style is not in keeping with the *Four Corners*' tradition of leaving the audiences with the choice to make and the problems to think about. But by including no gay contacts other

than pick-ups the film does fall into the trap of implying that a gay life-style is sexual contact and no more. Given the rarity of such gay films it will be difficult for it to avoid that interpretation.

The scenes in the film, as it stands, which are unsatisfactory are those at the school dance and at the party afterwards. Apparently, the use of improvisation here did not work at all, and once shot, it was impossible to shoot them again. However this very brevity makes the impact of the social alienation that Jim feels in these scenes difficult to relate to. It is interesting, however, that a similar image of a gay man alone at a straight party is also used in a film made by Lewisham CHE — *David is a Homosexual!*

But the most serious criticism, in my opinion, is in terms of his relationship with Judy. Because she is the only developed woman character in the film she tends to be seen as WOMAN. She comes over rather flatly (I don't mean the acting) and the tension that she would have felt as she learned about Jim's sexuality is hardly explored at all. It is true that she escapes some of the female stereotypes inasmuch as she is not seen as an object, her face is not glamorous in any fashionable way and she does not use make-up. This is further strengthened by the film's avoidance of the close-up technique. But she does fulfil one female stereotypical role (not so unlike the roles of 40s Hollywood stars like Barbara Stanwyck) in as much as she is the selfless being who lets the man cry on her shoulder, regardless of her own needs. She makes no attempt to relate her own trap (her marriage) with the trap (the closet) that Jim increasingly perceives himself to be in.

These criticisms apart, the film is excellent. So many scenes — the coming out to a work colleague, the restlessness of being alone in a gay pub, conversations the morning after, phone calls in a staff room to gay friends — have a strongly identifiable authenticity about them.



Ken Robertson with some of the children who play in the film.

Life Class

The coming out scene in the classroom is particularly moving — and much more moving than the motorway scene — because the kids are so much more positive about their own identification than Judy is about herself. Improvisation again was a problem here but in quite a fruitful way for the shifting uncertain nature of much of what they said was a reflection of their very real uncertainty about their own developing sexuality. Although the teenage actors claimed to be tolerant of homosexuality, the questions they asked revealed all the prejudice and uncertainty that makes coming out so difficult and yet so necessary. "What if everyone was like you?" "Do you carry a handbag?" "Won't women have you?" A real split also emerged among the school kids, between the punks and teds. The punks who knew Jim and were taught by him in several scenes defended his right to do what he wanted against the more hostile teds who were not familiar with him.



Ken Robertson and Rachel Nicholas Jones at a rehearsal of a classroom scene.

This scene also makes one question the whole role and purpose of education. For once Jim was talking about something which was important to him and would have an impact on the lives of his class. It is so different from his attempts to instil information about Canadian wheat prairies into their unwilling heads. By sharing a part of his life with them he makes it impossible to continue to exercise authority in the traditional classroom manner; but he also makes it possible to develop a new kind of relationship with these kids, based on trust rather than authority.

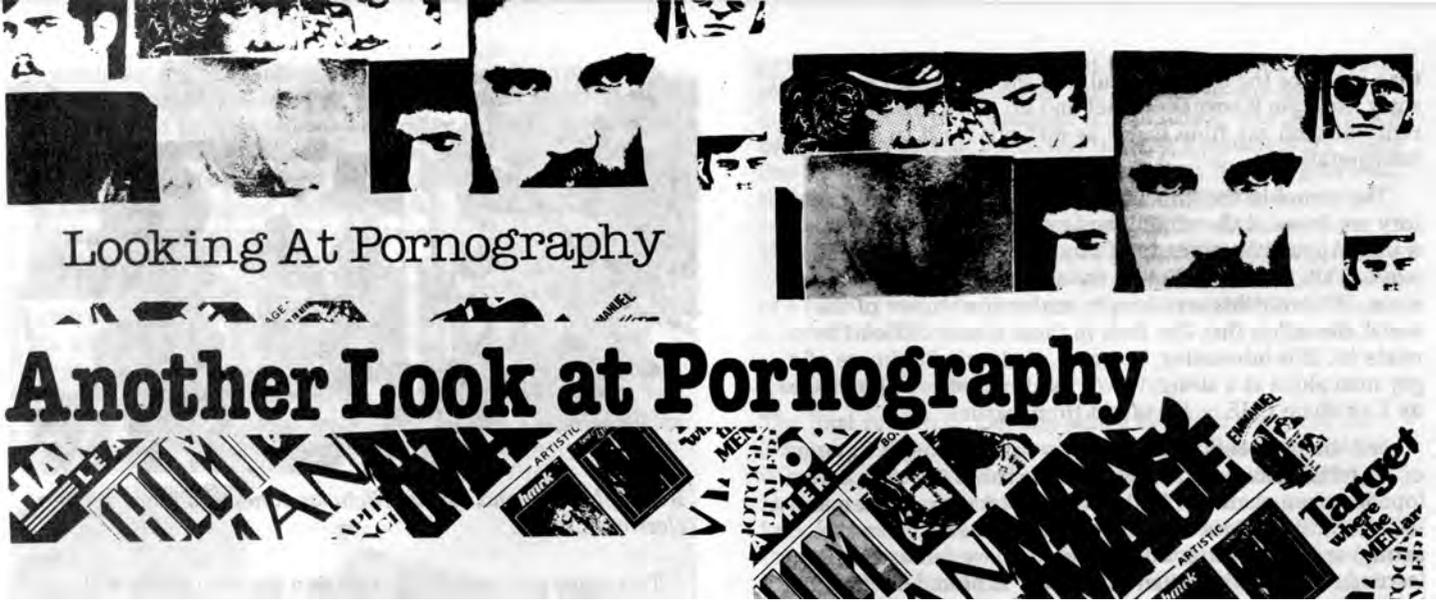
Coming Out — Breaking Out

In the end the film has to be judged a success. It enables us to perceive and comprehend the split in the life of the gay teacher — and consequently, the need for him to come out. We may regret its frequently depressing tone, the absence of an overt gay liberation movement, the weakness of the Judy character, but we are never left in any doubt about the importance of coming out. And that does remain the central tenet of the gay movement as it is now, however much we might wish it was more. So the film, by being firmly rooted in the ideology of the gay movement, has succeeded in breaking from the standard heterosexist ideology. Jim has begun to live a gay life-style on his own terms. The ambivalence of the last scene in Glades is not so different from the ambivalence that many of us feel about the fact that places like that are sometimes taken for the supreme achievements of the gay male community. But within that ambivalent context the fact remains that Jim has come a long way and if he still has a long way to go so do we all.

Footnotes

1. The title *Nighthawks* comes from a picture of the same name by the American artist, Edward Hopper, of three rather isolated people sitting in an all-night bar.
2. Fans of Nicholas Ray will, no doubt, have noticed that the names of the central characters, Jim and Judy, are the same as the central characters of *Rebel Without A Cause*.
3. Hitchcockian influences can be seen in the shot of the school staircase and also in Jim's change of T-shirt in the first scene which is reminiscent of Janet Leigh's miraculous change of underwear in the opening scenes of *Psycho*.
4. An overview of the *Images of Homosexuality* season at the NFT by Paul Hallam and Ron Peck appeared in *Gay Left 5*.
5. A review of *Open and Positive* — the story of John Warburton's case — appears elsewhere in this issue.

The Northern Ireland Gay Rights Association needs money for its appeal to the Commission on Human Rights in Strasbourg. Please send cheques and postal orders (payable to NIGRA) to the NIGRA Strasbourg Appeal, PO Box 44, Belfast BT1 1SH.



Dear *Gay Left*,

After reading with interest Gregg Blachford's article "Looking at Pornography" in issue No. 6 of *Gay Left*, I felt it necessary to make some comments on his ideas about porn, the erotica and the Socialist Morality. Unfortunately time restricts these comments to a brief letter, however I intend to elaborate upon the points raised below in a more detailed reply during the next few months.

The Personal and the Political

"Looking at Pornography" starts off by referring to the influence that Feminism has had on Socialist (Communist) political practice and theory, with its main contribution being its attempt at breaking down the barriers between the personal and the political. From this the article concludes that the personal is indeed the political. However, the point to emphasise is that, if the personal is the political then it is not only bound up in sexual relations, it would necessarily relate to all our activities and thoughts. Having said this doesn't of course belittle the importance of investigation into sexual relations. But we must be careful not to restrict this investigation to a narrow, onesided individualist approach, it must be made from a class standpoint, the standpoint of the working class and its struggle for political power, which is something this whole article has avoided.

A Socialist Morality

'Having accepted the idea that "the personal is political" it becomes necessary to evolve a socialist morality ... (or passing judgement on what should be considered as "proper" or "improper" behaviour).' We have here a misconception as to what morality is and what a communist attitude towards it should be. Questions that remain unanswered are, 1. who makes these 'moral judgements'? and 2. for whom and for what purpose?

A Communist (or Socialist) morality like any other morality is a question of class. The history of morality is the outcome of class struggle. The morality of the bourgeoisie, for instance, is the outcome of its class struggle, first with the feudal nobility then with the proletariat; Proletarian morality is the outcome of the class struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. Stating that morality is just the passing of 'judgements' on what is considered as 'proper' or 'improper' behaviour, has the effect of putting morality outside the class struggle and above classes. It implies that morality 'evolves' out of the whims and fancies of certain individuals, and does not explain how a morality comes about. The thing to remember is that morality has been moulded by the class struggle of the various class interests throughout the whole history of class society, and that a communist morality is made by the working class to serve the interests of that class in its struggle for political power and the construction of communism. Lenin made this point clear, as follows: 'We say that our morality is entirely subordinated to the interests of the Proletariat's class struggle. Our morality stems from the interests of the class struggle of

the proletariat ... Communist morality is that which serves this struggle and unites the working people against all exploitation.'¹

By using phrases that are devoid of class interests, only adds to the confusion about morality and leads to the conclusion that, all we need do is get the individual to bridge the gap between their sexual behaviour and their political 'perspective' to arrive at a proletarian morality. Can this be seen as a morality conceived by the working class for the furtherance of its struggle against the bourgeoisie for political power?

Our investigations into bourgeois morality and that includes sexual relations, must be undertaken to determine, what in bourgeois morality furthers the class struggle of the proletariat and what hinders that struggle. Our theories and conclusions, if correct and tested through practice, will 'evolve' into a proletarian morality.

A Definition of Pornography

Here again the question of porn is dealt with from an individualist approach, which probably stems from the 'secretive' nature of certain pornographic material.

Porn today manifests itself through the machinery of the bourgeois mass media, e.g. newspapers, books, mags, records, still photos, films, TV, theatre and the like, which are both private ('secret') and public. But if the personal is the political (which has been accepted) then porn must be studied from a political standpoint, a class standpoint. Mistaken ideas like, 'the nature of pornography is inherently secret, furtive, guilt ridden and essentially private' come from an inadequate historical analysis.

It was said that 'What is considered to be pornographic varies from culture to culture and from time to time. It cannot be analysed as a concept or as a reality on its own. It must be placed firmly within the structural and historical network of the economic and social relationships from which it springs.' Here the basis of an historical analysis had been laid, but this basis had been overlooked in Gregg's 'historical analysis' which only analysed the development of porn in just one culture, that of the bourgeoisie. This poses the question that porn is a relatively recent phenomenon and that there is no need to look back any further than the last three hundred years to understand its true nature.

To discover the origins of porn and its true nature, we need to study the whole history of human society. For to look for its origins and nature in just the cultural development of capitalism will not result in a concrete definition. We must make an on-going scientific study of porn and find out what role it has played, in its various forms, over the whole history of human society, from its primitive state to its most developed form. Only then will the true nature of porn reveal itself, from which we can conclude a concrete definition.

Pornography and the Erotica

At the end of this section on a 'definition' attempts were made to draw a line between porn and the erotica. But without a scientific analysis of the erotica it would be difficult to understand what the erotica is, and how it differs from pornography. Without such an analysis we end up with the same 'half baked' theories of the bourgeois intellectual, who claims that no proper definition of porn or the erotica can be made because of their 'problematic' nature.

What to do with Pornography?

Because a clear historical analysis and definition of porn have not been achieved, Gregg's theories on how we should deal with porn reveal an inadequate understanding as to how a Communist should deal with such a question. The point to emphasise is, does porn further the struggle of the working class for political power? Would the working class be better off without it?

Without actually coming down on one side or the other, on whether porn is an asset to the working class, or not, Gregg proposed four ways on how porn might be dealt with and discusses the practical outcome of these theories. Which in a 'nutshell' were: 1. Porn could be banned, but without a clear definition this would turn out to be ineffective. 2. Greater censorship towards porn 'would be dangerous for the freedom of expression of ideas in areas other than porn. If censorship becomes acceptable, it will not be too difficult for the state to move it into political areas as well.' 3. As the demands of the Feminists are the same as the Mary Whitehouse's of this world, No Porn (although for different reasons), we could not rely on the mass media to distinguish between these two campaigns. 4. If a ban was imposed on porn a black market would emerge and make porn 'even more degraded and furtive and may even increase the demand for it ... The real basis of sexism would remain untouched while the sex shops in Soho have their front windows smashed.' Gregg concludes, that a threat of a ban could be more effective than an actual ban, then individuals would be left to live with their consciences if they remain sexist or use pornography. This would be the most effective way of overcoming sexism and pornography.

Presuming that the above four points and their conclusion are related to overcoming porn and sexism in a bourgeois society, let us look at each point as laid out above. Point 1. A direct ban on porn would be ineffective since there is no clear definition. We need a definition that will explain why porn appears to have always been at the expense of the exploited classes. Point 2. There is a danger that greater censorship on porn could be used by the bourgeoisie to attack areas not related to it. We have already seen how the bourgeoisie 'bend' its own laws to suit its own interests, in the *Gay News v Whitehouse* trial for instance. If the Gay Movement, or the Women's Movement, do not ally themselves to the wider Labour Movement their hard fought for rights and gains will always be at the mercy of the bourgeoisie. Whether greater censorship on porn could be effective and whether it was used against areas not related to porn would depend upon the strength of the forces struggling over this censorship. Point 3. Apart from the confusion caused by no explanation being offered as to why there is a difference between the campaign of the Feminists and that of Mary Whitehouse for, no porn, it is fair to say that the proletariat could never rely on the bourgeois mass media to do anything for it, let alone explain these differences. Point 4. and its conclusion touch upon the important question of how we as communists should deal with pornography and sexism. If a ban was imposed on porn then a black market would undoubtedly flourish and the demand for it could increase. But isn't that how the bourgeoisie would deal with porn? The question is however, how should communists deal with porn and sexism. Is it just a matter of legislating porn out of existence, which would have no effect on the real basis of porn and sexism, or a matter of campaigning amongst the masses of working people to reveal porn and sexism for what they are, a handy means for the bourgeoisie to cloud the minds of the workers, leaving them confused as to whom their real enemies are, and squabble over 'the body politic'. Lenin once said in a conversation

with a German comrade: 'The proletariat is a rising class. it doesn't need intoxication as a narcotic or a stimulus. Intoxication as little by sexual exaggeration as by alcohol. It must not and shall not forget, forget the shame, the filth, the savagery of capitalism. It received the strongest urge to fight from a class situation, from the Communist ideal. It needs clarity, clarity and again clarity. And so I repeat, no weakening, no waste, no destruction of forces. Self-control, self-discipline is not slavery, not even in love.'² I equate porn with Lenin's term 'sexual exaggeration' and would add, the taking of drugs to the use of alcohol as a narcotic or a stimulus, which is just as effective in clouding the mind. The working class must rid itself of these bourgeois habits which blur its vision, it must gain clarity and have a clear mind to understand whom its real enemies are. This will not be achieved by indulgences in sexual exaggeration, drunken stupors, or by being 'stoned' on drugs.

The 'Socialist' Feminist Versus the Gay Male 'Socialist'

The greater part of Gregg's article is taken up with an analysis of the 'socialist' feminist line towards porn and sexism. The 'socialist' feminist holds that people should relate to each other as complete people, instead of using each other as sexual objects (whether it be mutual or one-sided, in the personal form, or in the wider social form). This 'socialist' feminist line is condemned as being 1. a denial of the erotica (which by the way Gregg has not defined), and 2. by it being equated with bourgeois marital relations. This 'socialist' feminist line has been condemned because it does not adhere to the ideas of the Gay Male 'Socialist' who accepts 'the open and prominent place that sex, especially casual sex, plays in many gay men's lives.' The line taken by the 'socialist' feminist has nothing to do with bourgeois marital relations, which generally makes one part of that relation a sexual and economic object, a possession, which is also mimicked by the 'gay subculture'.

Sexual relations are not outside class struggle, they are part and parcel of it and bourgeois sexual relations are the very thing that the 'socialist' feminists attack when they struggle for the supremacy of people being seen as complete human beings rather than as sexual objects. To say that this line is too close to the absolutist notion that 'sex is only allowed within the context of marriage and that any form of sexuality outside of that framework is perverted or criminal or sad'; has misunderstood what this feminist line is trying to get at. For, can't people show emotion towards each other and love one another without using each other as sexual objects, or adopting legal marital ties? This is the essence of this feminist line which challenges the supremacy of sexual objectification and struggles to put in its place the supremacy of people being seen as *real* people. The condemnation of this feminist line appears as a justification for people to continue to use each other as sexual objects and 'to do exactly what they want to do'. It has ignored the fact that human beings are social beings that relate to one another in one form or the other, and because of this fact we cannot 'do exactly what we want to do' as something existing outside of these social relations. Gregg has refuted the very thing he started out to achieve, and has ended up with the 'do your own thing' libertine attitude he rejected at the beginning of his article.

Gregg Blachford's article has raised many important questions, questions that Communists need to examine and draw conclusions from. But this examination cannot be undertaken from the individualist approach, it must be undertaken from a class standpoint, the standpoint of the class struggle of the proletariat. I hope this debate will continue and I look forward to reading what others have to say about pornography, the erotica, and the Socialist Morality.

Yours fraternally,
Fred Bearman

Notes

1. From *The Tasks of the Youth Leagues*. Foreign Languages Press, Peking 1975.
2. From *Lenin on the Woman Question, Conversation with Clara Zetkin*. As published by MLWA Women's Caucus.

The Four Waves

WOMEN'S BODY, WOMEN'S RIGHT: A SOCIAL HISTORY OF BIRTH CONTROL IN AMERICA
by Linda Gordon (Penguin Books, £1.50)

Reviewed by Sue Bruley

Linda Gordon has done us all a great service in writing this superb account of the history of birth control in the USA. The subject, as she readily admits, is such an integral part of the struggle for women's emancipation as a whole that the two cannot really be separated. She has undertaken, therefore, a mammoth task. She manages to combine a brilliant analytical study with a vast amount of factual information. I wish we had something comparable to it for the UK. Angus McLaren's recent book, *Birth Control in 19th Century England*, is shallow by comparison.

The author identifies three stages in the evolution of women's right to reproductive freedom. *Voluntary Motherhood* was advanced by late 19th century feminists who pressed for the social recognition of motherhood. Birth control at this time was not associated with increased sexual freedom, but the right of women to choose the circumstances when they would undertake their social role as mothers.

From 1910-20 the movement passed into the period of *Birth Control*. This term was first used by Margaret Sanger in 1915. Sanger began her public life as an organiser for the Women's Commission of the Socialist Party, which in this decade was a significant force in American political life (in 1912 they had 118,000 members and got 6% of the Presidential vote). Many birth control leagues were formed by feminists who were also committed to a socialist transformation of society. As Linda Gordon points out, the birth control movement reached its most vital and dynamic stage at the point of its maximum integration with radicalism. For this brief period, therefore, real possibilities existed for a socialist-feminist practice.

Regrettably, the connections which were made at grass roots level did not permeate through to the top. The Socialist Party leadership never committed itself to the birth control movement and its elaborate Women's Commission was never utilised to promote the birth control cause. As Linda Gordon states, Sanger's defection from the left was 'as much because the left rejected birth control as because Sanger and her followers rejected the left'.

During the 1920s the movement gradually adopted a liberal, reformist outlook, culminating in what the author calls the era of '*Planned Parenthood*'. The voluntary clinics, which were mainly run by ordinary women, were replaced by state funded clinics in which the professional, male doctor, usually with entrenched conservative attitudes, was the centrepiece. As the movement lost its connections both with socialism and feminism, it became more prone to eugenicist arguments (ie using birth control to restrict 'undesirable' categories. This and the Neo-Malthusian argument for controlling overall population size, had been present from the late 19th century.) Women campaigners began to openly advocate birth control as a means of restricting the black and immigrant populations in relation to the 'yankees'. During the 30s Sanger lost almost all the vestiges of feminism, couching her speeches in a eugenicist framework.

Linda Gordon refers to the modern feminist movement as the 'fourth wave'. She acknowledges that she is part of that movement. Throwing aside any notion of academic 'impartiality' she openly declares that her work is written from a socialist-feminist perspective. It is rare to uncover such thorough scholarship combined with an uncompromising political stance.

This perspective brings in a rich harvest. An example of this can be seen in the section on the modern movement, where she establishes the link between reproductive freedom and lesbian liberation. Referring to the "tyranny of heterosexuality", she states that "the political power of lesbianism is a power that can be shared by all women who choose to recognise and use it: the power of an alternative, a possibility that makes male sex tyranny escapable and rejectable" (p410).

The only point where I found myself disagreeing with Linda Gordon is in her conclusion where she says that 'most people' want to produce children and see them develop (p405). I don't and this made me feel abnormal, not to mention guilty, for rejecting the conventional path of motherhood. (Perhaps she has vestiges of the 'Voluntary Motherhood' perspective?) This is, however, a very minor flaw, in what is in every other respect an excellent book. Great value at £1.50 for over 400 pages. Buy it!

Girlfriends

GIRLFRIENDS

Reviewed by Sue Cartledge

The ambiguity in the title, "Girlfriends", goes straight to the paradox at the centre of this film. Annie and Susan are friends and flatmates, but not lovers. There is little to suggest even latent lesbianism in their relationship. They chat about work and boyfriends; Annie leaves to get married in the time-honoured heterosexual pattern. Female friendships, however strong, must fade at the advent of the all-conquering male with his promise of husband, home and family. And yet: the drama of the whole film hinges on the emotional intensity of their relationship. Susan is thrown, but cannot object, when Annie announces her impending marriage. After all, they are only girl friends, aren't they? But still ... Annie keeps coming back to Susan for advice — should she go on writing? take a course? — just as she tried out her latest piece of writing on her before she married. Susan's resentment and sense of loss simmers and finally erupts in the emotional climax of the

film, when she accuses Annie of deserting her: "I didn't leave you, Susan, I just got married" "I felt betrayed".

The question raised by the film is a central one in the Women's Movement: just what *is* the status of friendships between women? And this is a question not just of theory but of everyday practical conflicts. My own marriage started to crack apart when it became obvious to both of us that I was growing closer to my women friends than to my husband. And this is a common experience for feminists, heterosexual as well as lesbian. Many a marriage has run aground on the rocks of sisterhood. If this film has a moral, it is the feminist one that friendships between women are important, and can no longer just be brushed aside when a lover turns up. Indeed, the tables are turned, and at one point it is Annie's husband who is brushed aside, prudently retiring with baby while Annie and Susan sort out their feelings. We are left guessing as to the final outcome — the film ends as a cosy fireside scene between the two friends is frozen by the sound of hubby's approaching car in the drive.

So are Annie and Susan really repressed lesbians? As a feminist, I want to say, not necessarily. Sisterhood is sisterhood, never mind the sexuality. The Women's Movement is founded on solidarity between women, heterosexual as well as lesbian. As a lesbian, however, I must suspect that something funny is going on between Annie and Susan. I'm sure Claudia Weill had *something* in mind when she opened her film with Susan photographing Annie asleep in bed. And yet elsewhere the film appears to espouse an old-fashioned view of the Great Divide between heterosexuality and homosexuality. Rejecting a physical advance from Cecilia, a lesbian she has offered temporary shelter to, Susan explains: "That woman that I told you I roomed with — she was my flatmate, not my lover". In other words, I am not A Lesbian. At any rate, Cecilia is sympathetically partrayed and certainly not a stereotype: naive, vulnerable, into yoga and the counter-culture, gentle and infuriating. A refreshing change from the weird creatures of male fantasy who occasionally struggle onto the screen under the label of lesbian.

But then, male fantasy doesn't get a look in in Claudia Weill's film. Realism triumphs, in the tackiness of Susan's flat, the recognisable messiness of conversations and events. There are no sex-objects: Susan struggles along with carrier bags, hung about with scarves and shapeless coats; Annie is blonde and could be conventionally pretty but always looks exhausted and dresses in acrylic polonecks gone frilly at the edges with age. Their lives are full of real-life problems — how can Susan learn, as a struggling photographer, to stand up to indifferent editors and supercilious gallery owners? Should she move into her boyfriend's flat or not? *He* sees it in terms of the wastefulness of paying two rents; Susan is worried about her security and sense of identity. Her mixed feelings produce one of the film's best lines: "I like *me* when I don't need *you*". Here she pinpoints the other central theme of the film: the struggle of women to exist as independent beings. Annie gives up and goes under in marriage and



motherhood: "I want Martin to take care of me" — only to surface again desperate for her own time and space. Susan keeps the time and space, and the lonely evenings and misplaced romantic lunges that go with this. Nobody mentions women's liberation, but on every count this is a good feminist film.

Chemical Castration

by Tom O'Carroll

The following article by Tom O'Carroll about the chemical castration of prisoners is a transcript of a contribution made at the National Council for Civil Liberties (NCCL) conference 'A Fair Deal for Homosexuals' which was held in London in Spring 1977. It was due to have appeared in the forthcoming NCCL pamphlet based on the conference contributions.

However in the summer of this year it became clear that there was opposition in NCCL to Tom O'Carroll's piece appearing, because of its sensitive subject matter. Most, though not all, of the prisoners on whom chemical castration is practised are paedophile offenders.

Despite strong support from the Gay Rights Committee at NCCL, the National Executive voted for the exclusion of the article. Patricia Hewitt, General Secretary of NCCL, noted in opposing its publication that public hostility to paedophilia was such that it damaged the cause of gay rights for the gay movement to be associated with it. She also argued that this article is badly researched and poorly written, but no offer was made to O'Carroll to include more information on such cases (though other contributors were given this opportunity) and despite O'Carroll making it known that he had extensive files on the topic. Several leading members of NCCL argued that there would be immediate press interest and mass disaffection from the NCCL membership — especially from affiliated trade unions — if the article was printed.

The article will not now appear in the forthcoming pamphlet, but is reprinted here in full.

In the course of my work with P.I.E. I have made interesting and appalling discoveries in the medical so-called 'treatment' of convicted paedophiles; of the various existing methods of behaviour modification of the sex offender that are in use today, such as the torture-like techniques of aversion therapy or the use of drugs. In addition to these 'treatments', some prisoners have undergone hormone implant operations.

This is the theory behind this particular treatment. The male sexual drive is based on the production of testosterone. The implanting of female hormones suppresses that drive. The implant itself is a small pellet, inserted under the patient's skin in the buttocks or abdomen, and the female hormone is absorbed into the bloodstream over a period of months, neutralising the maleness of the patient and extinguishing his sexual drive — in effect, chemical castration.

However, there is at least one common side effect. Patients subsequently grow breasts, of such a size that they have to be cut off. This has been publicly admitted. In a television interview Dr. Henry Field, a psychiatrist responsible for a series of hormone implants on prisoners in Wormwood Scrubs, said when asked about his work and specifically the growing of breasts,

"I always ensured that I chose the hospital and the surgeon who did the operation ... once I'd embarked on treating a man, I undertook to follow him up and make sure that the surgeon of my choice did the mastectomies."

In a discussion written up in the B.M.J. in 1973, Dr. Field said of hormone treatment,

"This is a radical procedure for treating the sexual offender. There is no question that one is deliberately changing the personality to remove his sexual life, so he won't interfere with small boys or girls and so that he'll be able to be released into society and not go on offending."

Although treatment is supposed to cover all sex offenders it is significant that Dr. Field does not say that the treatment is given specifically in order to stop men from raping women, or from murdering, or attacking children in sexual assaults. While it is true that some of the offenders in question may have been violent, this appears not even to figure as a criterion in whether they receive treatment. For instance, when asked the nature of his sexual offences, a prisoner featured in the television programme said they consisted of "just fondling" and that, to "see if they were interested". Yet this man was considered suitable for chemical castration.

What of the other point made by Dr. Field: "The sexual life of the prisoner is removed, so that he will be able to be released into society". Effectively, this means that the prisoner is offered the hope that if he consents to being chemically castrated, he will have a better chance of being released on parole, or, in the case of a life sentence prisoner, on a licence which can be granted at any time during the sentence. Either he has the implant or he stays inside, possibly for many years, or in the case of a 'lifer', indefinitely.

Under these circumstances it is no good for the Home Office to plead that a prisoner's 'consent' has to be given for an operation to take place (as they do). Consent under such duress is meaningless, and curiously enough, Dr. Field has admitted as much.

In a quote from the British Medical Journal, talking about brain surgery in the treatment of homosexuality, Dr. Field says, "The difficulty is one of valid consent when treating offenders. You can only get this if you offer treatment to somebody who has a fixed sentence, who can choose to have or not to have it. But you can't get what the lawyers call true consent from somebody who's serving a life sentence. What you're saying is: 'We can't let you out until you're safe; we want to do a certain procedure to ensure this; now we want you to give consent to this.' Clearly it's absurd to talk about true consent in this context."

Indeed it is. That is exactly what is happening. For the last two years I have been visiting a life sentence prisoner in Long Lartin prison, Worcestershire, who has received hormone implant treatment. In the course of sentencing him in 1972, Mr. Justice May said, "You will remain in prison until a cure is found for your freakish behaviour", and in answer to a

question from Mr. Norman Atkinson, M.P., the government indicated that this particular prisoner's release date would be affected by his response to medical treatment.

Life sentences are not the only problem area: the fixed sentence prisoner who stands a chance of getting release on parole can also be coerced into accepting chemical castration in order to impress the parole board. Others can be coerced simply by the threat of a prison sentence; in April 1977 a schoolteacher convicted of indecently assaulting boys was given a suspended gaol sentence, and the judge said he should be treated with drugs and electric shock treatment to subdue his urges.

Dr. Field is on record as having publicly advocated that actual castration should be offered to offenders as an alternative to long prison sentences. In saying this he is going a long way beyond what would be acceptable to Parliament at the moment. Unfortunately he is a man of immense power to the hapless paedophile offender, and displays the arrogance of those whose authority has for too long gone unchallenged. When he was asked whether one doctor alone should take the decision to treat offenders Dr. Field said, "I'm against committees, particularly of lay people who can't understand the issues". Not medical details, but "issues"

Dr. Field has been allowed by the Home Office to conduct a whole series of hormone implant operations at Wormwood Scrubs. What is worrying to me and others is how much freedom may be given to carry out experiments which go much further, possibly in the direction of psychosurgery, ie, burning out part of the offender's brain, to mentally castrate him. In this regard Dr. Field says,

"The arguments against psychosurgery are often specious, although there have been some disasters I've seen some excellent results."

With the passage of time, he says,

"Brain surgery in offenders which may at the present time be viewed with misgivings, would come to be accepted. It is perhaps a matter of educating the administrators and public opinion."

I believe this whole issue has not been taken up forcibly enough. Perhaps because the numbers of people at risk from these experiments is so small and the facts not easily available. The Home Office must be forced constantly into answering question after question about what they are up to — exactly which experimental techniques they are carrying out with regard to the treatment of sexual offenders, and to what extent.

Out & Out

OPEN AND POSITIVE: An Account Of How John Warburton Came Out At School And The Consequences.

Published by Gay Teachers Group 75p.

Reviewed by Margaret Jackson

This is a straightforward and lucid account of an attack by the 'socially enlightened and tolerant' Inner London Education Authority on the right of a teacher to be openly gay. It is a reminder to all gay teachers, if one were needed, that our gayness will only be tolerated as long as we do not talk about it to our pupils. We may be taunted, jeered at, or otherwise insulted or abused, but we still must not talk about it, not even to restore order in the classroom, or to regain the respect of our pupils. In 1974 the Leader of the ILEA gave an assurance that the Authority did not discriminate against gay teachers; yet it has barred John Warburton from employment in any of its schools unless he gives a written undertaking 'not in future to discuss homosexuality with pupils, except in the course of a completely structured programme of sex education, of which the Headmaster/Headmistress has

full knowledge and with which he/she is in full agreement.' As John points out, not only does this amount to being required to sign a separate contract of employment; it also means that he would have no right of self-defence in the face of future taunts by pupils.

How are we supposed to deal with such situations which, in view of the widespread ignorance about and prejudice against homosexuality, are hardly likely to be rare? John repeatedly posed this question to his employers and his union executive, who were both apparently unable or unwilling to offer any suggestions. Not surprisingly, the NUT executive once again revealed its reluctant to provide advice and support for embarrassingly 'deviant' members (— remember Tyndale?).

The bulk of the booklet consists of correspondence between the protagonists, with commentaries by John and other gay teachers. As an account of the events it provides fascinating reading and conveys a real sense of the struggle of those involved. My main criticism is that there is no attempt at a deeper *political* analysis of the issues and that consequently the strategies proposed, such as more gay teachers coming out, building up union support at grass roots level, and demanding a place for homosexuality in the curriculum, have a naively optimistic ring.

The afterword by Peter Bradley attempts to provide an overview of the case and its implications for future struggles, but he does not seem to view it as anything more than a Gay Rights issue. He correctly points out that John was not sacked for being gay or for coming out to his kids, but because, according to the ILEA, his private and personal life — his gayness — obtruded into his professional life 'far beyond acceptable limits'. There is apparently no record of any complaint being made against John by a parent or child. So the question is whose limits are being referred to? The answer would appear to be heterosexuals' limits.

Women teachers, especially in girls' schools, are in my experience constantly plied with questions about their boy-friends or husbands, and nowadays generally respond frankly; moreover heterosexuality is continually affirmed in schools in countless ways, eg by the wearing of wedding rings or the use of the style 'Mrs'. If I were to respond to the question 'Have you a boyfriend, Miss?' with the answer 'No, but I have a girlfriend', or 'No, I am a lesbian' I would be affirming my sexuality in exactly the same way as my heterosexual sister. Yet to judge by ILEA's reaction to John, this would constitute going beyond acceptable limits. Thus there is a contradiction between, on the one hand, ILEA's avowed policy of no discrimination against gays, and on the other, their implicit view that a teacher's affirmation of her gayness is unacceptable.

This contradiction is explained by Peter Bradley in terms of hypocrisy and prejudice, but is not, in my view, an adequate explanation. The intransigence of the ILEA, the ineffectiveness of the NUT, the absence of homosexuality

from the curriculum are not simply the result of prejudice and hypocrisy, but have their roots in a social structure which, organised as it is around the principles of private property and male supremacy, makes it inevitable that homosexuality will be viewed as a threat. Sexism is not merely a reactionary attitude which can be changed by pressure towards greater enlightenment, but a deeply pervasive ideology which is both produced by, and helps to legitimate and reproduce, patriarchal and capitalist relations. Homosexuality is not merely an alternative life-style, but undermines two of the key institutions of the patriarchal, capitalist state, namely marriage and the family. This is why its affirmation in our schools goes beyond acceptable limits.

One aspect of the book is particularly disturbing, and that is the inclusion of a letter written by John's parents to his former headmistress, in which they say: "We were told in 1972 by our two GPs that one in ten of the population is born with this feature and it is not something that they elect by choice. This has been confirmed to us by another medical practitioner of great experience." While I understand John's reasons for including this letter I find the lack of comment on the pathological model of homosexuality it so clearly expresses extremely alarming. It is bound to reinforce the prevailing view that homosexuality is a congenital disease or abnormality, and thus effectively depoliticises the whole issue.

Socialists and feminists will, I am afraid, find nothing to bite on in this booklet. Ultimately it treats gayness as a legal-moral issue, rather than a political-economic one, and therefore amounts to little more than a plea for tolerance.

Letter

PARIS NOVEMBER 1978

The major event in the French gay scene since the beginning of the social year, September in France, has been the denunciation in the courts of police raids on gay clubs. The Manhattan, an inexpensive gay club by Parisian standards, was raided by twenty or so cops dressed up in leather, who arrested eleven gays for 'outrage of public morals'. When the case came to court last month this rather banal affair was turned into a political trial by the lawyers and defendants who attacked the laws which double the penalties for gays for this 'crime', and linked the police raid with a pay-off system between the police and a mafia of the more expensive gay clubs.

Using the testimony of Senator Caillavet, who recently introduced a bill into the Senate to end the anti-gay legislation of Petain and De Gaulle, as well as a petition from such intellectuals as Marguerite Duras, Michel Foucault, Jean Luis Bory, and Guy Hocquenghem, six lawyers attacked the judicial bias against homosexuals in France.

Those involved in the trial were found guilty but given light fines and no convictions, which suggested that they government may be ready to vote the abolition of the gay laws, which was the programme of the homosexual candidates in the March general election.

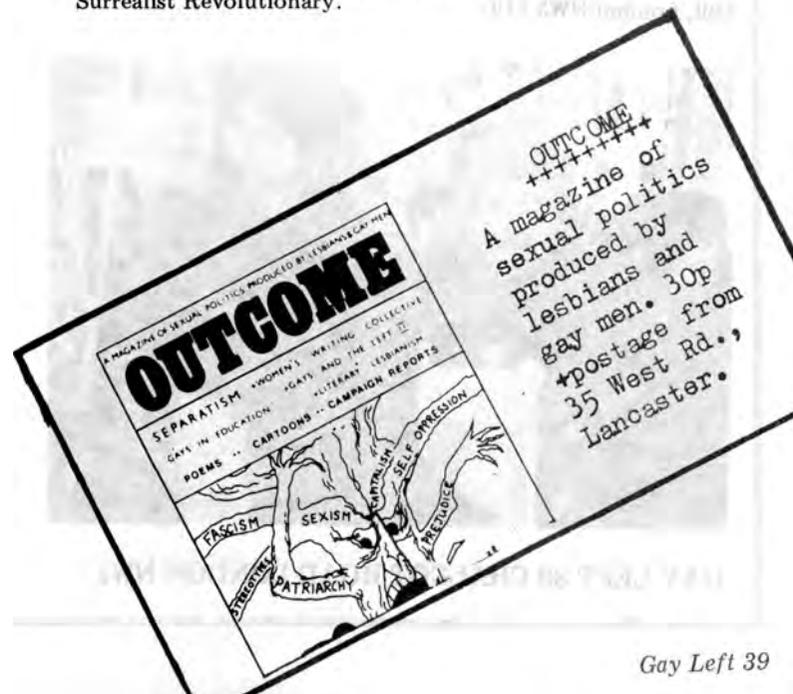
Until now the French political parties and the trade unions have been terrified of the gay debate. A glimmer of light from through the closed door has come from the attitude of some of the press: Le Monde, the establishment paper, Liberation (extreme Left), and Rouge (Trotskyist). Aragon's lover* stated recently in an interview with the Socialist Le Matin, 'I am gay and communist'. L'Humanite, the Communist daily, didn't comment on this.

GLH has broken up into local quartier committees, the CHA's. In the provinces, which can be heavily anti-gay, some twenty or so groups are active, something which neither the FHAR nor Arcadie, the reformist gay organisation in existence for twenty years, was ever able to initiate. There was also a national gay conference in Lyons earlier this month.

A new national paper 'Gay Life' will be coming out soon, to give a new perspective for gays and politics in France. It is to be put out by gay journalists, writers, and philosophers and GLH activists. Amongst those collaborating are Foucault, Hocquenghem, Nicholas Powell, and Rene Scherer. We hope it will survive longer than Gaie Presse, which was banned by the government along with other gay publications, and suffered from horrible financial difficulties which have also been affecting the rest of the Left and alternative press in France.

Jean Le Bitoux (Groupe de Liberation Homosexuelle)
Philip Brooks
Simon Watney (London).

* Louis Aragon, veteran French Communist, writer and Surrealist Revolutionary.



What's Left

Please can I stop being a tree soon? How a group of men looked after 200 children at the 1977 WLM Conference Creche. A pamphlet, costing 40p, published by Men's Free Press, 27 Clerkenwell Close, London EC1, and distributed by PDC.

ZAP! — A magazine which seeks to be of personal relevance to gay people. From Zap Publications, c/o Peace Centre, 18 Moon St, Queensway, Birmingham 4. Price 20p each + postage.

Red Therapy — A new one-off pamphlet costing 70p, published by a leaderless, self-help therapy group which has been going for about 5 years. The pamphlet is an attempt to share ideas and experience. Details from Red Therapy, c/o 28 Redbourne Ave, London N3 2BS.

The Politics of Sexuality in Capitalism. Red Collective and the Publications Distribution Cooperative have jointly republished in book form two pamphlets written by the former, first published in 1973 and long out of print. The pamphlets were collectively written by the group comprising of women and men. They addressed themselves to issues of general concern to the sexual liberation movements: the personal as politics, sexuality and capitalism, personal relationships and Freudianism. Though much work has gone on in these areas since the originals appeared, they are still of interest and value. Copies can be obtained from bookshops, price £1.95 paperback, £5.95 hardback.

SISTERWRITE is a new cooperative women's bookshop opening to the public on 30th November 1978. It will be carrying a large stock of British and American feminist books, ranging from women's studies, politics, and history to more general literature of particular interest to women. Posters, records and journals will also be available. It will be providing a comprehensive mail order service and catalogues in the near future. 190 Upper St, London N1. 01-359 2573

York Community Bookshop: 73 Walingate, York, YO1 2TZ. Specialises in books on gay liberation. A list of gay books and pamphlets can be obtained on request.

Alternative Socialism Newsletter — published by a group of people trying to bring together the approaches of the 'alternative society' and libertarian socialism with special emphasis on feminism and creating a non patriarchal society. There are contacts in Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds, Manchester and London. The London contact is Danny Cohen, 15 Rosslyn Hill, London NW3 5U0.



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Contents

Happy Families? Paedophilia Examined.	2
Gay Art	6
Spotlight on Greece	9
FOR Interpretation — Notes Against Camp	11
Homosexuals Fight Back	15
Gays At Work — No Complaints	17
Odds and Sods	18
Up Against The Law	19
You Can't Be A Socialist Perfume Maker	20
Two Letters on Freud	23
Why I Joined Gay Sweatshop	25
Gays and The Phoney War in Northern Ireland	28
The Making of Nighthawks	30
Another Look at Pornography	34
The Four Waves	36
Girlfriends	36
Chemical Castration	37
Out & Out	38
Letter from Paris	39

THE COLLECTIVE

This issue was put together by Keith Birch, Derek Cohen, Emmanuel Cooper, Phil Derbyshire, Simon Watney, Jeffrey Weeks, Nigel Young.

BACK ISSUES

Gay Left No 3
Women in Gay Left, Gays and Class, IS Gay Group, Gay Workers' Movement and usual reviews etc.

Gay Left No 5
Why Marxism, Images of Homosexuality in Film, Lesbian Invisibility, Gays and Fascism, Gay Theatre Past and Present, Politics & Ideology, Gay History, Future of the Gay Movement.

Gay Left No 6
(Gays) In The Balance, The State Repression and Sexuality, Looking At Pornography, Working Class Lesbians, Gays at Work, Motherhood, Fighting Fascism.

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