

**IN SEARCH OF THE BISEXUAL EXPERIENCE:**  
**MAPPING CONTEMPORARY BISEXUAL SPACES**

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## **Abstract**

My aim in this thesis is to explore contemporary ways in which bisexuality is currently being produced – theoretically and culturally – in the US and the UK. I argue that bisexual desire is not discrete, and that it cannot be understood except in relation to other desires, bodies, texts, and contexts. I have mapped three concurrent, contemporary ‘spaces’, rather than tracing a more conventional history of bisexuality. I focus particularly on the movement and tension between sexual desire and sexual identity, and the inseparability of sexuality, gender and race in the formation of contemporary bisexual subjectivities.

In Chapter One, I examine the development of bisexual space within the lesbian community of Northampton, Massachusetts USA in the late 1980s and early 1990s. I focus particularly on the bisexual/lesbian controversy surrounding bisexual inclusion in the annual Northampton Lesbian and Gay Pride March. In Chapter Two, I map bisexual and transsexual identities within contemporary feminist and queer theory, and lesbian and gay culture. I further explore bisexual and transsexual spaces of self-representation through the work of contemporary bisexual and transsexual photographers. In Chapter Three, I document the development of a separate bisexual identity in the context of the first US National Bisexual Conference San Francisco in 1990.

My concern throughout the thesis is with the process by which specific and separate bisexual spaces are produced and negotiated and the relationship between bisexual and ‘other’ cultural and theoretical spaces.

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## Preface

In October 1994 I began work on my doctoral thesis, believing I would be spending several years exploring the discursive production of bisexuality within late nineteenth century sexological texts, and comparing this to contemporary meanings of bisexuality. My desire was to begin a rather grand 'bisexual genealogy' that could be extended into the past or the future in a neat linear fashion. In the end, I decided that such a history could not do adequate justice to the ways in which multiple meanings of bisexuality circulate at a given historical moment. My interest in contemporary culture and theory prevailed. I believe that focusing my research within a relatively narrow timeframe (late 1980s and early 1990s) has allowed me to document more intricately the ways in which meanings of bisexuality are produced in relation to and in tension with one another. In addition, this focus has provided me with greater scope for interdisciplinarity, the analysis of a broad range of materials, and the consistent use of my own personal voice. It is my hope that this shift in perspective does not negate the importance of historical meanings, but highlights instead how 'past' and 'present' meanings inflect and complicate one another.

## Acknowledgement

Thanks are due to The British Academy for the majority of my postgraduate funding, The Fulbright Commission for a one-year scholarship to the US that made this work possible, and the California Institute of Contemporary Arts, for two separate grants. I have also been fortunate in my two academic homes while a DPhil student: the Centre for Women's Studies, University of York; and the Five College Women's Studies Research Center, Mount Holyoke College.

Of course, I am for ever in my parents' debt.

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Help and support with the direction of the thesis, the content, and the nuts and bolts came generously and unstintingly from my supervisor, Nicole Ward. Heartfelt thanks to, Claire Eustance, Merl Storr, Cath Stowers, Victoria Howell, and David Hansen-Miller for proof-reading as well as emotional support. Claire's name should be in lights above Leicester Square for letting me print out my thesis on her printer!

I am incredibly fortunate that there are people in my life who have not only offered me friendship, but changed the way that I think and altered the course of this work. Jyl Lynn Felman and Henry Rubin insisted upon the use of the personal in my work, and met my vulnerability with their own. Ann Kaloski, Jo Eadie and Merl Storr shaped this work in ways often too central to delineate accurately, and underlined the quasi-spiritual importance of vegetarian sausages and ice cream. Jay Prosser, Arlene Dallalifar and David Hansen-Miller seemed even to enjoy timely conversations about my work.

For making the stressful times not only bearable but joyful, a rather weepy thank you to (in no particular order) Claire, Diana, Karen, Annie, Henry, Jay, Cath, Jo, Merl, Jyl, Harriet, and Jane. For unexpectedly turning my life upside down, inside out, and leaving me wondering who I used to play house with, David.

It's finally in, Ann!

### **Author's Declaration**

Although all the work in this thesis is original and unpublished, I have drawn on and expanded my own previously published material in several places. Chapter One, 'By Way of An Introduction...', builds on the work on presented in two articles: 'Bisexual Theoretical Perspectives: Emergent and Contingent Relationships', in Bi Academic Intervention, ed., (1997) *The Bisexual Imaginary: Representation, Identity and Desire* (London: Cassell): 14-37; and 'From Landmarks to Spaces: Mapping the Territory of a Bisexual Genealogy', in G B Ingram, A-M Boutillette and Y Retter, eds, (1997) *Queers In Space: Landscapes of Marginalized Sexualities* (Seattle: Bay Press): 147-162. In addition, Chapter Three, Part Three, 'Subjects of Transgression', served as the springboard for 'Waiting for No Man: Bisexual Femme Subjectivity and Cultural Repudiation', in S Munt, ed., (1988) *Butch/Femme: Inside Lesbian Gender* (London: Cassell): 90-100.

## **CHAPTER ONE. By Way Of An Introduction...**

### **Theorising Bisexuality, or, Towards a Bisexual Cartography**

#### **Introduction**

My aim in this thesis is to explore contemporary ways in which bisexuality is currently being produced – theoretically and culturally – in the US and the UK. I have focused on analysing bisexuality as it is constructed in relation to other contemporary theoretical and political sites of sexuality and gender. Throughout my thesis I argue that bisexual desire is not discrete in and of itself and that it cannot be understood except in relation to other desires, bodies, texts, and contexts. I focus particularly on the movement and tension between sexual desire and sexual identity, and the inseparability of sexuality, gender and race in the formation of contemporary bisexual subjectivities. I argue that bisexuality is informative of the ways we understand, name and express desire in contemporary US and UK theories and cultures, irrespective of whether or not bisexual identities and communities are visibly present.

This way of theorising bisexuality moves away from an approach that sees bisexual history as bonded to the emergence of bisexual identities or particular individuals. My aim instead is to develop a bisexual genealogy that examines the importance of *constructions* of bisexuality in the formation and maintenance of sexual desire, behaviour and identity generally. According to historian Michel Foucault, to privilege the history of sexual identity – its narrative, its emergence and its effects – is also to privilege dominant discursive formations. (Foucault 1971)<sup>1</sup> Such a history is less a narrative of resistance and

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<sup>1</sup> No contemporary writer on issues of sexual desire and identity could be other than profoundly influenced by Foucault. I have also been influenced by feminist critics of Foucault, however, who point to the limits of his frameworks for feminist theory in terms of their ‘gender blindness’. (e.g. Diamond and Quinby 1988 and Bordo 1993, esp. pp. 45-99) As a result I make

more a narrative of the dominant, one that has already been told, and gains only strength through its repetition.<sup>2</sup> Foucault argues that we might better focus on ‘releasing’ subjugated knowledges, analysing and connecting them, thus creating genealogies that are at odds with the history of dominant identities. (Foucault 1980: 85ff) In her description and critique of Foucault, Jana Sawicki describes this methodology as being ‘designed to facilitate an “insurrection of subjugated knowledges”’. (Sawicki 1991: 26) In this vein, I am interested in mapping a genealogy of bisexual desire whose meanings are at odds both with dominant ‘history’ which erases bisexuality, and with prevailing conceptions of bisexuality which privilege identity above more covert formations. In short, my aim is to trace disparity among, as well as cohesion of, contemporary bisexual meanings.

This introductory chapter surveys the current arena of bisexual culture and theory in the US and the UK. I suggest a new approach to analysing bisexual cultures and theories and outline the areas of study that this thesis is concerned with. Section One, ‘Minefields of Bisexual Meaning’, documents the struggle to theorise bisexuality against existing models of sexual identity.<sup>3</sup> Part One, ‘The Growth of Bisexual Theory and Culture’, examines the recent increase in bisexual activism and theorising and explores some of the existing problems of bisexual cultural and theoretical meaning. Part Two, ‘The Search for Bisexual Identity’, charts bisexual responses to those meanings and some of the limitations of those responses. In Section Two, ‘Tracing Contemporary Bisexual Spaces’, I argue for the usefulness of approaching bisexual theories and cultures from the

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use of Foucaultian perspectives as and where appropriate, but am not a devotee. I detail my eclectic approach to theorising bisexuality in the final section of this chapter.

<sup>2</sup> Foucault himself is prey to identity’s insistent narrative (as, indeed, we all are) in his structuring of modern sexuality around the intelligibility of a white, male homosexual identity at the close of the nineteenth century in *History of Sexuality: Volume One, an Introduction*. (Foucault 1978)

<sup>3</sup> I began this work in an article entitled ‘Bisexual Theoretical Perspectives: Emergent and Contingent Relationships’, (Hemmings 1997). Section One of this chapter draws on this

perspective of 'spaces'. In Part One, 'Bisexual Cartographies', I outline the three 'bisexual spaces' whose geography I trace through this thesis. Part Two, 'Interdisciplinary Trials (Or, why is this feminist research?)', situates my project within a women's studies tradition of interdisciplinarity, self-reflexivity and responsibility.

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article but is substantially re-written and updated.



## Section One: Minefields of Bisexual Meaning

### **Part One: The Growth of Bisexual Theory and Culture**

There has been very little bisexual theory to date that is not based in psychology, psychoanalysis or sexual identity politics. When three influential works on bisexuality were published between 1975 and 1978 – Margaret Mead’s ‘Bisexuality: What’s It All About?’ (Mead 1975) Charlotte Wolff’s *Bisexuality: A Study* (Wolff 1977) and Fritz Klein’s *The Bisexual Option* (Klein 1978)<sup>4</sup> – a virtual silence about bisexuality was broken. This silence had stretched since Alfred Kinsey’s findings in the late 1940s and early 1950s that ‘only 50 per cent of the population is exclusively heterosexual throughout its adult life, and [...] only 4 per cent of the population is exclusively homosexual throughout its life’, (Kinsey, Pomeroy *et al* 1948: 656) and his development of the ‘Kinsey Scale’. (Ibid: 656-659)<sup>5</sup> While Kinsey’s findings shocked America in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the implications of a bisexual continuum were evidently not addressed, since Mead’s article twenty seven years later reminds readers that: ‘The time has come [...] when we must recognize bisexuality as a normal form of human behavior.’ (Mead 1975: 29)<sup>6</sup>

Before Kinsey, bisexuality was represented and produced in twentieth-century fictional works such as Virginia Woolf’s *Orlando* (Woolf 1928) and Radclyffe Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness*, (Hall 1928) or in sexological works

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<sup>4</sup> This is not to say that there were no writings on bisexuality between Kinsey and Mead, but none that had a widespread readership or effect. Other writings include Fast and Wells 1975, Blumstein and Schwartz 1976, and Bode 1976.

<sup>5</sup> The Kinsey Scale numbers 0 to 6, 0 being exclusively heterosexual, 6 being exclusively homosexual. The ‘true bisexual’ is understood to be a ‘Kinsey 3’, equally attracted to men and to women. (Kinsey, Pomeroy *et al* 1948: 656-7)

<sup>6</sup> It is not clear precisely *why* there was such a long silence about bisexuality from 1953 until the late 1970s. Work on bisexuality in this period still needs to be done. Gayle Rubin has written on probable causes of silence and repression of deviant sexual behaviour in the 1950s and 1960s. (Rubin 1984: 269-291) Rubin’s influential piece does not include bisexuality as a

such as Wilhelm Stekel's *Bisexual Love*. (Stekel 1934) *Orlando* represented and confirmed the medical view of bisexuality as a mélange of male and female, masculine and feminine traits in one body. *The Well of Loneliness* may seem an unlikely choice of early twentieth century bisexual representation and production, given its prominent role within the canon of lesbian fiction. Bisexuality is that human propensity which allows Mary Llewellyn<sup>7</sup> to be attracted to both women and men, however: it both explains and enables her return to the heterosexuality at the end of the novel.<sup>8</sup>

After the late 1970s, bisexuality seems to disappear once again as a public subject of discussion. There is virtually no writing on bisexuality as a viable personal and political concern and choice until the early 1990s. In the last few years there has been an 'explosion' of bisexual writing in the US and the UK, begun by Loraine Hutchins and Lani Ka'ahumanu's *Bi Any Other Name: Bisexual People Speak Out* in 1991. (Hutchins and Ka'ahumanu 1991) This bisexual 'explosion' has been particularly notable in the US, and has primarily taken the form of edited anthologies of personal histories or political perspectives.<sup>9</sup> In the UK, Sue George's *Women and Bisexuality* was the first non-edited book to be published on women's bisexuality for almost fifteen years, and is still one of the few British books on the subject, (George 1993) and the Off Pink Collective have published two volumes of bisexual narrative – *Bisexual*

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'deviant' sexuality, however.

<sup>7</sup> Llewellyn is the feminine lover of the novel's masculine protagonist, Stephen Gordon.

<sup>8</sup> This 'traitorous moment' has haunted twentieth century lesbian femmes ever since, and, more recently, has established a conflicted relationship between femme and bisexual identities. I discuss Mary Llewellyn as the 'bisexual subject-in-waiting' in 'Waiting For No Man: Bisexual Femme Subjectivity and Cultural Repudiation'. (Hemmings 1997) I am aware that *The Well of Loneliness* can also be read as a transsexual autobiographical narrative, (Prosser 1998) in which case our understanding of Mary shifts once again.

<sup>9</sup> In addition to *Bi Any Other Name* see *Closer to Home: Bisexuality and Feminism*, (Weise 1992) *Bisexual Politics: Theories, Queeries, and Visions*, (Tucker 1995) and *Plural Desires: Writing Bisexual Women's Realities*. (The Bisexual Anthology Collective 1995). The latter is Canadian.

*Lives* (Off Pink Collective 1988) and *Bisexual Horizons*. (Rose, Stevens et al 1995)

Despite the lack of bisexual publications, local and national bisexual activism increased dramatically in the 1980s in both the UK and the US. In the UK there are currently twenty-four local bisexual groups; a national bisexual women's network; a national bisexual phonenumber; a national HIV and AIDS education and action group, Bisexual Action on Sexual Health (BASH); a national SM bisexual group and newsletter, *Ungagged*; and a national bisexual youth network, Biscuits. (*Bi Community News* 1997: 11-12) The national magazine *Bifrost* folded in 1995, but has been replaced by the monthly *Bi Community News*. The UK National Bisexual Conference is held every September, attracting between 300 and 400 people annually.<sup>10</sup> In the US there are local bisexual groups in almost every large city; a national bisexual network (BiNet); and a national magazine *Anything That Moves*.<sup>11</sup> The 1<sup>st</sup> National Bisexual Conference in the US was held in San Francisco in July 1990;<sup>12</sup> the 5<sup>th</sup> National Bisexual Conference will be held in Boston in April 1998.<sup>13</sup> Bisexual space has also been created on the internet, with user-lists and net-sites proliferating.<sup>14</sup> This burgeoning of bisexual community can be linked to the plethora of bisexual anthologies in the 1990s.

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<sup>10</sup> In 1997, the 15<sup>th</sup> National Bisexual Conference was held in London. I discuss the creation of bisexual conference spaces in the US in Chapter Four.

<sup>11</sup> *Anything That Moves* is a relatively glossy magazine, with feature articles, national and local advertisers, and its own merchandise. *Bi Community News* looks more like a local newsletter. Figures 1 and 2 show two covers from summer 1996 – from *Bi Community News*, and *Anything That Moves* respectively – which indicate the different levels of financial investment in each magazine.

<sup>12</sup> Archive material from this conference forms the basis for Chapter Four.

<sup>13</sup> National Bisexual Conferences began much later in the US, and take place less regularly than in the UK. For reasons of distance, it is more difficult to organise a National Bisexual Conference in the US, and more difficult and more expensive for delegates to attend, than in the UK.

<sup>14</sup> These include *biact-l* (bisexual activism), *bisexu-l* (bisexuality), *bifem-l* (bisexual women) and *bithry-l* (bisexual theory). See *Anything That Moves* Issue #10 (1996) for details of

Figure 1. Front Cover, *Bi Community News* (1996) Issue 8, June.

Bi Community News  
 BM Ribbit, London WC1N  
 3XX, e-mail: 100523.2521  
 @compuserve.  
 com

# Bi Community News

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We intend to be  
 answerable to the  
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Inside: Gay men having sex with women (and  
 lesbians who do it with men) • The truth about  
 bisexually active men • BiCon '96 • and lots more

## What We Want From Pride

'I don't think a change of name is going  
 to produce and overnight change in the event  
 itself. I'd like to believe that I could go to Pride

now as a mixed-  
 sex bisexual  
 couple without  
 getting a load of  
 smart-arsed  
 remarks from  
 lesbians and gay  
 men. It might  
 happen but we're  
 a long way off yet.'

'I don't care what happens as long as those  
 big, tough dykes protect me from any  
 homophobes (like last year).'

'I just saw this TV advert featuring a man  
 dressed in fetish gear telling his shocked wife  
 he was "out and proud." It was an advert for  
 Apple Tango. That says it all really. Pride isn't  
 much more than a marketing opportunity for

leisure products. Maybe bisexuals now will get  
 to be a recognised consumer group. I'm not  
 saying that's not important, but in the end it's

just not enough.'

'I always look  
 forward to Pride  
 and this year is the  
 first of a new era.  
 I'm not expecting  
 too much in terms  
 of organisation for  
 bisexuals as there  
 are clearly some

problems. I guess this isn't surprising as it's  
 hard to start from scratch. I'm just  
 anticipating a feeling of power and solidarity  
 marching with hundreds of other bisexuals  
 amidst thousands of queers. I can't wait!'

'I want every gay man and every lesbian to  
 recognise me as an equal, and to understand  
 who and what I am. Ha! Fat chance!'

**'Maybe the opportunity to  
 party alongside gay men at  
 Pride on an officially equal  
 footing will mean that  
 bisexual men will finally learn  
 some dress sense and shave  
 off those fucking beards.'**

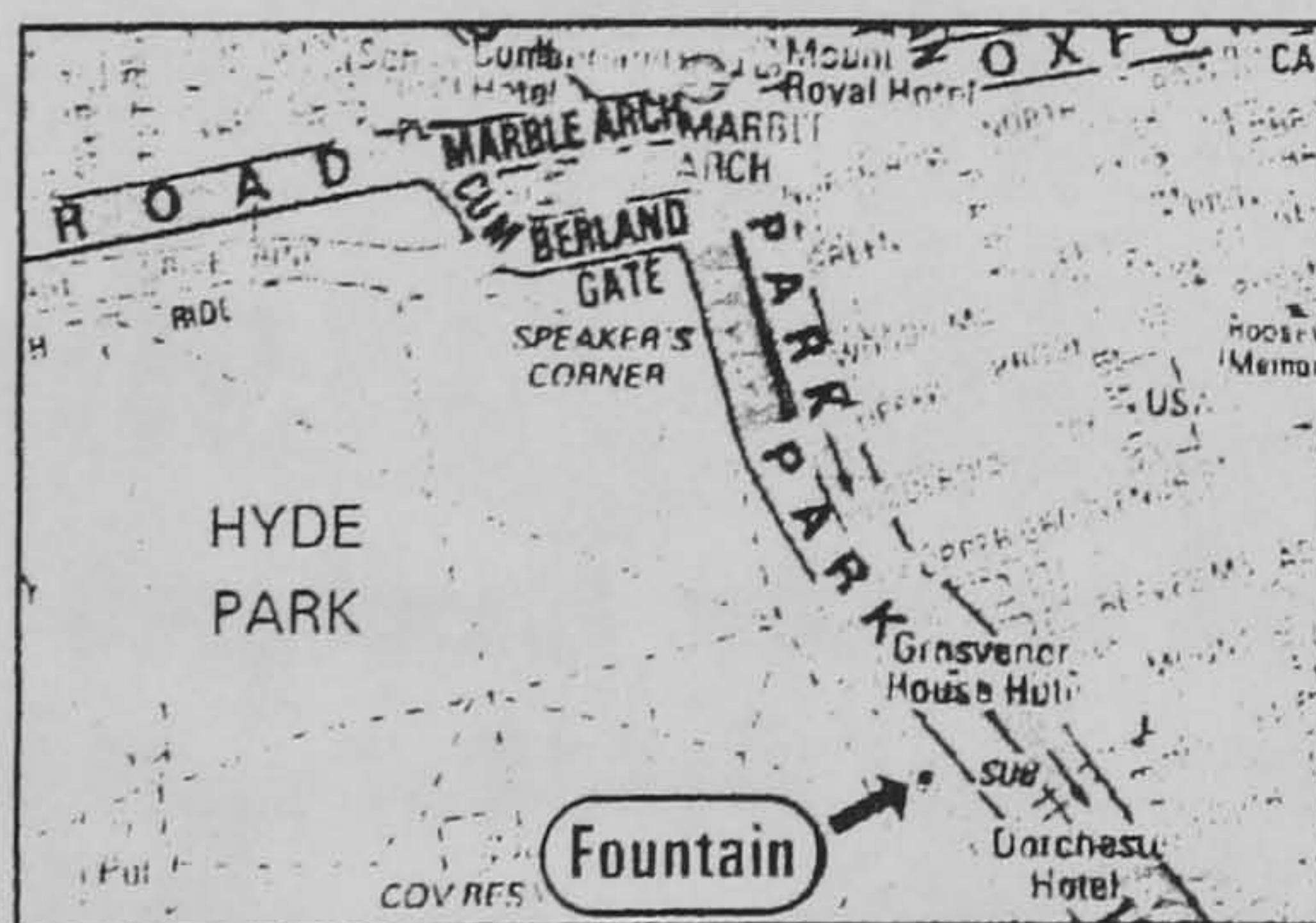
## Bisexuals March On Pride

This is the first year we've officially got the  
 seal of approval. So let's show them how many  
 of us there are, and how loud and vibrant and  
 darn sexy we are.

The Pride Bi Working Group has announced  
 a meeting point for all bisexuals, whether  
 they're representing a group, coming down  
 with friends, or just coming by yourself and  
 want to march with a group. If you join us,  
 we'll all get to march in a section near the  
 front of the march.

Meet between 10 and 11 am (sharp) on the  
 day (Saturday 6th July) at the fountain (see  
 the map below).

Nearest tubes - Marble Arch or Hyde Park  
 Corner. Buses - 2, 10, 16, 73. Wheelchair  
 access via underpass under Park Lane.



## Post-Pride Picnic

Stuck with what to do with the Sunday after  
 Pride, well don't book your tickets back home  
 quite yet. A coalition of bi groups is organising  
 a huge bi picnic.

Groups involved are: BiCon '96, London Bi  
 Group, Bi Women's Group, Bi Community  
 News, SM Bisexuals, Bi Phonenumber,  
 Fencesitters Ball and the Black Bi Group.

Even if you don't fit into any of those  
 groups, you're more than welcome. Bring food  
 and drink to share, as well as a frisbee or  
 umbrella (depending on the weather) for a  
 chance to meet other bisexuals, relax and  
 socialise in the open air.

Meet at 2 pm, Green Park underground  
 station (just past the ticket barriers), or if  
 you're late, we'll be the horde of bisexuals in  
 Green Park near the tube station.

## BCN Introductory Pack Available!

Yup! If you're a subscriber and you want one of  
 our introductory guides to UK bisexuality, then  
 all you need to do is drop us a note or e-mail,  
 and we'll send you one with your next issue.  
 It's crammed full of first-person accounts of  
 life, information and resources.

If you belong to a group, or phonenumber, send  
 us an SAE, and we'll send one on to the group.

Figure 2. Front Cover, *Anything That Moves: The magazine for the Card-Carrying Bisexual* (1996) Issue #11, Summer.

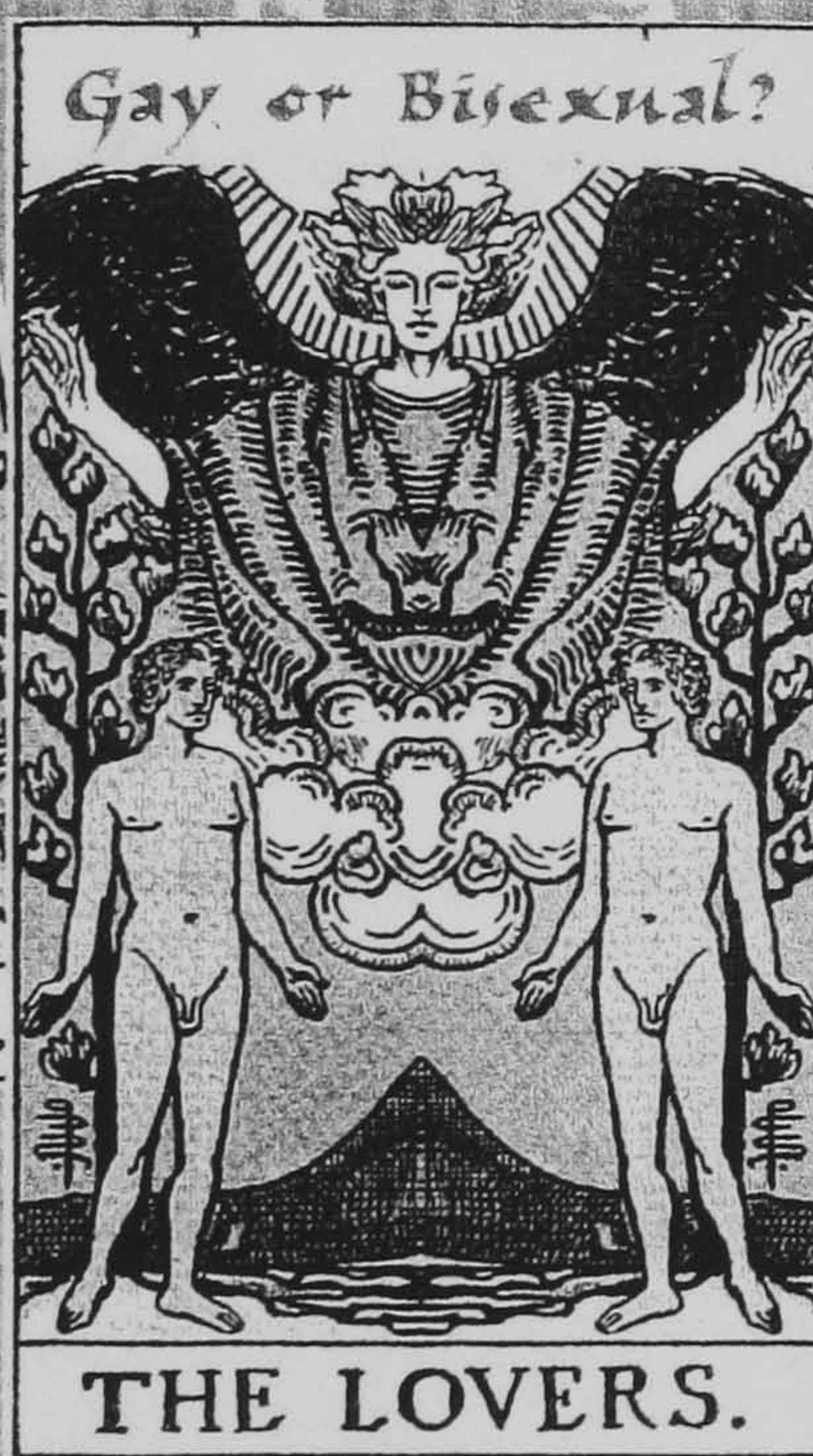
Issue #11  
Summer  
1996

# ANYTHING

\$6.00

# THAT MOVES

The Magazine for the Card-Carrying Bisexual



## Inside

**D.C. Deepthroat takes on Republican Rep. Bob Inglis!**

**Same Gender Marriage is Already Legal in the US — We're Not Kidding!**  
**A Fat, Vulgar, Angry Slut!**      **Sexual Others from Behind the Iron Curtain**

**More! More! More!**

This increased activism, however, is not matched by a parallel interest in bisexual theory, which is still relatively scarce when compared with the burgeoning of lesbian and gay or 'queer' volumes in the 1990s. When I began thinking about bisexual theory in 1991 there were no undergraduate or graduate courses on bisexuality in the UK or the US.<sup>15</sup> Robyn Ochs' undergraduate course – 'Contexts and Constructs of Identity: Bisexuality' – at Tufts University in 1992, was (as far as I know) the first course offered with bisexuality as its core topic.<sup>16</sup> And the bisexual anthologies of the 1990s were personally interesting to me, but offered little in the way of theoretical vision.

In the last few years, however, bisexual theorising has begun to make its mark within academia. In 1992 Elizabeth Däumer published her 'Queer Ethics; or, The Challenge of Bisexuality to Lesbian Ethics'. (Däumer 1992) This was the first US or UK publication to theorise bisexuality in relation to queer and feminist theory, and swiftly became one of the most influential articles for the development of British bisexual theory.<sup>17</sup> In the UK in 1993, several bisexual writers, researchers and academics (including myself) met at the 11<sup>th</sup> National Bisexual conference in Nottingham, and formed the national network for research on bisexuality, Bi-Academic Intervention. In its first two years Bi-Academic Intervention held three one-day conferences and distributed a regular(ish) newsletter, providing a valuable space for bisexual theorists to develop and share

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<sup>15</sup> At the 'Activating Theory: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual Politics' conference at the University of York in 1991, Ann Kaloski and I co-ordinated a workshop on women and bisexuality. One section of the workshop asked the question 'what is bisexual theorising?' to which no one had even tentative suggestions. At that stage, the very possibility of theorising bisexuality in a consistent way seemed difficult to imagine.

<sup>16</sup> Robyn Ochs' course on bisexuality was offered again in 1996, under the slightly amended title of 'Identity/Politics: Bisexuality in Context'. A separate course on bisexuality is not the only measure of bisexual theory being taken seriously, of course. But most of the course outlines I have seen within lesbian and gay or sexuality studies do little more than gesture towards bisexuality as a central contemporary concern.

<sup>17</sup> Däumer's title situates both her writing and bisexuality as part of a queer narrative that sees itself in opposition to (radical) lesbian/feminism.

their ideas.<sup>18</sup> More recently two edited volumes of bisexual theory have been published: *RePresenting Bisexualities: Subjects and Culture of Fluid Desire* (Hall and Pramaggiore 1996)<sup>19</sup> in the US, and *The Bisexual Imaginary: Representation, Desire and Identity* (Bi Academic Intervention 1997) in the UK. Bi Academic Intervention also produced a US journal special edition on bisexual theory. (Morris and Storr 1997)<sup>20</sup> Bisexual writers are also increasingly being asked to submit their work to anthologies which do not prioritise bisexuality, but which do consider a bisexual perspective to be a useful and necessary one.<sup>21</sup>

Two established academics have also demonstrated their critical interest in bisexuality recently. Marjorie Garber's epic *Vice Versa: Bisexuality and the Eroticism of Everyday Life* was published in the summer of 1995. (Garber 1995) The sheer range of Garber's book is staggering. She discusses bisexuality's role within sexology, psychoanalysis and psychology, its function in relation to literature, art and culture, and the farthest reaches of its possible meanings (is sexual attraction to a grapefruit bisexual attraction?). Garber's work is unlikely to change many queer scholars' minds about the importance of bisexual theory to sexuality studies, however. *Vice Versa* is extremely well referenced, engaging in

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<sup>18</sup> The last Bi-Academic Intervention day conference was 'Performing Bisexualities', at the University of York, November 1995. See Figure 3 for the flyer for this day conference.

<sup>19</sup> In Chapter Four I engage with Michael du Plessis' article in this volume, in terms of his advocacy of a bisexual 'middle ground'. (du Plessis 1996)

<sup>20</sup> Bi Academic Intervention is currently idle, though it may be revived once key members have finished their PhD theses!

<sup>21</sup> One of the first 'queer' volumes that included bisexuality in its title and two articles addressing bisexuality was *Activating Theory: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual Politics*. (Bristow and Wilson 1993) Other recent anthologies to include articles on bisexuality include: *Feminist Nightmares: Women at Odds*; (Weisser and Fleischner 1994) *Mapping Desire: Geographies of Sexualities*; (Bell and Valentine 1995) *Anti-Gay*; (Simpson 1996) *Queer Studies: A Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Anthology*; (Beemyn and Eliasan 1996) *Queers in Space: Communities, Public Places, Sites of Resistance*; (Ingram, Bouthillette and Retter 1997) *Playing With Fire: Queer Politics, Queer Theories*; (Phelan 1997) *Butch/Femme: Inside Lesbian Gender*; (Munt 1997) and *Lesbian and Gay Studies: A Critical Introduction*. (Medhurst and Munt 1997) Aside from *Activating Theory* and the *Queer Studies* anthology, all of these anthologies include just one (token?) article on bisexuality. The *Journal of Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Identity*, edited by Warren Blumenfeld, regularly includes articles on bisexuality, and

Figure 3. Flyer (1995) 'Performing Bisexuality', 4<sup>th</sup> Bi-Academic Dayschool, Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> November 1995, University of York.

4<sup>th</sup>  
**BI-ACADEMIC INTERVENTION  
 DAYSCHOOL**

theme:  
**PERFORMING  
 BISEXUALITY**

**(or, making a song & dance of our desires...)**

**A small, informal & supportive day of papers, workshops,  
 performance & discussion which aims to stimulate thinking  
 around bisexuality and the visual & performing arts.**

topics include:

- SINGING & SONGWRITING - DRESSING UP -
- DANCE & DESIRE - TRANSEXUALITY -
- PHOTOGRAPHY - BISEXUAL IMAGES -

**Saturday 18th November 1995  
 University of York  
 9.30 - 5.00**

to book, or for further details, contact:  
 Ann Kaloski, Bi-academic Intervention,  
 Centre for Women's Studies, University of York, YORK YO1 5DD  
 e.mail: eakn1@york.ac.uk  
 (send cheque made payable to 'Ann Kaloski'  
 for £2/£3/£4/£5 - unwaged/low/reasonable/high income)

Room D/056

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has four bisexual researchers on its editorial board.



tone, and pleasurable to read, but could scarcely be considered theoretically rigorous. Garber uses a number of different bisexual meanings interchangeably, and presents bisexuality as the ‘answer’ to restrictive notions of sexuality and society generally. (Garber 1995: 15-16, 206, 156)<sup>22</sup> Yet, given Garber’s reputation and the large number of positive early reviews,<sup>23</sup> it seems likely that *Vice Versa* will appear on student reading-lists and clear some space for a consideration of bisexual theory, if not within lesbian and gay/queer studies, then quite probably within cultural studies and film studies.<sup>24</sup>

Jonathan Dollimore has also begun to explore possible ways of theorising bisexuality. In ‘Bisexuality, Heterosexuality, and Wishful Theory’, (Dollimore 1996) Dollimore documents the defensive position bisexual theorists have been forced into, and relentlessly critiques the tendency of some bisexual theorists (myself included) to be ‘more postmodern than thou’ in the attempt to bring bisexuality queer recognition. (Ibid: 525, 527-9) Instead, Dollimore suggests that we follow Garber in confronting ‘the challenges and difficulties of the actual desiring encounter with difference, as distinct from the comfortable theoretical invocation of it.’ (Ibid: 529)<sup>25</sup> As I argue later in this chapter, Dollimore’s position is a useful progression for bisexual theory, though not without problems of its own.

This increased political and theoretical attention to bisexuality has meant that the term ‘bisexual’ is now frequently invoked by lesbian and gay theorists,

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<sup>22</sup> I discuss Garber’s work on bisexuality further later in this chapter and in Chapter Three.

<sup>23</sup> For reviews of *Vice Versa* see: (in the US) Kermode 1995 and White 1995; (in the UK) Melly 1996, Johnson 1996 and Clarke 1996. All these reviews rave about Garber’s ability to engage the reader and rekindle interest in bisexuality.

<sup>24</sup> My own work places bisexuality between, part of, or allied to lesbian and gay/queer studies and women’s studies, though I do not see this as foreclosing other bisexual positionings. I discuss the interdisciplinary placing of bisexual research in Section Three of this chapter.

<sup>25</sup> Dollimore’s article is reprinted in *Lesbian and Gay Studies: A Critical Introduction* and so seems likely to become a frequently cited bisexual text. (Dollimore 1997)

although their attention usually remains restricted to the gloss ‘lesbian, gay and bisexual’. (Fuss 1991: 2; de Lauretis 1991: iv) It is rare, however, for non-bisexuals to theorise bisexuality other than to illustrate a related point. For example, in *Getting Specific: Postmodern Lesbian Politics*, lesbian theorist Shane Phelan makes the quite remarkable statement that for lesbian community to understand its own history it will need to acknowledge ‘“bisexuality,” the inevitable supplement of sexual categorizing, at the *center* of lesbian experience.’ (Phelan 1994: 96, my italics) Yet, ironically enough, Phelan herself only mentions bisexuality twice in her book, the second time to stress, once again, that bisexuals ‘introduce another other, not at the margin but at the *heart* of lesbian theory.’ (Ibid: 152, my italics) Two exceptions to this invoking of ‘the supplemental bisexual’ are Pat Califia’s *Public Sex* (Califia 1994) and Julia Creet’s ‘Anxieties of identity: Coming Out and Coming Undone’. (Creet 1995) Both writers interrogate the founding of lesbian desire and identity on bisexual repression, and (in particular Creet) advocate the acknowledgement of bisexuality as an important part of the process of creating a conscious, non-Freudian lesbian sexuality. (Califia 1994: 183-190; Creet 1995: 186)<sup>26</sup>

### ‘Minefields’

The lack of bisexual theorising can be partially attributed to the range of seemingly contradictory meanings that the term ‘bisexual’ carries. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick asks the following questions about bisexuality on an email discussion list:

Could we ask, about a concept like bisexuality that is gaining new currency, NOT so much ‘What does it *\*really\** mean?’ or ‘Who owns it and are they good or bad?’, but ‘What does it *\*do\**?’ – what does it make happen? – what (in the ways that it is being or *\*could be\** used) does it

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<sup>26</sup> I discuss this and other work of Califia’s in Chapter Two, Section Two and in Chapter Three, Section One. I discuss Creet’s article in Chapter Three, Section One.

make easier or harder for people of various kinds to accomplish and think? (Sedgwick 1994, author's emphases)

Sedgwick's line of questioning is extremely useful: it moves us away from absolute definition and possession, and towards an understanding of bisexuality gaining meaning through its *function*. Sedgwick's angle allows us to ask: What meanings of bisexuality circulate currently? Could it be used differently, and, hence, come to *mean* something different?

So many definitions of bisexuality proliferate in twentieth-century UK and US culture, that merely disentangling one meaning from another is a mammoth task. Malcolm Bowie's definition in *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: A Critical Dictionary* provides the three most common definitions of bisexuality:

**bisexuality** This term has at least three current meanings, and these can easily produce confusion. As used by Darwin and his contemporaries it presented an exclusively biological notion, synonymous with hermaphroditism, and referred to the presence within an organism of male and female characteristics. This meaning persists. Secondly, bisexuality denotes the co-presence in the human individual of 'feminine' and 'masculine' psychological characteristics. Thirdly, and most commonly, it is used of the propensity of certain individuals to be sexually attracted to both men and women. (Bowie 1992: 26)

As I suggested at the beginning of this chapter, *Orlando* and *The Well of Loneliness* represent and reproduce these three meanings of bisexuality in 1928. Kinsey recognises these meanings but disputes the association of bisexuality with intersexuality, hermaphroditism or androgyny, (Kinsey 1948: 657) preferring to think of heterosexual, bisexual and homosexual as adjectives qualifying sexual behaviour rather than as predisposition. (Ibid) Kinsey's warnings have not been heeded, however,<sup>27</sup> and all three meanings retain their currency today.

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<sup>27</sup> In a breathtaking presentiment of queer theory's emphasis on behaviour not identity, (e.g. Sedgwick 1990) Kinsey remarks that: '[the term bisexual] should, however, be used with the understanding that it is patterned on the words heterosexual and homosexual and, like them, refers to the sex of the partner, and proves nothing about the constitution of the person who is

The three meanings of bisexuality that Bowie identifies combine in particular ways to make conceiving of an adult bisexual identity – a possible fourth and more contemporary meaning – difficult. For example, in a recent class I taught on bisexuality, a number of students validated their perception that ‘we’re all bisexual really’ by reference to the increased acceptance of androgyny in night-clubs, which meant that the gender of the person they desired was not always clear. None of these students acted contrary to their sexual identity, however. Their latent bisexuality allowed heterosexual or homosexual desire for either sex to surface; they could appreciate the ‘other side’ of themselves. A bisexual potential functions here as *inclusive of* heterosexual and homosexual desires, and gendered ambiguity, but it does not lead to an adult bisexual identity.

There are a number of structural reasons why bisexuality is rarely conceived of as an adult sexuality. Firstly, the sex or gender of sexual-object-choice cannot signify bisexuality, where for heterosexuals, gay men and lesbians it can. Although we know that factors other than gendered sexual-object-choice do, of course, influence sexual identity, it is rare for these to be seen as the *defining* factor of sexual identity.<sup>28</sup> In an ‘inversion’ schema where masculinity and femininity must remain sexual complements irrespective of heterosexual or

---

labelled bisexual.’ (Ibid) It seems to me that Kinsey’s work is a valuable resource much under-exploited by contemporary theorists.

<sup>28</sup> For example, people whose sexualities are formed primarily through fetishism or sadomasochism, or intergenerational or inter-racial dynamics, are difficult to account for. Their behaviour is rationalised as a secondary ‘deviation’ of the sexual aim. Freud discusses some of these in ‘Deviations in Respect of the Sexual Aim’, acknowledging that some degree of fetishism, for example, is ‘habitually present in normal love’. (Freud 1905: 66) Freud believes that such a deviation becomes pathological only ‘when the longing for the fetish passes beyond the point of being merely a necessary condition attached to the sexual object and actually takes the place of the normal aim’. (Ibid:66-67) Within contemporary lesbian and gay politics and theory, it is only in the last decade – with the US and UK ‘sex wars’ and the attack on SM practices by the British legal system in 1990 (Bell 1995: 304-317) – that SM and fetishism have been taken on as sexual identities by some practitioners of those acts. Such moves help to expose the fallacy that the sexual self is formed through sex and gender alone, although even people who identify as sadomasochists commonly still consider themselves lesbian, gay or straight.

homosexual object-choice, bisexuals' inconsistent sexual-object-choice presents further structural difficulties. Lesbian or gay male sexuality can be theoretically heterosexualised through such terms as 'mannish woman' and 'effeminate man', and by association with their correlate 'opposite-gendered' object-choices.<sup>29</sup> If one's gendered subject position determines and is determined by a consistent opposite-gendered object-choice, a bisexual's structural lack of finite object-choice<sup>30</sup> throws her or his own gendered position into question: a 'sometimes mannish bisexual woman'? It doesn't have quite the same ring to it!

Neither does the 'bisexual subject'<sup>31</sup> structurally display the requisite consistency of object-choice *over time*. The formation of sexual identity requires not only that one make a particular gendered and sexed object choice but that one *continues* to make that choice. The present can only be validated by the anticipated future, which can only be validated by a past that is retrospectively given meaning according to the present. One is allowed 'mistakes' as long as they are seen *as* mistakes, as an interruption to the narrative of one's true sexual identity. Contemporary lesbian and gay 'coming out' narratives commonly follow this chronology, taking the form of either (i) a story of innate but repressed homosexuality uncovered or (ii) a conversion story of transformation from previous ignorance.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, bisexuals strive to create a "before" and "after" that lends validity to their present self-perception: "For the first time I felt

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<sup>29</sup> I am not suggesting that butch/femme lesbian desires necessarily conform to heterosexual models of sexual identity formation. In the latter, the mannish woman is the invert while the feminine object of her desire is a misguided heterosexual waiting to be cured. In non-heterosexual butch/femme the femme's desire is also understood to be queer and it may be that she does not desire masculinity at all.

<sup>30</sup> I stress the *structural* inconsistency here, because bisexuals may have consistent object-choice through time.

<sup>31</sup> I use scare quotes here to propose a bisexual subject despite the fact that the structures of sexual identity I am examining work to preclude such a subject.

<sup>32</sup> Some versions of the coming-out narrative combine these two elements. (e.g. Malin 1994) For both critique and celebration of lesbian coming-out narratives see Kaloski 1997 and Creet 1994.

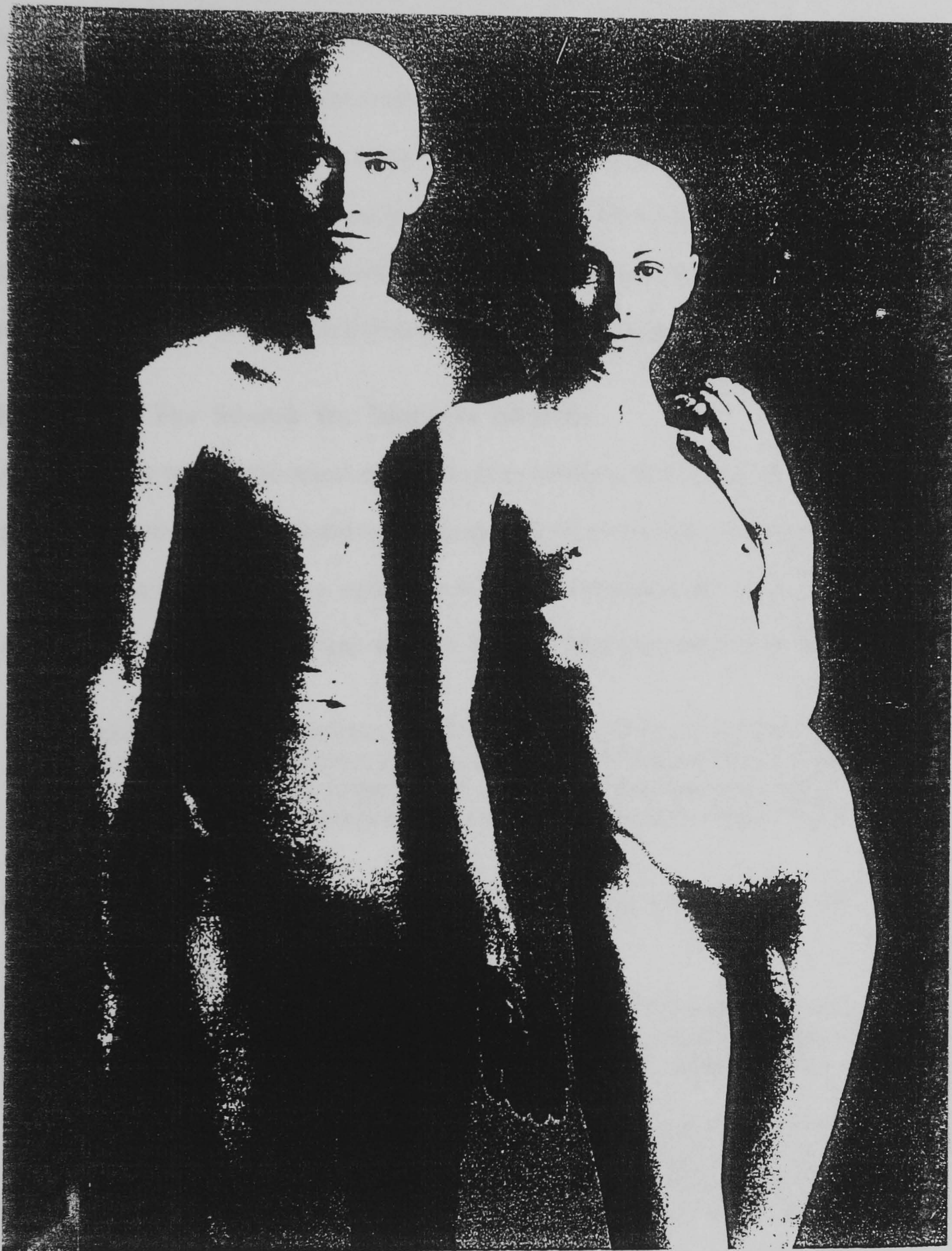
like a whole person” ’; (Gregory 1983: 150) ‘ “[m]y sexuality has caused me problems because it was too broad to be acceptable to me, as I was trying to force it into narrow definitions – first heterosexual, and second, lesbian” ’. (Ibid) The above examples follow much the same ‘redemptive line’ as lesbian and gay narratives since they claim an innate but repressed bisexual self and/or a moment of bisexual revelation. Inevitably – in order to complete the myth of an authentic chronologically-validated bisexual self – lasting attractions to people of both sexes figure prominently in bisexual self-narratives. One of the contributors to the volume *Bisexual Lives* tells the story of her bisexuality via a list of her various lovers: ‘Amanda (for two and a half years), Paul (for four and a half years)’ etc. (Clare, in Off Pink Publishing 1988: 27) The impression we are surely meant to be left with is that here is a *real* bisexual, dedicated to multiple object-choices of both sexes, steadfast in her endlessly mutable, never-satisfied bisexual desire. It is but a short step from here to the stereotype of the bisexual as necessarily non-monogamous and only representable in threes. Even supposing that all bisexual desire were expressed through the simultaneous, unbroken desire for both sexes, however, the gender complementarity necessary for bisexual desire to be heterosexualised could not be completed (because there are three participants, not two). A ‘bisexual chronology’ such as Clare’s still does not lead to the end-point of the appropriate sexual and gendered subjectivity.

Our ‘bisexual subject’, then, cannot be structurally produced or endorsed through gender of sexual-object-choice, gendered subject position or chronology of sexual identity, and hence cannot be understood as an adult sexual identity under these terms. It is thus that bisexuality is produced as hermaphrodite, androgyne, or as the potential that precedes adult sexual choice.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Figure 4 shows a contemporary representation of this notion of bisexuality as hermaphrodite, androgyne, and ‘human potential’. (O’Sullivan, in Raven 1995: 11) Effectively, this image is

Figure 4. Photograph by Tim O'Sullivan, in Charlotte Raven (1995) 'Swap Shop', 'Future Sex', *Observer Life*, 15 October: 11.



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both an attempt to represent a bisexual body, and the desire that determines that body. One or other figure would not be a representation of bisexuality per se, but perhaps transsexuality. I return to this image in Chapter 3, where I am concerned more particularly with the representation of bisexuality within contemporary feminist and lesbian/gay/queer discourses.

As a consequence, contemporary adult bisexuality is frequently understood in terms of behaviour alone,<sup>34</sup> and is denied legitimacy in terms of sexual identity politics. For example, lesbian/feminist theorist Claudia Card argues that a ‘bisexual’ woman is ‘a good example of inauthenticity in a lesbian.’ (Card 1985: 213)<sup>35</sup> To return to Kinsey, his research found that a large number of American men and women behave bisexually to some degree. However, this ‘bisexuality’ could only be made sense of as indicative of one’s relative proximity to the nevertheless oppositional poles of heterosexuality and homosexuality.<sup>36</sup>

### **Part Two: The Search for Bisexual Identity**

As a response to this structural and cultural exclusion, most bisexual writers argue that bisexuality is a valid sexual identity in its own right, with its own internal consistency, its own ‘coming out’ narratives (discussed above) and its own unique (and often separate) culture. Despite Mead’s assertion in 1975 that

there is not, and it seems unlikely that there will be, a bisexual liberation movement. For the truth is, bisexual men and women do not form a distinct group, since in fact we do not really recognize bisexuality as a form of behavior, normal or abnormal, in our society (Mead 1975: 29)

bisexual theorists frequently adopt identity and visibility tropes to advance

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<sup>34</sup> This production of bisexuality as sexual behaviour rather than identity partly informs more recent understandings of bisexuality as only sexual, and therefore as apolitical. I explore the construction of bisexuality through its association with ‘the sexual’ further in Chapter Two, Section Two, Part One.

<sup>35</sup> A similar view of bisexuality in women as lacking the requisite loyalty for a valid sexual and political identity is expressed by Marilyn Frye when she says that ‘[l]oyalty and identity are so closely connected as to be almost just two aspects of the one phenomenon’. (Frye 1985: 216) Both Frye’s and Card’s articles are discussed by Mariam Fraser in ‘Lose Your Face’. (Fraser 1997: 39-44, 46-49)

<sup>36</sup> Curiously, in this context, bisexuality can become stripped of sexuality in itself, while being seen as the ‘tie that binds’ the two oppositional poles of heterosexuality and homosexuality. Bisexuality is both only sexual, and also asexual. If to be a Kinsey 3 is to be equally attracted to men and women, i.e. completely bisexual, it is also to be equally *unattracted* to men and women, i.e. completely asexual. Bisexuality is never about two, only about one – asexual, or self-fulfilling – or three – continuously and equally attracted to both men and women. (Kinsey, Pomeroy et al 1948: 636-659; and 1953: 468-476)



notions of a discrete bisexual identity and community.

Bisexual activists and researchers have begun to use the concept of 'monosexuality' to distinguish between bisexuals (who desire more than one sex) and monosexuals<sup>37</sup> (who do not), and thus create a sense of common bisexual ground:

It may be [...] appropriate to regard those for whom sex/gender is a deciding factor in selecting or ruling out partners (homosexuals and heterosexuals, sometimes collectively referred to as monosexuals) as more similar to each other than either is to those bisexuals for whom sex/gender is of little or no importance or relevance in their relationship choices. (Highleyman 1995: 86)

Not only are bisexuals linked by their difference from monosexuals, we are also uniquely oppressed by 'monosexism' – 'the belief that people can and should be attracted to only one sex/gender and that there is something wrong with those who cannot or will not choose'. (Ibid: 87)<sup>38</sup> A rather cynical reading of Mead and Highleyman together suggests that bisexuals need their behaviour to be pathologised ('there is something wrong' with us) in order to secure a group identity from which to assert the normality of bisexuality.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> 'Monosexual' is defined in *Bi Any Other Name* as: 'a term used for both heterosexuals and homosexuals – i.e., all people who love only one gender and take for granted the sexual dichotomy set up by the patriarchy. Bisexuality calls this system of categories and divisions into question.' (Hutchins and Ka'ahumanu 1991: 370) Garber quotes Wilhelm Stekel as declaring in 1934: '“*There is only bisexuality [...] There are no monosexual persons!*”' (Garber 1995: 202, italics in the original) While clearly Stekel creates a mutually exclusive opposition between the two terms, he does not believe 'monosexuals' to be real or genuine, where in the more recent definition and use they are.

<sup>38</sup> I agree that the assumption that one is either lesbian/gay or straight is damaging or even fatal in terms of lack of adequate HIV+/AIDS prevention material aimed at people who have sex with men and women. (Farajajé-Jones 1995: 119-121) However, the monosexual/bisexual opposition effectively erases the differences between lesbians and gay men and heterosexuals. In a bid to claim minority status, the fact that lesbians and gay men do not have the same definitional, social or economic power as heterosexuals is conveniently ignored. (Blumenfeld and Hemmings 1996: 319)

<sup>39</sup> Ironically enough, advocates of a 'monosexual'/bisexual definitional framework are, in fact, rejecting a political model in favour of a psychoanalytic one. As Stekel declares, (see endnote 36) and Highleyman implies above, monosexuals disavow heterosexual or homosexual desire. To endorse the bisexual/'monosexual' relation is to reassert a Freudian understanding of

The second way in which bisexual writers lend credibility to a bisexual identity is by constructing bisexuality as *more* authentic than lesbian, gay or straight sexualities. Thus, bisexuals have been erased from history, wrongly represented, and politically decried, not because bisexuality is rare, but because it is everywhere repressed.<sup>40</sup> Garber extends this maxim to its logical conclusion, insisting that sexuality and bisexuality are, in fact, synonymous, and, further, that '[b]isexuality is that upon the repression of which society depends for its laws, codes, boundaries, social organization – everything that defines “civilization” as we know it.' (Garber 1995: 206)<sup>41</sup> The history of sexuality is rewritten through a process of bisexual reclamation and naming that is itself a rewriting of the lesbian and gay liberation maxim: 'We Are Everywhere!' (Désert 1997: 20). Sappho, Oscar Wilde,<sup>42</sup> and Virginia Woolf are all being reclaimed as

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bisexuality as the pre-Oedipal ground from which 'monosexual' object-choice develops, an understanding that precludes a consideration of adult bisexual identity-development.

<sup>40</sup> Two of the main proponents of bisexuality as historically (and currently) erased and wrongly represented are Sue George and Amanda Udis-Kessler. (George 1993; Udis-Kessler 1996) In 'Challenging the Stereotypes' Udis-Kessler sees negative stereotypes of bisexuals as wholly erroneous, and in no way productive of 'true bisexuality'. (Ibid: 45-57) The editors of *The Bisexual Imaginary* write that the contemporary task is not to 'ditch' negative stereotypes and replace them with more 'truthful' representations, (Bi Academic Intervention 1997: 3-4) but to conduct analyses of 'the ways in which [bisexual] meanings accrue; and [to ask] what strategies can be used to effect a more useful or enabling range of meanings.' (Ibid: 3-4) The latter approach draws heavily on Michel Foucault's critique of the belief that Victorian sexual repression has given way to a more sexually 'open' twentieth century, (Foucault 1978: esp. 3-13, 42-57) and his attention to the mechanisms of power as endlessly productive rather than repressive. (Ibid: esp. 77-131).

<sup>41</sup> See Chapter Three, Section One, Part Three, for Garber's perception of bisexuality as a transgressive force for change. The difference between Freud and Garber is that Freud does not advocate the 'unrepression' of bisexuality, whereas Garber does. Freud does not envision a world beyond taboo; Garber wants everyone to have equal access to all the possible sexual and erotic pleasures that (bi)sexuality purportedly offers.

<sup>42</sup> Both Klein and Garber highlight Oscar Wilde's relationships with both men and women, Klein in 1978 and Garber in 1995. Klein is unequivocal about his view of Wilde as bisexual. (Klein 1978: 147-148) Garber is aware enough of the theoretical problems of reclaiming from a contemporary standpoint to qualify her documentation of Wilde's erotic as bisexual: 'since Wilde's genius lay in inventing himself as an apostle of perversity, of transgression as such, to "reclaim" him as bisexual instead of gay would be merely to repeat the gesture of fragmentation and compartmentalization, the gesture of essentializing, that is contrary to his own practice and thought.' (Garber 1995: 354-5) Since Garber considers any desire or behaviour that is not either exclusively focused on one sex, or exclusively determined by the sex and

bisexual because of their relationships with more than one biological sex. Re-writing history in this way focuses on substitution rather than re-evaluation of our understanding of sexual identities, and the ways in which we write history in the first place.<sup>43</sup>

The third way that some bisexual writers advance bisexuality as ‘separate’ from other sexualities is to describe it as the ‘critical outside’. This position seeks less to explain or define bisexuality than to locate it on the critical edge (of feminist and lesbian and gay/queer identities, politics and theories, in particular), and as a tool that highlights the structural problems within sexual identity.

Elizabeth Däumer proposes that:

we assume bisexuality, not as an identity that integrates heterosexual and homosexual orientations, but as an epistemological as well as ethical vantage point from which we can examine and deconstruct the bipolar framework of gender and sexuality in which, as feminists and lesbian feminists, we are still too deeply rooted, both because of and despite our struggle against homophobia and sexism. (Däumer 1992: 98)

Mirroring Däumer’s arguments, I wrote in 1993 about a late twentieth-century, feminist ‘bisexual body’ that I envisioned as ‘a signifier of the possible reconfiguration of the relationships between sexes, genders and sexualities’.

(Hemmings 1993: 136) I articulate this bisexual (woman’s) body as a ‘double-agent’ within heterosexual and lesbian communities, and present bisexuality as transferring knowledge rather than being produced by knowledge. Similarly,

Maria Pramaggiore draws on the work of Eve Sedgwick to envision bisexual

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gender of object-choice to be ‘bisexual’, however, and since she does not adequately or consistently distinguish between behaviour and identity, Wilde is, nevertheless, according to her definition, bisexual. A more pragmatic and accurate view of a figure such as Wilde is to say that, however he identified in his lifetime, Wilde is now ‘important in the constitution of a bisexual imaginary *and* a gay imaginary’. (Bi Academic Intervention 1997: 208) I discuss the issue of reclaiming of bisexual identities further in Chapter Three, Section One.

<sup>43</sup> As lesbian historian Lillian Faderman writes: ‘there are no constants with regard to lesbianism, neither in the meaning of love between women nor in the social and political life that is created through it.’ (Faderman 1991: 305)

theory as an ‘epistemology of the fence’ that ‘open[s] up spaces through which to view, through which to pass, and through which to encounter and enact fluid desires.’ (Pramaggiore 1996: 3) For Pramaggiore, ‘fence-sitting’ provides the bisexual with a unique vantage point allowing her ‘to reframe regimes and regions of desire by deframing and/or reframing in porous, nonexclusive ways.’ (Ibid) Such abstract metaphorisations of bisexuality have been critical necessities in the move to theorise bisexuality, but erroneously suggest that bisexuality is not produced by the same structures it critiques.

In fact, the very notion of bisexuality as ‘outside’ is facilitated by existing structures of sexual identity.<sup>44</sup> A queer bisexual perspective may see this position as deconstructive of identity, as a conscious positioning from which to look, rather than a pre-conscious one from which to emerge. Yet the aim is still to delineate the unique, separate insights bisexuality itself has to offer us (even as critical position), rather than critically evaluating bisexual emergence, and its enmeshed relationship with ‘other’, at times inseparable, desires and identities.

Dollimore’s position in ‘Bisexuality, Heterosexuality and Wishful Theory’ (Dollimore 1996)<sup>45</sup> is closer to the one I wish to develop in this thesis. As I outlined earlier, Dollimore rejects defensively-constructed bisexual theory and culture that insists upon bisexuality’s numerous special virtues (including the notion that bisexuals are uniquely placed ‘outside’ of sexual identity structures), dubbing this the ‘wishful theory’ of his article’s title. (528) Dollimore’s interest lies instead in the ‘mass of tangled desires and identifications’ (528) that such theory wishes to disavow, or lay bare. He suggests that bisexual theorising

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<sup>44</sup> Jo Eadie makes a similar point in his article ‘“That’s Why She’s Bisexual”: Contexts for Bisexual Visibility’, when he argues that instead of attempting to place bisexuality outside its stereotyped representation, it would be more fruitful to examine that ‘set of hegemonic conceptions of what bisexuality means which structure for all of us the perception of bisexuality’. (Eadie 1997: 143)

<sup>45</sup> All further references to Dollimore’s article in this chapter are by page reference in the text.

(Williamson 1995)<sup>46</sup> attend to ‘the challenges and difficulties of the actual desiring encounter with difference, as distinct from the comfortable theoretical invocation of it’, (529) a process he sees exemplified in Garber’s work on bisexuality. (Garber 1995) By way of illustration, Dollimore imagines a bisexual scenario in which ‘a bisexual male partakes of a threesome in which he watches a man fucking with a woman.’ (529) Dollimore believes that this bisexual man’s contradictory identifications (he wants to be both the man and the woman; he wants to have both the man and the woman) is what makes his position worthy of our attention, rather than a socio-political perspective that obscures or attempts to resolve his experience. (531)

Janice Williamson’s ‘autobifictograph’, ‘Strained Mixed Fruit’, could be read as a refusal of the bisexual resolution Dollimore deplors. As with the experience of Dollimore’s ‘bisexual man’, resolution within Williamson’s bisexual narrative is always deferred, and never completely satisfying. Thus, when the protagonist is about to ‘come out’ as bisexual, her mother beats her to it by telling her that her best friend made love to her, then claims she did not enjoy it. As her ‘bisexual daughter [...] chokes on the lettuce’ (48) the mother continues:

She was drunk you know. Reminded me of your  
 Father – DRUNK.  
 Perhaps if you tried it again, you might like it.  
 No. I won’t. (49)

When our heroine finally does ‘come out’, her mother tells her she will have ‘an unhappy life’. (49) This common homophobic parental response to children’s queer declarations here reads as more reflective of the protagonist’s mother’s story of sexual misery. The mother interrupts the flow of her daughter’s story

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<sup>46</sup> All further references to ‘Strained Mixed Fruit’ are by page references in the text.

once more by mentioning her own mother, who she thought was a lesbian: 'When she made my clothes, she stood on a chair to fit them to me. / Then she stuck pins in me. Touched my nipples. Made me cry.' (49) Is the protagonist's grandmother an incestuous SM lesbian? Is her mother 'coming out' as an incest survivor? Or is the grandmother a fabrication of the mother's homophobic mind? In terms of narrative, the mother's interruption pre-figures our heroine's second 'coming out' as an incest survivor – '[a]s I begin to work on child sexual abuse narratives and my own suspected incest experiences, I feel some pressure to renounce my sexual past.' (59) In both cases, the protagonist's 'coming outs' can only be understood in relation to her mother's more dramatic declarations, which punctuate and frustrate the former's rather banal narrative, and which do not cohere in a bisexual identity.

Where Williamson differs from Dollimore, however, is in her concern with a bisexual desire that is both psychically complex, but also historically and socially grounded. The protagonist's experiences are explicitly historicised through the 1970s and 1980s, and are set against a backdrop of AIDS, racism, and police violence in Canada, while Dollimore gives us no indication of time or place to guide our reading of the 'bisexual man's' experiences. In order to differentiate himself from 'bisexual wishful theory' Dollimore separates our psychic experience of the erotic from its material or social context. (Dollimore 1996: 531) It becomes clearer, then, why Dollimore should praise Garber's work on bisexuality so highly. Both writers share a generalised sense of bisexual erotic possibility, based on a universal and ahistorical notion of 'the psyche'. Hence, although Garber takes us on a whirlwind tour through history, '[a]gain and again' (529) in Dollimore's words, 'confront[ing] us with the challenges and difficulties of [that] actual desiring encounter with difference,' (529) she returns ('again and again') to the same, ultimately banal, conclusion. Bisexuality is

(everywhere and everytime) repressed, denied and restrained, and is therefore the 'transgressive' other that is psychically bound to surface, is bound to rupture the smooth passage of time and progression of history.

In certain respects, then, I aim to do in this thesis what Williamson does in her 'anti-narrative'; I aim to provide a history of bisexual experience without sacrificing the complex and conflicting ways in which that desire is experienced by the individual or group. Like Garber, I want to focus on the bisexual knowledges produced in the margins of dominant discourse, but I also want to connect those to one another through something other than an assumed bisexual universal. I do not want to find bisexuality everywhere in the same form, but look at its contradictory productions in a number of parallel arenas. This position is in line with a number of the articles in the two recent bisexual theory volumes, *RePresenting Bisexualities: Subjects and Cultures of Fluid Desire* (Hall and Pramaggiore 1996) and *The Bisexual Imaginary: Representation, Identity and Desire*. (Bi Academic Intervention 1997) In *RePresenting Bisexualities*, Frann Michel argues for attention to be paid to bisexual meaning in lesbian butch/femme contexts. (Michel 1996)<sup>47</sup> In *The Bisexual Imaginary*, Jo Eadie's article '“That's Why She's Bisexual”: Contexts for Bisexual Visibility', interrogates bisexual meaning in contemporary film and critiques the search for the visible 'bisexual subject'. (Eadie 1997) Stephanie Device's photo-essays, 'Sometimes It's Hard to Be a Woman/ Caught in the Act', suggest a range of contradictory and irresolvable bisexual meanings within the arena of contemporary sexual and gender politics. (Device 1997) I make regular reference to a number of texts from these two volumes throughout this thesis. Together they constitute a rich, if recent, context for this thesis to build on.

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<sup>47</sup> I return to Michel's work in Chapter Three, Section Two.

Before I develop my position further in Section Two, let me be clear that I do not think that identity narratives are a 'bad' thing. As someone who calls herself bisexual, I attach a narrative of self to that term and make sense of a large number of my experiences through that identity. Such narratives are what enable us to make sense of our sexual selves in a hostile world. In fact, my desire for this 're-imagining' is precisely because of a lack of bisexual narratives emphasising the partiality bisexuals commonly experience, as against narratives emphasising only consistency, identity and community. Bisexual identity narratives do not make sense of the discontinuities and misrepresentations that make up my bisexual life, and are part of my bisexual history. If I were to present my own past as internally consistent, as inexorably leading to the present 'bisexual moment', I would be denying my experience in favour of a one-dimensional gloss to describe my, and all other bisexuals', history. My three years as a lesbian separatist, the times when and the spaces where I am 'read as' something else, the always partial sense of 'homecoming', these things are at the heart of my present sense of self as bisexual, not peripheral to it.



## Section Two: Tracing Contemporary Bisexual Spaces

Do bisexual epistemologies go further than trendiness, charting the politics of sexualities in Western culture, redistricting and redistributing desire, and creating new cartographies for our cultural erotics?  
(Pramaggiore 1996: 2)

Following my engagement with contemporary bisexual theorists above, this section outlines my own approach to theorising bisexuality in contemporary US and UK contexts, and provides the framework within which to read the rest of the thesis. My focus is on the bisexual meanings produced in contemporary cultural and theoretical sexual *spaces*. I am interested in delineating a number of spaces where sexual and gender identities are in negotiation with one another whether or not bisexuality is explicitly named, to create ‘new cartographies for our [*bisexual* theoretical and] cultural erotics’. (Ibid) The study of sexuality and space is a burgeoning area of academic concern influenced by the postmodern shift from analysing social and cultural life through a focus on *time* – grand narratives, linear history and so forth – to centring on ‘the logic of spatial organisation’ (Keith and Pile 1993: 2) – temporary connections, local sites and so forth. Thus, Fredric Jameson argues that ‘our psychic experience, our cultural languages, are today dominated by categories of space rather than categories of time, as in the preceding period of high modernism.’ (Jameson 1991: 16) It is Foucault, however, who is most strongly associated with this ‘spatial shift’ in relation to the study of sexuality and space.

In ‘Of Other Spaces’, Foucault writes on methods for ‘interpret[ing] human geographies as texts and contexts’, (Soja 1995: 14) and discusses the interplay between geographic and historical imaginations: focus in this thesis is on the contemporary bisexual meanings produced in contemporary cultural and theoretical ‘sexual spaces’. I am interested in delineating a number of spaces

where sexual and gender identities are in negotiation with one another whether or not bisexuality is explicitly named, to create ‘new cartographies for our [*bisexual* theoretical and] cultural erotics’. The study of sexuality and space is a burgeoning area of academic concern that has much to do with the postmodern shift from analysing social and cultural life through a focus on *time* (grand narratives, linear history and so forth) to focusing on ‘the logic of spatial organisation’ (Keith and Pile 1993 2) (temporary connections, local sites and so forth). Fredric Jameson is one of the advocates of this shift. Jameson argues that ‘our psychic experience, our cultural languages, are today dominated by categories of space rather than categories of time, as in the preceding period of high modernism.’ (Jameson 1991 16) Michel Foucault is, perhaps, most strongly associated with this ‘spatial shift’ in relation to the study of sexuality and space. In ‘Of Other Spaces’ Foucault writes on methods for ‘interpret[ing] human geographies as texts and contexts’, (Soja 1995 14) and discusses the interplay between geographic and historical imaginations

The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein. (Foucault 1986: 22)

Foucault’s earlier work on genealogy began this move from time to space in its challenge to conventional historical narrative. (Foucault 1971: 215-37; 1980: 82, 85) His later work on spaces provides a further critique of linearity, combining his genealogical commitment to ‘subjugated knowledges’ with a desire to excavate both the past and the future through their placement in the present – a genealogy of the present. (Foucault 1986) Contemporary work on sexuality and space that emerges from this postmodern tradition assumes not that ‘sexuality acts

itself out in space,' (Colomina 1992: ii) but that 'the question of space [is] already inscribed in the question of sexuality'. (Ibid) How is sexuality spatially produced? How does it 'take up space'? Where are particular sexual behaviours and identities located? What imaginative (rather than simply geographical) spaces do the disenfranchised create and occupy?

Foucault's understanding of 'heterotopias' (Foucault 1986: 24) is particularly pertinent to the study of lesbian, gay, queer or feminist understandings of 'sexual spaces'. A heterotopia is a site of 'mixed, joint experience' (Ibid) acting as a mirror for the self, a real and imaginary space at once. Heterotopias are linked, but not reducible to, normative spaces. Queer spaces<sup>48</sup> – such as the imaginative 'gay space' of a post-Stonewall USA, or the general notion of 'shared queer culture', as well as bars, clubs, and support groups – are understood as spaces of survival, as spaces that allow queer identity to flourish in the relative safety of other queers: 'Queer space enables people with marginalized (homo)sexualities and identities to survive and to gradually expand their influence and opportunities to live fully.' (Ingram, Boutillette and Retter 1997: 3) As Foucault argues, these queer spaces are the heterotopias of 'compensation'. (Foucault 1986: 27) It would be somewhat ironic, of course, if 'queer space' became wholly associated with sexual identity, in light of the postmodern history of the interest in 'space' as a site of identity's critique. In *Mapping Desire: Geographies of Sexualities* (Bell and Valentine 1995) and *Queers in Space: Communities, Public Places, Sites of Resistance* (Ingram, Boutillette and Retter 1997) – two recent volumes explicitly concerned with 'queer space' – however, the emphasis is on using the term 'queer space' as a

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<sup>48</sup> John Bentley Mays attributes the first use of the term 'queer space' to Gordon Brent Ingram, an environmental planner from Vancouver. (Mays 1994: C7) Mays suggests that queer space is a particularly appropriate term to describe public spaces, such as park or toilets, that are 'queered' by 'nocturnal sexual trysts and romps that have historically defined and sustained

mechanism through which to investigate *difference* as well as commonality. As far as I am aware, aside from a speculative piece of my own,<sup>49</sup> there has been no work on bisexuality and space *per se*.

### **Part One: Bisexual Cartographies**

I began thinking through the possibilities of theorising bisexuality in and through sexual spaces after I went to the ‘Organizing Sexualities’ conference in Amsterdam in June 1994.<sup>50</sup> The conference was organised to coincide with EuroPride 1994 and, for once, academic and activist worlds did not seem completely at variance. Amsterdam was buzzing, the streets were decked with pink triangles and banners, and the sun was shining. Performances, workshops, dance clubs, academic presentations, all jostled for my attention and were all designed to be part of the conference experience. Despite my feeling ‘at home’ at the conference and in Amsterdam generally, in keeping with the subtitle of the conference – ‘Gay and Lesbian Movements since the 1960s’ – I was the only person giving a paper on bisexuality, and it seemed as though I might be the only bisexual delegate at the conference. The only space given to bisexuality as a relevant area of concern was that created by my presentation or my specific interventions in discussion forums. Although the conference organisers and delegates seemed extremely interested in what I had to say, ‘bisexual space’ was restricted to my body, and disappeared if I was not in the room, or chose not to speak on issues of bisexuality.

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urban gay communities.’ (Ibid)

<sup>49</sup> My article ‘From Landmarks to Spaces: Mapping the Territory of a Bisexual Genealogy’, (Hemmings 1997) suggests possible uses of theorising bisexuality and space, and provides three preliminary examples of the kinds of spaces open to such analysis. Of these three spaces, it is only the third, bisexual conference spaces, that I have pursued here. This section of Chapter One draws on and develops my arguments in that piece.

<sup>50</sup> ‘Organizing Sexualities: Gay and Lesbian Movements Since the 1960s’, International Conference, Amsterdam, June 22-24, 1994.

One conference paper was on the different kinds of spaces in Amsterdam that mark out a young gay male identity. (Duyves 1994) In the discussion after the paper, the group<sup>51</sup> explored the importance of public and private spaces – e.g. bedrooms, hotels, streets, parks, clubs, bath-houses – in the formation of a contemporary gay male identity.<sup>52</sup> One participant turned and asked me what and where bisexual spaces might be. I had to admit that there were no explicitly bisexual public spaces, and very few ‘private’ bisexual spaces such as support groups or households. Another delegate suggested that perhaps both gay *and* straight spaces are bisexual spaces. This is true in certain respects. Bisexuals certainly occupy both lesbian and gay and straight spaces, and may call one or other, or both, ‘home’. And both gay and straight spaces (including bars, clubs, restaurants, and ‘political’ spaces) have been formed through the intervention and work of bisexual people as well as gay or straight people. But in this conference discussion about gay male spaces, and for theorists of sexuality and space more generally, particular spaces were being posited as productive and reflective of *named* sexual identity.<sup>53</sup> In that sense neither gay *nor* straight spaces could be said to be bisexual spaces, since a bisexual’s identity is never the dominant

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<sup>51</sup> On arrival, conference delegates were asked to choose one ‘workshop stream’ to follow through the conference. This meant that there was a sense of group cohesion often lacking at large conferences, enabling complex discussions to be carried through a number of papers.

<sup>52</sup> The importance of public and private spaces framing lesbian identity is not as well documented as those framing gay male identity, and is hence relatively under-theorised. Rare examples of lesbian ‘spatial exploration’ include: Joan Nestle’s *A Restricted Country*; (Nestle 1987) Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline Davis’s *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community*; (Davis and Kennedy 1993) Gill Valentine’s ‘Out and About: Geographies of Lesbian Landscapes’; (Valentine 1995) and Sally Munt’s ‘The Lesbian *Flâneur*’. (Munt 1995) *Queers In Space: Communities, Public Places, Sites of Resistance* (Ingram, Boutillette and Retter 1997) makes a substantial contribution to this area including the following articles on lesbian space: Pat Califia’s ‘San Francisco: Revisiting the “City of Desire” ’; (Califia 1997) Joan Nestle’s ‘Restriction and Reclamation: Lesbian Bars and Beaches of the 1950s’; (Nestle 1997) Maxine Wolfe’s ‘Invisible Women in Invisible Places: The Production of Social Space in Lesbian Bars’; (Wolfe 1997) and Yolanda Retter’s ‘Lesbian Spaces in Los Angeles, 1970-90’. (Retter 1997) The concern with documenting lesbian space is clearly growing.

<sup>53</sup> See, for example, Munt 1995 and Nestle 1997.

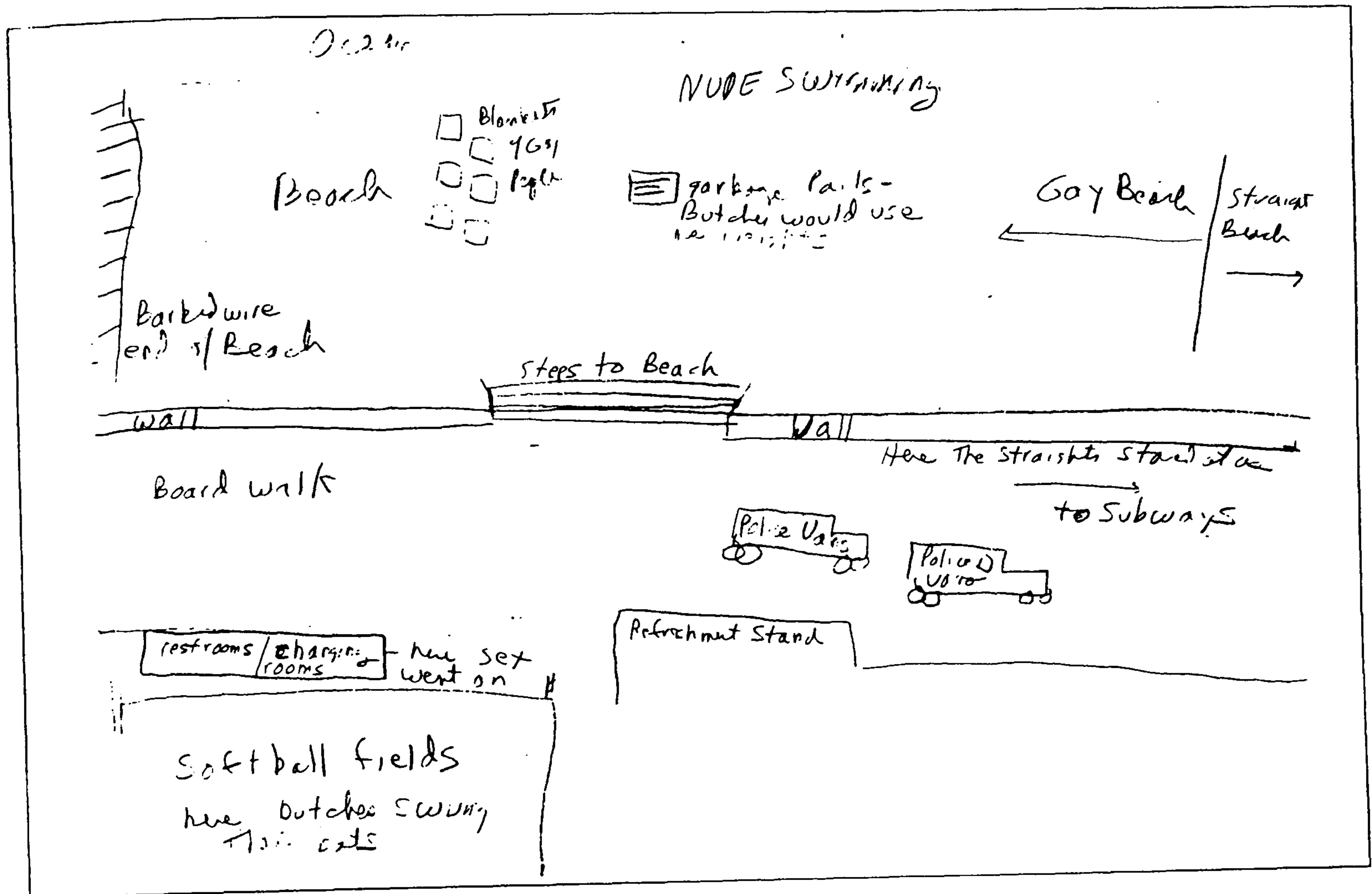
identity being produced or delineated in gay or straight spaces, and frequently bisexuality is not named.

This exchange raised a number of issues for me, which I thought about after the conference, and am still pondering now. If bisexuals are simultaneously included and excluded, central and marginal to gay and straight spaces, what are the implications for a positive bisexual identity, or for bisexual theorising? If there are no 'bisexual spaces' *per se*, how do we represent bisexuality, and what is the relationship between bisexuality and space? Lesbians, gay men and heterosexuals also occupy cultural spaces that do not fully reflect their identity, of course. But lesbian and gay spaces, while not providing a perfect match for all those naming themselves as 'lesbian' or 'gay' do provide a space within which a recognised lesbian or gay identity can be negotiated. Heterosexual spaces are rarely named as such, yet this is because spaces that are not otherwise named are assumed to be heterosexual by default. Bisexual presence within 'other' spaces of sexual identity is uniquely central to the constitution of a contemporary bisexual subjectivity.

A small hand-drawing by Joan Nestle (Figure 5) graphically displays this problematic. (Nestle 1997: 65) Nestle's drawing is an illustration of the gay and lesbian beach she used to frequent at Riis Park, New York, in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Nestle describes how the safety of this space of queer desire was always restricted and demarcated by heterosexual onlookers, from the wall behind the beach, from the straight part of the beach, and by police patrols. (Ibid: 65-66) In Nestle's drawing (and in the sexual imagination more generally) gay and straight spaces are separated by a thin line on the beach, and the double line of the wall. Where is bisexual space, either actually or imaginatively? Is bisexual space in the thin line in the sand? Or sandwiched between the two lines separating the voyeurs behind the wall from the sunbathers? Is it to be found, perhaps,

within either gay or straight territory? Inside the changing rooms? On the softball

Figure 5. Hand-drawing of lesbian space at Riis Park, New York, 1958.  
(Nestle 1997: 65)



fields? Inside the police vans? Is bisexual space entirely absent, or is it perhaps all-inclusive, allowing gay and straight to coexist, and marked by the four straight lines forming the boundary to the map itself?

Nestle's drawing also highlights an important aspect of sexual geography. The gay spaces Nestle sketches here are not concrete or absolute. The lines separating straight from gay are imaginative ones that can be transgressed, or ignored. The gay beach is there under sufferance as the presence of the police vans and the onlookers indicate. As Nestle states: 'we were always watched'. (Ibid: 65) Neither is this gay space permanent. Nestle renews her annual summer pilgrimage 'sometimes as early as May but surely by June'. (Ibid: 63) In the winter months the bars of the city become, once again, the only gay space.<sup>54</sup> The imaginative extent of the gay beach at Riis Park is brought to the fore in an incident described by Nestle:

Only once do I remember the potential power of our people becoming a visible thing, like a mighty arm threatening revenge if respect was not paid. A young man was brought ashore by the exhausted lifeguards and his lover fell to his knees, keening for his loss. A terrible quiet fell on our beach, and like the moon drawing the tides, we formed an ever-growing circle around the lovers, opening a path only wide enough for the police carrying the stretcher, our silence threatening our anger if this grief was not respected [...] The freaks had turned into a people to whom respect must be paid. (Ibid: 66)

Determination that the man's grief will be respected transforms the gay space of the beach, unifying its members, and solidifying such that heterosexuals transgressing that space (through mockery) would be courting violence. The fact that this space of resistance cannot accurately be mapped in no way alters its

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<sup>54</sup> In her discussion of the Sea Colony bar, Nestle again emphasises the precarious safety of gay space. She remembers the humiliation and anger of being forced to queue for the toilet (to prevent more than one woman at a time going in) and being handed her allotted amount of toilet paper. Nestle carries these memories with her in the present: 'We wove our freedoms, our culture, around their obstacles of hatred, but we also paid the price. Every time I took the fistful of toilet paper, I swore eventual liberation. It would, however, be a liberation filled with



power to shape gay community and identity. In many respects, such imaginative sexual space is more powerful than those geographically visible spaces that can be contained by the hostile heterosexual gaze. As I look at Nestle's drawing I wonder where such an imaginative bisexual space might reside.

Interestingly, since the Amsterdam conference in 1994, more and more bisexual spaces *have* been opening up. Bisexuals are increasingly named in what are now Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual, or Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender events, organisations, or spaces. For example, 'Bisexual and Transgender' were explicitly included in the London Lesbian and Gay Pride March for the first time in 1996, and scarcely any university campus 'queer' groups in the UK or the US now question the need for named bisexual inclusion. Queer academic conferences in both the UK and the US tend now to include 'Bisexual', or to use the umbrella term 'Queer' rather than, or in addition to, 'Lesbian and Gay'. For example, the Lesbian and Gay Studies Conference held at Rutgers University in 1991 in the US was superseded by the Queer Studies Conference at Iowa State University in 1994. As I mentioned above, bisexual conferences are held annually in the UK, and also (less frequently) in the US. There are bisexual phonedlines and self-help groups, bisexual magazines and newsletters, bisexual resource centres and bisexual national organisations. Public bisexual spaces are still rare, however. The attempt in 1996 in San Francisco to create a public bisexual club night, 'The Fence Sitters Lounge', was unsuccessful: the event was only held twice. While the development of bisexual spaces suggests a consolidation of a bisexual movement and identity in the 1990s, these spaces are not, as yet, culturally widespread enough to be a primary factor in bisexual self-identification.

While in Amsterdam, the question of spaces seemed vexing and even inappropriate to bisexual theorising. Yet, in fact, the problem of bisexuals and

space provides an entry-point into asking questions about bisexuality. How do bisexuals negotiate sexual spaces that do not take their name, or confirm their identity? What difference to otherwise named spaces does a bisexual make?<sup>55</sup> Where do we look to find bisexual histories? As bisexual spaces begin to take shape, what do they look like, and why? A focus on sexual spaces is a useful way of looking at how bisexuality expresses itself in relation to other sexual identities and how its history is marked by its presence in different communities. In an imaginative bisexual space in the same genre as Nestle's, who is being asked to respect bisexual space and identity and who is included in bisexual visible presence? This focus on spaces, then, is a way of foregrounding bisexuality while insisting on its partiality; it is a way of mapping bisexuality without necessarily privileging identity.

#### 'Thesis Outline'

The three following chapters of my thesis are an attempt to map bisexual subjectivity and the bisexual body in contemporary US and UK sexual spaces, and, in doing so, to present a challenge to a 'progressive', linear notion of (bi)sexual history with identity as its natural end-point. The genealogy of bisexuality I propose to trace in this thesis juxtaposes three concomitant spaces, both concrete and imaginative, where bisexuality plays a significant role, irrespective of whether or not it is named. They are not necessarily spaces that promote bisexuality, but bisexuality is always constructive of as well as constructed through their geography. I aim, then, to conduct a partial archaeology of a complex and contradictory bisexual present.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> A bisexual perspective may be one way of highlighting the internal variance of lesbian, gay or straight spaces.

<sup>56</sup> As Maxine Wolfe suggests in her article 'Invisible Women in Invisible Places', (Wolfe 1997) such an approach 'seeks to clarify and relate the historical interplay among forces at the present moment and at other times, looking for differences and similarities, discontinuities and

Chapter Two, *Desire Bi Any Other Name: Bisexual Desire and Identity*, and the 'Northampton Pride March Controversy', situates bisexual women's desire within lesbian community in Northampton, Massachusetts, USA. I trace the oscillation between bisexual women's desire and identity in the late 1980s and early 1990s, in the context of debates on the inclusion of the term 'bisexual' in the annual Northampton Lesbian and Gay Pride March. How do bisexual women and lesbians share the same spaces? I am particularly interested in the mechanisms used to set up women's bisexuality and lesbianism as separate from one another, and in the extent and implications of the 'success' of the desire for named bisexual recognition.

Chapter Three, *The Erotics of Theory: Charting Bisexual and Transsexual Representation*, situates bisexuality and transsexuality within contemporary lesbian and gay, feminist and queer theories and cultures. How are bisexuality and transsexuality placed and to what (or whose) ends? What effects does the association of bisexuality with transsexuality have on both bisexual and transsexual subjectivity? Pre-operative transsexual bodies appear dissonant with the subject, and bisexual bodies cannot be recognised through association with a particular sexual partner. How, then, can we map these bodies, whose gendered and sexual graphology is not always transparent? This chapter is an acknowledgement both that contemporary theories of sexuality and gender constitute a 'space', or 'hyperspace', (Ingram, Boutillette and Retter 1997: 13) and that what constitutes a 'bisexual space' is imaginatively and actually shaped by its theoretical production.

Chapter Four, *A Place to Call Home: The Creation of a Separate Bisexual Space*, charts the development of national bisexual conferences as uniquely bisexual spaces. I focus here on the 1990 National Bisexual Conference in San

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continuities, changes in language, use, and meaning as well as physical form.' (Ibid: 301)

Francisco, which was the first national bisexual conference in the US. My concern here is with the process by which a separate bisexual space is produced and negotiated and the relationship between this bisexual space and 'other' cultural and theoretical spaces. I trace the discursive formation of 'the bisexual' in one of the few specifically bisexual spaces, asking how such a space is mapped out and how the bisexual subject of that space is articulated.

Aside from forming a geography of parallel 'bisexual spaces', these three chapters share a number of other similarities and connections. Each space is partly influenced by the other two and specific texts may cross-reference one another. For example, feminist or lesbian ideas central to the production of bisexuality in theory's 'hyperspace' (Ibid) may be invoked in the other two contexts, or bisexual meaning in San Francisco may be cited in Northampton to different effect.<sup>57</sup> This is partly a result of the concomitant occurrence of the three bisexual spaces I delineate, of course.

Although I have argued that 'bisexual space' is formed in relation to both gay and straight space, I focus primarily on lesbian/feminist, gay or queer sites of bisexual production in this thesis. A pragmatic reason for this decision is that the bisexual thread is easier to trace here than in heterosexual spaces. Since heterosexuality rarely names itself, what is included or excluded from that term generally remains hidden. Naming and visibility are critical issues for sub-cultural communities and identities. As a result, there is more documentation on bisexual inclusion or exclusion in non-heterosexual contexts, because there is more at stake.

In addition, my focus on these particular sexual spaces is a reflection of my own interests and investments. The spaces I choose to navigate in this thesis

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<sup>57</sup> Where such overlaps and intertextual references are pertinent I have noted them. Otherwise I invite the reader to draw her own imaginative maps from the ones I offer.

are familiar ones, are ones I have traversed or immersed myself in. I am not a dispassionate *flâneur*. I provide one particular link between the three spaces; I am, if you like, one of these spaces 'own skein[s]'. (Foucault 1986: 22) I have lived in both Northampton and San Francisco, and consider myself to be a part of an expanding transgendered community in the US and the UK. My own sense of self as bisexual has been negotiated primarily in relation to these lesbian, gay, queer and transgendered social and political spaces.<sup>58</sup> Historian Dell Upton writes that 'an individual's perception of a landscape changes with the experience of moving through it', (Upton 1988: 357) and sexual geographer David Bell cites 'Sally' who argues that 'a lesbian is occupying space as it occupies her.' (Bell 1997: 84) My thinking about bisexuality, and indeed my sense of bisexual self, has changed due to my travels in and through these particular sexual landscapes. 'Space is, after all, a form of representation': (Colomina 1992: i) the spaces I trace are not only an attempt to locate bisexuality, but a representation of my own location.

Finally, these three spaces are not only sexual sites, or more accurately perhaps, there is no 'purely sexual' zone. Gordon Brent Ingram points out that '[a] queerscape is just as much the product of marginalizations derived from inequities based on gender, race, culture, language, class, age, and disability as queer desire and acts.' (Ingram 1997: 31) The queer spaces I describe in this thesis are populated by diverse groups and individuals. Pat Califia makes a similar point that 'the sex zone' is generally also a space for other disenfranchised groups: poor people, recent immigrants, sex workers and queers (Califia 1997: 177) rub up against one another or rub each other up the wrong way. Neither, of course, are 'poor people', 'recent immigrants', 'sex workers' and 'queers'

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<sup>58</sup> I am aware, however, as Nestle's sketch suggests, that those spaces are always circumscribed by heterosexual culture as well as providing their own momentum. Heterosexuality is never

categories distinct from one another. It is only by paying attention to difference and dissonance within sexual spaces that accurate maps of those spaces can be sketched.

**Part Two: Interdisciplinary Trials (Or, why is this feminist research?)**

In this thesis I am not methodologically faithful to any single discipline or approach. My primary materials include newspaper articles, photographs, interview transcripts, political flyers, letters, personal experience, audio-taped workshops, audio visual materials, fiction, feminist and queer theory, newsletters, and a host of other archive material from a number of different geographical locations. And I have combined a range of contemporary feminist and lesbian and gay/queer critical and discursive approaches with those of cultural geography, oral and community history and social analysis. The fact that the texts I engage with are so disparate is not accidental: far from it. I believe that the eclectic, piecemeal nature of the body of my research is true to the conditions of bisexual production at present. Bisexual research is still in its infancy, with very little cultural, political, or personal documentation and theory to call its own. And as I discuss above, bisexual subjects are constituted through, not in spite of, their partiality and their 'cultural theft'. An attempt to unify these conditions through a single *disciplinary* perspective would be seeking a form of theoretical harmony I do not consider appropriate.

Both my interdisciplinary research perspective and my interest in personal location are part of a women's studies tradition.<sup>59</sup> Part of the reason for women's studies' widespread encouragement of interdisciplinarity in the UK lies in the

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wholly absent from these spaces, in other words.

<sup>59</sup> Sue Lees cites as one of the pre-requisites for women's studies' success that '[i]t must have an interdisciplinary base [...] and should not be subsumed into a faculty structure,' (Lees 1991: 101) and Rosemarie Buikema and Anneke Smelik note that '[w]omen's studies is characterised

history of its evolution. Women from within different disciplines in the university came together out of frustration with the lack of space to teach and conduct research in areas commonly not considered scholarly by their own departments. (Broughton 1993: 73)<sup>60</sup> The history of women's studies is, at least partly, a history of the attempt to convince university administrators, teachers and students that women's studies is at once an interdisciplinary pioneer and a valuable and viable 'discipline' in its own right.<sup>61</sup> Joanna de Groot and Mary Maynard describe this tension as produced by the attempt 'to express both methodological pluralism and specificity in our scholarship.' (de Groot and Maynard 1993: 14)<sup>62</sup> Rosi Braidotti's understanding of *transdisciplinarity* in feminist research has also been highly instructive for me. In *Nomadic Subjects* Braidotti advocates that feminists:

become fluent in a variety of styles and disciplinary angles and in many different dialects, jargons, languages, thereby relinquishing sisterhood in the sense of a global similarity of all women *qua* second sex in favor of the recognition of the complexity of the semiotic and material conditions in which women operate. (Braidotti 1994: 36)

For Braidotti, feminist attention to differences among women is precluded by the reliance on a single disciplinary approach. Braidotti's vision is not of a 'seamless

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by its interdisciplinary nature.' (Buikema and Smelik 1993: xi)

<sup>60</sup> Broughton warns us, however, of women's studies' tendency 'to construct itself as "seamlessly" interdisciplinary: as gratifyingly inclusive and internally conflict-free.' (Ibid: 75)

<sup>61</sup> For example, Sandra Coyner is insistent that Women's Studies needs to construct itself as an academic discipline with its own identifiable methods, (Coyner 1983: 46) while, in the same anthology, Gloria Bowles advocates a move away from increased specialisation: 'Perhaps one day the renaissance man will be replaced by the interdisciplinary woman'. (Bowles 1983: 40)

<sup>62</sup> Aside from the developments of women's studies as an inter/disciplinary concern within the academy, the close historical relationship between feminist research and feminist political activism has also meant that notions of intellectual 'purity' are commonly abandoned in favour of adopting the best means to the purpose of the research. Feminist scholars have argued that far from this approach making their research less objective 'value-laden research processes [...] are producing [...] more complete and less distorted social analyses' (Harding 1987: 182) than those which falsely claim neutrality. Joan Acker, Kate Barry and Johanna Esseveld make a similar point in their article entitled 'Objectivity and Truth: Problems in Doing Feminist Research'. (Acker, Barry and Esseveld 1991: 133-153)

interdisciplinarity' but of a feminist transdisciplinarity disrespectful of hierarchy. (Ibid) For Braidotti, 'rigor' is no longer applicable to a highly specialised disciplinary expertise, but to a 'passionate investment in a project and in the quest of the discursive to realise it.' (Ibid: 93) Such a method is not based on purity of ideas and does not pay homage to their supposed origins or ownership, but is a practice of ' "theft," or extensive borrowing of notions and concepts'. (Ibid: 36-37) True to her word, Braidotti borrows the technique of ' "deterritorialization" or the becoming-nomad of ideas' (Ibid: 36-37) from Gilles Deleuze. My genealogy of bisexuality is, in effect, a process of scavenging from 'other' locations, to flesh out a bisexual subject whose presence has been difficult to trace from a more conventional historical perspective.

In relation to personal location, a central concern for women's studies is that of reflexivity in research and teaching methods. De Groot and Maynard emphasise the importance for women's studies of the 'lived experience' (de Groot and Maynard 1993: 10) of both researcher and researched, and argue that self-reflexivity is 'very much part of the feminist tradition of linking awareness, experience and interpretation'. (Ibid: 11)<sup>63</sup> In my own work, self-reflexivity has been key in negotiating the research subject's 'lived experience', although I endorse Joan Scott's critique of a simplistic appeal to 'women's experience' as the authentic foundation of feminist research. (Scott 1992: 31)<sup>64</sup> The place of the 'personal voice', either of the research subject or the researcher, is no longer self-evident. Rather than abandoning 'experience' as a useful intervention or ground for analysis, I have tried to explore the interfaces among different 'voices' in this

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<sup>63</sup> Mary Margaret Fonow and Judith A Cook highlight the significance of 'reflexivity as a source of insight' (Fonow and Cook 1991: 2) in feminist research, as does Sandra Harding who stresses the importance of 'locating the researcher in the same critical plane as the overt subject matter'. (Harding 1987: 8)

<sup>64</sup> Scott follows on from the work of Teresa de Lauretis who writes of experience as a process constitutive of subjectivity, (de Lauretis 1984: 159) and Denise Riley who challenges the



thesis. How do these 'voices' inflect one another or produce one another and to what effects? What does bisexual experience mean in relation to lesbian, feminist, queer and transsexual experience? Reflexivity, for me, is less about proclaiming one's position *at the outset*<sup>65</sup> than it is about being open to the ways in which collision, collusion and conflict with one's research bodies shape one's own position and give it meaning. In this I am, of course, influenced by Adrienne Rich's 'Notes Toward a Politics of Location'. (Rich 1984) Rich argues seductively that one should '[b]egin [...] not with a continent or a country or a house, but with the geography closest in – the body', (Rich 1984: 212)<sup>66</sup> while issuing the warning that one's own feelings 'are not *the* center of feminism.' (Ibid: 231) Rich's desire to locate herself in her writing, which I share, inflects my genealogy of 'bisexual spaces' with a feminist ethics, a feminist politics of location.

Braidotti brings together interdisciplinarity and the feminist researcher's reflexivity when she describes transdisciplinary as the process of:

Passing in between different discursive fields, and through diverse spheres of intellectual discourse. The feminist theoretician today can only be 'in transit,' moving on, passing through, creating connections where things were previously dis-connected or seemed un-related, where there seemed to be 'nothing to see.' (Ibid: 93)

The bisexual subject whose path I am tracing commonly masquerades as, or is

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political efficacy of a movement built on the notion of 'experience'. (Riley 1988: 100)

<sup>65</sup> In that by now familiar, glib, initial declaration of race/class/sexuality positioning. Rarely are other markers of difference – age, physical ability or disability, income – stated. Perhaps the latter are still considered matters of 'private' concern! My point here is that self-reflexivity only functions as more than a political gesture if one's own position is integrated into the actual research (whether or not it is stated in the text).

<sup>66</sup> The influence on feminist theory of Rich's text has been immense. Donna Haraway (Haraway 1988) is clearly influenced by Rich when she emphasises the importance of locating the Western eye not the 'Other'. (Haraway 1988) In the 1990s, feminist researchers Elspeth Probyn and Chandra Tolpade Mohanty also explicitly reference 'Notes Toward a Politics of Location'. (Probyn 1990: 177; Mohanty 1992: 82)

read as, something else. She may be passed by unnoticed or she may pass as someone else. A transdisciplinary approach seems, then, to be highly appropriate both to my position as researcher navigating different disciplines and communities and to my subject. I would wish to bear in mind Elspeth Probyn's lingering suspicion of this nomadic researcher, however. Probyn writes that:

The 'nomad' has recently appeared as the model of the Western subject wandering through various localities [... T]he metaphor of the nomad unfortunately recalls some of the more unsalubrious aspects of tourism. The nomad or the tourist is posed as unthreatening, merely passing through; however [her] person has questionable effects. (Probyn 1990: 184)

It is my hope that my attention to my own position of engagement throughout this thesis will prevent this tourist-like separation between researcher and researched in uncharted territory, and may indeed provide fresh perspective on places I thought I already knew.

Another way of looking at this work is to see it as part of an emerging 'bisexual studies', an inter or transdisciplinary area that has been born of a number of other disciplines.<sup>67</sup> The trajectory I trace in this thesis places my bisexual genealogy within and among lesbian and gay/queer studies and feminist/women's studies in particular. Throughout my work the relationship between women's studies and lesbian and gay studies is presented as one of dependence and mutual reinforcement, contradiction and tension. Following Judith Butler's critical inquiry into the 'proper object' of study for gender and sexuality studies respectively, (Butler 1994) my research clouds not only the distinction between these disciplines, but further, the distinction between those 'proper objects' – gender or sexuality – in the first place. Butler writes:

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<sup>67</sup> I do not actually favour the term 'bisexual studies', suggesting as it does more unity than

What separates the putative object of feminism – gender, construed as sex – from the putative object of lesbian and gay studies – sex, construed as sexuality – is a chiasmic confusion in which the constitutive ambiguity of “sex” is denied in order to make arbitrary territorial claims. (Ibid: 6)

By making central the fact that sexuality and gender are mutually constitutive of bisexuality in the contexts I examine, and that both these terms are produced through discourses of race and ethnicity, I hope to make the case for transdisciplinary attention to indiscreet objects and subjects.

Like Donna Haraway’s ‘illegitimate offspring’ the postmodern cyborg, (Haraway 1985: 191) the bisexual subject’s allegiances are never clear. My bisexual (rather than cyborg) ‘myth is about transgressed boundaries, potent fusions and dangerous possibilities which progressive people might explore as one part of needed political work.’ (Ibid: 196)<sup>68</sup> In certain respects, the bisexual subject whose history I trace is a classic undisciplined juvenile who is placed in an endless stream of different homes, but who is always moved on once she starts making trouble. Lesbian and gay studies and women’s studies are, of course, somewhat ‘illegitimate’ themselves. The bisexual juvenile’s women’s studies and lesbian and gay studies parents may turn out to be temporary foster carers only.

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there is and more texts than there are. It is a useful contingent term, however, for discussing the roots of interdisciplinary work on bisexuality.

<sup>68</sup> Haraway might balk at the association arguing as she does that ‘[t]he cyborg... has no truck with bisexuality’. (Ibid: 192) The bisexuality Haraway defines her cyborg against, however, is the pre-oedipal bisexual potential I have critiqued earlier in this chapter. I would like to believe that she would rather like the bisexual subject I am tracing in this thesis.

## CHAPTER TWO.

### Desire by any Other Name: Bisexual Desire and Identity, and the Northampton 'Pride March Controversy'

#### Introduction

I begin this work on bisexual spaces by exploring the overlaps and differences between women's bisexuality and lesbianism in Northampton, Massachusetts, USA. Since the late 1960s, Northampton, and the surrounding areas of Amherst, South Hadley and the valley hill towns – together known as the 'Happy Valley' – have been home to a thriving lesbian community.<sup>69</sup> A bisexual women's community, however, has never established itself in Northampton, although there are numerous bisexual women living there. In this chapter I focus on events and writings between 1989 and 1995, during which time a series of heated debates took place concerning the named inclusion of bisexuals in the annual Gay and Lesbian Pride March.<sup>70</sup> I am interested particularly in how bisexual and lesbian identities are discursively produced as separate within this contemporary space, and how, within the same context, lesbian and bisexual experiences and personal narratives work to undermine such a separation.

In the context of my thesis as a whole, a consideration of bisexual and lesbian space in Northampton provides a rare opportunity for analysing the attempt to carve out bisexual space within lesbian community. My emphasis is less on the 'success' or 'failure' of this endeavour, than on the extent to which it

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<sup>69</sup> Northampton came to the eyes of the ever-curious US public in a feature article with the header 'Strange Town Where Men Aren't Wanted' in the *National Enquirer* in April 1992. (Anon April 21 1992: 8) The sensationalist article dubbed Northampton 'Lesbianville, U.S.A.', and gave the false impression that a third of Northampton's population is lesbian. More conservative estimates are that between one tenth and one fifth of the population is lesbian or gay (whether these statistics include bisexuals is never stated). (Galst 1994: 12) The *National Enquirer* article gave rise to a number of other articles on the town's lesbian community (see endnote 72) and was covered on CNN (a national TV news station) and 20/20 (a sensationalist news program) in September 1992.

<sup>70</sup> I discuss briefly the position of bisexuals in relation to San Francisco's annual Freedom

is marked by its particular lesbian context. The Pride March debates create the first overt space for discussion about bisexuality in Northampton's contemporary lesbian history. This is also one of the first times that bisexuality has been discussed at length within the contemporary lesbian and gay community in the US generally. Stacey Young remarks that:

the controversy over the Northampton Pride March brought us [bisexuals] a long way. The thoughtful and sustained public discussion of bisexuality and the role of bisexuals in queer communities/movements was unprecedented, coming as it did before the publication of any of the bisexual anthologies. (Young 1995: 225)

I want to argue alongside Young that '[a] close look at the Northampton controversy and *Gay Community News's* (GCN) coverage reveals a good deal about some of the different ways that identity and community are conceptualised within lesbian and gay politics'. (Ibid: 219) Northampton holds a prominent place in the lesbian imaginary, serving as a focal point for notions of lesbian identity, community and possibility within the US, much as San Francisco does for gay men.<sup>71</sup> As Michael Lowenthal notes, 'Northampton is something of a lesbian Mecca, to which all dykes must make at least one pilgrimage during their lives'; (Lowenthal 1994: 75) and the *Los Angeles Times* suggests 'common wisdom holds [that...] "All lesbians pass through here at least once"'. (Mehren 1991: E1)<sup>72</sup> The ripples of disruption caused by these debates spread throughout lesbian

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Parade (the equivalent of the Lesbian and Gay Pride March) in Chapter Four.

<sup>71</sup> Although there has not been any extensive work on Northampton's lesbian community a number of authors refer to its importance in the lesbian imaginary. (Garber 1995: 80-82; Ferber 1995; LeVay 1995: 116-117; Lowenthal 1994) I discuss the attempt to carve out a bisexual space in San Francisco in Chapter Four.

<sup>72</sup> Other articles that focus on Northampton as a symbol of lesbian community include: 'A Town Like No Other'; (Kantrowitz and Senna 1993) 'What Price Paradise: Life in Northampton after "20/20"'; (Galst 1994) 'Northampton: How to Make Lesbian Mecca'; (Neves 1994) *États-Unis: La Cité des Femmes*'; (MacCoy 1993) 'Northampton, Paradis des Femmes'; (Anon 1996) 'You Don't Have to Be a Lesbian to Live Here, But It Doesn't Hurt'. (Cowley 1993) As the titles of these disparate articles indicate there is considerable investment

communities in the US, and have implications for both lesbian and bisexual identity and community more generally.

Although the debates I attend to in this chapter surround the *Lesbian and Gay Pride March*, the discussions almost exclusively concern the relationship between lesbians and bisexual women, and lesbian and bisexual community. Both bisexual men and women take part in the debates, but gay male opinion is curiously absent, although several gay men resigned from the 1990 March Committee following its decision to exclude bisexuals.<sup>73</sup> My analysis focuses explicitly on the relationship between bisexual women and lesbians as outlined in and created through these debates.<sup>74</sup>

Section One of this chapter, 'Personal and Political Locations: Background to the Pride March Controversy', provides a cultural and historical background to the debates I analyse in more detail in the rest of the chapter. Part One, 'Lesbian/ Bisexual Wanderings', interweaves the narrative of three decades of lesbian community and culture with my own experience of living in Northampton. I also begin to trace a history of bisexual women's identity and community in Northampton. In Part Two, 'Bisexual/Lesbian Struggles', I outline the history of debates about bisexual inclusion and exclusion in the Northampton Lesbian and Gay Pride March and Committee, and begin to identify some of the

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in Northampton as 'lesbian home' from both within and outside the lesbian community itself.  
<sup>73</sup> Although gay and bisexual men do make up a strong presence in Northampton, there is little organised community as such. (Lambert 1992) In 1994 there was an attempt to forge community by setting up the *Valley Gay Men's Calendar*, with the support of *The Calendar*, Northampton's listings magazine for lesbian events in the area. The *Valley Gay Men's Calendar* did not last more than a year, however. Michael Lowenthal discusses the (sometimes productive) tension between lesbians and gay men in Northampton in his article 'The Happy House O' Queers at 281 State'. (Lowenthal 1994)

<sup>74</sup> In June 1997 I had a conversation with Ann Ferguson, who suggested that the exclusion of bisexuals was a direct result of bisexual men and gay men taking centre stage in 1989, when the Committee and March names were first changed to include 'Bisexual'. Ferguson believes this is evidenced by the lack of a lesbian speaker at the 1989 Pride March Rally. I briefly address this issue later in this chapter. Gay men and bisexual men swiftly ceased to be the focus of attention, however.

themes that characterise these debates. Section Two, 'A Question of Difference: Discursive Constructions of Bisexual and Lesbian Identities', examines the texts produced through the Pride March Controversy in terms of how 'bisexual' and 'lesbian' are situated in relation to one another. In Part One, 'Sexual and Political Territory', I explore the association of bisexual women with sexual behaviour and of lesbians with political community. I also examine the function of the notion of 'heterosexual privilege'<sup>75</sup> in constructing bisexual identity as less politically progressive than lesbian identity. In Part Two, 'Visible Identities', I analyse the Pride March debates through the theme of visibility politics: who is seen, how one looks, and the political and discursive implications of these viewpoints for bisexual and lesbian identities in Northampton. In Part Three, 'The Contradictions of Experience', I read the stories of Sharon Gonsalves and May Wolf to see how two individual sexual and identity narratives shed a different light on the Pride March debates.

The texts that I work with in this chapter are drawn from The Northampton Collection, located at the Northampton Sexual Minorities Archives (NSMA) in Massachusetts, USA. I conducted the majority of the research at the NSMA in the academic year 1994/95,<sup>76</sup> and completed additional research there in Spring 1997. The NSMA is a grassroots resource, run by the curator Bet Power<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> The term 'heterosexual privilege' refers to the freedom and rights accorded opposite-sex couples that are not accorded to same-sex couples. This lack of freedom and rights may be institutional (in terms of lack of health benefits for same-sex spouses in the US, for example), or legislative (in terms of homosexuality or sodomy still being illegal in some US states, and differing ages of consent for heterosexuals and homosexuals in the UK). See Jonathan Goldberg's *Sodomities* and Anthony Grey's *Quest for Justice* for a US and UK analysis respectively. (Goldberg 1992; Grey 1992) Loraine Hutchins and Lani Ka'ahumanu define 'heterosexual privilege' as 'the benefit of basic civil rights and familial recognition that heterosexuals accord themselves as the "norm"'. (Hutchins and Ka'ahumanu 1991: 369) As a result anyone who is not heterosexual risks being emotionally and socially stigmatised or victimised (often violently). The use of the term 'heterosexual privilege' is a way of linguistically signalling that this 'norm' is, in fact, dependent on homosexual oppression.

<sup>76</sup> Thanks to the Fulbright Commission for funding this project.

<sup>77</sup> My thanks go to Bet Power for his extensive help in my research for this chapter, and for

from his home by the river on the outskirts of Northampton (Figure 6).<sup>78</sup> The Archives is an unfunded project housing approximately 660 periodical titles, 3500 books, and special collections on Northampton and Chicago (its previous home). (Hemmings 1996: 43) The Northampton Collection is a rich, ongoing, local collection of personal papers, cassettes, slides and newspaper clippings, documenting lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered events, political discussions, celebrations and personal relationships in the Northampton area from 1968 to present.<sup>79</sup> It is made up of general files in date order (1968-present), files on particular individuals and groups, and material on particular issues (e.g. several files concerning sadomasochism (Shelix box)).<sup>80</sup> In Section One I make use primarily of the general files and special collections; in Section Two I focus on the local and national newspaper and magazine debates (1990-1991) that emerged from and partly comprise the Pride March Controversy.

As well as using The Northampton Collection I follow comparable debates in a number of lesbian and feminist journals, in particular *Sojourner* and *Lesbian Connection* to highlight the fact that the issues I am identifying in this

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facilitating my access to The Northampton Collection. Power was a key participant in the Northampton Pride March debates; he is a female-to-male transsexual but identified as lesbian at the time of the debates. Where I reference Power's words before his change in identity I use the pronoun 'she'. Although Power himself believes he has always been a man, at the time of the Northampton debates Power was lesbian both to herself and to the lesbian community. I believe that to use 'he' in this context would be unnecessarily confusing for the reader.

<sup>78</sup> The Archives has an interesting history. It began life as the New Alexandria Library for Lesbian Women in 1974, was shortened to the New Alexandria Lesbian Library [NALL], and became The Sexual Minorities Archives in 1992, coinciding with Power's own transition from butch lesbian to transgendered man. In November 1994 I interviewed Bet Power about the relationship between the Archives' transition and his own. The interview forms the basis of my article 'From Lesbian Nation to Transgender Liberation', which gives more detailed information on the Archives. (Hemmings 1996: 37-60)

<sup>79</sup> At present the materials in the Archives could be said to be roughly 60% lesbian, 20-25% gay male, and the rest – though obviously interwoven – bisexual and transgender. I briefly discuss archiving issues and sexual orientation in Chapter Four, Introduction. The Archives are open (evenings and weekends only) to anyone to use, irrespective of sexual orientation or gender. The number of visitors varies from 300-500 annually, the majority being women's studies students and researchers from the five colleges in the area. (Ibid: 44)

<sup>80</sup> To my knowledge this is the first time that The Northampton Collection has been worked on



Figure 6. Photograph (1995) of The Sexual Minorities Archives,  
Northampton, Massachusetts



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for academic purposes.

local context are also relevant in a national, and international context. In addition, I consulted materials at The Stonewall Center,<sup>81</sup> and the files on Northampton housed at Northampton's queer bookstore Pride and Joy.<sup>82</sup> Discussions with personal contacts living in the area, and my personal experience of being a bisexual woman in a predominantly lesbian town have also influenced the writing of this chapter.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> The Stonewall Center is the lesbian, bisexual, gay and transgender centre at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.

<sup>82</sup> Thanks to Karen Bellavance-Grace for letting me work in the bookstore.

<sup>83</sup> I include a range of archive material from The Northampton Collection in Appendix I, to give the interested reader a flavour of the texts I have been working with. I have included flyers and articles from three decades of lesbian activism and community in Northampton and some of the texts I discuss in this chapter.

## Section One. Personal and Political Locations: Background to the Pride March Controversy

### **Part One: Lesbian/Bisexual Wanderings**

#### 'Creating Community'

Northampton's contemporary lesbian community began in the early 1970s, with the establishment of women's and lesbian/feminist co-operatives. Many lesbian/feminists studied at the women's colleges – Smith (based in Northampton) and Mount Holyoke (based in South Hadley) – and stayed on after graduation. This is still common today.<sup>84</sup> In the 1980s the lesbian influence on Northampton became more firmly established, mainly through the establishment of local lesbian entrepreneurship and cultural events. Lesbian-owned businesses – bookshops, craft shops, lingerie shops, restaurants and bars – proliferated. As a result, other businesses began to target the burgeoning lesbian market, offering 'dyke discounts' (Freedland, 1995: 7)<sup>85</sup> and dyke-friendly ambience. Before and during the 1995 Lesbian Festival in Northampton – run yearly by WOW Productions, a lesbian-run entertainment promotion company<sup>86</sup> – many

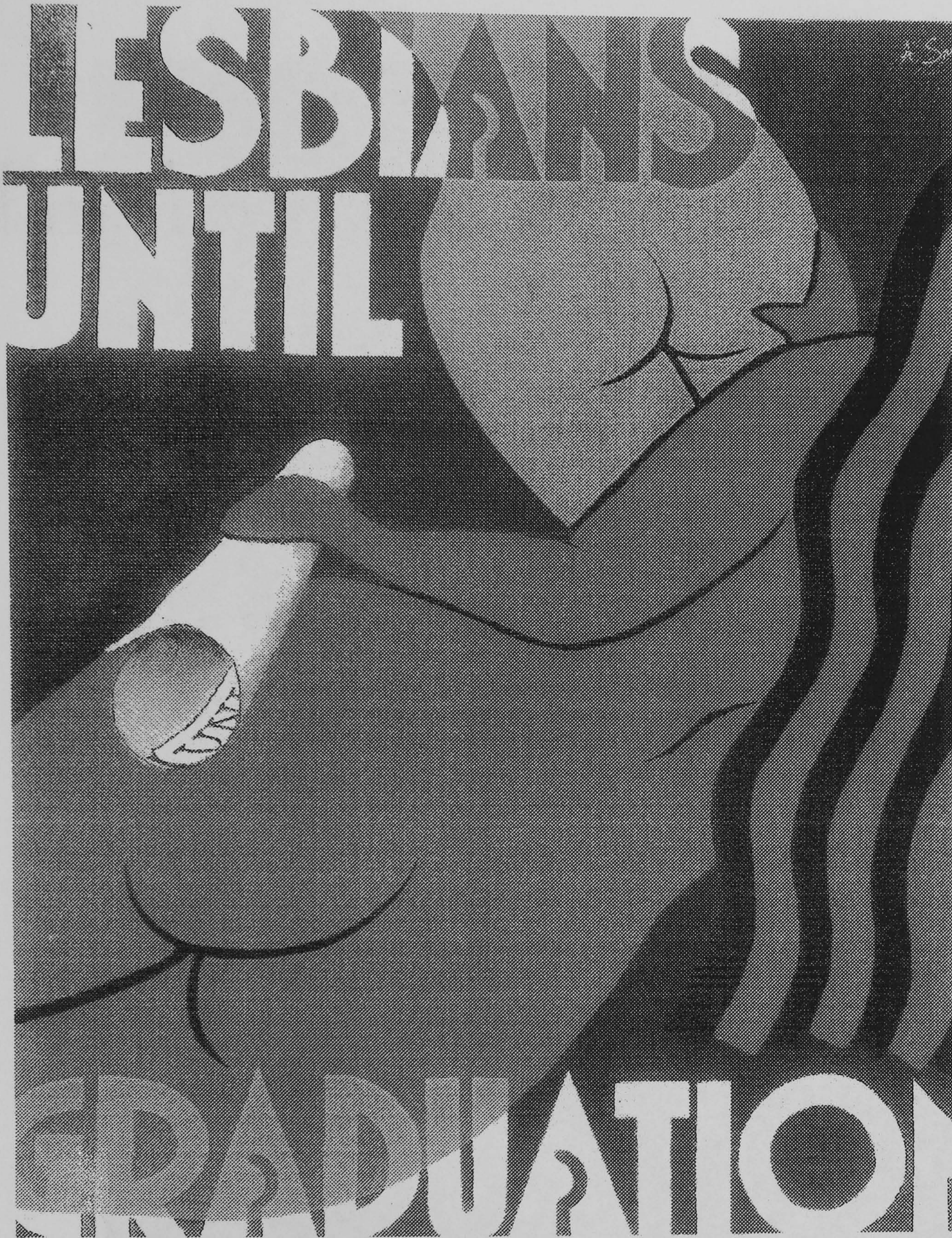
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<sup>84</sup> One negative side of this 'expectation' that new lesbians will come from the women's universities is the use of the term 'lesbian until graduation'. This is used as a slur against those women who 'explore' same-sex desire while undergraduates, and 'turn straight' the moment they graduate. These women are seen as fickle and a drain on resources, as scared of the social and possibly career disadvantages admitting to being a lesbian would bring. These accusations are, of course, not dissimilar to those levelled at bisexual women. See 'Lesbians Until Graduation'. (Kornblut, 1995: 36-41) Figure 7 shows the lead picture for the article. Figure 8 shows one of the photographs: 'I am not a Lesbian'. The photograph depicts two 'feminine' women limply embracing, confirming by their pose what they are denying by what we assume to be their words – their lesbian desire. At least, this is the reading the author provides, a reading that sees only a choice between lesbian and straight, and does not consider that some of these 'lesbians until graduation' might see themselves as bisexual.

<sup>85</sup> How one can certify one's 'dykedom' is not clear. I do like the idea, though, of heterosexual women musing over whether to insist that they are 'dykes' in order to 'cash in' on a rare lesbian economic advantage.

<sup>86</sup> In previous years The Lesbian Festival was held on private land outside Northampton. After the 1994 Festival, however, when it rained all weekend, WOW Productions decided to hold it in the town centre. This move met with a mixed reaction. Some lesbians thought that the unavoidable presence of men in the town centre would dilute the social and political feel of the Festival; others thought that the move would strengthen lesbians' position within Northampton, declaring that presence central to the town. The 1995 Lesbian Festival was the

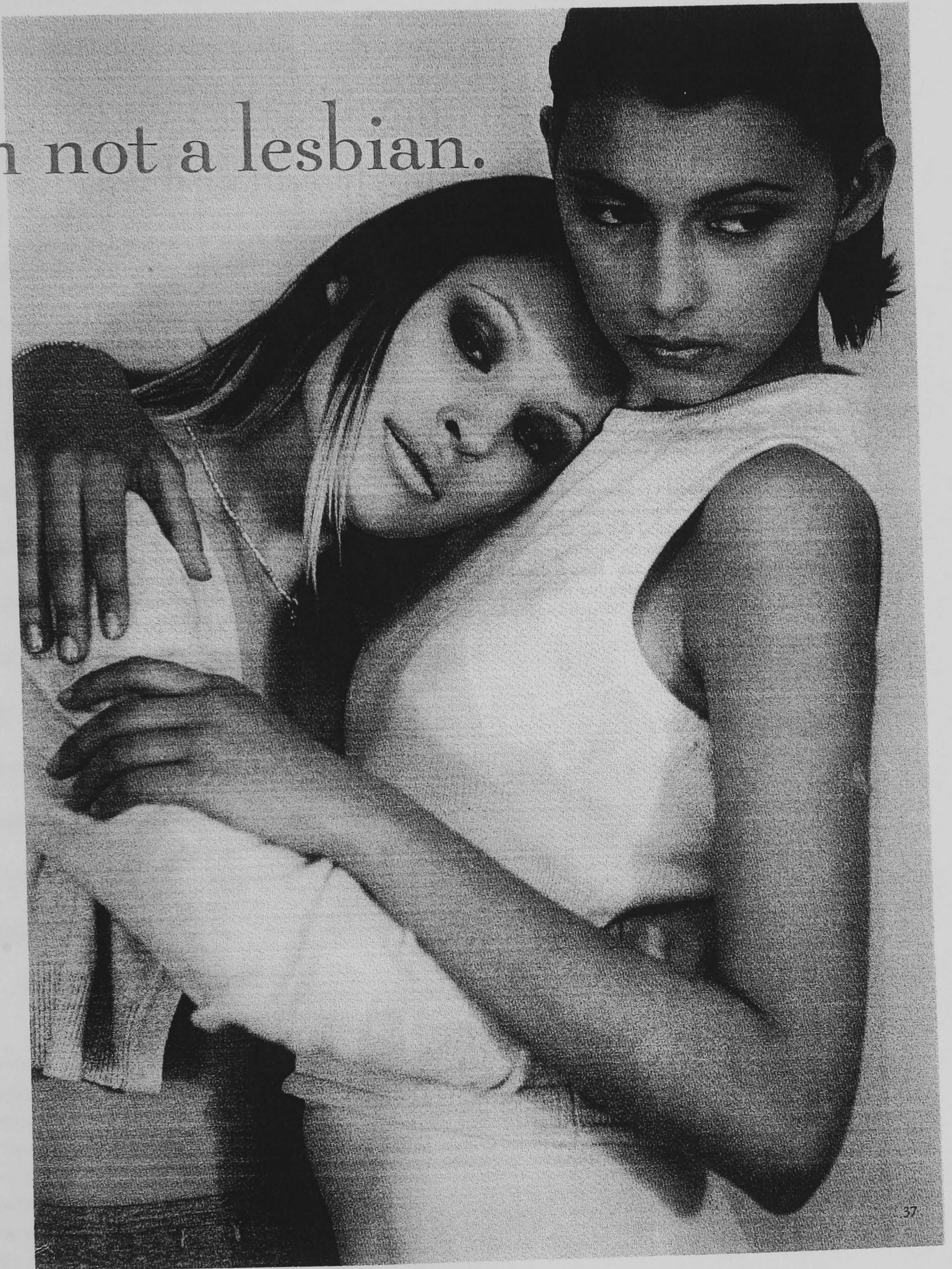
Figure 7. Cover image for 'Lesbians Until Graduation'. (Kornblut 1995: 35)



last one in Northampton. WOW Productions made a financial loss at the Festival from which it never recovered. As a result Northampton's arts scene has been greatly reduced. So far, no other organisations have been set up to take over the responsibility for putting together the Festival, which was one of only two annual women's festivals in the US (Michigan Womyn's Music Festival being the other). (conversation with Zizi Ansell, WOW Productions, March 1995)

Figure 8. Photograph in 'Lesbians Until Graduation'. (Kornblut 1995: 37)

I'm not a lesbian.



storefronts sported bright pink festival posters and flyers, saying ‘Welcome to Northampton’s Lesbian Festival’. Lesbianism is big business in Northampton. Culturally, the town offers lesbian music, lesbian dances, lesbian films (at the local arts cinemas), lesbian theatre, book-readings, academic papers, and more. Northampton is certainly no metropolis: it maintains its small-town feel. As a friend from San Francisco notes: ‘It feels a bit like they’re going to take the set down at the end of the day.’ A walk through the streets of Northampton gives an impression of the town. Walking up Main Street from Market Street, under the bridge with lesbian graffiti (two entwined women’s symbols) emblazoned in red,<sup>87</sup> you pass *Praktically Worn* (A),<sup>88</sup> a second-hand clothes store, two well-known town dykes behind the counter, the piercing service (‘navels and nipples – reduced’) advertised in the window. Continuing up Main Street, taking a left onto Pleasant Street is the Pleasant Street Theater arts cinema (B), showing non-mainstream, foreign, and queer movies. A couple of blocks down Pleasant Street is *Sylvesters* (C), a rather up-market breakfast diner, where groups go every Sunday a.m. *en masse*, the sidewalk bursting with queers nursing their hazelnut-vanilla coffees and reading the *New York Times*. A short walk further down Pleasant brings you to the mostly gay male SM store *Primitive Leather* (D), where you can buy all manner of rubber, leather and lace clothing, sex toys, and SM equipment.

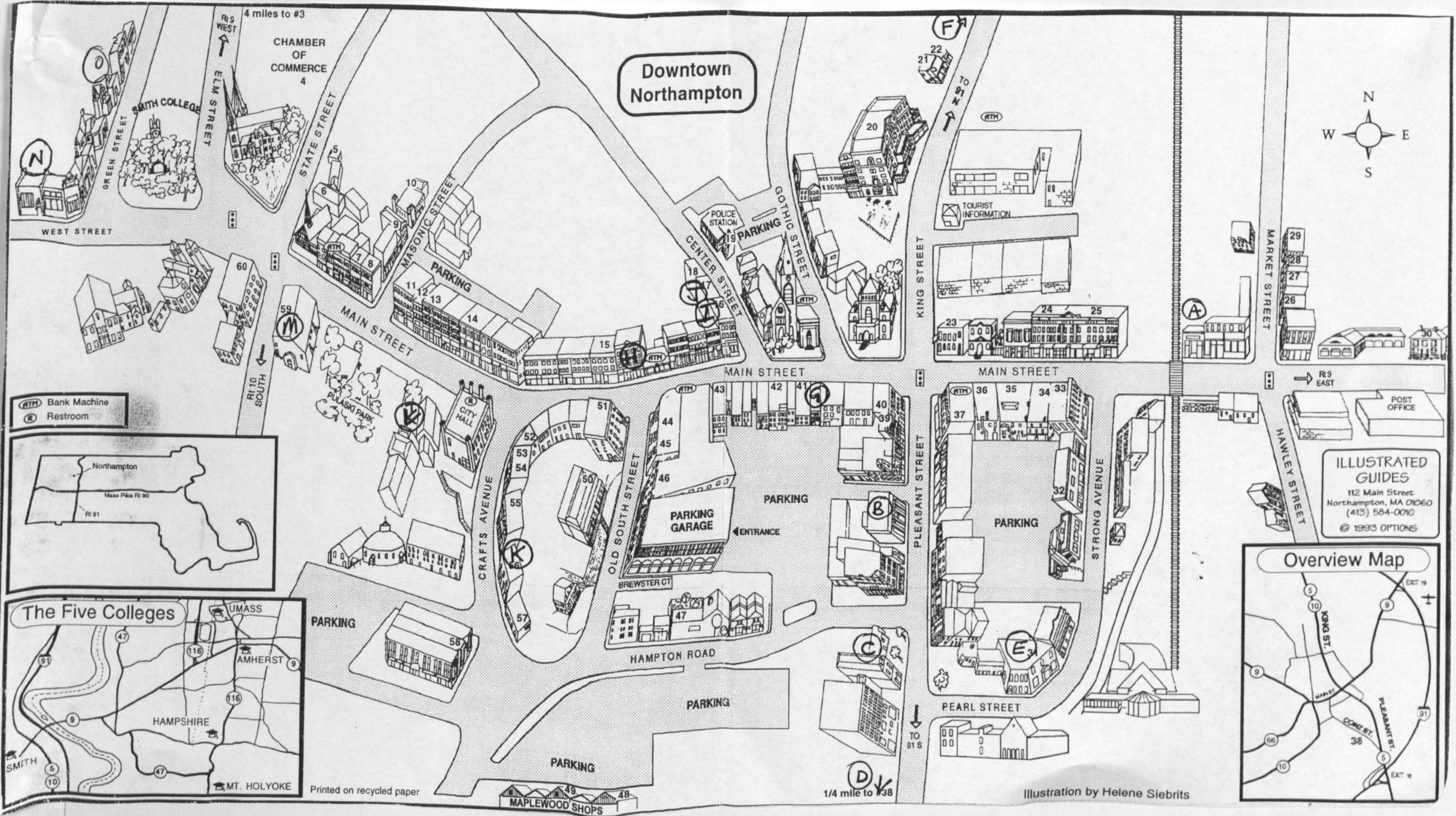
Just around the corner on Pearl Street is Pearl Street night-club (E),

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<sup>87</sup> This graffiti was reproduced in the article in the *National Enquirer* article on Northampton (see footnote 69). I have not included a copy of this in the Figures as one of the ‘stars’ of the article has requested that the article (or any parts of it) not be reprinted. Her experience at the hands of the *National Enquirer* journalists was highly unpleasant. She was photographed under false pretences and had no idea that the picture of her with her lover was going to be nationally reproduced by the tabloids. (Bradway 1992: 6) The sensationalism of ‘Lesbianville USA’ has certainly had its casualties. By 1997 this lesbian graffiti had been ‘cleaned up’ and carried instead a pastel rendition of a hand wielding a large paintbrush.

<sup>88</sup> Sites are marked alphabetically on the map of Northampton (Figure 9) and correspond to the letters in the text.

Figure 9. Map of Downtown Northampton, illustrated by Helene Siebrits



which hosts a lesbian and gay night every Thursday. Back up to the main intersection and out onto King Street is Lunaria (F), Northampton's (lesbian) feminist bookstore, housing the 'Lesbians for Lesbians' group influential in the debates about the inclusion of bisexuals in the Pride March (Figure 10).<sup>89</sup> A sign over the lesbian fiction section asks men not to browse.<sup>90</sup>

Coffee shops predominate on Main Street, ranging from the rather exclusive café, Curtis and Swartz (G),<sup>91</sup> for the more chic lesbian couple, to The Haymarket café (H), which offers a slightly younger and trendier experience. On the right off Main Street is Center Street, home to Northampton's own lesbian lingerie store, Gazebo (I), offering the 10% dyke discount. Just down the road from Gazebo is the Iron Horse (J), a bar and performance venue where lesbian, gay and queer acts from all over the country come to play, despite its small size.<sup>92</sup> Further up on the left off Main Street, on Crafts Avenue, is Pride and Joy (K), the town's only specifically queer (mixed) bookstore. Pride and Joy also stocks videos, sex toys, magazines, badges, T-shirts<sup>93</sup> and cards, and serves as a community base for information.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Lunaria has a sign in the window, saying 'Third Wave', to indicate a new generation of lesbian/feminist activists. Lunaria has long been a site of controversy within the lesbian community, insisting on a no pornography or SM materials policy. Popular urban myth has it that in 1989 two lesbians went into Lunaria and began to enact a public SM scene. This act of provocation resulted in *TC* refusing to advertise Shelix (Northampton's woman-to-woman SM group) in its pages. (News Release, NALL June 1989)

<sup>90</sup> After Lunaria, King Street becomes a landscape of parking lots, service stations and supermarkets on your way out of town. The town center of Northampton is only a few blocks square.

<sup>91</sup> Curtis and Swartz closed in June 1997.

<sup>92</sup> To give some idea of the diversity of queer life in Northampton, in May 1997 both Pheron (an internationally-adored lesbian folk singer) and Sleater Kinney (a 'riot grrl' punk band with a generally younger following) played to packed audience.

<sup>93</sup> Pride and Joy had T-shirts printed with the slogan 'Lesbianville, USA' after the media attention, as both a tourist souvenir and ironic memento for locals (Figure 11).

<sup>94</sup> It may seem surprising that there is no Lesbian and Gay Community Center in Northampton. Partly this reflects the small size of the town, and the huge resources needed to set up a centre. Partly there is so much available to lesbians (and gay men) in Northampton, that the usual function of a Community Centre as 'somewhere to go' to meet other lesbians and gay men is rendered less meaningful. In the last couple of years, though, there have been moves towards



Figure 10. Photograph of Lunaria: Third Wave Feminist Booksellers, Northampton, Massachusetts



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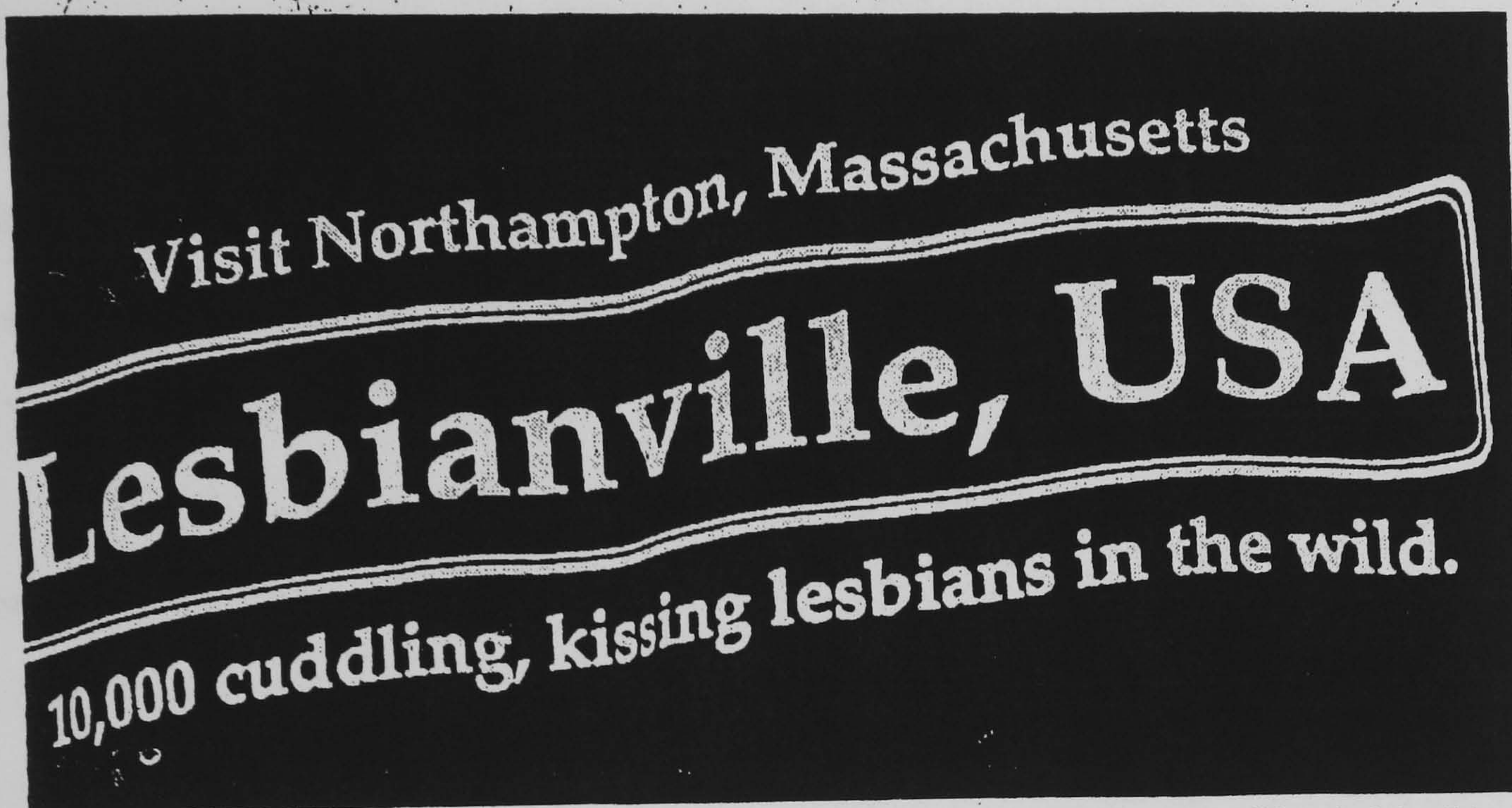
establishing such a centre. Benefits to raise money for this purpose are held every now and then, and a committee has been set up to oversee these funds. Notice was sent out in November 1991 of plans to start a 'Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual Community Center'. (Anon 1991) The initiative was in part a result of conflicts within the community about bisexual inclusion, and the identification of the need for a space of 'community focus' where diversity could be celebrated and differences aired.

Figure 11. 'Lesbianville, USA' from the *Chicago Tribune*. (Tobey 1993: 10)

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Section 5 Chicago Tribune, Sunday, December 5, 1993

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Photos for the Tribune by Robert Tobey//

everyone likes the nickname for Northampton, which adorns this T-shirt sold at Pride and Joy, resident Pamela Kimmell says, "I think it's hilarious. It's a very empowering word."

Figure 12. Photograph of the North Star Bar, Northampton, Massachusetts.



Continuing up Main Street towards the imposing edifice of Smith College at the top of the hill, you pass the Unitarian Church (L). The church steps provide the unlikely site for a daily congregation of young butches, decked out in their casual yet precise teaming of white T-shirts and low-slung 501s, drinking coffee, and projecting their group gaze outwards, as much to mark out their own territory as to cruise. Past the church on the left is the old stone building of the Academy of Music (M), now an alternative theatre, film and performance venue.<sup>95</sup>

Walking past Smith College on your right, up to West Street, you can see the North Star (N) ahead of you (Figure 12). The North Star bar and dance club is Northampton's lesbian bar, owned and run by and for lesbians and gay men for almost ten years.<sup>96</sup> My favourite time to go to the North Star is 5pm, arriving straight from Smith's Neilson Library. Sitting at the bar with my friend Rebecca, only a few other regulars in the place, a unique camaraderie develops as we nurse our 'Buds' and watch re-runs of 1950s sit-coms playing on the TV behind the bar. At that time of the day, the sweat of the previous night still hangs in the air, the ambience lonely and comforting at the same time.

It has only taken me fifteen minutes to get to the Green Street Café (O), an upmarket restaurant run by two gay men, which prides itself on serving 'only the best' French cuisine. As the waiter shows me to my friend's 'usual table' in the window and I consider the menu, two women walk by the window hand in hand. This is such a common sight that I barely even register the moment; it is

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<sup>95</sup> In May 1997, The Academy of Music showed both *Chasing Amy* and *Female Perversions*, two films that have central queer (and arguably bisexual) female protagonists.

<sup>96</sup> It was sold in November 1995 and ceased to be a specifically lesbian bar, after attempts to save a failing business in the winter by closing the restaurant. The North Star changed hands again in May 1996 becoming The Grotto. I continue to use the old name in this chapter, although The Grotto is also a queer bar, as I have barely visited it under the new management. See Chapter Three, Section Two, Part One, for further elaboration of the significance of the North Star.

only now, in writing, that I remember.

The picture I am building is one of a vibrant, well-serviced lesbian community, with the emphasis most definitely on the ‘serviced’. It can be extremely difficult for new women in town to meet other women, precisely because most ‘lesbian spaces’ are so commerce-oriented,<sup>97</sup> and require company for you to feel part of the community. For lesbians and bisexual women, sitting in a coffee shop surrounded by lesbians, is, perhaps, only a joyful community experience if you are with someone else already; it is not necessarily the best environment to meet new people. Specific lesbian events in Northampton tend to be organised around a theme. *TC* lists endless potlucks and group therapy meetings, but few political or purely social events.<sup>98</sup> In this respect the very public nature of Northampton’s lesbian community can make ‘coming-out’ a very isolating experience. Perhaps this is where the nostalgia I experience when writing about the North Star’s lingering sweat comes from. I think that what I liked about 5pm at the North Star was the residue of a sub-cultural queer experience that is otherwise lacking in Northampton generally. There are few treacherous heterosexual urban territories to negotiate, queer haven all the sweeter for the danger. The brash commercialism of Northampton’s lesbian community – though selling rainbow earrings and aromatherapy rather than computers or fast food – can be linked to, say, the bright lights of Grand Opening (Boston’s women’s sex store), where what was hidden and marginal is made visible and central. For people whose ‘illicit’ desires are not separate from the contexts in which they have more traditionally found expression, the shopping opportunities

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<sup>97</sup> Katja Sarkowsky highlights this shift in lesbian and gay community from the anti-capitalist 1970s to the consumer-oriented 1980s. (Sarkowsky 1996: 4)

<sup>98</sup> *TC*’s editorial and letter pages traditionally provide a space for lesbian/feminist views. During the Pride March Controversy *TC* gave regular updates of related community events and urged lesbians to participate actively in the debates.

and cappuccinos of Northampton can be about as exciting as a cold shower.<sup>99</sup>

Yet, Northampton is not the totally safe lesbian haven that the tabloids (and at points, my own narrative) would have you believe.<sup>100</sup> The town-wide ban on smoking in public places serving food<sup>101</sup> has had the unanticipated effect of forcing alcoholic smokers onto the streets, thus increasing the levels of homophobic harassment lesbian and bisexual women receive.<sup>102</sup> In Northampton, lesbian moral, physical and mental health also provides a major source of lesbian income. In every issue of *TC* there are well over forty advertisements for lesbian health practitioners and counsellors. Nevertheless, the economic and consumer base of Northampton's community remains precarious. As should be clear from my 'tour' of Northampton, lesbian and gay businesses often follow a pattern of opening, closing, and re-opening. While there is always a client-base for lesbian venues or alternative health practices, there is not a regular enough cash flow to secure the long-term health of these ventures. In her discussion of the '20/20' reporting, Liz Galst emphasises that the prime-time TV slot failed to mention that in 1994 Northampton's unemployment rate reached an all-time high at 7.5%. Neither did the program represent the large number of 'professional lesbians' delivering pizza or working in coffee shops in order to afford to live in the Happy Valley. (Galst 1994: 13) Valle Dwight suggests that 'Northampton's national

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<sup>99</sup> See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's exploration of the pervasive paradigm and sexual excitement of the closet in Chapter Two of *The Epistemology of The Closet*, (Sedgwick 1991) though Sedgwick also warns her reader of the dangers of glamorising such repression (as I seem to be doing).

<sup>100</sup> The *CNN* and *20/20* television coverage of Northampton presented the town as entirely non-homophobic, and interviewed only prosperous professional women. (Galst 1994: 13)

<sup>101</sup> Effective from Summer 1994, and part of the gradual move from lesbian bar-culture to lesbian health culture (though not only affecting lesbians, obviously). The flyer advertising a workshop on lesbians and alcohol in 1982 (Figure 13) signals the beginning of this trend.

<sup>102</sup> A lesbian friend of mine talks of how she has begun to find walking past Bart's and Coffee Connection (two coffee shops on Main Street) intimidating, because of the comments and harassment she endures from the men sitting outside smoking. She notes that walking by used to be a lesbian femme cruising experience, but that this had been ruined now that the smoking ban has taken effect.

Figure 13. Flyer (1982) 'Alcohol and the Lesbian Community', Northampton General Files, The Northampton Collection, The Sexual Minorities Archives.

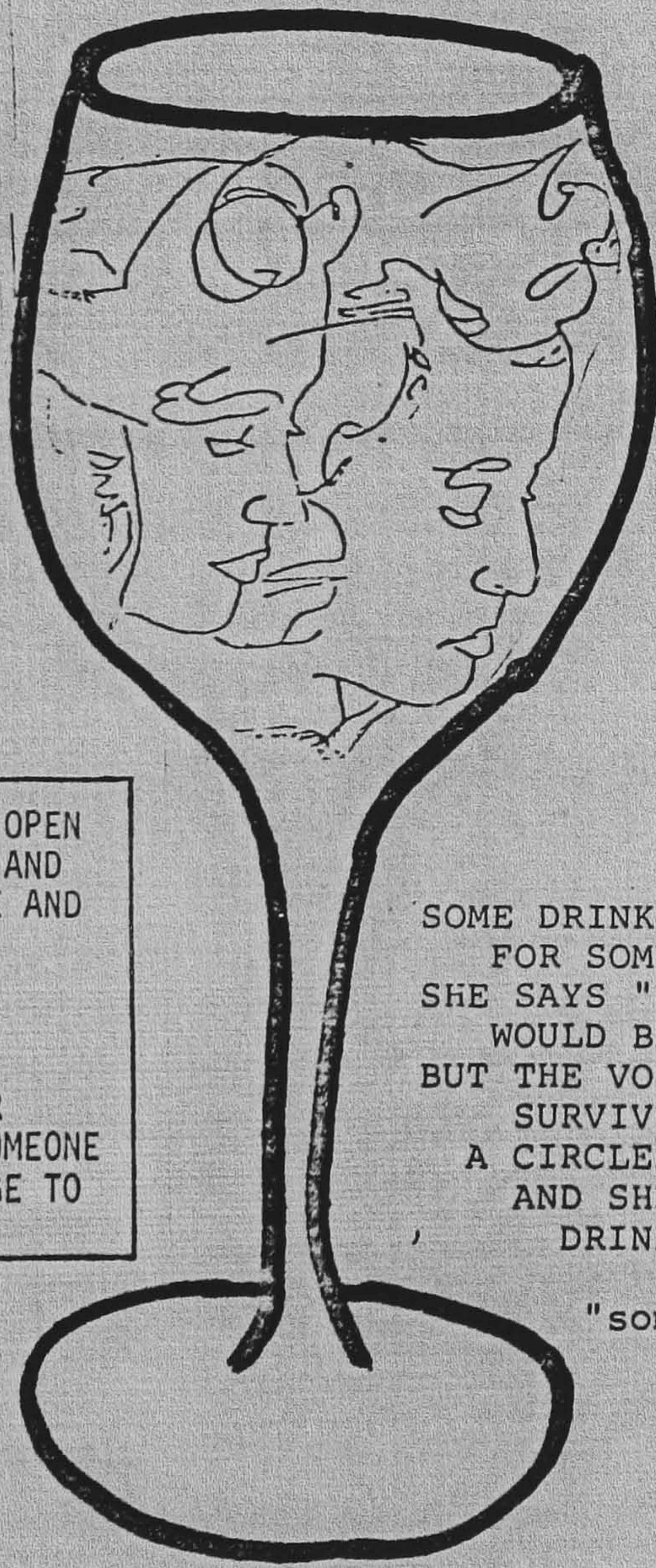
# ALCOHOL AND THE LESBIAN COMMUNITY

A FREE WORKSHOP OPEN TO ALL LESBIANS

DATE: NOVEMBER 6, 1982

TIME: 10am-1pm

LOCATION:  
THORNES MARKET THIRD FLOOR  
VALLEY WOMEN'S MARTIAL ARTS  
SPACE



FOR MORE INFORMATION  
CONTACT:  
MADELEINE 586-8127  
SANDY 584-9016

THIS WORKSHOP IS DESIGNED TO OPEN DISCUSSION ABOUT THE AFFECTS AND IMPLICATIONS OF ALCOHOL ABUSE AND ALCOHOLISM IN THE LESBIAN COMMUNITY.

ANYONE WHO HAS AN INTEREST OR CONCERN ABOUT THEIR OWN OR SOMEONE ELSE'S ALCOHOL USE IS ENCOURAGED TO ATTEND.

SOME DRINK AND CALL IT CELEBRATION  
FOR SOME IT'S PAIN AND SORROW  
SHE SAYS "WELL MAYBE JUST THIS ONCE  
WOULD BE OK"  
BUT THE VOICE OF MILLIONS STRONG  
SURVIVING GUIDING LIGHT  
A CIRCLE HOLDS HER TIGHTLY  
AND SHE THROWS THE  
DRINK AWAY.....

"something about the women"  
holly near

reputation as an accepting environment for gays and lesbians has [...] meant an increase in visitors,' (Dwight 1994: 8) resulting in the local Lesbian and Gay Business Guild 'working with other groups to bring tourists to the area year-round, especially in the traditionally slow winter months.' (Ibid) It is the lesbian tourist-trade that sustains Lesbianville's alternative economy, not, in fact, the lesbian 10-30% of Northampton's more permanent population.

Neither is Northampton an idyll immune from incidents of homophobic violence. A 1977 article in *Lesbian Connection* on Northampton's lesbian community – 'Analysis of a Lesbian Community – Part One' – discusses the creation of an 'attack and defense patrol' in August 1975. (Anon July 1977: 7) The patrol was established in response to several weeks of harassment, 'culminating in an attack by several men with a shovel and a machete, at a neighbourhood bar where lesbians hung out.' (Ibid; NALL 1984) In late 1982 and early 1983, the New Alexandria Lesbian Library, Womonfyre Books,<sup>103</sup> and individual lesbians prominent in Northampton's lesbian community, became the targets of homophobic harassment in the form of death threats left on answer-phones and in letters. (NALL 1984)<sup>104</sup> Community organising and the resulting pressure on Northampton's mayor and police force in early 1983 resulted in the arrest and conviction of the perpetrator in October of the same year.<sup>105</sup> Similarly,

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<sup>103</sup> The first lesbian-owned bookstore in Northampton selling feminist, lesbian and queer books, Womonfyre Books closed in January 1989 for reasons discussed below.

<sup>104</sup> A video made by Heramedia on violence against lesbians includes a section on the 1982-1983 violence in Northampton. Violence against lesbians is explained in the video transcript as the result of men's feelings of exclusion – 'lesbian by definition excludes men and this is seen as a threat to male prerogative and masculinity'. (Heramedia 1986: n.p.) This definition of 'lesbian' comes under attack in a very different way during the Pride March Controversy, as I argue later in this chapter.

<sup>105</sup> Robert Kremensky was convicted of violating the rights of lesbians, (NALL 1984) and was given a one-year jail sentence, This was the first such sentence under the state civil rights law for a violation of a person's civil rights. That year's Pride March – 'Come Out For Justice: Come Out For Good' – was entirely comprised of speakers talking violence: Bet Power, on the homophobic violence against NALL; Gwen Rogers, on behalf of All People's Congress and the

‘a 21-year-old Northampton woman [was] punched in the face [...] by a man who made obscene references about her being a lesbian’, (Moulton 1993: n.p.) outside Pearl Street night-club on 4 March 1993. Once again, the perpetrator was prosecuted under a civil rights violation with bodily injury and battery, (Ibid) and, once again, the lesbian community immediately rallied around the victim, holding a candlelit vigil at the scene of the crime. (Loisel 1993, n.p.) Clearly Northampton lesbians do face homophobic violence. The difference between Northampton and many other towns, however, is the extent to which the community as a whole responds to such incidents.<sup>106</sup>

The failure of the Domestic Partnership Ordinance to pass the town referendum in November 1995, also indicates that homophobia can be mobilised when right-wing factions feel that the town’s lesbians and gay men have stepped over the line. As the report in the UK’s *The Guardian* suggested the day before, ‘a dream of sorts’ was on trial: ‘By Wednesday morning, [lesbians] will know if their safe haven is still safe’. (Freedland 1995: 7)<sup>107</sup> The failure of the Ordinance by only 87 votes – 4,770 to 4,683 (Anon 1995: n.p.) – was particularly shocking since the Ordinance itself would not have guaranteed health insurance benefits for partners, but merely allowed same-sex couples to gain a certificate attesting to the nature of their relationship. Responses to the defeat of the Ordinance varied from, ‘[t]his is a city of great hope and spirit’, to ‘I’m surrounded by people who don’t support me at best and at worst hate me.’ (Ibid)

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People’s Anti-War Mobilization, on the link between violence against lesbians and violence against other communities. (Heramedia 1986)

<sup>106</sup> Pat Califia makes a similar point about queer safety in San Francisco: ‘there was this weird dynamic of queer areas of San Francisco being simultaneously under attack and yet often well-defended.’ (Califia 1997: 193)

<sup>107</sup> I am not suggesting that equal rights would be guaranteed had the Ordinance passed the referendum. The issue of Domestic Partnership is highly contentious, not least because it assumes that lesbians and gay men want to be ‘just like’ heterosexuals. Nevertheless, it is clearly seen as a threat to ‘heterosexual morality’ by those contesting it. For some of the pros



‘Analysis of a Lesbian Community – Part Two’ also mentions some of the internal tensions of a lesbian community that aspires towards unity, but necessarily includes people with different politics, experiences and needs, particularly those of class and ethnicity. (Anon September 1977: 9-10) The importance of discussion, respect and inclusion is highlighted in this early article, but in the 1990s Northampton’s lesbian community remains overwhelmingly white and middle-class. (Sarkowsky 1996: 7) While Northampton itself is a white middle-class area, there are established communities of Puerto Ricans and Latinos in the areas surrounding Northampton – in particular Florence Heights. But little attempt has been made to examine the reasons why there are very few people from those communities who consider themselves to be a part of Northampton’s lesbian community. In an interview about the wave of homophobic violence in Northampton in 1982-83, Kiriyo Spooner and Bet Power mention racist attacks perpetrated against the Hispanic community at around the same time. (Heramedia 1986: 3) When asked why links between the two communities had not been made, Spooner points out how ‘insular’ the lesbian community is – ‘I call myself a separatist, and I [...] haven’t been involved in doing coalition political organizing.’ (Spooner, in Heramedia 1986: 3) At no point does the fact that there might be Hispanic lesbians for whom the two identities are not a matter for ‘coalitions’ but of inseparable identity occur to Spooner. Both Spooner and Power acknowledge that the lesbian community sees itself as separate from other communities, and, by default, white:

I think the perceptions that I get, walking around Northampton, are of segregation. Florence Heights is somewhere out there, the Hispanic community is somewhere out there, the Black community is somewhere out there, and this is the white community. (Power, in Heramedia 1986: 4-5)

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and cons of fighting for Domestic Partnership or marriage rights see Blumenfeld 1996.

Such segregation means that Northampton cannot be seen as a safe environment for lesbians of color.<sup>108</sup>

Debates about pornography and sadomasochism in the late 1980s split Northampton's lesbian community in much the same way as the Pride March Controversy. Rather than providing a supportive background to a thriving community, in the late 1980s Northampton became the site for irreconcilable warring factions. The May 1989 issue of *Valley Women's Voice* published a letter mourning the closing of Womonfyre Books on January 21, 1989. (Power et al 1989: 5) The authors blame 'anti-pornography Lesbians and [...] a group of women who opened Lunaria Bookstore in Northampton, too small a geographic area to support two Lesbian-feminist bookstores.' (Ibid)<sup>109</sup> Womonfyre was allegedly the target of numerous attacks by anti-pornography feminist activists, closing when its owners were no longer able to meet the cost of replacing repeatedly broken windows. The debate attracted national attention when Susie Bright reported in *On Our Backs* that 'Lesbian Censors Close Women's Bookstore'. (Bright 1989: 9)<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Interestingly, though, the Northampton area has 'more Jewish lesbians per capita than any other area (with the possible exception of the Park Slope section of Brooklyn).' (Newman 1993: 32-33) The majority of those are Ashkenazi rather than Sefardic Jews (i.e. are of European rather than Middle-Eastern heritage) and so this could illustrate the relative ease of white ethnic assimilation. However, there is a strong commitment to Jewish visibility and community in Northampton that contradicts that view.

<sup>109</sup> Womonfyre operated a policy of no censorship of lesbian materials, stocking lesbian-feminist texts, alongside lesbian pornography and erotica. The NSMA in Northampton has recently acquired several boxes of archive material relating to Womonfyre Books. Unfortunately these arrived as I was leaving Northampton and I was unable to look through them. The information included here is from the general files.

<sup>110</sup> The next edition of *Valley Women's Voice* published a number of other letters on the closing of Womonfyre Books including a response from the owners of Lunaria who rejected the claims of Power *et al*, and information about Womonfyre Books from a former employee. All the letters took issue with the letter from Power *et al*, and with the editorial decision to publish the letter. (Maloof and Zadik 1989: 4-5; Ryan 1989: 5) The editors apologised to Lunaria. After the owner of Gazebo (the lesbian lingerie store) responded to rumours that the anti-pornography

From March 1989 onwards there were frequent anti-pornography rallies in and around Northampton which culminated on 16 April 1989 in Amherst, where women publicly burned large quantities of pornographic material, opening up the floodgates to the pro- versus anti-censorship debates (Figure 14).<sup>111</sup> In the same period, *TC*'s editor refused to print an advertisement for Shelix (Northampton's woman-to-woman SM group) in its listings, provoking an angry response from the anti-censorship lobby (Figure 15). As part of the response, a lesbian sex reading was held at The New Alexandria Lesbian Library on May 7 (Figure 16). All through the summer arguments raged,<sup>112</sup> blending with the Pride March debates the following year. Those who argued against the inclusion of the term 'bisexual' were commonly the same people who had been vocal in the anti-pornography campaigns. In many ways these larger debates about sexuality form the backdrop to the debates surrounding the inclusion of bisexuals in the Pride March and Committee.

### 'Bisexual Culture'

One might expect – as I did – that in a town so full of lesbians and gay men, with so much to offer in the way of consumerism and community, there would also be a thriving bisexual community, a network of active, 'out' bisexuals. When I first arrived in Northampton in Autumn 1994, I scoured *TC* for bisexual groups and activities. A bisexual women's discussion group took place on Wednesday evenings at The Haymarket. Brimming with enthusiasm and hopeful

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lesbians were about to fire-bomb her business, the women at Lunaria speculated that police infiltration into the lesbian community might have been responsible for these and other such rumours. (*TC* May 1989: 1; Anon April 1989)

<sup>111</sup> This event was followed up with a public lecture the next day by Andrea Dworkin on 'Pornography and Civil Rights'. (Anon April 1989a)

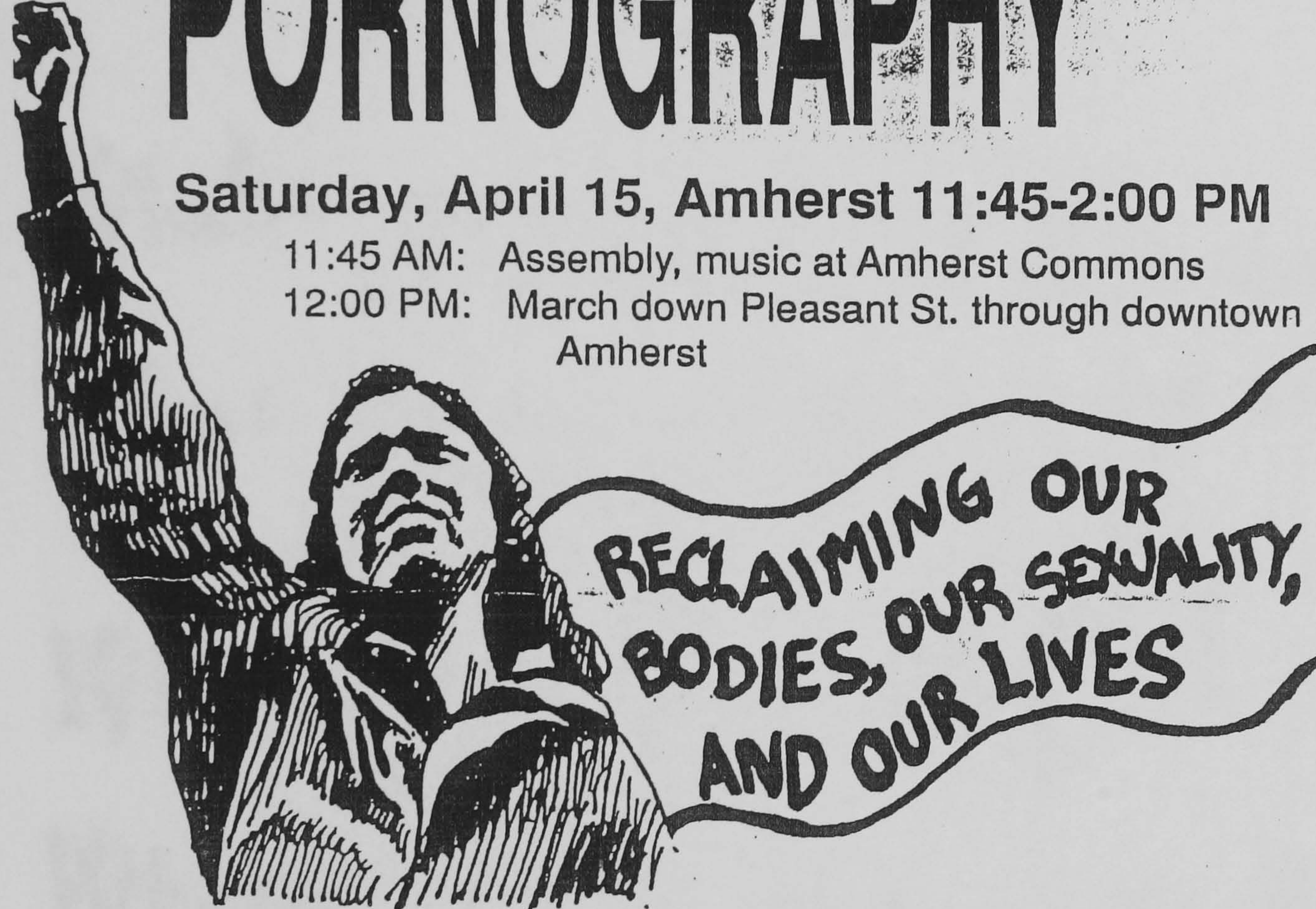
<sup>112</sup> In August there was 'A Week of Feminist Views' organised by the anti-pornography lobby, including an educational slideshow, lectures, and rallies. The events took particular care to link the fight against pornography with feminist pro-choice campaigns. (Anon August 1989)

Figure 14. 1989 Flyer for the March Against Pornography, from The Northampton Collection.

# MARCH AGAINST PORNOGRAPHY

**Saturday, April 15, Amherst 11:45-2:00 PM**

11:45 AM: Assembly, music at Amherst Commons  
12:00 PM: March down Pleasant St. through downtown Amherst



RECLAIMING OUR  
BODIES, OUR SEXUALITY,  
AND OUR LIVES

Protest pornography - the sexualized degradation of women in our world. Come with your banners, signs, family, and friends to proclaim your anti-pornography/pro-freedom stand. There will be a creative and meaningful rally, interesting speakers on the censorship controversy, sexuality, and women's oppression, music and performances.

Sign and Banner-Making Party: Tuesday, April 11th 7-10  
Northampton (584-1038 for more info)



Figure 15. 1989 Flyer 'Shelix: The True Story', Shelix Box,  
The Northampton Collection

SHELIX.

The True Story:

What: NEW ENGLAND'S ♀ TO ♀  
S/M SUPPORT GROUP SINCE 1983

Who: FOR ALL WOMEN WHO LIKE SAFE,  
CENTERED, CONSENSUAL,  
LOVING S/M WITH WOMEN

When: July 9 \* 8 P<sup>M</sup>!  
TOPIC: "PUBLIC SEX"

Where: IN NOHO  
(413)

How: CALL 584-7616 info

Why: FOR FREEDOM FOR LOVE FOR  
THE SEXY, SOBER PLACE TO BE  
EXACTLY WHO YOU R



Det

Figure 16. 1989 Flyer, 'Fire and Power: Lesbian Sex Readings', Shelix Box, The Northampton Collection.

**FIRE & POWER**  
LESBIAN SEX READINGS

**FIRE:** Poet - Wolf Womyn  
Shu Publishing  
Books: Ice Mirrors,  
Sensual Rhythms & Purple Bats,  
Wolf Nights, Liquid Lovers

'I perceive the beauty, light,  
power & wisdom of the Universe  
as it flows through Lesbians;  
This is the source & inspiration  
for my work.'

**POWER:**  
Bet Power lives with & directs  
the Library; founded SHELIX,  
New England Woman-to-Woman  
S/M Support Group; & writes  
for On Our Backs (S.F.),  
The Valley Women's  
Voice (Amherst), &  
Leather News  
(Hamburg).

All Women Welcome  
\$4 more or less  
413-584-7616 for info &  
location

Wheelchair accessible, but  
not bathroom

NEW ALEXANDRIA LESBIAN LIBRARY

Sun., may 7, 1989, 7 pm

for my research, I turned up at the appointed time, anticipating several tables of bisexual women with stories to tell, and a bisexual political perspective on Northampton's lesbian and gay culture. I walked around The Haymarket a few times; there was no sign saying 'Bisexual Discussion Group' in bold letters and the clientele of the cafe offered no clues. In the end I had to ask several tables of people if they were the bisexual women's discussion group – and was greeted by blank stares, or incredulous laughter – before I happened upon the right table. The bisexual women's discussion group turned out to be three women, all under twenty-five, white, middle-class, and very recently 'out' as bisexual. All three had only recently moved to the area.

A Northampton bisexual women's group had been active in the early 1990s, but had disbanded after the 'resolution' of the Pride March Controversy. The Amherst-based Valley Bisexual Network boasted over 150 members during the Controversy but also disbanded in 1992. The group was at the centre of bisexual activism up until this time.<sup>113</sup> The Valley Bisexual Women's Support Group was formed by newcomers to the area in Autumn 1993. This group collapsed six months later due to internal conflicts over confidentiality and race/ethnicity, that proved impossible to resolve.<sup>114</sup> The bisexual women's discussion group I attended at The Haymarket comprised several women from that support group. These women also organised monthly Bisexual Women's Brunches, and advertised them in *TC* so that other women could come along to something more informal than a discussion or support group. These were much

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<sup>113</sup> It is not clear why the group did not continue. It may have been supplanted by the inception of Queer Nation in 1991, or the Pride March Controversy may have resulted in leadership 'burnout'.

<sup>114</sup> One of the group's co-facilitators felt that her needs as the only woman of color in the group were not being met. Conversely, some members of the group felt that this woman took up too much space, and was not fulfilling her role as facilitator. None of this was dealt with directly, but discussed among cliques outside the group. The bad feeling escalated until the group fell apart, not through direct confrontation, but because members of the group (unsurprisingly)

better attended than the discussion groups, with between 5 and 10 regulars.

By Spring 1995, however, the Bisexual Women's Discussion Group had ceased to meet, and a new fortnightly Bisexual Women's Support Group was organised, attracting between 7 and 15 people to each meeting.<sup>115</sup> This group's relative success was, I think, due to the fact that most group members had only recently begun to acknowledge their desire for people of more than one sex, and needed a safe social (rather than political or theoretical) space to explore what bisexual desire might mean.<sup>116</sup> Most of the women were struggling to understand their desire within the framework of Northampton's lesbian community: the lesbian community had been their 'home' for a long time. Those women in relationships with lesbians felt that there was no space for their bisexual desire (whether or not they identified as bisexual) to be acknowledged within the lesbian community. Yet they also expressed fears that the 'bisexual community' would not be able to offer the level of support that they were used to. This group did not last long either. Women who were comfortable with their bisexual desire or identity found they no longer needed a support group, and the frequent changeover of participants created too much instability. By January 1996 the group had faded away. As far as I know no other bisexual groups have been established since then.

General information on bisexuality is equally hard to locate. The NSMA has only a couple of books and some out-of-date newsletters from US cities (e.g. Seattle, Boston and San Francisco) with large bisexual groups. Pride and Joy

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simply stopped going. (Personal sources 1994-95)

<sup>115</sup> I was a member of the Bisexual Women's Support Group for several months in 1995. The information recorded here is gathered from my impressions while attending the group, and from follow-up information about the group from another participant. The other members of the group agreed that I could make use of this information.

<sup>116</sup> The only requirement to be a part of the group was that the woman be questioning her desire (for one sex exclusively) whether or not she identified as bisexual. Of course, the word 'bisexual' in the name of the group meant that the majority of women who came were



stocks a couple of US bisexual anthologies, in addition to a ‘humorous’ postcard suggesting that lesbians take out ‘bisexual insurance’. The idea is that a lesbian can use this insurance to gain compensation for being heart-broken when her fickle bisexual lover (inevitably) leaves her for a man.<sup>117</sup> None of Northampton’s lesbian-friendly businesses have ‘dyke and bi discounts’. At the 1995 Northampton Lesbian Festival I was the only and first ever person to facilitate a workshop on bisexuality (there were several hundred workshops over three days). Academic interest in bisexuality has grown within the Five College area in the last few years. Nevertheless, syllabi and course outlines do not conceive of bisexuality as anything other than a last-minute addition to a women’s studies or lesbian and gay studies curriculum.

Yet the evidence is contradictory. Sitting in Bart’s one day, reading one of the local free newspapers – *The Valley Advocate* – I was struck by the women’s personal advertisements, approximately 60% of which included the word ‘bi’: ‘bi woman seeks’; ‘bi femme looking for’, ‘lesbian looking for bisexual experience with non-sexist man’, etc. These women were clearly marking out their bisexual desire and seeking a lover, partner or friend on the basis of that desire. The disparity between the six or seven people making up the core of the bisexual women’s group and the dozens and dozens of women anonymously proclaiming their bisexual desire does seem marked. They were prepared to advertise for it, but not to join a group of other women identifying as bisexual. Somehow, bisexual desire, identity and community are never quite united in Northampton.

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considering such an identity.

<sup>117</sup> Both the curator of the NSMA and the owner of Pride and Joy are, in fact, extremely bi-positive. Their reasoning for the lack of bisexual material was lack of availability. A single call to BiNet USA (the US national bisexual organisation), however, could have provided them with a wealth of leaflets, news sheets and book-lists.

## **Part Two: Bisexual/Lesbian Struggles**

### **'History'**

The lesbian and gay community of Northampton was divided between 1990 and 1993 between those who favoured inclusion of the term 'Bisexual' in the Lesbian and Gay Pride March, and those who did not. The debates concerned the nature of sexual politics and the boundaries of a queer community, as well as specific issues attending named inclusion of bisexuals.

In 1988, two members of the Valley Bisexual Network approached the Northampton Lesbian and Gay Pride March Committee (PMC) requesting that the name be changed to the Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Pride March. The response was negative; the reason for the decision was given as time-constraints. (Anon 1991a: 4) In the October before the 1989 March, a unanimous vote was taken by members of the Committee (five to six people, including members of the Valley Bisexual Network) to change the name to include 'Bisexual'. The meeting saw an influx of bisexuals and allies for the voting process, most of whom did not continue to be a part of the Committee or working groups after the motion was passed successfully. (Ibid) The 1989 PMC sent out a memo to political groups in the area announcing without preamble that: 'It's that time again – we're getting ready to hold the 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Pride March'. (Logan 1989)

A proposal to revert to the former name was made at the first meeting of the 1990 PMC, on December 13, 1989. (Lew 1990: n.p.) This time the vote went in favour of the original name, by one vote. (Anon 1991a: 5) Several participants at that meeting did not consider the vote binding, however, and called for another, more formal, vote. The editor of *TC* announced a 'COMMUNITY ALERT', arguing that the lesbians who had attended the December 13 meeting had 'tried to express our concerns, but were met with hostility and

condescension'. (*TC* Jan 1990: 1)<sup>118</sup> Angry at the fact that the initial vote was ignored, *TC* called for as many lesbians as possible to attend the next Pride Committee meeting on January 10, 1990, and to meet the week before for a strategy meeting. Northampton Center for the Arts was also booked for a 'meeting of the entire Lesbian community' on January 23. (*Ibid*) The announcement makes it clear that one is expected to choose between the lesbian 'we' who have 'created a community we care deeply about, and are in danger of seeing [...] made invisible' (*Ibid*) and the bisexual interlopers. At the January 10 meeting attended by between forty and fifty people a clear majority confirmed the decision to revert to The Lesbian and Gay Pride March. (*Anon* 1991a: 5)

The primary reason given for hostility to the change in name to include bisexuals was that it reflected a move away from lesbian visibility and politics. Among the speakers at the 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Lesbian and Gay Pride March in 1988 were a gay man with AIDS and black lesbian keynote speaker, Barbara Smith.<sup>119</sup> At the Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual March in 1989 a white bisexual man spoke on bisexuality, and a white heterosexual woman spoke about the recent Massachusetts gay and lesbian civil rights bill. (*Oh* 1988: 19)<sup>120</sup> The marked absence of any lesbian speakers confirmed many people's suspicions that bisexual inclusion equals lesbian exclusion. (*Lew* 1990; *Brook and Dreher* 1990: 3-4)<sup>121</sup> The gay men and bisexuals who had been on the Committee resigned, and instead, the all-lesbian Committee invited 'bisexuals and other politically

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<sup>118</sup> The editor of *TC*, Pamela Kimmell, supported the original name of 'Lesbian and Gay' throughout the Controversy.

<sup>119</sup> Smith spoke of the importance of coalition building among diverse minorities, not just sexual minorities – 'I have to believe in coalitions because those are the only kinds of politics that can save my life' '. (*Smith, in Oh* 1998: 19)

<sup>120</sup> The ten Committee members – five lesbians, three bisexuals and two gay men – decided to select speakers according to specific issues rather than identities. The lack of any lesbian speakers was partly due to last-minute cancellations. Most of the entertainment was lesbian, both ASL interpreters were lesbian, and the MCs were lesbian and gay. (*Ibid*)

sympathetic groups to march as our allies'. (*TC* Feb 1990: 1)

A community wide meeting was called on March 15 1990, as a 'chance to discuss differing perspectives on who is a part of our "community" [... and] how we can model dealing with conflict in a progressive way'. (*TC* March 1990: 1)

The meeting was called by the Program for Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Concerns<sup>122</sup> at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and facilitated by Felice Yeskel, the lesbian co-ordinator of the Program. As the editor of *TC* notes, and as the name of the Program suggests, the organisers of the meeting were in favour of bisexual inclusion. (*Ibid*)<sup>123</sup> Over three hundred people attended the meeting, many of whom aired their discomfort with the January 10 decision. (*Power* 1990: 5) The feeling at the March 15 meeting was overwhelmingly in favour of explicit bisexual inclusion. (*Anon* 1991a: 5) An informal agreement was made to schedule another meeting for the Fall to continue the dialogue, and establish a clear way of deciding who was to be explicitly included in the March's title and organisation, although this meeting never materialised.

In March 1990, Micki Seigel began what became known as the 'newspaper wars', when she wrote a letter protesting the exclusion of bisexuals from the PMC. Seigel, a bisexual woman who had served on the Committee the previous year, resigned after the return to the original name. According to Seigel, '[b]isexuals had been working on the march for years, without official acknowledgment [...] Now I am the one who is invisible.' (*Seigel* 1990: 2) In their letter responding to Seigel, Sarah Dreher and Lis Brook denied the allegation that she was forced to resign as publicity officer, though they did not attempt to

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<sup>121</sup> See footnote 74.

<sup>122</sup> The Program for Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Concerns was renamed The Stonewall Center in 1995.

<sup>123</sup> Two of the other organisers of the meeting were former members of the PMC, who had resigned after the January 10 vote to restore the original title of the March.

hide their vehement anti-bisexual feeling. (Brook and Dreher: 3-4) So began the parade of feelings for and against bisexual inclusion, published in local Northampton papers and the national gay and feminist presses, which lasted until mid-1991.

In 1991, the Lesbian and Gay Pride March and Committee's name remained unchanged. One month before the 1991 March, four lesbians who had secured the permit for the March and formed the Steering Committee called a public planning meeting. The issue of bisexual inclusion was met with a 'stubborn refusal to discuss the issues and emotions surrounding the march.' (Anon 1991a: 5) When criticised for this refusal, members of the Committee homed in on the lack of interest on the part of those requesting the name-change, arguing that 'the current group stepped in when no other group formed to help take responsibility for organising the march. (Brook, in Kroeplin 1991: 1) The Committee's decision to name the march 'Claiming Our Identity: Protecting Our Lives', did nothing to lessen bisexuals' feelings of anger at being excluded once more. An alternative March Committee, calling itself 'The Committee for an All-Inclusive Pride March', met twice weekly in the month leading up to the March. The alternative theme was announced as 'Unity is Our Power, Diversity Our Strength'.<sup>124</sup>

The alternative committee issued this statement:

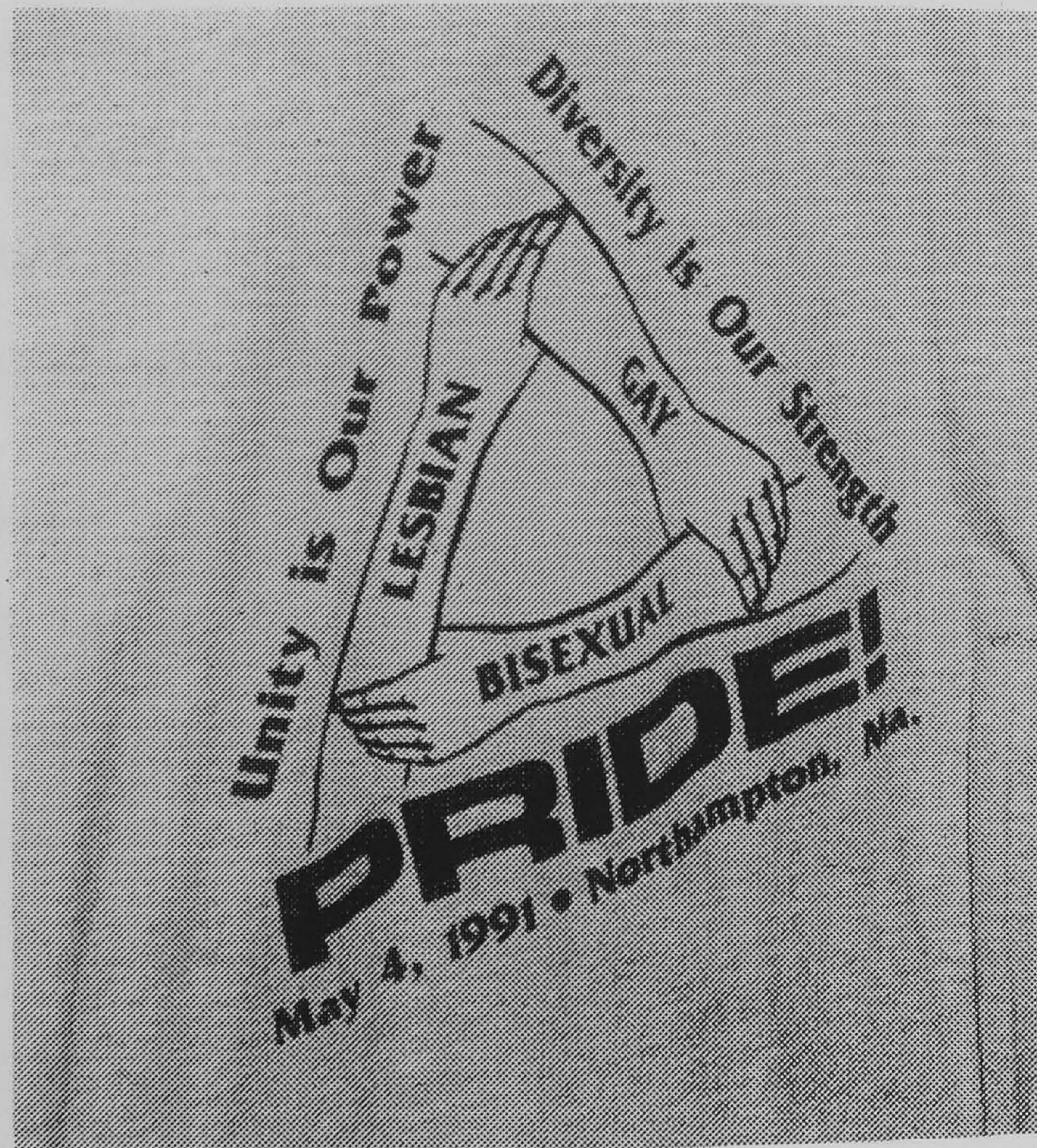
The issue has become larger than just the name change. [The Committee's] stance symbolizes a refusal to acknowledge and embrace the diversity of sexual identity (whether it be Bisexual, S/M, Drag Queen, and/or outside of a narrow definition of what it means to have a homosexual identity) in our community. (Committee for an All-Inclusive March 1991: 6)

These words are echoed by Sarah Dreher in her speech at the 1991 Lesbian and

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<sup>124</sup> Figure 17 shows the alternative Pride March T-shirts from 1990 and 1991.

Figure 17. Photographs of alternative T-shirts for the 1990 and 1991 Northampton Pride Marches.



Gay Pride March Rally, when she says that: ‘Something’s going on here, and it’s bigger than a name.’ (Dreher, in Kroepelin 1991: 1) Dreher’s claim is perhaps best supported by the fact that she was booed and shouted down throughout her speech, which damned ‘inclusion’ and ‘diversity’ as ‘pretty words’ designed to ‘guilt-trip’, and which emphasised the importance of a political lesbian identity. (Dreher, in *TC* June 1991: 2) Since the same women who were vocal in the anti-pornography/SM arguments in 1989 spoke most publicly in favour of maintaining the Pride March as Lesbian and Gay, their position began to be seen as advocating a homogeneous lesbian community.<sup>125</sup> From this point on, the anti-bisexual-inclusion advocates were damned as anti-diversity and even ‘fascist’ as well as biphobic.

After a series of long and drawn-out community meetings in 1991, a lesbian, gay and bisexual, community-wide ballot was held to determine the majority view. On February 2, 1992 voters decided in favour of a Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual PMC comprising three lesbians, three bisexuals and three gay men.<sup>126</sup> The Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Pride March, with the theme ‘We Are Family: Pride Equals Power’, took place on May 9, 1992 (Figure 19). Finally, it seemed, bisexuals had achieved the inclusion and visibility they sought. The title of the 1993 Pride March was similarly amended to become the ‘Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Pride March’. (Figure 20)

### ‘Exclusion and Inclusion’

The debates about the inclusion of the term ‘Bisexual’ in the Northampton Pride March and Committee emerged as a result of conflict within the lesbian and gay community, rather than from outside it. The 1988 Pride March’s full-page advertisement in the *Daily Hampshire Gazette* says: ‘Tomorrow, thousands of

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<sup>125</sup> See pages 70 and 71.

Figure 18. Sample Ballot paper for the public ballot on the Pride March name-change.

## 1992 Pride March Sample Ballot

**What would you like the 1992 Pride March to be named?**

1992 Lesbian & Gay Pride March

1992 Lesbian, Gay & Bisexual  
Pride March

**Who would you like to see on the 1991 Pride March Steering Committee?**

(It was decided that the committee will be composed of 12 people, except in the case noted below \*.)

Lesbians, Gay Men & Bisexuals

Lesbians & Gay Men

If you choose this option, what  
would you like the composition of  
the Steering Committee to be?

If you choose this option, what  
would you like the composition of  
the Steering Committee to be?

4 Lesbians, 4 Gay Men, 4 Bisexuals

4 Lesbians, 4 Gay Men, 3 Bisexuals\*

Other \_\_\_\_\_

8 Lesbians, 4 Gay Men

6 Lesbians, 6 Gay Men

Other \_\_\_\_\_

**How would you like the 1992 Pride March Steering Committee to be formed?**

Have people volunteer today after the ballots have been counted.

Have election by and of those present after the ballots have been counted.

There are three months left until the Pride March. The Steering Committee will need to be formed tonight. After the ballots have been counted (at around 5:15), the Steering Committee will be formed and the work of the Pride March will begin. If you are interested in submitting your name for Steering Committee membership or voting on the Steering Committee membership, please stay or return at 5:15.

<sup>126</sup> See Figure 18 for the ballot paper for this referendum.



Figure 19. Flyer with theme of 1992 Pride March.

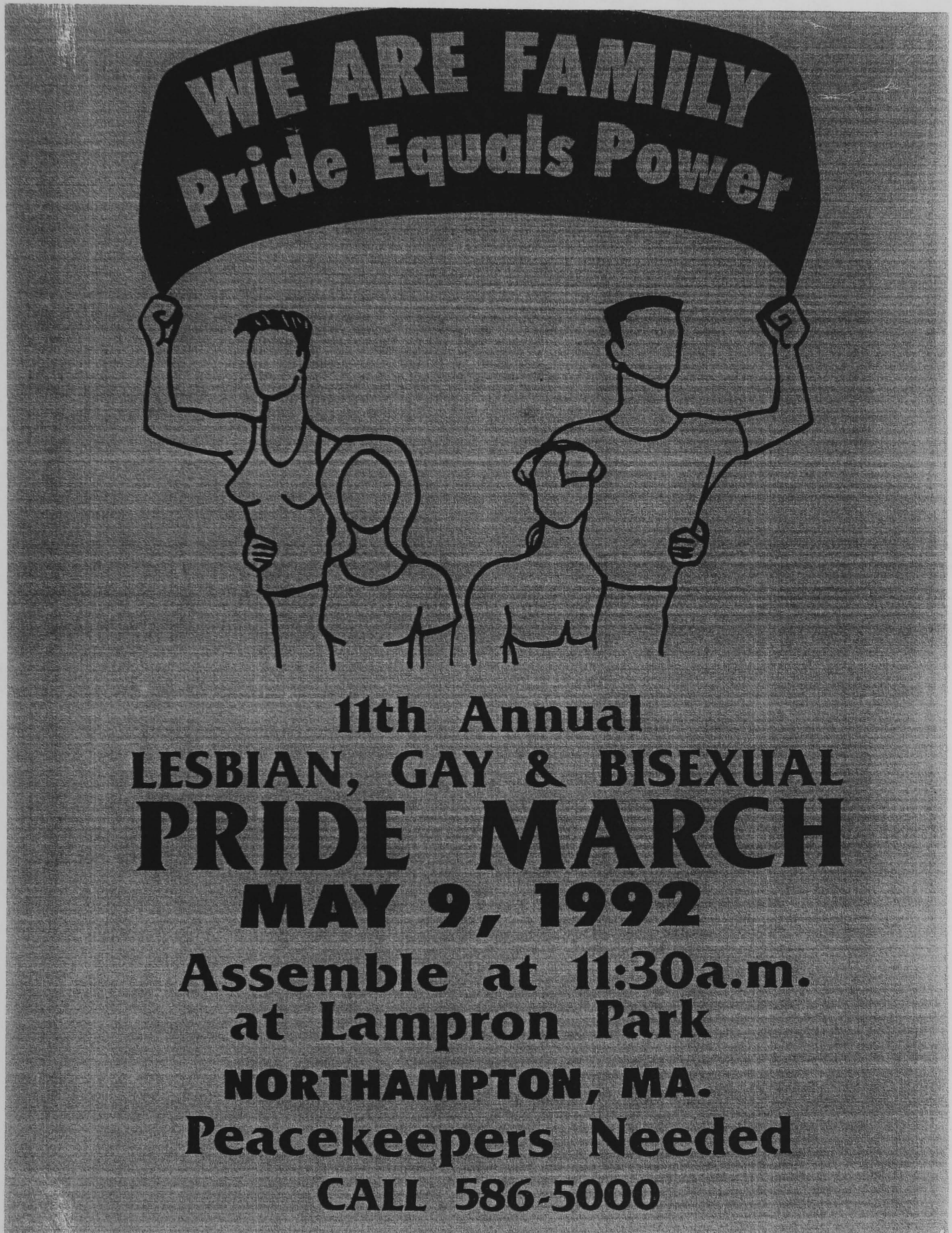
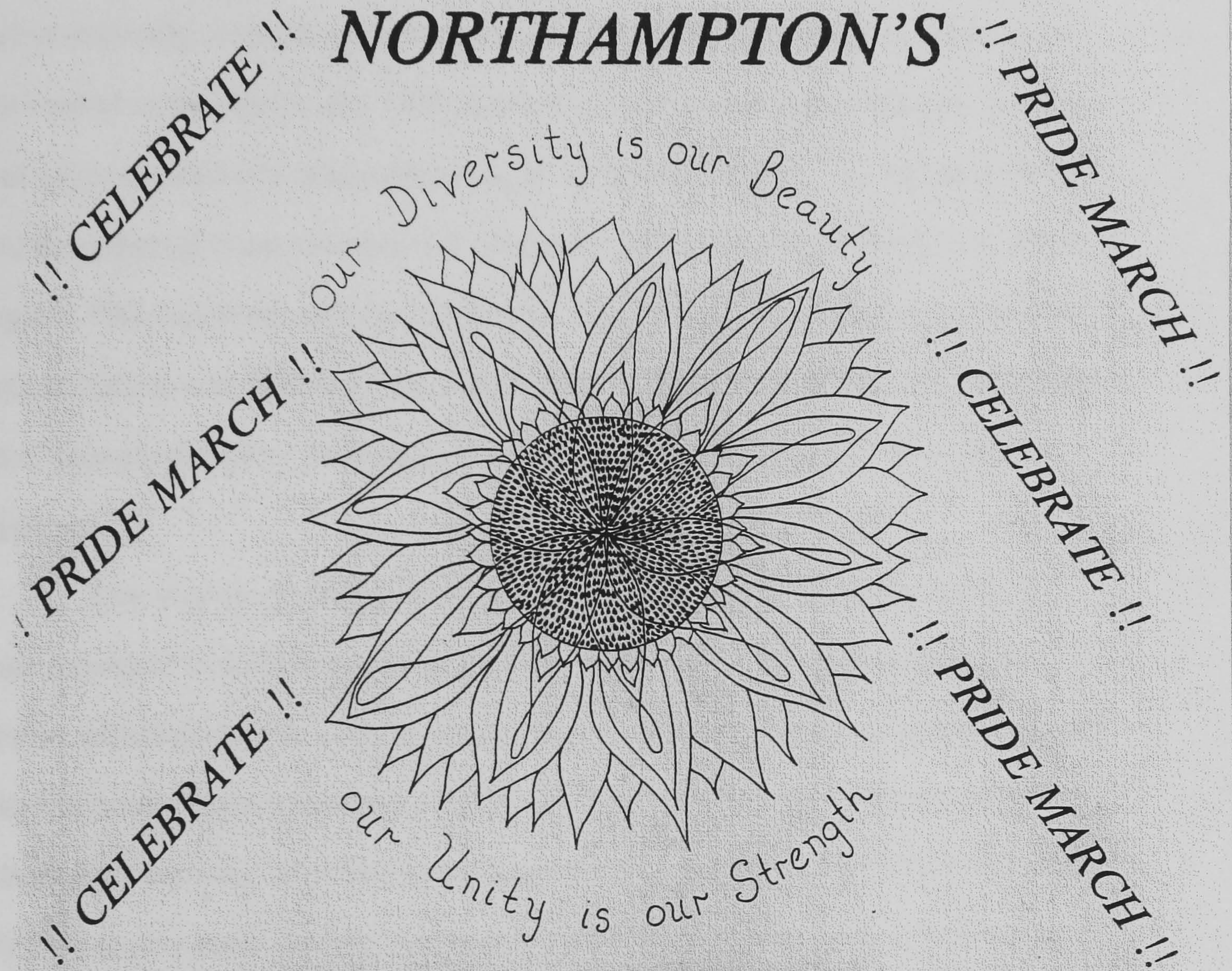


Figure 20. Flyer with theme of 1993 Pride March.



**12th ANNUAL  
LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL  
& TRANSGENDER  
PRIDE MARCH  
SATURDAY MAY 8, 1993**

*ASSEMBLE AT LAMPRON PARK AT 11:30am*

**FOR MORE INFO. CALL: 536-1600**

gay men, lesbians and bisexuals will march with their friends through the streets of Northampton proclaiming who they are within the safety of the crowd.’ (Anon 1988: 18) At this point, bisexuals are considered part of the core of lesbian and gay community, in need *of* rather than *being* allies, despite the fact that they are not named in the March. By 1990, however, the bisexual position in the lesbian and gay community is relegated to one of ‘political affiliation’. (Contrada 1990a: 16) Responding to accusations of bisexual exclusion the 1990 March Committee argues: ‘We can work together and march together; but we cannot be pressured into decisions which change the shape of our own political identities.’ (Ibid) The ‘we’ being potentially pressured here is clearly not lesbians, gay men and bisexuals.

One way of expelling bisexuals from a conception of lesbian and gay community is to vilify bisexual women for claiming lesbian space that is not theirs. Elisabeth Brook’s comment is typical: ‘We lesbians have worked long and hard to create safe communities for ourselves. Bisexuals are welcome to, and should, do the same. But do not try to grab what we have created.’ (Brook 1989: 6) This moves easily into the accusation that bisexual women are unwilling or unable to create their own community – ‘[f]or reasons [the Steering Committee] cannot comprehend, some bisexual women seem to feel they cannot create their own community, but must attach themselves to the Lesbian community.’ (Dreher and Brook 1990: 3). Boston bisexual activist Robyn Ochs responds to such accusations of parasitic bisexual behaviour thus: ‘I say to [...] all the [...] people who still don’t get why I and other bisexuals insist on “attaching” ourselves to the lesbian community: I do so because it is my community.’ (Ochs 1990: 5)

Initially, then, those arguing for the inclusion of ‘Bisexual’ in the title of the Pride March do so on the basis of ‘group unity inclusion’, (Contrada 1990:

12) rather than through a desire to create a bisexual community separate from the lesbian and gay community. The rhetoric of bisexual separation or inclusion remains ambivalent throughout the debates, however. For example, committee member Sue Krause suggests after the 1990 March that '[t]he lesbian and gay community gets on very well with the rest of the community'. (Krause in, Contrada 1990b: A-2) It is not clear here whether bisexuals form part of 'the rest of the community' or are included in 'the lesbian and gay community'. In the former case recent controversy would scarcely warrant saying that the two '[get] on very well'; in the latter, the 'bisexual inclusion' arguments become figured as internal wrangles within the lesbian and gay community. Similarly, Elisabeth Brook's statement that '[s]ome people were confused because [bisexual inclusion] had never been a factor before and they wanted to remain in keeping with the historical significance of using "lesbian and gay"', (Brook, in Contrada 1990: 12) could be read as a lack of desire to address the issue of bisexuality, an assumption of pre-existent bisexual inclusion within 'lesbian and gay', or a combination of the two. Likewise, the re-naming of the Pride March to include bisexuals provokes several readings. On the one hand, bisexual inclusion is sought as a way of acknowledging the history of bisexual work – personal, political and historical – within the lesbian and gay community. It is an attempt to make bisexuality visible, and to prevent its continuing to be a secondary consideration subsumed within 'lesbian and gay'. On the other hand, this naming signals a move towards a separate bisexual identity, and a way of making bisexuality visible in its own right, which could be read as confirmation of the view that bisexuals are not necessarily part of lesbian and gay community after all.

The Pride March Controversy takes place within this contradictory framework of inclusion and exclusion. The struggle to establish the positions of

bisexuality and lesbianism in relation to one another structures the Controversy as I discuss below. One effect of this is that the debates surrounding bisexual and lesbian identity, desire and community become more polarised than might otherwise be the case. Bet Power reports that at the March 15 1990 community meeting many lesbians were angry and confused over the rift between lesbians and bisexual women, because '1. they are lovers or friends of Bisexuals; 2. they are themselves Lesbians coming out as Bisexuals.' (Power 1990: 5) Power highlights the indivisible nature of 'Lesbian' and 'Bisexual' identities rather than focusing on the separate merits of either one. The terms of the discursive rift between 'Bisexual' and 'Lesbian', however, mean that there is little documentation that pursues this line, other than to make the case for bisexual inclusion (still separately defined) within the lesbian community.

## Section Two. A Question of Difference: Discursive Constructions of Bisexual and Lesbian Identities

In this section I want to explore the mechanisms used to establish bisexual women's and lesbian identity as related to different communities and desires, as, effectively, different from one another. Often this relationship is established as an antagonistic and hierarchical one, when bisexuals or lesbians claim their 'difference' as evidence of individual and cultural superiority.

### **Part One: Political and Sexual Territory**

#### 'The Sexual/Political Divide'

One of the primary ways in which the distinction between bisexuality and lesbianism becomes marked in the Pride Controversy is through oppositional use of the terms 'political' and 'sexual'. *TC* emphasises its arguments against bisexual inclusion by using a capital 'L' for 'Lesbian' and a lower-case 'b' for 'bisexual'. In a sense this marks the difference between what is perceived as a political identity – Lesbian – and a sexual identity – bisexual.<sup>127</sup> This same strategy of capitalising 'Lesbian' and not 'bisexual' (or 'bi-sexual'), is used sixteen years earlier in the C.L.I.T. papers of 1976 – 'many of the women of the Black Left are Lesbians or bi-sexual'. (C.L.I.T. 1976: 47)<sup>128</sup> Throughout her 1990 letter Power capitalises 'Bisexual' and 'Sadomasochist' as well as 'Lesbian'. Power is stressing the political nature of 'Bisexuals' and 'Sadomasochists' through the use of capital letters. In a sense she is marking out these terms as identities in their own right, rather than as subsidiaries of 'Lesbian' or descriptive terms for behaviour, even though she is arguing for the difficulty

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<sup>127</sup> This capitalisation is not consistent within the Pride March debates, however. It is most commonly used when the particular political point discussed is being made.

<sup>128</sup> The use of '-' in 'bi-sexual' similarly constructs bisexuality as orientation or propensity rather than identity.

of separating the terms in a community context.<sup>129</sup> What is interesting here, too, is the way in which bisexuals and sadomasochists are grouped together – by proponents of bisexual inclusion as well as dissenters – as sexual positions oppositional or subsidiary to the organic term ‘Lesbian’. Not only is bisexuality constructed as wholly sexual, bisexuals themselves are also charged with trying to redefine lesbianism in terms of sexuality – ‘[s]ome of the non-lesbian members of the committee appeared determined to define our lifestyles in purely bedroom, not political, terms.’ (TC January 1990: 1) The ‘personal’ nature of bisexual sexual choice is contrasted with the continued need for a strong political lesbian identity and community, because of ‘societal homophobia, job security, foster care, woman-hating and violence against women’. (TC February, 1990: 1) Rather than focusing on ‘sexual preference’ alone, the 1990 March Committee argue that ‘the abbreviated title is aimed at focusing on the broader spectrum of gay issues’. (Contrada 1990: 12). These ‘broader’ issues are cited as ‘child-rearing, foster care and marriage.’ (Ibid) These three areas of concern initially seem a curious choice to juxtapose *against* bisexuality, which would surely have a significant contribution to make to a discussion on children and marriage. What is being asserted, however, is that for lesbians – who cannot legally get married in the US, are frequently not allowed to foster children, and risk losing parental charge of their own children in court judgements – these issues are political. The implication is that for bisexuals these issues are simply matters of sexual choice or heterosexual privilege.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> It is significant that in her letter Power alternates between capitalising ‘Transvestite’ and ‘Transsexual’ and using the lower-case. At this time Power cannot be unequivocal about their status, either within the lesbian community, or as separately validated identities. It is not until 1993 that the issue of whether to change the Pride March and Committee name to ‘Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, *and Transgender*’ surfaces.

<sup>130</sup> The argument that bisexuality emphasises the sexual rather than the political ironically mirrors the arguments of the Northampton *anti*-pride lobby that holds a ‘Straight Pride’ rally each year to protest the Lesbian and Gay (and Bisexual) Pride March. (Riley 1991: 6). Both

It is the overlaps in terms of homophobia that are figured as the common ground between bisexual women and lesbians. Ara Wilson argues that '[i]t seems irrelevant to create a distinct bisexual identity – what bisexuals have in common with lesbians and gays is their experiences as homosexuals.' (A Wilson 1992: 28)<sup>131</sup> Oppression and political identity are seen as co-extensive here.<sup>132</sup> What is never mentioned is that what constitutes expressing those 'experiences as homosexuals' is, at least partly, same-sex *sex*. A bisexual women's desire is both the key to political identity and credibility and the reason she does not have access to political identity and credibility. By extension, a bisexual woman can only claim a political identity if her same-sex desire leads her to identify as a lesbian.

Bisexuals' responses to the accusation that they are 'watering down' lesbian politics characteristically fail to challenge this opposition of sex and politics. Firstly, bisexuals downplay the extent to which sexual behaviour is formative of a bisexual identity. So Michele Moore stresses that just as '“lesbianism is a way of life, not just something we do in bed” [...w]e bisexuals are not vaginas or clitorises or penises, we are whole human beings.' (Moore 1990: n.p.) Secondly bisexuals emphasise their political closeness to lesbians and their shared community. Hence, in response to Dreher and Brook's March 1990 letter, Ochs insists that:

Gay liberation is my liberation. When out with my girlfriend, I would not get just halfway beat up by a gay basher [...] I would not be fired from

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parties focus on sexual behaviour as a private concern. The association of bisexuality with sexual behaviour rather than (political) identity is still current. In January 1998 I noticed that Silver Moon Books ('Europe's largest' feminist bookshop on Charing Cross Road) has its books on bisexuality in the 'Sex and Sexuality' section of the shop, rather than the 'Sexual Politics' section. Other than *The Joy of Lesbian Sex*, all books on lesbianism are shelved in the 'Sexual Politics' or 'Lesbian and Gay' sections of the shop.

<sup>131</sup> Similarly, Lesley Mountain – a bisexual woman – proposes that it is only 'when we express the lesbian or gay part of our sexuality that we will suffer [from oppression].' (Mountain 1992: 7)

<sup>132</sup> In other contexts this association can be made for bisexuals by use of the term 'monosexism', as I discussed in Chapter One, Section One, Part Two.



only half of my job by a homophobic boss [...] If I had children I would not lose only half of them in a custody battle [...] I wouldn't lose half of my apartment if I were living with a woman lover and my landlord didn't like that [...] Yes, bisexuals who are not 'out' will not suffer direct effects of homophobia. But neither do lesbians who are not out. (Ochs 1990: 5)

Ochs redefines the issue as one of political commitment (signified by being 'out') as well as common sexuality (the argument would not work quite so effectively if Ochs were out with her boyfriend). She consolidates her argument by emphasising her political credentials, citing her participation in an impressive array of lesbian, gay and bisexual events and groups. (Ibid) For Karin Baker and Helen Harrison (two leading figures in the Boston Bisexual Women's Network (BBWN)<sup>133</sup>) bisexuality's primary political contribution to the lesbian, gay and bisexual community is its gender subversion: 'Bisexual liberation [...] depends on the subversion of gender categories. The same can be said of lesbian and gay liberation.' (Baker and Harrison 1990: 3)

In stressing their political affiliation with lesbians and gay men, however, it becomes less and less clear why Ochs, Baker, Harrison and Moore want bisexuals named separately. Their insistence on bisexuals as political rather than purely sexual beings, and their failure to engage with any possible differences – sexual or political – between bisexual women and lesbians, leaves me wondering, why do they *not* politically identify as lesbians? At no point do these writers examine more closely the function of the 'sexual versus political' separation, which must be seen in the context of a larger structuring dichotomy producing bisexual women and lesbians as discrete entities. Bet Power is one of the few people to articulate the sexual *as* political in this context. Power argues that unlike

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<sup>133</sup> The Boston Bisexual Women's Network was formative in the development of a US National Bisexual Network in the late 1980s. I discuss its role in a national context in Chapter Four, Section One, Part Two.

lesbians and gay men, bisexuals, transvestites, transsexuals, sadomasochists, and 'other sexual preferences [...are] just beginning to find their voices'. (Power 1990: 5) Power envisages a broader Sexual Minorities Movement evolving from the Gay and Lesbian Movement.<sup>134</sup>

In her speech at the 1991 Lesbian and Gay Pride March rally, Sarah Dreher argues that '[s]ome of us feel that bisexuals are a part of our community because they are oppressed for their sexual choices. Some of us feel that it takes a lot more than sexual oppression to be a community'. (Dreher 1991: 2).

Bisexuals' best attempts to evidence their common sexual oppression with lesbians now prove fruitless. Dreher shifts the terms of the debate by defining lesbian community as in excess of that oppression and as something to which bisexuals cannot have access. Dreher's speech is peppered with references to the form that excess takes, revelling in her 'Lesbian heritage' and 'our special outlook on life'. (Ibid) In reference to Northampton's lesbian community, Dreher stresses that: 'We have been strong. We have built a center of Lesbian power that is recognized and admired across the country'. (Ibid) The closing paragraphs of Dreher's speech remember previous lesbian community spaces in Northampton, and talk of the need to 'pick up the torch' again to create new spaces, such as a community centre and a local lesbian newsletter – '[o]ur overriding goal must be to create, not destroy.' (Ibid) Dreher's perspective is very much in line with that of lesbian philosopher Sarah Hoagland who says, '[w]hat I am calling "lesbian community" is not a specific entity; it is a ground of our be-ing.' (Hoagland 1988: 3)

For Dreher, bisexuals' inclusion in lesbian community, signalled by their named inclusion in the Pride March, 'would erase our politics, our special

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<sup>134</sup> Though many transsexuals and transvestites have struggled to keep gender identity distinct

outlook on life, our identity. They would have you say “We’re all alike except for who we sleep with,” and thereby reduce all our issues to sexual issues.’ (Dreher 1991: 2) The ‘lesbian ethos’ sketched by Dreher seems to derive from a structural ‘Lesbian Difference’ presumed to be at the heart of lesbian community, and which provides the explanation for why bisexuals can only march as allies. If Dreher’s ‘Lesbian Difference’ is innate, a bisexual woman can only be a part of lesbian community if she is true to her lesbian self, if she ‘comes out’ as a lesbian. If this difference refers to the rich history of lesbian community in the US, bisexual women are equally effectively erased from that history. Pamela Kimmell, the editor of *TC*, asserts that bisexual lack of compromise in the Northampton debates shows ‘ “an extreme lack of understanding and respect of lesbian and gay history and the people who lived it.”’ (Kimmell, in Kroeplin 1991: 1) Since a separate bisexual community has only become an issue in the 1990s in the US and the UK, the insistence on lesbian cultural difference strips bisexual women of their own genealogy within lesbian history. Lesbian theorist Shane Phelan argues that lesbian culture has always been peopled by women who desire both women and men,<sup>135</sup> and that bisexuality is ‘at the center of lesbian existence.’ (Phelan 1994: 96)<sup>136</sup> Whether or not those women called themselves bisexual, they were certainly predecessors of a contemporary bisexual subjectivity. The insistence on ‘Lesbian Difference’, whether cultural or innate, sets bisexual women at a distance from lesbian history and community.

The language used by those against bisexual inclusion in the Pride March underscores this notion of ‘Lesbian Difference’. Throughout the debates,

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from sexual identity.

<sup>135</sup> See particularly *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold* for a detailed local history of US lesbian bar culture of the 1940s and 1950s in Buffalo, New York, (Davis and Kennedy 1993) and *Public Sex* for the inaccuracy of separating bisexual and lesbian history within S/M and butch/femme cultures. (Califia 1994: 186)

<sup>136</sup> I discuss the extent of Phelan’s commitment to this ‘bisexual history’ in Chapter One,

bisexual threat is contrasted with lesbian bewilderment. Bisexuals are ‘self-serving’, (Dreher and Brook 1990: 2) while lesbians are ‘alarmed and concerned’. (Ibid) Bisexuals are parasites ‘attach[ing] themselves to the Lesbian community’, (Ibid) feeding off the hard work and creativity of lesbians – ‘[i]t’s all being done by dykes’. (*TC* June 1990: 1) Lesbian concern and caring is consistently met with bisexual ‘hostility and condescension’. (*TC* January 1990: 1) In return, bisexuals accuse the lesbians on the 1990 and 1991 March Committees of ‘fascism’ and ‘conspiracy’. (Kroeplin 1991: 1) At the predominantly lesbian 1990 Pride March keynote speaker Virginia Apuzzo asks ‘“I’m wondering why my dyke self feels so at home here today”’? (Apuzzo, in Contrada 1990b: A-2) This safe lesbian home needs to be vigilantly guarded against the ‘danger’ (*TC* January 1990: 1) of both homophobic violence and bisexual interlopers.

The lesbian ‘reclaiming’ of the 1990 March is consistently viewed in terms of territorial rights. *TC*’s triumphant editorial after the return to the ‘Lesbian and Gay Pride March’ in 1990 was entitled ‘Take Back the March Night’. (*TC* February 1990: 1) A parallel is being drawn between violence against women – traditionally protested by feminists in ‘Take Back the Night Marches’ – and the perceived ‘bisexual violence’ against lesbians. This link is made even more explicit in a ‘note to the editors’ of the *Valley Women’s Voice*:

The following statement on lesbian occupied territory was in part sparked by the recent controversy in Northampton, MA surrounding the 1990 Gay/Lesbian Pride March... (Northampton Lesbians Fighting Pornography 1990: 3)

The authors link the Pride March debates with the rape of a woman following the ‘Take Back the Night March’ in the same year. They argue that both marches will

remain symbolic until the Northampton community really becomes ‘LESBIAN OCCUPIED TERRITORY’, (Ibid, authors’ emphasis) which is the only space that ‘can offer long-term protection from men, and create alternative women’s culture free from the violence of heterosexuality.’ (Ibid)<sup>137</sup> The threat posed to lesbian territory by bisexual women is their relationship, or potential relationship, to men. The bisexual woman’s male lover lurks in the shadows; she is his phallic envoy into uncharted territory.<sup>138</sup>

#### ‘Heterosexual Privilege and “Lesbian Difference”’

In a early letter, Dreher and Brook report that at one of the PMC meetings they were scorned for pointing out that lesbian and gay issues differ from bisexual issues ‘because bisexuals continue to enjoy heterosexual privilege’, (Dreher and Brook 1990: 2) and told that they too could ‘pass’ if they ‘dressed differently’ (Ibid). Dreher and Brook continue by saying that ‘Mrs. Seigel announced that she could speak for the Lesbian community “because I have always felt like a man in a woman’s body.” And so on. The horror continued.’ (Ibid)

The ‘bisexual voice’ in Dreher and Brook’s letter confirms their initial accusation of heterosexual privilege and so represents the absolute antithesis of lesbian desire and identity. Firstly, there is no doubt that Seigel is one of those

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<sup>137</sup> Lesbian freedom from the ‘violence of heterosexuality’ is also placed in the context of the anti-pornography debates. The authors state that ‘[w]e see the fight against pornography as central to this politics, central to the struggle to reclaim our lives and to make Lesbian community more than mere safe space for Lesbians.’ (Ibid)

<sup>138</sup> The pages of *Sojourner* carry debates about inclusion of male children at lesbian festivals at the same time as the debates about bisexual women’s place in the lesbian community are being thrashed out. (Johnson 1989: 7; Anne 1989: 7-8) The debate that took place within the pages of *Sojourner* seemed to assume that women could be divided into lesbian and straight even though the terms of the debate were similar to those structuring the bisexuality discussions. One woman writes that ‘there are *many* ways in which we identify ourselves; being lesbian and straight are not the only ones. Being a feminist mother and a non-feminist mother are identities... Being Black, Hispanic, Indian, Asian-American or white; being elderly or a teenage mother’. (Randall 1989: 3) What starts off promising a degree of complexity with regard to ‘affectional preference’ (Ibid) only sees oppositional constructions of sexuality as complicated by the ‘other’ factors mentioned, not by internal difference.

bisexuals exercising her heterosexual privilege given the pointed referencing of her as ‘Mrs. Seigel’ throughout Dreher and Brook’s letter. Secondly, the suggestion that Dreher and Brook could (and by implication, should) ‘pass’ as heterosexual stands in opposition to the pride of being ‘out’ as a lesbian. Finally, Mrs. Seigel claims to identify with and be able to represent lesbians on the grounds that she has always felt like a man in a woman’s body. What appear in Dreher and Brook’s text as examples of bisexual difference from lesbianism, are used by Seigel as reasons *for* being able to speak for the lesbian community. At no point is there any discussion of differing forms of heterosexual privilege, passing and male-identification,<sup>139</sup> or of why it is that they are considered so dreadful. That ‘lesbian’ is the antithesis of these three ‘bisexual blunders’ is also assumed to be self-evident, and Dreher and Brook’s ‘horror’ is cast as a natural lesbian reaction in need of no elaboration. To question that ‘horror’ is to ask more precisely which acts, and which behaviours really *do* signify ‘lesbian’ and which do not; to elaborate would be to admit that ‘Lesbian Difference’ is formed relationally rather than self-reflexively.<sup>140</sup>

Dreher and Brook are not unusual in their understanding of lesbianism. In many respects it is an assumed distance from men that marks out a particular strand of lesbian/feminism in contemporary US and UK culture. As the C.L.I.T. Collective argue in 1976: ‘the initial and continuing power of the Women’s

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<sup>139</sup> For example, for some women ‘heterosexual privilege’ may go hand in hand with violence from their male partners.

<sup>140</sup> Bet Power’s 1990 letter can be read as a response to the assumption that lesbians and transsexuals are mutually exclusive groups. (Power 1990: 5) Power asserts that many of the lesbians at the March 15 1990 community meeting were unhappy with the decision to revert to the former name of ‘Lesbian and Gay Pride’ because of their own transvestite or transsexual feelings, behaviours or experiences. (Ibid) Power contends that: ‘ “[f]eeling like a man in a woman’s body” is no horror, contrary to Ms. Dreher and Ms. Brook – it is simply a fact of life for another brave and proud group of newly-emerging oppressed people.’ (Ibid) Power challenges the assumptions both that lesbians do not have sex with men, and that they are *not* men. In doing so, Power must only increase the ‘horror’ Dreher and Brook feel. I discuss feminist/queer ‘horror’ of and fascination with transsexual bodies and subjects in Chapter Three, Section One,

Movement flows from our actual separation from men to form a movement of women dissatisfied with men'. (Collective Lesbian International Terrors 1976: 41) Elisabeth Brook continues this lesbian/feminist tradition in her letter to *Sojourner*, 'Lesbians Don't Fuck Men'. (Brook 1989: 6) Brook poses her questions – 'How can you call yourself a lesbian when you have sex with men? How can you have sex with men when you believe yourself to be a lesbian?' (Ibid) – in disbelieving terms. For Brook, women who have sex with women and men are bisexuals, 'period' (Ibid); sexual behaviour and identity are supposed to mirror one another. Yet, in asking her questions, Brook is unwittingly forced to discuss lesbians who *do* have sex with men, lesbians whose sexual behaviour and sexual and political identity may not be aligned.<sup>141</sup>

Once the incontrovertibility of 'Lesbian Difference' falters a space is created to ask these questions in a different way, however. Greta Christina is, thus, able to inquire: 'Is a lesbian: a woman who only fucks other women?' (Christina 1990: 14) Here the incredulity of Brook's question is replaced by another rhetorical turn of phrase, only Christina's assumes the answer 'No'. Christina continues:

That would include bi women who're monogamously involved with other women. A woman who doesn't fuck men? That would include celibate straight women. A woman who would never get seriously involved with men? Rules out lesbians who've been married in the past. A woman who never has sexual thoughts about men? That excludes dykes who are into heavy and complex gender play, who get off on gay men's porn, or who are maybe just curious. Do you have to be 100% directed at women and away from men in thought, feeling, word, and deed from birth to qualify as a 'real' lesbian?<sup>142</sup> That would rule out all but about two women on the

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Part Three.

<sup>141</sup> Monique Wittig's work on the lesbian as 'not woman' relies on a similar separation of the lesbian world and 'other worlds'. A lesbian is 'not a woman' because she is socially and politically positioned outside of heterosexual patriarchy. Her desire cannot be made sense of in hierarchical relationship to 'man'. Wittig does not discuss bisexuals, in part, because their social and political location and desire may seem at odds ('not-woman' and 'woman' at different moments). (Wittig 1992: 9-20)

<sup>142</sup> A T-shirt sold at Pride and Joy in Northampton suggests the same homogeneity that

planet. I hope they can find each other. (Christina: 14-15)

Christina mentions a range of practices, identities, experiences and histories, including but not restricted to bisexuality, that cannot be accounted for by the separation of 'lesbian' from 'sex with men'. It becomes increasingly clear why many of the arguments made against bisexual inclusion in the Pride March link bisexual women with lesbian sadomasochists and lesbians who oppose the censorship of pornography. Each of these positions is seen as increasing the likelihood of male infiltration into the lesbian community. In the Northampton Lesbians Fighting Pornography's article I cited earlier, SM is linked to heterosexuality – '[h]ow many dykes can truly say that the eroticism of s/m differs in any significant way from what every tract of compulsory heterosexuality from Freud and Havelock Ellis to Harlequin has force-fed us since infancy?' (Northampton Lesbians Fighting Pornography 1990: 3) – as are bisexuality and pornography. (Ibid)

These connections are by no means restricted to the Northampton Pride March debates. In a US context, Elizabeth Armstrong cites an anonymous writer for the *San Francisco Bay Times*, who argues that bisexuals who claim lesbians sleep with men and who call themselves ' "bi-dykes" [oppress] lesbians as surely as straight male pornography.' (Armstrong 1995: 199) In a UK context, Susan Ardill and Sue O'Sullivan connect a number of behaviours and identities as potentially 'other' to lesbianism, in their discussion of the banning of lesbian sadomasochists from the London Lesbian and Gay Centre in 1985: 'Bisexuality, paedophilia, sadomasochism, transsexuality, dress codes – all came up in the MC [Management Committee] discussions about who could or should be welcome in

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Christina is critiquing here. The T-shirt has '100% lesbian' written on the front and the words 'NO COMPROMISE' in capital letters emblazoned on the back.



the centre.’ (Ardill and O’Sullivan 1986: 36)<sup>143</sup> The strategic positioning of sadomasochists as ‘other’ to lesbian identity within the Northampton debates is not consistent however. As a key figure within Northampton’s anti-pornography lobby, one might expect Sarah Dreher to denounce lesbian sadomasochism as not ‘real’ lesbian behaviour. In her 1991 Pride March speech, however, Dreher counters claims that SM lesbians are honorary bisexuals, saying that they ‘sure seem like “real Lesbians” to me.’ (Dreher TC 1991: 2) In a strategic move, Dreher claims SM lesbians as ‘same’ in order to ensure that the greater threat of bisexual women remains ‘other’. Ardill and O’Sullivan also raise the salient point that ‘there is often a chasm between discussions about the “politics of sexuality” and discussions about what our actual different sexual practices are.’ (Ardill and O’Sullivan 1986: 31) Pat Califia explores how lesbian denial of actual lesbian sexual practices (including sex with men) can lead to the fatal refusal of the reality that lesbians can transmit the HIV virus to one another. Self-preservation becomes self-destruction. Califia writes:

Lesbians still don’t believe that AIDS has anything to do with them. The best-educated dykes will grudgingly concede that the disease might be able to pass from one woman to another, but not from one real lesbian to another. We already knew that real lesbians don’t have sex with men, for fun or for money. But because of AIDS, the pool of women-loving-women, pussy-eating, cunt-fucking women who also qualify as ‘real lesbians’ has grown even smaller. Real lesbians don’t shoot drugs, share needles, or play sex games that expose them to somebody else’s blood. We’re all in twelve-step programs, but none of us are junkies. Real lesbians don’t sleep with straight women or bisexual women. Real lesbians don’t have heterosexual histories. (Califia 1993: 210)

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<sup>143</sup> The authors add that ‘[a]t the same time the MC, an all-white group of men and women, discussed making the centre accessible to more Black and working-class gay men and lesbians.’ (Ibid) Coming as it does straight after the passage I cited above, this sentence seems to link the committee’s ambivalent relationship to bisexuals, paedophiles, sadomasochists and transsexuals to the centre’s acknowledged lack of race and class diversity. Here we have a further example of the way in which bisexual inclusion becomes associated with a more general diversity in a rather uncritical way.

Here Califia explores a context where talking about lesbian sexual practices, however uncomfortable the information, is more likely to ensure the preservation of lesbian safe space than the reliance on a self-reflexive mode of difference.

Brook tries to manoeuvre around this problem of lesbian desire for men by an appeal to oppression and guilt. She says:

Occasionally a lesbian may find herself having sex with a man because she is tired of fighting a homophobic society, because she is tired of hiding, because of her own internalized self-hatred or homophobia. But this is not bisexuality, this is pain. (Brook 1989: 6)

Brook does admit that lesbians do have sex with men, then. Or, more precisely, a lesbian who finds herself having sex with a man (notice the passivity implied – a lesbian would never *choose* this sexual behaviour), can only remain a lesbian in Brook's terms if she is a 'guilty lesbian', or a 'lesbian in pain'. (Ibid)<sup>144</sup> It is not coincidental that Brook identifies 'true bisexuals' as those who enter 'into healthy unions with both sexes.' (Ibid) By extension, 'true lesbians' would enter into 'healthy unions' with women only.

Colleen Urban displays similar slippage in her article 'Lesbians are not Bisexuals', when she argues that to include bisexual women in the word 'lesbian' is dangerous, 'because it does not recognize that there are women out there whose primary emotional, social, sexual, and spiritual connections are with women, exclusively.' (Urban 1989: 4) Like Brook's, Urban's emphasis on the fact that some lesbians are exclusively committed to women does not put a final barrier between bisexuals and lesbians, but rather between 'complete lesbians' and those lesbians and bisexuals with sexual or emotional commitments to men. Brook's lapsed lesbian is by no means a lost cause. She can still purge herself of

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<sup>144</sup> This is a similar point to the one I made about lesbian and gay 'coming out' narratives in Chapter One, Section One, Part One: 'mistakes' or 'interruptions' are fine as long as they are seen as such.

her non-lesbian error: 'The lesbians I know who find themselves attracted to men are disturbed by this, expend a lot of time and energy soul-searching, and try to get down to the root of the problem.' (Brook 1989: 6) Even for Brook the meaning of 'lesbian' has shifted. Being a lesbian now seems to be more about occupying a particular personal and political position in relation to men, rather than a simple refusal of attraction to men. 'Lesbian Difference' becomes equated with *ideal* lesbianism, which needs to be defined in relation to other identities, and specific sexual practices. The 'Lesbian Difference' that was presented as axiomatic, is now figured as a strategic distinction marking out a political position in opposition to 'bisexual' (sodomasochist or transsexual) in the context of the Pride March debates.<sup>145</sup>

## **Part Two: Visible Identities**

Dreher's statement 'I am a lesbian and I see the world through lesbian eyes', (Dreher 1991: 2) at the end of her speech to the 1991 Lesbian and Gay Pride March rally foregrounds the key context of 'visibility' that structures the Northampton debates about bisexual inclusion. Throughout the Controversy, increased visibility is unquestioningly desired by both lesbians and bisexuals, is grasped as a sign of political power and credibility. As with the strategic polarisation of the 'sexual' and the 'political', the mobilisation of tropes of visibility informs the way participants of the Controversy understand such concepts as 'self', 'community' and 'identity'.

### **'Come out, Come Out, Wherever You Are'**

As I mentioned earlier, one of the main reasons why some people were opposed to bisexual inclusion was because increased bisexual visibility was understood as

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<sup>145</sup> Like Denise Riley I do not believe that to highlight a term's 'inherent shakiness' (Riley 1988: 98) is to strip that term of value. Clearly 'Lesbian Difference' is, in many cases, as

producing increased lesbian *invisibility*. The January 1990 edition of *TC* reports that '[w]e have created a community we care deeply about, and are in danger of seeing that community made invisible.' (*TC* January 1990: 1) In the same edition the terms of the debates are set as having to choose between 'the bisexual or the Lesbian community'. (Ibid)<sup>146</sup> The Dreher and Brook letter to *GCN* in March 1990 picks up on the theme of visibility more explicitly with its title, 'Visibility? Whose Visibility?' (Dreher and Brook 1990) Advocates of the March remaining 'Lesbian and Gay' argue not that bisexual and lesbian visibility are in inverse proportion to one another, but rather that bisexual inclusion *equals* lesbian invisibility. Any increased visibility afforded bisexuals (i.e. their named inclusion in the March) is seen as *erasing* lesbian visibility. In the letter I cited above that sparked the newspaper debates, Micki Seigel uses similar language to argue in favour of bisexual inclusion. Her rationale for specific bisexual naming is that '[b]isexuals had been working on the march for years, without official acknowledgement.' (Seigel 1990: 2) And in reference to the defeat of the motion to include bisexuals, Seigel says '[n]ow I am the one who is "invisible".' (Ibid)

Presumably, the inclusion of the word 'Bisexual' in the March does not actually result in the erasure of a lesbian identity. Lesbians still exist, take part in the March and understand themselves in relation to the lesbian (gay and bisexual) community. Nor does the lack of bisexual acknowledgement in name mean that bisexual involvement in the Pride March is a fantasy. Bisexuals may not be visible *as* bisexuals in that context but one assumes that they might be highly visible in other respects – as members of the lesbian and gay community, or as workers on the March Committee, for example. For both lesbians and bisexuals, however, visibility is about being seen as, and being able to see oneself as, a

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useful term for lesbian survival.

<sup>146</sup> Note the lower-case 'bisexual' and upper-case 'Lesbian' distinction made here, as discussed In

distinct sexual identity. The association of bisexuality with the sexual accounts to some extent for the fears that the lesbian community as a *political* community will be compromised by bisexual inclusion. And that same association fuels bisexuals' determination to be valued as part of that political community. Further than this, though, bisexual visibility as part of the lesbian community does indeed mean the disappearance of the proverbial 'Lesbian Difference'; if bisexual and lesbian women march together one never quite knows who is who.<sup>147</sup>

The relationship between sexual identity and community needs to be consolidated through another form of naming, too. Not only must community embrace you and name you, individuals must also provide validation of sexual identity, whether shouting your/their name in the street or whispering it in your ear. One of the organisers of the 1991 March explains that:

I find it hard to imagine that someone who's been in a heterosexual marriage for 20 years,<sup>148</sup> and goes out and has a fling with [someone] of the same sex should be setting the political agenda for me. That person can't speak for me. (Anon 1991: n.p.<sup>149</sup>)

What is implied is that while the married woman cannot speak or set the political agenda for the author, someone else *could*. Since the author's argument is being made in defence of not including 'bisexual' in the Pride March, we presume the woman who can speak for the author must be a lesbian, rather than a bisexual or heterosexual woman. But that is to presuppose a seamless visibility politics. We

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Section Two, Part One.

<sup>147</sup> In part this is because bisexuals do not have a separately identifiable dress code. Ironically enough, it is those bisexuals (or lesbians) marching with male lovers that are likely to be read as bisexual. They are less of a threat to lesbian identity than those marching with a woman lover. The power of 'Lesbian Difference' is, surely, that same-sex lovers will be read as lesbian whether they are or not.

<sup>148</sup> This could be an oblique jibe at Micki Siegel, the married bisexual who resigned from the 1990 March Committee.

<sup>149</sup> See Appendix I for the text of this article from the Northampton Collection. Unfortunately there is no way of tracing the referencing information for this text. The article was obviously written in 1991, probably the week before the Pride March, but although I searched the local

do not actually know the sexual identity of the author's ideal advocate. We only know about her behaviour, and more precisely, what her behaviour does *not* include. The woman the author assumes *can* speak for her, and set the political agenda, is described only in terms of experience and behaviour: unmarried and not merely 'flirting' with same-sex desire. The organiser's advocate could therefore be lesbian, bisexual or heterosexual.<sup>150</sup> Ironically, the author assumes that sexual behaviour and identity go hand in hand, even though that is precisely the issue in question during the Pride March Controversy. For the author, and for visibility politics, there can be no gap between behaviour, identity and community.

This visibility discourse, then, assumes not only a separation between terms ('lesbian' can be seen, and sees itself, as different from 'bisexual'), but also a reflexive relationship among individual lesbians and among individual bisexuals that vouchsafes who they are and affirms that difference. Visibility functions as a way both of creating and maintaining self and of obtaining external political validation. Community reflects the individual, and the individual can *see herself* reflected in both community and other similarly formed selves. In this respect, the visibility discourse is both a way of presenting sexual identity to the world, and a way of confirming what constitutes that identity. Instead of sexual identity residing in self, it is its (community and individual) reflection that carries the weight: surface rather than depth. As we have seen, that reflection can also be the site of identity's undoing, though, when what you see is not what you get.

The 'Stay Out: Stay Proud' theme for the 1990 Pride March is, of course, highly appropriate. Not only should you 'come out', you should also 'stay out'. What is required is repetition of the act of making oneself visible. 'Stay out' reads

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newspapers for that time, I was unable to trace its origin.

<sup>150</sup> Her heterosexual advocate might be a celibate woman whose primary emotional relationships

more like a demand than an invitation. Coming out as bisexual in the context of the Pride March has already been precluded (other than as ally). The theme is addressed to lesbians and gay men. Hence the statement 'Stay Out: Stay Proud' is not finished – it is a demand to 'stay out' *as lesbian or gay*. The associated issues of remaining closeted are interesting in this context. For those people in the process of coming out as bisexual (as many people did during the Controversy), obeying the invocation to 'stay out' as lesbian would be to remain closeted.

The theme 'Stay Out: Stay Proud' suggests a kind of refusal to accede to change. The reflection that confirms your identity only ever reflects who you are now, not who you might become, or even who you have been. It is a reflection that feeds off the object it confirms, in an endless, but static circle. There is no room for the change of heart that bisexuals represent. Jo Eadie argues that '[c]oming out appeals to the narcissistic pleasure of presenting to another a finished image of ourselves, which they return to us in exactly the same form.' (Eadie 1996: 2) This is the circle that needs to be endlessly repeated, projected back into the past (this is who you always were) and endlessly into the future (this is, and always will be, your true self). One could argue, then, that in this context the 'Stay Out: Stay Proud' theme is primarily motivated by the fear of change represented by bisexual inclusion. Separation, self-reflection and stasis: three aspects of sexual identity manifested and validated through the visibility discourse in operation here.

The theme of the 1991 Lesbian and Gay Pride March was 'Claiming Our Identity: Protecting Our Lives'. Once more, sexual identity is produced through territorial allusion. Before the March Lis Brook 'encourages as many people as possible to "come out," or reveal their sexual identity.' (Brook, in Kelliher 1991: 3) Ordinarily, this invocation would be read as asking people to 'reveal' the pre-

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are with other women, for example.

existent truth of who they are. But in relation to the visibility discourse her comment reads as asking people to become who they are through revealing it, and seeing themselves reflected back.

The terms of the visibility discourse do, of course, mean that within the 'bisexuality debates' exclusion *does* come to equal invisibility. A number of bisexuals and their allies did not attend the 1990 March because they had not been explicitly named. As well as not participating herself, Bet Power remarks that 'many more Lesbians, Gay men, S/Mers, TVs and TSs, will also choose to refuse the terms of this year's discriminating Lesbian/Gay March.' (Power 1990: 5) In an exchange of letters, Bet Power and Steve Boal (a founding member of the Amherst-based Valley Bisexual Network) discuss the relative merits of staying away from the March versus participating in it as visibly as possible. Boal expresses concern at Power's decision to withdraw her support from the March, arguing that this merely plays into the hands of those who would deny bisexual visibility – 'no voice, no visibility'. (Boal to Power, April 7, 1990: 1) Boal's response to bisexual exclusion is to try and co-opt the March's theme 'Stay Out: Stay Proud', by marching 'loudly and visibly', (Ibid) and distributing armbands and balloons proclaiming their possessor to be bisexual or a bisexual ally. In her reply, Power reiterates her decision not to attend the March, adding that she will continue to 'speak out' in articles. (Power to Boal 1990: 1-2) She adds that she will return to the Northampton Pride March once it includes 'all sexual

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minorities'. (Ibid)<sup>151</sup>

Bisexuals' desire for inclusion in the Pride March mirrors lesbian desire for a community in which one's own sexual identity can be separately named and validated. In my view, by adopting the same terms of visibility and representation, bisexuals ignore the power of bisexuality to disturb the accepted form of visibility politics. In a different context one lesbian comments that:

Armed with heterosexual privilege and statistical distortions, bi's [sic] try to redefine 'lesbian' in their own image. Bi's [sic] are getting a lot of support for this [...] If only it weren't for those damned uncooperative lesbians. (Anon, in Armstrong 1995: 199-200)

Acceptance of bisexual women into the lesbian community means that the closed circle of lesbian identity and community is opened up so that the internal variance of both can no longer be denied.

#### 'Becoming Visible'

As I have argued above, the aim of bisexual inclusion was initially to include and represent bisexuals within their lesbian and gay community. Inevitably, with the adoption of the visibility form of identity politics, bisexuality begins to be marked out within the Northampton debates as both a separate identity and one tied to an independent bisexual community. In response to assertions that bisexual women are incapable of forming their own community – 'some bisexual women seem to feel they cannot create their own community, but must attach themselves to the Lesbian community' (Dreher and Brook 1990: 3) – bisexuals themselves begin to emphasise the importance of a bisexual community related to, but not coextensive with, lesbian and gay community. From Ochs' statement that the lesbian community '*is my own community*', (Ochs 1990: 5) and Jodi Lew's that '[b]isexuals certainly will be invisible if they are explicitly excluded', (Lew 1990:

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<sup>151</sup> I have included Boal's and Power's letter exchange in Appendix I.

n.p.) we move to stronger assertions of bisexual community. Karen Baker and Helen Harrison argue that a '[v]isible and active bisexual community is critical to the success of the movement as a whole', (Baker and Harrison 1990: 3) and Brad Robinson (of the Valley Bisexual Network) speaks of a 'bisexual population' which is alienated and excluded from the 1990 March. (Robinson, in Muther 1990: 3) This 'bisexual population', or community, now claims to be 'critical to' and unethically excluded from the lesbian and gay community on the grounds of the common interests and shared concerns of *discrete* bisexual, lesbian and gay bodies. Cynthia Van Ness asserts that:

Bisexuals are indeed participating in gay and lesbian events [...] but that doesn't mean that we aren't simultaneously building our own community. *GCN* covered last spring's East Coast Bisexual Conference, and I'm looking forward to this year's first annual National Bisexual Conference in San Francisco in June. (Van Ness 1990: 4)<sup>152</sup>

It is not clear from the documentation generally whether this growing bisexual community is conceived as a subset of the lesbian and gay community, or as an overlapping community. This lack of specificity perpetuates the confusion over bisexual inclusion and exclusion. The language is a rather vague one of coalition politics, where different, distinguishable groups are all part of one big happy family. It is no coincidence that the themes for the 1992-1994 Pride Marches are: 'We Are Family: Pride Equals Power' (Figure 19); 'Diversity is Our Beauty: Our Unity Is Our Strength' (Figure 18); 'Breaking Down Walls: Building a Community' (Figure 21). All three themes emphasise a common bond across difference.

Similar rhetoric is used by proponents of the umbrella term 'queer' in

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<sup>152</sup> Van Ness is here invoking the development of national and regional bisexual conferences to make her case. Bisexual community does not develop in Northampton, though, as I have already noted. I discuss both of the bisexual events Van Ness mentions in Chapter Four of this thesis.

Northampton. ‘Unity’ and ‘diversity’ are used interchangeably to present a vision of an all-inclusive ‘queer’ community, where everyone is acknowledged separately, but is seen as part of a diverse whole. For all the language of unity, visibility as a particular identity is still seen as a political necessity:

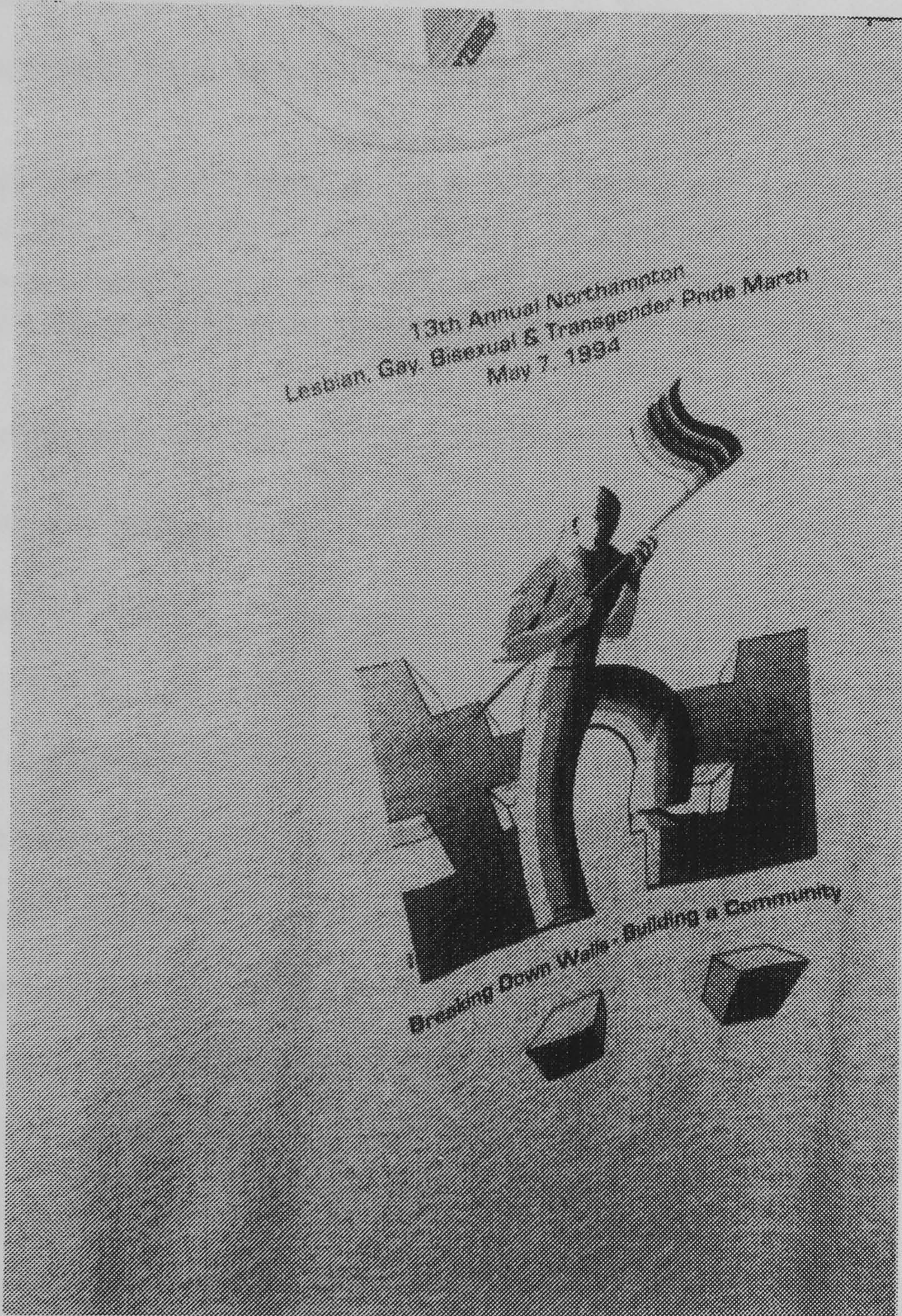
We are all diminished if any one of us remains invisible – whether it is the lack of lesbians and gay men as speakers at last year’s March or the decision this year to remove ‘Bisexual’ from the title and exclude bisexuals and heterosexual allies from the March Steering Committee. We also all remain invisible if those of us with privilege accept it without question or action – whether that privilege be heterosexual, white, class, gender, age, and so on. (Anon 1991a: 6)

Yet such queer notions of inclusion and naming are always doomed to failure, in part because it is never possible to name everyone, as a result of which we must all be ‘diminished’. In the Northampton context, the queer endeavour seems to end up amounting to little more than an expansive liberal pluralism, where if only we could tolerate each other’s differences we would be able to live in harmony and strength. This tendency towards a ‘different but equal’ view is satirised in *The Calendar* as an ‘April Fool’, in a false announcement for ‘the Bisexual, Trisexual, Transvestite, Transexual [sic], Asexual, Oversexual, Ultrasexual, Heterosexual, Non-sexual Pride March Committee’. (*TC* April 1990: 1)<sup>153</sup> The list is expanded to the point where even the initial inclusion of ‘Bisexual’ appears ridiculous. *Gay Community News*’ April 1, 1990 edition – *Gay Community Nudes* – also provides a satire on the Northampton debates in its article ‘Dyke and Bi Factions Sling It Out’, (Seccs Uelle 1990: 43) interviewing participants in a mock mud-wrestling contest between lesbians and bisexuals: ‘“There’s been so much mudslinging already we decided we might as well go for the real thing,” said Mac Truque, spokesdyke for one of the groups, Butches Offended by Bi’s

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<sup>153</sup> The announcement underlines the association of ‘bisexual’ with ‘the sexual’ as discussed above. In this context the capitalisation of each identity is highly satirical.

Figure 21. Photograph of 1994 Pride March T-shirt.



[sic] (BOB).’ (Ibid) As a result of facilitation the bisexual and lesbian groups find common ground in their anger at ‘ “self-identified femme lesbians who are sleeping with men.”’ (Ibid) Everyone knows who she is, how she relates to other identities and who the enemy is; everyone is ‘mud-wrestling’ for her own particular patch of territory, as well as for recognition within a ‘larger whole’.

Continuing in the queer-pluralist vein Marcia Deihl emphasises that she strongly support[s] lesbian separatist events and spaces, and I personally would never intrude as a bisexual woman. I support the right [...] of any minority to meet alone [...] But a Queer Pride Rally is another event entirely. Historically, it has been a coalition event. (Deihl 1990: 5)

Deihl is pre-empted by a contributor to *Sojourner* who argues that ‘bisexual inclusion’ does not ‘homogenize lesbians into invisibility, but [...] adds] our diverse voices and strengths to a community of incredible breadth and vision.’ (Hutchinson 1989: 38) Yet such views of community are somewhat simplistic, assuming we can distinguish among our commonalities and differences without difficulty, while leaving the terms of identity politics intact. The bisexual/lesbian dispute is ‘resolved’ in Northampton by a form of coalition politics, an additive politics. What begins as a dispute about who is able to call themselves ‘lesbian’ – who can be a part of lesbian and gay communities, a challenge to the self-reflexivity of identity-formation and perpetuation – becomes a question of who can create identity and community along the same lines.

Ginny Lermann unwittingly highlights one of the problems with this political model of inclusion when she proclaims that: ‘To step from the safety of the lesbian community into new territory is no mean feat. I am proud of my courage’. (Lermann 1989: 5) Lermann continues by saying: ‘I still participate in non-biphobic activities within the gay community, for this is my community too’. (Ibid) The tension, for Lermann, arises from being part of lesbian community on

the one hand, and striking out to find new territory that could be safe for bisexuals on the other. There are a number of questions raised by Lermann's story about the nature of the hard-won 'bisexual territory':

Does bisexual territory overlap with lesbian territory, or is it separate?

How will identities be negotiated within that 'common ground'?

Are lesbians expected to 'give up' some of their territory to share with bisexual women?

Will lesbians be welcomed in bisexual territory?

Is bisexual women's involvement in the lesbian community to be restricted to those 'places of commonality'?<sup>154</sup>

Details about what these 'commonalities' might be, where (in both concrete and theoretical terms) they might be found, and how they relate to the existing forms of sexual politics are never forthcoming. Thus, Michele Moore suggests that:

Bisexual women and men are creating our own community. But building a community takes time, and all communities borrow elements from those that have preceded them. The gay rights movement borrowed from the women's movement, which borrowed from the Black civil rights movement; and so the bisexual movement borrows from the gay and lesbian movement. I'm sad some lesbians and gay men feel threatened rather than flattered that bisexuals find their movement and culture admirable enough that we want to borrow elements from it. (Moore 1990: n.p.)

Moore does not specify what bisexuals are 'borrowing', however, relying on assumptions about the general terms 'culture' and 'movement'.<sup>155</sup> Perhaps it is because the nature of bisexual territory is never explored – other than rhetorically through something we might now term 'Bisexual Difference' – that bisexual

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<sup>154</sup> These questions are similar to those I asked in relation to Nestle's hand-drawing (Figure 5) that I discussed in Chapter One, Section Two. In the Northampton context, however, the questions have shifted so that it becomes possible to ask what changes might affect lesbian space in the creation of bisexual space.

<sup>155</sup> In Chapter Four I begin that work of documenting what is borrowed and what is left behind in the establishment of a bisexual identity and community.

community does not flourish in Northampton even after the inclusion of 'Bisexual' in the Pride March. 'Bisexual Difference' emerges as a strategic category to enable 'bisexual inclusion' (in whatever capacity), in much the same way as 'Lesbian Difference' seeks to preclude the same. The historical and personal relationship of bisexual women to the lesbian and gay community is betrayed by an emphasis on crass political visibility that has no real ground.

### **Part Three: The Contradictions of Experience**

The polarisation of 'bisexual' and 'lesbian' in the Northampton Pride March Controversy oversimplifies the experiences of both bisexuals and lesbians in Northampton. Consequently, the unsettled nature of sexual identity and its relationship to what Marjorie Garber terms 'apolitical' (Garber 1995: inside cover) desires, behaviours and experiences is minimised.<sup>156</sup> For me, the Northampton debates highlight the fact that a bisexual history is always also a history of other desires, identities and communities. A history of women's bisexuality in Northampton is inevitably inseparable from the town's lesbian history. While I acknowledge the need for bisexuals to be validated and for their work to be acknowledged, I do not necessarily believe that that has to take the form of a separate naming made meaningful through the entrenched rubric of identity politics. I want to look now at two examples of how desire, community and identity do not always 'fit' into that rubric.

In May 1989, Sharon Gonsalves wrote an article for *Sojourner* in favour of 'greater acceptance [of bisexuals] in the lesbian and gay communities'. (Gonsalves 1989: 7)<sup>157</sup> What is most interesting to me about Gonsalves' article, however, is her representation of the relationship among her own desire, identity

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<sup>156</sup> Garber views bisexual desire as the spanner in the works, whereas I believe that the relationship among desire, experience, behaviour and identity is rarely stable for anyone (whether their desire is bisexual or not).

and understanding of community. Initially, Gonsalves speaks of her difficulty in ‘coming out’ as bisexual. She describes the sense of the ‘loss of our community’ (7) both for her personally, ‘and for other lesbians who have come out as bisexual’. (Ibid) That Gonsalves chooses not to modify the term ‘lesbian’ to ‘ex-lesbian’ or ‘women who thought they were lesbian’ is highly significant. Gonsalves is not speaking here of bisexual women who were previously hiding in the lesbian community, masquerading as lesbians; Gonsalves presents herself and those like her as lesbians who have taken a bisexual identity. This subtle, but important, distinction is underscored later in the same paragraph, when Gonsalves tells us, ‘[a]lthough being seen with a man may make me look like a straight woman (and afford me heterosexual privilege), I feel like a lesbian who’s seeing a man.’ (7) Gonsalves experiences her desire as lesbian, even though she is in a relationship with a man. Or perhaps I should say, Gonsalves experiences her desire as lesbian *and* is in a relationship with a man; the two are not presented as mutually exclusive here. For Gonsalves, her lesbian desire comes not from sexual-object-choice but from her sense of self, and from the lesbian community, which provides the context for her desire.

One might expect Gonsalves to continue to identify as a lesbian who has sex with men, her lesbian desire relating to a lesbian identity still, irrespective of sexual-object-choice. After all, Gonsalves herself sees the lesbian community as ‘a place where I belong’, (7) and she acknowledges that in some instances she does ‘come out’ as lesbian: ‘I’m much more likely to refer to myself as a lesbian when I’m with straight people than when I’m among lesbians.’ (8) Yet among lesbians Gonsalves feels ‘like an imposter’, ‘invisible’, and ‘dishonest’, if she is unable to come out as bisexual. Gonsalves says that she needs to be seen as bisexual, in order for her ‘true self’ (the self that desires men as well as women)

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<sup>157</sup> All further references to this article will be by page number in the text.



to be acknowledged, understood, and appreciated – ‘[g]etting rid of labels makes our differences invisible’. (8) Gonsalves believes that the label ‘bisexual’ allows her to be read as who she is. Utilising a familiar visibility politics rhetoric, Gonsalves proclaims, ‘I am bisexual all the time, not straight among straights and gay among gays.’ (8)

And yet, Gonsalves’ own story is much more complex and contradictory than her ‘pride-in-self-identity’ story might seem to suggest. Gonsalves is clear that the ‘self’ referred to in both gay and straight contexts is bisexual – ‘I am bisexual all the time’ – but this self is not necessarily best signified by the corresponding label ‘bisexual’. Presumably, it is not through a desire wilfully to misrepresent herself that Gonsalves refers to herself as a lesbian in some heterosexual contexts, but because she feels that offers a better view of herself than referring to herself as bisexual. For example, it is not uncommon for bisexual women to be treated ‘more indulgently’ than lesbians by homophobic straight friends, on the basis that the former are at least partly heterosexual. In lesbian contexts, however, Gonsalves feels that referring to herself as bisexual offers a better view of who she is. Gonsalves is, in fact, suggesting that one’s publicly proclaimed identity is *not* always the same as one’s self-perception, though she does consider her self-identity to be constant. This sits rather bizarrely with her stress on the importance of accurate labels, since her own experience brings into focus the ways in which label and self do not always precisely correspond.

The relationship between desire and identity is called similarly into question through Gonsalves’ narrative. As I mentioned earlier, Gonsalves terms her own desire ‘lesbian’; this desire can be directed to a man or a woman.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Appropriately enough, Elisabeth Brook’s letter ‘Lesbians Don’t Fuck Men’ (as discussed above) appears in the July edition of *Sojourner* as a response to Sharon Gonsalves’ article. Not

Already, this is problematic, given the usual assumption that lesbian desire can only be directed towards women.<sup>159</sup> Still more unlikely, the ‘end result’ of Gonsalves’ desire is bisexual not lesbian identity. Gonsalves’ desire for men could perhaps be written as a ‘mistake’, as ‘false consciousness’ or even as a queer perversion, if she continued to identify as lesbian. What Gonsalves’ experience suggests, however, is that lesbian desire can lead to and confirm a bisexual identity. She elaborates:

[As...] a lesbian, I’ve learned a lot about myself; the patriarchy; ways male and female children are socialized; and about [...] oppression [...] I’ve also learned what relationships can and cannot be. I relate to individuals, not penises or breasts. I am capable of loving men and women, and they are capable of loving me. (8)

Gonsalves’ lesbian desire does not stand in contradiction to her bisexual identity, but is productive of it. In contrast to the conventional ‘coming out’ narrative,<sup>160</sup> Gonsalves does not need to rewrite her lesbian desire as bisexual desire in order to endorse retrospectively her bisexual identity.

Gonsalves’ narrative also challenges the accepted relationship between community and identity, whereby community acceptance of a particular desire eases the way into an identity reflective of that community.<sup>161</sup> Thus, in Northampton, lesbian desire can become lesbian identity with the aid of a supportive and well-established community context in which to express itself. If

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only *do* lesbians ‘fuck men’, but, according to Gonsalves, lesbian desire itself can be directed to women and men.

<sup>159</sup> Elizabeth Däumer argues even more controversially that there should be no reason why ‘a man [could not] resist his designated gender [...] and assume a lesbian identity’. (Däumer 1992: 95) Däumer’s words provoke an ardent response from Jacqueline Zita for whom the idea of a ‘male lesbian’ remains a profoundly immaterial (in all senses) concept. (Zita 1992: 106-127)

<sup>160</sup> See Chapter One, Section One, Part One.

<sup>161</sup> In rural areas or towns with no established lesbian and gay community in the US, same-sex desire is much less likely to coalesce into a lesbian or gay identity. Similarly, in places with no bisexual community, those who might otherwise identify as bisexual may identify as lesbian, gay or straight.

the expression of a certain desire – e.g. lesbian sadomasochism, or Gonsalves’ lesbian desire for women and men – is unacceptable to that community, an alternative identity – sadomasochist, or bisexual – may be produced. When desire and the resultant identity do not match, community may fail to provide a space for the recognition of that identity. So, the lack of support for sadomasochistic desire within Northampton’s lesbian and gay community has given rise to a separate SM community.<sup>162</sup> Clearly, the Northampton lesbian community does not easily provide a context for bisexual women’s identity. But in terms of the structures of sexual communities, although Gonsalves argues in favour of ‘coming out’ as bisexual, there is no guarantee that a bisexual community would provide the support for her (mis-matching) lesbian desire either.<sup>163</sup>

As a way of attempting to resolve the tension between lesbian desire and bisexual identity in their own sexual narratives, Gonsalves and others become members of a community explicitly intended to mediate and reflect the relationship between these apparently contradictory forces.

I have gained a lot of strength from meeting with other lesbians who have come out as bi. My support group (the Hasbians) has helped me get back out into the lesbian community – a place where I belong. (7)

The ‘hasbian community’ acts as a kind of interim community, serving the functions (supporting and strengthening) that the larger community cannot.<sup>164</sup>

Supported by this ‘hasbian community’, lesbian desire can be integrated into

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<sup>162</sup> In a similar vein, Henry Rubin argues that the creation of a separate transsexual identity and community emerges in the 1970s in the US, after butch lesbians were no longer welcome within the lesbian/feminist movement. (Rubin 1997)

<sup>163</sup> At a bisexual discussion group meeting in Nottingham in 1993, two bisexual women in a long-term relationship with one another expressed discontent at the ways in which they felt that their needs within what could easily be defined as a ‘lesbian relationship’ were not being met.

<sup>164</sup> I do not wish to suggest that the term ‘hasbian’ is unproblematically embraced by bisexual women who have previously identified as lesbians. For example, Stacey Young sees labelling bisexual women as ‘hasbians’ or ‘straight’ as part of the same discursive move that categorises all non-lesbians as the same, as *not* lesbian. (Young 1991: 79)

bisexual identity.<sup>165</sup> Where lesbian community serves to blur the distinction between lesbian desire and lesbian community, so that it becomes difficult to see which ‘came first’, Gonsalves’ ‘hasbian community’ is self-consciously constructed to meet the needs of those for whom the disjuncture between desire and community has resulted in a bisexual identity.<sup>166</sup>

In June 1990, May Wolf wrote a letter to *GCN* in which she bravely risked ostracism from the lesbian community by asking whether or not bisexual desire can in turn lead to lesbian identity. Wolf relates the Northampton Pride March debates directly to her own experience, saying that ‘[the furore] has come at a time when I have been reevaluating how I define my sexuality.’ (Wolf 1990: 4)<sup>167</sup> In her next paragraph, which is worth quoting in full, Wolf raises two key issues in relation to lesbian identity:

I know that there are many women who feel as though they have been lesbian from birth or at least a young age. I am not one of those women. In fact I identified as heterosexual and was interested in boys all of my growing years. I had close friends of both genders. But in my 16<sup>th</sup> year, my emotionally abusive father added sexual abuse to his repertoire of efforts to injure my soul. After that certain body parts, sounds, touches and smells became triggers not to excitement or pleasure but fear and anxiety. (4)

In the first couple of sentences, Wolf challenges the lesbian coming-out narrative that requires lesbian desire to have always been present in some form. In the second half of the paragraph, Wolf describes and claims her personal relationship to her father’s abuse, and the influence this has had on her sexuality. In the face of homophobic discourses which attribute lesbianism to a response to abuse and,

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<sup>165</sup> In Britain, several ‘bisexual women and lesbians’ discussion groups exist, serving the same function of making the transition from lesbian to bisexual, or bisexual to lesbian easier, as well as providing space for people in ‘mixed couples’. (*Bi Community News*, January 1996: 12)

<sup>166</sup> Hasbians are obviously part of both the lesbian community and the bisexual community (where one exists). So far there have (thankfully) been no attempts to advocate a change to the ‘Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Hasbian, and Transgender Pride March’.

<sup>167</sup> All further references to this article will be by page number in the text.

therefore, as pathological and curable, Wolf's declaration is highly politically charged. In addition, Wolf's narrative could be used as confirming the stereotype of lesbians as women who fear or hate men, and hence she risks the wrath of a lesbian community in Northampton that has established itself as a positive woman-loving-woman community.

Wolf has been sexually and emotionally involved with a woman for more than ten years. Ordinarily, this would provide her with almost mythical status in a still-young community. Yet Wolf says that she 'cannot honestly call [her]self a lesbian', (4) because, while her experience of abuse means she cannot act on it, she has a continuing sexual attraction to men. Wolf has been an active member of Northampton's lesbian community for a long time and, until now, has always marched in the 'Lesbian and Gay Pride March'. She speaks of a complex and politicised relationship with her female partner – '[m]y partner and I live our lives, debate whether or not to have children, bemoan the fact that we can't be on each other's health insurance, make daily decisions about whether to be out to whom and to what degree.' (4) In light of her relationship, it is tempting to write Wolf's experience as that of a woman who finds a home for her bisexual desire in the lesbian community, a place of harmony after the violence of the heterosexual world. It is clear, however, that Wolf does not find the lesbian community to be such a place. Wolf relates that she did not march in the 1990 Pride March because she did not feel 'full belonging'. (4) The need to define who 'counts' as lesbian in the face of the debates about bisexuality results in Wolf interrogating her own place in the lesbian community. In the face of the stark polarisation of 'bisexual' and 'lesbian' during the Northampton debates, Wolf is forced to choose, redefining as nearer to bisexual than lesbian. This reading is confirmed by the way Wolf closes her letter: 'Since I haven't yet found a label which fits me, bisexual is as close as I can come. And when the march includes bisexuals, so

too will I come.’ (4) Although, ‘[i]n the early years [she] identified fiercely as a lesbian’, (4) Wolf’s has to renegotiate her sense of self once more when she discovers that the lesbian community cannot support her (undemonstrated) desire for men.

Wolf’s narrative of desire and identity actually resists such an easy reading, however. Her final uncomfortable ‘coming-out’ as bisexual effectively undercuts itself. Wolf can not find a ‘label which fits’ her, and so will grudgingly adopt ‘bisexual’. But in stating that ‘when the march includes bisexuals, so too will I come’, Wolf distances herself from the term she appeared to have accepted. Earlier in her letter, Wolf remarks that ‘I’m not even sure that the label bisexual quite explains my experience.’ (4) Wolf further declares that despite her sexual and emotional relationship with her female partner ‘[t]he reality is that I feel heterosexual. The reality is that I am grateful that I am also comfortable with the sexual and emotional love of my woman partner, because that means I have love and I might not have had love.’ (4)

If we can speak of Sharon Gonsalves as experiencing lesbian desire for men and women, could we also conceive of May Wolf as experiencing heterosexual desire for men and women? The latter feels much more difficult to assert, because the two conclusions have very different implications in the current political climate. One can all too easily imagine a homophobic argument being made that since heterosexual desire can be directed to both men and women, no one need now identify as anything other than heterosexual. But Wolf never asserts a heterosexual *identity*, and her experience of opposite-sex sex was scarcely one of privilege or power. I also think it is important to point out that Wolf’s partner is fully aware of Wolf’s feelings about her sexuality – ‘[a] measure of our love is that we are able to talk about everything, even the issues I raise here.’ (4) If Wolf’s partner does not see Wolf’s sense of herself and her

desire as an impediment to their sexual relationship, then it seems reasonable to conclude that a woman's heterosexual desire can, indeed, be directed to women as well as men. In Wolf's case, her heterosexual desire for men is not acted upon, which may be why she never identifies as heterosexual, only as emphatically lesbian or almost bisexual.

The problem with the relationship I have been examining between desire, community and identity is that a 'resultant' sexual identity is usually anticipated, even if that identity changes later. Wolf attempts to resist this solidification of her desire, though, of course, the debates about bisexual inclusion which precipitate her article make this very difficult. Wolf says:

Sexuality is a complex phenomenon; labels perhaps offer a way to generalize across great numbers of people. But if we really pause and talk with one another, the complexity and heart defy easy lines of demarcation between in and out. I am out, I am out as a woman whose sexuality has been interrupted and interfered with by incest, a woman who feels sexual feelings for men, but who lives a primary emotional and sexual life with another woman. (4)

Wolf's moving passage (which just precedes the final paragraph in which she almost 'comes out' as bisexual) complicates the relationship between desire, community and identity within the conventional coming-out narrative. Wolf 'comes out', not as a lesbian, not as a complete and finished sexual package, but as a woman whose complex experiences and desires bring her to living with another woman. To insist Wolf is lesbian or bisexual, or indeed to situate the two identities as opposed and force her to choose, would be to deny her history and to invalidate her story.

### **Epilogue: A Couple Of Years On...**

113 Market Street is a three-storey, detached wooden-slatted Massachusetts house, with front and back porches, near the centre of Northampton. To a woman fresh from England it definitely looks like an old woman in a shawl on a front-porch swing would complete the picture. 113 Market Street is a 'dyke household', owned by a dyke landlady, and advertised as such. This is no novelty in Northampton. I replied to the advertisement in *TC* – 'woman wanted for dyke household' – not sure whether or not I qualified as a potential or desirable part of a 'dyke household'. Katie (my eventual flatmate) opened the door and invited me into a spacious living room with polished floorboards; she was a vision of loveliness in long skirt and blouse, blonde bob immaculate, make-up perfect. I confess my immediate thought was 'she doesn't look like a dyke'.

Soon after I move in, I decide that it is mildly ironic that 113 should be called a 'dyke household', since most of the people living there either would not call themselves dykes, or do not come under 'general dyke specifications' (Figure 22). The landlady is a different matter, however. Penny is a Northampton dyke through and through. She has been living here since the 1970s, has the ubiquitous Northampton dyke haircut – short and spiky on top, long at the back – wears jeans and flannel shirts, never wears make-up, and looks faintly bemused when she visits to collect the rent, or mend the boiler.

Flat One, First Floor: Katie and me. Katie, it turns out, is a femme dyke, social worker, WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant), previously married to a woman named Molly, recovering alcoholic, and, subsequently, close friend. She had one important relationship with a man in her early twenties, which she still values. She is extremely positive towards bisexuals, sadomasochists and



Figure 22. Photograph of the members of the 113 Market Street Household.  
Clockwise from left to right: Katie, me, Isobel, Joey, Katrina, Rebecca, Carlos



transsexuals. In the course of living in flat one, both Katie and I modify our senses of self quite considerably. I begin to identify more strongly as a bisexual femme (in part through living with Katie). By the time I am nearing the end of my time in Northampton, Katie is beginning to question whether she might be bisexual. Our friendship is cemented by our experiences of relationships with transsexual men.

Flat Two, Second Floor: Joey and Katrina. Joey and Katrina are a lesbian couple, who have lived together for a number of years. Both of them have working-class roots. Though they do not identify strongly in this way, their styles would allow them to be read as, respectively, butch and femme. Joey is much more traditional than Katrina, both in terms of general politics, and in terms of feminist/lesbian politics. While I am there, Katrina is pregnant. She has had artificial insemination through her insurance, on the grounds that she and her partner (she never stated her partner's sex) had been trying for over a year with no success. Joey and Katrina are busy preparing for the baby's arrival, trying to save money, buying a new car, decorating the house, etc. Katrina is certainly the one who 'holds things together' in Flat Two. Katie and Katrina are close friends, and the three of them have in common other friends who visit the house.

Flat Three, Third Floor: Rebecca, Isobel and Carlos. It turns out that I already know Rebecca – though not very well – from the bisexual women's group. We become friends, partly on the basis of both being bisexual femmes in a town that often likes neither. Rebecca is a Jewish, middle-class bisexual dyke, and a returning student in English at Smith. She has been with Isobel for three years, and they moved to Northampton from Arizona in the summer of 1994, with Isobel's twelve-year old son, Carlos, and their seven cats. Isobel is a Cuban butch, who was brought up as a boy by her father. She is working as a

temporary social services relief worker (a job for which Katie recommended her). Rebecca, in particular, identifies strongly as SM. After meeting my transsexual male lover, and talking to him about gender issues, it emerges that Isobel is considering whether or not she might be transsexual herself. Carlos is a fairly shy twelve-year old, who seems to accept the relationship between his mother and Rebecca, though this year he did not go to the Pride March in case anyone from his school saw him.

All seven householders of 113 are on friendly terms. We often meet in the morning on the back porches, share videos, and go out for breakfast as a group to Sylvesters on a Sunday morning. The most regular visitors to the household are my lover, Mark, and Katie's gay male friends Frederico and William, who are also friends of the other members of the household. It could be argued that this is not really a dyke household at all: too many male-female relationships; too many bisexuals; too many femmes and butches; too many male visitors. This was my initial feeling. Yet all of us see ourselves as part of the lesbian community of Northampton; all of us see ourselves as part of a dyke household, certainly with as much right to be there as anyone else.<sup>168</sup>

On reflection, this was a mini community capable of modification, too. Katrina and Joey had never met a transsexual before, but through their friendship with Katie and me, and spending time with Mark, their views shifted. Isobel's sense of self clearly shifted; as I mentioned, so did mine and Katie's. It was this, I think, that allowed us all to think of ourselves as a part of a dyke household. There was no single image in the mirror to be recognisable as self. Separate identities – such as bisexual, and in a different way, SM, or femme, or even man

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<sup>168</sup> By June 1997 things have, of course, changed. Katie now identifies as bisexual and is in a relationship with a heterosexual man. Joey and Katrina have had their baby – Diana – and moved to a larger apartment. They are in the process of ending their relationship. Isobel and Carlos have also moved out after Rebecca and Isobel ended their relationship. Rebecca continues

– while of critical importance were not seen as exclusive of the term ‘dyke’. It is not that the other senses of self were ‘subsumed’ under the term ‘dyke’, it is more that in this context, the terms were compatible with one another, could reside in a complex but friendly and productive tapestry.

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to see Carlos regularly.

## CHAPTER THREE

### The Erotics of Theory: Charting Bisexual and Transsexual Representation

#### Introduction

How can I reconcile the contradictions of sex and gender, in my experience and my politics, in my body? We are all offered a chance to escape this puzzle at one time or another. We are offered the True or False correct answer ... But the boxes that we check ... do not contain the complexity of sex and gender for any of us. (Pratt 1995: 21)

In this chapter I continue to explore possible answers to the question I asked in Chapter One regarding imaginative bisexual spaces: how are these constructed in relation to other spaces of sexual and gendered subjectivity?<sup>169</sup> Here I move from the geographical and imaginative ‘lesbian space’ of Northampton, Massachusetts, and into the theoretical space(s) of contemporary sexuality and gender studies. I will be tracing the discursive meanings of bisexuality, as produced by and in relation to contemporary US and UK feminist and queer theories.<sup>170</sup> As in the previous chapter, my concern is both with how ‘other’ categories of sexual and gendered identity become meaningful by deploying bisexuality in particular ways, and with how bisexuality cannot be wholly contained by those deployments.

Bisexuality has been, and continues to be, understood as *either* regressive or transgressive in relation to feminist and queer theories. On the one hand, bisexuality is viewed as that which consolidates gendered and sexual categories, occupying the sexual and gendered ‘middle ground’, and holding polarised ‘opposites’ in (heterosexual) tension. Thus, for Ara Wilson and Elizabeth Wilson writing in the 1990s, political bisexuality shakes the firm ground of lesbian and

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<sup>169</sup> See Chapter One, Section Two, Part One, especially pages 36-37.

<sup>170</sup> Thus, this chapter could also be read as a move from lesbian studies to the linked but different fields of feminist and queer studies. I agree with Judith Butler when she suggests that the time may be ripe ‘to encourage the kinds of conversations that resist the urge to stake territorial claims through the reduction or caricature of the positions from which they are

gay identity and community by fetishising heterosexuality as sexually transgressive, (E. Wilson 1993: 112-3, A. Wilson: 24) a position which is not so far removed from the C.L.I.T. Collective's view in 1975-76 that 'bi-sexuality' only benefits straight women who 'want a little excitement in [...] their sex lives' with men. (C.L.I.T. Collective 1975-76: 27) On the other hand, bisexuality emerges as that which exposes the limits of binary gendered and sexual categorisation, providing one transgressive alternative to heterosexual/homosexual, male/female oppositions.<sup>171</sup> So Marjorie Garber asks rhetorically: 'Is bisexuality a "third kind" of sexual identity, between or beyond homosexuality and heterosexuality? Or is it something that puts in question the very concept of sexual identity in the first place?' (Garber 1995: 15)

We have seen how these contradictory meanings of bisexuality played out in relation to lesbian space in Northampton. There, bisexual inclusion was viewed either as precluding lesbian transgression of heteropatriarchal norms (regressive), or as exposing the limits of identity and community formation through static object-choice (progressive). In this chapter I want to explore these contradictory bisexual meanings in a different context, and introduce a further level of analysis. In the course of my research for this chapter it became clear that transsexuality is also contemporarily produced as either regressive or transgressive. Hence, for Bernice Hausman, writing as recently as 1995, as for Janice Raymond in 1979, transsexuals become subjects only through surgical and medical patriarchal intervention; their true aim is to maintain the status quo. (Hausman 1995: 110-140; Raymond 1979: 99-119) While for writers such as Sandy Stone and Kate Bornstein, transsexuals present the most radical challenge to 'accepted discourses of gender'. (Stone 1991: 295; Bornstein 1994) Stone

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differentiated'. (Butler 1994: 21)

<sup>171</sup> See Chapter One, Section One, Part One, 'Minefields' (pages 13-20), for an introduction to

articulates her position thus:

I am suggesting that in the transsexual's erased history we can find a story disruptive to the accepted discourses of gender [...] the transsexual currently occupies a position which is nowhere, which is outside the binary oppositions of gendered discourse. (Stone 1991: 295)<sup>172</sup>

Given these discursive similarities between bisexuality and transsexuality, I have decided to look, in this chapter, at how both terms and identities are produced in feminist and queer rhetoric. It is my contention that an examination of the spaces that these identities occupy within the overlapping fields of sexuality, gender, feminist, lesbian and gay, and queer studies tells us as much about those fields as it does about bisexuality and transsexuality *per se*. My aim in this chapter is to provide a map of contemporary feminist and queer theory in terms of what they want bisexuality and transsexuality to 'do' and why. In this, I hope to remain faithful to my initial desire to explore bisexuality as indiscrete, as historically produced in relation to other bodies and desires.<sup>173</sup>

Section One of this chapter, 'Such an Endless Fascination', examines some of the current meanings of bisexuality and transsexuality within feminist/gender and queer/sexuality studies. Part One, 'From Hermaphrodite to Androgyne', briefly sketches the interdependent relationship between bisexuality and transsexuality in history, theory and representation, and highlights my own investment in linking bisexual and transsexual production. Part Two, 'Subjects of the Dominant Order', investigates further the positioning of bisexuals and transsexuals as regressive ('traitors'), through the mobilisation of a particular feminist and lesbian understanding of 'femininity'. Part Three, 'Subjects of

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these contradictory meanings of bisexuality in a contemporary theoretical sphere.

<sup>172</sup> Stone suggests that 'passing' transsexuals erase themselves by 'constructing a plausible history – learning to lie effectively about one's past. What is gained is acceptability in society.' (Stone 1991: 295)

<sup>173</sup> See Page 1 of my thesis, where I outline this overall position.

Transgression’, analyses in more depth the construction of bisexual and transsexual subjects as subversive. Section Two, ‘Territorial Occupation and Bodily Resignification’, focuses on the ways in which bisexual and transsexual photographic images open up new spaces of meaning where bisexual and transsexual bodies, subjectivities, narratives and desires can be represented other than as reductively transgressive or regressive. In Part One, ‘Whose Body am I Reading?’, I look at ‘Self Portrait’ by Loren Cameron, (Cameron 1993) tracing the progression of my own reading of Cameron’s image, and inviting non-transsexual readers to do the same. In Part Two, ‘Whom Does She Desire?’, I look at how frequently contemporary bisexuality is represented through ‘threes’ (three couples, three bodies, three objects), and as a way of imagining a different representative form I turn to a series of images by Stephanie Device. I am particularly interested in how Device turns the gaze that seeks to stereotype bisexuals back onto the viewer. What changes to the feminist/gender, queer/sexuality terrain do these excessive transsexual and bisexual bodies make?

I have used a range of different materials and sources for this chapter. Section One makes use of feminist, lesbian and gay, queer, bisexual and transsexual writings on the subject of transsexuality and bisexuality, and also refers to recent community events and conferences, conversations, and my own personal experiences. Section Two uses the photographs of Cameron and Device. Cameron and Device are both activists and artists, poorly paid (if at all), for whom photography is something to be fitted around the paid work they do to survive. Their work remains outside the establishment and so provides what I consider a timely critique of many of the issues I discuss in Section One of this chapter.



## Section One: Such an Endless Fascination

Here on the gender borders at the close of the twentieth century, with the faltering of phallocratic hegemony and the bumptious appearance of heteroglossic origin accounts, we find the epistemologies of white male medical practice, the rage of radical feminist theories and the chaos of lived gendered experience meeting on the battlefield of the transsexual body: a hotly contested site of cultural inscription, a meaning machine for the production of ideal type. (Stone 1991: 294)

### **Part One: From Hermaphrodite to Androgyne**

Within US and UK lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities the distinctions between transsexuality, bisexuality and homosexuality is only now beginning to be charted. (Denny 1994: 21-23) Historically bisexuality has been read as physical or psychical hermaphroditism, (Freud, 1905: 55) or as psychical androgyny. (Hirschfeld 1910, Weininger 1903). Other sexological authors conceive of bisexuality as the ‘ground’ from which heterosexual or homosexual adult sexual orientation evolves. (Krafft-Ebing 1894; Ellis 1928) Thus, in her article ‘The Sexual Reproduction of “Race”: Bisexuality, History and Racialisation’, Merl Storr cites Ellis who suggests that:

‘We can probably grasp the nature of abnormality better if we reflect on the development of the sexes and on the latent organic bi-sexuality in each sex. At an early stage of development the sexes are indistinguishable [...] it may be said that at conception the organism is provided with about 50 per cent. of male germs and about 50 per cent. of female germs’ (Ellis, in Storr 1997: 8)

Storr also quotes Krafft-Ebing who suggests that: ‘The primary stage [of evolution] undoubtedly was bi-sexuality, such as still exists in [...] the first months of fetal existence in man’. (Krafft-Ebing in Storr 1997: 9) Physical hermaphroditism (bi-sexuality) is used by both Ellis and Krafft-Ebing as an explanation for later gender and sexual inversion. Transsexuality has similarly been read as inversion (Ellis 1918) or hermaphroditism and intersexuality. (Allen

1954) Unsurprisingly, then, there are points where bisexuality and transsexuality are also used interchangeably. To return to Tim O’Sullivan’s contemporary representation of bisexuality as hermaphrodite and androgyne that I mentioned in Chapter One, (O’Sullivan, in Raven 1995: 11, in Figure 4) the same image could also be read as two transitioning transsexuals – one female-to-male, one male-to-female (reproduced here as Figure 23). Bisexuality and transsexuality may be read for one another, then, through their common association with hermaphroditism, contemporary blurring reflecting a much older merging.<sup>174</sup>

Recently, energy from bisexual and transsexual communities has been expended in wresting those merged meanings apart, and reassigning historical personages as one thing or another. Transgender activists (such as the group ‘Transsexual Menace’ in New York) have been concerned to reclaim such canonical figures as Gertrude Stein, Radclyffe Hall, and Billy Tipton from lesbian and gay history as transgendered if not transsexual – ‘queer, but not gay’. (Denny 1994: 23) Bisexual activists have insisted that Sappho and Oscar Wilde were really bisexual. (Klein 1978: 139-166; Garber 1995: 20, 28, 282)<sup>175</sup> To insist that these characters were, or are, bisexual, or transsexual is often counter-productive. There is a danger that a historically false separation between different gender and sexual identities gets set up, in order that previously ignored or maligned identities may gain validity and prominence.<sup>176</sup>

In this chapter I want to connect the disparate histories of transsexualism

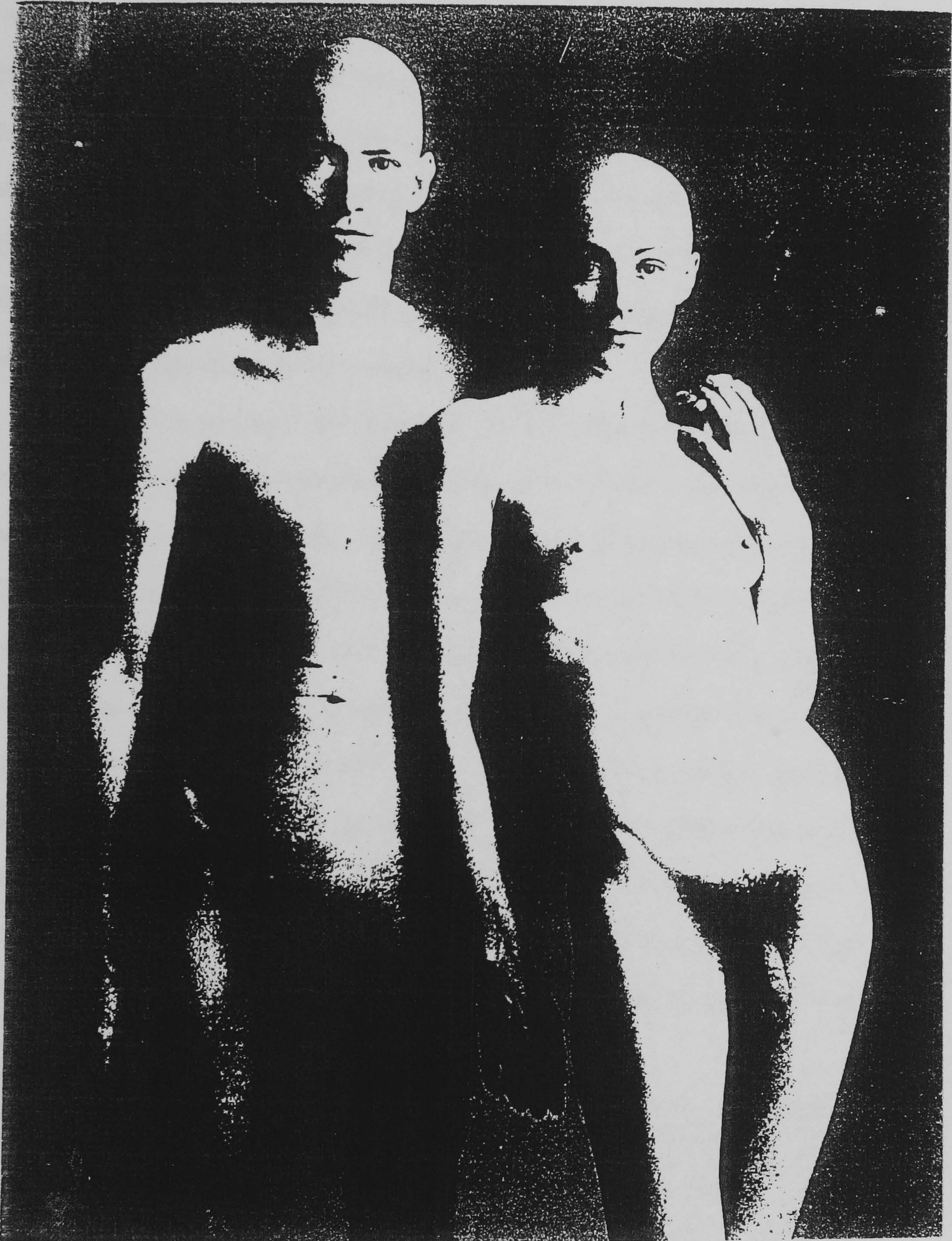
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<sup>174</sup> Yet it is interesting to note the lack of scarring in the Raven photograph, the glamorisation of the notion of being ‘two’, rather than changing sex, which is presumably in part a reflection of the overall title of the series, ‘Sex in the Twenty-first Century’.

<sup>175</sup> See Chapter One, footnote 42.

<sup>176</sup> This act of reclaiming is also completely understandable, however. A brief look at two recent films *Carrington* and *Butterfly Kiss* indicates the continued gross misrepresentation of women’s bisexual desire. In *Carrington*, there is no hint of Carrington’s sex with women (also note that she also wears dresses throughout the film, except for the initial temptation of Lytton Strachey, though she was contemporarily known as a cross-dresser). By contrast, *Butterfly Kiss* includes women having sex with both men and women, but has been billed exclusively as a lesbian film.

Figure 23. Photograph by Tim O'Sullivan, in Charlotte Raven (1995) 'Swap Shop', 'Future Sex', *Observer Life*, 15 October: 11.



and bisexuality in this precise historical moment, in order to interrogate the ways that they are read as either similar or different. This move is not an attempt to recreate pre-1930s conditions whereby bisexuality, transsexuality and homosexuality are viewed as subsets of one another.<sup>177</sup> But it *is* an attempt to steer a slightly different course than the contemporary political one within lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities which seem bent on negating historical overlaps in the search for a discrete bisexual or transsexual, lesbian or gay, body and identity. This approach also allows me to concentrate on the mechanisms and effects of continuing to produce bisexuality and transsexuality as similar to or different from one another (particularly in terms of transgression or regression) rather than struggling primarily to disentangle them.

My own experience is woven into my text and provides its own motivations. As well as the political and theoretical links between bisexuality and transsexuality, I am specifically concerned with the relationship between bisexual femme and female-to-male or FTM subjectivities.<sup>178</sup> I want to look at some of the ways in which these two identities, histories and experiences relate to, mirror and problematise one another. I emphasise the bisexual femme, rather than bisexual woman, and FTM, rather than MTF, not because I think this conjunction is more widespread or more significant in terms of the discourses of gender and sexuality I am concerned with, but precisely because neither bisexual nor transsexual experience can *be* generalised. My choice here is partly influenced by a sexual relationship that I had with an FTM, which was highly significant for me, not

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<sup>177</sup> Jay Prosser argues convincingly that 'female' inverters are the predecessors of a contemporary transsexual subjectivity rather than lesbian subjectivity (sexual perversion being a subset of inversion in Havelock Ellis, and not necessarily coextensive with it). (Prosser 1998)

<sup>178</sup> The terms 'FTM' and 'MTF' do more than simply shorten 'female-to-male' and 'male-to-female' respectively. They denote a shift in political emphasis and in transsexual narrative progression away from the idea of moving *from* female *to* male, or vice versa, towards claiming transsexuality as an identity in itself.

least because of its coincidence with my own ‘coming out’ as femme. Because of my own experiences I am more familiar with the experiences and issues surrounding FTM and bisexual femme subjectivities than I am with those raised by MTF or bisexual butch or bisexual non-gender-specific subjectivities.<sup>179</sup>

While I was preparing the materials for this chapter one question kept coming back to me: What is it that you desire in FTMs, Clare? This question could be asked and answered in a number of ways. What is it I physically, emotionally or intellectually desire in FTM bodies and histories? What is it that attracts me to, makes me want to have, to write about FTM bodies and histories in conjunction with my own? What is it about my bisexual femmeness that creates or fuels that desire? What do I actually, physically, desire? This last question is the cause of the most anxiety for me. As a bisexual woman, my desire for FTMs is interpretable as desire for the ultimate ‘bisexual object-choice’, for a body and gender that do not ‘match’.<sup>180</sup> For example, Annie Sprinkle rejoices in her desire for her lover, ‘a female-to-male transsexual/hermaphrodite – the perfect playmate for bi-sex!’ (Sprinkle 1991: 103)<sup>181</sup> One point of contention between my lover and I during our relationship was my bisexuality. Because I am able to relate sexually to men and to women, he said he could never be sure I was not responding to his gendered maleness as butch rather than as male. The fact that I was able to eroticise his body/gender mismatch, while enabling on one level, was unsettling

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<sup>179</sup> I also discuss the relationship between bisexual femme and FTM subjectivities in the article ‘Waiting For No Man: Bisexual Femme Subjectivity and Cultural Repudiation’, (Hemmings 1998) though in that context I am more concerned with establishing a basis for theorising lesbian community from such a perspective.

<sup>180</sup> This is particularly true with respect to FTMs who have not had upper and/or lower body surgery.

<sup>181</sup> Bisexual writer Marcy Sheiner also describes this fascination with and desire for the ‘two-in-one’ of her transsexual lover: ‘I caught glimpses, in his facial expressions and gestures, of the woman who still lived inside the man. The effect of these flashes upon my psyche was almost electrical: I could actually feel my brain cells straining to process the bombardment of bi-gendered signals.’ (Sheiner 1996: 19)

to him on another. I did not mind what he clearly minded so much.

My lover's anxiety and Annie Sprinkle's enjoyment do not entirely resonate with my experience. It is certainly true that my bisexual femme desire allows me to eroticise FTMs. However, I think that my desire has at least as much to do with the specific shared histories of some bisexual femmes and FTMs, as it does with bisexual desire for male *and* female. Many bisexual women learn the expression of their desire in lesbian communities.<sup>182</sup> Many FTMs also learn the expression of their desire in lesbian communities, often as butches. Both bisexuals and FTMs may maintain and negotiate their ties to the lesbian community, at least in the early stages of transitioning.<sup>183</sup> A bisexual woman and a transsexual man: this could be read as a heterosexual relationship with an altogether unexpected narrative, a heterosexual relationship with a combined lesbian history. Like the anxiety surrounding bisexual women's open presence in the lesbian community that I documented in Chapter Two, FTM presence in the lesbian community is similarly a cause of controversy and negotiation.<sup>184</sup> In London in July 1996, queer (and formerly dyke) photographer Del Grace came out as transgendered during his slide show event at The Ritzy, (Grace 1996) causing outrage in the mostly lesbian audience. Again, as in the Northampton context, the fear of transsexuality is partly structured by issues of inclusion and exclusion. Trans or bisexual people can be included in a Pride March as *additions* to a community without too much disruption, but problems occur the moment a

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<sup>182</sup> For example, see my discussion of Sharon Gonsalves' narrative of desire in Chapter Two, Section Two, Part Three.

<sup>183</sup> 'Transitioning' here refers to changes in sexual *and* gendered identity.

<sup>184</sup> Gayle Rubin identifies the 'permeable boundaries' between butch and FTM subjectivities and experiences, advocating tolerance towards FTMs: '[a] sex change is a transition. A woman does not immediately become a man as soon as she begins to take hormones. During the initial stages of changing sex, many FTMs will not be ready to leave the world of women [...] They will leave lesbian contexts on their own, when they can, when they are ready [...] Some FTMs will experiment with sex change and elect to abandon the effort. They should not be deprived of their lesbian credentials for having explored the option.' (Rubin 1992: 475-6)

lesbian expresses bisexual or transsexual experience within ‘her’ own subjectivity. The external ‘other’ can be ‘tacked on’, but the ‘other’ within causes a more structural fragmentation within lesbian identity.<sup>185</sup>

But I wanted to be even more specific. My bisexual femininity is only latterly learned, previously avoided, mostly re-signified as wanting to have, when I wanted to be.<sup>186</sup> I see that reflected in an FTM masculinity and maleness which is hard-fought for, and never entirely consolidated. So my desire is less a desire for ambiguity, than a desire for consciously attained masculinity and maleness that reflects back, stresses, dwells on, accentuates and values my femmeness. Our desire may take form in a lesbian context, but it cannot deny its heterosexuality, its definite male-femaleness, which is the spectre that must be banished from the butch-femme dynamic.<sup>187</sup>

## **Part Two: Subjects of the Dominant Order**

Transsexualism has been a subject of contention within feminism ever since Janice Raymond published *The Transsexual Empire* – her condemnation of transsexual subjectivity and medical technological intervention as always and necessarily patriarchal – in 1979. (Raymond 1979) For Raymond, male-to-female

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<sup>185</sup> As we saw in Chapter Two, bisexuality and transsexuality are less threatening to lesbian (and gay) selves if they can be differentiated. Once differentiated, they can be reassimilated into the ‘queer realm’, but always as ‘different’. I would like to continue in my assertion that the recent inclusion or addition of ‘bisexual and transgendered’ to previously ‘lesbian and gay’ groups, meeting places, and events is not always as unproblematically progressive as it may seem. For example, in 1996, ‘London Lesbian and Gay Pride’ became ‘London Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Pride’, yet the festival’s Pride Magazine made no mention of bisexual or transgender issues, individuals, or groups except in terms of a trivialising spread on ‘drag fashion’. (Pride Magazine 1996)

<sup>186</sup> I am aware that this separation is a rather convenient and simplistic one. As Diana Fuss illustrates in *Identification Papers*, (Fuss 1995) wanting to have (desire) and wanting to be (identification) often occur in the same moment, and are thus not mutually exclusive.

<sup>187</sup> I discuss this notion of heterosexuality as the structuring myth of lesbian butch/femme, which results in lesbian theory’s denial of ‘bisexual femme’ as a valid subject position both later in Part Three of this section, and the article I mention in footnote 178, above. (Hemmings 1998)

transsexuals are the horrific result of men's womb envy, the material form of the desire to leave women no integrity in a coercive and patriarchal society. (Ibid: 103-4, 112) And while transsexual women ('male-to-constructed-females') are really malicious men who sap female energy, transsexual men ('female-to-constructed-males') are really women seduced by the desire for patriarchal power. (Ibid: xix) Stephen Whittle writes that *The Transsexual Empire*

discredited for a long time any academic voice that [transsexuals] might have [had...] with feminist theorists. As a result of [Raymond's] work, feminists saw transsexuals as misguided and mistaken men seeking surgery to fulfil some imagined notion of femininity, and furthermore, upholding the gendered sex-role structure inherent in the patriarchal hegemony which sought to discredit feminist work. (Whittle 1996: 207)<sup>188</sup>

Here Whittle touches on an issue that strikes me as central to any discussion of Raymond's argument – her intense dislike of femininity. Throughout *The Transsexual Empire* Raymond argues that only by embracing stereotyped femininity can an MTF transsexual gain access to hormones and surgery: 'the male-to-constructed-female transsexual exhibits the attempt to possess women in a bodily sense while acting out the images into which men have molded women'. (Raymond 1979: 99) In addition, 'lesbian-feminist' transsexuals seek to 'possess women at a deeper level, this time under the guise of challenging rather than conforming to the role and behavior of stereotyped women'. (Ibid) In other words, male-to-female transsexuals confirm 'femininity' as a projected male fantasy whether through displaying classically feminine behaviour and garb, or through possessing women by guile (and hence behaving in a traditionally male/masculine way).

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<sup>188</sup> Sandy Stone's 'The *Empire* Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto', is also a response to Raymond, as the title suggests. Like Whittle, Stone argues that: 'Though *Empire* represented a specific moment in feminist analysis and prefigured the appropriation of liberal political language by a radical right, here in 1991 [...] it is still the definitive statement on transsexualism by a genetic female academic.' (Stone 1991: 283)



Raymond's belief that femininity *per se* is an irredeemable ill (not just when displayed by transsexuals) is confirmed in her more recent work. As part of her argument that male-impersonation does not rely on an investment in male privilege, and so is fundamentally different to male female-impersonation, Raymond states that:

The reason that women wear pants is mainly comfort and convenience. Pants are practical in all types of weather and don't make women physically vulnerable or encourage sexual harassment, as certain styles of feminine clothing do. (Raymond 1996: 217)<sup>188</sup>

This is a startling quote. Raymond vilifies transsexuals with the excuse of protecting feminist culture, yet here accuses women who wear 'certain styles of feminine clothing' of making themselves vulnerable to, or even encouraging sexual attack. This could hardly be considered a feminist approach to issues of violence against women. For Raymond femininity can only ever be a subset of masculinity, derived from maleness and 'the patriarchal order'.

Unsurprisingly, Raymond also dislikes androgyny, which she sees as the merging of the two opposites which nevertheless remain unchallenged, 'and so androgynous humanism replaces feminist politics'. (Raymond 1996: 218)<sup>189</sup> Raymond ends her article by insisting that '[a] real sexual politics says yes to a view and reality of transgender that transforms, instead of conforming to, gender'. (Ibid 223)<sup>190</sup> Yet precisely what 'a real sexual politics' might be remains

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<sup>188</sup> This article first appeared as the 'Introduction to the 1994 Edition' of *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male* (New York: Teacher's College Press, 2nd edition). (Raymond 1996: 215)

<sup>189</sup> The notion of androgyny is discussed rather more ambivalently in the early lesbian/feminist classic *Lesbian Woman*. (Martin and Lyon 1972) For Martin and Lyon, androgyny involves wearing trousers rather than skirts, for similar reasons to those stated by Raymond: 'they give you much more freedom of movement than skirts, and they are warmer'. (Ibid: 66) Martin and Lyon's androgynous woman maintains a non-masculine balance by continuing to wear lipstick, however. (Ibid: 68)

<sup>190</sup> It is curious that this line of Raymond's comes right at the end of *Blending Genders*, (Ekins and King 1996) a volume that offers a (mostly positive) range of contemporary views on

unaddressed and obscured by Raymond's anti-transsexual and anti-feminine vitriol.<sup>191</sup>

Bernice Hausman, writing in 1995, might seem an unlikely successor to Raymond's comprehensive anti-transsexual position, given that her perspective is more influenced by Michel Foucault and Judith Butler than by Mary Daly. Hausman charts the importance of the historical and medical separation of 'gender identity' from 'sex' and the body in the production of contemporary transsexual subjectivity. She argues for a Barthesian perception of contemporary gender identity as the 'mythic' signifier that has displaced sex and the body in the primary semiotic chain naturalising heterosexual reproduction. (Hausman 1995: 175-194) Hausman conflates these two main strands of her argument by presenting the transsexual subject as being wholly (and willingly) produced through technology and, therefore, as the *personification* of that regulatory 'myth' of gender identity.<sup>192</sup> For Hausman as for Raymond: gender is bad, and transsexuals are the most gender-invested of all contemporary subjects.<sup>193</sup>

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transsexuality, transvestism and transgender.

<sup>191</sup> Of course, not all feminist theorists 'misidentify the construction of the feminine within a masculinist economy with the feminine itself'. (Butler 1994: 18) For example, two years before the publication of *The Transsexual Empire*, French feminist theorist Luce Irigaray, imagines the possibilities of female labial signification operating independently of the phallus in *The Sex Which Is Not One*. (Irigaray 1985) As Butler says, for Irigaray 'the feminine could not be theorized in terms of a determinate *relation* between the masculine and the feminine'. (Butler 1990: 10)

<sup>192</sup> Although one might wish to make a critical distinction between Hausman and Raymond's interrogation of hegemonic gender norms and their treatment of transsexual or transgendered subjects, both writers in fact damn (in feminist terms) the latter through the former. Raymond's choice to call transsexuals by their former gender (e.g. 'male-to-constructed female', for transsexual woman), and Hausman's collapse of regulatory systems and subjectivities, effectively produce the transsexual subject as the embodiment of those norms, *and nothing more*. I discuss Hausman's denial of any other form of transsexual agency at the end of Section One of this chapter.

<sup>193</sup> Jay Prosser takes issue with Hausman's 'gender chronology', which fixes the emergence of gender identity as a category of self firmly in the 1930s onwards. He writes that: 'Arguably, in Freudian psychoanalysis, which preceded the medical technologies subject to Hausman's focus, gender is already in excess of corporeal sex.' (Prosser 1997: 3) I would suggest that Hausman *needs* to fix the simultaneity of gender identity's emergence and transsexual subjectivity in order to secure her premise that transsexual agency is wholly circumscribed by technology.

Bisexuality has also frequently been dismissed as the antithesis of a political or personal challenge to patriarchy, again through its association with an oppressive femininity. Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, commenting on lesbian roles and styles of the early 1970s, note:

We have found some interesting anomalies in the butch-femme pattern over the years. One which crops up rather consistently is women – usually divorced and, we suspect, not Lesbian at all – who pair up with butch Lesbians. In these partnerships the entire male-female dichotomy is acted out to the nth degree. The femmes insist that their butches wear only male clothing and that they appear and act as nearly like the stereotyped male as possible [...] Most of these femmes have been divorced more than once. It appears that they have been so badly treated by men that they can't bear the thought of re-marrying. (Martin and Lyon 1972: 67)

Martin's and Lyon's two references to 'divorce' in the above passage emphasise these femmes' (at least) behavioural bisexuality. The bisexual/femme makes real the fear that femininity craves masculinity for its fulfilment, settling for a butch only when 'a real man' is unavailable or proves to be a disappointment. The figure of the bisexual woman is used to confirm the assumed link between femininity and heterosexuality and thus shores up the assumption that femininity is always and only ever defined in hierarchical relation to masculinity.

Writing in 1995, femme writer Minnie Bruce Pratt retrospectively explains the motivation for the rejection of 'gender roles' in the 1970s:

As women and as lesbians we wanted to step outside traps set for us as people sexed as woman, to evade negative values gendered to us. We didn't want to be women as defined by the larger culture, so we had to get rid of femininity. We didn't want to be oppressed by men, so we had to get rid of masculinity. And we wanted to end enforced desire, so we had to get rid of heterosexuality. (Pratt 1995: 19)

In the framework Pratt describes, lesbianism figures as the primary challenge to heteropatriarchy because of its rejection of both sex with men *and* femininity. Such a framework is still formative today. Julia Penelope, writing in a radical

feminist volume in 1996, argues that when a lesbian embraces femininity her motivation is always and only to remain closeted, to pass as heterosexual. As with Martin and Lyon, the link between femininity and bisexuality in lesbian culture is central but never explicit:

We may or may not choose whether we will love women or men, but we do choose whether or not we will act on our desire. Many lesbians still choose to behave heterosexually, to marry men, and to bear them sons. Eventually, some find their way to acting on their love for a woman, but not all, and they frequently bring their acquired heterosexual behaviors with them when they enter the Lesbian community. Apparently, it does not occur to most of them that unlearning femininity might be a good idea. Others, the hasbeans, choose to love women for a while and then marry men and bear them sons. (Penelope 1996: 126-7)<sup>194</sup>

Femininity, bearing sons, marrying men, behaving heterosexually while being lesbian; these are combined as part of Penelope's attack on the bisexual women she can never quite bring herself to name. Mirroring Raymond's abhorrence of the femininity of transsexual women, Penelope concludes her article in no uncertain terms: 'Femininity is a choice I won't respect'. (Ibid: 147)<sup>195</sup>

This association between bisexuality and femininity is linked to anti-transsexual feeling in Sheila Jeffreys' work on the legacy of the 1960s' 'sexual revolution'. Jeffreys picks up where the C.L.I.T. papers left off, arguing that

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<sup>194</sup> Penelope's words remind me of Elisabeth Brook's in 'Lesbians Don't Fuck Men'. (Brook 1989: 6, discussed in Chapter Two, Section Two).

<sup>195</sup> For Penelope, femininity/bisexuality is not only *not* lesbianism, it is one of many sources of 'real lesbians' oppression. Penelope associates femininity with having money (being able to buy all those accessories), with having access to money (through better job prospects and male attention), (Ibid: 120) and with being thin. (Ibid: 127) Clearly, not all femmes and butches are working-class, as Sheila Jeffreys points out in 'Butch and Femme: Now and Then', (Jeffreys 1993: 171-72) but to claim, as Penelope does, that lesbian femininity only ever denotes class privilege (as well as bisexuality) is fundamentally inaccurate. This stands in direct contradiction to the evidence of femme theorists such as Joan Nestle, Madeline Davis and Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy who have researched the importance of femme-butcht identities in working-class lesbian communities. (Nestle 1987; Davis, and Kennedy 1993) An altogether different approach to femmes and class is taken by Betty Rose Dudley in her 'in-your-face' article 'A Fat, Vulgar, Angry Slut', where she rages against middle-class girls 'doing' butch and femme as 'stud' and 'slut', when 'they expect a privilege that no slut or stud that I grew up with ever envisioned'. (Dudley 1996: 14)

bisexuality is a way of straight/feminine housewives pleasing their husbands. (Jeffreys 1990: 111, 115). In the same volume Jeffreys also critiques transsexuality in terms of what she perceives to be its structural homophobia:

Transsexuals are people who have grown up in a homophobic society but are attracted to others of their own sex. Such is their aversion to homosexuality that these men and women are unable to accept that they are simply gay. In order to relate to people of their own sex they need to transform their bodies so that they can convince themselves that they are really heterosexual. (Jeffreys 1990: 182)

The same passage can easily be re-read substituting 'bisexual/femme' for 'transsexual'. Bisexuals are commonly accused of being unable or unwilling to relinquish heterosexual privilege, or of suffering from internalised homophobia. Just as Martin and Lyon's bisexual/femme insisted her butch wear male clothing, the third sentence above could read as follows: '[bisexual femmes] need to transform their [same-sex lovers'] bodies [from lesbian to butch/male] so that they can convince themselves that they are really heterosexual.' For Martin and Lyon the bisexual/femme is heterosexual in truth, where for Jeffreys she is a lesbian.

These productions of bisexuality and transsexuality as politically reductive and therefore incompatible with feminism occur because there is so much at stake. To challenge the assumption that lesbianism is always the most effective challenge to patriarchal heterosexuality, or that femininity is always and only ever circumscribed by oppressive masculinity, is to question some of the central tenets of feminist thought. Flawed though those tenets may be, the threat of their disappearance may be equally unsettling. My own experience is that transsexuality and bisexuality tend to make non-transsexual or non-bisexual feminists uncomfortable, because acknowledgement of those subjectivities forces a re-evaluation of the relationship of gender to the body and of gender and object-

choice to sexuality.<sup>196</sup> In other words, there is very deep resistance to the idea that ‘feminine’ or ‘masculine’ subjects may not be wholly contained within or produced by the entrenched dominant structures of gender.

### **Part Three: Subjects of Transgression**

Queer theory is a primarily US-based critical approach to contemporary theory, culture, literature and film that has strong ties to postmodern and post-structuralist feminist theories. Queer theory mirrors queer activism which sought to challenge assimilation policies within the lesbian and gay movement, particularly through HIV and AIDS activism, and offered a forceful critique of the predominantly white, male and middle-class composition of gay and lesbian movements.<sup>197</sup> It is difficult to isolate specific texts as being among *the* most influential within queer theory, not least because the creation of a queer canon runs counter to the stated anti-linear, anti-narrative aims of queer theory and politics. Yet I think few would disagree when I suggest that Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* (Butler 1990) and Eve Sedgwick’s *Epistemology of the Closet* (Sedgwick 1991) are two key texts that any queer theory enthusiast would certainly have had to have read.<sup>198</sup> I would

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<sup>196</sup> Donna Haraway argues that gender/sex distinctions are too useful to feminists to be debunked, even though women have been oppressed by (as well as resistant to) them. (Haraway 1992: 134)

<sup>197</sup> See *Lesbians Talk Queer Notions* for a useful summary of the history of queer activism. (Smyth 1992) For more in-depth analyses of queer activism see Warner 1993 and Woods 1995. Queer political activism had mostly fizzled out by 1993, though its approach survives in some fringe groups, for example, the Lesbian Avengers. In Chapter Four, I mention the Queer Nation San Francisco archives in connection with the influence of the 1990 National Bisexual Conference in San Francisco.

<sup>198</sup> Having said that, a posting to the Queer Studies email discussion list in September 1996, asking for an initial bibliography for queer studies prompted a listing which did not include Sedgwick or Butler! Instead the list focused on cultural politics-based texts such as *The Material Queer*. (Morton 1996) I would argue, though, that the Butler-Sedgwick combination has been particularly influential in circumscribing the relationship between bisexuality and transsexuality and queer. It is worth noting, too, that Butler’s *Excitable Speech* also makes this move towards discussing queer and materialism. (Butler 1997) Of course, Butler and Sedgwick’s work does not appear from nowhere. Butler’s most obvious precursors are Gayle Rubin and Monique Wittig, and both she and Sedgwick utilise the work of Foucault extensively. (Rubin 1984, Wittig 1992, Foucault, especially 1978) Butler acknowledges this debt to both Rubin and Wittig in her edited

also suggest that Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* is important for queer theory both in terms of the way she intertwines autobiography and theory, and of her careful negotiation of sexuality and race borders/crossings. (Anzaldúa 1989)<sup>199</sup> All three of the above texts highlight one of the central desired effects of queer theory: to expose the difference and opposition between heterosexual and homosexual identities as fictional and politically motivated, and to challenge heterosexuality's normative status. This is typically achieved by problematising the relationship between gender and sexual identity, and/or the relationship between gender and the sexed body: 'Queer theory [seeks] to denaturalize gender, to loosen its tie from sex, gender's bodily referent.' (Prosser 1995: 484)

It is easy to see how bisexuality (which problematises the assumed relationship between object-choice and sexual identity) and transsexuality (which problematises the assumed relationship between genetic sexed body and gender identity) could figure as the epitome of all that is transgressive of heteronormativity after *Gender Trouble*. (Butler 1990) Butler's insistence on the tenuous hold gender norms have over subjects potentially 'releases' bisexual and transsexual subjects from their production as emblematic of those norms. Diana Fuss asks in her introduction to *Inside/Out*:

[W]hat gets left out of the inside/outside, heterosexual/homosexual opposition, an opposition which could at least plausibly be said to secure its seemingly inviolable dialectical structure only by assimilating and

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journal special edition 'More Gender Trouble'. (Butler 1994) Other works that have been influential include Teresa de Lauretis' edited queer theory edition of *Differences*, (de Lauretis 1991), Diana Fuss's *Inside/Out*, (Fuss 1991) Joseph Bristow and Angelia Wilson's edited collection *Activating Theory*, (Bristow and Wilson 1993), and more recently and more eclectically, Laura Doan's *The Lesbian Postmodern* (Doan 1994) and Elizabeth Grosz and Elspeth Probyn's *Sexy Bodies*. (Grosz and Probyn 1995) What strikes me is the literary, critical theory or philosophy slant to all of these texts. Lesbian and gay history texts, for example, while clearly influenced by queer theory to a certain extent have not debunked the categories 'lesbian and gay' in quite the same ways. See the work of Duberman, Vicinus and Chauncey 1991; Chauncey 1994; Abelow, Barale and Halperin 1993; and Nestle and Preston 1995.

<sup>199</sup> While most queer volumes include several texts by people of color, Anzaldúa's work on race, gender, and sexuality differences is still a rarity.

internalizing other sexualities (bisexuality, transvestism, transsexualism...) to its own rigid bipolar logic? (Fuss 1991:2)

For Fuss, bisexuality, transvestism, and transsexualism are positioned together as ‘outside’ the dialectical structures that they are said to shed light on. Fuss’s lack of further attention to these three categories only confirms the impression she gives that they provide the same critique and occupy the same outsider position as one another. Marjorie Garber, too, conflates transgenderism, cross-dressing and bisexuality. In *Vested Interests: Cross Dressing and Cultural Anxiety*, Garber argues that transvestism provides ‘a space of possibility structuring and confounding culture’. (Garber 1992: 17) It is ‘the disruptive element that intervenes, not just a category of crisis of male and female, but a crisis of category itself’. (Ibid) In her 1995 book *Vice Versa: Bisexuality and the Eroticism of Everyday Life*, Garber makes almost identical claims about bisexuality’s capacity to force such a ‘crisis of category’: ‘Bisexuality is that upon the repression of which society depends for its laws, codes, boundaries, social organization – everything that defines “civilization” as we know it’. (Garber 1995: 206)<sup>200</sup> I find Garber’s focus on the ‘pleasures and possibilities’ of transgendered and bisexual experience to be extremely significant in terms of their relation to queer theory and politics.

#### ‘Bisexual Pleasures’

Behaving bisexually does indeed seem to figure as the epitome of transgression for self-respecting queers within the lesbian and gay community at present; the gay press is full of references to lesbians and gay men acting on their (parodic, rather than normative) opposite-sex desire. I want to take two examples of this flirtation with bisexuality in an attempt to identify the discursive position of

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<sup>200</sup> See Chapter One, Section One, Part Two, for a slightly different analysis of this citation.



bisexual pleasure within a queer rubric more specifically.

In Nic Williams' erotic short story 'The Boy at the Bar', (Williams 1995)<sup>201</sup> the gay male protagonist is picked up in a SM leather bar by a tough, menacing stranger. His humiliation (and queer pleasure) is complete when the stranger reveals *herself* as other than the male leather daddy the protagonist had thought he was responding to. (Ibid: 14) Opposite-sex sexual behaviour is not antithetical to queer in this fictional scenario. The discovery of the 'true' sex of the leather daddy provides precisely that desired queer disjuncture between sexed body, gendered role and sexual identity. But as the story develops it is clear that the 'heterosexual' *act* and the queer sexual identity must remain distinct and in oppositional tension. The protagonist, Phil, realises that his 'leather daddy', Chris, is a woman through the following exchange:

'That's for staring at my girlfriend.'  
 Jesus! What now? Did he mean he's straight? What the fuck?  
 'Some of us like cocks,' he continued evenly. 'We just don't need the guy attached.' Oh my god, what a set up. Tony's [the barman's] friends with all the dykes, he must have known [...] Jesus, a woman, a dyke at that, fucking me! (Ibid)

Phil moves swiftly from imagining his 'daddy' to be a straight man (signalled by the reference to the girlfriend), to realising 'he' is a 'she', and a dyke. At no point, even before her revelation that she just likes 'cocks' not men *per se*, does Phil consider bisexuality as a viable identity for his 'assailant', even though this would actually make more immediate sense for a narrative that is otherwise confused and fragmented. Chris's dislike of men once again precludes bisexuality within the narrative; both Phil's and Chris's sexual identity can remain unambiguously gay and lesbian respectively. As a result, the subjects whose gendered and sexual behaviour is not contained within dominant gendered and

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<sup>201</sup> Published In the UK's most recent queer pornographic/erotic magazine, *Common*

sexual norms are always already oppositional subjects – gay men and lesbians. In other words, structural location and subjectivity are conflated once again.

In *Public Sex*, Pat Califia ruminates on the reasons she does not call herself bisexual, even though she has opposite-sex sexual partners:

Why not simply identify as bi? That's a complicated question [...] A self-identified bisexual is saying, 'Men and women are of equal importance to me.' That's simply not true of me. I'm a Kinsey Five, and when I turn on to a man it's because he shares some aspect of my sexuality (like S/M or fisting) that turns me on despite his biological sex. (Califia 1994: 185)<sup>202</sup>

Califia argues that she 'eroticize[s] queerness, gayness, homosexuality' (Ibid: 185) rather than same-sex attraction, arguing that '[i]t is very odd that sexual orientation is defined solely in terms of the sex of one's partners'. (Ibid: 186) Yet even though Califia frames her story in terms of a discussion of bisexuality, at no point does she consider the implications of sex with a bisexual man. She views her lesbianism and her partner's gay maleness as the reason why her opposite-sex sexual encounters remain queer *despite* a temporary 'heterosexual' object choice. Clearly, if either participant were to identify as bisexual the opposite-sex object choice could not be framed as peripheral to identity in quite the same way.

For both Califia and Williams, then, a 'heterosexual' act and lesbian or gay identity must remain separable for 'queer pleasure' (the distancing of gendered and sexual behaviour from gendered and sexual location) to be the resultant effect. Jo Eadie makes a similar point when discussing the following comment in the British magazine *Gay Times*:

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*Denominator.*

<sup>202</sup> Califia does acknowledge that biphobia may also be the reason some lesbians or gay men do not identify as bisexual when they experience opposite-sex desire. It is also worth noting that self-identified bisexuals do *not* necessarily desire men and women in equal proportion as Califia suggests. However, I want to stress here that Califia's piece (first published in 1983) was one of the first to defend the right of bisexual women to be a part of lesbian sub-culture.

‘Sex between gay men and lesbians is [...] coming out of the closet [...] Now people talk openly of their opposite-sex-same-sexuality lovers and at the party after the SM Pride March a gay man and a lesbian had sex on the dance floor, but it wasn’t heterosexuality. You can tell.’ (McKerrow 1993: 29, in Eadie 1993: 150)

For Williams, Califia and now McKerrow, the queer pleasures of opposite-sex desire can be acknowledged and acted upon as long as *you can tell* it is not heterosexuality. I would argue instead that what you need to be able to tell is that the act is not *not* lesbian and gay, since being able to *tell* that an opposite-sex act is ‘not heterosexuality’ does not open up a space for bisexual queerness.

Bisexuality (as behaviour or as identity) can only be acceptable within a queer arena if its closeness to ‘heterosexuality’ is erased or denied; if gender parody is always finally visible as such. The effect of bisexual production within and borrowing from queer theory is two-fold. Firstly, bisexuality has to prove its subversive credentials within the same form in order to be considered worthy of attention. Secondly, subversion itself becomes the sought-after chalice, and is assumed always to be progressive.<sup>203</sup>

Bisexuality becomes rather curiously repressed as the boundaries of queer as oppositional to heteronormativity are so vigilantly guarded. Judith Butler’s work, for example, barely considers bisexuality. Where Butler is discussing the ways in which butch/femme can be seen as highlighting rather than replicating the constructed nature of the heterosexual matrix, she makes one of her most frequently cited statements:

The replication of heterosexual constructs in non-heterosexual frames brings into relief the utterly constructed status of the so-called heterosexual original. Thus, gay is to straight not as copy is to original, but, rather, as copy is to copy. (Butler 1990: 31)

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<sup>203</sup> Using the example of Nazi radicalism, Elizabeth Wilson argues that the simple crossing of established boundaries does not always guarantee progressive political change. (Wilson 1993: 108, 115) And Michel Foucault argues that transgression is simply defined as the crossing of a boundary, which in turn sets up another boundary to be crossed, *ad infinitum*. (Foucault 1977)

Those non-heterosexual frames might be imagined to include bisexuality. Instead Butler privileges gender mirroring/parody of heterosexuality, invoking butch/femme and drag as exemplary in this regard, and considering bisexuality only in terms of its psychoanalytic meanings rather than its performative potential. (Ibid: 54, 57-77)<sup>204</sup> Butler's theory of what makes butch/femme and drag so potentially subversive is their very closeness to heterosexuality, the way in which their 'performance' makes conscious the mechanism of repudiation in sustaining our identities, though this is clearer in the 'masculine lesbian' than the femme. (Butler 1993: 85-88, 234ff) The feminine woman repudiates 'the masculine' but cannot be read as repudiating heterosexuality other than through the presence of a visibly non-heterosexual masculine subject (the butch). One could quite reasonably transfer Butler's criteria for femme parody to a bisexual subject. Bisexuality can make an almost perfect copy of heterosexuality in terms of sexed bodies as well as gender 'performance', and, like the lesbian femme's desire, bisexuality is rarely visible outside an explicitly queer context. Butler's heterosexual 'replication' can only take place in lesbian or gay frames because what allows the notion of 'repudiation' to work is a bisexual mechanism that always threatens to surface. As Carole-Anne Tyler notes, in the Butlerian scenario 'mimicry functions as an index of [the 'real'], gesturing toward it, and maintaining a certain contiguity with it.' (Tyler 1994: 235) The non-

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<sup>204</sup> Very recently, Butler has begun to address bisexual possibilities for performativity more precisely. In the 'Afterword' to Sally Munt's *Butch/Femme: Inside Lesbian Gender* (Munt 1998) Butler acknowledges that the relationship between heterosexual and non-heterosexual frames must be theorised as at once divergent and similar, (Butler 1998: 227) and that a bisexual femme position might be a useful one from which to continue this task. She suggests that '[s]ome forms of bisexual practice not only cross that line [between heterosexual and homosexual], but muddle the very possibility of drawing the line. If a bisexual woman is not quite straight, even betrays straightness by her refusal to offer absolute sexual loyalty to its norm, she is also not quite a lesbian, if we understand lesbianism to require an exclusive commitment to women.' (Ibid: 228)

heterosexuality of the femme is particularly precarious, given that she is not legible as femme on her own, and given her history of recuperation as heterosexual.<sup>205</sup>

Rather than rejecting the established theoretical links between the femme and her heterosexuality (the subject and her structural location), lesbian culture transfigures that relationship in terms of ‘myth’ – the (lesbian urban) myth of femme abandonment of her butch lover for a man. Pat Califia’s femme-butcht poetry foregrounds the tension between the myth of femme abandonment and the assumption that she will stay with her butch:

And you can tell she’s a femme  
 Because she makes you cry  
 When you can’t give her everything  
 You imagine she wants  
 That a man could give her  
 (Califia ‘Diagnostic Tests’ 1992: 484)

The butch lover imagines herself lacking in relation to a man; it is her femme (who is, of course, used to this scenario, structured as she is by its confines) who ‘makes her cry’, not by leaving her (she is femme after all) but by chiding her lover for her foolishness. Califia is the femme’s champion, acknowledging her bravery and the taunts she receives from ‘both sides’:

Being a successful femme  
 Means making a butch desire you  
 And then enduring when that lust  
 Turns into suspicion.  
 ‘If you want me,’ she sneers,  
 ‘You must really want a man.’  
 Nobody knows how much it hurts  
 When you go out on the street  
 And straight men tell you  
 The same damned thing.  
 (Califia ‘The Femme Poem’ 1992: 417)

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<sup>205</sup> See, for example, the inscription of Mary in Radclyffe Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness* as a ‘subject-in-waiting’, as always about to be recuperated into heterosexuality. (Hall 1928)

The ‘successful femme’ (the femme who does not fall into heterosexuality), *endures* her butch’s suspicion, rather than deflecting or circumventing it, presumably because she knows that is an impossibility. The poignancy of the poem lies in Califia’s astute perception that both straight male and butch readings of the femme must necessarily co-exist. The shadow of Carole-Anne Tyler’s grammatical structuring of the femme as not-quite-not-straight, (Tyler 1994) lurks between these lines, echoing Califia’s earlier sentiment in the same poem that she’s ‘a sucker’ (Ibid: 416) for

[...] women who can never have what they want  
 Because the world will not allow them  
 To be complete human beings – that is, men.  
 (Ibid: 417)

The structure of this sentiment allows multiple readings. Men are ‘the world’, are that which prevents women having ‘what they want’; or, what those women want *is* men, but the loss of human status attending such desire is too high a price to pay for heterosexual privilege.<sup>206</sup> The spectre of straightness that has always structured the femme is transformed in these poems into an ‘operative myth’ that enacts Butler’s functional mode of repudiation. That the shadow of straightness is not a structuring trope for butches can be seen in the up-front clear acknowledgement of butch desire for a man:

You can tell she’s butch  
 Because she’s one of the boys  
 (And fucks one of them occasionally  
 To prove it).  
 (Califia, ‘Diagnostic Tests’, 1992: 485)

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<sup>206</sup> This reading, of course, echoes Martin and Lyon’s description (cited above) of the divorced femme as turning to butches because of having suffered irredeemable ills at the hands of men. It also reminds me of May Wolf’s description of her desire for women as heterosexual desire, as cited in the final section of Chapter Two.

Here the butch is ‘saved’ from the spectre of straightness through her ability to identify with ‘the boys’, and through the tone of irony that marks this representation of butch desire for men, a tone that is absent from her femme representations. In Califia’s poetry, the unconscious heterosexual object-choice that the femme has always already made becomes conscious, becomes part of the social and erotic dynamic of the butch-femme play (that both femme and butch are aware of). As a result the femme may become a contemporary subject without having to deny her historical, cultural and grammatical location.

What enables femme identity to be constituted, however paradoxically, as always ‘about to abandon’ her butch is the perpetuation of bisexuality as structuring potential. I am not suggesting that Califia and Butler are wrong to creatively manipulate particular meanings of bisexuality in order to produce a contemporary femme subject. Bisexuality as a sexological and psychoanalytic potential certainly does function as a refusal of femme – historically, politically, and structurally. Indeed, such meanings of bisexuality as sex-and-gender merged subjects continue to circulate currently. However these are not the *only* meanings of bisexuality available. Bisexuality can also mean desire – whether acted upon or not – for men, women and trans people.<sup>207</sup> Bisexual identity can be taken on as an adult sexual identity rather than pre-Oedipal potential structuring the heterosexual and homosexual opposition. These latter meanings are overlooked in the work of Butler and Califia.

There is another possible aspect to Butler’s performative mode here too. Julia Creet argues that Butler’s exclusive focus on lesbian and gay contexts marks

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<sup>207</sup> Lani Ka’ahumanu and Loraine Hutchins define ‘bisexual’ as ‘people who have erotic, affectionate, romantic feelings for, fantasies of, and experiences with women and men, and/or who self-identify as bisexual.’ (Hutchins and Ka’ahumanu 1991: 369) See Chapter One, Section One for close attention to the different meanings of bisexuality circulating currently.

less the site of subversion of heterosexuality than it does her own anxieties of 'coming undone'. (Creet 1995)<sup>208</sup> Creet discusses her own attraction to heterosexuality, and re-interprets lesbian and gay insistence on the distinctness of homosexual identity as a political 'defense against re-incorporation into heterosexuality or into the categorization of what might more accurately be called bisexuality.' (Ibid: 186)<sup>209</sup>

### 'Transgender Performance'

Throughout the 1990s, transgender 'performance' has assumed an almost mythical position within queer theory and politics. In 1998 – eight years after her suggestion in *Gender Trouble* that drag might offer useful insights into discontinuities among sexed body, gender role and sexual identity (Butler 1990) – Judith Butler writes that '[t]he questions posed by transgender promise to become some of the most vexing and most important for the radical theorization of gender in the next decade.' (Butler 1998: 229) Such queer reclaiming of transgenderism can be seen as an attempt to validate gender performance in the face of the vilification of transsexuals by radical feminists, as discussed above. As a result queer theories tend to prioritise transgender 'subversion' in the face of accusations that transsexuals and transvestites are normative and misogynist. We might recall Marjorie Garber's enthusiasm for the transvestite's 'deconstruction' of categories of identity, (Garber 1992: 17) as well as Kate Bornstein's insistence that 'the transgendered person [is] a gender outlaw [causing] the destruction of the gendered system of reality on which most people base major aspects of their lives'. (Bornstein, in Whittle 1996: 211) Writers such as Gilbert Herdt and Leslie Feinberg have similarly celebrated transgendered people as the 'third sex', and

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<sup>208</sup> I have already mentioned Creet in Chapter One, page 6, as one of the few theorists to discuss bisexuality as central to lesbian identity-formation seriously.

<sup>209</sup> Creet's own rather shy hints at a bisexuality that threatens to undo her own lesbian identity



transgenderism as a space in-between male and female. (Herdt 1994; Feinberg 1996)

Transgendered blurring or highlighting of the structures of sex, gender and sexuality is also seen by some theorists as posing a challenge to the often unspoken 'raced' nature of that relationship. Thus Garber explains her assertion that transvestism causes 'category-crisis' by elaborating:

I mean a failure of definitional distinction, a borderline that becomes permeable, that permits of border crossings from one (apparently distinct) category to another: black/white, master/servant, master/slave. (Garber 1992: 16)

Garber expands on her assertion by focusing on historical narratives in which African male slaves cross-dress in order to escape captivity: 'a black man sees that he can pass as a woman because he is, in white eyes, already a woman'. (Ibid: 293) Garber suggests that such forms of cross-dressing make conscious and strategic use of the construction of race and gender as imperialist and patriarchal effects of one another.<sup>210</sup>

Such attention to the relationship between race and gender in transgendered contexts occurs in critical readings of Jennie Livingston's acclaimed *Paris Is Burning*, a documentary of African-American and Latino drag balls and gay male subculture in New York. (Livingston 1991) Judith Halberstam argues that the film offers its audiences:

lessons about how to read gender and race [...] as not only artificial but highly elaborate and ritualistic significations. *Paris Is Burning* focused questions of race, class, and gender and their intersections with the drag

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resonate throughout her text.

<sup>210</sup> For Merl Storr the cultural association of black men with femininity finds its 'ground' in nineteenth century sexological works that equate masculinity with a white reproductive heterosexuality, allowing for the construction of homosexuals, prostitutes and black men and women as 'deviant'. (Storr 1997) In a similar vein, Sander Gilman traces eighteenth and nineteenth century representations of prostitutes and black women, highlighting their common production as physically coarse, and therefore masculine. (Gilman 1992)

performances of poor, gay men of color. (Halberstam 1994: 211)

For Halberstam, then, transgender performance calls identity into question on more than a gendered front. However the subversion of gendered and raced norms relies on Livingston's transgendered subjects not 'passing', on their gendered performances being read *as* performances. A subject such as Venus Xtravaganza, who by passing successfully as a white woman troubles the association of transgender performance with gender, race and class subversion, cannot remain intact within the film's bounds. The film notably ends with the narrative of her murder by a 'client' on discovery of her deception. Judith Butler argues that Venus's passing as a white woman outside the framework of the 'balls' consolidates hegemonic norms:

Venus, and *Paris is Burning* more generally, calls into question whether parodying the dominant norms is enough to displace them [...] I want to underscore that there is no necessary relation between drag and subversion, and that drag may well be used in the service of both the denaturalization and reidealization of hyperbolic heterosexual gender norms. (Butler 1993: 125)

Butler's implication is that the denaturalisation of white heteronormativity *would* have been secured had Venus performed her subjectivity exclusively within queer frames, had she remained legible as both transgendered and of color. It is difficult to shake the impression that for both Livingston and Butler it is Venus's desire to be 'real' rather than 'subversive' that engenders her own demise.<sup>211</sup> As a result, Venus is forced back into being the embodiment of the gendered and sexual norms that Raymond, and later Hausman, argue inscribe all transsexual subjectivity. Through her sleight of hand that dismisses 'passing' as a strategy that might offer up different readings of the relationship between (trans) gender

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<sup>211</sup> Thus *Paris Is Burning* and the queer secondary sources combine to produce Livingston's text as something of a contemporary queer moral fable or fairy tale, with deviation from the queer

and race,<sup>212</sup> Butler effectively distances herself from the scene she surveys and positions herself behind Livingston's lens.

In her critique of *Paris Is Burning*, bell hooks argues that Livingston, 'a white Jewish lesbian from Yale', (hooks 1991: 61) takes on the role of detached white observer who offers fame and fortune to unfortunate poor gay men of color, but who takes the accolades for herself. (Ibid)<sup>213</sup> Butler attempts to exonerate Livingston (and thereby herself) from hooks' charges of unconscious yet objectifying eroticization by arguing that the subjectivity of the (white, lesbian) creator/observer of the film is also challenged:

What would it mean to say that Octavia [a black male-to-female transsexual] is Jennie Livingston's kind of girl? Is the category or, indeed, 'the position' of white lesbian disrupted by such a claim? If this is the production of the black transsexual for an eroticizing white gaze, is it not also the transsexualization of lesbian desire? (Ibid: 135)

While Butler does all she can theoretically to move Livingston (and herself) beyond her position as white eroticiser, she exercises no such attempt to extricate Venus from her position as collaborator in raced and gendered normativity. Butler effectively uses hooks' critique of Livingston's/her white self to situate transgender performance as transgressive only within a white queer frame of desire.

Coco Fusco critiques the above white queer framework asking the pertinent question, '[i]f subversion occurs because of ambiguity, for whom does

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ideal punishable by symbolic (as well as actual) death.

<sup>212</sup> For example Venus's death could be seen as a result of white male panic attending the discovery of the *lack* of distance between natural and constructed white femininity, rather than as evidence of passing's futility.

<sup>213</sup> Butler acknowledges her own identification with Livingston when she remarks that hooks' comments form 'an interpellation which also implicates this author in its sweep'. (Butler 1993: 133) Jackie Goldsby affirms hooks' critique when she states that '[Livingston] can tell this story because her identity is not implicated in it', (Goldsby 1993: 115) because her 'cultural and social privilege [...] is inscribed into the film, however unobtrusive she strives to be.' (Ibid) Goldsby notes that she is 'thankful that [Livingston] did' make the film, however, because 'never has

it occur?' (Fusco 1995: 73) and suggests that an emphasis on subversion is a particularly white entry-point into the lives of the voguers.<sup>214</sup> Fusco critiques a queer analysis of the voguers' 'families' as the antithesis of the traditional heterosexual family unit by highlighting its white western presumption:

To suppose that the voguers reinvented the white American middle-class family also implies that subaltern lives are purposely organized to subvert white heterosexual American norms, which is hardly the case, though whites may read them as such. To assume so, as Butler would seem to do, is surprisingly, if not alarmingly, ethnocentric. (Fusco 1995: 74)

At no point does Butler consider the voguers' families in relation to heterosexual norms within their own cultures. For Fusco this failure indicates that a continued queer emphasis on 'subversion' perpetuates the centrality of white heterosexism as that by which all else may be measured.

Halberstam maintains this tradition of using transgender performance as a way of challenging dominant sex and gender norms:

we are all transsexuals [...] We all pass or we don't, we all wear our drag, and we all derive a different degree of pleasure – sexual or otherwise – from our costumes. It is just that for some of us our costumes are made of fabric or material, while for others they are made of skin; for some an outfit can be changed; for others skin must be re sewn. There are no transsexuals. (Halberstam 1994: 212)<sup>215</sup>

Viewed only as transgressive spectacle, Halberstam's reading of transgender

speech, as performance and oral text, been so irresistible to my eyes and ears.' (Ibid)

<sup>214</sup> 'Voguer' is a slang/familiar term for the drag queens who 'vogue' at the balls. 'Voguing' is a staged dance made popular by Madonna. As Goldsby points out, Madonna's appropriation of the term and the style relies on the drag queen voguers' invisibility. (Goldsby 1993: 113)

<sup>215</sup> Halberstam's work follows the tradition established by Virginia Prince (a well-known male-to-female transvestite) in 1976, who argues that '[o]f all people in the world, TV's should recognize the fact that you do not have to be a female to 'be' a 'girl,' because a great many of us definitely feel ourselves to be girls when we are dressed even though we are perfectly aware that we are males. If a TV looks well enough to pass on the street it should certainly be clear to her that in society she is a girl not only to herself but to everyone else who sees her or has any sort of interchange with her. Girlness is set forth by the clothes, the hair-do, the shoes, makeup, jewelry, manner and general actions.' (Prince 1976, in Hausman 1995: 135) Like her successor, Prince does not differentiate between 'looking like' and 'being'.

performance marks the difference between material and skin as purely incidental. As a result, transsexuals who claim that their sex-change (or skin-change if we believe Halberstam) is meaningful in different ways to drag, risk being accused of essentialism, of upholding rather than dismantling a static concept of gendered or sexual identity. In her analysis of *Blah*, the documentary film of Les Nichols' transition from female to male, and his relationship with 'post-porn' star Annie Sprinkle, Halberstam suggests that:

By apparently understanding his gender performance as no performance at all and his gender fiction as the straight-up truth, Les Nichols takes the trans out of transsexualism. There is no movement, or only a very limited and fleeting movement, in crossing from a stable female identity to a stable male identity, and Les seems not to challenge notions of natural gender at all. (Ibid: 219)

Halberstam thus places transsexuals and transgender people at opposite ends of a spectrum of gender subversion, with passing transsexuals firmly placed at the normative end, and transgender people whose gendered performance can easily be read, firmly placed at the subversive end. Both Butler and Halberstam are searching furiously for the ways in which trans subjects might be validated within already established terms. Thus Butler asks:

Is transgender a betrayal of lesbian identity, or is it the radical extension of the butch/femme challenge to gender norms? Does it support the most idealized and recalcitrant forms of gender norms, or does it expose the way in which every body 'becomes' its gender? (Butler 1998: 229)

Transsexual experience is seen as wholly 'managed' by the competing discourses of contemporary sexuality and gender studies; it is never the starting point from which theory might be developed or critiqued. Halberstam never asks, for example: why can queer theory only account for Les Nichols as normatively heterosexual? Or, if Les Nichols is 'normatively heterosexual', how do the meanings of that category shift when one of its members is Les Nichols, a former

lesbian separatist?

Sandy Stone's 'The Empire Strikes Back: a Posttranssexual Manifesto' is commonly read as underscoring the queer argument for the transgressively transgendered self. Stone argues that it is the disruptions to the smooth linear narrative of self that make transsexuality so disturbing to heteropatriarchy:

In the transsexual as text we may find the potential to map the refigured body onto conventional gender discourse and thereby disrupt it, to take advantage of the dissonances created by such a juxtaposition to fragment and reconstitute the elements of gender in new and unexpected geometries [...] In order to effect this, the genre of visible transsexuals must grow by recruiting members from the class of invisible ones, from those who have disappeared into their 'plausible histories.' (Stone 1991: 296)

Stone concludes by directly addressing 'passing transsexuals', invoking them to 're-vision' their lives, to lay 'the ground work for the next transformation.' (Ibid:299) On an initial reading, Stone's words do not seem very different from Halberstam's or Butler's, with their focus on incongruity and fractured narratives. Yet there is one very important difference: Stone's emphasis remains consistently on the transsexual body. Although she imagines the transgressive possibilities of transsexual experience in terms similar to queer theorists, Stone always returns to the meanings of the transsexual body, its realities, and its impossible position in relation to a medical discourse that seeks to deny transsexual agency. It is Stone's fight to validate a viable transsexual subjectivity, always in excess of dominant prescription, that motivates and permeates her presentation of the transsexual body as text; whereas for Halberstam and Butler transgendered performance is a tool for validating and prioritising a queer discontinuity that ultimately resides in a lesbian or gay body. The task for bisexual and transsexual theorists, then, may be to find ways of resisting the production and representation of bisexuals and transsexuals only as *objects* of attention and desire, rather than as subjects of their own histories and

experiences.

### **Towards a New Method**

In his article on bisexual representation in contemporary film, Jo Eadie urges us to examine how bisexuality is used as a discursive trope for other issues, such as impurity, self-obsession, or American identity. (Eadie 1997) Eadie is keen not to dismiss this as only 'biphobia', but instead to look at how conceptions of what bisexuality means 'structure *for all of us* the perception of bisexuality'. (Eadie 1997: 2, my italics) How, in other words, can one have a positive, complex sense of oneself as bisexual outside of the rather limited theoretical production that I have been describing? I conclude my article 'Locating Bisexual Identities' asking a similar question:

In critiquing feminist structures of sameness and difference, am I trying to create myself as somehow not implicated in those structures? If bisexuality is not adequately accounted for, where could it be located? From what position(s) could a bisexual feminist theory be explored? (Hemmings 1995a: 50)

In both Eadie's and my own text, a central question emerges. How is bisexual subjectivity at once contained within normative structures and resistant to/illegible within those structures? Clearly, one of the central problems for theorising bisexuality at present is that of representability. How do others see us, and, perhaps more crucially, how do we see ourselves?

This issue of representation and the gaze is one that concerns transsexual writers and artists as well. Transsexual writers have commonly responded to the hostile, universalising gaze that would render transsexual subjectivity and experience non-existent, invalid, or monstrous, by turning the question back: From where do *you* look? What do *you* hope to see? How do *you* position yourself in relation to me, and to what ends? Raymond writes in her 'Preface' to

*The Transsexual Empire:*

While various individuals have looked at the issue of transsexualism very few have ever really seen it. Transsexuals see themselves as women [...] Doctors fixate on hormonal techniques [...] Therapists view transsexualism as a humane solution [...] The public sees the media's image of the talk-show transsexual [...] Many women see the transsexual [...] as the man who has paid the ultimate price of manhood in a patriarchal society. (Raymond 1979: xiv)

The implication is that Raymond herself does not need to look at what she sees; she sets herself up as the observer, as the one who does not 'view' but the one who 'knows'. In response, Carol Riddell writes: 'I want to know where Janice Raymond is coming from about transsexuals [...] If Ms Raymond sorted out her projections about transsexuals it might lead her to want to write in a different way.' (Riddell 1996: 178) This is, of course, a recommendation Raymond has yet to take up.

In an extract from Cherry Smyth's article on the 'phenomenon' of FTMs in San Francisco, Susan Stryker opens: 'I know why I let myself be photographed. Do you know why you look?' (Stryker in Smyth 1995: 21) Stryker links this issue of perspective to the queer desire for transsexuals to provide liberation from gender oppression, which then turns to anger when 'we don't offer a way out they've been looking for but haven't found.' (Ibid: 40) She concludes:

I'm tired of being a scapegoat for the gender trouble of everyone else. Ask yourself – why do you look when we transsexuals make spectacles of ourselves? Is it the curiosity of the freak show, the same voyeuristic desire mixed with dread and titillation that makes you scan the asphalt for gobs of red as you drive slowly past the accident scene? Or is it some fantasy of transcending material limits to behold the sex of angels? And ask yourself, too, what it is that you see. Monsters, mutants, cyborgs, perverts, exotic objects of queer lust? Or just men and women by other means? (Ibid)



With Stryker's words in mind, I want to look once more at the work of Bernice Hausman. Hausman begins her 'Preface' to *Changing Sex* with a remark about her 'fascination' (Hausman 1995: vii)<sup>216</sup> with transsexualism and ends it by saying that she has no desire to 'condemn transsexuals themselves', (xi) perhaps hoping to signal benign curiosity or an objective anthropologist's approach to her subject. Yet, elsewhere in her 'Preface', and, in fact, throughout the book, I am reminded of that alternative meaning of 'fascination' – 'to fascinate vb 2. [...] arousing terror or awe'. (Collins 1990: 301) Hausman's 'terror' in respect to transsexual bodies is first evidenced by a story she tells:

I am perhaps one of the few expectant mothers who worry that they will give birth to a hermaphrodite. At four months, I sat in front of my computer rewriting my chapter on intersexuality, thinking that I knew more about congenital abnormalities of sex than any pregnant woman should know. Rachel waited until I sent the manuscript off to Duke before making her way into this world; I thank her for her patience. (x)

God forbid that Hausman should give birth to one of those 'abnormally sexed' beings that are the object of her scrutiny!<sup>217</sup> Hausman presents herself as an Eve-like innocent, where knowledge of intersexuality could, like the original sin it represents, harm her unborn child. To conceive of intersexual or transsexual agency after setting the direction of the gaze so firmly would indeed be difficult. Throughout the book, Hausman's 'terror' simmers under the surface of the text, contained by her intractability on the subject of transsexual agency, bubbling up in her insistence that transsexuals should tell the true 'horror' of their physical experience of transition, and finally being reduced to her concluding warning that

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<sup>216</sup> All future references to *Changing Sex* are by page number in the text.

<sup>217</sup> Jay Prosser remarks of the same passage that it is exemplary of her 'critical perspective: that she views the unclearly sexed body with anxiety and alarm because she imagines her own body in a clean, unambivalently sexed location'. (Prosser 1996: 401) I am reminded here of Sarah

taking hormones should not be done ‘without proper medical treatment and supervision’, (200) thereby reinforcing the medical-transsexual relationship she has hitherto been so critical of.

Rosi Braidotti recounts how ‘Pare describes the monstrous birth as a sinister sign (‘mauvais augure’) that expresses the guilt or sin of the parents.’ (Braidotti 1996: 139) Hausman’s insistence on transsexual ‘monstrosity’ could be read as part of Braidotti’s genealogy of teratology (monsters), as a way of Hausman maintaining a distance between self and other. Certainly her story expresses more about Hausman’s own subjectivity than it does about transsexuals’. Prosser argues in the same vein that ‘[t]he horror in [Hausman’s] fantasy derives from its breaking down – through the imaginary hermaphroditic child – her antithesis between subject and object, between critic and transsexual.’ (Prosser 1996: 401) Again, for Braidotti:

The peculiarity of the organic monster is that s/he is both Same and Other. The monster is neither a total stranger nor completely familiar; s/he exists in an in-between zone. I would express this as a paradox: the monstrous other is both liminal and structurally central to our perception of normal human subjectivity. (Braidotti 1996: 141)<sup>218</sup>

Both transsexuality and bisexuality are situated as both Same and Other to feminist/gender and queer/sexuality studies. They are ‘not quite nots’ of gender and sexuality politics and theory, and so can simply be expelled but must be endlessly reproduced as marginal (and therefore as central) to feminist and queer subjectivity.

What queer and feminist concerns about transsexuality and bisexuality articulate is a concern with the relationship – changing, political and productive –

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Dreher and Elisabeth Brook’s ‘horror’ of ‘passing lesbians’ discussed in Chapter Two.

<sup>218</sup> Susan Stryker has also written on the notion of transsexual as monster – ‘I will say this as bluntly as I know how: I am a transsexual, and therefore I am a monster’ (Stryker 1994: 240) – arguing for the reclaiming of this term, along the same lines as lesbians, gay males, or

among genders, sexualities and bodies. To my mind, the proscription of bisexuality and transsexuality as regressive or transgressive of dominant structures of gender and sexuality signals deeper theoretical and political concerns about the relationship between dominant culture and sub-cultural resistance. The question of how and in what ways sexual and gendered subjects are produced by or in excess of social and political structures of gender dominates contemporary feminist and queer theories. What the writings of Raymond and Butler have in common, then, is a desire to explore and articulate that relationship between subjects and relations of domination. For Raymond and Penelope, the lesbian challenge to heteropatriarchy must involve the rejection of stereotypical gender-roles, while for Butler and Halberstam, the dissonance between same-sex desire and gendered role-play of butch/femme subjects exposes the limits of the heterosexual regulatory regime. It is clear, however, that this queer parody can only be performed by visibly oppositional (lesbian and gay) subjects. Other potential subject-location dissonance – through transsexual and bisexual challenges to the logic of sexed bodies of sexed object-choices – is dismissed as already contained within dominant structures. In particular, queer theorists treat bisexual and transsexual ability to pass as (always having been) heterosexual, in much the same way as Raymond and Penelope – as a sign of location within the dominant. The changing narratives that inform bisexual and transsexual subjectivity, are seen as belonging to the past or to the future, rather than productive of present bisexual and transsexual meaning *whether visible or not*. The integrity of the visible subject of resistance is thus maintained; bisexual and trans subjects may be transgressive, paradoxically, only in so far as their current narratives allow them to be read as lesbian or gay.

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bisexuals have claimed 'queer', 'dyke', 'fag' or 'fence-sitter'.

Section Two of this chapter moves away from others' representations of bisexual and transsexual bodies, genders and sexualities, and toward bisexual and transsexual self-representations. I am particularly interested in new configurations that present a challenge to the confines of the feminist/queer gaze that would limit bisexual and transsexual meaning to a regression/transgression dyad. Can the relationship between subjectivity and relations of power be made visible in ways that the over-emphasis on gender transgression for lesbian and gay subjects precludes?

## Section Two: Territorial Occupation and Bodily Re-signification

Through the real-life postmodernist practice of hearing (and listening to) many voices [...] gender, sex and sexuality are facing not just deconstruction but also reconstruction in the practices of many individuals and in the community's view of who can claim membership. (Whittle 1996: 204)

### **Part One: Whose Body Am I Reading?**

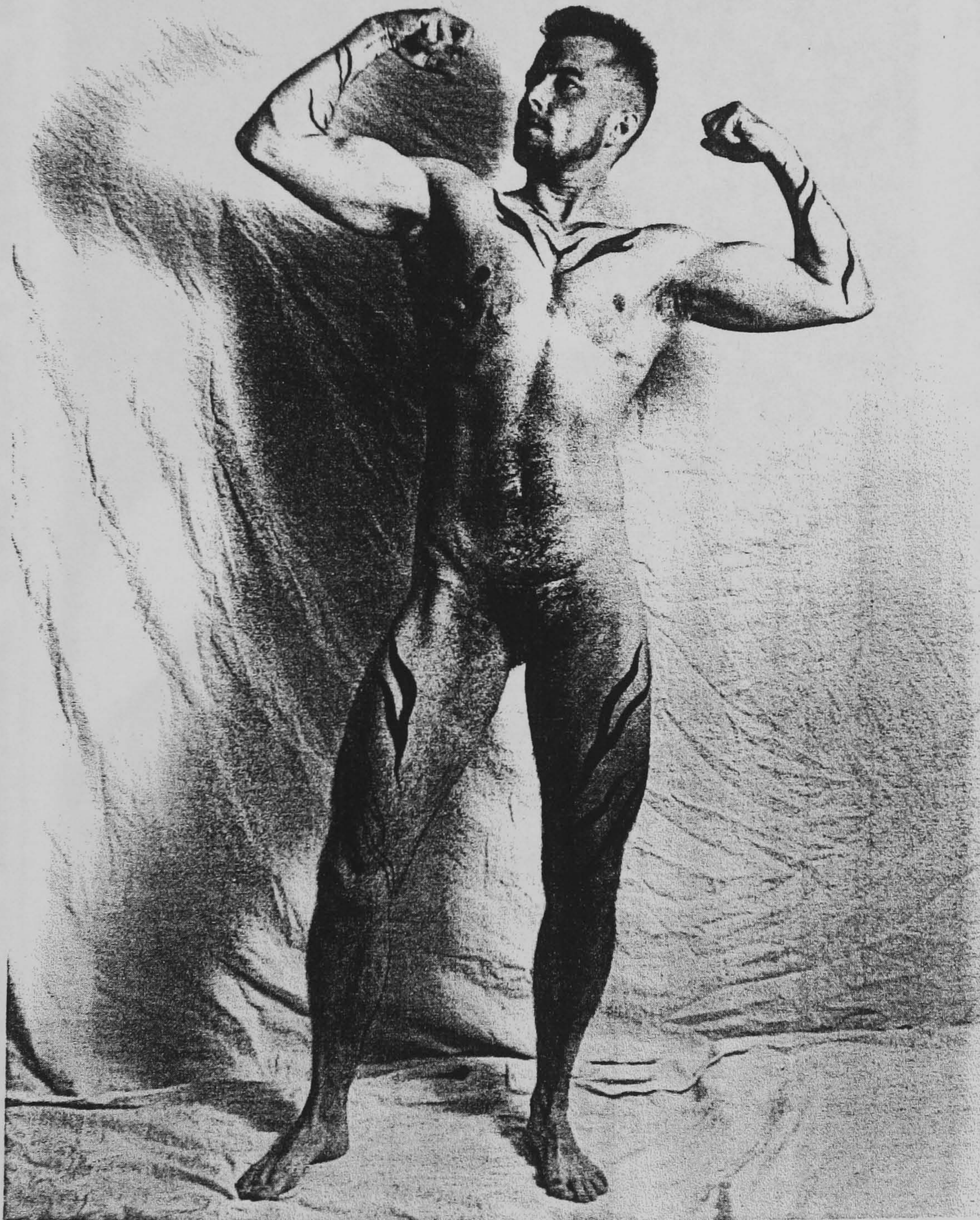
I have chosen to look at a self-portrait by Loren Cameron (Figure 24), a FTM from San Francisco, who is a transsexual artist and a self-taught photographer. Stryker – in the same article which discusses the importance of ‘the gaze’ in transsexual representation and reading – says of Cameron: ‘So far, [he] is the only photographer familiar enough with the nuances of transgender desire and transsexual embodiment to do the kind of work I wanted to be a part of.’ (Stryker in Smyth 1995: 40) The self-portrait I am looking at is reproduced in both Stryker's article and Stephen Whittle's essay in *Gender Blending*, (Whittle 1996), and was originally exhibited in San Francisco in 1993. Other photographs by Cameron were published in Leslie Feinberg's *Transgender Warriors*, and his own photographic collection, *Body Alchemy*. (Feinberg 1996; Cameron 1996a) I think it is fair to say that Cameron is the US's foremost transgender photographer at present.<sup>219</sup> Cameron's ‘Triptych’ (Cameron 1996 – Figure 25), exemplifies the feelings of claustrophobia and containment that transsexuals commonly feel in relation to feminist or queer discourse, or as objects of desire for the exotic, as discussed above. Cameron's main concern throughout his work is to represent transsexuals positively and beautifully, to rectify some of the balance of negative press and objectifying curiosity transsexuals commonly encounter. (Ibid: 8-12)

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<sup>219</sup> In the UK, transgender self-representations are only just beginning to emerge, in the work of photographer Del laGrace Volcano, for example. The emphasis in Grace's work is on empowerment and returning the gaze straight to the camera. (Grace 1996) This certainly appears to be an emergent theme in transgender photography.

Figure 24. Loren Cameron (1993) 'Self Portrait', in S Whittle (1996) 'Gender Fucking or Fucking Gender?' in R Ekins and D King, eds, *Blending Genders*: 196-214.

GENDER FUCKING OR FUCKING GENDER?

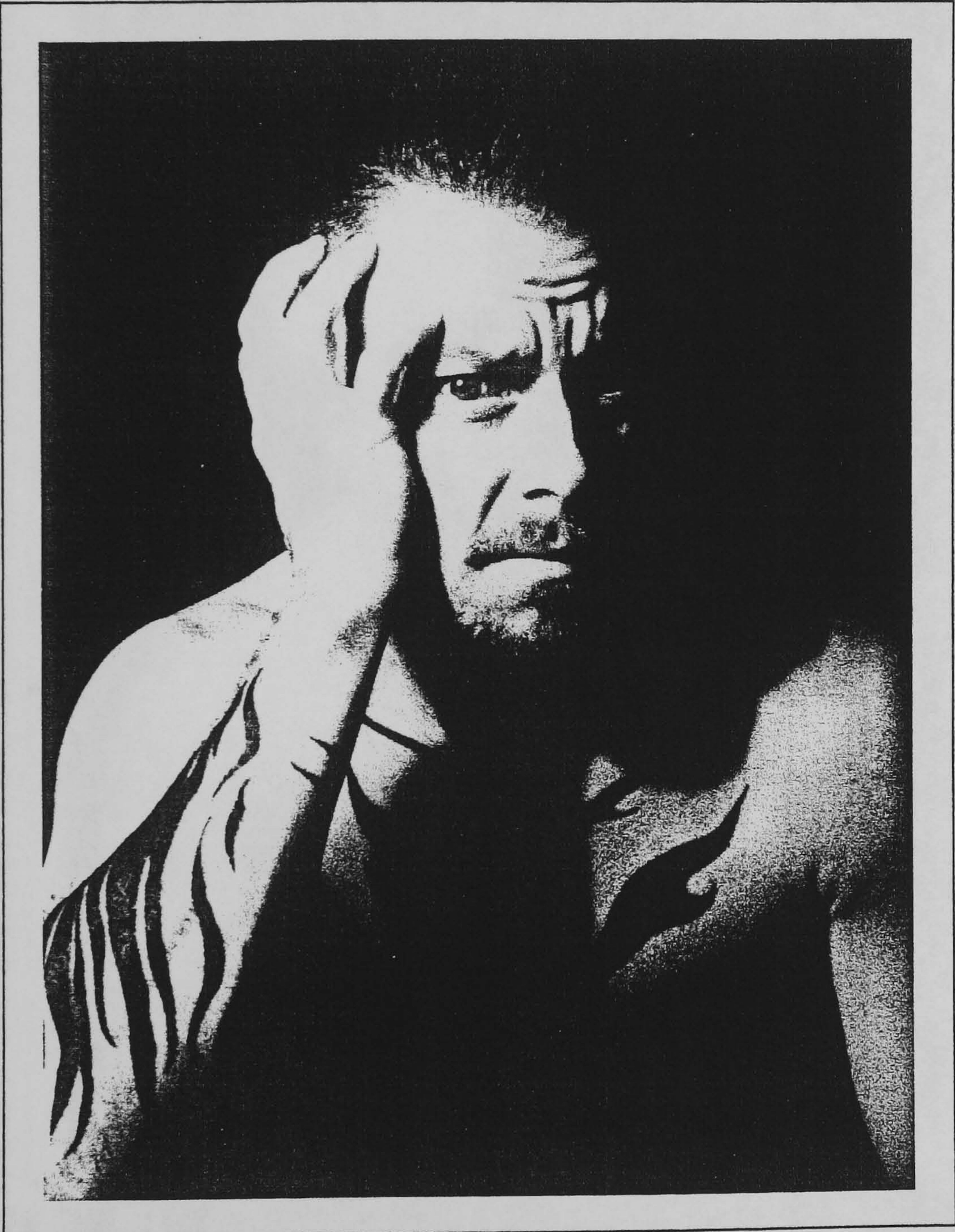


© L. Cameron, 1993.

*Loren Cameron's self-portrait*

Figure 25. Loren Cameron (1993) 'Triptych', in L Cameron (1996) *Body Alchemy: Transsexual Portraits – Photographs by Loren Cameron* (San Francisco: Cleis Press): 29-31.

**THIS IS WOMYN-ONLY SPACE. WHERE'S YOUR DICK? SORRY, BUT I DON'T LIKE MEN. YOU'RE NOT A  
YOU: I'M NOT A LESBIAN. DO YOU HAVE WHAT IT TAKES TO BE A REAL MAN? YOU'RE  
MUST BE SOME KIND OF FREAK. I CAN'T BE WITH LIKE A WOMAN. YOU DON'T BELONG HERE.  
MAN: YOU'LL NEVER SHOOT SPERM. YOU  
KIND OF SHORT, AREN'T YOU? YOU PISS**



**YOU'RE SO EXOTIC! MAY I TAKE YOUR PHOTO-**

**MEAN I'M GAY: YOU'RE REALLY A**

**INTRIGUE ME. MY ATTRACTION TO YOU DOESN'T  
BEST OF BOTH WORLDS. DO YOU HAVE A PENIS?**



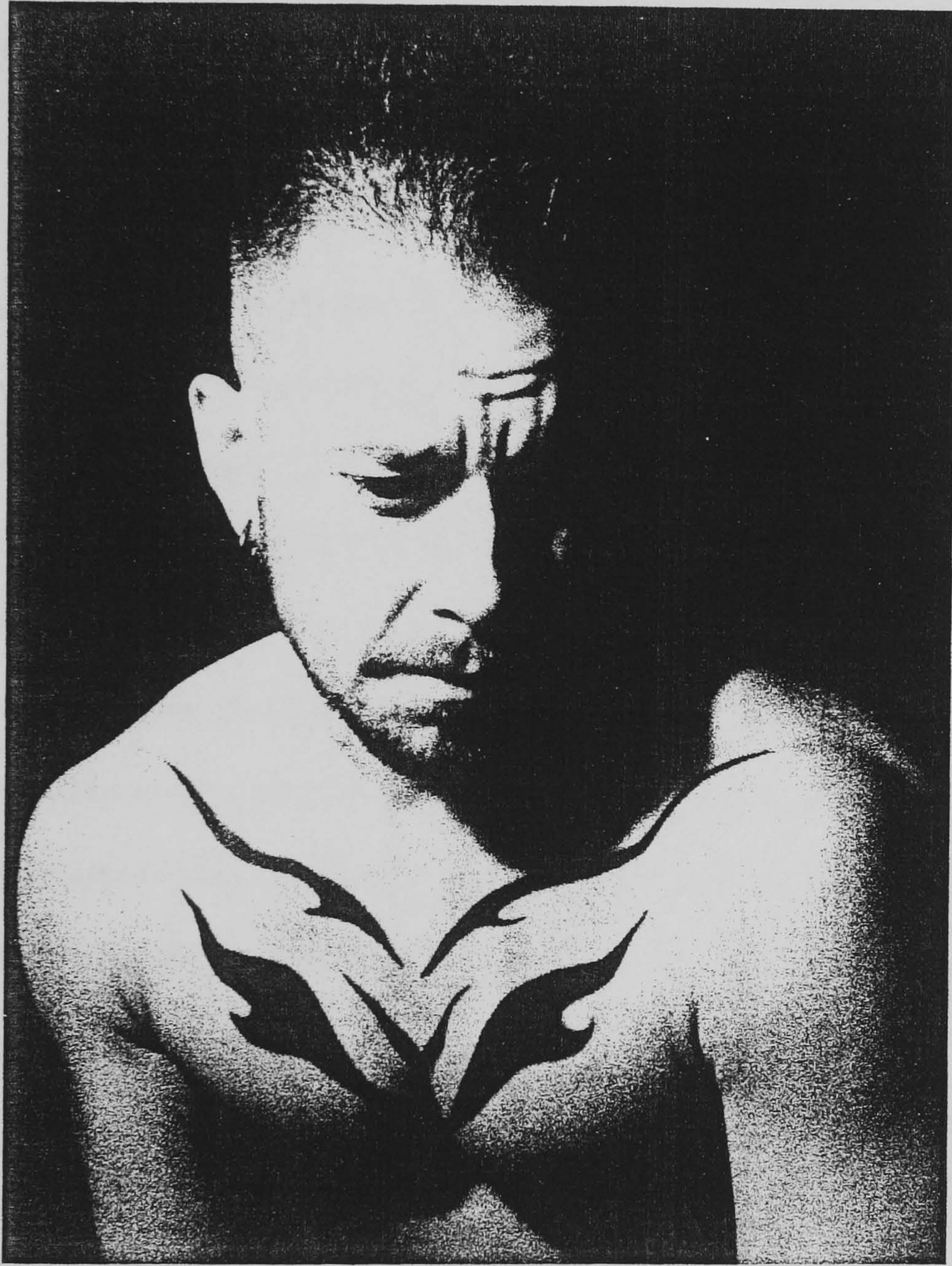
**GRAPHY? I'VE ALWAYS BEEN ATTRACTED TO HAIRY  
WOMAN. I THINK TRANSEXUALS ARE SEXY.**

**WOMEN. YOU'RE THE THIRD SEX! YOU  
I LIKE VERY BUTCH WOMEN. YOU'RE THE**



**MEN ARE JERKS, WHY WOULD YOU WANT TO BE ONE?  
HOMOPHOBIC. YOUR VOICE DOESN'T SOUND**

**YOU WANT TO CUT OFF YOUR TITS? MAYBE YOU'RE JUST  
SEXUAL? YOU STILL LOOK FEMALE TO ME.**



**I JUST CAN'T GET USED TO CALLING YOU "HE".  
DYKE? DOES THIS MEAN YOU'RE HETERO-  
VERY MASCULINE. WHY CAN'T YOU JUST BE A BUTCH**

**YOU'RE JUST A DYKE WITH A BEARD. ARE YOU MISOGYNIST?  
ARE YOU MISOGYNIST?**

In terms of reading the transsexual text of self-representation, the text of the transsexual, I want, as a non-transsexual, to focus on the process and narrative of my own reading here. I am interested in what non-transsexual readers of Cameron's text want that text to tell us, and in how we establish its meaning. I would like other non-transsexual readers of this chapter to open themselves up to that kind of self-scrutiny too, so that they can read with me. In this way, my hope is that further discursive construction of transsexuality as regressive or transgressive may be avoided in favour of bringing the gaze itself under scrutiny. I can offer the reader two guides to this process: firstly, Susan Stryker's inquiry, 'I know why I let myself be photographed. Do you know why you look?' (Stryker in Smyth 1995: 21) and secondly, Jay Prosser's comment that in transsexual autobiography 'gender is not so much *undone* as queerness would have it as redone, that is, done up differently'. (Prosser 1995: 488)

Loren Cameron exposes himself naked, in body-builder pose. He is strong, confident, and looks to his right rather than at the camera, not because he cannot, but because he does not want to. But in that description I have already made a series of assumptions. He is male; he is strong; he is self-assured. Why and how do I come to make these assumptions so confidently that I present them as a preamble to my 'critical reading'?

*Take One – Certainty:* Cameron presents familiar male, or even 'macho' elements – well-defined muscles, positive, self-reliant stance, and a significant amount of facial hair. His flame tattoos accentuate those chiselled surfaces, show him, perhaps, as a man who can endure pain.<sup>220</sup> In short, he is unequivocally

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<sup>220</sup> Tattoos are obviously not a male preserve (as the foot-long peacock etched on my own back makes plain). I am suggesting, though, that Cameron's flames signify maleness in conjunction with his other marks and attitudes. I think that my own tattoo marks me in a similar way, actually, as being of and in my own female body. It is not simply the tattoo themselves or the body they mark, but a conjunction of a number of signs and meanings that link body and tattoo in signifying maleness or femaleness. Similarly, tattoos do not always signify gender.

male. Cameron confirms this reading for me when he says:

‘I used to read a lot of graphic art novels and loved looking at all those masculine archetypes. I always wanted a body like those comic book heroes with their bulging biceps and firm, hard pecs. But it wasn’t just about muscles, it was about gender identity.’ (Cameron, in Smyth 1995: 19).

*Take Two – Ambivalence:* Twin scars on, just under, his chest, and hair on his abdomen tapering down to a vagina not a penis, reveal Cameron as inhabiting a modified body, reveal his assured body as having changed over time, as other than static and self-evident. Does his pose come from that temporal narrative, or exist in spite of it? Do the tattooed flames echo that modification, similarly represent the desire to create a body Cameron can live and with? The twin scars and genitals (what Cameron shows us of them, and so mostly what I read into them): do they sit at odds with the *Certainty* of Cameron as unequivocally male? Or rather do they combine to produce a very particular male effect? What is the difference among Cameron’s sculpted biceps, the one lick of flame on his right forearm precisely mirroring/predicting the prominent vein to one side of it, and the re-shaping of his chest?

*Take Three – Self-Scrutiny:* Which is Cameron’s naked narrative and which my own? It is surely already too late to attempt to detach my own desire from my readings. For a week, I can’t stop looking at this self-portrait, tracing Cameron’s body with my eyes, trying to track my own responses accurately, wondering about the order of reading, the order through which Cameron’s body emerges as meaning, finding alternative cultural meanings to his closed left fist. Then one day, going through this process again, I finally notice the scar from the cut across Cameron’s pelvic bone. And this shocks me. How is it that I have been staring at Cameron’s body everyday, and not noticed this mark? What does it mean that I am obviously not giving the same attention to the genital area of

Cameron's body as I am to his right forearm? Does this mean I am completely unconcerned by the specifics of Cameron's genitals? That 'maleness' for me is as likely to be signalled by conscious clenching as it is by protruding penis? Or does this mark the significance of Cameron's 'lack' for me (such that I can't even look?) even though I believe myself to be reading against such overdetermined signification? You might ask: Whose body and gender am I primarily interested in, mine or Cameron's? And so, on to an exploration of the relationship of my own narrative to Cameron's, a closer look at what it means for me to desire his (altered) image. Stephen Whittle reads the same photograph to highlight the relationship between queer and transsexuality, suggesting that Cameron's self-portrait:

shows a man who is proud to be without, because his masculinity does not come from a penis but from himself [...] Cameron does not 'gender blend', instead he escapes gender because it can no longer be imposed by the observer as the boundaries keep moving. (Whittle 1996: 214)

Cameron's self-portrait certainly presents a challenge to the assumption that gender can only be signified by one particular body, or more precisely, one set of genitals. Jay Prosser, on the other hand, interprets Cameron's 'Self Portrait' as 'profoundly unreadable':

The splitting in viewed and viewer takes place precisely because of a (my?) failure at reconciliation of the parts/past. Cameron's stylized (passing) masculinity – his muscular chest and shoulders and the beautiful tattoos spread across them – only makes more visible what is excessive or absent from this picture: what doesn't pass. (Prosser 1996: 64)

Both Whittle and Prosser conclude that Cameron is not satisfactorily a man or a woman (since the eye is always 'drawn and fixed' to the conflicting bodily markers of gender, and, in that sense, can never rest). Whittle perceives this as propelling the 'reader' (willing or not) 'beyond gender'; Prosser perceives this as

the reason transsexuality both cannot be read within and yet cannot escape bodily markers of gender. I find my own reading to be at odds with both Whittle's and Prosser's interpretations. In response to Whittle I would argue that we are always in negotiation with gender and the ways bodily signs are read: we cannot move voluntaristically 'beyond gender' however much we might wish to. And because I find Cameron's body beautiful and readable as transsexual, both within existing gender conventions and through a glimpse of how gender might be re-signified through different bodily signs (both Cameron's and his readers'), I do not want to read in line with Prosser.

My own reading of Cameron, symptomatic as it is of my particular non-transsexual location, is that he is not 'gender-fluid' but male, despite the 'female' markers. Or, I finally read Cameron as all the more male because of those markers. A synthesis of the certainty, ambivalence and self-scrutiny I described earlier leads me to believe that my reading narrative works thus:

- (i) I read Cameron as a man.
- (ii) I question that conclusion when I read the dissonance among his bodily markers of gender – aren't men supposed to have penises?
- (iii) I toy with and reject the possibility that Cameron is a woman – there are too many markers of maleness, and those 'female markers' that hold so much cultural weight no longer impress.
- (iv) I return to my initial conclusion that Cameron is a man. This is the result of consciously tracing the signs that presumably 'added up to' my initial reading of Cameron as male.
- (v) I can describe Cameron as a transsexual man, a term available to us contemporarily. Calling Cameron 'transsexual man' describes both his own history and his meaning for me within the above reading narrative.

This non-transsexual reading was confirmed for me when I presented some of

my ideas to an English graduate students work-in-progress session, together with Cameron's self-portrait. I asked the group to try and identify their reading process in terms of assigning maleness or femaleness to Cameron.<sup>221</sup> The responses covered a vast range. Cameron was variously 'potent' and 'emasculated';<sup>222</sup> the embodiment of 'West Coast American-ness'; an advertisement for a 'new commodity' (transsexualism); a relative of satyrs, centaurs and mermaids (these were English literature students, after all!); a representation of cosmic unity (through a notion of hermaphroditic ideal, I suspect); a 'picture of profound alienation of self and capitulation'; and the 'body beautiful'. Yet despite these diverse readings, there was no-one in the group who read Cameron as anything other than male, however the individual reached that conclusion (i.e. whatever the specifics of their own narrative) and regardless of whether they saw Cameron's maleness as acceptable or perverted, beautiful or disgusting. In addition, all the members of the group agreed that they had initially read Cameron as male, and that their narrative confirmation of that was always referential – i.e. at no point was the belief that Cameron is male wholly abandoned.

According to Barthes, in photographic representation the subject mimics her/himself and arranges her/himself as s/he wants to be seen, and/or needs to be seen in order to maintain the sense of self that s/he already has. Barthes states that:

In front of the lens, I am at the same time: the one I think I am, the one I want others to think I am, the one the photographer thinks I am, and the one he makes use of to exhibit his art. In other words a strange action: I

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<sup>221</sup> It would, of course, be pointless to hypothesise as to how many members of this group were non-transsexual. I think I can safely assume that the majority were non-transsexual, however.

<sup>222</sup> The term 'emasculated' struck me particularly interesting, since it suggests that Cameron is being read as having had his penis (the sign of that potency, presumably) removed, and stands as a manifestation of every man's supposed castration complex. This contrasts with Whittle's reading of Cameron as a "human fucking penis". (Ian, in Whittle 1996: 212)

do not stop imitating myself [...] I invariably suffer from a sensation of inauthenticity, sometimes of imposture. (Barthes 1981: 13)<sup>223</sup>

With respect to Cameron, the emphasis is different because he is the author of his self-representation, of course. He both poses as the object of the gaze and is the one who captures the pose. Yet within a Barthesian frame and in light of the analysis of my reading narrative several points can be made about the way that Cameron represents himself to his audience and to himself.

- (i) He wants to be seen as a man, as he sees himself.
- (ii) He presents himself naked, and therefore does not see his genitals as a contradiction in that self-representation of himself as male. He sees himself as male both in spite of, and because of, his genitals.
- (iii) Cameron's self-representation is consistent with his sense of self as male, is necessary to maintain and/or consolidate that sense of himself as a transsexual male.

The potential gap between 'transsexual male' and 'male' is deflected back onto the observer, because of the confidence with which Cameron represents his maleness to us as authentic.

From a Lacanian perspective, subjectivity is formed through language, though the ability to say 'I'. This entry into culture through language is precipitated by the subject's differentiation from the mother due to the rupture caused by the entry of the father. The moment of self-articulation, then, cannot be separated from our acknowledgement of sexual difference and our relationship to it (which determines our position in culture). (Lacan, in Mitchell and Rose 1985: 83-85)<sup>224</sup> Cameron's maleness, however, does not rely on this acknowledgement

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<sup>223</sup> Tyler discusses Barthes' understanding of photography as another form of posturing, of passing, yet also as a moment (when the shutter clicks) that is essential to and constitutive of self (in terms of recognition and self-recognition). (Tyler 1994: 224)

<sup>224</sup> Judith Butler describes the relation of self to phallus thus: 'There is no inquiry [...] into

of (biologically-based) sexual difference as the ground for subjectivity, and in that respect he calls into question the authority of the penis as the phallus' envoy. Tyler suggests that the penis *passes as* the phallus in order to shore up sexual difference, in order to make biological maleness and phallic authority appear co-extensive. (Tyler 1994: 241) Rather than Cameron 'passing as' a man, then, he effectively exposes the *passing of the penis* as the phallic signifier, exposes not *his* lack, but the penis's attempt to cover up *its* lack of irrefutable phallic authority. In doing so, Cameron inevitably also call the 'I' of the observer (which is also assumed to be formed in relation to sexual difference) into question; reading Cameron's subjectivity through its altered bodily referents is, in Lacanian terms, to challenge the (unconscious) basis of our own subjectivity. In other words, to read Cameron cannot be other than to read oneself. Cameron's self-conscious self-representation exposes not just himself, but the mechanisms whereby we make sense of him, ourselves, and the structures of sexual difference we understand our selves by.

Stephen Whittle analyses Cameron's self-portrait from another perspective, emphasising the explicit context of body-building within which the photograph is framed. Whittle draws on the work of Marcia Ian, who in argues (in a section Whittle does not look at) that:

Bodybuilding is about the body's self-loathing, its horror at its own repulsive beauty, and is therefore sublime. It fulfills the wish to objectify the already unfamiliar body, to make it even more unrecognizable, to transgress or explode its limits, to metamorphose, to expose the deep materiality of its interior. (Ian 1994: 72)

Cameron's body is sublime, not in terms of being 'beyond' body, but in terms of

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ontology *per se*, no access to being, without a prior inquiry into the "being" of the Phallus, the authorizing signification of the Law that takes sexual difference as a presupposition of its own intelligibility.' (Butler 1990: 43-44)



being heroically *of* body and of masculinity.<sup>225</sup> Yet, unlike penis-endowed bodybuilding men, to self-represent as Cameron does is to consciously resist gender identity as either wholly independent of or wholly dependent upon the body. The fragment of Ian's piece that Whittle quotes delineates Cameron's form in quite another (and from a feminist perspective, possibly a more problematic) way.

'bodybuilders plan ... (to) ... display as much tumescent muscle as possible, the skin must be well tanned and oiled, the physique rock-hard, showing striations and bulging veins ... in other words to look as much like a giant erection as possible ... a human fucking penis.' (Ian, 1994: 79)

and Whittle continues:

Cameron becomes the human fucking penis. He is what he does not apparently possess, and which by default we would assume he desires. (Whittle 1996: 212-214)

If Cameron is the embodiment of the desire to be a penis, it might seem that Raymond et al were right after all to consider transsexual bodies as literal or metaphorical penises. This accusation is usually levelled at MTFs who are seen as retaining their phallic brains and masculinity, hence raping women (stealing their remaining possession – their difference from men) and occupying their cultural territory (women's space). (Raymond 1979: 103-4, 112)<sup>226</sup> Lesbian feminist transsexuals are the epitome of violence against women within this schema, since they 'take' both women's bodies and (by deception) women as lovers. Raymond does not talk about FTMs in any detail, yet it is extremely interesting how

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<sup>225</sup> Michael Moon and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick develop the relationship of the transgendered body to divinity through a reading of the at once corporeal and hyper-real body of Divine. (Moon and Sedgwick 1993: 218-251)

<sup>226</sup> Carol Riddell comments that '[a]lthough the transsexual woman has no penis, in the feminist movement "her whole presence becomes a 'member' invading women's presence and dividing us

Whittle's reading of Cameron through Ian appears to take Raymond's statements about MTFs and very literally apply them to this particular FTM (or to FTMs more generally). Of course, Cameron's self-portrait is the absolute opposite of Raymond's notion of transsexual *deception*, yet is not necessarily any the less phallic because of that. Would Raymond ask: If MTFs realise their castration anxiety, do FTMs realise penis envy?

This discussion of the meanings of both transsexual and non-transsexual bodies in relation to gender, finds form in the experiences of lovers of FTMs. Marcy Sheiner writes about her relationship with Rob, an FTM, and about her ambivalence, her curiosity, and her own desire. Of sex with her lover, Sheiner writes:

It was as if his whole body became one giant cock, and I simply became cunt, opening up to receive the energy [...] Ironically, I felt more female with Rob than I had ever felt with a genetic male. Maybe it was because I was more trusting of a he-who-had-been-she, and could therefore drop my survival skills, allowing myself to become pure, primeval woman. It felt liberating – for awhile. Eventually, of course, there was a price to pay. (Sheiner 1996: 20)

Sheiner talks about the way that her sense of self as a woman changes through her relationship with Rob. The 'price' she pays is her mutation from capable independent feminist of dubious sexuality, to (as she sees it) heterosexualised, complementary vessel. This all makes for rather distressing, unreconstructed reading, which appears to confirm all of Raymond's worst fears about the predatory nature of transsexuals, and the terrible dangers of being seduced by masculinity. (Raymond 1979: 112) Yet it is not alien to me. I have a journal full of (mostly dull and repetitive) entries about my own femininity being 'brought out' through my relationship with Mark, an FTM, my own calls mirroring Marcy's 'hysterical phone calls at 7:00am'. (Sheiner 1996: 20)

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once more from each other". (Raymond 1979: 104)' (Riddell 1996: 173)

It's been nearly two months since we first fucked [...] I've felt all-consumed, physically, emotionally, like my body gets sick for you when you're not there with me.

We talked about sex and I wasn't entirely honest [...] What I didn't say was that I sometimes feel like I'm only tits and cunt to you, that you almost never touch the rest of my body, almost never run your hands all over me until I quiver. Kiss my body all over – you've never done that. Ironic, really, because I touch you where I can, where you'll let me, which is everywhere but tits and cunt. My body is just those things, because yours is not those things, doesn't have those things ...

At the moment I slip in and out of my body so easily.. I can feel myself slipping in, slipping out ...

I think I've been performing femme as if it's passivity, waiting, an open receptacle; it's strange to me, unfamiliar. And with the top/bottom dynamic, I'd said it didn't spill into our relationship, but it had. It had meant I was looking to you to define me, to define our dynamic.  
(Hemmings 1995)

As you might imagine, this stage of my reading of Cameron disturbs me. It seems to situate Cameron's self-representation as a performance of a psychoanalytically-inscribed desire to be not only the phallus, but to wield the same power as its cultural and historical proxy, the penis. The embodiment of dominant masculinity indeed! Transsexual male disruption of the grounding of phallic authority in sexual difference does not necessarily divorce the resultant maleness from gendered difference and its cultural effects. I would much rather say that the maleness displayed and produced in and through Cameron bears no relation to Raymond's rapacious double agent. But I cannot. There are a number of questions begged by my anxiety: Why does it matter that Cameron could clearly be read as 'human fucking penis'? Why do I/we need him to disprove Raymond first in order to lay valid claim to maleness?

I am led again to a rather hesitant conclusion that Sheiner's/my narrative says more about what we want to see, do, explore, and perform in terms of our own embodied gender, than it really does about Rob's, Mark's, Cameron's (or

FTM) embodiment more generally. This does not please me greatly. It is a painful reading which suggests that my own narrative of masochistic indulgence relies on my reading FTM bodies as penises, a desire for more, not less, masculinity, with that masculinity coextensive with the cultural location of maleness. Raymond says something similar about this ‘“last remnant of male identification”’ that is ‘attraction to masculine presence’. (Raymond 1979: 113) Yet, for femme lovers of FTMs, there seems to be something compelling about being ‘feminine/female’ with a man, where that maleness is consciously attained rather than assumed, and where that man has not always been recognised as such. In other words, masculine subject-male location dissonance seems to be desired and desirable, but this does not have to be visible in the present; it can be enacted through narrative.

The question for FTMs’ lovers is not just about one’s own response to maleness, but also how one gets read in turn. Sheiner discusses her family’s reaction to Rob with some trepidation. (Sheiner 1996: 20-21) If Rob is read uncomplicatedly as a man, Marcy’s sexuality is read as straight. Her own sexual history is erased.<sup>227</sup> Debra Bercuvitz writes about her relationship with transgendered butch Kris in similar ways to Sheiner and myself:

My identity as femme was clear to me. But as Kris became more stone, then passed as a man, I realized that not only was I losing my external identity as a lesbian, but my own sense of self became clouded as I related more to Kris’s masculinity. (Bercuvitz 1995: 90)<sup>228</sup>

My lover and I are at the North Star bar, Northampton, Massachusetts.<sup>229</sup> He is read as male in heterosexual spaces most of the time; queer (and particularly

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<sup>227</sup> Sheiner’s piece is published in *Anything That Moves* (the national US bisexual magazine), and mentions her previous men and women lovers. She does not state whether or not she identifies as bisexual, but it does seem likely.

<sup>228</sup> Minnie Bruce Pratt writes similarly of her own changing relationship to both her sexuality and her gender identity, in particular through her relationship with Leslie Feinberg, the ‘s/he’ of the title. (Pratt 1995: especially 19-21, 83-84, 114-115, 142, 184)

<sup>229</sup> See Chapter Two, Section One, Part One, for a brief history of the North Star.

lesbian) spaces produce more ambivalence. I am mostly read as ‘low femme’ in queer circles, and as dyke in straight circles. We are both in our late twenties. We are dancing, and are obviously lovers.

You have on your leather, black silk shirt, jeans. I’ve got on my new purple linen dungarees – low back, tight black T-shirt. You buy whiskeys for us and we move to the side of the pool table – one eye on the butches one eye on the dance floor. (Hemmings 1995)

How are we being read? As a heterosexual couple? As a butch/femme couple?

A butch, probably in her forties (we both assumed she was butch rather than FTM) comes and stands almost uncomfortably close to us. Her pool cue planted on the floor, grasped firmly in her hand, she surveys and protects her territory. Is she threatened by us? – by Mark? – or is she just letting us know? whose bar this is ... She doesn’t look at us. (Ibid)

Are we threatening to her territory because she sees us as a heterosexual couple who ‘shouldn’t be there’, or as an unknown butch/femme couple who might be ‘on the up’! The choices available through which to read my or my lover’s desire are limited to straight or lesbian; it is highly unlikely that we were being read as FTM and bisexual femme, particularly in that context.

Later at home, we talk about how people were watching us. Because they wanted what you had, they wanted what I had, in our bodies, in our sexuality, in our honesty? We were dancing our sexuality trans guy and bi woman. We were dancing our sexuality charming heterosexual couple. We were dancing our sexuality butch/fem, and so are we? (Ibid)

What I find particularly interesting about this issue of ‘passing’ here – is that I am not quite sure which reading is the wrong one. Both are partly wrong, and partly right. We are both butch and femme, and straight man and straight woman, since our history cannot but inform our practice/performance. More precisely, perhaps, we are not *not* those things. Reminiscent of my reading of Cameron’s ‘inauthenticity’ as producing rather than undercutting his maleness, our dance

also suggests that artifice is not equivalent to essence, but also that the two are not separable either. The ‘spectre’ of straightness cannot be banished from our butch-femme dance; the ‘spectre’ of butch-femme, of lesbian contexts, cannot be banished from our heterosexuality.<sup>230</sup> In this sense our ‘passing’ both reflects and does not reflect who we are, since it offers a glimpse of the present but cannot (not) be faithful to the narrative that has brought us there.

### **Part Two: Whom Does She Desire?**

Bisexual activists and theorists have been consistently concerned with ways of representing both the bisexual body and bisexual sexual history.<sup>231</sup> In his introduction to *RePresenting Bisexualities*, Donald Hall states that ‘[t]his collection takes as one of its foundational premises that BISEXUALITY cannot be definitively REPRESENTED.’ (Hall 1996: 9, emphasis in original) As I argued in Chapter One, the contemporary imagination seems locked into the figuring of bisexuality and bisexuals through threes, as a result of which bisexuality is impossible to conceive of effectively as an independent sexual identity or subjectivity.<sup>232</sup> Similarly, most contemporary attempts at resolving the problems of bisexual representation have used the same paradigm to create images of ‘threes’ – two men and a woman; two women and a man. Marjorie Garber pinpoints the lasting nature of bisexual representation through threes in her choice of film stills from 1931 to 1994. (Garber 1995: between 288-289, Figure 26) The front cover of the UK bisexual anthology *Bisexual Horizons*, (Rose *et al* 1996: front cover, see Figure 27) continues this theme, though here

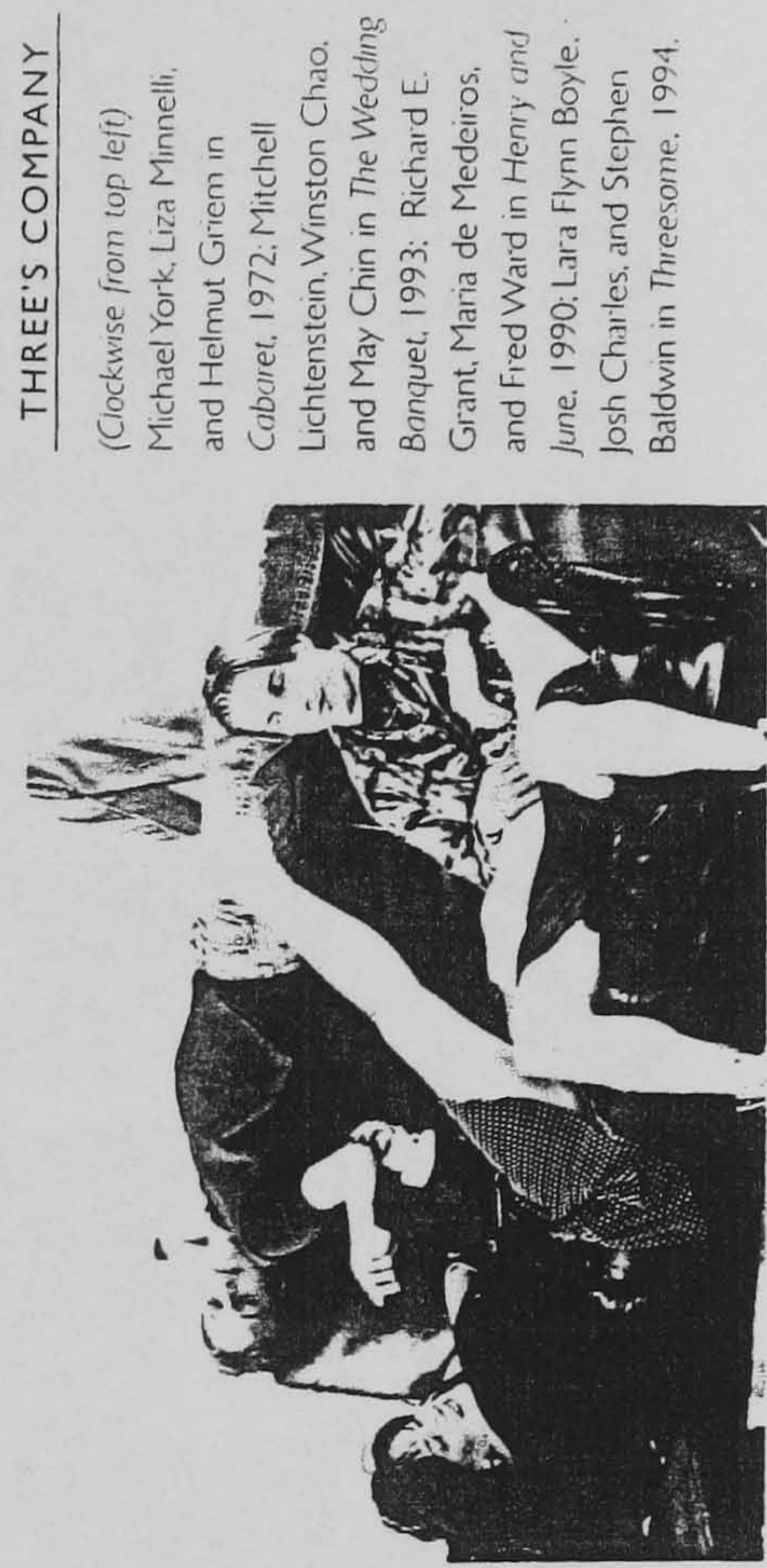
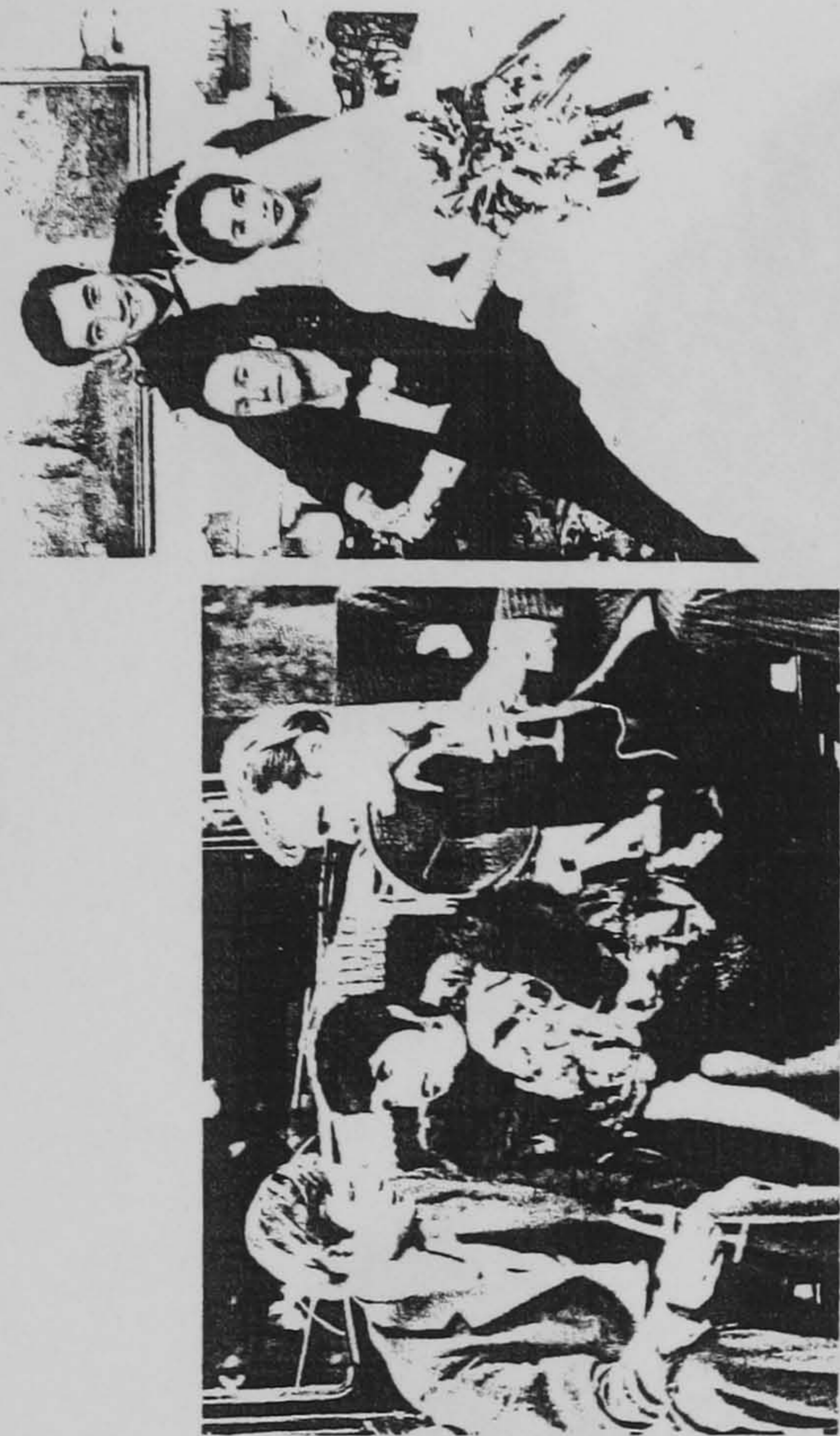
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<sup>230</sup> Clearly this reading resonates with my analysis of Califia’s poetry in Section One, Part Three of this chapter.

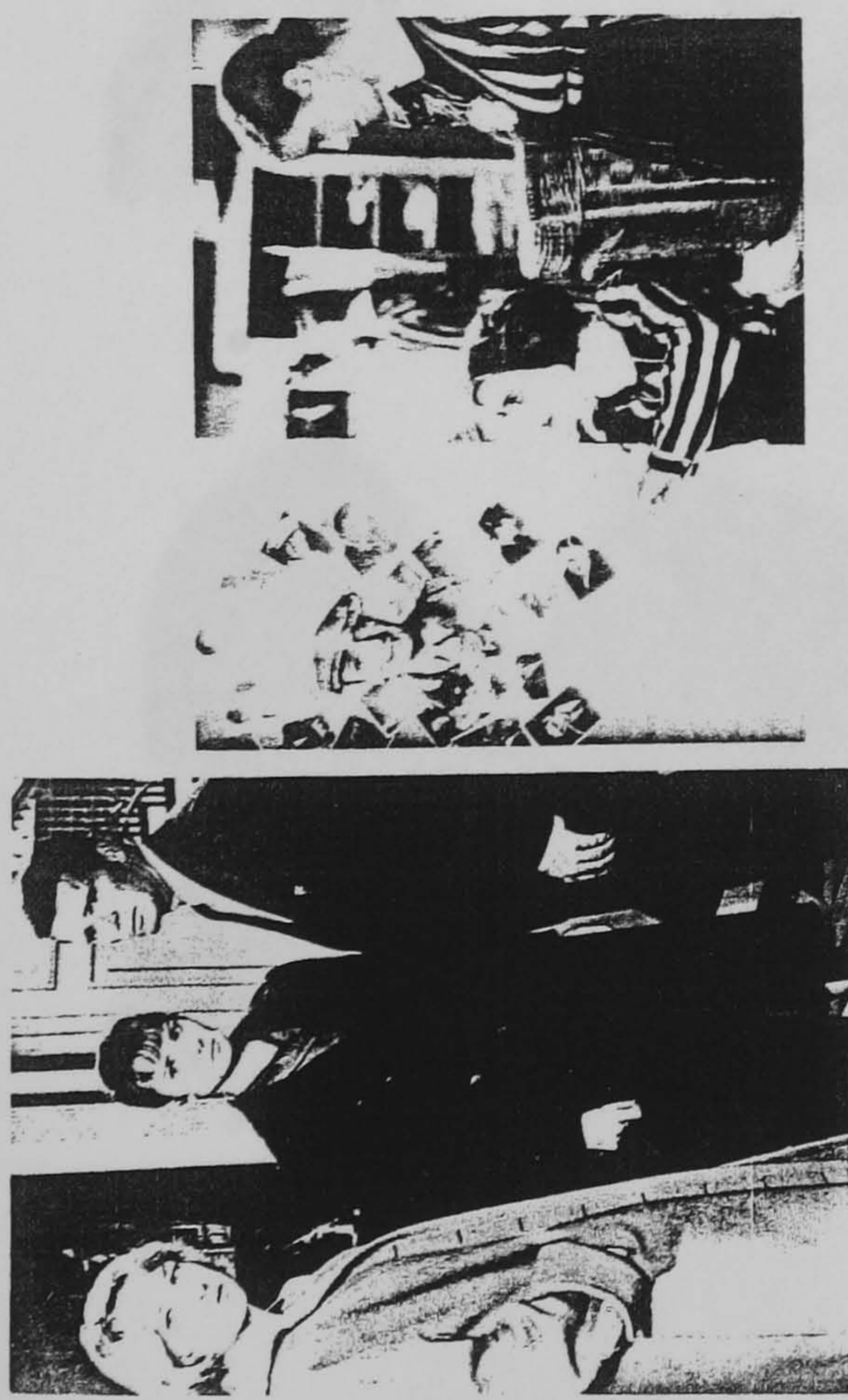
<sup>231</sup> Marjorie Garber highlights negative dominant representations of bisexuals and bisexuality, and argues for ‘bisexual readings’ of representations in film and art. (Garber 1995) See also Bryant 1996, for an account of representations of bisexuals in film, and Udis-Kessler 1995 for a rejection of bisexual stereotypes.

<sup>232</sup> See Chapter One, Section One, Part One.

Figure 26. Film stills: Marjorie Garber (1995) 'Traumatic Triangles' and 'Three's Company', *Vice Versa: Bisexuality and the Eroticization of Everyday Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster): plates between 288-289.



**THREE'S COMPANY**  
 (Clockwise from top left)  
 Michael York, Liza Minnelli,  
 and Helmut Griem in  
*Cabaret*, 1972; Mitchell  
 Lichtenstein, Winston Chao,  
 and May Chin in *The Wedding  
 Banquet*, 1993; Richard E.  
 Grant, Maria de Medeiros,  
 and Fred Ward in *Henry and  
 June*, 1990; Lara Flynn Boyle,  
 Josh Charles, and Stephen  
 Baldwin in *Threesome*, 1994.



**TRAUMATIC TRIANGLES**  
 (Clockwise from top left) Shirley  
 MacLaine, Audrey Hepburn, and  
 James Garner in *The Children's Hour*,  
 1962; Hertha Thiele inspects her  
 classmates' secret pin-up collection  
 in *Mädchen in Uniform*, 1931;  
 Maggie Smith, Robert Stevens, and  
 Jane Carr in *The Prime of Miss Jean  
 Brodie*, 1969; Sandy Dennis, Keir  
 Dullea, and Anne Heywood in  
*The Fox*, 1968.

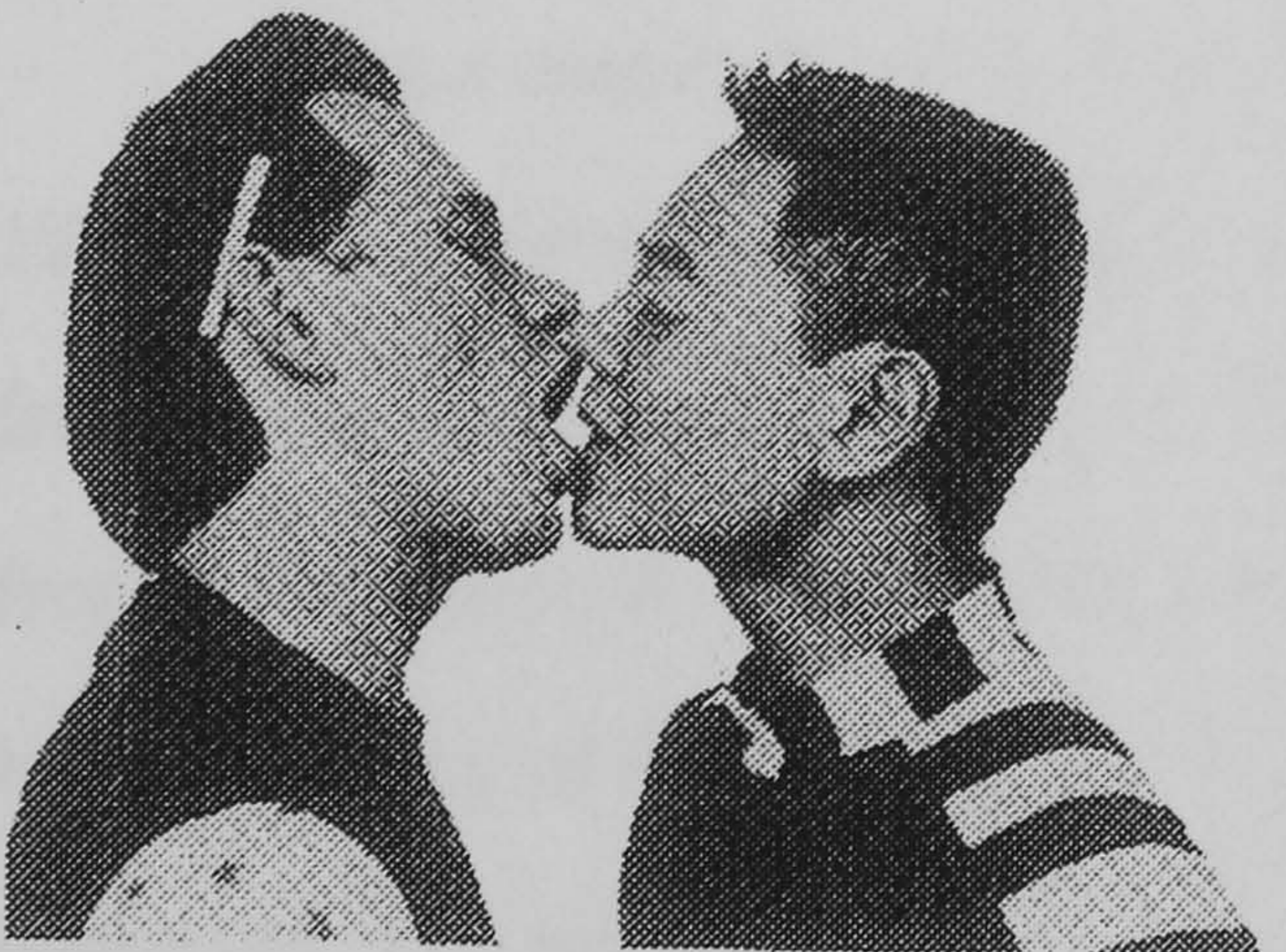
Figure 27. Front cover: Sharon Rose, Cris Stevens *et al*/The Off Pink Collective (1996) *Bisexual Horizons: Politics, Histories, Lives* (London: Lawrence and Wishart).



# Bisexual *Horizons*



Politics  
Histories  
Lives



Edited by  
Sharon Rose,  
Cris Stevens *et al*  
The Off Pink Collective



the three is created through multiple representations of more recognisable couplings. Interestingly, this latter image is taken from an HIV+/AIDS safer sex campaign where lesbian, gay and straight HIV risks are brought into focus, but bisexuality is never mentioned. On the cover of a bisexual anthology, however the images combine to suggest a variety of possible bisexual combinations. Such representations rely on the consistent presence of two differently sexed bodies to create a specific bisexual context within which all of those bodies may be read as bisexual. It is easy to see how bisexuality becomes positioned as regressive within a representative field that can only over-emphasise bi-gendered object-choice. Indeed, it is difficult to know how one might represent bisexuality effectively other than through these threes, or T-shirts declaring one's sexual orientation for all to read. The cover photograph of the 'Bisexuality Issue' of *Newsweek* in July 1995 has two men and a woman looking confrontationally straight at the camera. (*Newsweek* 1995: front cover; Figure 28) They are all young, dressed in black and white, smart and trendy. The bisexuality represented in these images situates bisexual bodies in relationship to the sexual choices that result in a contemporary bisexual identity – desiring both men and women in other words. Part of the difficulty, then, is that representations of bisexuality need to encapsulate both a bisexual body itself, and the bodies that are the object of bisexual desire.

Even a narrative series of photographs, such as the four in the Winter 1996 issue of *Anything That Moves (ATM)* repeats that same form (*ATM* 1996: front cover, 24, back cover, 22, see Figures 29, 30, 31 and 32 respectively). The front cover shows two men either side of a woman, surely not coincidentally holding a copy of the bisexuality issue of *Newsweek* with its front cover displayed. The woman has her arms around the two men, bringing them into the picture, establishing their three-way relationship. The images in *Newsweek* and

Figure 28. Front cover: *Newsweek* (1995) 'Bisexuality', July 17: front cover.

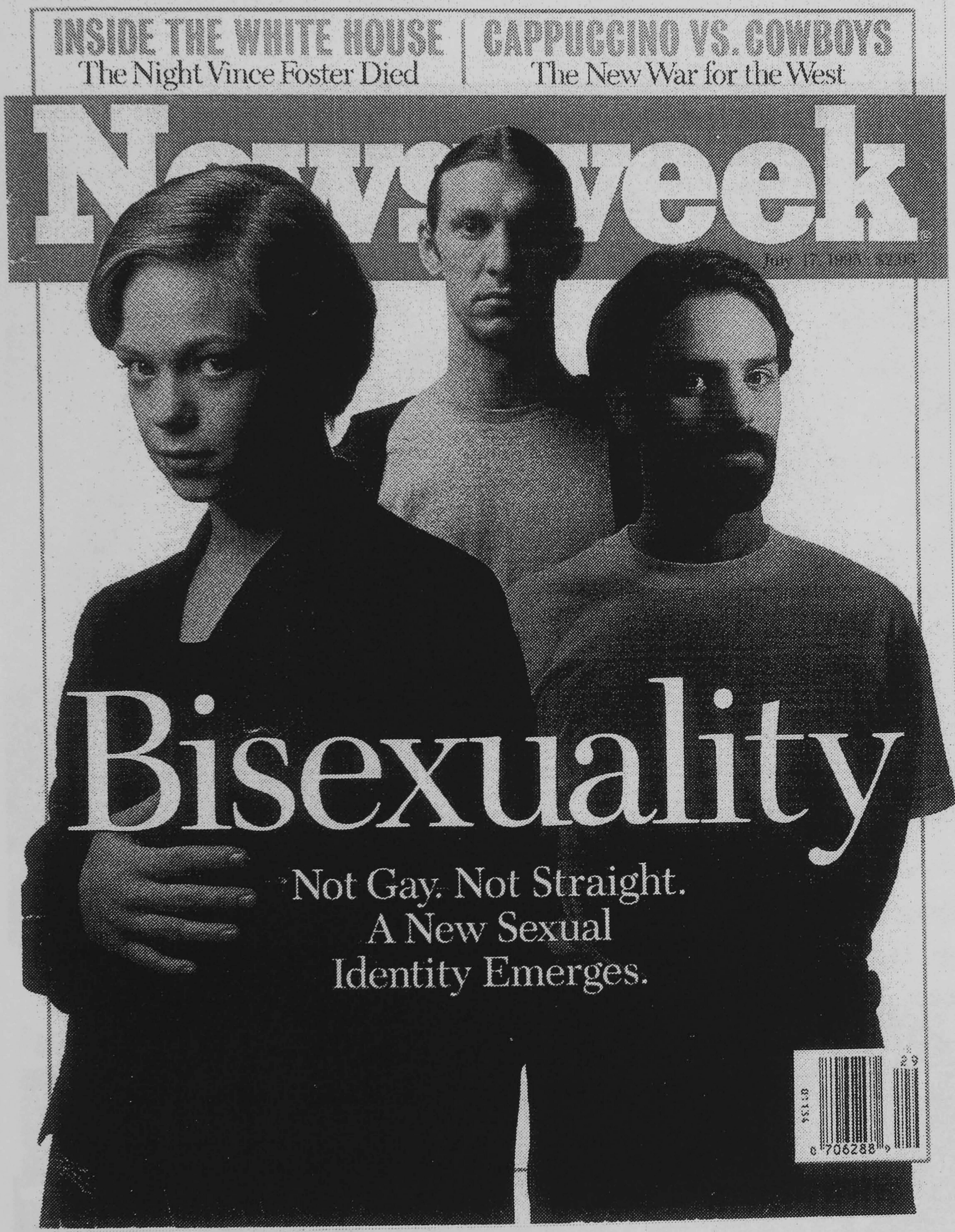


Figure 29. Rachel Lanzerotti (1996) Untitled, *Anything That Moves: The Magazine for the Bisexual at Large Covering Gender and Sexuality Prix Fixe to à la Carte*, Issue #10, Winter: front cover.

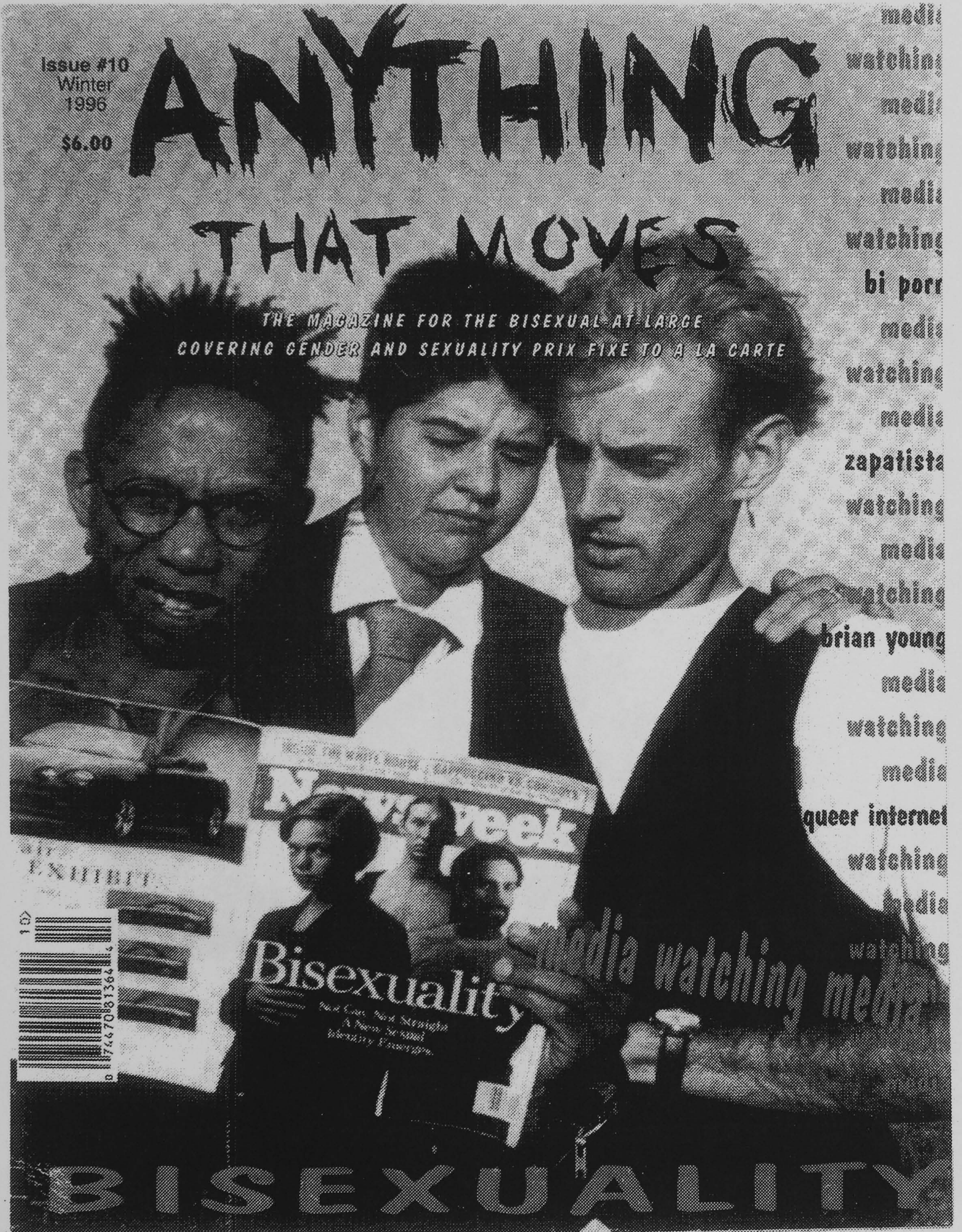
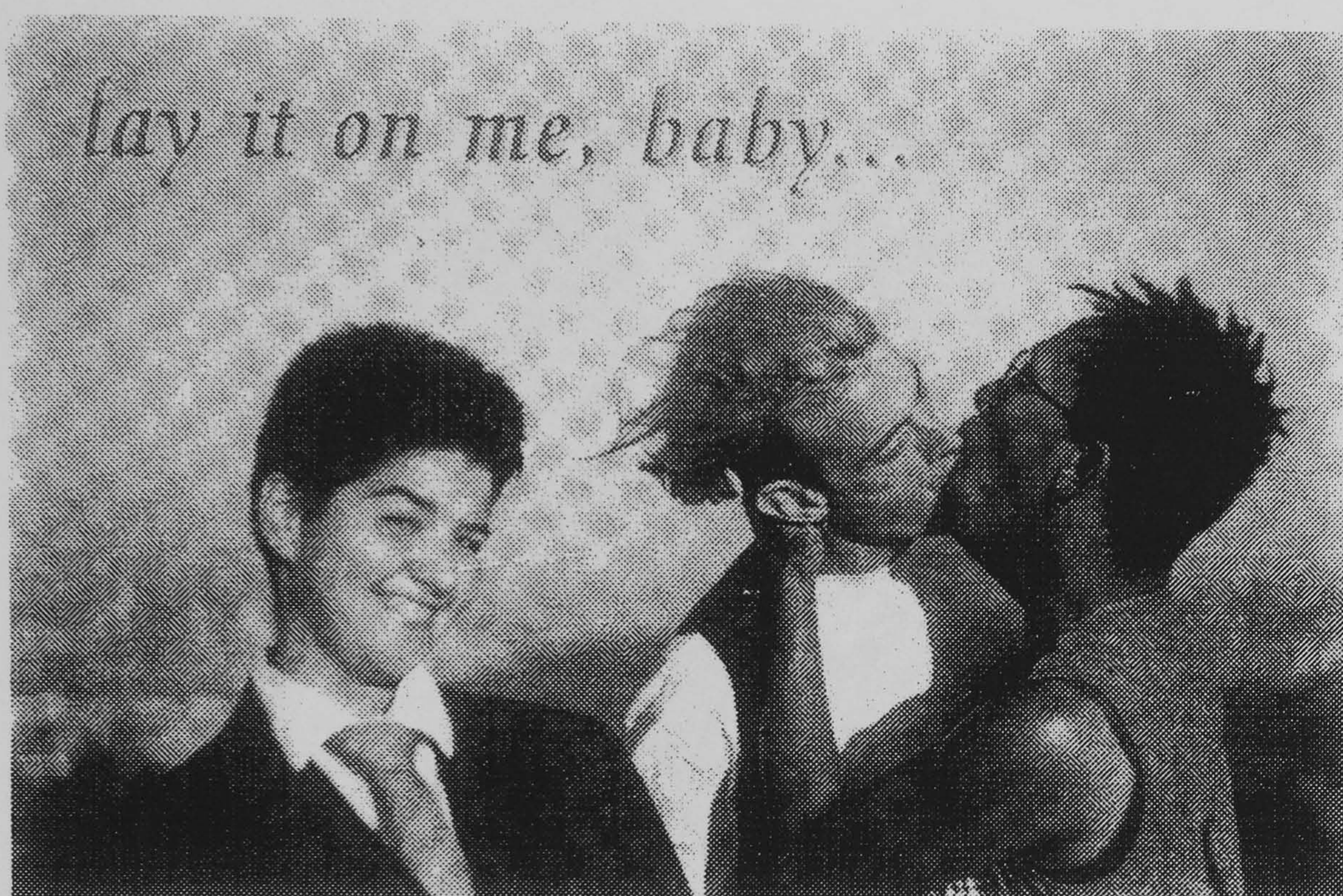


Figure 30. Rachel Lanzerotti (1996) *Untitled, Anything That Moves: 24*.



Figure 31. Rachel Lanzerotti (1996) *Untitled, Anything That Moves*: back cover.



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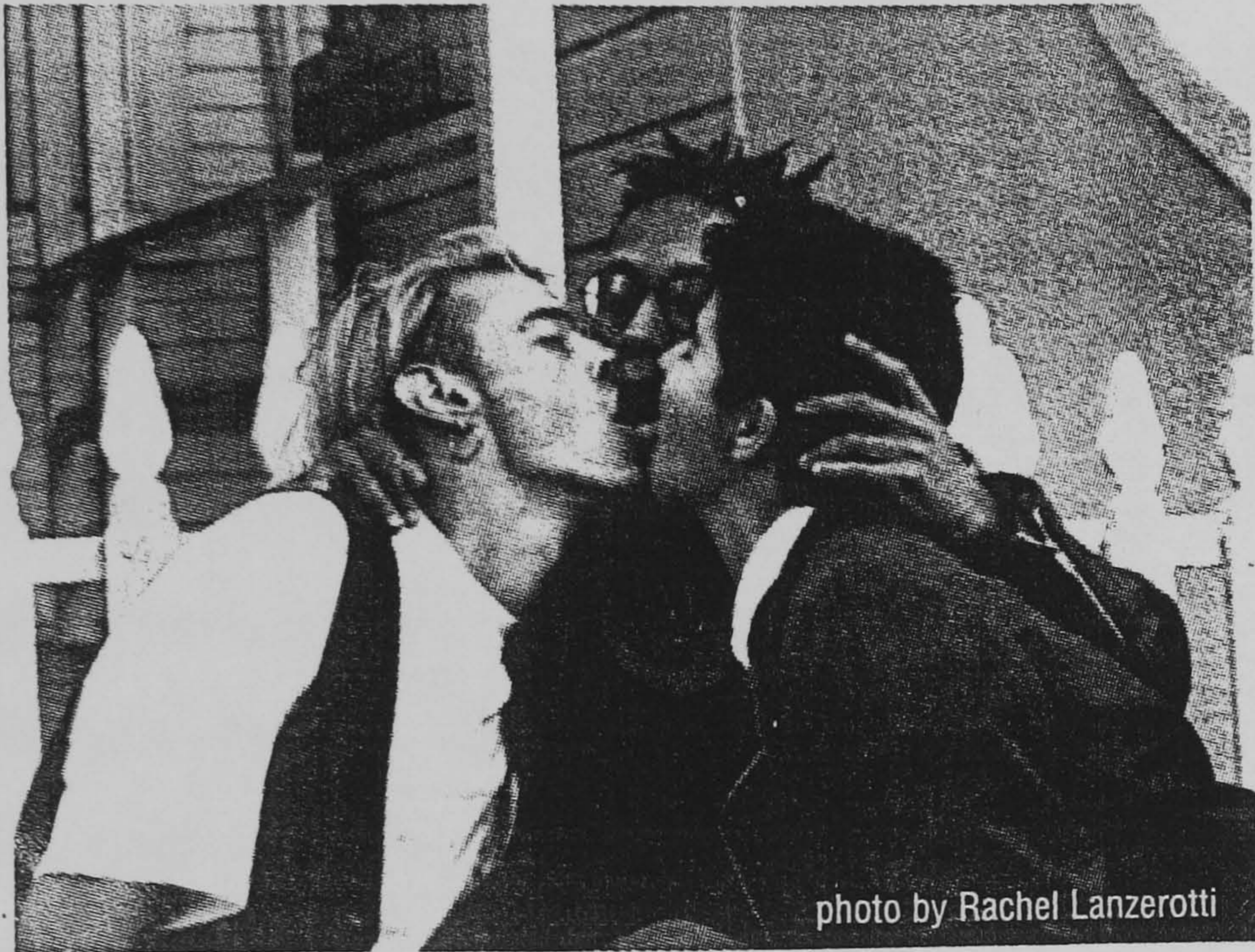
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Figure 32. Rachel Lanzerotti (1996) Untitled, *Anything That Moves*: 22.



*ATM* would not function in the same way if two figures were obviously 'primary' with the other figuring only as a peripheral interest. In effect, it is a bisexual scene that is produced through such representations, and within which all participants are bisexual by implication.

One way in which I think that this rather complex framework for reading bisexuality is made slightly more accessible is by attaching this 'boundlessness' to actual bisexuals. Both the object and the subject of desire have to be produced as unequivocally bisexual. The presence of 'the three' on the *Newsweek* 'Bisexuality' cover not only gives us a 'multiple bisexual body', and a 'multiple bisexual option', but condenses the three into each single body. The main body of the article itself confirms this. Only bisexuals are represented: there are no lesbian, gay or heterosexual partners, because in terms of representation this cannot confirm the sexuality of the bisexual subject. The participants must all be bisexual. The *ATM* front cover is the beginning of a series of photographs that initially appears to challenge the predictable three-in-one plot. On the back cover we see the same three in a different, less predictable pose. The two men kiss just behind the woman who smiles knowingly and with obvious glee at the camera. She shares their pleasure it seems, and her presence changes the scene even though the two men appear blissfully oblivious to her presence (their eyes are closed and the hand that holds the head of one of the men is also excluding the woman from this particular erotic act). Without the first picture it would be possible to read this second image as two gay men and a dyke (rather than a straight woman, in terms of coded dress, I think). The return to 'absolute bisexuality' occurs within the pages of the magazine itself, appropriately enough as an insert to an article in the section 'Bisexuality and the Media'. Here the three kiss one another in a circle facing inwards, equidistant, on the same level, complete with picket fence in the background.

The other way in which bisexual representation is striven for is through a gendered and (in the case of *ATM*) 'raced' melange. In both cases, there are two male and one female figures. This combination could be problematic if all three participants need to be read explicitly as bisexual: the woman could be read as straight. She is saved from her heterosexuality, however, by her gendered difference. The *Newsweek* woman wears a man's jacket that seems a little too large for her feminine form (note the lipstick and short but definitely 'feminine' haircut); the *ATM* woman is more clearly masculine, coded butch, with short hair and no make-up. In both cases, too, the men are 'feminised'. Again, in *Newsweek*, this is more subtle. The men have only slightly longer hair and more casual dress. In the *ATM* images the men are markedly more feminine than the woman, with longer hair and jewellery. Not only are both sexes present, the gender of those sexes are mixed and matched. In much the same way as the accompanying 'hermaphroditic' picture to the Charlotte Raven article (see Figure 23) represents bisexuality as two genders in one body, the *ATM* picture represents bisexuality as the act of, the embodiment of, bringing together the split parts of a psychic wholeness, and thus also opens up the field in terms of objects of desire.

Jo Eadie reads Raven's 'hermaphroditic' representation in a slightly different way. Eadie sees this as a bisexual representation not in terms of an attempt to produce multiply gendered bodies of bisexuality but in terms of a decadent display of available body parts to be devoured by the bisexual gaze, feasted upon with relish as part of a bisexual bacchanalia. (Eadie 1997) Yet, as Eadie points out, the image is unsatisfactory in that it only represents bisexual desire for a mixture of genitals and mammaries of white, shaven-headed people. It fails in its attempt to represent bisexual insatiability since it cannot represent the ways in which gender and sex characteristics are also 'raced'. The ideal to satisfy



bisexual 'consumption' would be to have access to as full a range of sexed, gender and raced bodies as possible.<sup>233</sup> Garber attempts to circumvent this problem of representation by arguing that: 'In a world in which a person could only be classified as male or female, black or white, gay or straight, bisexuality simply does not fit in.' (Garber 1995: 156) As with her treatment of transvestism, for Garber, bisexuality becomes a way of fusing all sorts of oppositions, and most particularly sex, gender and race oppositions. And for Garber, this move re-configures bisexuality as transgressive rather than regressive, by virtue of its position as 'in between' sexed, gendered and raced polarities.

It is, thus, an integral part of the *ATM* image's production as bisexual that the three are 'racially mixed', are read in this context as a white man, a black man, and a Latina. Since the image is used as a way of representing not just a bisexual relationship (comprising of three) but a bisexual body itself (as if the three were merged), the different gender and racial representatives combine to produce bisexuality as both a gender and a racial amalgam. The *ATM* threesome makes explicit what the Raven photograph does not: that both object and subject of bisexual desire and identity are representable only as boundlessness and/or absolute inclusivity, and are, therefore, fundamentally unrepresentable without an extensive range of sexed, gendered and 'raced' bodies.

A slightly different reading of the *ATM* series would highlight its self-conscious irony. In this context the studied symmetry of the bisexual components in terms of gender and race, and also in terms of the (unnatural) equi-distance of the three participants in 'the kiss' provides a critique of the structure of bisexual images rather than an attempt to represent bisexuality unselfconsciously. Similar

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<sup>233</sup> The pun on sexual and capitalist consumption is certainly apt. Sexual identity and desire can be, and is, marketed and targeted much like any other late twentieth century identity. See Nick Selby's article in *The Bisexual Imaginary* which explicitly links bisexuality and consumer culture. (Selby 1997)

attempts to circumvent this problem of bisexual unrepresentability through irony include the front cover of *Vice Versa* which shows a painting by Janet Rickus called (appropriately enough) 'Three Pairs'. (Garber 1995, front cover, and between 527-528, Figure 33) The voicing of what we see – three pears – is reminiscent (as Garber suggests) of 'three pairs', one of the ways in which bisexuality is frequently represented. The multiple bisexual ironies contained in such an image (the classic threesome, but with no gender specificity; the reference to three couples; or just three pears) open up the possibilities and problems of such representations for our scrutiny.

The front cover of the sexual geography volume *Mapping Desire* (Figure 34) offers another possible way of representing bisexuality. Here we have an image of a navel, reproduced in such a way that it seems to be an orifice. The image is ungendered and deliberately ambiguous in terms of subject or object of desire. In the context of the volume's subject matter, the image could be read as mapping out new territory for sexual identity, one where navels are orifices, and gender does not signify desire. This might transform the configuration of bisexuality as either regressive or transgressive middle-ground, by attempting to remove gender from the picture altogether. Although *Mapping Desire* is not a bisexual volume (though it does contain one bisexual theory essay) and there is no comment on the meaning of the image by the editors or any of the contributors, it does open up scavenging possibilities in terms of bisexual representation.<sup>234</sup>

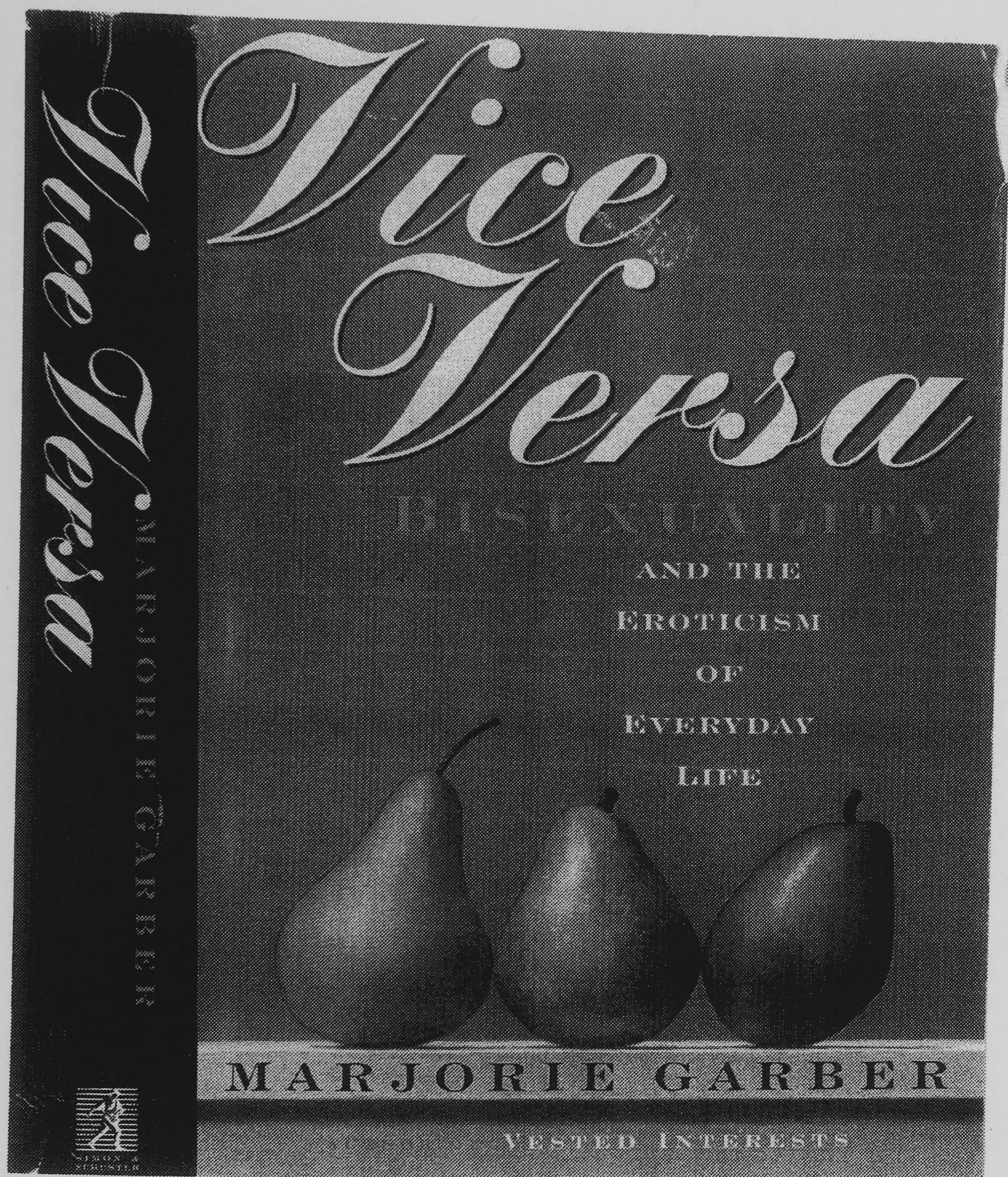
#### 'Representing Bisexual Desire'

In her creating of bisexual images, Stephanie Devise raises many of the same issues (in particular with regard to issues of passing and temporality in bodily

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<sup>234</sup> I owe this notion of bisexual scavenging to Ann Kaloski, for whom the process always

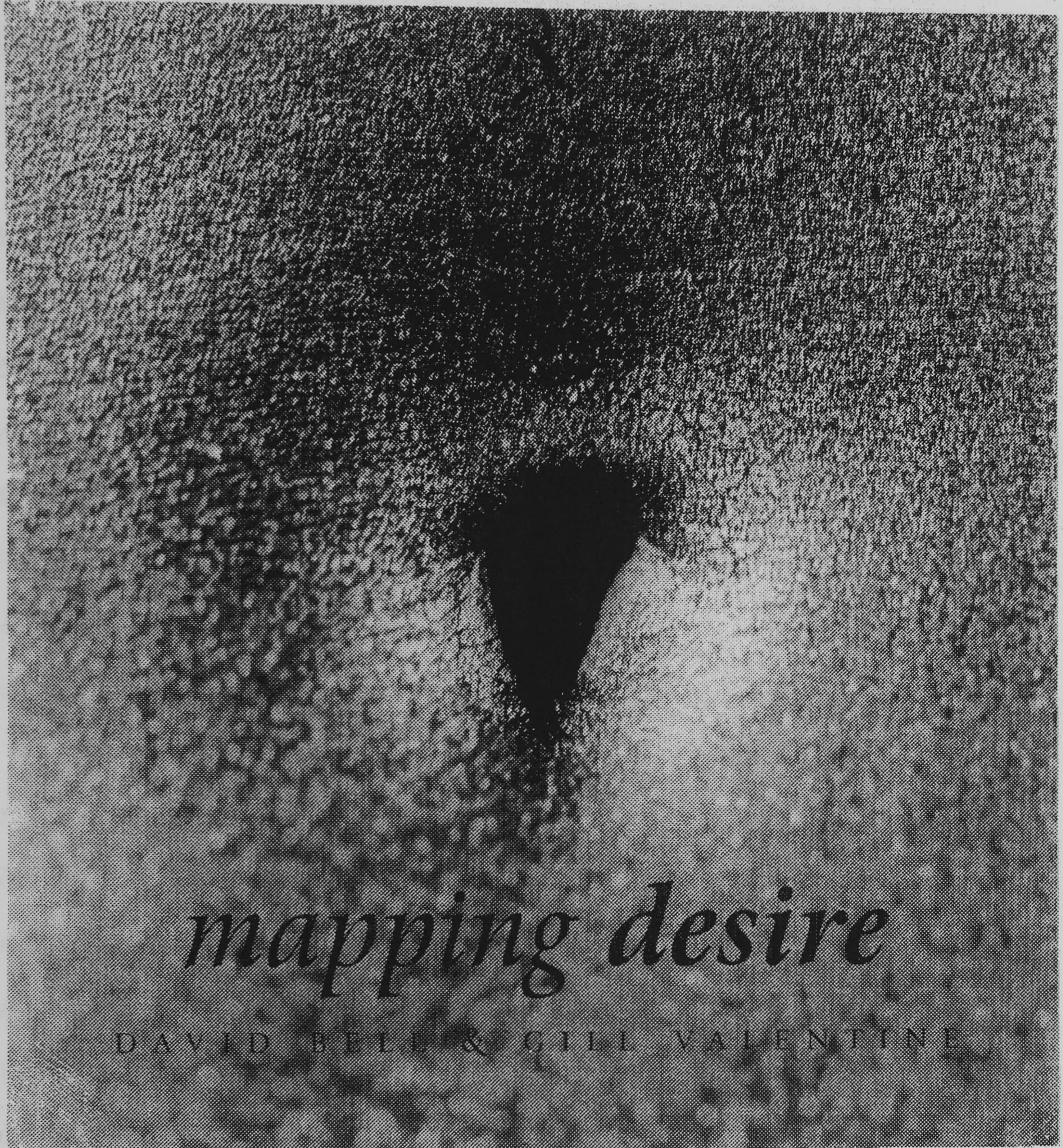
Figure 33. Front cover: Marjorie Garber (1995) *Vice Versa*.



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seems extremely pleasurable!

Figure 34. Front cover: David Bell and Gill Valentine, eds (1995) *Mapping Desire: Geographies of Sexualities* (London and New York: Routledge).



representation) to Cameron. Device is an artist and photographer from the UK. She is a bisexual activist and her work is motivated by the desire to create 'bisexual images' that grapple with the problems of bisexual representability. I have chosen to look at Device's work in particular, since I believe that it moves bisexual visual representation in a hitherto uncharted direction, offering new ways of figuring and understanding bisexual bodies and desires.

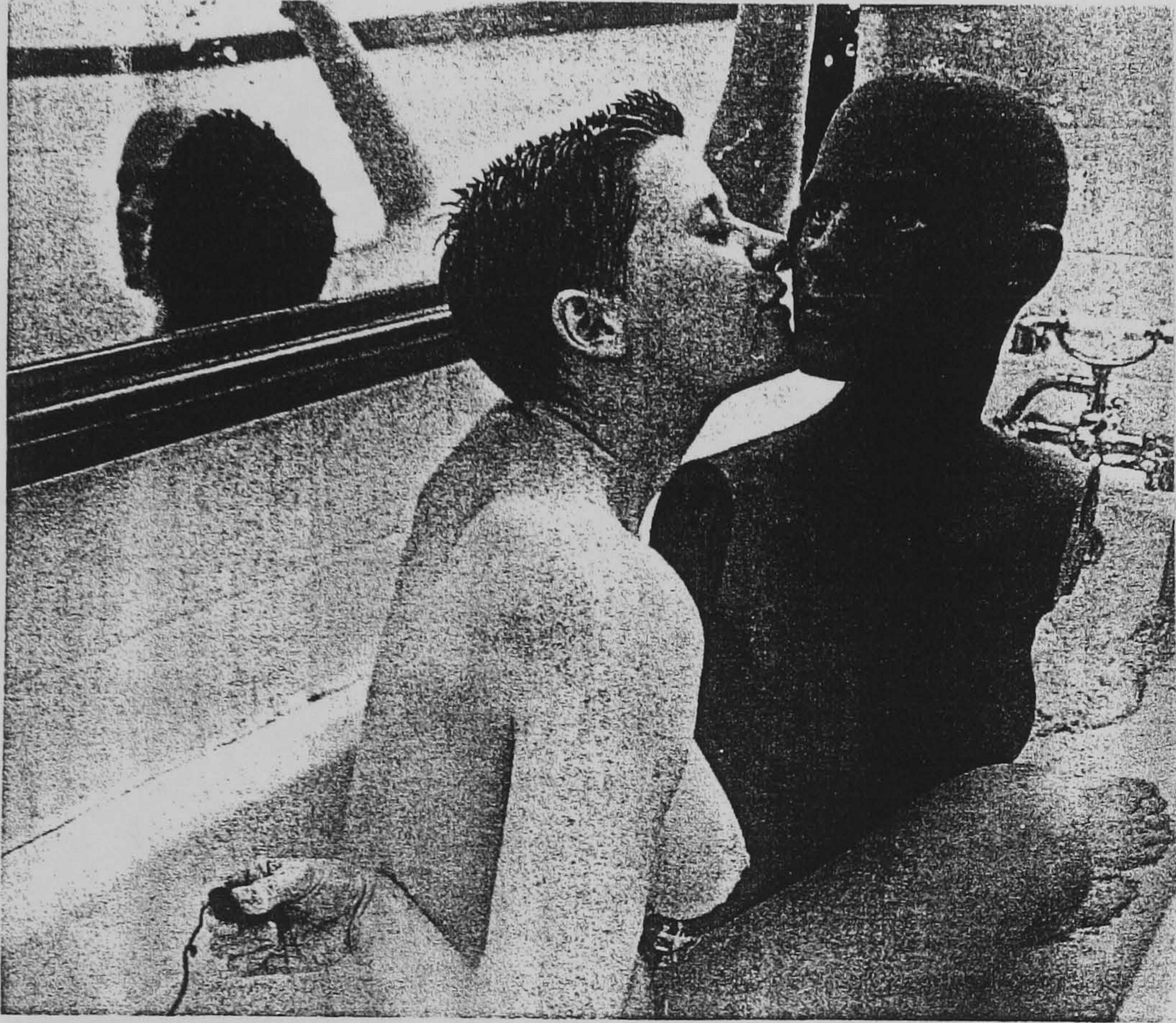
Similarly to Cameron, I think, Device does not attempt to show bisexuality in a single moment, but creates a narrative in the mind of the reader, and a relationship between reader and artist that is made explicit. The four photographs I am focusing on are a series: 'silenced: missing'; 'you make me feel mighty real'; 'silenced: jealousy 1'; 'silenced: jealousy 2'. (Figures 35, 36, 37 and 38)<sup>235</sup> Device plays with the contemporary and historical meanings of bisexuality in an ironic and conscious way. Object of desire, gendered object-choice, associations of bisexuality and non-monogamy, narratives of partners one might have had, all these themes are interwoven in her work.

In the first image, 'silenced: missing', Device sits naked in a bath with the object of her desire, and throws water, as if in blessing, over her lover's head. The effect is almost claustrophobic. They are confined in a small and somewhat unlikely space; the water falling has the effect of seeming like bubbles floating upwards, as if Device and her love were underwater. It is a scene of intense intimacy. And yet, of course, the object of Device's desire is an armless mannequin torso, an unappreciative piece of moulded plastic, which stares past Device, unmoved by Device's shower of affection. There are a number of plays going on here. Device writes that she was inspired to shoot this series by a Patsy Kline song, 'Fingerprints':

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<sup>235</sup> Two of these images (Figures 35 and 37) appear in *The Bisexual Imaginary*, under the slightly different names 'silenced 1: missing' and 'silenced 2: jealousy'. (Device 1997: 190-191)

Figure 35. Stephanie Device (1997) 'Silenced – Missing'



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I am working here with the full series, as yet unpublished in this form.

Figure 36. Stephanie Device (1997) 'You Make Me Feel Mighty Real'

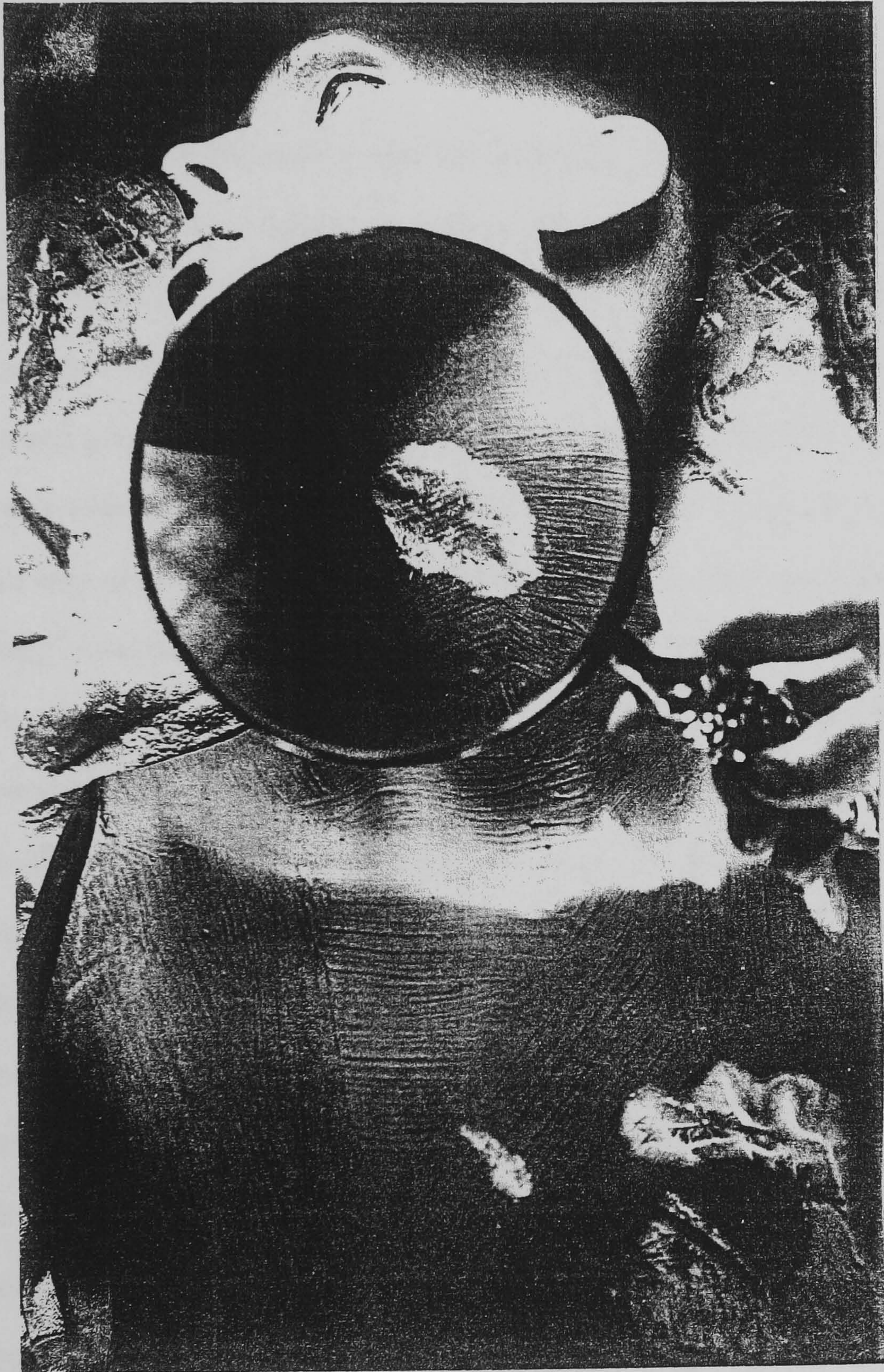


Figure 37. Stephanie Device (1997) 'Silenced – Jealousy 1', in Bi Academic Intervention, ed., *The Bisexual Imaginary*: 191





Figure 38. Stephanie Device (1997) 'Silenced – Jealousy 2', in Bi Academic Intervention, ed., *The Bisexual Imaginary*: 192



and when the day is through  
 I dream only of you  
 I sit alone and dream of all the things we didn't do  
 now I am all alone  
 and when the teardrops start  
 I feel the fingerprints that you left on my heart  
 (cited by Device 1997b)

Device's first image could be read as absolute isolation – a bisexual image that does not present bisexuals as having an endless stream of sexual partners, but rather as being forced to create an intimate fantasy with an inanimate object. Of course, the image is also playing off and with other images of bisexuals as not restricted to one gender of object choice. Is Device's desire for the (more female than male) mannequin torso displaced lesbian desire, or does the mannequin function as a way of propelling us beyond gender-of-object choice as signifying sexual identity? After all, the mannequin is actually neither female nor male, and cannot tell us anything concrete about Device's desire. Another possible effect of the image resides in its references to a contemporary cyber-world where flesh, plastic and silicone chips are not so separate after all.<sup>236</sup> Perhaps, in other words, the mannequin *is* Device's object of desire, and is not standing in for a gendered human. Mannequins may just be Device's fetish. Instead of presenting us with a range of gendered choices as lover (as in the *Newsweek* and *ATM* images), Device's desire both highlights and deflects the significance of gender in terms of her own desire.

The second image, 'you make me feel mighty real', is mostly blurred. In the main segment Device's head obscures the mannequin's, so that we can only see its breasts. In the slim shot of the mirror we see Device kissing her object of

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<sup>236</sup> The theoretical play with the relationship between human and machine is, of course, a central part of contemporary feminist and queer theory. See for example Donna Haraway's now canonical article 'A Manifesto for Cyborgs', (Haraway 1990 [1985]) and Sandy Stone's 'Split

desire. Had we not already seen the first image, it would be not be evident from this second one that the object of Device's attention is a mannequin. The mannequin is fixing its gaze on the observer more precisely than Device who is still fixated by her object of desire. It is the mannequin who addresses us. By this reversal of images – Device might have chosen to 'reveal' the non-human nature of her love more gradually – Device precipitates a reading whereby we privilege the non-human over the human: we assume that her love is a mannequin, the same one as in the previous shot. In other words, by the second shot, *we* do not expect a male or female body to be in the bath with Device; we know it is neither, or that this is not even relevant. This is, in my view, a beautiful and effective turn. The burden of responsibility for representing bisexuality is moved away from the artist (or the bisexual) and placed onto the reader (who may or may not be bisexual). Neither male nor female (and certainly not both) need to be present to read Device's desire. It is worth noting that Device sees herself as a lesbian-identified bisexual, and that here she creates a way of reading her desire for women as bisexual, as not wholly bound to her object-choice. It is this specificity of Device's images, her refusal of bisexuality as 'middle-ground', that I find so compelling.

The third and fourth images, 'silenced: jealousy 1', and 'silenced: jealousy 2', address the issue of jealousy and bisexual narrative in representation. The scene has shifted to more comfortable surroundings, and Device takes the opportunity to scrutinize her lover. Again, Device is inspired by Patsy Kline:

if you can't be all mine  
 then why am i all yours  
 i wonder where a heart draws the line (cited by Device 1997b)

Wondering where a heart draws the line again has multiple resonance here. In a series of 'bisexual photographs' of course, this suggests the common bisexual adage of loving people not genders or bodies, and not wanting to be restricted by political imperatives to desire only one gender or body.

In the context of this series, too, the phrase relates to jealousy and to physical possession and obsession. The body under scrutiny is one that bears the marks of a previous encounter – a handprint, a mark on and under the right breast, and the mark of a mouth on her lover's neck. In the next photograph Device holds her lover's head with care while examining the mouth-print in close-up. Device covers the ground of jealousy, of imagining real (and fantasy) lovers when with one lover. These images highlight a certain attention to detail, a curiosity with, as Device says, 'lovers' skin as terrain which other people have travelled'. (Device 1997b) Those marks are not usually visible to the human eye – hence the light dusting as if fingerprinting. Perhaps it is here that Device's feelings surface – fingerprinting usually only occurs at the scene of a crime. In relation to the Patsy Kline lyrics, the crime emerges as one of passion that Device's imagination cannot erase. Device's feelings about these traces are nevertheless ambiguous. She could be acknowledging her lover's past; she could be fetishising it; she could be racked with jealousy and possessiveness. We have no way of telling.

The mannequin's narrative is made visible to Device; previous lovers reside in the present moment, in the moments of greatest intimacy. The mannequin is hereby given a narrative of its own – whose imprints are these? They cannot be gendered, and we do not know whether they were made five minutes ago or five years ago. Similarly, we cannot tell if the mannequin consented to the touch, or whether the crime scene denoted by the fingerprint dust and the magnifying glass is a rape scene. This narrative of bodies touching,

resurfacing in unexpected ways, imprints of affection or rage left on the body – the mark on Device’s lover’s neck could also be a love-bite, a bruising – suggests a sexual narrative that never breaks but is ongoing and regenerative (if not always pleasant). One could also argue that the marks on the mannequin are Device’s own marks that she examines in preparation for someone else to witness; a way of making her own lust visible for someone else to scrutinise. In terms of bisexual narrative, Device’s images suggest to me that one’s sexual past does not always conform to one’s sexual present or future, but that the marks of previous or simultaneous lovers (or whatever kind) are left on the body and the mind.

Both Cameron and Device respectively, then, challenge the production of transsexuality and bisexuality within feminist and queer theories as transgressive or regressive. It seems to me that they achieve this in two central ways. Firstly, both artists throw this problematic back onto the viewer and interpreter of her images. This move, perhaps most graphically displayed in Cameron’s ‘Triptych’ (Figure 25), exposes the taken-for-granted discourses that usually *precede* representation. Neither Cameron nor Device attempts a ‘true’ representation of bisexuality and transsexuality in contrast to dominant meanings of them as regressive or transgressive. Cameron does not resolve ‘Triptych’ with the ‘right’ discourse; and the masculinity presented in ‘Self-Portrait’ is that of the ‘super-hero’ rather than heterosexual man of limited powers. Device does not cast aside her mannequin for a visibly gendered subject to convince us of her sexual transgression; nor does she expose the narrative of her object of desire. Instead we are left to struggle with hidden and disclosed meaning, and forced to recognise that the interpretation we offer is finally more indicative of our own subjectivities and desires than of theirs.

The second way in which Cameron and Device question dominant meanings of transsexuality and bisexuality is to contest the visibility discourse

that underpins them. Cameron's studied self-exposure grants us access to what is usually hidden; Device's magnifying glass highlights otherwise invisible traces on her lover's body. Interestingly, in doing so, both artists foreground narrative progression (from female body to male body; from one lover to another lover) suggesting – ironically, perhaps, given the representational genre of photography – that what you see is most emphatically *not* what you get. The assumptions about the regressive or transgressive positioning of bisexual and transsexual subjects do not, in other words, take account of the shifting locations that punctuate bisexual and transsexual narratives. Both artists suggest that if we attend to the specificities of bisexual and transsexual narratives, we cannot help but see that bisexual and transsexual subjects exceed their discursive designation as either regressive or transgressive. These specific narratives contest any belief in a static relationship between subjectivity and location within relations of power. Visible as a man, Cameron has a different relationship to hegemonic power relations than when he was visible as female. Device is also differently positioned depending on whether her sexual object choice is male or female. The importance of transsexual and bisexual *narrative*, then, is that it allows for a consideration of subjective continuity rather than abrupt changes of location and reversal of subjectivity – woman to man; lesbian to straight, transgressive to regressive – as constitutive of bisexuality and transsexuality.

In my final chapter I will be examining the ways that these specific and disparate bisexual narratives are in turn re-configured as the basis for bisexual community and identity, and, interestingly, as the ground for a new politics of bisexual visibility.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### A Place to Call Home: The Creation of a Separate Bisexual Space at the 1990 National Bisexual Conference in San Francisco, USA

San Francisco is where gay fantasies come true, and the problem the city presents is whether, after all, we wanted these particular dreams to be fulfilled – or would we have preferred others? Did we know what price these dreams would exact? (White 1980: 30)

#### Introduction

In this thesis so far, I have been concerned with how, and to what effect, bisexuality is produced in gendered and sexual spaces where a bisexual identity or community does not take centre-stage. In this chapter I document the *bisexual* fantasy of community and space that ‘came true’ in the summer of 1990, by focusing on the history and execution of the 1990 National Bisexual Conference (NBC) in San Francisco. Although this is my final chapter, I do not see the spaces I have been concerned with as ‘progressive’, as inevitably leading to the creation of a separate bisexual space and identity. As I argued in Chapter One, I believe that the spaces where bisexuality is not named are as important to bisexual history and a contemporary bisexual subject position as the space of bisexual identity and community that I turn to now. I see the 1990 US NBC as one example of a contemporary bisexual space where bisexual desire, identity and community form the core around which ‘other’ identities are negotiated. I am particularly interested in exploring the following questions: How is this dream made possible? What exactly does this dream consist of? And, to return to my concern with Butler’s understanding of the mechanism of repudiation in the construction of sexual and gendered identity,<sup>237</sup> which repudiations allow a contemporary bisexual subject of bisexual space to emerge, and to what effects?

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<sup>237</sup> See Chapter Three, Section One, Part Three for my analysis of Butler’s construction of bisexuality as potential in relation to her notion of ‘repudiation’. I discuss the possibilities of bisexual cultural repudiation as a response to Butler in ‘Waiting For No Man: Bisexual Femme Subjectivity and Cultural Repudiation’. (Hemmings 1998: 95-100)

Finally, if bisexual identity is one of the possibilities foreclosed by lesbian, gay or queer identities, how does a 'bisexual discourse' effect similar foreclosures in order to secure its own presence?

Focusing on the NBC in San Francisco is useful for a number of reasons. As the first national bisexual conference in the US, the 1990 Conference was viewed as a key moment for the growth of individual bisexuals. Hence many of the discussions both before and during the conference relate to individual identity-formation. The Conference also marked the inception of the North American Multicultural Bisexual Network, and so provides details of the relationship between bisexual identity and the larger bisexual community. Both of these issues are concerns throughout this thesis. Other reasons I am interested in this particular bisexual space are related to its San Francisco context. San Francisco is a Mecca for gay men and shapes a gay imaginary, much as Northampton shapes a lesbian imaginary.<sup>238</sup> It seems appropriate to the scope of this thesis to consider bisexual space in such a predominantly gay space, particularly after examining the production of bisexuality in relation to the predominantly lesbian space of Northampton and the queer and feminist terrains of contemporary theory. In addition, I lived in San Francisco in the winters of 1995 and 1997 and became well acquainted with members of the San Francisco Bay Area bisexual community and its resources.

In Section One, 'Making Bisexual Presence Felt: Imaginative and Geographical Cartographies', I trace the development of bisexual space in San

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<sup>238</sup> This is not to say that lesbians and bisexuals do not make homes in San Francisco, but it does not function so readily as a recognisable indicator of these identities. For San Francisco's position in the gay imaginary see: *States of Desire: Travels in Gay America*; (White 1980: 30-33) *Making Trouble: Essays on Gay History, Politics, and the University*; (D'Emilio 1992: 74-95) *Gay Culture in America: Essays from the Field*; (Herdt 1992) *Gay by the Bay: a History of Queer Culture in the San Francisco Bay Area*; (Stryker and Buskirk 1996) and *Queers In Space: Communities, Places, Sites of Resistance*. (Ingram, Boutillette and Retter 1997) Most recently, Nan Alamilla Boyd has explored the role of the San Francisco police and media in creating San Francisco as *the* space of deviant desire in the US. (Boyd 1997)



Francisco and historicise the decision to hold the 1990 NBC in San Francisco. Part One, 'Locating Ourselves', draws a contemporary and historical map of bisexual identity in San Francisco up until the 1990 Conference. Part Two, 'The Road to San Francisco', tells the history of national and local events leading to the 1990 NBC. Both Parts are concerned with the location of bisexual identity and community and the search for a bisexual 'home'. Section Two, 'Bisexual Stonewalling: the 1990 National Bisexual Conference Space', traces the discursive construction of this bisexual space, and asks which behaviours and identities (sexual, gendered, raced, political) are included or excluded, named or assumed. Part One, 'Bisexual Difference', highlights the conscious construction of the 1990 NBC as 'home'. Part Two, 'Bisexual Differentiation', suggests some tensions and contradictions in the production of the bisexual subject of the Conference. Section Three, 'Building a Bisexual Community: Spaces of Inclusion and Exclusion', examines two contentious issues in the struggle to establish what counts as bisexual space. Part One, 'Love Knows No Gender', explores the feminist and gender politics of the Conference space. Part Two, 'The Bisexual Melting Pot', interrogates the construction and function of race and ethnicity at the Conference.

The material for this chapter was gathered from a number of different sources. Most of the archive material was stored in dusty boxes in the basement of one of the conference's main organisers, Lani Ka'ahumanu.<sup>239</sup> These boxes contained: an almost complete set of minutes of the 1990 Bisexual Conference Committee Meetings from 1989-1990; flyers for fundraising events and the Conference itself; financial and logistical information; personal correspondence;

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<sup>239</sup> As well as being involved in the organisation of the 1990 National Bisexual Conference, Ka'ahumanu co-edited the first bisexual anthology *Bi Any Other Name: Bisexual People Speak Out*, with Loraine Hutchins, (Hutchins and Ka'ahumanu 1991, see Chapter One, Section One, Part One) sits on the board of the Gay and Lesbian Historical Society of Northern California (GLHSNC), and is a leading figure in local, national and international bisexual activism.

Conference programs and statements of purpose; information on the U.S. National Bisexual Network (NBN); Conference evaluation sheets; and other miscellaneous information including some photographs.<sup>240</sup> I also interviewed Lani Ka'ahumanu about the history of the Conference and Robyn Ochs (a founding member of the Boston Bisexual Women's Network (BBWN)) about the NBN Track that ran throughout the Conference.<sup>241</sup> To situate the Conference material within a wider context I consulted back issues of two bisexual publications *Bi Women* and the *Bay Area Bisexual Network Newsletter*. Both these publications provided information on the Conference itself and enabled me to begin mapping the development of a bisexual community context for the Conference.

Throughout the research for this chapter, I was wary of the dangers of describing the Conference from the perspective of the organisers only. Clearly this would give a very biased view, most likely focusing on the Conference's *aims* more than delegates' experiences of attending, or the *results* of the organiser's efforts to create the Bisexual Conference space. Hence, I also listened to over twenty audio tapes of conference workshops.<sup>242</sup> These enabled me to hear the discussions that were going on during the Conference, and to gain a clearer picture of what kind of bisexual space, identity and community was being experienced and formed by the Conference delegates themselves. Similarly I had access to a two-hour videotape of the conference, which allowed me to add another dimension – that of ambience. Although a number of people had

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<sup>240</sup> At present I have copies of the original material, so that the fullest archive collection is in my care. Lani Ka'ahumanu and I are working on a project to bring all the original material together, along with my chronological notes and indexing.

<sup>241</sup> These interviews were conducted on the basis of one bisexual activist and writer to another. These interviews enabled me to ask for specific information (where there were gaps in the existing archive material), and address particular issues such as the role of feminism in the Conference.

<sup>242</sup> Thanks to Jim Fraizin for agreeing to lend me these master tapes.

described the opening Conference plenary to me in some detail, it was only when I watched the video footage of this event that I began to develop a strong sense of its emotional importance for both organisers and delegates.

San Francisco's general library resources and gay and lesbian archives are second to none, and there is already a wealth of secondary material on San Francisco's queer geography. For background information on San Francisco's lesbian and gay activism, I consulted materials at San Francisco's Public Library, and the GLHSNC, also in San Francisco.<sup>243</sup> The information I obtained from these sources is integrated throughout this chapter.<sup>244</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> The GLHSNC is a useful community and academic resource located in downtown San Francisco, just a couple of blocks away from the Public Library. It contains national and local information on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual and transgendered life, in the form of books, pamphlets, flyers, journals, newspapers, and archive material. Information on bisexuals, transsexuals and transgendered people is difficult to locate, however, since it is mostly dispersed throughout the archive, and is not cross-referenced. Under the category 'bisexual' there is only a handful of bisexual newsletters and books, although bisexuality is mentioned throughout the archive. This means that bisexual research continues to be an extremely difficult and time-consuming process. This provides a different understanding of the lack of bisexual research at present. The fact that the Sexual Minorities Archives in Northampton is in the process of creating new cross-referenced categories including 'bisexual' and 'transgender' is a good thing, to my mind, in terms of this issue alone. (See Chapter Two, footnote 79, and Hemmings 1996.43-48)

<sup>244</sup> I was particularly interested in the Queer Nation Archive at the GLHSNC. Queer Nation San Francisco began in the summer of 1990, just a couple of weeks after the Bisexual Conference. With more time, I am sure it would prove fruitful to trace bisexual inclusion and exclusion in this queer context, to see what effect, if any, the development of a separate bisexual space had on San Francisco's queer community.

## Section One: Making Bisexual Presence Felt: Imaginative and Geographical Cartographies

### **Part One: Locating Ourselves**

I want to create, here, the imaginative and geographical space of bisexual identity in the mind of the reader unfamiliar with San Francisco's sexual minority terrain. I aim firstly to sketch a map of bisexual space in the run up to the Conference (1989-1990), and secondly, to trace the roots of this space in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>245</sup> This shows that the 1990 NBC itself is not an isolated bisexual space, but one that can be placed within a more general bisexual geography in San Francisco.<sup>246</sup>

#### 'Gay and Lesbian Enclaves'

San Francisco's 'The Castro' – delimited by Castro Street from its intersection with Market Street and 17<sup>th</sup> Street (Harvey Milk Plaza) all the way to 'Noe Valley' (24<sup>th</sup> Street) and many of the surrounding streets – is well known as the 'Gay Ghetto' (Figure 40).<sup>247</sup> The countless bars, restaurants and shops that line this always-crowded neighbourhood cater specifically (although not exclusively) to San Francisco's thriving gay male community. The block on Castro between 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Streets is home to A Different Light (A), the city's famous gay and

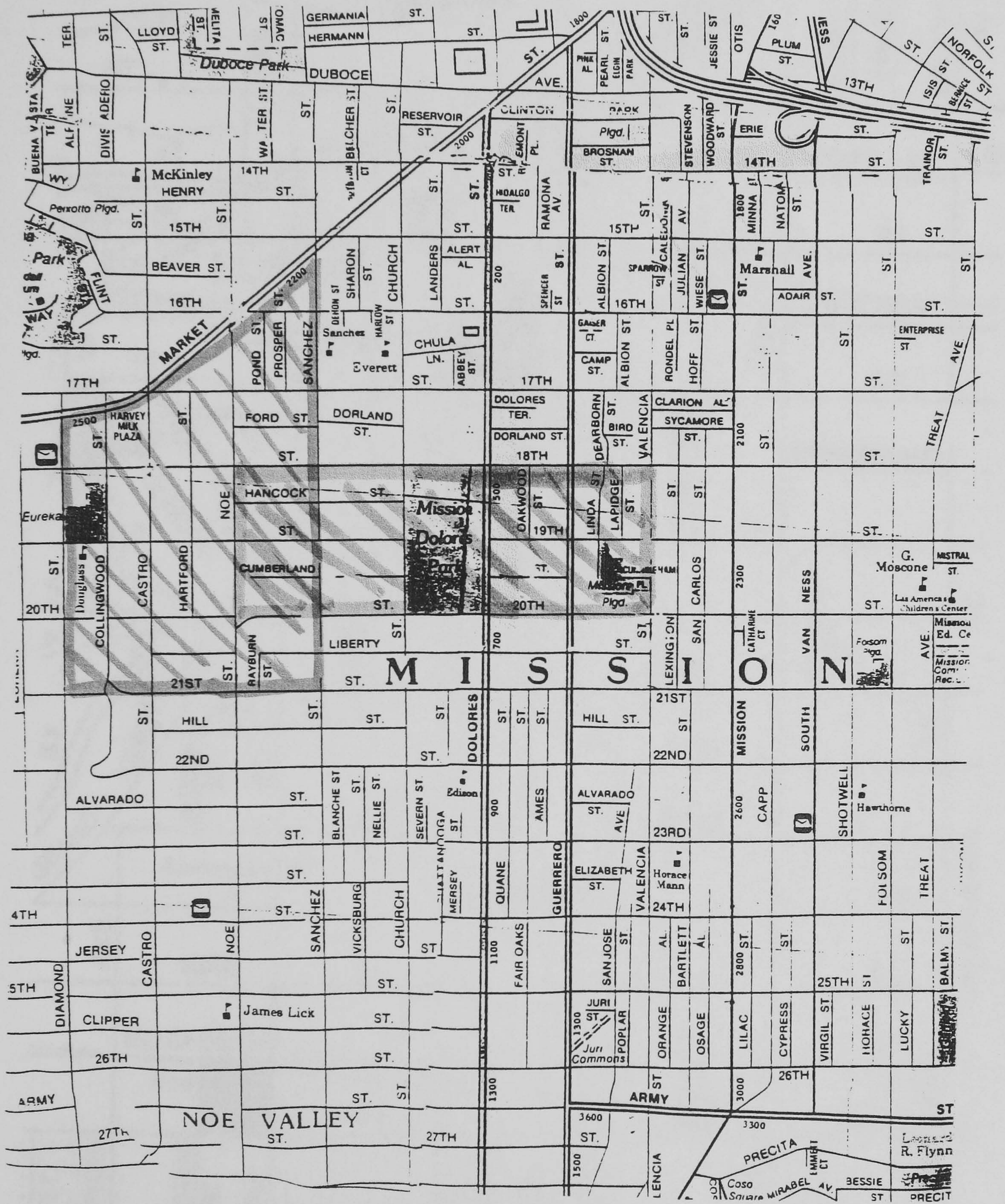
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<sup>245</sup> The gay and lesbian population of San Francisco is too large, and its history too complex, for me to attempt even a partial documentation of its history in the way I was able to with Northampton's development as a lesbian community. Moreover, this would not be new work. John D'Emilio traces this history in his chapter on San Francisco – 'Gay Politics, Gay Community: San Francisco's Experience' – in *Making Trouble*. (D'Emilio 1992: 74-95) Part of D'Emilio's analysis documents the increase of the city's gay and lesbian population after the end of World War II, when large numbers of servicemen and women were dishonourably discharged and stayed in the Bay Area, (Ibid: 78) the influence of the 'Beat poets' of North Beach, (Ibid: 80) as well as the post-Stonewall Gay Liberation Movement. (Ibid: 85-88) San Francisco's bisexual community is both small and large enough to be traceable in San Francisco, however, and so I am able to provide this history.

<sup>246</sup> Figure 39 shows a map of the area of San Francisco that this section is concerned with, from Castro Street (top) to South Van Ness (bottom), and 25<sup>th</sup> Street (left) to 16<sup>th</sup> and Market Street (right). Figures 40, 42, 44 and 45 show details from this map.

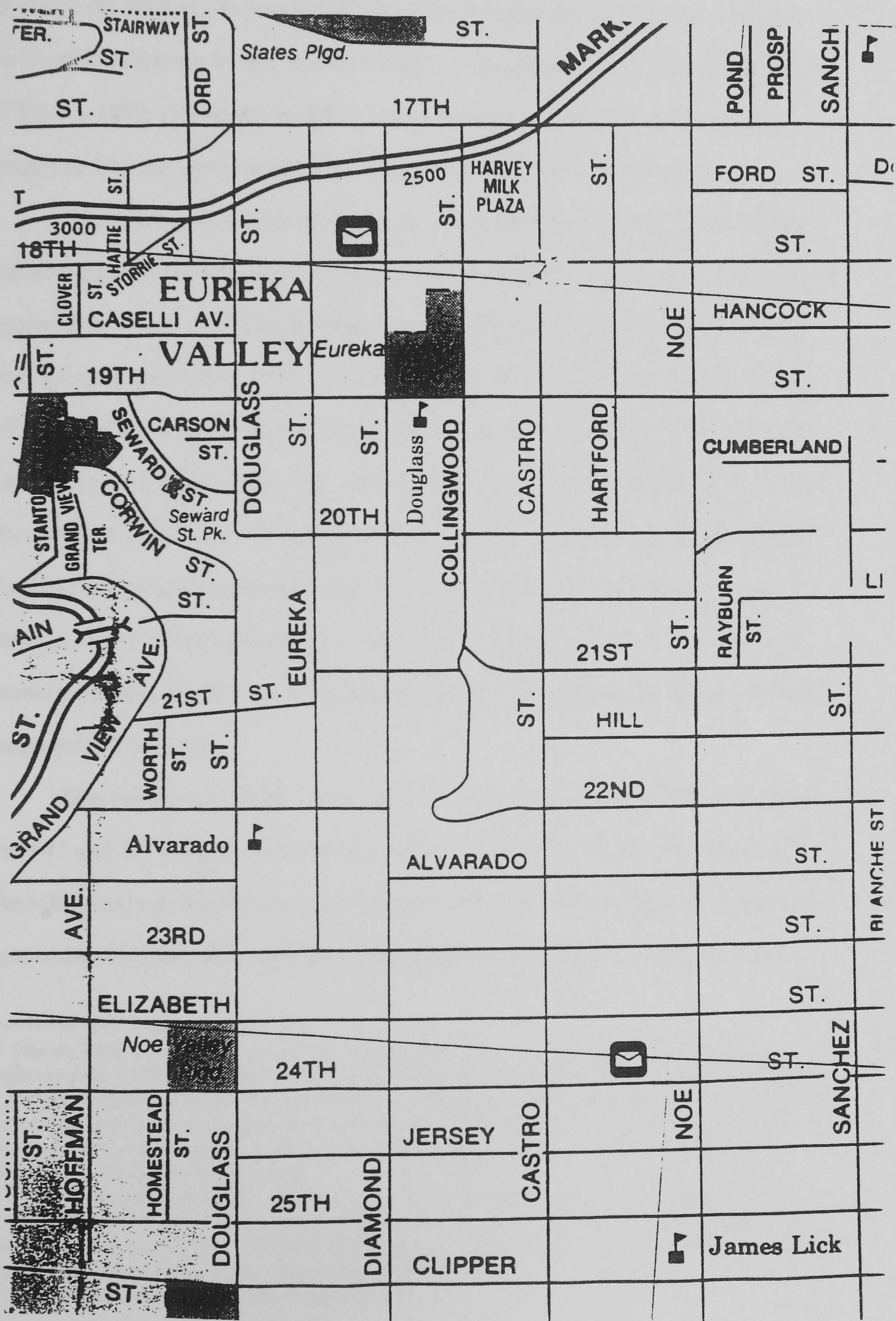
<sup>247</sup> Figure 40 shows a map of San Francisco's Castro area. The 'Gay Ghetto' is concentrated between 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Streets. Places mentioned are marked alphabetically on the map. On the basis of this 'territorial' demarcation for gay male identity in The Castro, Stephen Murray

Figure 39. Street Map of The Castro, Mission, and Noe Valley areas of San Francisco. Shaded areas refer to particular (predominantly) community territory: blue = gay; yellow = lesbian; pink = Hispanic/immigrant; green = bisexual.



argues that the social science term 'community' can be applied to the 'gay male community' in San Francisco. (Murray 1992: 107)

Figure 40. Street map of The Castro area of San Francisco.



lesbian bookstore. The bars on 18<sup>th</sup> Street (between Noe and Castro Streets) throng day and night with gay men talking, drinking and cruising. Gay gyms and offices on the first floors provide a further level of the gay experience, and give rise to what is known as the 'Castro Clone', a 'handsome, masculine-looking', (D'Emilio 1992: 93) white, middle-class consumer and bar-fly, whose mirror-image can be recognised a thousand-fold throughout the 'Gay Ghetto'.

'The Castro' has been and continues to be the most important site of gay community and political activism in the San Francisco Bay Area. Harvey Milk's camera store, from which he co-ordinated his political career in the late 1970s until his assassination in 1978,<sup>248</sup> was opposite the Castro Cinema (B) between 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Streets. The Castro street-fairs (Figure 41), the annual Halloween street party, and the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Pride Marches, are all centred in The Castro. The street itself is often the site for political leafleting, demonstrations and confrontations, mostly relating to gay, lesbian, bisexual or queer politics.<sup>249</sup> San Francisco gay male politics and identity, in particular, are formulated, contradicted and re-solidified on the streets that make up this vibrant community landscape.

Directly south of The Castro, between Dolores Street and Harrison Street, and 14<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> Streets, is the Mission district of San Francisco (Figure 42).<sup>250</sup> The inhabitants of the Mission are predominantly low-income Mexicans, Central Americans, students and 'radicals'. The neighbourhood (particularly Mission

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<sup>248</sup> Harvey Milk was the first openly gay Supervisor, elected to San Francisco's Board of Supervisors in 1977. During his brief career he was a guiding light in the successful campaign to prevent Proposition 6, the 'Briggs Initiative' (which sought to prevent gay men and lesbians from teaching in the state education system), from becoming law. Milk and Mayor George Moscone were assassinated in 1978 by Dan White, an ex-supervisor on the city's Board of Supervisors. (D'Emilio 1992: 88-91)

<sup>249</sup> Many of the political debates between 'gays and the gay anarchists', (Williams 1990: n.p.) i.e. between the 'old gays' and a new generation of queer activists, took place on the streets of The Castro, taking the form of heated arguments and poster wars. (Williams 1990; Reihl 1990; Pepper 1990; Gray 1990; Queer Nation Records 1990-1996)

<sup>250</sup> The places I mention are marked alphabetically.

Figure 41. 'Consolidation of Castro and Market Street as Gay Public Space in the 1970s', photographed by Crawford Burton. Courtesy of the GLHSNC.  
Reproduced from *Califia* 1997: 181.





Street itself) is filled with restaurants, cafes, grocery stores, second-hand stores, cheap markets, and community centres. Like many such poor neighbourhoods in cities in the US and the UK, the Mission is becoming increasingly gentrified by white professionals who enjoy the Mission's vibrancy but not its income-bracket. As a result what was, even five years ago, a relatively integrated neighbourhood has become increasingly segregated, with trendy white liberals frequenting their 'ethnic' cafés, bars and restaurants, and the long-term, mostly of color, inhabitants, trying to prevent what remain of their own spaces being appropriated.<sup>251</sup>

Within the Mission district is the less demarcated and more diffuse, but nevertheless locatable, lesbian community. Although, as I have noted, San Francisco is most notably a gay male Mecca, 'San Francisco is one of the very few cities where lesbians are residentially concentrated enough to be visible.' (D'Emilio 1992: 74) The spinal column of the lesbian community is Valencia Street, which stretches from the women's sex shop Good Vibrations (C), between 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> Streets, to 14<sup>th</sup> Street. Pat Califia describes Valencia Street as one of two 'nascent "lesbian ghettos."' (Califia 1997: 182)<sup>252</sup> Lesbian spaces on or near Valencia Street include the impressive San Francisco Women's Building (Figure 43, and D),<sup>253</sup> just off Valencia at 3543 18<sup>th</sup> Street; the Women's Bathhouse, Osento (E), on Valencia between 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Streets; the

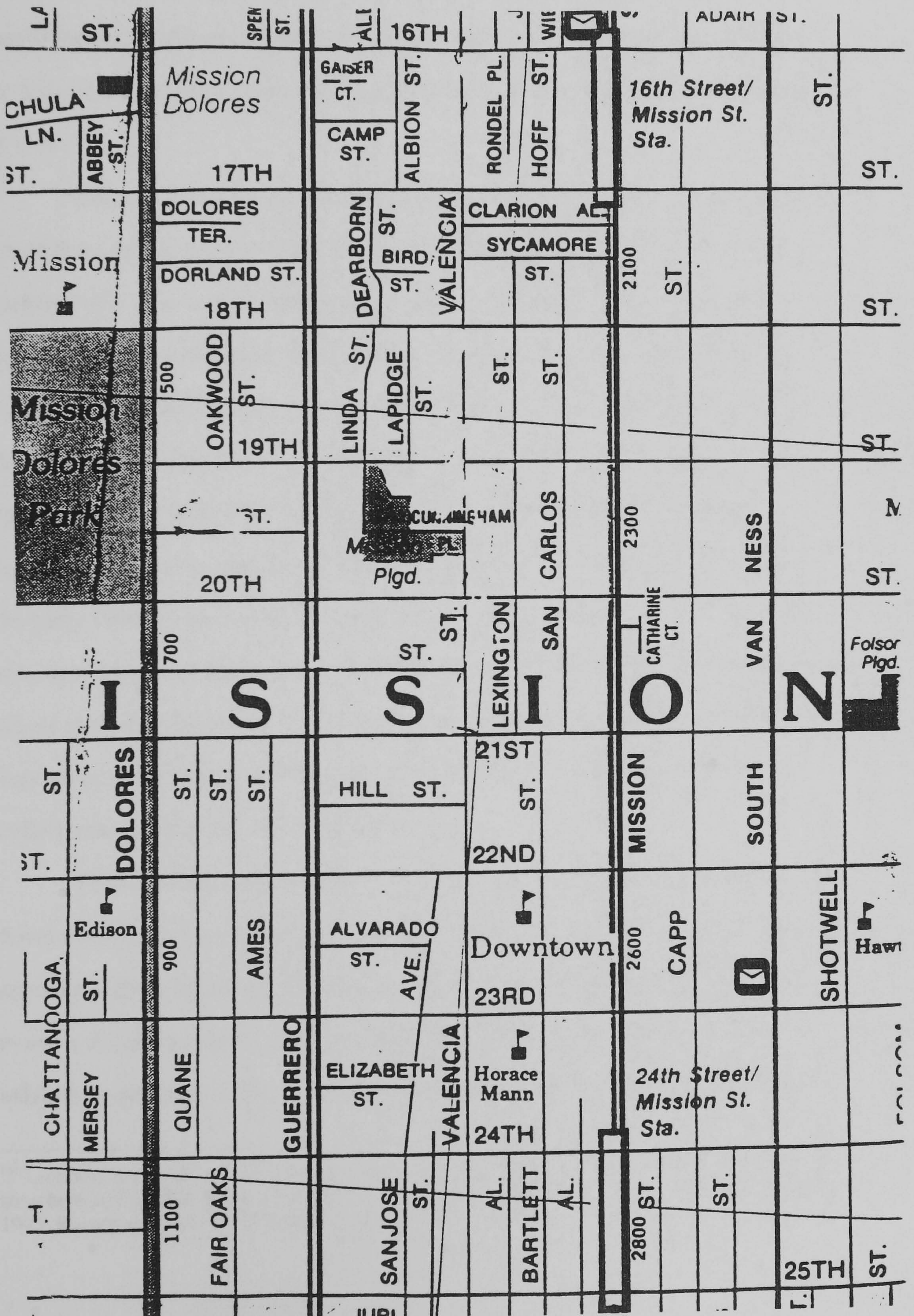
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<sup>251</sup> For example, a Korean bar on 24<sup>th</sup> Street between Valencia and Mission Streets, that was predominantly frequented by older Koreans and the occasional non-Korean friend in January 1997, had become a young, Anglo-American bar by August 1997. This rapid take-over is typical. Thanks to David Hansen-Miller for this information and for the 'story' of the Mission's white, liberal 'gentrification'. I should add that I am not divorced from this process of gentrification myself, as a white, soon-to-be-professional, temporary resident of the Mission. (I lived on 23<sup>rd</sup> Street, between Valencia and Guerrero, for two months in the winter of 1997.)

<sup>252</sup> The other being Park Slope in Brooklyn, New York. (Ibid: 181) In a later interview, published as an epilogue to this article, Califia reaffirms that 'Valencia [...] has finally been established as a lesbian neighborhood.' (Ibid: 189)

<sup>253</sup> Figure 43 shows two photographs I took of the Women's Building just after its exterior had been beautifully painted with the pictures and names of hundreds of women in the summer of 1994.

Figure 42. Street Map of the Mission district of San Francisco. Valencia's 'lesbian spinal column' is marked in yellow on the map.



women's bar, The Lexington, on 19<sup>th</sup> Street and Lexington (F), and the alternative women's performance space, LunaSea (G), a little further down 16<sup>th</sup> Street between Capp and South Van Ness.<sup>254</sup> These and numerous other neighbourhood cafés, bars and restaurants combine to create a lesbian-friendly environment that makes Valencia one of the most desirable areas for lesbians to live in.

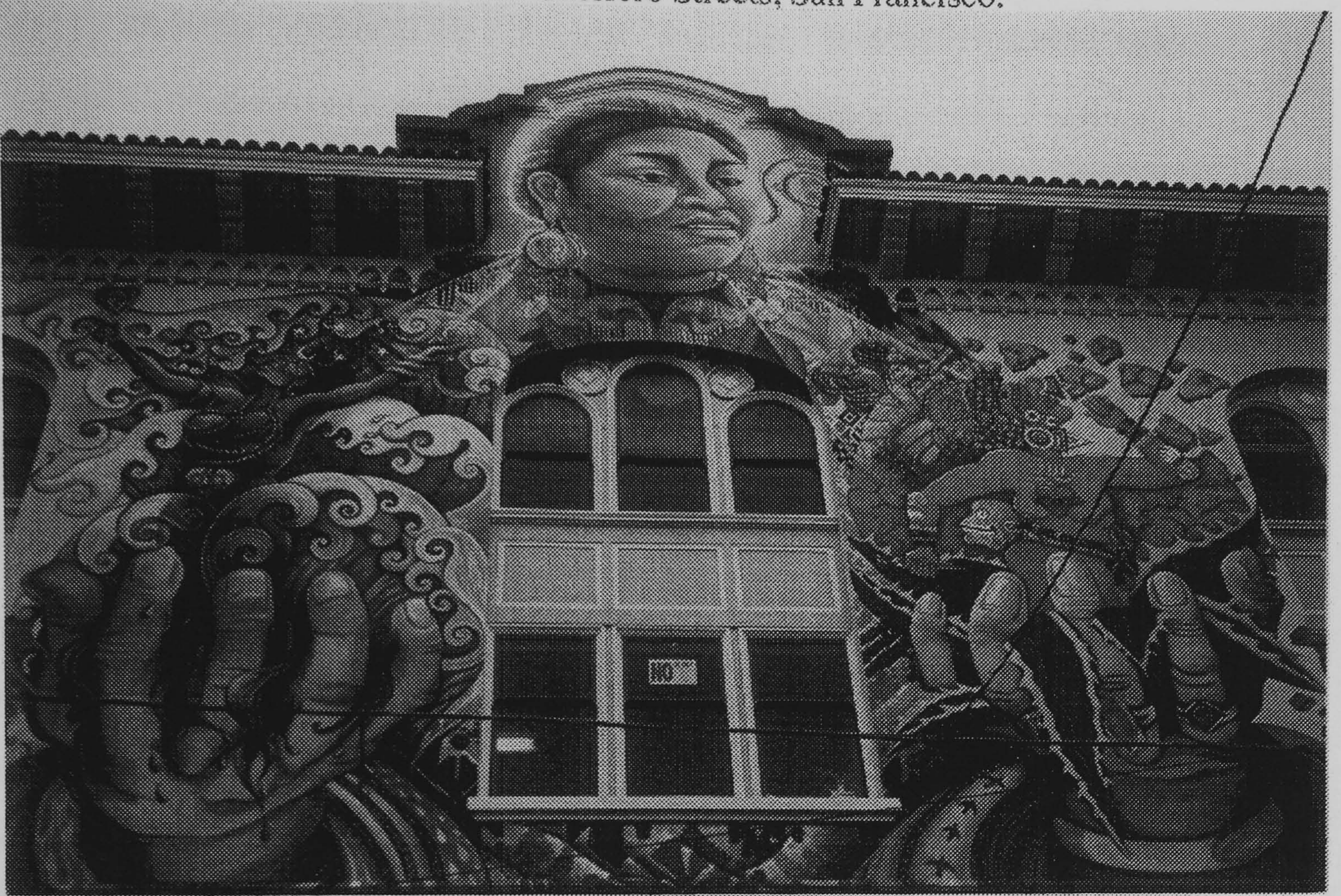
Valencia Street is not as uniformly lesbian as The Castro is gay, however. There is no mistaking The Castro as a gay male ghetto. But unless you were looking for it, it would be easy to miss or ignore Valencia Street's lesbian presence. This can be attributed to the more dispersed nature of lesbian space, and to the fact that there are fewer lesbians than gay men in San Francisco. But these are not the only reasons. Lesbian space is more precarious than gay male space generally. Hence the demise of San Francisco's Old Wives' Tales women's bookstore, and the women's bar, Amelia's (now the Elbo Room), in the early 1990s, both of which were located on Valencia Street.<sup>255</sup> Such 'early-closings' may be related to the fact that lesbians (as women) earn less money as a whole than gay men (as men) and hence are unable to support a wide range of venues, or to the lesbian community's increasing awareness of alcoholism (which restricts the number of lesbian bars).

From a different perspective, Valencia's lesbian territory is hard to pin down because lesbian space is rarely *only* lesbian space. At The Lexington's opening night in February 1997, several dozen men joined the hundreds of women. At an equivalent opening night at a Castro gay bar you would be unlikely to see any women at all. And from 15<sup>th</sup> Street to 18<sup>th</sup> Street, Valencia is

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<sup>254</sup> LunaSea is the only permanent alternative women's/lesbian cabaret venue in San Francisco. I have been to LunaSea twice: the first time to a lesbian comedy performance evening, in January 1995; the second time to a lesbian strip performance, in February 1997.

Figure 43. Photographs of San Francisco Women's Building, 3543 18<sup>th</sup> Street, between Valencia and Guerrero Streets, San Francisco.



<sup>255</sup> Northampton, Massachusetts is similarly unable to sustain a lesbian bar, restaurant or café, despite its huge lesbian presence. See Chapter Two, Section One, Part One, for a discussion of the problems of maintaining these lesbian-only space.

now the new centre of heterosexual prostitution. (Ibid: 189) Further, as is made clear by the terms ‘women’s bar’, ‘women’s building’, ‘women’s sex shop’ and ‘women’s performance space’, lesbian space is rarely named as such. Although ‘everyone knows’<sup>256</sup> that a ‘women’s bar’ is primarily a lesbian bar, women’s performance spaces and bookstores are historically feminist spaces that *include* lesbians.<sup>257</sup> The San Francisco Women’s Building houses (both temporarily and more permanently) numerous different identities and communities: feminist and lesbian groups, in particular feminist and lesbians of color groups; a women’s SM fair in the summer; and more recently, the 1<sup>st</sup> International FTM Conference in 1995. (Rubin 1996: 176)<sup>258</sup> Spaces such as San Francisco Women’s Building might best be viewed as ones of contemporary sexual, gendered and raced negotiation, rather than as any one community’s home. Valencia Street as a whole might also be viewed as a space producing and reflecting a *concentration* of lesbian community, where that community is always intervening and intervened in, and always overlapping with ‘other’ communities.<sup>259</sup>

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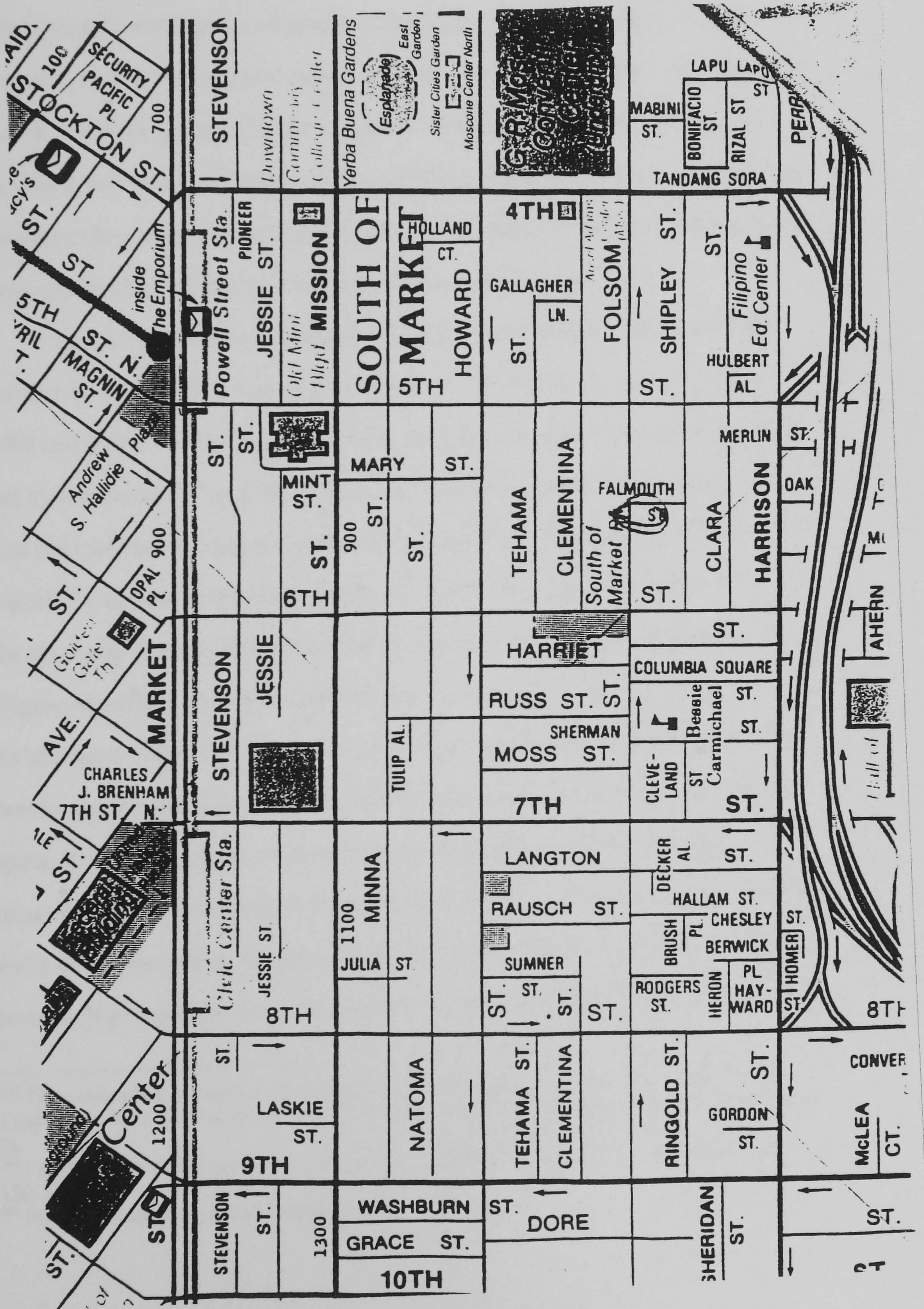
<sup>256</sup> Perhaps I am wrong in presuming that ‘everyone knows’ this, of course, like the observer from Chapter Three who ‘can [just] tell’ (McKerrow 1993: 2, in Eadie 1993: 150) that a gay man and a lesbian having public sex after the SM Pride March are *not* heterosexual. See Chapter Three, Section One, Part Three, for this reference to queer culture’s disavowal of bisexuality.

<sup>257</sup> The difference between what is signified by these terms must be due in part to the historical roots of lesbian bar culture in the 1940s, ‘50s and ‘60s, as opposed to the development of women’s bookstores and ‘women’s culture’ as feminist spaces in the 1970s.

<sup>258</sup> Given the identity of the majority of delegates to the FTM Conference, the Women’s Building here functions as a space of historical and theoretical conflict (FTMs in relation to ‘women’s’ space) as well as a space of newly formed identity. As Rubin wryly notes of the opening night of the conference: ‘The buzz from the numbers of all different kinds of transsexual men in one place superceded the irony that overenrollment had forced the last minute shift of the conference to the San Francisco Women’s building.’ (Ibid)

<sup>259</sup> These two areas, The Castro and Valencia Street, are not the only spaces in San Francisco marked as gay or lesbian, and neither are all such spaces one or the other. The ‘South of Market’ district (Figure 44) has long been a zone where sex workers, drug dealers, and clients of queer sex clubs descend after dark, and not always harmoniously. (Ibid: 182-188) The community spaces of The Castro and Valencia Street, however, are defined through their sexual minority populations in unique and significant ways, not least because their queerness is not limited to particular times of the day.

Figure 44. Street map of the South of Market district of San Francisco.



‘A “little space for the likes of me”’<sup>260</sup>

In his interview with Califia, Gordon Brent Ingram asks the following: ‘Has there been a diversification of spaces in the ghettos and sex zones to include bisexuals, transsexuals, transvestites, and sadomasochists?’ (Ibid: 191) Califia’s answer – ‘[t]hose groups of people still have fairly marginal positions in gay space in San Francisco’ (Ibid) – does not offer much hope of the development of permanent bisexual space in San Francisco at present. Or, perhaps, Califia is not aware of the bisexual spaces that have been opening up in her city.

One of the results of bisexual organising for the 1990 NBC was that a territory peculiar to bisexuals was indeed staked out in San Francisco during 1989 and 1990.<sup>261</sup> This space was concentrated in a narrow band between Noe and Valencia and 18<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Streets, and overlapped with (but was not reducible to) lesbian and gay spaces in San Francisco (Figure 45).<sup>262</sup> The majority of the committee meetings for the conference were held either at Ka’ahumanu’s house, 20 Cumberland Street (between Guerrero and Dolores) (Figure 46 and H), or Naomi Tucker’s house at 371 Noe Street. (I, and Ka’ahumanu 1995: 1)<sup>263</sup> In the latter stages of organisation, representatives from twelve committees crammed themselves at least twice-weekly into one or other space. Ka’ahumanu talks of those weeks with understandable nostalgia, remembering the ‘bisexual conference time line’ that was pasted around the inside walls of her apartment, (Ka’ahumanu 1995a) and notes that ‘we would kid because Noe was in between the lesbian Valencia and the gay Castro, and so Noe

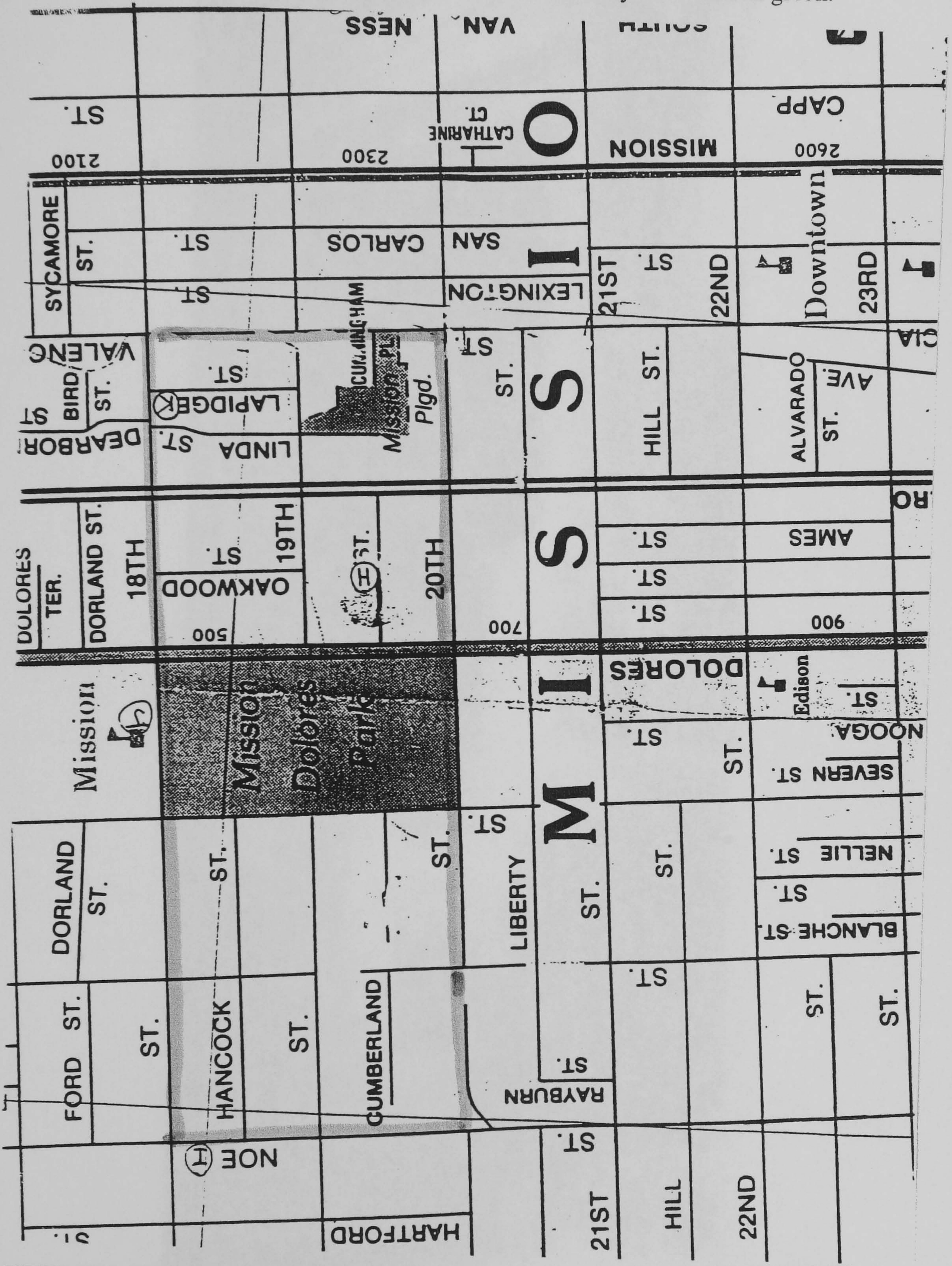
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<sup>260</sup> This subheading includes a citation from one of the speeches on *1<sup>st</sup> National Bisexual Conference*, the above-mentioned videotape of the conference. (Dajenya, in BiPOL 1990a: tape 2)

<sup>261</sup> I refer briefly to this issue in my article ‘From Landmarks to Spaces’. (Hemmings 1997: 159-161)

<sup>262</sup> Places I mention are marked alphabetically on the map.

Figure 45. Street map of the bisexual geography of San Francisco, 1989-1990. The approximate area of bisexual territory is marked in green.



<sup>263</sup> Like Ka'ahumanu, Tucker is a prominent members of the contemporary bisexual community in San Francisco and nationally. Tucker is the editor of *Bisexual Politics: Theories, Queries and Visions* (Tucker 1995) and a founder member of the San Francisco Jewish/bisexual caucus.



Figure 46. Photographs of 20 Cumberland Street, San Francisco.



was the bisexual neighborhood.’ (Ka’ahumanu 1995: 5) The 1990 NBC itself was held at the Mission High School, an ornate, somewhat Gothic building, at 3750 18<sup>th</sup> Street between Delores and Church Streets (Figure 47 and J),<sup>264</sup> The opening reception of the Conference, on the evening of Wednesday June 20<sup>th</sup>, was held at the High School. (Ka’ahumanu 1995: 1) On Thursday June 21<sup>st</sup> there was an ‘Evening Celebrating Bisexuality’ – a performance by members of the Bisexual Diaspora,<sup>265</sup> a bisexual performers’ group – held at the San Francisco Women’s Building, (K) a little further down 18<sup>th</sup> towards Valencia Street. (Ibid: 7; BiPOL 1990: 8)

The Bisexual Conference Steering Committee was concerned with practical and ideological issues of space from the outset. (Hemmings 1997: 160) Twelve sub-committees<sup>266</sup> were set up to negotiate areas such as logistics, media, housing,<sup>267</sup> site, access, People of Color Caucus,<sup>268</sup> and the parade. The conference itself ran from Thursday June 20<sup>th</sup> to Saturday June 23<sup>rd</sup>, during San Francisco’s annual Gay Pride Week. (Ka’ahumanu 1995: 1) Conference participants were encouraged to stay and attend the Lesbian and Gay Freedom Parade on Sunday June 24<sup>th</sup>, in order to make the bisexual contingent as visible as possible: the bisexual contingent was the second largest in the Parade that year. (Ibid: 13) A cable car was rented for the parade so that bisexuals with disabilities and bisexuals with AIDS could participate fully in the march.<sup>269</sup>

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<sup>264</sup> This final site was not confirmed until the beginning of May 1990, (SCM: May 5, 1990) which may indicate the difficulty of securing bisexual space.

<sup>265</sup> I discuss the advertising for this event in Section Two, Part One of this chapter.

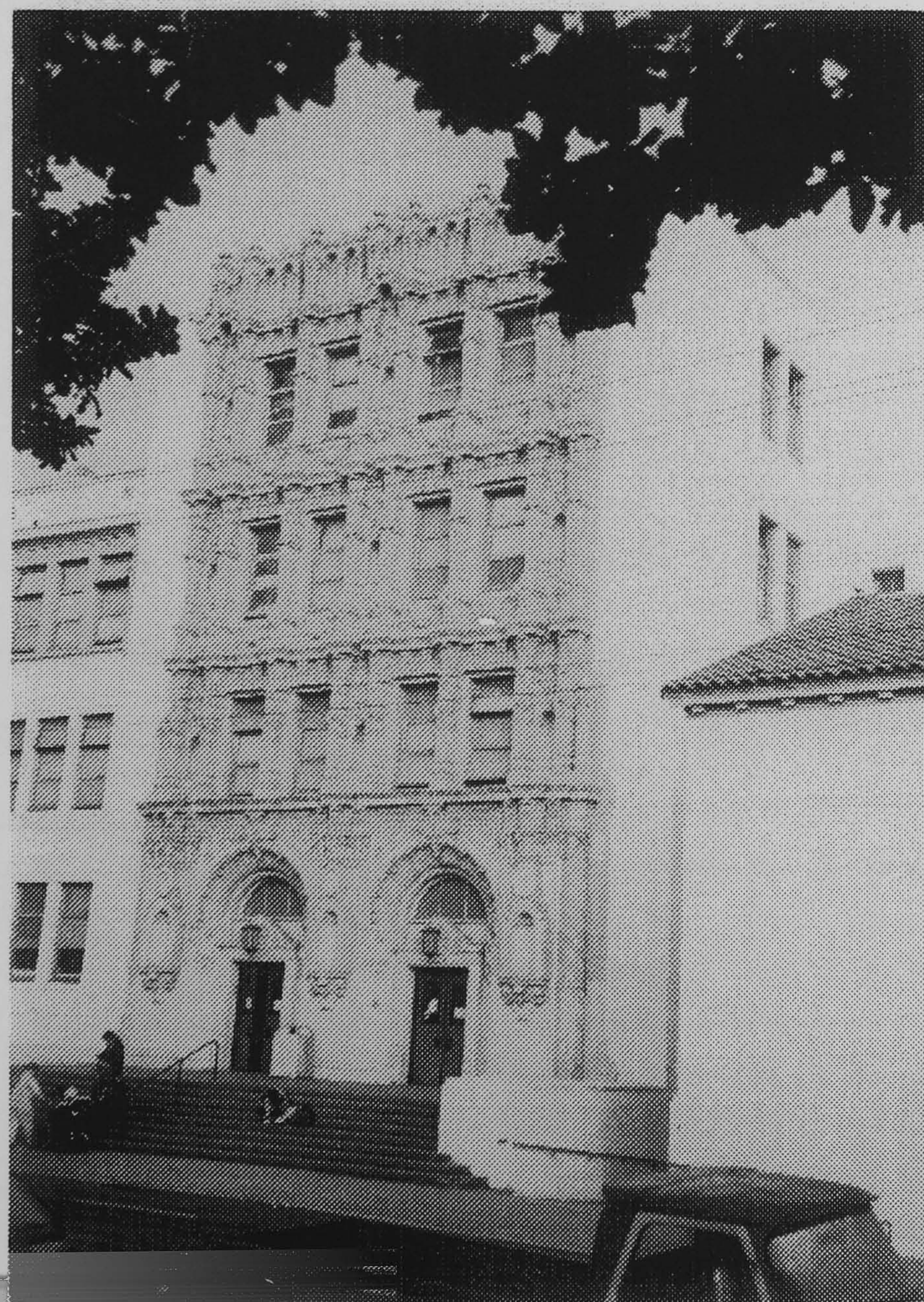
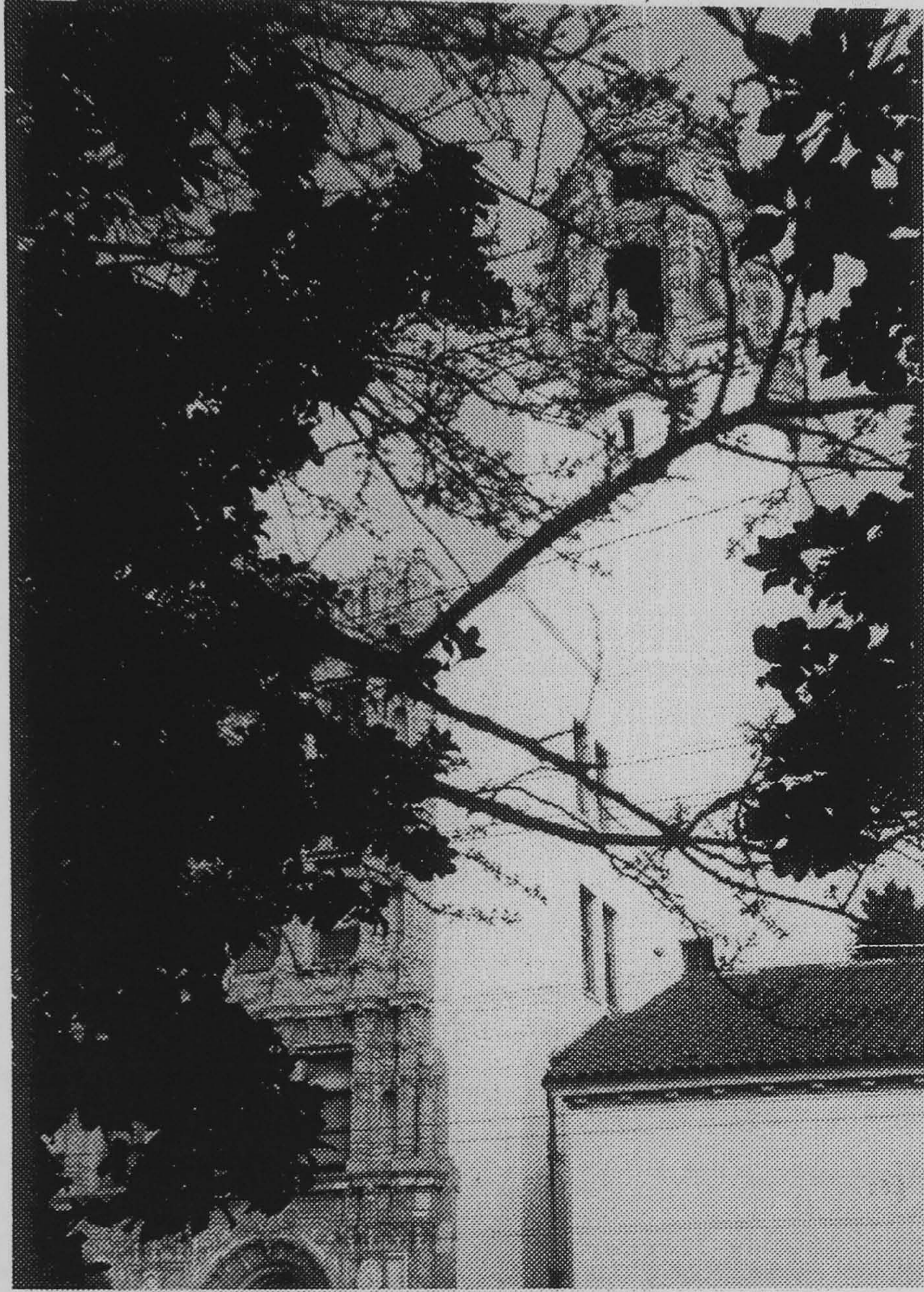
<sup>266</sup> Each sub-committee representative was required to give a regular report to the rest of the steering committee. (SCM: 1989-1990)

<sup>267</sup> A last-minute housing-crisis was caused by the unexpectedly high number of delegates, (Steering Committee Minutes (SCM): May 20, 1990) although by mid-June everyone had been placed. (SCM: June 1, 1990)

<sup>268</sup> I discuss the establishment of the People of Color Caucus and the desire to create a multicultural bisexual conference space in Sections Two and Three of this chapter.

<sup>269</sup> After much discussion, the Steering Committee made the decision not to share the cable car with any other (non-bisexual) group, in order to maximise bisexual space and visibility. (SCM: April 17, 1989; September 17, 1989; April 22, 1990)

Figure 47. Photographs of Mission High School, 3750 18<sup>th</sup> Street, between Delores and Church Streets, San Francisco.



In his article ‘Blatantly Bisexual: Or, Unthinking Queer Theory’, bisexual theorist Michael du Plessis discusses the commonplace of bisexuality as occupying ‘some “middle ground” between other entities, whether sexualities, genders, or social groups’. (du Plessis 1996: 22) Du Plessis suggests that we might want to conceive of that middle-ground as a ‘radical [...] site for a new bisexual activism’, (Ibid: 23) rather than as the ‘only place to which bisexuality gets relegated’. (Ibid: 22) The bisexual space I have been sketching here quite literally occupies the ‘middle ground’ between the gay male Castro and the lesbian and Hispanic Mission. Although only temporary, these bisexual spaces form a cluster that overlaps the borders of those other spaces. The San Francisco Women’s Building is figured as a temporary home for bisexual community as well, for example, and Tucker’s house overlooks the ‘Castro Clone’ bars on 18<sup>th</sup> Street between Castro and Noe. The other non-geographically located bisexual spaces I have described – the cable car, the bisexual contingent in the Freedom Parade, the attempts to provide space for difference<sup>270</sup> – open up spaces *within* other communities, and carve out spaces within the existing bisexual community too.

Interestingly, the commonplace of the bisexual ‘middle ground’ that du Plessis analyses is almost always thought to be located between gay/lesbian and *straight* spaces and identities. For example, Hélène Cixous describes bisexuality as a bridge between homosexuality and heterosexuality and as ‘the location within oneself of the presence of both sexes’ in ‘Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks/Ways Out/ Forays’. (Cixous 1986: 85) A number of authors in bisexual anthologies of the 1990s<sup>271</sup> underline the ways in which they believe bisexuals are discriminated against by ‘both sides’ – i.e. by heterosexuals and by lesbians

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<sup>270</sup> I am referring to the crash accommodation for delegates on low income, disability access and the People of Color Caucus, amongst other spaces.

and gay men – and offer up critiques of the heterosexual/homosexual dyad that makes identifying as bisexual problematic.<sup>272</sup> Similarly, in Chapter One of this thesis I tried to locate bisexual space in relation to Joan Nestle’s hand-drawing of Reis Park.<sup>273</sup> At that point in my analysis I could only imagine bisexual space in the ‘thin line in the sand’ that separated gay and lesbian sunbathers from their straight counterparts, or as existing within or encompassing gay/lesbian and/or straight spaces.

As du Plessis notes, this construction of bisexuality as in between heterosexual and homosexual spaces, identities and communities is what enables the link between bisexuality and ‘multiculturalism’ to be made. (Ibid.: 23) Ka’ahumanu writes that: ‘Like multiculturalism, mixed heritage and bi-racial relationships, both the bisexual and transgender movement expose and politicize the middle ground’. (Ka’ahumanu 1995b: 64) This link between bisexuality and multiculturalism is effectively dependent on bisexuality combining or going beyond heterosexuality and homosexuality, so that it can be paralleled to combining or going beyond ‘black’ and ‘white’.<sup>274</sup> As I argued extensively in Chapter One, Section One, this figuring of bisexuality as ground, bridge or *mélange* of sexed, gendered or sexual opposites makes conceiving of bisexuality as an adult sexual identity extremely difficult. Perhaps it is in charting bisexual ‘middle grounds’ in places such as San Francisco that contemporary meanings of bisexuality as conjoining other than white heterosexuality and white

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<sup>271</sup> See Chapter One, Section One, Part One, for a list of recent US and UK bisexual anthologies.

<sup>272</sup> See particularly, Kathleen Bennett ‘Feminist Bisexuality: A Both/And Option for an Either/or World’, which takes its title from a quote by Tom Robinson – ‘I’m simply trying to live a both/and life in an either/or world’. (Robinson, in Bennett 1992: 205) See also: Trnka 1992:103-114; Queen 1991:17-21; Blasingame 1995: 229-234; and Dajenya 1995: 235-236.

<sup>273</sup> See Chapter One, Part One, Section Two, and Figure 5.

<sup>274</sup> I have critiqued the association of bisexuality with ‘diversity’ and multiculturalism in Chapter Two, Section One, Part Two, and Chapter Three, Section One, Part Three. In Sections Two and Three of this chapter I examine more closely the ways in which bisexual conference

homosexuality can flourish. Du Plessis appeals to our imaginations in the same vein: 'Picture a middle ground that is not static but on the move [...] That is the space for new bisexualities that can be exorbitant, ecstatic, beside themselves'. (Ibid:41-43)

## **Part Two: The Road to San Francisco**

How did the contemporary bisexual cartography in San Francisco detailed above emerge? What is its history? Has bisexual community in San Francisco always been negotiated in relation to lesbian and gay spaces? In this Part, I begin to piece together the history of the contemporary bisexual movement in San Francisco.

'The 1970s'

BiPOL, San Francisco bisexual community's political wing, was founded in 1983, and was the primary organising group of the 1990 NBC. Bisexual writer Amanda Udis-Kessler suggests that until the early 1980s, the bisexual community had been primarily a support network, which organised social gatherings as a way of reducing individual bisexuals' isolation. She argues that in the mid- to late-1970s, during the period of 'gay male utopianism and lesbian feminist construction of community norms, bisexuals were not doing much, at least not in an organized way', (Ibid: 22) and includes the San Francisco Bisexual Center (founded in 1976) among those 'social-only' groups. (Ibid)<sup>275</sup> Udis-Kessler provides a starting-point of 1980 to the contemporary bisexual movement in the US:

In 1980, the year the New York and Chicago bisexual social groups peaked in popularity, a lesbian activist [Ka'ahumanu] in San Francisco went public with her relationship to a man and quietly initiated the process that led us to where we are today. In 1982, she ran an article in a Bay

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space is imagined through a multicultural model. Here, it is clear that heterosexuality and homosexuality are presumed white, and so compared to 'other' oppositions, e.g. black/white.

<sup>275</sup> Elizabeth Reba Weise also writes that the Bisexual Center's activity was restricted to running 'support groups, rap groups and social functions for a large bisexual network.' (Weise 1992a: xii)

Area women's paper calling for bisexuals to become a political force within the women's movement. (Udis-Kessler 1995: 24)<sup>276</sup>

The bisexual history Udis-Kessler traces is one with lesbian/feminism at its centre.<sup>277</sup> While I have no doubt that lesbian/feminism had, and continues to have, an enormous influence on the contemporary bisexual movement in the US, I question a historical narrative of bisexuality that rejects other possible roots as simply apolitical. Udis-Kessler overlooks or denies pertinent bisexual histories, either because they do not evidence the appropriate (feminist or lesbian and gay) political position, or because they are not pre-packaged and conveniently labelled 'bisexual'.

In contrast to Udis-Kessler, Stephen Donaldson makes the case for considering the Sexual Freedom League (SFL), of which he was a part from 1967, as the precursor to the contemporary bisexual movement, even though it did not organise under the term 'bisexual'. (Donaldson 1995) He writes: 'based in San Francisco but nationally organized, the Sexual Freedom League propagated the slogan "If it moves, fondle it," [...] and staged some memorable bisexual orgies'. (Ibid: 33) As bisexual activist and writer Liz A. Highleyman suggests, 'members of these groups were often more closely connected to heterosexual "swinger" communities than to gay or lesbian communities.' (Highleyman 1993: 1) Udis-Kessler may wish the situation were otherwise, but the SFL and the National Bisexual Liberation Group (founded in New York in

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<sup>276</sup> Udis-Kessler suggests that: 'Post-Stonewall lesbian and gay groups got along fine for more than a decade without bisexuals insisting on inclusion, and bisexuals presumably got along fine during that period without seeking it.' (Ibid: 18) This seems to be a rather uncritical view of the mechanisms of political exclusion (i.e. because bisexuals did not insist on inclusion, they must have 'got along fine'?).

<sup>277</sup> This is certainly not an unusual approach. The second US bisexual anthology to be published in the 1990s was *Closer to Home: Bisexuality and Feminism*, (Weise 1992) and my own work in 'Locating Bisexual Identities: Discourses of Bisexuality and Contemporary Feminist Theory' (Hemmings 1995a) accounts for bisexuality's contemporary relevance to sexual politics in terms of its relationship to feminism. I discuss the relationship between bisexuality and feminism as a source of tension in terms of the 1990 Bisexual Conference in Section Three, Part One of this chapter.

1972)<sup>278</sup> are very much a part of a narrative of contemporary bisexual community, despite their apparent lack of feminist politics.<sup>279</sup> Udis-Kessler's bias also means that she misrepresents the history of sites that were not explicitly feminist. She states that:

San Francisco, which later boasted some of the earliest political activism, was content at this point [in the late 1970s] to speak of the need to recognize and value the natural androgyny of people [... T]he overwhelming theme among these early bisexual organizations was human freedom and potential, a clear recall of early gay liberation statements. (Udis-Kessler 1995: 22)

As Highleyman points out, however, the Bisexual Center was 'from the start engaged in political activism', (Highleyman 1993: 1) educating on sexual health and forming coalitions with gay and lesbian community leaders throughout the 1970s. (Raymond and Highleyman 1995: 334)<sup>280</sup>

The Bisexual Center is worth a little closer scrutiny. Its founder, Maggi Rubenstein, describes her own difficulties 'coming out' as a bisexual in post-Stonewall San Francisco.

In those days I worked with gay, lesbian, transgender and heterosexual people in counseling, but not bisexual and I was troubled because I felt I was bisexual and I couldn't find anything about my orientation except what Kinsey had researched and written about. All the research has been flawed because we [bisexuals] have been left out. (Rubenstein, in Fung 1996: 34, parentheses in original)

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<sup>278</sup> The National Bisexual Liberation Group published what is probably the earliest bisexual newsletter *The Bisexual Expression*. (Highleyman 1993: 1)

<sup>279</sup> I too have concerns about the notion of 'sexual freedom', predicated as it often seems to be on an assumption of availability rather than choice. Many of my ideas concerning the politics of a 'desirable bisexual history' (including lesbian feminism, but not including 'swingers', for example) have been developed in discussion with Ann Kaloski.

<sup>280</sup> There is a very recent Bisexual Center Archive in San Francisco, which, unfortunately, I did not manage to gain access to. I did not know about the Bisexual Center on my first visit to San Francisco, and during my visit in 1997 the archive material was in the process of being catalogued and moved to the San Francisco Public Library. I am hoping to be able to use this archive source at a later date as a way of following up my interest in the development of bisexual movements in the 1960s and 1970s.



Rubenstein began to provide 'bisexual education' herself. As one of the founding members of San Francisco Sex Information (SFSI) in 1972, she insisted on a core bisexual component to the information and education provided. (Ibid) When the Bisexual Center was founded in 1976 by a group of about twenty people, (Lourea, in Tucker 1995b: 49) its central focus was on bisexual issues and politics, but it did not attempt to split itself off from the communities it was a part of:

We decided [...] it was going to be a bisexual center, but it wasn't going to limit itself to supporting bisexual rights only. It was going to support lesbian and gay rights, and all people's rights. There wasn't much on transgender issues then, so we weren't very sensitive to that in the early '70s, but we are much more sensitive to that now. We wanted to make this as far-reaching an organization as we could. We wanted the Bi Center to be a safe harbor for people to share without getting trashed. (Rubenstein, in Fung 1996: 35)

Thus, on June 30, 1977, the Bisexual Center held a press conference to speak out against Anita Bryant's and State Senator John Briggs' Proposition 6 which, if passed, would have barred homosexuals from being employed as schoolteachers in the California school system.<sup>281</sup> The Bisexual Center's press conference 'emphasized that gay concerns were also bisexual concerns.' (Hutchins and Ka'ahumanu 1991d: 361)

Despite such political initiatives, David Lourea<sup>282</sup> remarks that '[w]e were politically unaware and naive, hoping for acceptance. "We're nonthreatening. We're nondemanding"'. (Lourea, in Tucker 1995b: 49) Rubenstein summarises the Center's approach when she says that '[w]e were having a good time and we were also delighted that we were offering a service.' (Rubenstein, in Fung 1996: 35) The context for this political naïveté is a pre-HIV and AIDS San Francisco.

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<sup>281</sup> See footnote 249 for details of Proposition 6, or the Briggs Amendment.

<sup>282</sup> Lourea was an early San Francisco activist and founding member of the Bisexual Center.

The Bisexual Center brought together bisexual people from the group sex, heterosexual, lesbian and gay communities at a time of sexual exploration and freedom:

The late '60s and early '70s were exciting times. During the Sexual Freedom movement, swingers were exploring their sexuality and challenging the stereotypes within the context of group sex scenes. In the process, many people began to open up to bisexuality. If you were lying down blindfolded and a number of people were touching you, you couldn't tell whether they were male or female. . . . Oh! A light bulb goes on! Maybe there isn't a difference! (Lourea, in Tucker 1995b: 48)<sup>283</sup>

Lourea similarly connects the growth of interest in bisexuality to developments within San Francisco's SM community in the 1970s. As women made inroads into gay male SM scenes, so the question shifted from ' "Are you gay or straight?" ' to ' "Are you a top or a bottom?" ' (Ibid: 49)<sup>284</sup>

Despite this energy and activity, both Rubenstein and Lourea acknowledge that the lesbian and gay communities in San Francisco continued to marginalise bisexuals in the late 1970s: 'We kept giving our lifeblood, our energy, to gay and lesbian liberation, yet we were still being discounted.' (Ibid: 51) Lourea also notes that the local newspaper the *Bay Area Reporter* would frequently omit bisexual involvement in any given action or event, publishing letters of complaint from bisexuals under biased headings such as 'Bis *feel* left out'. (Ibid: 51, my italics)<sup>285</sup> The activists involved in the Bisexual Center were convinced that within a few years bisexuals would become accepted within the

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<sup>283</sup> Ann Kaloski makes a similar point about the 1960s in a UK context when she says: 'Something about the time did create new spaces for all kinds of behaviour [...] It was a time which challenged notions of gender and sexual orientation, and the relationships between bodies, genders and sexualities.' (Kaloski, in *Bi Academic Intervention* 1997a: 202)

<sup>284</sup> See my discussion of Pat Califia's article 'Gay Men, Lesbians, and Sex: Doing It Together', (Califia 1994a) in Chapter Three Section Two, Part Two.

<sup>285</sup> One of the main complaints of the organisers of the 1990 Bisexual Conference, too, was that the press did not publicise the event as fully as they might have done, even where Committee members sent press releases or articles themselves. (SCM: June 17, 1990) The *San Francisco Bay Times*, for example, did not print an article it had asked Ka'ahumanu to write for them. (SCM: June 3, 1990)

lesbian and gay and heterosexual communities, and that a widespread grass-roots bisexual movement, ‘probably larger than the gay movement’, (Ibid: 50) would flourish. Lourea notes wryly: ‘*That* was our naïveté.’ (Ibid, italics in original)

‘The 1980s’

Despite the optimism of its founders, the San Francisco Bisexual Center closed in 1984, shortly after BiPOL started in 1983.<sup>286</sup> The Center’s demise occurred as people gradually stopped using the service; its organisers eventually decided that the need for the Center no longer existed within the community. (Rubenstein, in Fung: 35) There are several possible explanations for the decline in the Center’s use. Firstly, at that time, San Francisco’s bisexual community base may not have been broad enough to support both BiPOL and the Bisexual Center. Secondly, members of the Center had become increasingly divided over the question of whether its function should be primarily social or political. These battles were never resolved. BiPOL was unequivocal about its political function from its inception, describing itself as a ‘progressive, feminist, political organization’, while it continued the Bisexual Center’s dedication to supporting the sexual freedom ‘of all people, regardless of age, gender or different abilities to explore and define openly their own sexual styles’. (BiPOL 1983)

Probably the central reason for the Center’s closure, however, was its continued emphasis on non-monogamy, group sex, and SM. Its closure in 1984 coincided with the peak of the early HIV and AIDS pandemic in San Francisco, when accurate sexual health information was still scarce, and AIDS was still

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<sup>286</sup> The Bisexual Forum of New York which had been running from 1975 as a social, educational and support group closed just prior to that in 1983: ‘Because of general burnout, changes in life circumstances, and lack of new leadership, the last official meeting took place in 1983.’ (Hutchins and Ka’ahumanu 1991d: 359-400) As in San Francisco, the bisexual movement in New York gained new energy in the mid-eighties, with the New York Area Bisexual Network (NYABN) and the Bisexual Political Action Committee (BIPAC) of NYABN in the mid- to late-1980s.

known as Gay Related Immuno-Deficiency (GRID).<sup>287</sup> The Center's borrowed slogan 'make love, not war' could no longer serve as a rallying cry in San Francisco in the early 1980s, when people were dying as a result of unsafe sexual practices that had not previously been considered dangerous. As Lourea argues, the increased

awareness of GRID and eventually AIDS [...meant that w]e pulled back from the Center. Suddenly there was something else; our energy *had* to shift into AIDS work. Because we had not nurtured and developed a strong group behind us, the Bi Center changed. (Lourea, in Tucker 1995: 54)

The response to AIDS changed not just the individual lives of bisexuals affected with the virus, but also the political map of bisexuality in relation to the rest of the queer community in San Francisco.<sup>288</sup> Again, Lourea: 'As horrible as it is, I think AIDS brought bisexuality out of the closet.' (Ibid: 54) Not only were bisexuals fighting for their lives in the 1980s, they were also struggling against the predominant stereotype of the bisexual as transmitter of AIDS from gay male to heterosexual or lesbian communities. (Rubenstein, in Weise 1997: 10)<sup>289</sup>

Although some bisexual activists from the 1970s, such as Donaldson, lament the shift away from an emphasis on the revolutionary power of a liberatory (bi)sexuality, and towards a more focused identity politics, (Donaldson 1995: 41)<sup>290</sup> the majority of Bisexual Center activists channelled their energy into

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<sup>287</sup> I.e. AIDS was considered by the medical establishment to be related to sexual identity rather than high risk behaviours at this time.

<sup>288</sup> Alan Rockway, Cynthia Slater and David Lourea, three of the founding members of BiPOL have since died of AIDS – Rockway and Slater before 1990, Lourea in 1992. (Ka'ahumanu 1995a)

<sup>289</sup> The fight against AIDS is still central to the US bisexual movement in the 1990s: 'The main focus of the bisexual movement has been and continues to be the visibility and liberation of all people. Currently and most urgently this is in our struggle against AIDS.' (Hutchins and Ka'ahumanu 1991c: 222)

<sup>290</sup> Although Donaldson associates the emphasis on sexual revolution with the Sexual Freedom League, other writers before and since make similar arguments. Herbert Marcuse, for example, argued in 1966 sexual freedom transforms the societal/sexual repression on which capitalism is founded. (Marcuse 1966.: xv-xxv) Transgressive sexual behaviour (i.e. behaviour invalidated by

the newly-formed BiPOL and, later, the Bay Area Bisexual Network (BABN), founded in 1987. (Rubenstein, in Fung 1996: 35; Hutchins and Ka'ahumanu 1991d: 363) David Lourea, for example, was one of the 1990 NBC organisers and a keynote speaker at the opening plenary. There are, in fact, strong connections between these two phases of bisexual political activism, even though the differences between those phases are strongly marked. The threads of 'sexual freedom' politics still operate in a 1990s San Francisco bisexual imaginary through the concern with an inclusive focus that is nevertheless politically directed. In a sense it is this desire for political inclusion that fuels the tensions in the search for a bisexual 'home', as I shall argue in Sections Two and Three of this chapter. If we write out 1970s bisexual history as apolitical and/or irrelevant to a contemporary bisexual movement, those connections may be lost, and the complexity of contemporary bisexual spaces over simplified.

BiPOL was politically active around HIV and AIDS issues from the start. In the Summer of 1983, it organised one of the first of many AIDS demonstrations in San Francisco, protesting outside the Haitian embassy at the arrest of fifty six gay and bisexual men in an AIDS panic in Haiti. (Hutchins and Ka'ahumanu 1991d: 362) AIDS awareness programs were developed that simultaneously critiqued the stereotyping and dangerous use of 'bisexual' in the existing literature, and raised the question of women as a potential risk-group. BiPOL never lost sight of the San Francisco bisexual movement's historical participation in the sexual freedom movement, however, emphasising sex-positivity instead of silence, shame and stigmatisation of particular identity

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normative society, including but not restricted to homosexuality) is therefore considered to be political activism in and of itself. Marjorie Garber adapts Marcuse in 1995 to make the case for bisexuality (rather than deviant sexuality more generally) as the repressed force on which society is built. See Chapter Three, Section One, Part Three for a discussion of Garber's belief that 'Bisexuality is that upon the repression of which society depends for its laws, codes, boundaries, social organization – everything that defines "civilization" as we know it.' (Garber 1995: 206)

groups, at a time when this was not a widely-favoured perspective. (Hutchins and Ka'ahumanu 1991d: 362) BiPOL activists shared bisexual-specific HIV/AIDS information at conferences, on committees, and at public gay cruising sites such as bathhouses and parks. BiPOL members contributed to the activism that defeated Proposition 102 in California, which would have made it mandatory for HIV+ people to report this information to the state authorities. (Stryker and Van Buskirk 1996:112)<sup>291</sup>

In 1985 BiPOL organised the first bisexual contingent to take part in the Lesbian and Gay Freedom Parade (Figure 48). This first attempt to carve out a separate bisexual space within the march was highly successful. Hutchins was dressed as Janis Joplin, with a sign displaying Joplin's famous quote: ' "Don't compromise yourself, it's all you've got!" ' (Hutchins and Ka'ahumanu 1991b: xv) Other members of the contingent carried signs such as 'Bi Cuspids, Bi Focals, Bi All Means. Lani [Ka'ahumanu] was Bi and Large.' (Ibid)<sup>292</sup> The energy of that event is typified by the humour with which anti-bisexual feeling from onlookers of the march was handled: 'We held up wooden BiPhobia Shields to the sidewalk crowds whenever they booed us for being bold enough to proclaim ourselves bi in a gay crowd.' (Ibid)

BiPOL's high profile in the mid- to late 1980s resulted in rapid growth of the San Francisco bisexual community. By 1989 there was enough support to allow several different bisexual groups to flourish in the San Francisco Bay Area, including (in addition to BiPOL) the umbrella group BABN, BiFriendly (a regular social group meeting in restaurants and cafés in San Francisco), and

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<sup>291</sup> Proposition 102 was sponsored by US Representative William Dannemyer in 1988.

<sup>292</sup> Hutchins and Ka'ahumanu first met at this event, where Ka'ahumanu placed the seed of the first US bisexual anthology *Bi Any Other Name: Bisexual People Speak Out* (Hutchins and Ka'ahumanu 1991) in Hutchins' mind. (Hutchins and Ka'ahumanu 1991b: xv-xvi)

Figure 48. The Bisexual Contingent at the 1985 San Francisco Freedom Day Parade. (Stryker and Buskirk 1996: 109, date error in original)



several university campus bisexual groups in the Bay Area.<sup>293</sup> The political growth of the San Francisco bisexual community in the 1980s in response to the AIDS pandemic means it sees itself as politically and socially allied to the city's lesbian and gay communities, whose population has also been decimated by the virus. The San Francisco bisexual community has very little contact with white heterosexual community. Rubenstein reasons that: 'Sometimes it has been easier and more comfortable to hang out with the gay and lesbian community and push for out rights there than to buck the mainstream.' (Rubenstein, in Weise 1997: 10)

Despite this queer emphasis, however, gay and lesbian communities in San Francisco have not fully recognised the bisexual community's contribution to and investment in queer culture and politics. Susan Stryker and Jim Van Buskirk argue that it is only

in the late 1980s, with the organization of the Bay Area Bisexual Network (BABN) and BiPol, [sic] a political action committee, [that] the issue of bisexuality gain[ed] widespread visibility in the 'monosexual' queer community. (Stryker and Buskirk 1996: 106-7)

Although bisexual visibility has increased in queer communities in the late 1980s, I would not say that it is 'widespread'. Despite bisexuals' high profile role in fighting ignorance about HIV and AIDS in San Francisco, and the ever-mounting death toll of bisexuals, gay and lesbian activists frequently fail to acknowledge the extent of bisexual investment in this struggle. On January 31, 1989, for example, ACT UP San Francisco organised a roadblock of the Golden Gate Bridge in protest at the apathy towards and violence against HIV+ people and People With Aids, handing out these flyers to car drivers:

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<sup>293</sup> BABN and BiFriendly were involved in the organisation of the 1990 conference, which was spearheaded by BiPOL. All three groups are still running at the time of writing (April 1998).



We are gay men and lesbians who see our community being devastated by the AIDS epidemic. We are straight and bisexual people who are involved in the fight against AIDS. (reproduced in Stryker and Van Buskirk 1996:114)

What is notable about the language in this flyer is its alignment of straight and bisexual people as allies 'involved in the fight against AIDS'. There is no acknowledgement that bisexuals 'see [their] community being devastated by the AIDS epidemic' too. This elision of bisexuals indicates either a lack of belief that there is such a thing as bisexual community, and/or a refusal to acknowledge the extent of the effects of AIDS on bisexuals. Stryker and Buskirk's work in *Gay by the Bay* also reflects a characteristic lack of familiarity with bisexual issues. They include just one and a half pages on bisexual involvement in San Francisco's lesbian and gay communities, failing to document bisexual involvement in AIDS work or the 1990 NBC. (Ibid)<sup>294</sup> Bisexual invisibility within queer communities is thus compounded by scarce and often inaccurate information.

#### 'Bisexual Landmarks'

The seeds of the 1990 NBC were not just sown in San Francisco. Bisexual groups and organising were increasing on the East Coast of the US during the 1980s too.<sup>295</sup> BBWN was founded in 1982 by eight women, and has moved

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<sup>294</sup> Stryker and Van Buskirk's ignorance is evidenced by their dating of the inception of BiPol [sic] as 'the late 1980s', (Ibid) rather than 1983. The general lack of bisexual history in this book may be due to the fact that Stryker and Van Buskirk's primary research was conducted at the GLHSNC. See footnote 244 for details of my own difficulty researching bisexuality here.

<sup>295</sup> The growth of bisexual groups in the US is not restricted to either coast, of course. Weise writes that '[s]ince the early 1980s, other bi groups, both women's and men's, have emerged across the country. Some of the strongest are in Seattle, Los Angeles, Washington D.C., Philadelphia, Santa Cruz and Chicago.' (Weise 1992a: xiii) The Seattle Bisexual Women's Network (SBWN), founded in 1986, was particularly involved in establishing the NBN.

from strength to strength.<sup>296</sup> By 1987, BBWN had over fifty members, an autonomous newsletter (*Bi Women*),<sup>297</sup> and a mailing list of almost a thousand women in US, Canada and Europe. (Weise *et al* 1987: 10)<sup>298</sup> The East Coast Bisexual Network (ECBN), a regional umbrella group, was founded in 1985 to facilitate communication between various East Coast bisexual groups and individuals, and began holding a regular regional conference. In May 1987, ECBN hosted its fourth ‘Conference on Bisexuality’ in New York City, where Rubenstein gave the keynote address, (Ibid) and which attracted over one hundred and fifty people from fifteen states. (Ibid) During that conference, the need for a National Bisexual Network was established, and plans were made for ECBN to sponsor a National Bisexual Contingent to the 1987 March on Washington for Gay and Lesbian Rights. (‘Call to Bisexuals’ 1987; Hutchins and Ka’ahumanu 1991d: 365)

As the largest group in the area, BBWN organised this National Bisexual Contingent. Viewing the contingent as an opportunity to organise bisexuals nationally, BBWN constructed the event as *the* starting point for a national bisexual movement. Before the 1987 March on Washington, BBWN distributed a flyer, ‘Call to Bisexuals’, the last lines of which read:

Witness the birth of a national bisexual movement in Washington on October 11<sup>th</sup>! Whatever the size of the Bisexual Contingent, it will be a proud contingent. You can count on it. We’ll be waiting for you. (BBWN 1987)

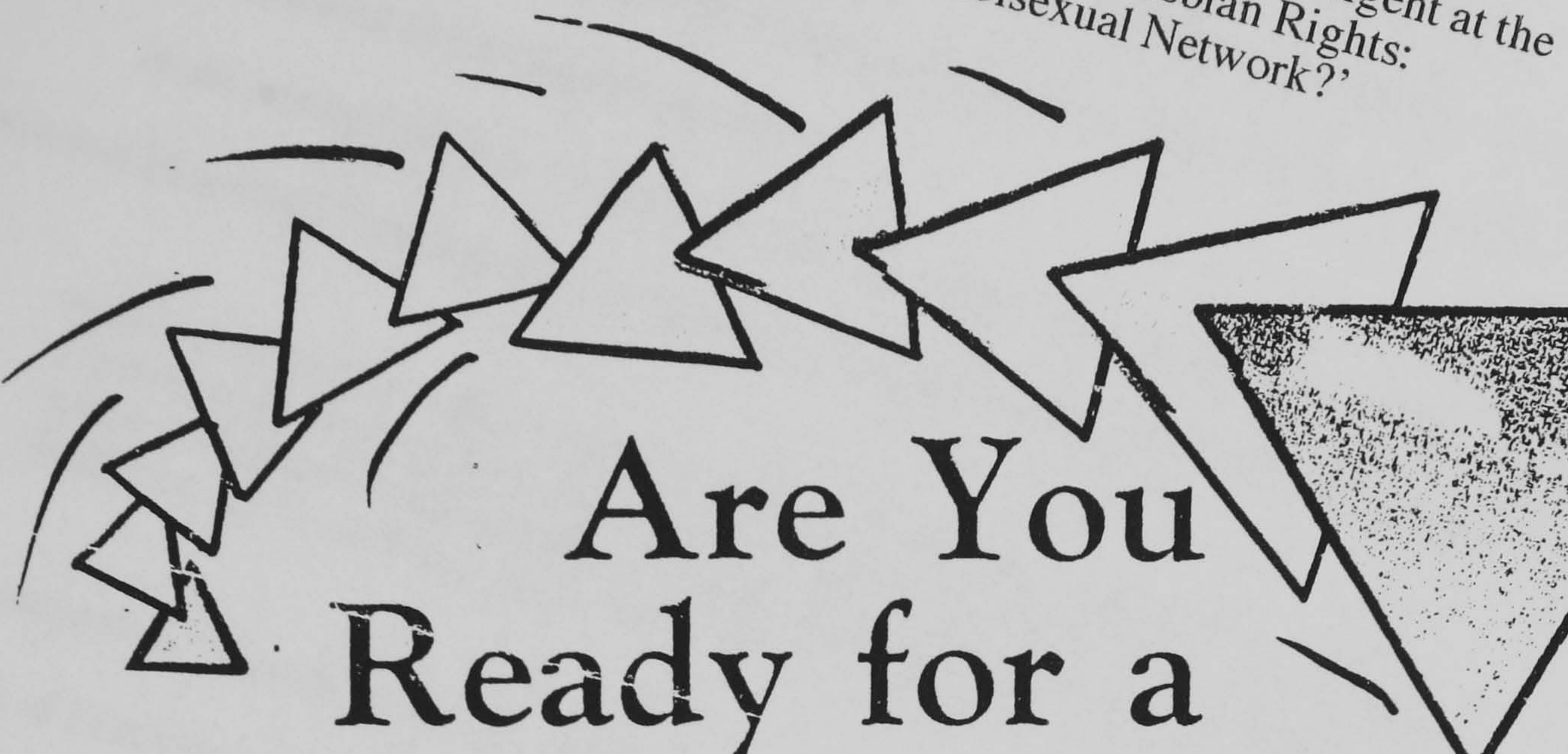
During and after the March, BBWN handed out copies of the flyer, ‘Are We Ready for a National Bisexual Network?’, (BBWN 1987a; Figure 49) which had

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<sup>296</sup> Weise writes that ‘BBWN had its beginnings in 1982 at a lesbian discussion group the night it tackled the issue of bisexuality. Some of the women who attended that discussion went on to start a bi women’s support group the BiVocals, and then BBWN.’ (Weise 1992a: xiii)

<sup>297</sup> *Bi Women* is still published regularly today (April 1998).

Figure 49. Flyer distributed by the National Bisexual Contingent at the 1987 March on Washington for Gay and Lesbian Rights: 'Are You Ready for a National Bisexual Network?'



# Are You Ready for a National Bisexual Network?

In October, bisexual men and women from all over the country travelled to D.C. to march with the National Bisexual Contingent for the March on Washington for Gay & Lesbian Rights. The Fourth Annual Conference on Bisexuality, produced by the East Coast Bisexual Network in May, was attended by some 250 bi's from 16 states. For some of us, these two recent events clearly demonstrate the need for a National Bisexual Network, a political body that would facilitate communication and political action among the 20+ bi networks that already exist nationwide. The potential for such a network is enormous. The question is whether the bisexual movement in America has gained enough momentum to drive a national network.

The increased visibility of bisexuals both within the straight world and the gay and lesbian community is inevitable. More and more bisexuals are coming to realize that unless we promote and protect our rights to live and love the way we want to, nobody else will. Gays and lesbians are years ahead of us in their organized struggle for liberation, and our liberation has been enhanced through their efforts. However, gay issues and bi issues are not identical. We need our own movement to serve our own emotional and political needs.

Now is the time to assess those needs. Would you like to see the founding of a National Bisexual Network? What should a national network do to foster bi awareness and activism? What actions or events should it undertake? Should it perform an educational function? Do we need to educate ourselves, heterosexuals, gays & lesbians,

politicians, the media, the Pope, all of the above? How could a national network best serve the bi community?

Those of us who organize regionally know what it's like to work for networks with large mailing lists and tiny member participation. A national network would fail in its mission to represent bi's without active participation from different regions and different *kinds* of bi's. A handful of people cannot mobilize a whole country. What role would YOU be willing to play in a National Bisexual Network? Would you be willing to serve as a regional representative on a National Steering Committee? Would you contribute to or edit a newsletter? Would you travel, perhaps a long distance, to attend a bi conference? Would you give money? A lot? The Big Question: would your involvement in a National Bi Network be limited to being on the mailing list? Besides assessing our needs, we must also assess our collective energy and the strength of our commitment.

Perhaps the idea of a National Bi Network is premature. Perhaps we should take stock again two years from now, or five years from now. On the other hand, perhaps the time is NOW!

ARE YOU READY FOR A NATIONAL BISEXUAL NETWORK?  
WHAT ARE YOU WILLING TO DO??

Start by filling out this handy coupon. Mail it to: National Bisexual Network, c/o Bi-Pol, 584 Castro Street, Box #422, San Francisco, CA 94114. Feel free to check off more than one of the boxes below.

The growth of BBWN is also documented in Hutchins and Ka'ahumanu 1991d: 360, and by Ochs (prominent East Coast bisexual activist) in a personal retrospective. (Ochs 1991)

BiPOL San Francisco's P.O. Box number on it. Recipients of the flyer were encouraged to detach and return the bottom section of the flyer to BiPOL, state their opinion about the feasibility of a National Bisexual Network, and commit themselves to some form of participation.<sup>299</sup>

In an article for *Gay Community News*, one of the organisers of the National Bisexual Contingent, Liz Nania, writes retrospectively of the event as:

surely one of the finest moments in bisexual history. Gutsy bisexuals [converged] from about twenty state, women and men with the courage and conviction to affirm their identity before more than half a million lesbians, gays, and gay-rights advocates. (Nania 1987: 5)<sup>300</sup>

Nania continues: 'Sunday morning marked the beginning of the first ever gathering of bisexual women and men from all over the country'. (Ibid) In fact, the ECBN Conference on Bisexuality in May held in New York City had *also* been a gathering of bisexuals from all over the country. Nania's claim is probably less an example of historical amnesia than it is the manifestation of her own (and a shared) desire for the National Bisexual Contingent on October 11<sup>th</sup> in Washington DC to be particularly significant, and to lead to a cohesive National Bisexual Network. Nania continues:

Although the March weekend couldn't have been more beautiful and empowering, the important question remains: *How do we use this experience?* [... F]or you bisexuals out there, read your local gay papers and watch for the new and expanded gay and lesbian projects that the March generated and take part as an OUT bisexual. Participate in the formation of the new National Bisexual Network. (Ibid)

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<sup>299</sup> BBWN had decided that BiPOL was the only national bisexual group large enough and established enough to co-ordinate a nation-wide response to the flyer.

<sup>300</sup> It is, of course, highly appropriate that this event – widely viewed as the beginning of the formation of the NBN – takes place within the context of lesbian and gay community and activism, setting the tone for the queer focus of national and regional bisexual politics in the late 1980s and the 1990s.

Lucy Friedland similarly marks the importance of the National Bisexual Contingent in the 1987 March on Washington in a letter written for *Sojourner* almost a year later:

You may ask ‘What’s so hugely important about 100 bisexuals?’<sup>301</sup> [...] I sense that in order for these 100 people to participate meaningfully in the March they *had* to march in a bisexual contingent [...] In the continuing ‘march’ towards gay liberation, bis cannot be left behind. We cannot leave bi liberation in the hands of gay liberationists. (Friedland 1988: 3, italics in original)

The 1987 National Bisexual Contingent is consistently marked as a turning point in bisexual history. This key bisexual space is formed within lesbian and gay territory, but also functions as a sign of a future, separate bisexual space.<sup>302</sup> The event emerges as a pivotal moment in the early formation of a contemporary US bisexual imaginary.

Within four months of the October 1987 March on Washington, BiPOL had received over one hundred and fifty responses to the ‘Are You Ready for a National Bisexual Network?’ flyer, and more than \$500 towards costs. (Hutchins and Ka’ahumanu 1991d: 366; Ka’ahumanu 1995a)<sup>303</sup> The feedback from the flyer was overwhelmingly in favour of establishing a National Bisexual Network, and by February 18, 1988 Ka’ahumanu and Autumn Courtney<sup>304</sup> were able to distribute a national mailing:

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<sup>301</sup> Clyde Dillard of Bi-Ways, Washington DC, sets the number at fewer than 50. (Dillard 1987: 2)

<sup>302</sup> The Bisexual Contingent at the 1987 March on Washington was also personally significant for individual bisexuals. Matthew le Grant talks of ‘march[ing] proudly with the NATIONAL BISEXUAL NETWORK contingent’ (le Grant 1991: 209) and relates this to what he sees as ‘the last major step in my own personal coming out process.’ (Ibid: 208)

<sup>303</sup> The bisexual group from Washington DC, Bi-Ways, also sent a nine-page ‘Manifesto’, with a postscript suggesting possible logos for the Network.

<sup>304</sup> Autumn Courtney was one of the main organisers of both the NBN and the 1990 Conference, and a member of BiPOL.

Dear Nascent National Bisexual Networkers:

Yes we are ready! Yes we will go for it. Yes, from one low key flyer you responded from all over the USA. Yes, we're making history [...] It's time to COME OUT as a movement! (Ka'ahumanu and Courtney 1988)<sup>305</sup>

The mailing asked networkers to prioritise the aims of the Network, and included the first written mention of the 1990 NBC: 'Would it be possible to attend a conference in June, 1990 during Lesbian/Gay Pride Week and march as a contingent in the Parade? Who would seriously think about attending?' (Ibid) The most sustained responses to Ka'ahumanu and Courtney's questionnaire came from groups in Boston, Seattle, Washington DC, and North Carolina.

(Ka'ahumanu, Courtney and Weise<sup>306</sup> 1988)<sup>307</sup> Individual enthusiasm proved difficult to maintain, however, and decisions about the structure of the Network were repeatedly postponed. Eventually, 'nascent-network' members were advised that: 'The North American Bisexual Network In-Formation will (hopefully) hammer out the final statement of purpose and by-laws at the [1990 International Bisexual C]onference<sup>308</sup> to form a fully fledged organization.'

(Ka'ahumanu, Courtney and Weise 1988a) There were two subsequent national mailings to the Network members prior to the Conference. The first, sent in April 1989, functioned primarily as a vehicle to distribute the Call for Workshops and Performers for the Conference, and to reinforce the decision that: 'This is where the NABN [North American Bisexual Network] will give birth to itself.'

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<sup>305</sup> This mailing included selected responses to the original flyer, a summary of organisational suggestions (e.g. establishing a newsletter, steering committee and yearly conference, and continuing to work within national gay and lesbian organisations), and a list of purposes (e.g. networking, creation of national statement of purpose, dissemination of information, and combining resources). (Ibid) This mailing is reproduced in Appendix II.

<sup>306</sup> By the second mailing in June 1988, Weise (from SBWN) had joined Ka'ahumanu and Courtney as co-ordinators of the 'Nascent North American Bisexual Network-in-formation'. (Ibid)

<sup>307</sup> See Appendix II for these groups' proposals with respect to the formation of the National Network.

(Ka'ahmunu and Courtney 1989) The second, sent in October 1989, was a proposal for the structure of NABN from the 'North American Bisexual Network working group of the 1990 San Francisco Conference on Bisexuality Committee'.<sup>309</sup> The 1990 NBC, then, was explicitly conceived of as a space to mark the inception of the national bisexual movement.

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<sup>308</sup> This title was later amended to the 1990 National Bisexual Conference, given that its organising was entirely US-based.

<sup>309</sup> This committee was comprised of Weise, Andrew Murray and Lisa Moore of SBWN and BiPOL. See Appendix II for the text of this proposal.

## Section Two: Bisexual Stonewalling: the 1990 National Bisexual Conference Space

The 1990 NBC itself was simply titled ‘Celebrate!’ (BiPOL 1990)<sup>310</sup> It began on Wednesday evening with an opening reception at the Mission High School, and ended on Saturday evening with a closing ritual, following the report on the ‘Official Formation of the National Bisexual Network’ that afternoon. There was a social event each evening of the Conference: Thursday, ‘An Evening Celebrating Bisexuality: The Third Path’; Friday, ‘Clean and Sober Get Acquainted Social’, in honour of the Bisexual People of Color Caucus; and Saturday, to end the Conference, the ‘Free Clean and Sober Dance’. Every lunchtime delegates could participate in the NBN Committee meetings, the ‘open mic’ performances, or a bisexual 12-step meeting.<sup>311</sup> The three-day program included six general assemblies and six workshop spaces. Workshops were grouped into eleven tracks – People of Color, Feminist, Androgyny and Gender, Writing/Publishing, Sexuality, Relationships, Therapy, AIDS, Spirituality, Political, and Coming Out – with the number of workshops varying from two in the Spirituality track, to thirteen in the AIDS track.<sup>312</sup> In total four hundred and thirty nine delegates attended the conference over the three days,<sup>313</sup> compared to

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<sup>310</sup> All details of the conference in this paragraph are taken from BiPOL’s Conference Brochure. There are no page numbers in this text.

<sup>311</sup> 12-step programs were made famous in the US by Alcoholics Anonymous, but there is now a 12-step group for almost any addiction or difficulty. They are self-help groups that invoke the notion of a ‘spirit’ to guide you through the 12-steps to ‘recovery’. See Chapter Two, Section One for a discussion of sobriety and queer community in the 1980s and 1990s in the Northampton context.

<sup>312</sup> The emphasis on bisexuality and AIDS at the Conference highlights the influence of its San Francisco location. Ka’ahumanu remarks that when she went to a bisexual conference in Boston in 1989 and spoke about AIDS ‘nobody in the Boston area had had anyone they knew die of AIDS. By that time in ’89, I had stopped counting [... ] In San Francisco [...] some of our leadership had died of AIDS already’. (Ka’ahumanu 1995: 10) The 1990 National Bisexual Conference coincided with the 1990 International AIDS Conference also being held in San Francisco. (GLHSNC General Files, 1990) The centrality of AIDS was also marked by the presence on the main stage of the auditorium of three panels from the AIDS Memorial Quilt commemorating members of the bisexual community who had died of AIDS. (BiPOL 1990, SCM: January 21, 1990)

<sup>313</sup> 66.3% of attendees were from California, 71.5% of which were from the San Francisco Bay Area (which includes San Francisco, Berkeley, Oakland and San Jose); 7.7% were from Massachusetts (mostly Boston); 4.3% from New York; 3.9% from Washington State (mostly



Figure 50. Advertisement for the 1990 [Bi]/Lesbian/Gay Freedom Day Parade and Celebration, San Francisco, Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> June. (BiPOL 1990)

# **"7-8-9-10, We Love Women, We Love Men!"**

**1990(BI)/LESBIAN/GAY FREEDOM DAY PARADE & CELEBRATION**  
**"The Future Is Ours"**



**The largest gay pride parade featuring the largest Bi marching contingent in the world begins at 11:00am at Spear & Market Streets and ends at the Civic Center.**

**Check the Conference Information Board for Bi Marching Contingent Information.**

**This will be a Bistoric event! Let's all march together and proclaim our diversity, our strength, our numbers, our PRIDE!  
 A Motorized Cable Car will be available.**

**"Come On Now, Let's Hear You Shout  
 Bisexuals Come On Out!"**

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Seattle); and 4.1% from overseas (Australia, Canada, England and Scotland), 55.5% of which were from England and Scotland. (Finance and Logistics Committee 1989-1990)

the pre-Conference estimate of one hundred and twenty five delegates.

(Ka'ahumanu 1995: 2)

In keeping with the positioning of the 1990 Conference as *the* pivotal event in the creation and consolidation of bisexual community and identity, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors officially proclaimed June 23, 1990 'Bisexual Pride Day in San Francisco'. (Hutchins and Ka'ahumanu 1991d: 366; McPherson 1990) The Bisexual Contingent for the '1990 [Bi]/Lesbian/Gay Freedom Day Parade and Celebration' (BiPOL 1990, parentheses in original) was marked in advance as historic in its advertisement in the Bisexual Conference Brochure (Figure 50):

The largest gay pride parade featuring the largest Bi marching contingent in the world begins at 11:00am at Spear and Market Streets and ends at the Civic Center [...] This will be a Bistoric event! Let's all march together and proclaim our diversity, our strength,<sup>314</sup> our numbers, our PRIDE! (Ibid)<sup>315</sup>

The significance of the 1990 Conference for a linear narrative of bisexual history is also emphasised throughout the Conference Brochure whose opening 'welcome' paragraph reads:

Just as Stonewall marked the crystalization of the gay and lesbian liberation movement, so does this Conference mark the beginning of the coalescing of our bisexual community. This is an historic occasion which will shape the growth of bisexuals across the nation. We are here to celebrate our strength as a community and as a people. Through discovering the diversity and the talents of each other, we can realize our

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<sup>314</sup> This conjunction of 'diversity' and 'strength' pre-empts the alternative theme of the 1991 Pride March theme in Northampton: 'Unity is Our Power, Diversity Our Strength'. See Chapter Two, Section One, Part One.

<sup>315</sup> Before the occurrence of either the Conference or the March, the former is already being written about as precipitating the 'largest Bi marching contingent in the world' at the latter. The bisexual contingent at the Parade was, indeed, the largest ever, with one estimate that there were two hundred and fifty participants, (Christina 1990: 8) and another that there were over three hundred. (Highleyman 1990: 4)

true power. It is through the National Bisexual Network that we can be connected to our history and our community. (BiPOL 1990)<sup>316</sup>

Once again, bisexual history is placed in relation to a lesbian and gay context – the Stonewall Riots of 1969 in New York City<sup>317</sup> – and simultaneously detached from that history. Bisexuals now have their own founding moment in the 1990 National Bisexual Conference. One major difference between the two events paralleled here, of course, is that the Stonewall Riots were a local (and then national) reaction to homophobic violence, whereas the 1990 NBC is a pre-planned event emphasising unity and celebration with (as far as I know) no casualties. Unlike other identity movements of this century – the Suffrage Movement, the Black Civil Right Movement, and the Lesbian and Gay Movement, to name but three – this founding moment in bisexual history is not born from a mass public response to violence and oppression, but from a conscious desire for unity, for a community and movement to give the term ‘bisexual’ contemporary political meaning.

This vision of bisexual unity could also be seen in terms of a later twentieth century understanding of bisexual marketability. As Donaldson notes, the solidification of bisexual identity could be seen as ‘an attempt to create an exploitable bisexual market along the lines of the rapidly growing gay and lesbian markets, and even to seduce consumers away from them.’ (Donaldson 1995: 42)

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<sup>316</sup> The local press response to the Conference endorses this parallel. Sarah Murray writes in the *San Francisco Sentinel* that ‘more than 400 bisexuals from as far away as Boston and Great Britain converged on Mission High School to see what a bisexual movement might look like’. (Murray 1990: 13) In an article aptly titled ‘Conference Marks Bisexuals’ Stonewall’, Carol Queen is cited as saying: ‘We’re thinking of this as our Stonewall 20 years later’, (Queen, in McPherson 1990: 22) and Greta Christina confirms that ‘[r]eferences to Stonewall were commonplace’ (Christina 1990: 8) throughout the Conference.

<sup>317</sup> It is important to note, however, that ‘Stonewall’ as the founding moment of gay culture is a contested event within lesbian and gay history. George Chauncey, for example, has beautifully documented New York’s vibrant and visible homosexual community in the early twentieth century, in *Gay New York*, (Chauncey 1994) and Warren Blumenfeld and Diane Raymond write that ‘at least one hundred years prior to the Stonewall Riots there was a healthy, homosexual rights movement’. (Blumenfeld and Raymond 1993: 276)

In these terms, the 1990 NBC could be seen as the promotion of bisexual culture and products (from safer sex to T-shirts) as well as the creation of the contemporary bisexual consumer who will buy such products.<sup>318</sup> The Bisexual Conference Committee certainly understand the power of self-publicity. The Conference was professionally filmed for a two-hour video, (SCM: June 3, 1990) and many of the conference workshops were audio-taped; the Conference was bound to be a saleable historical memory.<sup>319</sup> This marketing of bisexuality is one possible context from within which to read any discussion of bisexual inclusion and exclusion in the Conference space.

### **Part One: Bisexual Differences**

As well as providing a historic bisexual landmark, the 1990 Conference Committee sought to create a sense of 'home' for the four hundred plus delegates in attendance. Marking the Conference experience as having been one of safe refuge from a biphobic outside world, Ka'ahumanu exclaims at the final assembly: ' "Standing here today, I feel like I've clicked my heels three times and come home." ' (Ka'ahumanu, in Christina 1990: 48) The Conference was the first time some delegates had met another bisexual person, let alone several hundred. (Ka'ahumanu 1995: 11) The emotional connections among delegates were heartfelt, and the 'hidden stories, the secret stories, the untold stories of our community' (Hutchins, in Murray 1990: 13) formed the 'constant backdrop' (Ibid) to the Conference. Throughout the three days regular emphasis is placed

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<sup>318</sup> See the 'Editors' Roundtable' in *The Bisexual Imaginary* for a brief discussion of this aspect of UK and US bisexual culture. (Bi Academic Intervention 1997a: 205)

<sup>319</sup> Of course, the advertising strategies of the Committee mean that the Conference is effectively easier to research than any other. I am only too aware of my own gains as a researcher as a result of these strategies.

on the relationship among the larger bisexual community (both present and in process), regional groups, and individual bisexuals.<sup>320</sup>

The opening plenary session of the Conference was planned as a way of dramatising this individual-community relationship. People on stage and in the audience were primed to stand up and say their name, and two things about themselves: for example, 'I'm Lani Ka'ahumanu; I'm a lesbian-identified bisexual; and I'm a parent'. (Ka'ahumanu 1995: 12) The process was then opened up to the audience.

And so then there was all of a sudden people standing up on stage, all different kinds of bisexuals, it was mind-boggling [...] So people started coming forward and saying, 'I'm blah-blah, and I'm from a small town in Ireland, I'm a school teacher and I'm a bisexual too.' It was [...] so moving, because people were from all over, people couldn't stop cheering and screaming. (Ibid)

The desired sense of bisexual home is, thus, achieved by an appeal to and emphasis on diversity within the bisexual community. The Conference space is planned as one in which any and every bisexual can see herself represented and catered for. A draft of the Conference Statement of Purpose opens with these words:

This conference will bring together bisexuals of all colors, classes, ages, abilities,///etc. who are community organizers, scholars, artists, regular folks to share our experience, theories, strategies, skills, artistic expression and our history. (Conference Statement of Purpose n.d., text as in original)

The Conference Committee demonstrated their commitment to this ideal of an inclusive bisexual home through a number of important practical measures.

Conference Committee members attended disability/access awareness training

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<sup>320</sup> Thus, the general assembly meetings that took place twice a day alternated between providing a space for individual testimony, local group histories and discussions of a larger bisexual

before the Conference, (Ibid: 7, SCM: June 5, 1989)<sup>321</sup> and Conference presenters were ‘strongly encouraged’ to make their workshops as ‘inclusionary’ as possible. (SCM: January 21, 1990) The People of Color Caucus was planned in November 1989, (SCM: November 19, 1989) and met several times before the actual Conference. (SCM: March 3, 1990, March 18, 1990, April 22, 1990) American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters were booked for hearing-impaired individuals and for the plenary assemblies, and Conference signs were printed large and bold for partially-sighted delegates. Advertising was in English and Spanish. Childcare arrangements at the Conference were prepared well in advance, with a budget of \$1000 set aside for this purpose. (Ka’ahumanu 1995: 6) Registration was on a sliding scale and waived for those attending from overseas. (Ibid)

At the Conference itself organisers attempted to make the spaces as open as possible. Delegates were asked not to use scented products to protect those with Environmental Illness (EI), and most of the social spaces were alcohol and smoke-free zones. (BiPOL 1990) Wheelchair access to the Conference site itself was limited, however, with only one lift; most of the sessions took place on the second floor. (Ka’ahumanu 1995: 8) As well as the People of Color Caucus, a Special Needs Caucus met during the Conference and a ‘Special Needs’ page was included in the Conference Brochure, drawing delegates attention to each other’s needs and to the ‘shape’ of the Conference space (Figure 51).

Ka’ahumanu makes the salient point that whatever the designs of the Conference organisers, many delegates with special needs discovered that their requirements were not being respected. (Ibid: 9) The Conference Committee’s extended efforts

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movement. (BiPOL 1990)

<sup>321</sup> Ka’ahumanu relates how the sight-impaired leader of the Committee training on disability awareness could not find the training room because the writing on a note that had been left for her with instructions was too small. (Ka’ahumanu 1995: 7) Although this was a painful (and

to make the 1990 Conference space accessible in a variety of ways are laudable, however, and most participants acknowledge this in the Conference evaluation sheets. (NBC Evaluation Sheets 1990)

This practical attention to bisexual differences at the 1990 Conference is secured by a rhetorical, ideological thread of the notion of unity running through the plenary speeches, published materials and Conference 'vision'. Naomi Tucker opens the Conference with her jubilant declaration: 'This is the bisexual harmonic convergence!' (BiPOL 1990a: tape 1) Ka'ahumanu argues that an overarching notion of 'bisexual home' needs to be created at the Conference, so that delegates can return to their various geographical homes with a strong sense of their own position within a larger bisexual movement. (Ka'ahumanu 1995: 11) The sense of Conference unity was envisioned as a mechanism to generate sufficient energy within individuals and regional groups for the conception of other regional bisexual spaces:

we wanted to get across to people, and talked about this from the stage quite a bit, [...] that we recognize that [...] you're going to have to go home, and you're going to crash. We're going to crash [... W]e talked a lot about the early days when it was only [...] six of us or seven of us [in San Francisco] doing these wild things [...] making the community look very big, even though it wasn't. And we talked a lot about that [...] emphasizing the organizing. (Ibid)

The tone in the conference workshops was, similarly, of a bisexual group unity formed through its internal diversity. At his session, 'Bisexuals as an Ethnic Minority', (Gutierrez 1990) Fernando Gutierrez makes a case for viewing bisexuals as having a distinct history, and stresses that we need to 'create [our] own sense of sameness and continuity as bisexuals', to 'create culture for ourselves in the here and now.' (Gutierrez 1990: tape 1)<sup>322</sup> And at his workshop,

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embarrassing) lesson to learn, Ka'ahumanu also notes that the incident illustrated to skeptical Committee members the importance of disability access and awareness. (Ibid)

<sup>322</sup> Gutierrez also confirms the status of the Conference as a historical landmark suggesting that bisexuals 'are making history [...] by participating in this Conference'. (Ibid)

Figure 51. 'Special Needs' page of the 1990 National Bisexual Conference Brochure. (BiPOL 1990)

## ▼ SPECIAL NEEDS ▼

The 1990 National Bisexual Conference Organizers are committed to making this Conference as accessible as possible for every person who wants to attend, including many who have historically been excluded from significant events in our community.

For those with special needs, the Conference is providing valet parking; large-print site maps, ASL (CSC) interpreters; refrigeration for medications and special diets; rest areas; first aid; an accessible message board, wheelchair accessibility for the Conference and all Conference sponsored events; smoke-free Conference site and scent-free areas; environmentally "safe" bathrooms and environmentally "safe" soaps in all bathrooms. Please note: "Safe" is only a relative term in the world of environmental sensitivities, hence the quotation marks!

### SOME PEOPLE AT THE CONFERENCE WILL BE WEARING ARM BANDS:

**Lavendar:** designates people with EI  
**Blue:** designates Special Needs Monitors  
**Red:** designates First Aid Monitors  
**Green:** designates Steering Committee

#### Special Needs Services & Where To Locate Them

**Special Needs ( AIDS/ARC/PWA; Blind/Sight Impaired; Deaf/Hearing Impaired; Environmental Illness; Mobility) Registration Table (front lobby)**

**Wheelchair Accessible entrance, ramps and bathrooms throughout (see map, marked with signs)**

**Large Print Message Board (Front Lobby)**

**Large Print Maps & Programs (Special Needs Registration Table)**

**ASL Interpreters (Special Needs Registration Table)**

**Special Needs Seating (Auditorium, Classrooms)**

**EI & WA Access Bathrooms (2nd floor, follow the signs)**

**Special Needs Resting Space (Room #225; includes refrigerator for medications or special diets)**

**Personal Assistance at Elevator**

**Some wheelchairs available at elevator exits**

**Volunteer Psychotherapists on Call (First Aid Room & Info Central in front lobby)**

**Valet parking of your vehicle. Differently Aabled parking set aside behind the high school**

### SPECIAL NOTES:

Because Mission High is an old building, we can't make it 100% safe for every person who has EI, but each of us can help make it possible for MANY people with EI to attend this Conference by making our bodies and clothing EI "safe."

We request that before coming, NO ONE USE any scented products such as scented deodorant, soap, shampoo, oils ("natural" or otherwise), lotions, perfumes, dryer fabric sheets or any other scented products.

During the Conference, please refrain from chewing gum or candy and wear clothing that has been washed since exposure to pets.

There will be separate auditorium seating for people with EI, and they have the option of wearing lavender armbands so that they are identifiable to people who are not EI safe.

### NO SMOKING

Many people with EI suffer prolonged, severe reactions to smoke which clings to clothing and hair. Therefore, we ask smokers to refrain from smoking to the extent that you can and no smoking on Mission High School grounds.

We realize that at a large Conference such as this we may not be aware of a particular need you might have. Please feel free to request assistance from monitors wearing blue armbands. Talk to us when you register. Come directly to the Special Needs/First Aid Room at any time throughout the day.

**Please Help Make This A Safe, Co-operative & Accessible Conference!**



'Labels: Can't Live With Them, Can't Live Without Them', Michael Beer proposes that:

Either we can take the established route of creating just another ghetto [...] Or we can take a leap and cast a very wide net. We can try to be as diverse as possible and almost try to come up with a synonym for the word 'sexual'. We can make this really be a movement not only about sexual liberation, but about ending lookism, racism, sexism, ageism, That's my dream. That's my utopia. (Beer, in Murray 1990: 13)

The bisexual movement is presented here as a panacea not only for sexual oppression, but also for any number of other social and political ills. Bisexuality is everywhere presented as having the potential to heal the splits caused by sexual, gender, racial, age and class differences, both within the world and within the (bisexual) self. A typical comment by one workshop participant sums this perspective up: 'I will be who I will be.' (Anon, in Hutchins 1990) The participant uses what I call the 'future utopic grammar' of the bisexual self and community produced at the 1990 NBC. This grammar constructs a bisexual home of possibility, of fantastic architect's blueprints that defy the laws of structure and gravity. I want to argue that this is a bisexual home that could never be built.

## **Part Two: Bisexual Differentiation**

Not everyone is convinced by this call for a unified celebration of differences in the name of bisexual diversity, however. Greta Christina<sup>323</sup> comments that by the end of the conference she was frustrated with 'the lack of clarity over long-term goals [...] and the] vagueness of vision'. (Christina 1990: 48) She continues by criticising the

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<sup>323</sup> I mention bisexual writer and activist Greta Christina in Chapter Two, Section Two, Part One, in relation to lesbian sexual practices and 'The Northampton Controversy'.

tendency for a number of workshops to be somewhat simplistic and imprecise, as well as [...] the speeches, several of which were clichéd, long-winded, and self-indulgent. The judgement may seem harsh, but the power and excitement of a newly conscious sexual minority in its embryonic stage is much too valuable to be diluted by the atmosphere of an awards ceremony. (Ibid)

It seems to me that this ‘awards ceremony’ atmosphere is not, as Christina argues, what holds the ‘newly conscious’ bisexual movement *back*, but what effectively creates it. Although the Conference Committee are adept at identifying and emphasising differences *among* bisexuals, and *within* the term ‘bisexual’, differentiating bisexual identity, community and space from ‘others’ proves far more problematic. The rhetorical invocation of differences is not located within a demarcated bisexual space or set of boundaries other than those the Conference provides. The ‘awards ceremony’ atmosphere, then, is precisely what locates this bisexual space. The enthusiastic assertion of unity is the thread connecting the Conference space of bisexual difference, without which there would be no ‘newly conscious sexual minority’ at all.

This reluctance on the part of the Conference organisers and delegates to position bisexual space in relation to other identities, communities and spaces is demonstrated particularly in the ambivalence with regard to bisexuality’s relationship to lesbian and gay communities and identities. For some Conference participants bisexuals are an inseparable part of lesbian, gay or queer communities: Queen, for example, remarks that bisexuals’ ‘same sex connections are very powerful and precious [...] that’s what makes us bisexual instead of heterosexual. We’re not heterosexual people’, (Queen, in McPherson 1990: 22) and Courtney emphasises that ‘[w]hether or not they are a part of our community, we are a part of theirs. We have always been a part of the lesbian gay community and we will always be there.’ (Courtney, in Christina 1990: 8) Lourea also argues in favour of viewing bisexuals as both ‘[a]part and separate’

Figure 52. Rachel Kaplan and Keith Hennessy (1990)  
 'Bi Artists' Manifesto', in BiPOL (1990) *Celebrate*.

# Bi Artists' Manifesto

THIS IS EDUCATIONAL. WE ARE BISEXUAL PERFORMANCE ARTISTS. WE WANT YOU TO KNOW THAT WE EXIST. We are post-Stonewall, post-feminist bisexuals, performing in the continuum of art/sex/activists that is HUNDREDS, if not THOUSANDS, of years old. We want the Bisexual story to be added to the TRUTH as it is known. We are not 100% pure grade anything. We want to be acknowledged as ALLIES to the GAY and LESBIAN communities and as MEMBERS of a larger community of SEX RADICALS in pursuit of PLEASURE. Rather than identifying as homo or hetero, bisexuals find themselves in an essential state of FLUIDITY and NON-IDENTITY, a third path. This is a process of SURRENDER and SURVIVAL in a world seeking to constrict, contain and control our DESIRES. OUR INNER CHILDREN WANT TO COME OUT. Our Inner Children live in a world where gender does not determine desire or behavior. WE WANT TO CHALLENGE the notion of a static sexual identity. We acknowledge the possibility of free-falling towards ALL of our DESIRES. THE POSSIBILITIES OF GETTING WHAT WE WANT.

WE DECLARE THE 90's AS THE FIRST OFFICIAL DECADE OF OUR EMERGENCE. WE WILL COME OUT AND BE WITNESSED. We will open the closet door to our desires. We will support each other in shame-free circles. Because we want to participate as CITIZENS OF THE WORLD COMMUNITY and be recognized as important contributors to the movements for SEXUAL LIBERATION, the democratization of creativity and FREEDOM FOR ALL BEINGS, we will:

CHALLENGE historical revisionism by interrupting the mechanisms of bisexual disappearance.

No longer will we assume as gay or lesbian any person known to have sexual relations with members of the same gender (unless they insist). We know that homo identity did not exist in many communities before the industrial non-revolution, but that same-gender sex was part of the MAGICAL TRANSITION OF INITIATION, the healing of wounds, the circling of circles.

No longer will we assume that anyone's sexual identity exists in the context of anything but the FLUIDITY OF DESIRE and the REALITY OF CHANGE.

We will educate about bisexual involvement in the histories of radical culture. WHAT WE CANNOT FIND IN BOOKS, WE WILL INVENT.

We will build bridges from ourselves and our communities to art/sex/activists everywhere, whenever possible. We will not shame each other for boundaries created to protect our spirits and our work.

WE DEDICATE THE CREATION OF OUR UNIONS TO THE ONGOING REVOLUTION OF LIBERATION FOR ALL BEINGS.

Rachel Kaplan  
 Keith Hennessy  
 March 1990

(Lourea, in McPherson 1990: 21) from the lesbian and gay community. Other commentators see bisexual space as equally separate from lesbian, gay and heterosexual spaces – ‘straight society sees us as perverted, and gays see us as selling out’. (Ellyn, in Christina 1990: 8) And still others suggest that we need to work towards establishing a space of inclusion, one that can incorporate bisexual, lesbian, gay and straight difference – ‘I don’t want a bi community; I want there to be a unified sexual minority community.’ (Anon, in Ochs 1990: tape 2) The Conference organisers are clear from the outset that the Bisexual Conference space should be consolidated adjacent to or within lesbian and gay space, which is partly a reflection of the Conference’s location in San Francisco. Several Conference evaluation sheets complain of the lack of focus on heterosexual issues, however. Comments include: ‘Please address heterophobia<sup>324</sup> in your next convention’; (Anon, in NBC Evaluation Sheets 1990) and ‘not everyone comes to bisexuality through lesbigay groups’. (Ibid) It would indeed be difficult to decide the parameters of bisexual space in relation to ‘other’ sexual communities on the basis of such conflicting visions and needs.

Rather than attempt to differentiate bisexual space from ‘other’ space, then, bisexual space is posed as enigmatic and joyfully inclusive, as a space with no actual place. The ‘Bi Artist’s Manifesto’ (Figure 52) written by Rachel Kaplan and Keith Hennessy, the co-ordinators of *The Third Path: an Evening of Performances by Members of the Bisexual Diaspora*, is a case in point. The authors stress the importance of acknowledging bisexuals:

WE WANT YOU TO KNOW THAT WE EXIST [...] We want the bisexual story to be added to the TRUTH as it is known [...] WE DECLARE THE 90’S [sic] AS THE FIRST OFFICIAL DECADE OF

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<sup>324</sup> Hutchins and Ka’ahumanu define ‘heterophobia’ as ‘the fear of closeness and/or intimacy with those of the other sex; the fear of being perceived as opposite-sex oriented.’ (Hutchins and Ka’ahumanu 1991: 369)

OUR EMERGENCE. WE WILL COME OUT AND BE WITNESSED.  
(Kaplan and Hennessy 1990, caps and fonts in original)

The specific nature of bisexuals' visibility and where it might *be* witnessed remains opaque. In the 'Bi Artists' Manifesto' bisexuals are 'post-Stonewall' and 'post-feminist' but we are also

not 100% pure grade anything. We want to be acknowledged as ALLIES to the GAY and LESBIAN communities and as MEMBERS of a larger community of SEX RADICALS in pursuit of PLEASURE. Rather than identifying as homo or hetero, bisexuals find themselves in an essential state of FLUIDITY and NON-IDENTITY, a third path [...] OUR INNER CHILDREN WANT TO COME OUT [...] We acknowledge the possibility of free-falling towards ALL of our DESIRES. (Ibid, caps in original)

Bisexuals are thus represented as in a state of perpetual motion, allies to one community, members of another, never reducible to a single category: 'We build bridges from ourselves to art/sex/activists everywhere [sic]', (Ibid) but *where* we are cannot be mapped. This is a similar problem to the one I identified in Chapter Two at the close of Section Two, Part Two. Claims are made for a separate bisexual identity and community, but what separate space bisexuals can claim as theirs alone is impossible to articulate. It is small wonder that bisexuals are often avid science fiction or Internet enthusiasts, or that, as Kaloski notes, 'bisexuals can be identified by their [...] addiction to *Star Trek*.' (Kaloski 1997: 47) Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (Piercy 1979) is possibly the most frequently cited 'bisexual text'. It is not accidental that this takes place in a 'future utopic' world. Similarly the proliferation of bisexual internet lists and interest makes perfect sense: the Internet functions here as a 'world' without circumference, a potential space for a bisexual utopia.

This lack of specific bisexual location is presented as positive, as part of the future utopic grammar of bisexuality that propels bisexual desire and identity

towards somewhere it will never arrive. The free-falling bisexual is not expected to land.<sup>325</sup> This future utopic bisexual grammar also refers ‘back’ to a time before differentiation, of course, the ‘memory’ of an uncircumscribed sexuality propelling the bisexual community to a like future. Kaplan and Hennessy’s invocation to reclaim our inner children, above, comes as no surprise in this context. Their representation of an imaginative bisexual space is reminiscent of a pre-Oedipal polymorphous perversity<sup>326</sup> – ‘[w]e will open the closet door to our desires. We will support each other in shame-free circles.’ (Ibid)

In the flyer design for ‘The Third Path: An Evening of Performances by Members of the Bisexual Diaspora’ (Figure 54) this sense of bisexual placelessness is confirmed. The flyer shows two hands and forearms clasped, meeting at the centre point from which three arrows branch out. There is no information to indicate where the hands come from – they break the blackness only at the point where they meet. There is no indication of permanence to the hold (though it does seem firm), and no hint of where they might next surface. The image is an attempt to make bisexuality visible, without specifying the different trajectories that might lead to this bisexual moment, this bisexual space. Bisexuality might spring forth at any moment, it seems, and at the meeting point of any three identities, desires, experiences, or histories. In a contemporary re-writing of Freud, bisexual desire here precedes the direction of the sexual, political or cultural aim.<sup>327</sup>

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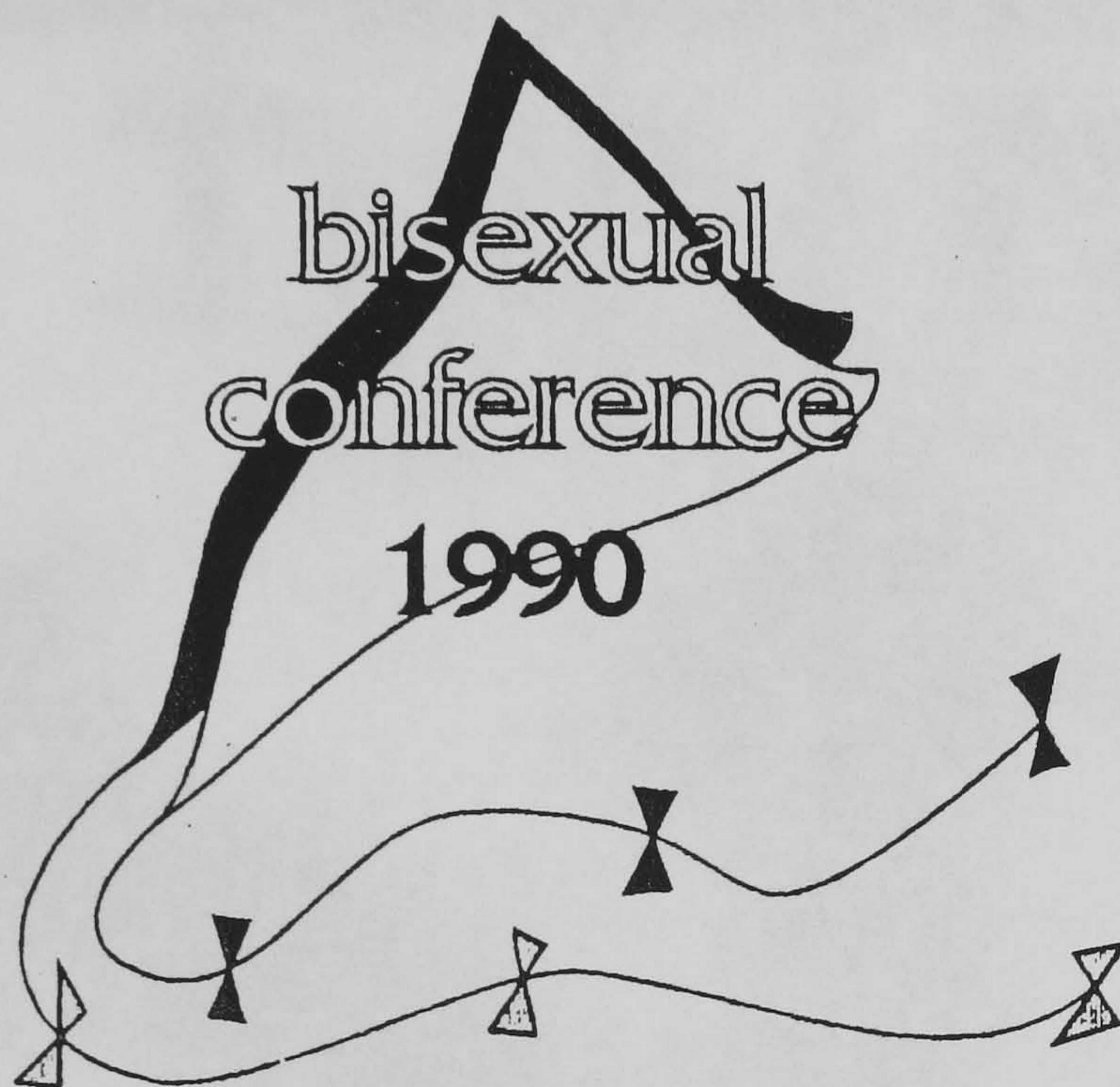
<sup>325</sup> The logo for the 8<sup>th</sup> National Bisexual Conferences in Edinburgh in 1990 is a kite, reflecting the same theme of bisexual desire as free-floating and blown by chance winds. (8<sup>th</sup> National Bisexual Conference (UK) 1990, Figure 53)

<sup>326</sup> Freud describes the polymorphously perverse disposition in children as innately present and preceding the directing of the sexual aim through the ‘mental dams against sexual excesses – shame, disgust and morality’. (Freud 1905: 109)

<sup>327</sup> It may just be the reproduction of the image, but it looks to me as if the forearm being grasped does not belong to a willing participant in this representation of bisexual space. Are some people bisexual despite themselves? Do they need to be dragged kicking and screaming into a bisexual space, and held there until they get used to the idea? I am probably over-reading when I say that this suggests to me that non-bisexual people attending the Conference and/or

Figure 53. Flyer for the Eighth National Bisexual Conference, Edinburgh, 7-10 September 1990.

## the eighth national bisexual conference



**edinburgh**  
**7th - 10th september**

The Edinburgh Bisexual Group is proud to host the Eighth National Bisexual Conference. The conference is an opportunity for bisexual people, their friends, partners and allies to meet others from all over Britain and beyond, in a warm and friendly atmosphere. We will be exploring ideas about sexuality, identity, personal development and sexual politics.

A wide range of discussions and talks will interest you whether this is your first conference or you've been before and want to explore ideas in more depth.

We welcome anyone supporting bisexuality, regardless of sexuality, sex, race, HIV status, age, ethnic background, class, transsexuality, disability, nationality or religion. Bigots will not be welcome.

So if you're already in contact with the British bisexual movement, or if you think you might be bisexual and you're wondering if there's anyone else who shares your feelings, or if you want to meet other bisexual people, come and join us at the Eighth National Bisexual Conference.

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performance might need to be on their guard in case they are claimed for a particular bisexual emergence!

Figure 54. Rachel Kaplan and Keith Hennessy (1990) 'Third Path: An Evening of Performance by Members of the Bisexual Diaspora', in BiPOL (1990) *Celebrate*.

**PERFORMANCE ≠ SILENCE**

# THIRD PATH

an evening of performances  
by members of the bisexual diaspora

signing for the hearing impaired

wheelchair access

this event is part of the  
**1990 NATIONAL  
BISEXUAL  
CONFERENCE**  
sponsored by  
**BiPOL**  
call 415-775-1990

**THURSDAY  
JUNE 21  
8:00PM  
WOMEN'S BUILDING  
3543 - 18th Street  
(near Valencia)  
\$5 - \$10 sliding scale**

**PERFORMANCE = ACTION**



Kaplan and Hennessy's use of the term 'diaspora' refers to the dispersion of Jews after the destruction of Israel, and to the sense of connection that links the Jewish people, wherever they may make their homes. (Brah 1997) The use of the term 'bisexual diaspora', here, suggests that sense both of dispersion and connection, though, as with the blithe reference to the Conference as the 'bisexual Stonewall', there is no oppression or destruction that can be said to have caused the scattering of bisexual peoples in the same way. In contemporary post-colonial theory, 'diaspora' is used to refer to the exile of people of color as well as Jews, indicating less an originary moment but a dispersed Imaginary, a sense of subjectivity formed from a number of different locations. Kaplan and Hennessy's invocation of the 'bisexual diaspora' suggests that the bisexual occupies borderlands not unlike Gloria Anzaldúa's mestiza subject, in other words, whose identity is formed in the 'borderlands' between and among dominant identities. (Anzaldúa 1987)<sup>328</sup> Du Plessis likewise advocates the bisexual use of the strategy of 'para-naming', whereby "bisexuality" can work in ways not unlike the "oppositional consciousness" of which Chela Sandoval writes in relation to the contradictions of "U.S. third world feminism." (du Plessis 1996: 22) Para-naming is the process of naming the self through negation: for example, the bisexual slogan "Not half gay; not half straight, but totally bisexual," in which "bisexual" achieves its meaning through its refusal of both adjacent terms'. (Ibid) I have already mentioned my concerns about such a sexual/racial slippage that relies on bisexuality being located as the middle-ground between heterosexuality and homosexuality alone. In the context of the 1990 Conference, the blithe reference to 'bisexual diaspora' without accompanying specificity raises a question about the ethics of such bisexual appropriation of

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<sup>328</sup> For an extended and subtle engagement with Anzaldúa's text from a bisexual perspective see Kaloski 1997.

post-colonial geographic imagery. For third world feminists diaspora is located and locatable, the result of specific exile and relocation, hybridity and fusion.<sup>329</sup> The bisexual utopia invoked by Beer, Tucker, Kaplan and Hennessy at the 1990 Conference, however, *precludes* the possibility of mapping ‘bisexual diaspora’, relying as it does on an appeal to undifferentiated unity. The use of ‘diaspora’ here, then, reads as a strategy for understanding bisexuality as inclusive of the ‘multicultural’ differences suggested by that term, rather than as a way of mapping bisexuality’s own difference.<sup>330</sup> In this context, du Plessis’ para-naming (we are not gay, not straight, etc.) also reads as strategy for maintaining the desire for a bisexual space free of exclusion.

The representation of bisexual conference spaces as no place and every place is not unique to the 1990 NBC in San Francisco. Figure 55 shows the logo for the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Bisexual Conference held in London in 1992, in which arrow-less cupids hover either side of the world. The juxtaposition between the world – denoting inclusivity and difference – and the cupids – denoting innocence and arbitrary desire, produces a similar effect to the ‘Third Path’ text, in its appeal to both a past and a future bisexual ‘innocence’. The 5<sup>th</sup> International Bisexual Conference held at Harvard in April 1998 utilised a similar notion of ‘pre-discursive’ unity. Through the conference title – ‘One World, Many Faces: Unity and Diversity in Bi Communities, Queer Communities, and the World’ (Leibensperger 1997) – bisexual conference space is once again imagined as a unifying space within which all the ‘faces’ among bisexual and queer communities and ‘the world’ may circulate. Once again a visual image of ‘the

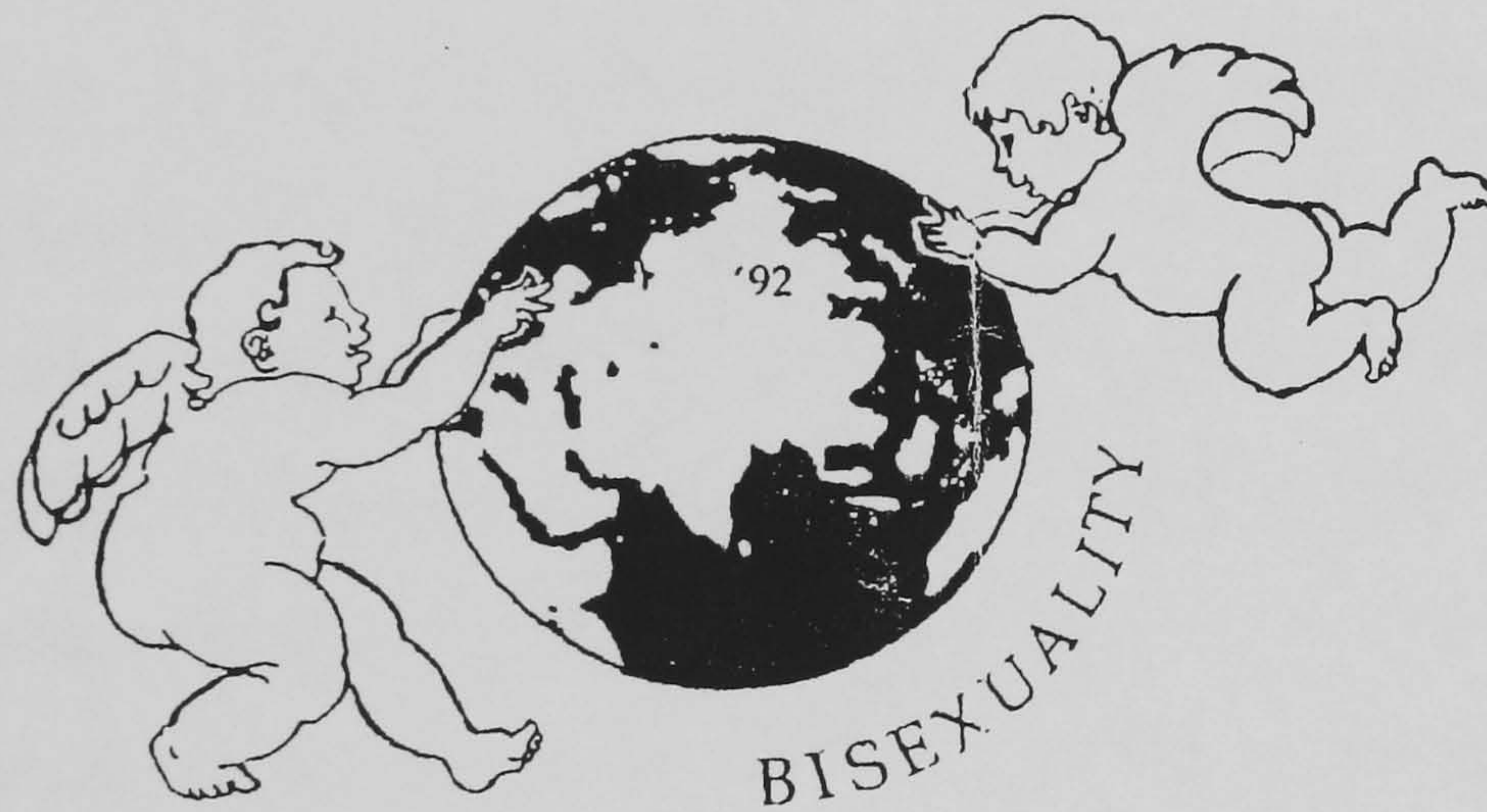
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<sup>329</sup> Anzaldúa’s mestiza subject is formed by and acts upon very particular influences: Mexico, Tex-Mex culture, and California. (Anzaldúa 1987) Spivak’s ‘subaltern as female cannot be heard or read... [she] cannot speak’, (Spivak 1988: 308) as a result of definable white global capitalism and Western intellectual discourses.

<sup>330</sup> The careful mapping of bisexual hybridity, its own internal variance, is, however, a useful and necessary process. Ann Kaloski’s work is explicitly concerned with this process, (Kaloski 1997) and my own work on bisexual partiality could, perhaps, be seen in a similar light.

Figure 55. Registration leaflet from the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Bisexual Conference, London, United Kingdom, June 23-24, 1992.

2ND INTERNATIONAL  
BISEXUAL CONFERENCE  
*London, United Kingdom*



Friday 23rd October 1992

9.30am - 12.30pm  
1.30pm - 5.50pm

Saturday 24th October 1992

10.00am - 12.00 noon  
2.00pm - 5.30pm

world’ provides the backdrop to the conference information (Figure 56). In an unsettlingly similar tone to the ‘one world’ Benetton advertisements, the 5<sup>th</sup> International Bisexual Conference is presupposed as both containing and moving beyond difference, even though the Conference itself was predominantly white and almost exclusively Northern European and North American.<sup>331</sup> There is no shadow of doubt here: no question mark – One World, Many Faces? – to suggest the possibility that this space might *not* be inclusive.<sup>332</sup>

What I have been describing in this Section is the visualisation of the 1990 Bisexual Conference space through a future utopic bisexual grammar that presupposes bisexual inclusivity and anchors itself in relation to a future perfect lack of differentiation. The reality of the Conference space and experience is, unsurprisingly, distinct from (though still related to) this vision. The attention to access discussed above suggests that insistent issues of power and difference could not be solved by a ‘will to inclusion’ alone. Ka’ahumanu describes her feelings of loss at her realisation that the bisexual community could not remain an innocent community. (Ka’ahumanu 1995: 2ff) Of a series of conflicts and betrayals over the role of feminism in the Conference,<sup>333</sup> Ka’ahumanu states candidly that:

it was so painful [...] It was hard for a lot of re[asons]. Mostly it was the innocence, the level of trust that we had all been operating on [...] It was like rape; it was violent [...] There was this sense of loss. (Ibid: 4-5)

As my discussion of the role of the Bisexual Center in the consolidation of bisexual community in San Francisco makes clear, bisexual community had not

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<sup>331</sup> Interestingly, ‘the world’ here is marked out as ‘other’ to bisexual and queer communities. The ‘world’ in this context is not only produced as bizarrely heterosexual, but also as anything *not* North American or Northern European, as that non-specific ‘other’ to our queer, Euro-American selves.

<sup>332</sup> I return to my experiences of the 5<sup>th</sup> International Bisexual Conference in my Conclusion to this thesis.

Figure 56. 'Fifth International Bisexual Conference: One World, Many Faces – Unity and Diversity in Bi Communities, Queer Communities, and the World', Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA, April 3-5, 1998, Conference Program.



**F I F T H**  
**INTERNATIONAL**  
**B I S E X U A L**  
**C O N F E R E N C E**

**ONE WORLD, MANY FACES**

Unity and Diversity in Bi Communities,  
 Queer Communities, and the World



Harvard Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual  
 and Gay Graduate Students  
 Harvard Bisexual, Gay, Lesbian,  
 Transgendered and Supporters  
 Alliance

Bisexual Resource Center  
 Multicultural AIDS Coalition

Biversity Boston

BiNet USA

Boston Bisexual Women's Network

Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA  
 April 3-5, 1998

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<sup>333</sup> I discuss the relationship of feminism to the Conference in Section Two, Part One of this chapter.

existed in a state of pre-political innocence. However, the *belief* that it did, and the rhetorically expressed desire to 'return' to an inclusive bisexual space, propel the narrative of the 1990 Bisexual Conference in significant ways. The desire for innocence is one factor determining which identities and communities are differentiated from or adhered to, and what political ground is claimed or rejected, in the creation of the Bisexual Conference space.

### Section Three: Building a Bisexual Community: Spaces of Inclusion and Exclusion

An extract from BiPOL's statement of purpose, revised for the 1990 Conference Brochure runs:

BiPOL is an independent Bisexual/Lesbian/Gay political action group founded in 1983 which supports Bisexual identity and rights. While BiPOL works in tandem with the more personal, social and support Bisexual Groups, BiPOL supports more militant public methods to EDUCATE, ADVOCATE and AGITATE for Bisexual visibility and inclusion. BiPOL is a progressive, feminist, political organization. We believe in fighting to end the oppression of all people regardless of sexual or gender orientation, different abilities, race, age, culture, ethnicity, class or religion. (BiPOL 1990)

In this section I want to explore further the tensions, contradictions and decisions influencing who is included in the term 'bisexual' and in the 1990 NBC space. I am interested in exploring the ambivalence between Weise's statement in her 'Opening Remarks' on the first day of the Conference that, as bisexuals, it is 'humanity [...] that defines us [...] We can be all things simultaneously and that scares people', (Weise, 1990a: tape 1) and BiPOL's far more partisan Statement of Purpose, above. In that statement bisexual politics is unequivocally intertwined with lesbian and gay politics, and is firmly established as occupying a feminist, anti-racist, -ageist and -classist position.<sup>334</sup> These seemingly opposed views of bisexuality as either always already inclusive of 'humanity' or as political-biased in order to achieve eventual inclusion, are reflective of the historical strands of bisexuality that tend to prioritise either a sexual liberation or a feminist political model of the bisexual movement run throughout the Conference. The Conference is a site where these different historical trajectories

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<sup>334</sup> As I have noted, BiPOL was the organising and sponsoring group for the Conference, and so its politics set the tone of the whole Conference, as indicated by the printing of Statement of Purpose at the front of the Conference Brochure.

come together, where there are attempts to resolve the differences between the two perspectives. In fact, this desire to integrate humanist and feminist perspectives at the Conference is one way in which a sense of national bisexual unity is imagined, and a further marker of the cultural significance of the Conference as a landmark in the Bisexual Imaginary.

I focus here on the ways in which the politics of both gender and race are formative in the creation of the Bisexual Conference space. Firstly, I discuss the extent to which feminism is viewed as foundational and integral to an individual and collective bisexual self. Secondly, I am concerned with the influence of discourses of race and ethnicity in the formation of a bisexual space and identity.

### **Part One: Love Knows No Gender**

The shift from bisexual movements of the 1970s to those of the 1990s is marked partly by the change in leadership from predominantly men to predominantly women. One reason for this change is the premature death in the 1980s and 1990s of many bisexual men from AIDS-related illnesses, as discussed briefly in Section One, Part Two, above. Thus Donaldson remarks that ‘the change [in bisexual leadership] may reflect how AIDS has decimated the male population and stigmatized bi men as AIDS infectors of the straight majority.’ (Donaldson 1995: 37) Another reason is that most of the women leaders of the bisexual movement ‘came out’ as bisexual after identifying as lesbian (and often as lesbian separatist): these women have been concerned to safeguard radical feminist politics within the bisexual movement.

Feminism is not only central to the lives of many bisexual women, both theoretically<sup>335</sup> and personally,<sup>336</sup> it is also part of the fabric of the US bisexual

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<sup>335</sup> In her ‘Introduction’ to *Closer to Home: Bisexuality and Feminism*, (Weise 1992) Weise makes the case for bisexual and feminist identities being mutually implicated in one another because of the challenges she perceives they both make to hierarchical sex and gender difference. She writes: ‘Those of us who consider ourselves feminist are excited about the possibilities of a



community. Weise suggests that the increased feminist focus within the bisexual movement can be attributed to the fact that: 'The two largest women-only groups, Boston's and Seattle's, are both staunchly feminist-identified.'<sup>337</sup> Other groups have grown more out of sexual liberation model.' (Ibid: xiii) Both the Boston and Seattle women's groups were instrumental in the discussions about the NBN prior to the NBC, and in the planning of the Conference itself. The inception of BiPOL in 1983 marked the desire for an explicitly political and feminist political agenda within the bisexual movement in San Francisco, and this perspective was maintained throughout the organising of the 1990 Bisexual Conference.

(Ka'ahumanu 1995: 1-2) Thus, Ka'ahumanu notes that: 'Autumn [Courtney] and I were really clear that we always brought up feminism at every meeting'. (Ibid: 2) In addition Ka'ahumanu and Courtney drafted a policy document for Committee members, 'Bisexual Politics: What It Is', (BiPOL 1988/89) that situated bisexual feminism as fundamental to the Conference and to bisexual identity and community more generally.

This feminist emphasis is not universally accepted within the bisexual movement, however, and was the cause of a major conflict in the 1990 NBC Committee. (Ka'ahumanu 1995)<sup>338</sup> In the early meetings (late 1988-early 1989)

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bisexuality informed by the understanding that sex and gender are classifications by which women are oppressed and restricted. We see bisexuality calling into question many of the fundamental assumptions of our culture: the duality of gender; the necessity of bipolar relationships [... and] the demand for either/or sexualities.' (Ibid: ix)

<sup>336</sup> For many of the women involved in bisexual organising, bisexuality and feminism cannot be separated. Thus, Rubenstein states that, for her, feminism and bisexuality 'co-incided. Getting into feminism and my power as a woman gave me the courage to come out as bisexual.' (Rubenstein, in Sheiner 1991: 204) Similarly, many of the articles in *Closer to Home: Bisexuality and Feminism*, trace the path of the author from identifying as lesbian to identifying as bisexual. See Gonsalves 1995, Silver 1995, Young 1995, and Zabatinsky 1995.

<sup>337</sup> Joan Hill of SWBN remarks that the group 'was founded by women who think that feminism is relevant to their lives', (Hill, in BiPOL 1990a: tape 2) and the growth of the group is the basis of a workshop in the Feminist Track of the Conference. (Weise 1990) Robyn Ochs of BBWN also emphasises her group's feminist, collective organisation, and its distance from the Boston Bisexual Men's Network. (Ochs 1990a)

<sup>338</sup> References to the interview in this part will be by page number in the text.

one of the Conference Committee members<sup>339</sup> frequently challenged the feminist emphasis of the planning. Ka'ahumanu outlines the story of this rift in my interview with her. 'You know, "feminism, what does it mean, why do we have to deal with sexism? I'm oppressed too." One of those kind of men.' (2) Despite this man's being a 'provocateur', (Ibid) Ka'ahumanu explains that 'he would challenge pieces but he would listen... so it *felt* OK.' (2) With Weise and Lisa Jean Moore, this Committee member organised the first national mailing informing Network members and regional bisexual groups about the 1990 Conference in San Francisco. At the last moment he removed his name from the letter and altered its contents, adding the word 'feminist' at inappropriate points. His action was intended as 'an alert', (2) to make people aware that 'it was [...] basically "fascist feminist people" running this organization'. (2) The letter went out before the sabotage was identified by the rest of the Conference Committee.

Superficial effects of this letter included this person's subsequent absence from Committee meetings (since he refused to acknowledge the possibility of culpability), and the necessity of organising and paying for a repeat national mailing. (3) Two attempts were made to negotiate with the perpetrator: Weise 'wrote this brilliant letter to him about working with him, consenting on the letter, and then him [...] sending something out with her name on [that] she didn't approve of'; (3) and there was a meeting organised in an effort to resolve the resultant personal conflicts. (3)<sup>340</sup> The impact of the letter on the Conference organising did not end there, however. Ka'ahumanu believes that this intervention 'broke apart our whole community' (3) in terms of forcing the Conference Committee to move out of the state of innocence they believed they

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<sup>339</sup> Ka'ahumanu asked me not to name this person, as he continues to be an active member of San Francisco's bisexual social network.

<sup>340</sup> The perpetrator did acknowledge that he was wrong to have changed the letter and then taken his name off it, but was not prepared to revise his view of feminist organising as manifestly anti-men. (3)

had been operating within. Despite the fact that the Committee sent out another mailing immediately to ‘clean it [all] up as quickly as possible without targeting him or anything’, (3) the realisation that bisexual identity – like all identity – is a messy business could no longer be ignored. In other words, the assertion of feminist unity that marked the early days of the Conference organising, could not account for disagreement, human maliciousness, or error. The Committee was required to reconsider its assumption that an inclusive bisexuality is always already both radical and ethical, or indeed, that there could be common agreement about the meaning of those terms in the first place. Clearly, ‘the saboteur’ considered it his ethical duty to ‘warn’ potential Conference delegates of the feminist emphasis of the Committee, while feminist Committee members considered such an emphasis to be at the heart of an ‘ethical bisexuality’. Effectively the anti-feminist letter forced the Committee out of a state of presumed innocence, forcing its members to take a political position in relationship to feminism. From this point onwards, continued insistence on a feminist focus – ‘[p]eople across the country had to know that this was feminist’ (4) – was combined with a knowledge that this would inevitably lead to the exclusion of those who disagreed.<sup>341</sup> The Committee recovered from this anti-feminist ‘violation’ (4), but as Ka’ahumanu laments ‘we’ll never be that innocent again’, (4) and the meanings of feminism in the context of the Conference were radically altered.<sup>342</sup> Although this incident is understood as provoking the *devastation* of the bisexual community’s innocence, I prefer to view it as marking the *inception* of a bisexual community aware that however strong the desire for unity, each decision about bisexual meaning differentiates that community from what and whom it is not.

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<sup>341</sup> The fact that the feminist focus excludes some anti-feminists is marked by this man’s non-attendance at the Conference. (5)

<sup>342</sup> I discuss these alterations below.

Responses to and perspectives on feminism continue to provide fuel for ruptures within the bisexual movement more recently. Stephen Donaldson remarks rather defensively that:

The imbalance of gender is a problem. Bisexual leadership at all levels must reach out to men, and men in the movement must take responsibility for developing remedies. The intellectual discourse of the bi movement, which often appears to be dominated by 'women's issues,' must be broadened, or the movement may be perceived by men as a primary vehicle for arcane intrafeminist controversies. (Donaldson 1995: 37)

Aside from the fact that Donaldson clearly deems feminism a concern for women only, he also perceives it as a source of tension between the interests of the (feminist) leadership of the movement and those of the grassroots of the movement. From a different perspective, the joint co-ordinator of BiNet USA,<sup>343</sup> Stephanie Berger, mentions her current and ongoing frustration with male network members' defensiveness at her feminist approach to bisexual organising.<sup>344</sup> One thing is clear: feminism is both central to and a contested part of the contemporary US bisexual movement.

#### 'Feminism and the 1990 Conference'

In July 1987 a bisexual woman who attended the ECBN Conference writes that '[t]he men I met all indicated sympathy for feminism, but I also suspect some were motivated to come by sexual adventurism.' (Anon, in Weise *et al* 1987: 11)

'Sexual adventurism' and feminism are clearly viewed as mutually exclusive terms and choices here, in a way that reminds me, somewhat ironically, of the association of bisexual women with 'the sexual' and lesbians with 'the political' during the Northampton debates. Here it is bisexual (feminist) women who are assumed to be 'political', and bisexual men who are cast as 'sexual' (and

<sup>343</sup> BiNet USA is the current name of the US NBN.

<sup>344</sup> From a conversation with Stephanie Berger, January 1997. For Berger, such defensiveness is less a desire to move beyond gendered inequality, but a desire to disassociate the term 'bisexual' from the term 'political' more generally. (Conversation with Stephanie Berger, April 1998)

therefore apolitical). This personal response mirrors the accounts I have been describing that divide bisexual community history into pre- and post-feminist eras, (e.g. Weise 1992a: xiii) with the distinction between the two being a move from the creation of bisexual social space (humanist) to the creation of bisexual political space (feminist).<sup>345</sup> In the wake of the split within the Committee around issues of feminism, however, the Conference becomes imagined as a site for resolving this humanist/political tension without relinquishing a feminist premise. In this way, the Conference is the site for an attempt to recuperate feminism for a humanist model of bisexuality as wholly inclusive of difference.

An exchange in the *Bay Area Bisexual Network Newsletter* just prior to the Conference makes plain this desire to make humanism and feminism compatible. Naomi Tucker and Paul Smith's article 'Feminism and the Conference' (Tucker and Smith 1990)<sup>346</sup> in the February/March issue is intended as an explanation of 'why feminism is part of the statement of purpose of this upcoming June conference.' (1)<sup>347</sup> Tucker and Smith begin their article by stating that a feminist conference 'means that we strive to be inclusionary in our visions of community'. (1) This assertion frames the rest of the article. Tucker and Smith argue that without feminism women will continue to be oppressed, making equal relationships among individual men and women impossible and precluding the development of a bisexual community 'that is truly for everyone.' (1) For the

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<sup>345</sup> For example, a member of the Portland bisexual group reports that the group had been open to men and women in the mid to late 1980s, but had been predominantly 30-35 year-old white men. People stopped coming because the 'group had no sense of itself as political around bisexuality', (Anon, in Ochs 1990a.) until the women's group was founded (no date given). In 1990 the Portland bisexual women's group was flourishing, with between 10 and 20 members, 6-12 of whom attended weekly meetings. (Ibid) I have no reason to doubt the truth of the outline of the Portland group's history. The speaker's suggestion that the switch from bisexual social group to bisexual political group is coextensive with its change from being mixed to being women-only, (Ibid) however, simplifies the narrative and precludes investigation into other possible factors for the changes within that particular group.

<sup>346</sup> All further references to this article in this paragraph will be by page number in the text.

<sup>347</sup> Tucker and Smith are both member of the 1990 National Bisexual Conference Steering Committee, and their article must be read in light of this.

authors (and therefore for the Conference Committee) a feminist politics is about creating equality among men and women of all races, classes, ages and cultures:

The progressive, feminist politics of BiPOL necessitate actively struggling to end the oppression of all people regardless of sexual or gender orientation, different abilities, race, age, culture, ethnicity, class or religion [...w]e need more than a nondiscrimination statement of purpose. We need active outreach to diverse communities; we need an organizational structure that strives for [...] parity and reflects the diversity of our community. (1)<sup>348</sup>

In their article, Tucker and Smith attempt to refute any lingering notions of feminism as divisive and sectarian by claiming it as fundamental to a revolutionary vision of bisexual wholeness, as central to abolishing hierarchical ‘us/them’ (7) oppositions, and as allowing ‘the beauty of [bisexual] diversity’ (7) to emerge.

W L Warner is not convinced by Tucker and Smith’s arguments for a integrative feminist bisexuality, however. (Warner 1990)<sup>349</sup> Responding directly to their article, Warner warns against ‘binding’ (3) links between the bisexual and feminist movements, arguing that: ‘the bisexual movement is in danger of being hampered by the considerable baggage of the radical feminisms of the past.’ (3) In Warner’s view the feminist movement’s insistence on ‘feminine superiority’ (3) is incompatible with ‘creating space “in which we can all feel good about being bisexual” ’. (3) Interestingly, Warner uses the past tense for describing both the feminist movement and ‘the cultural oppression of women’, (3) implying that feminism is a tool of yesteryear. His/her own suggestion for the present and future is ‘to establish our own gender-centrist movement, truly inclusive, and [discard] the exclusionary trappings of both male and female

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<sup>348</sup> Clearly, this extract directly relates to BiPOL’s Statement of Purpose, quoted at the beginning of Section Three of this chapter.

<sup>349</sup> All further references to this article in this paragraph will be by page number in the text.

chauvinism'. (3) Warner's narrative of the bisexual movement reverses the tendency to place sexual liberation models in the naïve past, instead writing feminism as the outdated politics of naïveté, and humanism as the politics of a mature bisexual movement.

Tucker and Smith respond in turn by re-emphasising the points they made in their original article. (Tucker and Smith 1990a)<sup>350</sup> They too reject the 'doctrine of female superiority espoused by a monolithic movement of guilt and shame', (3) and underscore that in the context of the Bisexual Conference feminism means accessibility and equality for all. This feminism is (unlike the 'doctrine of female superiority): 'NOT the female parallel to chauvinism' (3, emphasis in original) but a way of

freeing women AND men from the traditional sex roles that bind and oppress us. Our goal is not, as you seem to fear, to have women dominate men. Rather we seek to affirmatively create a culture where women and men are equally valued. (3, emphasis in original)

The tone of Tucker and Smith's letter is conciliatory and defensive, where their initial article was vibrant and visionary. Tucker and Smith reinforce Warner's image of a feminist demon to be consigned to the paranoid past, in order to convince him that the feminist 'organizing principle of the Conference' (3) does not mean exclusion.<sup>351</sup> *Their* feminism (not unlike the 'gender-centrist movement' (Warner 1990: 3) Warner favours) is one where no one need feel bad about structural oppression as long as the mistakes of the past are not perpetuated in the present. In both letters, bisexual men's 'fears' of dominant women are given the same symbolic and political weight as the 'oppression of women in the past millenia'. (3) The difference is that Warner invokes this fear (of 'female

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<sup>350</sup> All further references to this article in this paragraph will be by page number in the text.

<sup>351</sup> See my Introduction to Chapter Three, where I discuss the consignment of both proponents of radical feminism and its political relevance, to a murky past.

chauvinism') where Tucker and Smith dismiss it. Neither letter considers the possibility that these 'fears' might be in any way related to the structural oppression of women that has been so neatly consigned to an ignorant past. Neither letter names this 'outdated' feminism *lesbian feminism* either, although that is effectively what is called up and then cast aside.<sup>352</sup> In this context, Tucker and Smith's letter reads as less a justification of the Conference Committee's advocacy of feminism, and more as reassurance for bisexual men that the 'lesbian' marker that would signal their exclusion has been removed from *bisexual feminism*.

This attempt to distance the bisexual feminism of the Conference from lesbian feminism continues through the Conference itself. The panel of speakers at the 'Bisexuality and Feminism' (McGuire 1990) session was comprised of two women and two men,<sup>353</sup> both of whom saw feminism as a way of moving beyond the confines of the gender oppositions that oppress both men and women, enabling women and men to forge egalitarian relationships with one another. Thus, Tom<sup>354</sup> states that feminism enables us to 'overcome [the] false divisions in our society based on gender [...] Part of our goal is to transcend them [...] and] build unity across divisions'. (Tom, in McGuire 1990: tape 1) These divisions are 'outside, not within' (Ibid) us, i.e. they are societally-imposed rather than of men or women's own making. The other male speaker on the 'Bisexuality and Feminism' panel, Bill Mack, similarly argues that men are 'systematically hurt by the way society is organized'. (Mack, in McGuire 1990: tape 2) For both speakers, (bisexual) feminism is a strategy for building the

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<sup>352</sup> This failure to name lesbian feminism is particularly notable given the number of women involved in both the bisexual movement and the Conference who previously identified as lesbian.

<sup>353</sup> It is clearly important that women *and* men come forward as advocates of feminism. Tucker and Smith's joint defensive of Conference policy is, of course, a case in point.

<sup>354</sup> Tom's surname was not on the tape of this session.



utopian future of gender, race and class equality that would mirror our pre-societal state, the ‘innocence’ that is lost by political exclusion. None of the speakers on this panel addresses the question of the ways in which gendered subjectivity may be formed in and through society, whether or not we ‘choose’ such formations.

A woman speaker on the same panel, Joan Hill, provides a brief history of feminism. Hill differentiates between radical feminism, which she defines as emphasising the socially-constructed nature of gender and ‘cultural feminism’, which she defines as a ‘reactionary movement’ (Hill, in McGuire 1990: tape 1) creating an opposition between men and women on the basis of a natural ‘feminine’ superiority, and encouraging women to withdraw from men. (Ibid)<sup>355</sup> In a similar way to Tucker, Smith and Warner, Hill consigns the usefulness of a ‘cultural feminist’ movement to a less enlightened past.<sup>356</sup> Instead, she links bisexual feminism to radical feminism in its visionary accentuating of utopian possibility. The lesbian centre of both radical and cultural feminism is, of course, not mentioned, as to do so would necessitate admitting that the term ‘feminist’ (radical, cultural, or otherwise) does *indeed* place a question mark over the role of bisexual men. Instead, the panel isolates cultural/lesbian feminism as the reactionary force preventing male-female harmony, effectively shifting the gaze away from male responsibility (as individuals or as a group) for the oppression of women.<sup>357</sup>

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<sup>355</sup> Alice Echols argues similarly that ‘radical feminism was a political movement dedicated to eliminating the sex-class system, whereas cultural feminism was a countercultural movement aimed at reversing the cultural valuation of the male and the devaluation of the female.’ (Echols 1989: 6)

<sup>356</sup> The words of feminists such as Echols and Hills have resulted in lesbian separatism being damned through its association with ‘cultural’ rather than radical feminism, as being merely a ‘reversal’ or ‘retreat’ rather than a serious political position that is still part of a contemporary radical feminist movement. See Tania Lienert ‘On Who is Calling Radical Feminists, Cultural Feminists (and Other Historical Sleights of Hand)’, (Lienert 1996) for a critique of Echols.

<sup>357</sup> Denise Thompson rejects the term ‘cultural feminism’ outright on the basis that those categorised thus do not choose the label. She argues that ‘cultural feminism’ is less a

In the discussion after the panel presentations at the 'Bisexuality and Feminism' workshop, one participant raises a series of questions about the relationship between bisexuality and feminism. She expresses doubts about bisexuality's ability to 'fix men', and asks for more information and less rhetoric about the ways in which race, sex and class may be aligned within a bisexual frame. (Anon, in McGuire 1990: tape 2) Her questions are greeted with a noticeable silence (on the tape), and she is eventually answered with a rhetorical invocation of an authentic bisexual self, whatever the context. (McGuire 1990: tape 2) The 'Bisexuality and Feminism' panel, and the Conference as a whole, structure debates about feminism in such a way that even to suggest sexism affects women and men differently, let alone that men might actually *gain* from patriarchy, is to invite a scorn generally reserved for the demon lesbian separatists of the bisexual imagination. The rest of the discussion after the panel reaffirms the separation of bisexual feminism from lesbian feminism, although the word 'lesbian' is only mentioned once. In response to a question about the difference between sexuality and gender, Tom argues that we must remember that we are 'dealing with messy, grey, human areas [...] more than [with] ideological dogmatic areas.' (Tom, in McGuire 1990: tape 2) In the context of this panel, it does not seem an over-reading to interpret Tom's statement as referring to the complex area of bisexual men and women's (human) desire and the rigid oversimplifications of lesbian politics respectively. In the run up to the Conference, bisexual space was located (as I illustrated) between and among lesbian, Hispanic, and gay male space in San Francisco. In the context of the

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description of a movement than it is a mechanism for various strands of feminist politics 'to distinguish their own position from an opponent who is not there.' (Thompson 1991: 8) Clearly, advocates of a humanist bisexual feminism at the Conference use the term to mark themselves out as 'not lesbian' without having to state that as such. It is for this reason that I leave 'cultural feminism' in scare quotes.

Conference itself, however, feminism is used as a mechanism for securing a bisexual space outside lesbianism rather than within in.<sup>358</sup>

In the process of separating the terms 'bisexual' and 'lesbian', the meaning of feminism in a bisexual context is altered too. Tucker and Smith's original assertion was that without feminism women continue to be oppressed, which *in turn* has implications for relationships among men and women. (Tucker and Smith 1990: 1) In the course of the Conference this has been transformed (via humanism) into the assumption that men and women are equally oppressed.<sup>359</sup> This position is further still from Weise's vision of bisexual feminist coalitions in 1988: 'A black lesbian feminist once defined coalition-building as working with people who might otherwise want to kill you.' (Weise 1988) The attempt to present feminist bisexuality as a way of moving towards a utopian harmony (and anticipating that utopian space such that there appears to be no work to do in the present other than individual soul-searching)<sup>360</sup> strips even the most liberal feminism of its emphasis on responsibility and struggle.<sup>361</sup> Thus, although Christina writes positively about the role feminism played in the 1990 Conference concluding that: 'there was an overriding sentiment that one of the best things about the bisexual movement was that it inherently challenges traditional attitudes about sex roles and relations between men and women',

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<sup>358</sup> This is, of course, a completely different situation to that I discussed in Chapter Two, where bisexual women sought to understand their bisexuality from within lesbian community.

<sup>359</sup> This de-emphasising of male responsibility for sexist oppression is endorsed by the Conference Committee in the later stages of organising. In an article on oppression attached to the Steering Committee Minutes of May 5, 1990, Charlie Kreiner argues that 'As a white/male/heterosexual and so forth, it is important to take complete pride in your humanity, not your roles. As a human, take pride in your inherent human qualities: that you are alive, have a right to exist, are completely good, innocent, blameless, whole, worthwhile, powerful'. (Kreiner 1990: 11) This view that subjects can detach themselves from the societal oppression that informs them and be entirely blameless sets the tone for the discourse of 'equal harm' to be healed by bisexual feminism that circulates at the Conference.

<sup>360</sup> Christina writes that everyone she spoke to at the 1990 Conference 'felt strongly that feminism had an important and valuable place in their personal life.' (Christina 1990: 48)

<sup>361</sup> See Susan L Brown's *The Politics of Individualism: Liberalism, Liberal Feminism and Anarchism*, (Brown 1993) which bravely attempts to rescue liberal feminism from the scathing critiques of its apolitical position. (e.g. Tong 1989)

(Christina 1990: 48) I am unsure whether ‘traditional attitudes’ are understood here as patriarchal or as lesbian feminist. In the clash between humanism and feminism, it is feminism that is forced to shift its boundaries. The Conference Committee’s attempt to show how feminism is inclusive results in its being stripped of any historical or political substance. Christina’s obvious pleasure at the fact that ‘almost everyone [she] spoke to [...] identified as feminist’ (Ibid) highlights for me that feminist politics have been watered down to such an extent at the Conference, that ‘feminist’ becomes little more than a label signifying bisexual agreement with a non-specific desire for equality. In my view, this desire for bisexuality to always already equal inclusion and equality rather ironically results in the denial both of political differences (e.g. the lack of response to the sceptical audience member) and social and individual differences (e.g. the effects of being a woman or a man in contemporary US culture).

### **Part Two: The Bisexual Melting-Pot**

When viewed as the space ‘in between’ lesbian/gay and straight communities, bisexual community is considered uniquely positioned to provide a home for, and a parallel to, other ‘mélanges’ – of gender, as we have seen, and also of race.<sup>362</sup> Thus Margaret Mihee Choe suggests that: ‘My not being black or white in America may make bisexuality easier. One could even say that bisexuals are the Asians of sexual America: you’re not one or the other, so you’re overlooked.’ (Choe 1992: 22) Mihee suggests that being neither ‘gay/straight’, nor ‘black/white’, (Ibid: 23) bisexuality and Asian American-ness occupy parallel spaces of exclusion and facilitate one another. Alternatively, bisexuals are written contemporarily as the magpies of sexual culture, piecing together their identities

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<sup>362</sup> See Section One, Part One and Section Two, Part Three of this chapter for earlier discussions of similar issues.

from different locations: ‘Out of this comes a sense of a bisexual hybridity’. (Eadie, in *Bi Academic Intervention* 1997a: 204) The hybrid is, of course, a contemporary subject more familiar to critical race theory than lesbian and gay or feminist theory.<sup>363</sup> In these various ways bisexuality is produced as either inherently *or* culturally situated in unique relation to communities and discourses of race.<sup>364</sup>

This discursive production of bisexuality and multiculturalism as theoretical and cultural allies with singular insight into one another is set against the knowledge the organisers have that the Conference will undoubtedly reflect the wider US bisexual community in being a predominantly white space. While white bisexuals may see bisexual identity as incorporating racial diversity, bisexuals of color apparently do not; certainly not in significant enough numbers to transform the desire for inclusiveness into a visible reality through their presence at bisexual events. There is a (by now familiar) gap between the Conference Committee’s desire for bisexual space to be *inherently* racially diverse and their knowledge that it will not be. This provokes a similar politicisation around issues of race as occurred around feminism. From the earliest stage of the Conference planning, the organisers employed a policy of affirmative action as an attempt to counteract the default whiteness of the bisexual community.

This affirmative action was not contested within the Committee, or by Conference delegates, unlike the Committee’s politicisation of bisexual space through feminism. This is partly because the 1990 NBC space is positioned

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<sup>363</sup> See Section Two, Part Three of this chapter. For the concept of hybridity in critical race theory see, for example, Young 1995, Bhabha 1990, and of course Anzaldúa 1987.

<sup>364</sup> Brenda Marie Blasingame ties racial diversity and bisexuality together in a slightly different way, arguing that racism is one root of biphobia within lesbian and gay communities. (Blasingame 1992: 50) Blasingame explains that the model for a queer existence is a white model and that queers of color whose experiences do not ‘match up’ to that model are often rejected on the grounds of being bisexual. (Ibid: 51-52)

within the predominant American fantasy of the US as a multicultural ‘melting-pot’ and, more specifically, San Francisco, where the activism of people of color has considerable influence and the racial and ethnic diversity of the population is highly visible. Within the terms of the Bisexual Conference space itself, affirmative action for bisexuals of color is accepted because the belief that bisexuality is uniquely positioned in terms of multiculturalism needs to be made *visible* if it is not to remain purely a metaphor. The conscious politicisation around race, therefore, produces a paradox of sorts. On the one hand it undermines the assumption that bisexuality is always already racially diverse; while on the other it seeks to produce a non-white centrality to, and visibility within, the Conference space such that the bisexual desire for inclusiveness, and the representation of inclusiveness, are drawn closer together.<sup>365</sup>

The need for political action to include people of color at the Conference was initially recognised by Loraine Hutchins. In October 1989 Hutchins wrote to the steering committee of ECBN requesting that:

Any ‘surplus’ funds in our ECBN account be allocated as scholarships for bisexual people of color and PWAs [people with AIDS] to enable both of these groups’ attendance at the June 1990 conference in San Francisco, as well as to facilitate advertising efforts about the availability of this resource to these segments of our bi community. (Hutchins 1989: 1)<sup>366</sup>

Hutchins places this request in the context of ‘several incidents of racism [she] witnessed [...] at the May conference at Harvard.’ (1)<sup>367</sup> She reasons that the bisexual community needs to stop viewing bisexuals as white – ‘[p]eople of color are not special exceptions or additions to “us”, (2) – and that this will occur only when bisexuals of color are enabled to attend bisexual events. For Hutchins this

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<sup>365</sup> As I mentioned in Chapter Two, the presumed multiculturalism of the bisexual community serves the additional function of providing a platform of moral superiority for bisexuals to occupy in relation to a predominantly white US lesbian and gay movement.

<sup>366</sup> Hutchins’ letter is included in Appendix II. All further references to Hutchins’ letter in this paragraph are by page reference in the text.

Figure 57. Ka'ahumanu Productions and BiPOI (1989)  
 'Under One Flag: A Dance', flyer.

Kaahumanu Productions and BiPOL Present

UNDER ONE FLAG

# A DANCE

*Commemorating*  
 The 20th Anniversary of Stonewall  
*and Benefitting*

- ★ Asian Pacific Lesbian Retreat
- ★ Men of Color Conference
- ★ 1990 International Bisexual Conference

**Saturday, June 17 at the Women's Building**  
 18th Street between Valencia & Guerrero, San Francisco  
 Sliding scale, \$10 & up

Peter Barclay Keyboards, 8-9 pm  
 Dance to the Moonlighters, 9 pm-midnight

Ethnic refreshments, no-host bar. Information: 821-3534

<sup>367</sup> The ECBN Conference, May 1989.

task involves an understanding of the structural and actual poverty of US people of color and a fundamental shift of the bisexual community's existing (white) perspective. (2) Hutchins concludes by insisting that real transformation requires a 'thorough and on-going self-examination and re-orientation of resources and consciousness towards addressing and changing this racism among us and beyond us.' (2)

Hutchins' suggestions were adopted by the ECBN Steering Committee. The announcement 'ECBN Offers Scholarship Fund', (BiPOL 1990b: 8) published in *Bi Women*, states that '[f]irst priority will be given to low income bisexual people of color.' (Ibid) The 1990 Bisexual Conference Committee also made concerted efforts to guarantee that the Conference would be as racially and ethnically diverse as possible. In an effort to reach a racially diverse population in San Francisco and coalition with other groups, the Conference Committee co-organised a benefit dance with members of the Asian Pacific Lesbian Retreat and the Men of Color Conference in June 1989.<sup>368</sup> And as part of a larger education outreach strategy, the Committee organised a plenary at the National AIDS/ARC Update Conference in San Francisco in October 1989 entitled 'Finding answers to the problems of reaching bisexual communities in regards to AIDS education, with emphasis on people of color.' (SCM: September 17, 1989)

With respect to internal organising, the Bisexual Conference Committee agreed that each sub-committee should not begin Conference planning until it had at least one person of color on it, (SCM: January 9, 1989; September 17, 1989)<sup>369</sup> and it was impressed upon workshop presenters that their sessions should be relevant to people of color's experiences. (Ka'ahumanu 1995: 9; SCM:

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<sup>368</sup> The Dance, 'Under One Flag', (Figure 57) was held at the San Francisco Women's Building. Members of the Asian Pacific Lesbian Retreat organised the bar, the Men of Color Conference Committee organised the food, and the Bisexual Conference Committee organised the logistics and ambience. (Ka'ahumanu Productions and BiPOL 1989)

<sup>369</sup> It is not stated whether or not this aim was achieved.



January 21, 1990)<sup>370</sup> In November 1989 plans were laid for a People of Color Caucus to organise both before and during the Conference. (SCM: November 19, 1989) The Caucus was established to influence Conference decisions, to provide a voice for bisexuals of color, and ‘to foster visible and diverse leadership in the bisexual movement.’ (Hutchins and Ka’ahumanu 199d: 366; SCM: March 18, 1990) Before the Conference, the People of Color Caucus issued this statement about their aims and an invitation to participants:

The 1990 Conference is the place for us to put forth our issues. We are forming a caucus to build multi-cultural alliances that will help us organize out [sic] agenda for the 1990’s [sic]. Our visibility will support bisexual people of color who are coming out of the lesbian/gay and heterosexual closets. The strength and challenge of our emerging bisexual community/movement is in our diversity [...] Please contact us. Let us know what is going on with you and/or your local community/movement. What do you want to see at the Conference? (The Bisexual People of Color Caucus 1990: 8)

The establishment of the People of Color Caucus suggested that the bisexual community had learned valuable lessons from the historical exclusions of ‘different liberation movements’, (Ibid) and could avoid repeating those exclusions – ‘[w]e don’t have to begin at zero.’ (Ibid)

During the Conference itself, the Committee continued to emphasise the centrality of racial diversity and bisexual inclusiveness in the formation of the national bisexual community. The People of Color Workshop Track had nine sessions (compared to six in the Feminist Track), and the general assemblies usually included at least one speaker of color, and stressed the importance of racial diversity and political coalitions among different communities. (BiPOL 1990; BiPOL 1990a) For example, Susan Carlton of the UC Berkeley Multicultural Bi/Gay/Lesbian Student Alliance relayed her experiences of

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<sup>370</sup> As a way of facilitating the racial diversity of workshops, the Committee offered resources for presenters who did not know where to find the pertinent information. (Ka’ahumanu 1995: 9)

coalition building between queers of color and bisexuals to force the campus gay and lesbian groups to become more inclusive of ‘both’ groups. (Carlton, in BiPOL 1990a: tape 2) Christina describes her story as ‘[o]ne of the most inspiring’ (Christina 1990: 11) of the Conference. Carlton’s narrative is ‘inspiring’ here because it demonstrates one of the prevailing assumptions of the Conference – that bisexuals and people of color are natural allies – in a concrete political realm. In similar fashion, Ron Franklin, a Conference organiser and member of the People of Color Caucus, underlines the Conference Committee’s hope that the bisexual Conference space (and bisexual community more generally) can be an environment where the desire for racial parity to be part of bisexual meaning is made visible:

‘One thing we’re trying to do in organizing this [Conference] is to be very inclusive of men, women, people of color, differently-abled. The push is to see that followed through so that it’s not just statements on paper, it’s not just wording: that there are people of color, differently-abled people, people from different classes, so that it becomes a true, very involved, very inclusive organization that addresses the special needs of people across the board’. (Franklin, in Christina 1990: 11)

Despite their best efforts at racial and ethnic inclusion, however, the Conference Committee discovered that they could not account for the attitudes or experiences of Conference delegates. Ka’ahumanu acknowledges that while ‘the representation of people of color *from the stage* was very well thought out’, (Ka’ahumanu 1995: 9, my italics) the majority of (white) workshop presenters still presumed a white audience. According to Ka’ahumanu members of the People of Color Caucus were amazed at the lack of ‘sophistication around challenging white supremacy’ (Ibid) from white bisexual delegates. The Caucus and the ECBN Scholarships were originally intended as strategies for insuring that the Conference/movement would *not* be predominantly or structurally white. In the course of the Conference, however, the Caucus’s role shifted to become

one of highlighting how the Conference space consistently fell short of those intentions, how, in fact, racial diversity is *marginal* rather than central to bisexual community. People of color expressed their concern and anger at their marginal position by walking out of Conference workshops that did not address issues of racial diversity, (Ibid) and/or in the Conference evaluation sheets. Those filled out by people of color all attest to their disappointment at the whiteness of the Conference,<sup>371</sup> and their longing for a more genuine attention to ethnic and racial difference. Here are three examples:

[D]iversity can't just be 'declared'. There has to be real listening to nonwhite, working class and differently-abled people.

Despite the commendable efforts to do otherwise, I found the ambience of the conference definitely skewed towards a white countercultural sensibility that tended to exclude those of us from working class or people of color origins.

The conference is too white. Why aren't there more People of Color here?  
(Conference Evaluation Sheets 1990)

Despite the evident dissatisfaction of people of color at the conference

Christina celebrates the Conference's diversity in her post-Conference article.

She writes that:

Although the [Conference] crowd was largely white, middle-class, educated, and able-bodied, it was not overwhelmingly so: there was a strong presence of disabled people and people of color, in significantly more than token numbers. An entire track of workshops focused specifically on bisexual people of color, and organizers and participants alike expressed a strong interest in creating a bisexual community that is multicultural and hospitable to any and all bisexuals and bi-friendlies.  
(Christina 1990: 11)

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<sup>371</sup> There are no statistics for the conference in terms of breakdown of participants along the lines of race or ethnicity. Of the 37 Conference Evaluation Sheets I have, however, 13.5% of evaluation sheets were completed by people of color (2 African Americans, 1 Puerto Rican, 1 Asian, and 1 Latina). This should not be taken as a percentage of people of color at the Conference, however. It seems likely that a disproportionately high number of people of color filled out evaluation sheets in order to signal their disappointment at the lack of 'racial inclusion' to the Conference organisers and to suggest future improvements. (Conference Evaluation Sheets 1990)

Readers are clearly supposed to be impressed by the existence of an ‘*entire* track of workshops focused on bisexual people of color’, [my italics] but in light of the above Conference evaluations one wonders *for whom* the Conference was not ‘overwhelmingly’ white, middle-class, etc, and who decides what constitutes ‘token numbers’, ‘strong interest’, or ‘hospitality’. Ka’ahumanu describes her shame at the realisation that, because the Conference felt safe to her as a light-skinned woman of color, she had assumed it was safe for everyone: ‘there [were] a lot of places around I-pass-for-white privilege that I didn’t understand’.

(Ka’ahumanu 1995: 9) Clearly the Conference was not experienced as a safe space by the people of color whose inclusion many white delegates were celebrating as further evidence of bisexual diversity.

The tensions generated over the question of the racial inclusiveness of bisexual space were particularly marked in the NBN Track discussions. The preliminary material on the ‘National Bisexual Network In-Formation’ in the Bisexual Conference Brochure makes it plain that the task of consolidating the Network during the Conference will not be an easy one: ‘We have a great deal of work ahead to reach our vision of a community-based national Network. Please join us and help realize the dream together.’ (Moore and Weise 1990)<sup>372</sup> From the beginning of the Network organising during the Conference ‘meetings were [...] frustrating because it took such a long time to make decisions and discuss ideas.’ (Moore 1990: 1) This process is exemplified in extended initial discussions about the name of the Network. The name ‘The North American Bisexual Network’ was decided upon by participants at Friday’s meetings, (Riles 1990: 4) but the next day, the name was changed by consensus to ‘The North American Multicultural Bisexual Network’. (Ibid) This consensus decision is described as a

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<sup>372</sup> Moore and Weise anticipate that one of the primary difficulties of establishing the Network is likely to be one of continuity, since anyone may enter and leave the discussion at will. They warn delegates that ‘if you want to have a say in what our National Bisexual Network looks like, you need to come early and contribute.’ (Ibid)

‘painful process’, (Ibid) a source of ‘extreme tension’, (Ochs 1995) and caused rifts among participants of the track. Riles, for example was angered by what she perceived as the politically-motivated ‘high-jacking’ of the strand, as opposed to genuine interest in building an inclusive National Network: ‘some of the people present were not committed to looking for a solution that everyone could agree on and support’. (Riles 1990: 4)<sup>373</sup> The name was changed because of the predominant view that the omission of the term ‘multicultural’ was racist and exclusionary. This perception was strengthened by the fact that there were no people of color at the Friday afternoon meeting, which clashed with the People of Color Caucus. (Ibid; BiPOL 1990)<sup>374</sup> As Moore notes: ‘The lack of diversity in the first two days of planning the Network was obviously a major problem.’ (Moore 1990: 1) Other participants of the Network Track argued that since the majority of people in the US bisexual community are white, the inclusion of the term ‘multicultural’ would be inaccurate and tokenistic. (Ochs 1995: 5) After the consensus decision to include the term ‘multicultural’ was reached,<sup>375</sup> organisers emphasised the need to ensure that the term not be a substitute for real efforts at racial and ethnic inclusion:

Much work has to go into the multicultural development of the Network. This should be emphasized in the next meeting [...] Meetings of the Network should not interfere with any of the Multicultural events. The Network should clearly state it’s [sic] commitment to Multicultural issues. (Moore 1990: 2)

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<sup>373</sup> Moore understates the case in her review of the Bisexual Network Track, saying that: ‘The comings and goings of people wanting to participate briefly [...] hinder decision making and can be annoying to others.’ (Moore 1990: 1)

<sup>374</sup> A further NBN meeting had been planned for Friday evening at the Women’s Building, but was cancelled when the organisers realised that the meeting would clash, once again, with the People of Color Caucus, and was not wheelchair accessible. (Riles 1990: 4)

<sup>375</sup> Conference participants continued to be confused over what to call the national network, however. For example, in her report on the Conference, Liz Highleyman refers to the Network as the ‘North American Bisexual Network’. (Highleyman 1990: 4)

The struggle over the naming of the National Network reflects broader struggles within the Conference over the relationship between bisexuality and racial and ethnic identities, struggles that remain unresolved. The addition of the term ‘multicultural’ serves as an indicator both of the bisexual community’s sense of its own diversity, and of its apparent lack of diversity.

### **Conclusion**

Race and gender are, clearly, central to the Conference space, but not in terms of an inherent bisexual inclusiveness of all genders, races and ethnicities. The centrality of race and gender to bisexual identity and community resides in the extent to which their *contested* position within bisexuality structures the emergence and experiences of this bisexual space. Where the 1990 Bisexual Conference space is ‘inclusive’, this is not because of an innate bisexual ability to transcend difference, but because it is a site where organisers and participants are forced to negotiate the mechanisms of power that produce difference.

The 1990 NBC space is interesting precisely because it crystallises the oscillation between bisexual ‘innocence’ and bisexual ‘identity’. The nostalgia for a ‘future perfect’ bisexual innocence rubs shoulders with the knowledge that identity-formation produces particular exclusions. In that respect, the 1990 Bisexual Conference space is not a ‘middle-ground’ uniting heterosexual and homosexual, white and black, male and female, as organisers and participants initially wished. It is, rather, a space where the assumptions constituting that *desire* for bisexuality to occupy the middle-ground are made manifest. Jo Eadie remarks that the desire for bisexuality to be inclusive in and of itself can be a way of forgetting ‘the fact that we are always caught up in *conflicts* of class, gender and “race”.’ (Eadie in *Bi Academic Intervention* 1997a: 204, italics in original) In the context of the Conference, that same desire means that the conflicts cannot be

forgotten. From early on, the Conference Committee realised that bisexual space and identity needed to be identified with some and differentiated from other identities and practices if it was not to replicate societal power-structures. In that sense, the process of creating the Conference space is also a process of *becoming* bisexual, of differentiating bisexuality from other forms of sexuality, and of trying to do so ethically.

Ka'ahumanu's playful queer reference to Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz* in the final plenary of the conference – 'Standing here today, I feel like I've clicked my heels three times and come home' (Ka'ahumanu, in Christina 1990: 48) – that I cited earlier as evidence of the discourse of the Conference as a safe bisexual home, can be re-read now as an expression of the knowledge that home is where you wake up when the 'dream' evaporates. Since the Committee sought to differentiate bisexual space with a care and attention rarely witnessed in the contemporary social field, the 'bisexual home' of the Conference is perhaps the painful realisation of this dream's unconscious foundations, rather than simply a dream that disappears in the cold light of day.

## Conclusion

Given my repeated emphasis on bisexual partiality throughout this thesis, it may seem antithetical to my project even to attempt to draw together the wealth of disparate material I have been concerned with here. Part of my interest has been to look at the *different* ways in which bisexuality is produced culturally and theoretically, rather than assuming a single bisexual meaning. I want to conclude this project, however, by unraveling some common threads running through the thesis as a whole, as a way of underlining both what I believe to be the importance of this work, and suggesting (a)venues for future research. Firstly, I want to return to the production of bisexuality as the ‘middle ground’ between the oppositional and hierarchical poles of sexuality, sex and gender, emphasising my reasons for seeking alternative constructions. In addition I want to link this issue to the understanding of bisexuality as governed by the regressive/transgressive dualism I have identified throughout the thesis. Secondly, I aim to emphasise the ways in which attention to alternative sites of bisexual production provides new insight into the relationship between structural hierarchies of sexuality and gender and those sexual and gendered subjects who negotiate those hierarchies. Finally, I want to relate these discussions to my own changing perspective and use of personal (bisexual) narrative in this thesis. How does my own ‘methodology of the personal’ resolve and/or complicate these key debates that bubble under the surface of my text?

### **Exposing the Middle Ground**

When the content of the three central chapters to my thesis was firmly established, my supervisor, Professor Nicole Ward, asked me why I had chosen not to examine bisexual discourse in relation to heterosexual spaces. At the time, I was puzzled by the question and answered in terms of the need to keep my



focus narrow, the relative ease of exploring ‘queer’ spaces, and my own personal investments in the communities I was exploring.<sup>376</sup> Yet, in the course of researching and writing, Nicole’s question kept returning to me, and in retrospect I believe my desire not to balance my bisexual cartography with a ‘representative’ range of sexual spaces is both a methodological and a political decision. I wanted my research to actively challenge the discursive production of bisexuality as the conceptual and actual ‘middle ground’ between heterosexuality and homosexuality.

As I suggest at a number of points in the thesis, I am interested in resisting this discursive production of bisexuality as vigorously as possible for the following reasons. Firstly, the notion of bisexuality as middle ground between heterosexuality and homosexuality allows contemporary feminist, lesbian, gay and queer theorists of sexuality and gender to maintain their understanding of bisexuality as ‘regressive’. Bisexuality is thus repeatedly configured as the tie that binds the heterosexual/homosexual binary, as both bridge between and no-man’s land. Bisexuality as middle ground unites and separates ‘male’ and ‘female’, and ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’, within a structural regime of heterosexual dominance. As middle ground, bisexuality can be re-inscribed as hegemonic structure (by such writers as Judith Butler and Donna Haraway), and bisexual subjects can be either ignored or marginalised as the carriers of a dominant curse. Secondly, this construction of bisexuality as middle ground also allows for the understanding of bisexuality as ‘transgressive’ of those same dominant categories of sex, gender and sexuality. Here, bisexuality’s location as ‘in between’ is understood to provide either a unique vantage-point from which to deconstruct gendered oppositions, (e.g. Däumer 1992) or a crisis of category itself; bisexuality is the ‘repressed third’ that haunts

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<sup>376</sup> I discuss the latter two readings investment in Chapter One, Section Two, Part One

the dyad. (e.g. Garber 1995) Appealing as it may be to reconfigure bisexuality as transgressive of those norms it is commonly accused of upholding, such a move cannot challenge the structural location of bisexuality. The implicit heterosexual construction of this ‘bisexual transgression’ – the merging or tension of gendered opposites as the basis for desire – is never challenged by such advocates.

The inter-linked constructions of bisexuality as regressive or transgressive, colluding with or challenging dominant categories, humanist or post-identity, run throughout this thesis, of course. To bring us more up to date, I want to mention briefly my experience of the 5<sup>th</sup> International Bisexual Conference at Harvard that I attended in April 1998.<sup>377</sup> Here too, bisexuality as transgression was the dominant discourse. At the opening plenary each mention of the word ‘bisexual’ was greeted with a standing ovation. The emphasis of the keynotes was on the equal exclusions bisexuals face from lesbian/gay and straight communities, and the importance of bisexuality’s inherent challenge to a ‘monosexual’ imperative.<sup>378</sup> The presumed diversity of bisexual community was consistently re-emphasised, despite the predominantly white and middle-class contingent. As I suggested in Chapter Four, a transgression model that is invested in bisexuality’s explosion of categories actually erases the differences of race and gender experienced by lesbian feminist delegates and delegates of color. Interestingly, where at the 1990 Conference this lack of specificity was vigorously resisted by the organisers, in 1998 what critique of subversive bisexual location existed was primarily to be found among participants. For example, Merl Storr and I presented papers contesting the political radicalism of understanding bisexuality as transgressive middle ground, focusing on the

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<sup>377</sup> See Chapter Four, Figure 56, for the cover of the brochure for this Conference.

disingenuous collapse of structures of race, gender and sexuality that often accompanies this move. Despite the highly critical nature of both papers, the majority of those present greeted such a perspective with enthusiasm. This provided a forum within the Conference as a whole where the specific positioning of bisexual subjects, communities and histories could begin to be addressed, even if this was not reflected within the Conference framework.

Although I did not stay until the end of the Conference – I felt depressed by the solidification of bisexual identity and community in ways that my research has sought to counter – my experience there has shed light on my work in this thesis. What I have hoped to show is that the construction of bisexuality as transgressive (as well as regressive) middle ground, while understandable, is ultimately counter-productive. Re-imagining the meaning of that middle ground does not, and cannot, critique the *structure* of hierarchical oppositions of sex, gender and sexuality. As we saw in Chapter Four, in relation to the position of feminism within the 1990 Bisexual Conference space, proposing bisexuality as subversive of gender norms, by virtue of its ‘post-feminist’ utopian potential, is profoundly ahistorical. Bisexuality as ‘beyond category’ effectively equalises those oppositional categories, refusing to acknowledge the hierarchies of gender that have historically influenced, and continue to influence, subject and community formation. In this rubric, the differences between a lesbian feminist position and a heterosexual male position in relation to structures of power are erased, as both are seen as equally ‘gender invested’.<sup>379</sup>

While highlighting the limits of theorising bisexuality as middle ground as a progressive political endeavour, in this thesis, I have also tried to focus on

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<sup>378</sup> See Chapter One, Section One, Part Two, and particularly footnotes 37, 38 and 39, for more detail about and a critique of the term ‘monosexual’.

bisexual production in other spaces and locations. Each chapter is an attempt to view bisexuality within queer contexts, to emphasise both the pervasive influence of bisexuality as heterosexual/homosexual middle ground, *and* the ways in which bisexual space is formed either as middle ground among a range of cultures, or is not a middle ground at all. Thus, in Chapter Two, bisexuality is produced both in opposition to and within the lesbian community of Northampton, as well as within queer culture. In Chapter Three, bisexuals and transsexuals are at points produced as one body, or as ‘indistinguishable’ from lesbians, gay men and heterosexuals, particularly in terms of sexual behaviour. Finally, in Chapter Four, bisexual identity and community is carved out between and among, the lesbian and gay, and white and Hispanic cultures of San Francisco. My three very different cartographies of bisexual space in this thesis are held together by their insistence that bisexuality is at times produced as other than the structural mechanism grounding heterosexuality.

### **Insistent Bisexual Narratives**

I believe that my focus on these bisexual locations *elsewhere* helps to shed light on the mutable relationship between bisexual subjects and their structural location within dominant regimes of sexuality and gender. Bisexual subjects are clearly positioned differently in relation to dominant (and sub-cultural) power relations, depending upon their sex, gender and current object-choice. The consistent factor in bisexual experience is, in fact, more likely to be her subjectivity (as bisexual) than, say, her privileged position (if with a man) or oppressed position (if with a woman). Her sense of self *as bisexual* is not produced by the experience of any one location within structures of power. This is not to negate

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<sup>379</sup> This is, of course, similar to the flattening out of differences between homosexual and heterosexual positions, in order to posit ‘monosexism’ as a primary form of biphobia. See footnote 378.

the effects of power-relations, but to emphasize the fact that a bisexual subject's positioning within those power-relations cannot be finally pinpointed. Her location is never equivalent to, nor wholly productive of her subjectivity.

The above is obviously true for subjects other than bisexual ones too. As I argued at the outset of my thesis, and again at the close of Chapter Three, however, the difference is that for a bisexual subject, this partiality is central to and productive of subjectivity, rather than that which undermines the supposed authenticity of the (lesbian, gay or straight) subject.<sup>380</sup> I would argue, too, that the elucidation of that narrative does make a difference to how we view structural location's influence over subjectivity. It suggests that positioning within structural power-relations does not finally determine one's subjectivity, either overall or at a given moment. For example, a bisexual woman in a relationship with a man does not have the same relationship to heterosexuality as a straight woman. Similarly, with regards to transsexual subjectivity, a man who has been culturally read as a woman, does not have the same relationship to maleness as a genetic male. That difference is marked on their bodies by virtue of previous structural location, and potential future locations. To assume (as often is) that bisexual subjectivity is different from lesbian subjectivity primarily in terms of its access to heterosexual privilege, is to obscure any notion of a bisexual narrative over time. In effect, to focus primarily on structural location is to banish the possibility of a continuous bisexual (or transsexual) subjectivity. It is for this reason that I have focused upon bisexual narratives of subjectivity throughout this thesis, rather than on structures of power that at best position bisexuality as oscillation (now this, now that), and at worst re-inscribe bisexuality as middle ground regulating or transcending heterosexuality.

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<sup>380</sup> See my discussion of Julia Creet's article 'Anxieties of Identity: Coming Out and Coming Undone', (Creet 1995) in Chapter Three, Section One, Part Three, 'Bisexual Pleasures'.

My argument concerning the specificity of bisexual narrative, above, and the changing relationship between subject and structural location that I believe typifies that narrative, is perhaps best illustrated by my own changing position in relation to my research within the thesis. In Chapter One I mention that the progression through this research is a personal one, that I am as shaped by my findings as they are by me. I also suggest that the use of the ‘personal voice’, while not unproblematic, remains a central concern within feminist research practice. I realise, however, that how my own experience functions as methodology as the thesis progresses, becomes increasingly obscure. Not only does my voice change in different contexts, but at certain points it frames the text, propelling the reader forward in a given direction, while at others its presence is negligible, little more than a whisper. This may certainly be confusing for the reader, especially given that there are no signposts in preparation for these textual shifts. Yet as I also mentioned in Chapter One, self-reflexive methodology could be usefully understood less as a search for the truth of experience, than as an exploration of ‘the interfaces among difference “voices”’, and how they inflect one another to produce a meaningful subject. To rephrase the subjectivity-location question, then, how might we make sense of this personal (bisexual) confusion?

In a sense, perhaps only consciously in retrospect, my journey through these bisexual spaces is indicative of my resistance to the construction of bisexuality as regressive or transgressive middle ground. To return to Rosi Braidotti’s conceptualisation of the researcher as nomad, (Braidotti 1994) and to Elspeth Probyn’s warnings about the researcher as tourist... I feel not so much that I have visited new bisexual places in my work, but that I have been, and continue to be, a tourist in my own cultural (a)venues, forced to look again at the spaces bisexuals occupy and the meanings generated by their presence in those

spaces. Looking back, I can say that the use of the personal in each chapter is both a methodological issue, a way of approaching the issue of bisexual experience, and a research finding itself, through which bisexual positioning and subjectivity may be read.

I want to go back over the relationship between my own narrative and my research now in more detail. My ‘search for the bisexual experience’ in the lesbian context of Northampton, Massachusetts, is quite explicitly framed by my own experience of living there. Section One of that chapter begins with an informal walk through the town, and ends with a discussion of the lesbian household I was a part of. Throughout the chapter my concern is with the ways bisexual women are included and/or excluded from lesbian community. The narrative ostensibly traces the shift from what I identify as initial bisexual inclusion within lesbian community, to the separation of bisexual identity through naming. In a direct mirroring of this trajectory (that is to say, inversion) I wander the streets of Northampton as an outsider searching for bisexual community, in vain, and end up with a sense of my own inclusion within a miniature lesbian community. At the close of the chapter there remains a contradiction between the ‘resolution’ of the Pride March Controversy through bisexual naming, and the apparent lack of bisexual visibility during my stay in Northampton. Yet my own movement towards rather than away from inclusion within lesbian community could perhaps be seen as providing alternative closure. Rather than ‘transgressing’ lesbian community, then, my own ambivalent narrative mirrors those of Sharon Gonsalves and May Wolf in suggesting a lack of stable location for bisexuality.

In the following chapter on bisexuality and transsexuality in feminist and queer spaces, my personal trajectory is still more problematic. The methodological use of the personal is, from the outset, motivated by my invested

relationship to the subject. At the time of conducting the research for this chapter, my involvement with my FTM lover provides a particular perspective on the relationship between bisexual and transsexual subjectivity. My interest in the historical and theoretical merging of bisexuality and transsexuality is persistently mediated through my desire, both to affirm and to separate the linked but different trajectories I analyse. Here, perhaps more than anywhere else in the thesis, my own subjectivity is implicated in the production of bisexuality (and transsexuality) as either regressive or transgressive. The end of Section One makes the case (rather too strongly?) for bisexual and transsexual subjectivity as *wrongly* inscribed by this dyad, thus preparing the way for a triumphant and romantic bi/trans escape, in the next section, from the confining gaze of the mythical, malicious viewer (who, neither bisexual nor transsexual, remains curiously unnamed). ‘Read with me’, I say, all the while refusing that possibility. I want, clearly, to map out a visible escape route from the normative middle ground, from the dominant structures of gender and sexuality, within which (my) bisexual and (his) transsexual subjectivity have no mobility. Instead of ‘transgression’ I want specificity, but in this context I can only sketch out an imaginative map that suggests the idea of bisexual narrative I can only bring together later.

In the final chapter, I attempt to take an uncharacteristic critical distance from my subject – the consolidation of bisexual identity and community through the 1990 Bisexual Conference in San Francisco. This is a deliberate move on my part. It seems quite clear to me from this research, and from the subsequent development of US bisexual conferences (as highlighted above), that the consolidation of bisexual space occurs here through an incorporation, rather than critique of the production of bisexuality as transgressive. As is no doubt clear, I am highly suspicious of the normative effects of such a progression, while I can



see the importance of identity and community for bisexual self-valuation. My desire in this chapter is to highlight the historical construction of separate bisexual space, how it undercuts itself, rather than damning from outside. In that sense I am conscious throughout the text of my presence there as an academic rather than ‘political activist’. In maintaining such a fictional, and perhaps even parodic distance, the ways in which bisexual separation and visibility work to reaffirm rather than contest productions of bisexuality as middle ground, can be brought to the reader’s attention. Perhaps it is even my desire to retreat into an academic *passing*, that exposes the internal logic of dominant bisexual subject-formation, rather like Butler’s passing subjects expose the workings of the heterosexual matrix. The ways in which bisexual wish-fulfillment (my own position in Chapter Three) seeks to gloss over the bisexual specificity that inevitably resurfaces are, to my mind, better addressed through this methodological tack than through a more direct critique. The consolidation of the middle ground of bisexuality makes a range of bisexual historical and personal narratives invisible, while privileging others. Reading through the use of the personal, then, the focus of this chapter becomes the process of bisexual rewriting and the writing out of 1970s bisexual activism, as well as bisexual subjects who do not fit the new rubric.

And so where does this leave, or lead, us? Inconsistent as my personal bisexual methodology is, it is precisely this trajectory that suggests possible (a)venues for further research. In contrast to a bisexual theory that privileges the transgressive over the regressive, and seeks to validate the ‘middle ground’ as a useful political location for bisexual identity and community, I want to propose the linking of my/incongruous bisexual narratives that run through this thesis. Rather than viewing (this) bisexual experience as fractured, as jumping from one location to another, and thereby from one subjectivity to another, perhaps we

might reconfigure it as a continuous narrative, with its own internal logic. The 'bisexual experience' I set out in search of (according to my title) does not reside in any single location or subjectivity. A bisexual subject moves through and attaches to itself different experiences of visibility and invisibility, privilege and refusal, cultural acceptance and cultural exclusion. She is produced by her various locations, but is not reducible to any single location. This emphasis on bisexual narrative, that would surely form the basis of a new project, must of necessity emphasise the local over the universal, and provides scope for acknowledging potential and actual bisexual collusion with dominant structures as well as resistance to the same.

A 'return to narrative' may seem strangely old-fashioned in these post-postmodern days, particularly given my focus in this thesis on spaces. Yet I believe that such approach to bisexuality may open up a number of productive areas for future research. I am particularly interested, for example, in the challenges that bisexual narrative poses to visibility politics. To trace bisexual narratives effectively I believe we need to consider *passing* as potentially productive of subjectivity rather than only as repressive of a 'true self', for example. In addition, a focus on narrative raises the question of literary criticism, perhaps forcing the researcher to produce close readings of bisexual texts and contexts, and to consider the relationship among different texts – a cultural intertextuality. How do we map bisexual narratives cross-culturally (within and among nation states), through age and class differences, to name but a few areas of interest? The task, then, continues to be an interdisciplinary one. I am not sure what we will discover by linking theories of space and narrative in researching bisexuality, but I am sure that the process will be an illuminating one.

## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX I: Archive Material from Chapter Two

#### List of Materials in Appendix (in date order)

- a. Elisabeth Brook (1989) 'Lesbians Don't Fuck Men', *Sojourner*, Vol.14, No.11, July: 6; and Sharon Gonsalves' response, *Ibid*.
- b. *The Calendar*, January 1990: front page.
- c. *The Calendar*, February 1990: front page.
- d. *The Calendar*, April 1990: front page.
- e. Seccs Uelle (1990) 'Dyke and Bi Women's Factions Sling It Out', *Gay Community Nudes*, April 1: 43.
- f. Steve Boal to Bet Power (1990) letter, April 7.
- g. Bet Power to Steve Boal (1990) letter, April 21.
- h. Anon (1994) 'Why Do the Lesbians Have All the Fun Around Here?', advertisement for the *Valley Gay Men's Calendar*.
- i. Unauthored and undated newspaper article.

### APPENDIX II: Archive Material from Chapter Four

#### List of Materials in Appendix (in date order)

- a. Lani Ka'ahumanu and Autumn Courtney (1988) 'Dear Nascent Bisexual Networkers', National Mailing, February 17.
- b. Boston Area Planning Committee (1988) 'PROPOSAL by the Boston Area Planning Committee for the Nascent National Bisexual Network', June 2; Seattle Bisexual Women's Network (1988) 'Yes to a National Bisexual Network', *Ibid*; and miscellaneous responses nationwide.
- c. North American Bisexual Network working group of the 1990 San Francisco Conference on Bisexuality Committee (1989) 'A Proposal', October 1.
- d. Loraine Hutchins (1989) Letter to the ECBN Steering Committee, October 27: 1-3.

# Letters

*Continued from previous page*

I have for people in all our manifestations.

Ginny Lernann  
Rockport, MA

## Lesbians Don't

### Fuck Men

To the Editor:

I am outraged and perplexed by Sharon Gonsalves's viewpoint in the May

*Sojourner*. How can you call yourself a

lesbian when you have sex with men?

How can you have sex with men when

you believe yourself to be a lesbian? And,

most importantly, how can you be sur-

prised at the loss of "your" lesbian com-

munity when you "come out" as bisexual?

A lesbian, by definition, is a woman

who loves/has sex with other women.

Period. Occasionally a lesbian may find

herself having sex with a man because she

is tired of fighting a homophobic society,

because she is tired of hiding, because of

her own internalized self-hatred or homo-

phobia. But this is not bisexuality; this is

pain.

Some people seem to be true bisexuals,

entering into healthy unions with both

sexes. They are neither superior to nor

inferior to lesbians or heterosexuals. But

they are not lesbians. They are bisexuals.

We share some common ground.

Lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals are

reviled by the safe, "straight" world

because of who we are. And, sharing politi-

cal concerns, it is probably expedient for

us to work together toward common poli-

tical goals. This does not mean we share a

community.

We lesbians have worked long and hard

to create safe communities for ourselves.

Bisexuals are welcome to, and should, do

the same. But do not try to grab what we

have created. "Getting back out into the

lesbian community" is not where you

"belong." It seems to me you want it all:

the woman-support of lesbians, the hetero-

sexual privilege that comes with relating

to men, and the "shock value" of announc-

ing to the straight world that you are a les-

bian. Yes, you are entitled to a women's

community—a bisexual women's commu-

nity.

You pride yourself on announcing to the

straight world that you are a lesbian, to

"educate" them to the fact that we exist.

What you are really saying to the straight

world is that lesbians sleep with men.

Thank you very much, but we don't need

this kind of PR. Be honest. Tell the

straight world you are bisexual—or are

you ashamed to admit it?

I don't know who the lesbians are who

are having "a quick fuck" with men and

calling it okay. The lesbians I know who

find themselves attracted to men are dis-

turbed by this, expend a lot of time and

energy soul-searching, and try to get down

to the root of the problem. Your cavalier

attitude is insulting to those lesbians who

are serious about what they do and who

they do it with.

Let's not get side-tracked into that tired

old "we're people first, men and women

second" argument. It belongs, rightfully, to

young people just coming out and trying

to find the courage to be what they are

and, wrongfully, to those who would deny

our individualities and homogenize us into

invisibility.

Elisabeth Brook  
Amherst, MA

### Sharon Gonsalves responds:

Many women would agree that they did

not leave the womb with their sexual iden-

tity written in stone. Many of us who

evolved into lesbians came out at a time

when if you loved women you called

yourself a lesbian regardless of the poten-

tial for future relationships with men.

Some of us didn't imagine we'd ever want

to be with men again. Believe me, I did

plenty of soul-searching. Rather than sup-

press my attractions I came out as bisexu-

al. I don't see my attractions to men as a

problem nor am I ashamed of my bisexu-

ality. Judging from the amount of positive

feedback I've received in response to this

viewpoint, I'd say there are many women

in my shoes. The lesbian community

stands to lose by ostracizing us. We are

your lovers, your friends, and your allies.

At least some of the pain that lesbians

who sleep with men or are attracted to

men feel comes from knowing that they

will lose a community they've been a part

of for a long time that's been very dear to

them. This doesn't have to happen.

Drawing battle lines and setting up camps

is divisive. My main concern is in building

a larger, stronger women's community that

includes those of us who have chosen to

sleep with men. Rather than attack each

other let's ask questions like: why are so

many lesbians coming out as bi? Are men

really different than they used to be? What

aren't women getting from each other in

the communities we've worked so hard to

build? We need to find ways to remain

supportive friends and allies (both bi's for

lesbians and lesbians for bi's).

## Publish Safe

### Sex Guidelines

Dear *Sojourner*:

This letter represents my annual plea

that *Sojourner* and other women's papers

*Continued on next page*

True? Or  
healthy mix with  
of and?

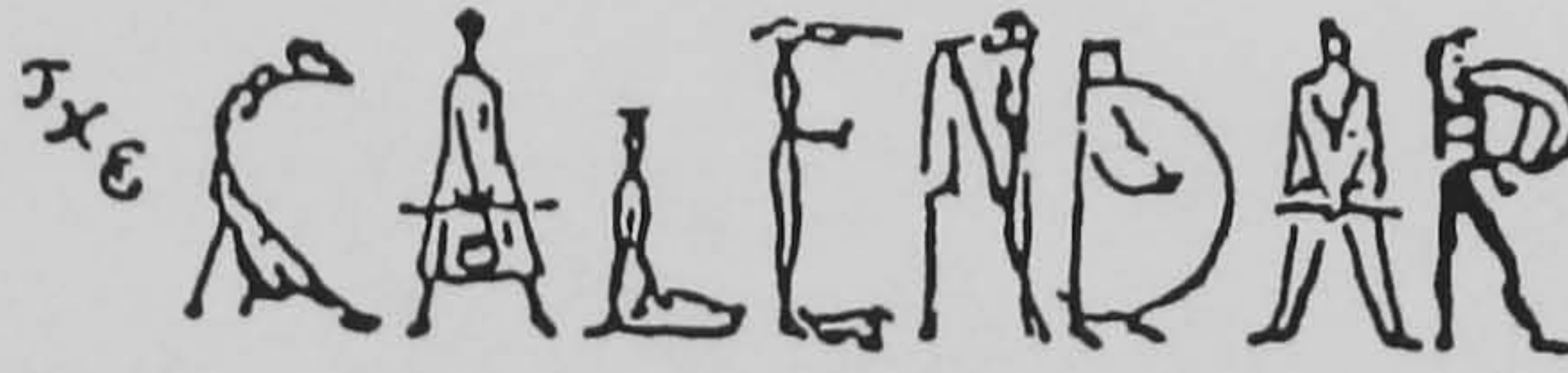
# Entertainment

REVOLUTIONARY ACTS! MUSICAL AND THEATRICAL PRODUCTIONS presents

Concert for an Affordable Cambridge

A WEEK FOR WOMEN  
WOMENCIRCLES:  
A SHARED SPIRITUAL  
JOURNEY  
Aug. 27 - Sep. 1  
Come celebrate and explore with us!  
ritual, dance, music,

b.



1990 January

a Monthly Listing of Events by, for, and about Lesbians in the Connecticut River Valley  
and the Berkshires



HERE WE GO AGAIN DEPT.

Whew, things happen fast, these days. Once again, THE MARCH is an issue for lesbian concern and action. (See the following announcement and ACT). My poor dog Magic got hit by a car and is recovering from a broken hip. No, the car didn't stop. And all of us are dealing with a brutal murder in the Mall parking lot. A young woman, not found for a whole day. Surely the murderer was inspired by the Montreal Massacre. And he may be still around, as there are no clues to his identity. So, we have to do something! What can we do? Are any of us doing anything? Some of us are. Some of us have become guerilla vandals, performing works of "Nyah! Nyah! Theatre" that may (goddess forbid) end up with fines or jail for them. The truth is, I'm having a hard time with vandalism as a feminist revolutionary tool. Boys are vandals, women clean up... Compare the paint-wielding guerilla raid on the Amherst Newsroom with any act carried out by any person in Romania, Poland, Guatemala, El Salvadore, Palestine, or any other country where men in uniform can randomly kill you. The energy, risk, danger, enthusiasm, and passion spent by these women on that act - what if they had organized a picket for a few weeks, with street theatre, activities and/or daily demonstrations? The media would have covered it, the Amherst Newsroom would have lost business, blah, blah, blah...

Sure, I talk. Like all of us, something happens, we talk, get all self-righteous, don't act. At least these women did something, and even though I disagree with the method, I applaud anyone taking action about anything she feels strongly. The apathy level around here has risen dramatically this winter, and I'm as bad as everyone else.

So I'm making the resolution to banish apathy from my life in 1990. There are important projects begun in the Valley. The quest for accessibility is one thing this community can be proud of. Lunaria" efforts, and the work at 16 Center St. are making more of our physical resources available to more of our sisters. And, although women have

not responded well to Fern's idea of working with Northampton's Peoples Institute, I encourage women to consider what a wonderful resource it could be for all of us, if it was accessible. Think again about taking on that project. The P.I. director is enthusiastic about working with a Lesbian group (yes, the L-word was used, ask Fern).

Only three photos have been sent in to the PHOTO CONTEST! One of them was from Israel! I really thought there were more picture-taking dykes in this dyke town. SO GET OFF YOUR ASSSES AND SEND IN YOUR PHOTOS NOW!!! And do something. Recycle, send contributions, write legislators, picket, petition, shelter, support, build coalitions, fight for rights, protect, investigate, teach. DO.

This is my opinion, of course. I probably won't do it again, but I encourage you to respond. Pamela

#### ANNOUNCEMENTS

**COMMUNITY ALERT:** A group of Valley Lesbians, independently of one another, attended the meeting of the May 1990 March committee on Dec. 13. We shared a common concern about the lack of Lesbian representation at the 1989 Rally, and the change of the name of the March from Lesbian and Gay Pride March to Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Pride March. Throughout an increasingly frightening and maddening 2-hour discussion, we tried to express our concerns but were met with hostility and condescension. Some of the non-lesbian members of the committee appeared determined to define our lifestyles in purely bedroom, not political, terms. Faced with the dilemma of offending either the bisexual or the Lesbian community, they chose not to offend the bisexuals. When it became apparent that we couldn't even reach consensus on the name of the march, the group agreed to a democratic vote on that single issue. It was decided - by one vote - to change the name back to its original "Lesbian and Gay Pride", and to canvass the community by means of a ballot at the rally following the march. At that point some members

of the committee declared the vote "non-binding" and invalid. We were shocked and angered by what went on in that meeting. We have created a community we care deeply about, and are in danger of seeing that community made invisible. We feel some kind of action must be taken. Therefore, we have decided to sponsor one more Lesbian caucus to the next meeting of the March committee, Jan. 10. The week before that, Jan. 3, we will meet to discuss issues and problems that have been raised, and to try to find creative ways to confront these. If you are concerned and interested, please join us on Jan. 3. Information on time and place will be available if you call 413-586-5071 and leave your name and number. We have already booked the Northampton Center for the Arts for a meeting of the entire Lesbian community on Tuesday, Jan. 23 at 7:00. We want to share our experiences with you, to hear your concerns, and to brainstorm ways to meet this very real threat to our hard-won community.

**WOMEN INDOORS!!** THRILL to the breeze of a rapid riffle ... SHAKE THE EXCITEMENT of "quartz" on triple ... FLEX your gluteus to its maximum while you really score, card games, board games, whatever. **WOMEN INDOORS!** What a warm feeling. Call Judy, 413-634-5456, or write **WOMEN INDOORS** c/o PO Box 9027 Spfld, 01100.

"NOW'S THE TIME" listeners - a lavender thank-you for your enthusiastic and generous support. Keep on listenin' and we'll keep spinning. Peace Be With You, Judy and Ruth.

**N.O.W. Meeting.** 1st Greenfield Chapter Mtg. Jan 10, 7:30PM. Greenfield Public Library on Main Street. Hampshire/Franklin welcome.

C.

# THE CALENDAR

a Monthly Listing of Events by, for, and about Lesbians in the Connecticut River Valley  
and the Berkshires

FEBRUARY 1990

Vol. 3 #10



## ANNOUNCEMENTS

**TAKE BACK THE MARCH NIGHT PRIDE MARCH COMMITTEE UPDATE:**  
Thanks to the combined efforts of nearly 40 concerned lesbians, we were able to turn the March committee around at the January 10 meeting. The thrust of our argument is contained in the following statement, which we passed out and read at that meeting: "The 1989 March and rally were not representative of lesbian concerns and/or interests. According to the vote taken at the December 13, 1989 meeting, the title of the 1990 march is the Lesbian and Gay Pride March. This is a political march, with the aim of celebrating and building on the gains we have made, and of strengthening the lesbian and gay communities. Though we have won a major victory with the Massachusetts Gay Rights bill, many battles remain to be fought. These include (but are not limited to): societal homophobia and its attendant violence, job security, foster care, woman-hating and violence against women. We encourage bisexuals and other politically sympathetic groups to march as our allies." The group voted to accept the return of the March name to "Lesbian and Gay Pride March." As they had threatened, the gay men and bisexuals who had opposed the change/return withdrew from the March committee. As of now, all committees related to the March are made up of dykes. We will make the 1990 March a memorable one, a march for our pride, our rights, and our visibility. Contrary to rumor, we didn't "storm the meeting" like Fascists. We turned out in large numbers because we're concerned. We're not terrorists. We're your sisters, your community. Come celebrate with us on May 5 !!

## COMMUNITY MEETING REPORT:

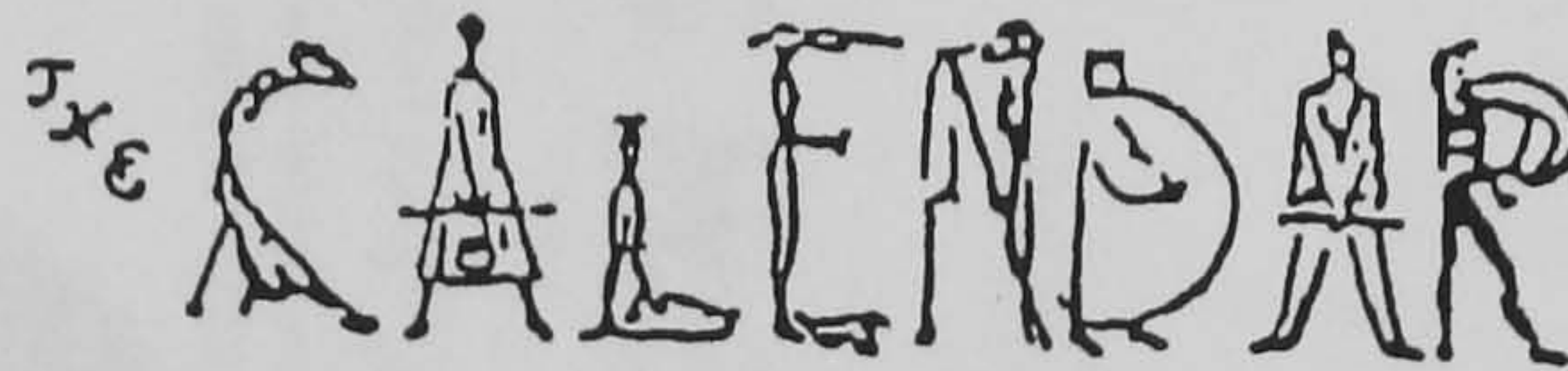
On Jan. 23, nearly fifty lesbians met to disseminate information concerning the May 5, 1990 Lesbian/Gay Pride March. We learned that lesbians now control the steering committee and work groups, so this year's march will be a huge change from the past few years. Several lesbians reported on the first few March meetings, during which -- after initial hostility toward lesbian initiative and input -- it was decided that the March title will not include the word Bisexual, because of the shift in political focus. Several gay men and bisexual folks have decided not to work on the march this year, making it a true Take Back the March March. We were pleased with the support our community gave us, and relieved and gratified to know that this is what the community wants and supports. More March help is needed -- especially peacekeepers. So keep a watch out, in TC, for more information. We also decided to meet after this year's March (not parade) to discuss plans and changes for next year. Consider getting involved. Make this your community, too.

**F.L.O.W.E.R. BLOOMS!** Thanks to the enthusiastic support of the Lesbian community, FLOWER met its goal of raising \$2500 to start its Spring granting cycle! If you are a Lesbian who has a not-for-profit project or idea that will benefit the Lesbian community of Western Mass., write FLOWER, P.O. Box 602, Northampton, MA 01061. Criteria for funding, guidelines, and an application will be sent to you. Or come by the FLOWER office - suite 220, 16 Center St., Northampton, MA, on Weds. 9:30-11:30 a.m. or Thurs. 6-8 p.m. Applications for funding will be ready **BY THE END OF FEBRUARY**. Many thanks to all you members who have made this

granting cycle possible. We're not stopping here, however. Fundraising has already begun for the Fall granting cycle with a goal of \$2500 and we want to raise \$5000 by Dec. 31, 1990 toward a vision of a Lesbian Community Center. So join now and help FLOWER build community in innovative ways.

**NORTH EAST WOMEN'S MUSICAL RETREAT (NEWMR):** The North East Women's Musical Retreat's TENTH YEAR FESTIVAL CELEBRATION is in the making. We are happy to announce that NEWMR X will be held over the Labor Day weekend at Echo Lark Camp in Poyntelle, PA. This year marks the beginning of a new decade and we are very excited about NEWMR's future. NEWMR has been a meaningful part of the lives of many women in the past and we believe that we can continue to contribute to our community.

d.



a Monthly Listing of Events by, for, and about Lesbians in the Connecticut River Valley  
the Berkshires



## ANNOUNCEMENTS

ANITA BRYANT MEMORIAL SPEAKERS Bureau. Speakers include Anita herself (after all, it WAS her idea!), Maggie Thatcher, Imelda Marcos, Nancy Reagan, Jean Kirkpatrick, Phyllis Schlaffley, and many other of those nationally-known women who make us so proud to be women ladies. Call 1-BESTFRIEND.

LESBIANS AGAINST THE POSTAL SERVICE (LAPS) are planning a demonstration at the Northampton P.O. to protest the continued use of oppressive patriarchal woman-hating language. Down with MAILBOXES!!! Call 1-JUSTRAVING to help recruit.

THE BISEXUAL, TRISEXUAL, TRANSESTITE, Transexual, Asexual, Oversexual, Ultrasexual, Heterosexual, Non-sexual Pride March Committee will meet at Hickey's on April 1. Gals, bring some yummy goodies, Men, bring your wonderful ideas. Let's make this the best March ever! Still working on a rally site big enough to hold us all!

P.C. HOTLINE - MESSAGE CHANGED daily! Keep up on the ever-changing P.C. rules. One call every morning, and you'll go to work confident that you know who is in, who is out, whom to disapprove of, who your leaders are (how about that Jan Clausen now with a man?), which community member is too P.I. to speak to, and who to hate. Also greatest gossip line in town! (P.C., of course) Call 1-LASTWRD.

THE POLITICALLY INCORRECT PRIDE Committee announces FANTASY-NASTY NIGHT at the North Star. Totally outrageous dress is encouraged - there will be a fashion show with "prizes". Also a Personal Ads Bulletin Board, leather market, toy show (bring your own to Show and Tell!), "services auction", public pillory, art show, precision bullwhip drillteam demonstration, and many other nasty things you never thought you'd see in Northampton! No sex police (unless in uniform), so check your attitude at the door. Benefit for THE CALENDAR.



THE HADLEY HOUSE PROUDLY ANNOUNCES that they are all pregnant with quintuplets (same donor). Due on International Women's Day! We are having a contest to name them! Call 1-KIDDIES FMI.

HELEN HAGENDAZ ANNOUNCES A BREAK-through in channelling! Join her April 1 at the Wendell Town Hall as she channels Eleanor Roosevelt, who will finally reveal how she was able to have a life-long lesbian relationship, stay married to the Pres., and become the world's most beloved person during her lifetime. We could all learn a thing or two. Meet at 2:PM. Bring questions.

## WORKSHOPS

TOUCHING OURSELVES, HEALING THE Universe. Join Hotlik Freespirit in an exploration of Transcendental Meditation and the latest fad new age healing techniques. April 1 at TC Office, 3:PM.

LALINGUA LEAGUE TECHNIQUE TO BE demonstrated by practitioner. Learn to read past lives by rubbing tongue bumps and cracks. Your own or others. Location TBA. Call 1-800-TONGUES.

YOU CAN HAVE IT ALL - MOVING INTO the 90's: A weekend workshop for lesbians looking for the Good Life (het-style). Learn how to balance babies (one on each hip) with a career in business, a full-time partner, a mistress on the side, and weekends of wine-tasting parties, while maintaining a politically correct exterior. Confidentially guaranteed. 1-800-SELLOUT.

STRUGGLE FOR NON-INTIMACY. ARE you sick of sharing? Are you tired of intimate details? Do you hate processing feelings? This workshop will teach you how to put up walls, not care about the feelings someone else is trying to guilt-trip you with, and laugh (HA!) at abandonment issues. Icy Soulshiver will lead. 1-IFROZEN.

FINDING OUR INNER VACUUM. BY MEDITATING in a safe space surrounded by crystals and wombmoon energy, we will discover the wellsprings of our Inner Emptiness. Learn to disempower your own vacuum. 1-800-THE-HOLE.



DO WHAT YOU LOVE & NEVER MAKE A penny! Who cares, as long as you're happy! For only \$999, these and other brilliant ideas can be yours in this 5 minute crash course called "How to Lose All and Keep Smiling" Call Ms. Fortune at 1-800-REALDEAL.

CLAY VULVAS ARE BACK!! Florence Breezbottom has graciously consented to facilitate her hands-on workshop creating her famous clay vulvas! Remember girls, Mother's Day is not far away. Think how delighted YOUR mother will be with her very own clay vulva on the piano holding those M & M's or breath mints. Clay vulvas are also excellent wedding gifts for that "het" bride you bedded for four years in college. These make wonderful pickle dishes, sure to dress up any dinner party. Call Flo at 1-800- MUD-CUNT.

## GROUPS

COCODEPENDANTS SUPPORT GROUP. Are you addicted to people who are addicted to people with addictions? Kick and Slam, the 2-Step Program, will help you overcome this and other dependancies. Meets at Sandy's whenever you want. 1-KIK-SLAM.

ADULT SURVIVORS OF 12 STEP PARENTS. (ed. note: I don't know if this is 12-Step Parents or 12 Step-Parents, since it was scribbled on the back of a scrap of paper bag, in crayon) Meets at the...(end of note)

WHO ARE YOU EATING/WHO'S EATING YOU - local author and teacher Lesbia Friend will lead a support group for wimmin who are concerned about their eating habits, bodily parts and relation to oral performance, beginning Thurs. April 31, 7pm - ? Call 1-800-EAT-OUT.

ROLE CONFUSION SUPPORT GROUP Are you butch? Are you Femme? How about a femmy butch, or a butchy femme? Eleanor Roosevelt once said that her success in life was due in a large part to the personal awakening of herself as a butch top. If you are questioning your role, or would care to be in a supportive atmosphere that reaffirms your role, call ROCKY FLOWERCHILD at 1-800-CON-FUSE.

**Ten Years Released Oodles of Pent-Up Frustration and Made Us Real That Our Ridiculous, Conservative, Mainstream Agenda was Nothin' More than Sublimation. (\$19.95 HARDcover)**

*"Mother Teresa would love After the Balling..."*  
 — Ex-Rev. Robert Williams



**KNOCKOUT**  
**THE WEEKLY MAGAZINE**  
**FOR LIPSTICK LESBIANS**

Photo essays, make-up hints, girtalk, personality quizzes and much, much more!!!

\$150/year. Free "Color Me Lesbian" chart with e subscription. For more info, write 1515 Rue Vogue.

...shows that progressive people hate the snow." Openly gay city councillor Dad Scodras attempted to rise above all the conflict in his press conference. "I think it is a great beginning. Gay and lesbian people and our friends are clearly beginning to do the massive amount of political organizing this referendum is going to take," he said. "It's just disappointing that so far, gay and lesbian people have been organizing against each other," he said.

Other groups holding press conferences included the League of Women from Newton, Continued on page 61

# Dyke and bi women's factions sling it out

## When lesbians and bisexual women in Northampton, Mass., couldn't talk out their differences they decided to take it to the pits

By Secs Uelle

**NORTHAMPTON, MASS** — After months of public accusations and fruitless community meetings aimed at finding common ground, lesbians and bisexuals pissed off at each other decided to settle their differences in a mudwrestling contest here.

"There's been so much mudslinging already we decided we might as well go for the real thing," said Mac Truitt, spokesdyke for one of the groups, Butches Offended by Bi's (BOB).

"We don't stand a chance against those big butch bullies," said Sheila Eatem of the group Innocent Bi-standers. "But we thought it would be a good idea to get in touch with the earth," said Eatem, adding, "plus, we might find some dates."

The proposal for the mudwrestling match came after a series of public meetings degenerated into name-calling. There was a brief moment during one of the meetings when it looked like the groups might have found a point of agreement. Sandy Shore, a

member of Lesbes, Gays, Bi's and Everybody, who acted as facilitator of the meeting, suggested, "Look, it seems like you gals aren't really mad at each other. What I'm hearing is that both groups are mad at self-identified femme lesbians who are sleeping with men." "Yeah, you can't trust a femme," shouted Ben. Here a member of BOB, "No lesbians who sleep with men owe it to their bisexual sisters to come out," said Eatem.

After 45 minutes of haggling about why the femme dykes were fucked up, the mudwrestling proposal was offered. But once the decision to go ahead with the contest was made, negotiations quickly broke down as the groups began arguing over logistics. Verification of the sexual preference of the referees for the contest was an especially sticky point, with some favoring letters of reference while others pushed for a "vote by the community approach."

Continued on and on!

*And hell.*

# IN OUR MOUTHS

PHOTOS FICTION CLASSIFIEDS & MUCH MORE!



FOR DYKES,  
 ABOUT DYKES,  
 BY BI'S

\$5 issue/\$28 year to: IN OUR MOUTHS, 526 SwitchHitter Lane, San Fran., Calif.  
 Rather Bright, Editor

GAY COMMUNITY NUDES APRIL 1, 1990 PA



f.

Steve Bond  
 (7 April 90)  
 57 East St.  
 Easthampton, MA 010

Dear Bet,

Micki read me the letter that you sent to G.C.N. It's a wonderful letter. You write and you speak eloquently - we are all lucky to have your voice in the Community.

I am concerned that some people are not going to march through Northampton this year. This is a choice, I think, that only becomes powerful if the majority of usual participants don't march. It's a important option for 1991 if changes can't be made. It's too late to orchestrate a majority boycott this year and it is perhaps too early for such a massive negative move.

This year each individual must make their own choice. But I see three options, only one of which is empowering. The March Committee will be pleased if people such as you and I don't march. They clearly would prefer that any opposition have no voice, have no visibility, and have no part in the March. If no one in this year's March objects to the discriminatory actions of the Committee the Committee will use the March as an endorsement of their position. One choice is not to march; The Committee will use our absence to consolidate power. Another choice is to march along invisibly in the crowd. The Committee will use our silence as a vote of confidence. The third choice is to march loudly and visibly, proclaiming our diversity and solidarity. The March Committee has narrowly defined ~~the~~ who the March is for, but they only have power to do this if we allow them to. By now I'm sure you have heard about the Committee's theme: "Stay Out, Stay Proud." The double meaning is not subtle. The fascist perspective of the Committee was clearly contrary to the ~~rest~~ view of the vast majority of those

at the March 15<sup>th</sup> meeting. It must be just as clear at the May 5<sup>th</sup> March that ~~they are a small~~ the Committee does not represent us - the diverse, energetic, loving Community of sexual minorities in Western Massachusetts.

There will be a balloon arch this year, because the arch has become an important memorial. I am working with the VGA to have every balloon stamped with "Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual Pride." The Valley Gay Alliance will carry its banner, but words supporting Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual Pride will be attached. The Valley Gay Alliance also voted not to donate money to the March Committee and not to list our name in the signature ad.

Rob Ranney, Brad Robinson, and I have produced two hundred T-shirts like the one enclosed and are selling them at virtually no profit (\$5). The VGA is lending money to print another one hundred. The goal of Rob, Brad and I was to produce a really good high quality inclusive Tee and flood the area with them. The Tee is heavy weight cotton. It says "Western Mass." to include all the people in the hills as well as the "Valley." It's timely for the whole decade. My private dream is that on May 5<sup>th</sup> there will be a sea of people at the March wearing white T-shirts with the words "Lesbian, Gay, & Bisexual Pride" on them. We've tried to create an affirmative, inclusive, upbeat shirt. This fight has grown very negative, and we wanted to do something positive. The enclosed shirt is free.

Thank you for your strength, your words, your help.

Fondly,  
Steve Boal

(P.S. - Contact me to buy more shirts - or Brad or Rob).



April 24, 1990

Dear Steve -

Thank you for your letter of support and for the wonderful t-shirt you guys have created! Rob is incredibly talented. The detail of cartooning in the shirt must have involved much work and love. I have put the t-shirt in the Northampton Archives within the New Alexandria Lesbian Library. A creative way to resist and speak out, indeed!

Yes, we must each deal with this year's discriminatory words in our own way. I feel very good about not attending and speaking out in print, nationally, about why (see enclosed, which GCN published as a by-lined article - sorry the xerox reduction makes the type so small). I can't help hoping that Queer will boycott this year + next, until the March is made truly inclusive. As a TV, an SLMer, as well as a lesbian, I can no longer choose to put myself in hostile, unwelcoming environments, such as the March will be for people like us. I have no energy for such struggle + must use the energy I have positively / constructively. I need to be re-charged at Pride marches, not depleted or even injured. I have chosen to speak out in the GCN article + use my energy around this issue positively in this way... by giving wider berth to our communities' (nationwide) ability to think about the idea of including all sexual

Never Again the Silence

minorities : That one group is not superior to another .

2.

You have also chosen a positive response: The shirt & the decisions made through V&A & balloons.

I plan to get re-charged in NYC at Pride on June 24. Proud as a dyke, cross-dressed and in full leather, marching with the leather contingent.

I hope you will find support at the Noho march and that you can find a way to connect with positive energy there, too.

Quite frankly, I am embarrassed at the behavior of the lesbians on the Steering Committee this year. I have noticed the Rally speakers are all lesbians with the exception of one gay man, and several are separatists who frequently speak against S/M, against "porn," against men, against Bi's. And that the dance after Pride excludes men entirely.

I am even more amazed that enough collective power has not been somehow put to bear on the Steering Committee to rescind its exclusionary decisions.

I guess, until it is, you'll find me staying away from the negativity <sup>inattentive</sup> and at events & gatherings where I and others who are "different" are respected and truly at home.

All The Best for The Spring -

Best Power...

P.S. Please thank Rob for me for the wonderful use of his art.

h.

Hey, Brother! Did you ever ask yourself, <sup>1994.</sup>  
**“Why do the Lesbians have all  
 the fun around here?”**

There is a simple explanation: Since 1987, the Lesbians of Lesbianville have had THE LESBIAN CALENDAR, which monthly lists everything going on that's of interest to Lesbians. From central Vermont to northern Connecticut, from Albany, NY, to Worcester, MA, TLC reaches into the homes of thousands of Lesbians, keeping them up to date on “what's happening”. *Now it's our turn...*

**BEGINNING IN SEPTEMBER, WE'RE PROUD TO INTRODUCE the  
 VALLEY GAY MEN'S CALENDAR**

*A Monthly Listing of Events By, For, and About GAY MEN in Western New England*

Did you ever wish that there was a bulletin board where you could advertise your business, announce your potluck, concert, fundraiser, or sporting event, congratulate a new family, eulogize a departed friend, or run a personal ad that's really you? And that you know would be seen only by local Gay Men?

**THIS IS WHAT LESBIANS HAVE HAD FOR SEVEN YEARS! NOW GAY MEN CAN, TOO!**

Every month, VGMC will bring you the info every local Gay Man wants to know, and wants you to know. All you have to do is send in your listings. The categories include:

**ANNOUNCEMENTS:** Almost anything of interest, including some national & international news items, but mostly info with a local focus. You'll send it in.

**DANCES/EVENINGS OUT:** Sponsored by your group for a fundraiser, planned with the local Two Step dancers, organized by your church, or just for fun. Many more will attend if they read about it in VGMC.

**PERFORMANCES/EVENTS/ARTS:** Advertised national Gay talent, appearing locally, or our own local talent appearing locally, or art openings, poetry readings, theatre performances, and anything else.

**CELEBRATIONS:** Birthdays, anniversaries, graduations, etc. or any excuse to celebrate!

**CONFERENCES/FESTIVALS:** If we hear about it, we'll print it. For local, regional, and national participation.

**SOCIAL & PROFESSIONAL GROUPS:** From Leather to cooking, from singing to senior citizens to computers to Gay Teachers, and more... You want to form a group? Join a group? List it in VGMC.

**HEALTH INFO/SUPPORT GROUPS:** From HIV testing info to Gay Survivors to sobriety support groups, VGMC wants to let you know everything that's available.

**FAMILY VALUES:** From national associations supporting gay parenting to support groups for gay teenagers, and everything else about our families.

**POTLUCKS/SPORTS EVENTS:** If you want to throw a potluck or brunch, join a volleyball team, or find a tennis partner, put it here and see what happens! It is a great way to meet new friends.

**WORKSHOPS/CLASSES/LECTURES:** If you think it is of interest, if you want to teach a class, if you are planning a workshop, put it in the VGMC.

**CLASSIFIED ADS:** This is where you look for a housemate, sell your car, look for a job, find a ride, list your tag sale, or find a place to live in a gay-friendly home.

**PERSONAL ADS:** Wouldn't it be nice to meet someone who lives closer than two hours away? Wouldn't it be great to meet someone with whom you might actually share some things in common?

i.

# Bi- sexuals at parade

By NAI UNOZ

NORTHAMPTON — Some bisexuals believe their exclusion from the official title of the annual gay and lesbian pride march is once again a case of separate but equal.

And proponents of keeping the event known officially as the annual gay and lesbian pride march say they want bisexuals as allies only.

Rancor between those who think the march should fall under the umbrella of gay, lesbian and bisexual and others who insist that the event should be officially noted as gay and lesbian has again surfaced. Last year, some bisexuals and their allies threatened to boycott the march because of the exclusion.

But an organizer said last night that there are some issues that only gays and lesbians can relate to and should be addressed specifically, without any "dilution" coming from expanding the march's purpose.

"We feel very strongly that we want a gay and lesbian march," said Lisa Brook, an organizer of the march. "There are many issues that bisexuals don't experience and it's hard to imagine someone who's been in a heterosexual marriage for 20 years, goes out and has a fling with a member of the same sex should be on the political agenda for the march. That person can't speak for us."

\*\*\*

In 1988, when only bisexuals and gays were on the march's planning committee, no lesbian speakers were scheduled to speak at the rally. "It was an enormous slap across the face for us," Brook said. "Many of us have vowed to never let that happen again."

The 10th annual event will take place May 4, beginning at noon at Lampton Park, with participants marching to Pulaski Park for a rally. This year's theme is "Claim Our Identity: Protecting Our Lives."

There had been talk of whether bisexuals should have their own separate march on the same day.

A meeting was held, and a decision was made to con-

tend that bisexuals should be included in this year's name, there will not be a second group marching to the park. However, they will be a contingent unto themselves in the march, she said.

"We are all fighting homophobia and oppression," she said.

A bisexual woman at the Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Concerns office at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst said "myths" abound about bisexuals both from the gay and lesbian communities and heterosexuals.

"There's this tendency in the gay community to view bisexuals as not legitimate — that we're confused and haven't decided we really want," she said.

\*\*\*

She added that the protocol of who constitutes a true gay, lesbian or bisexual is harmful. She questioned how far out of the closet someone has to be for them to be accepted as part of the community.

"What is lesbian? What is gay? I know from being an African American, there are a number of gays, lesbians and bisexuals, but we don't have the luxury of wearing pink triangles," she said. "And there are some people who say you're supposed to be a certain way. There's this phrase 'goddamn dykes,' about women who wear makeup. What is the definition of feminine? I'm also a Native American, I wear my hair long for my own reasons."

Elisa Campbell, a bisexual member of the Amherst Board of Selectmen and one of the speakers, said she would not have bisexual as part of the official title, but "withholds final judgment because she was not involved in any of the discussions. She hopes, however, that the rift will be resolved and the focus can again shift to more positive things.

"The reason that it's OK to be out in this area is in large part due to the work of female, male and female and the work of gays and lesbians. They are the people who really worked hard and took risks. All of us owe them our gratitude and acknowledgment."

# Appendix II

a.

February 17, 1988

Dear Hostent National Bisexual Networkers:

Yes we are ready! Yes we will go for it. Yes, from one key flyer you responded from all over the USA. Yes, we're making history. Yes, this letter will give you information pose questions, and inspire you like it has inspired us to read your responses.

The "us" is Lani Kaahumanu and Autumn Courtney of BiPol here in San Francisco. When Lucy Friedland called us previous to the March on Washington regarding using BiP's address for the "Are we ready..." flyer, we agreed. Between us we have 18+ years experience in the lesbian/gay political communities. The isolation must end. In this age of AIDS, negative media images, rampant biphobia and homophobia, a National Bisexual Network is imperative. We need positive images of bisexuals, which means we've got to get to know each other. We must become visible to ourselves as a community and so to those lesbian/gay/heterosexual communities we "belong" to. It is time to organize, strategize, share our stories both personal and political, the success and the struggles. It is time to COME OUT as a movement! We can educate the general public and ourselves, breakdown the stereotypes, disseminate accurate AIDS information and fight for the right of everyone of us to love whom we choose.

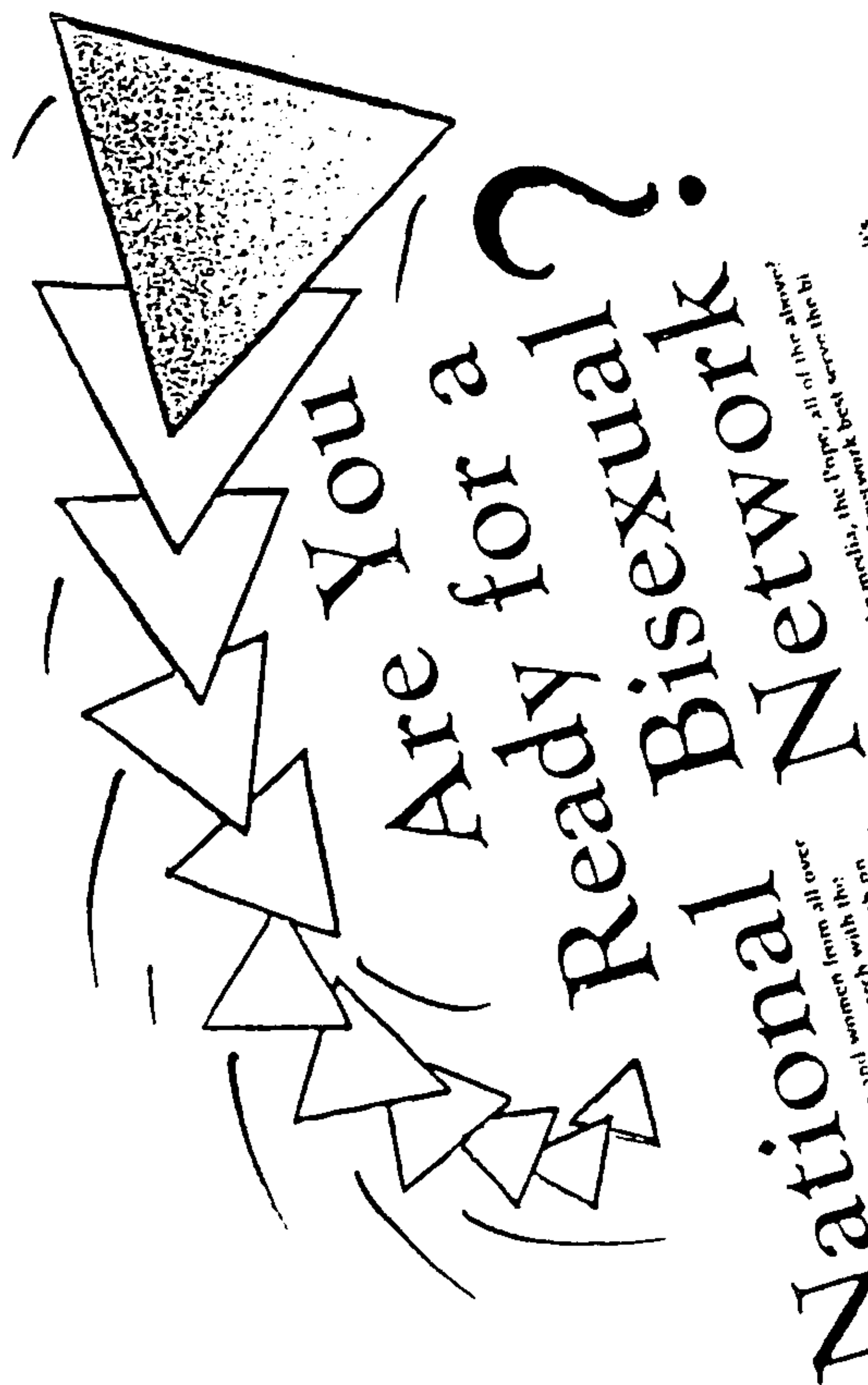
On the following pages we've tallied the information from your letters, outlined our ideas and what we've done so far, included the Bay Area Bisexual Network's Resource Guide (please add and update), posed questions, and in keeping with the idea of "getting to know each other" we've included a brief bio of ourselves.

We are willing to do the work necessary to continue the tasks we've started. We don't want to assume that we are the only people with the energy and interest to do all that needs to be done. This is a massive organizational project. Until we gather information on how to proceed, and until we all decide just what the process will be, we'll continue the following: maintain computerized mailing list, deposit the money generated by the flyer and this letter in BiPol's account (keeping a separate account, investigate federal non-profit status, continue sending out this letter packet to those who inquire, and basically act as the office. Please take time to fill out the questionnaire and give us your ideas on how to proceed. We have almost completed the California non-profit status. Autumn had a non-profit entity that she helped form when she was Secretary of the 1986 International Lesbian Gay Pride Celebration Coordinators for a one time only conference. The fee has been paid every year to keep it operative. There are three positions. Autumn is the Vice President. We need to set up a Board and a way to elect/appoint members. Then there is the Statement of Purpose and By-Laws (or is it Bi-Laws?). We look forward to hearing from you. We will report back hopefully in late April/early May.

Please feel free to copy and pass on this information to those bisexuals and bi-positive people and organizations that would be interested or need to know that an organized bisexual movement is afoot, and coming out nationally in the not so distant future. Also send us your bio's, your group's so we can pass them along. This is an exciting time.

Unitas the Bi-Word.  
*Lani Kaahumanu*  
Autumn Courtney

The non-profit was formed separate from the International Coordinators with the other person who organized the conference.



## Are You Ready for a National Bisexual Network?

These are the questions we've tallied from all over the country, bisexual men and women from all over the country, bisexual men and women from all over the country, bisexual men and women from all over the country...

1) YES, we're ready, for the National Bisexual Network, and here's what we should do. (Please elaborate on a separate sheet of paper, see pg 5 or 6.)

2) NO, we're not ready yet, and here's why. (Please elaborate...)

3) YES, we're ready, and here's what I'm willing to do. (Please elaborate...)

4) YES, we're ready, and I'm willing to do something for it. (And see pg 5 or 6.)

5) YES, we're ready, and I'll give you a big donation to see our need money. (My name goes on the mailing list to learn future developments.)

Form by: Lucy Friedland, Susan Doreen Williams, Barbara  
Design by: Jane Boyer, Susan Doreen Williams, Barbara



MEMBERSHIP ORGANIZATIONAL SUBCOMMITTEES

"A newsletter - more reliable than press releases, cheaper than advertising, an ideal forum for exchanging information, resolving common problems, sharing insights, developing strategies, and let's not forget fundraising."

"The current East Coast Bisexual Network could rename itself the BSN. Their phone #, mailing list etc. could be used as the basis for a national network. There could give them more energy, as people on the west coast and elsewhere would be now bound in the organization. On an entirely new organization could be formed. Of the two options, we think #1 is the best. We must be aware of our limited resources. We don't have much money."

"BIB would need a newsletter. Our suggestion would be that, if Seattle Biboemen decided to open the pages to men, a copy or two of that newsletter could be used for BIB news, advice to begin with. As we get larger we can break away and put together a national newsletter."

"We would suggest a national steering committee formed from members of local support groups throughout the country. Also a newsletter committee."

"I'm planning to start or help start a national newsletter or magazine for and about bisexual people. Thus far, I've discovered that there has been talk about starting a national network but that such a publication is not imminent. I don't want to duplicate other people's efforts, and I'm available to help where needed. Currently I work as an editor and reporter for a daily paper that is part of a national newspaper chain."

"A yearly conference for leaders/organizers to tell stories, share strategies, get to know each other."

"We are willing to designate and support a member of our leadership to serve as a regional rep on national steering committee. To send a rep(s) to participate in conferences, to contribute material (i.e. articles, etc.), and assist in editorial role in collaboration with others, to contribute money, participate in fundraising."

"It's a good idea to participate in national gay/lesbian organizations; The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, Gay and Lesbian Activist Alliance, etc. Why? These organizations are working for us - we should not hesitate to 'give something back'. But there is another reason: one of the accusations frequently leveled at bi's (especially in heterosexual relationships) is that when the going gets tough, the bi's go shopping for a heterosexual relationship. If we are to gain the respect of the lesbian/gay community we're going to have to earn it."

"...represents the heterosexual society. Again we suffer from ignorance as to what we are and are not, and as with the homosexual community, we will have to communicate through respected and established channels: in this instance 'special interest publications that cover sexuality and human behavior, as well as general interest media.'"

IDEAS

- Networking for groups/individuals with lesbian/gay/bisexual groups/individuals
- Build bibliography/resource lists - computerize
- Act as Clearinghouse for news articles program on bisexuality
- Report national and local action alerts - Matchbox
- Bisexual civil rights issues (jobs, AIDS, child custody, etc.)
- Bisexual activities local/national that need support (money, mobilization, mail, etc.)
- AIDS information update and resources
- VISIBILITY - PRIDE - SELF RESPECT - MARKING DECADES - EDUCATION
- Strategies - short and long term
- Non partisan politics
- Send individual(s) to important lesbian/gay/bisexual conference to represent bi.
- Report back to newsletter/special mailings
- Develop a Statement of Purpose and By-Laws which are aware of race, sex, class, gender, physical ability, religions and cultural differences and that welcomes diversity
- BUDGET SOURCES:
  - Membership dues: group and individual, student/unemployed/season, AIDS/AIDS free?
  - computerize and make catalogue of articles on bisexuality
  - local and regional fundraising
  - T-shirt/button coordinated and sold at Lesbian/Gay Pride Celebrations and Parade
  - mailorder
  - Peronals: (see space permits?? Also come to agreement on content specifications)
  - Ads (Portland mens touring, conferences, ???)

QUESTIONS:

What is most important this first year? Prioritize, please comment.

Statement of Purpose and By-Laws

Organizational Structure (Directing a Board of Directors, etc.)

Projected Goals (short and long term) What are they?

Update Resource Guide Nationwide

AIDS Information/Updates

Other

What is real given the local political situations we are facing as far as energy? What is happening locally?

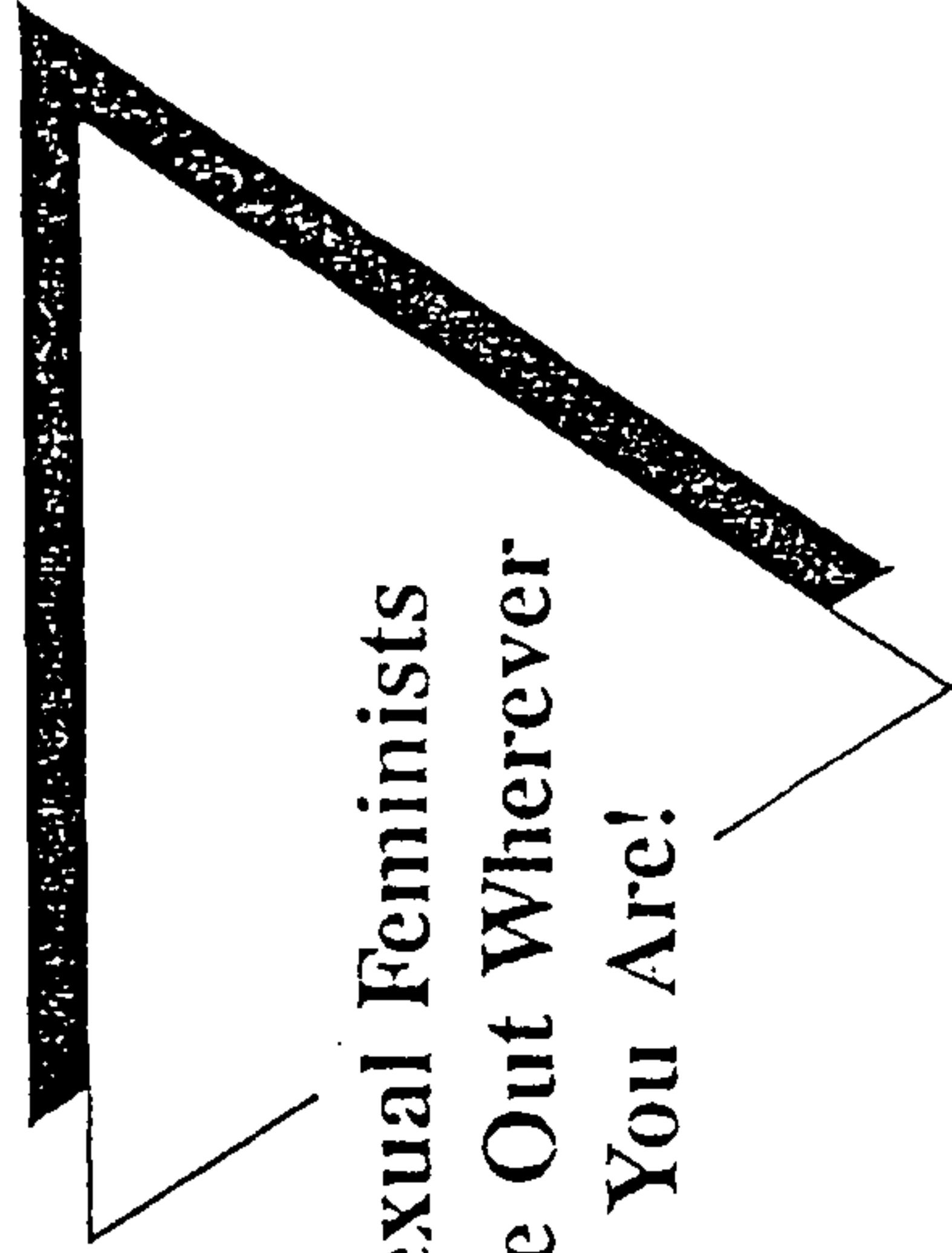
Is it important to have an equal amount of women and men represented when/where ever possible? How do we do that? (Specify in Statement of Purpose and By-Laws?)

Is nonpartisanship the best way to go with the BSN?

How do we "elect" the non-profit Board of Directors? Who would like to be on it?

Would it be possible to attend a conference in San Francisco in June, 1989 during Lesbian/Gay Pride Week and march as a contingent in the Parade? Who would seriously think about attending?

# Call for Material



**Bisexual Feminists  
Come Out Wherever  
You Are!**

Writings by Bisexual feminists, including but not limited to those whose main cultural/political identity and activity is within the lesbian/gay community and writings by those feminists whose primary identities are within other communities, are being collected by Lani Kaahumanu and Loraine Hutchins for an anthology which will reflect the growing visibility of the Bisexual community. All ages, classes, races, cultures, religions, people of color, other minorities and the differently-abled are encouraged to respond. Essays, articles, prose, interviews and poetry will be considered. Write Lani Kaahumanu at 1113 Fairmont NW, Washington, D.C. 20009 for more information; or call (415) 821-3534 by September 15, 1988. Material deadline October 15, 1988.



b.

PROPOSAL  
by the  
Boston Area Planning Committee  
for the  
nascent National Bisexual Network

2 June 1988

## 1. Background

Fourteen members of the Boston Bisexual Women's Network and the Boston Bisexual Men's Network met on May 1, 1988 to consider the formation of a National Bisexual Network, in response to the February 17 letter and questionnaire sent out by Lani K. and Autumn C. of BiPol.

We began by brainstorming about possible goals and activities of a national organization, and developed a fairly lengthy list, which will be summarized in Section III. As we attempted to prioritize our list, the following important concerns emerged in the discussion:

The "National Bisexual Network" at present has no formal structure or decision-making apparatus; there is not yet any "official" network policy, or even "official" membership status. No one can rightfully speak or act for the Network as an organization until such time as a policy-making body and official spokespeople have been democratically empowered. People can only speak or act as members of the planning committee of the "Network-in-Formation".

Since requirements and benefits of membership have yet to be determined, we question whether someone can claim even unofficial membership status in an as-yet-unformed organization, or offer such status to prospective members. Because of the latter problem, we strongly object to the coupon on page 7 of the 2/17 mailing.

The "board of directors" required for the Network's non-profit status should be viewed as an expedient legal fiction, with no automatic correspondence to any position of actual power, privilege, or prestige. We need to build our organization from the grassroots upward.

A National Network cannot succeed as an organization without the support of healthy local networks. We realize that the National Network welcomes participation from non-affiliated individuals -- i.e. those who don't have or belong to a local network. However, our experience in local and national organizing has taught us that complicated nationwide tasks can only be accomplished through the efforts of group organizing on a local level, and not through the work of isolated individuals trying to communicate over large distances.

- 1 -

At the same time, given that the local networks already suffer from a scarcity of committed activists, we doubt that a wide range of projects could be carried out for the national organization as quickly as we all would like. It wouldn't be in our long-term interests to draw substantial energy from the local organizing efforts.

With these concerns in mind, we agreed that the goals for a National Network should be kept as modest as possible for the foreseeable future -- say, the next year or two, at least. The Network's first function should be to foster communication and resource-sharing among the existing and yet-to-be-formed local bisexual organizations. We are just beginning to learn about each other. We must continue this process. To this end, we developed the following set of proposals.

## 11. Specific Proposals -- for the Near Term

## 1. Communication Among Local Groups.

All local groups, as a matter of routine policy, should send out copies of their printed materials to all the other groups. This would include sharing such things as newsletters, announcements of activities, brochures, address lists, bibliographies, and similar resources. Participation in this process would constitute "membership" in the "Network-in-Formation".

We are skeptical that sufficient energy, finances, and organization exist nationwide to create a formal National Network newsletter at this time. A more realistic possibility for national communication might be an arrangement with Gary North of Gibbin Publications to carry NBN news and communiques in his Bisexuality newsletter; but this would have to be discussed further.

## 2. Mailing Costs.

Each local group should pay the cost of mailing its own material, if at all possible. For those who can't afford it, funds should be made available from the existing National Network treasury.

## 3. List of Local Groups and Networks

An up-to-date list of the addresses of the local organizations should be developed and maintained "nationally", and distributed to those organizations. To begin this process, Boston is preparing its best list to send to San Francisco, which is currently managing the data base. We need to divide up the list and contact everyone on it to learn more about them -- who they are (a group, profile) and whether they are interested in participating in or receiving information from the National Network.

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## 4. List of Contact People.

Likewise, a list of network and non-network contact people should be developed, maintained, and distributed. Each local group should designate its own representative(s) to work on national organizing and bring back news to its members. The representatives would also be responsible for bringing the opinions of the group members to the attention of the National Network (in-formation). In addition, individuals not affiliated with groups or networks who are active in the National Network planning should be on this list.

For the record: we are not happy with the "regional" breakdown proposed in the 2/17 mailing; in fact, it is not yet clear whether power ought to be consolidated at any such intermediate level.

## 5. Membership solicitation.

We propose to strike the coupon on page 7 of the 2/17 mailing until "membership" comes to mean something. Solicitation of money is for the purpose of joining the planning process, not the network. We need to send a letter of apology and explanation to those who have already sent in their coupons.

## 6. Procedure for Continuing Dialogue.

The comments, proposals, or other responses generated by the various groups and individuals participating in this planning process should be mailed out to all the other groups and individuals (everyone on the Contact List). The S.F. group has agreed to do this for now. People across the country should be (strongly) encouraged to meet locally to discuss these ideas and send out their initial and subsequent responses. No formal decisions should be made until a representative group can be (physically) assembled, perhaps at the proposed 1990 national conference.

## III. Wish List -- for the Indefinite Future

Here are some of the goals and projects that we'd like to see adopted, someday, on a national level. The cryptic notation following each item indicates whether it seems as if the work involved would most appropriately be carried out by a national organization alone ("N"), by both local groups or individuals and a national organization ("L&N"), or by local organizations on behalf of the national network ("L->N").

We were inspired to draw a picture of these relationships, and so developed an image of a national network as a wheel with a national organization as the hub and the local organizations encircling it. Lines of communication and interaction connect the locals to the national like spokes, and connect the locals to each other around the circumference. A kind of mystical symbol and organizational chart rolled into one (?!). In this

- 3 -

vision, the locals nourish the national and in turn receive nourishment from it -- as well as from each other.



As you will see, virtually all these projects involve substantial local input; a national organization could never accomplish them alone, even if there were a paid national staff.

1. Improvement of communication among local groups (and with individuals not affiliated with any local group). [L&N]
2. Support for local groups: helping new ones form, inviting existing ones into the network, encouraging established groups to adopt younger "sister" groups, facilitating exchanges of resources and personnel. [L&N]
3. A national newsletter. [L->N]
4. A national media-watch project. [L->N]
5. National conferences. [L->N]
6. A national bibliography. [L->N]
7. A nationwide listing of bisexual organizations and other relevant groups. [L->N]
8. A national calendar. [L->N]
9. National archives. [L->N]
10. A national speakers' bureau. [L->N]
11. Media liaisons -- to both gay and straight press. [L->N]
12. Building alliances with gay and straight communities. [L&N]
13. Visibility campaigns. [L&N]
14. Work on physical and mental health concerns, including AIDS. [L->N]
15. Legislative outreach and lobbying. [L&N]
16. Multicultural organizing and outreach to traditionally neglected communities: people of color, youth, seniors, the disabled, "sex radicals", and others. [L&N]
17. International outreach: World Bisexual Network, etc. [N]
18. Development of printed and audio-visual educational materials; e.g. "What is Bisexuality?", "How to Organize", etc. [L->N]
19. Ongoing development of policy and strategy with respect to long- and short-term goals. [L&N]
20. Creation of formal national organizational structure: statement of purpose, by-laws, tax-exempt status, etc. [L&N]
21. Fostering national bisexual consciousness; combatting isolation. [L&N]
22. Establishing a national office, with paid staff. [N]

(Oh, how we dare to dream!)

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IV. In Conclusion

The members of the Boston Area Planning Committee would like to thank Leni and Autumn of BiPol for the care and effort they have put into this stage of organizing the soon-to-be BBN. On to 1990!

-- written by Zachary,  
revised by Lucy Friedland, and  
reviewed by Marjorie, Wayne Bryant,  
Woody Glenn, and Robyn Ocha,  
for  
the Boston Bisexual Women's Network and  
the Boston Bisexual Men's Network

The Boston Bisexual Women's Network (BBWN) is a not-for-profit collective founded in September, 1983. Their bi-monthly newsletter, Bi Women, goes out to about 100 organizations and 700 individuals, of whom perhaps 50 have been active in some organizational capacity over the past year. They host meetings for new members, fun volunteer nights, innumerable support groups, and occasional social and educational events; and organize annual events such as the Gay Pride contingent (with pre-march brunch) and the Dance/Auction Fundraiser. BBWN handles numerous speaking and media requests. They also maintain archives of articles, books, newsletters, and other publications relating to bisexuality.

The Boston Bisexual Men's Network (BBMN) is a social/support network founded in late 1983. Their monthly newsletter (originally The Bi Monthly, currently BBMN News) is sent to

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a mailing list that has included between 200 and 400 people, of whom 15 to 20 may be considered active "core members". Their activities include potluck dinners, hiking trips and other outings, educational activities, forming a Gay Pride contingent, hosting speakers on political or social topics, and occasional joint activities with the BBWN, including organizing conferences and retreats under the aegis of the East Coast Bisexual Network.

BBMN  
P.O. Box 639  
Cambridge, MA 02140

BBWN  
P.O. Box 1645  
Cambridge, MA 02238

The two networks share a phone line: (617) BIS-MOVE.

Yes to a National Bisexual Network!

The Seattle Bisexual Women's Network definitely thinks we need a national network. It's neither premature nor overly ambitious. We need organization, which only a national group can give.

Things such a network would do:

1. Provide national contact between local support groups.
2. Be a watch dog to respond to negative images of bisexuals in both the straight and gay press.
3. Provide an umbrella group, under which banner we can forge alliances with the Gay and Lesbian community.
4. Educate about bisexuality.

How would such a group function? In our discussion, we suggested several possible scenarios.

1. The current East Coast Bisexual Network would rename itself the National Bisexual Network. Their phone number, mailing list etc. could be used as the basis for a national network. This would give them more energy, as people on the west coast and elsewhere would be new blood in the organization.

2. A entirely new organization could be formed.

Of the two options, we think #1 is best. We must be aware of our limited resources. We don't have much money, nor many people actively willing to work on a BBN. Expending energy trying to form a new group when one already exists seems fruitless. If the ECBN were willing, that would seem the best option.

Such a group would need a newsletter. Our suggestion would be that if RiWomen decides to open its pages to men, a page or two of that newsletter be used for BBN news, at least to begin with. The expense and work of putting together a national newsletter seems beyond the resources of a newly formed group. As we get larger, we can break away and put together a national newsletter.

As for the organizational part of such a group. We would suggest having a national steering committee formed from members of local support groups throughout the country. Also a newsletter committee. In terms of money- a fee structure such that there is one individual rate, and a rate for local groups.

In Seattle there are two of us who are willing to work on forming a National Network. Lenore Norgaard is interested in putting together a national newsletter. I am interested both in working on a newsletter and serving on the national organizing committee.

Our group is sending a \$15 contribution. Some of our members are also sending separate donations.

For the Seattle Bisexual Women's Network.

*Lenore Norgaard*  
Beth Reha Weiser

Contact Information:

Seattle Bisexual Women's Network  
Post Office Box 30645  
Greenwood Station  
Seattle WA 98103-0645  
(206) 328-2827 (message #)

" We shall not really succeed in discarding the straitjacket of our own cultural beliefs about sexual choice if we fail to come to terms with the well-documented, normal human capacity to love members of both sexes. "

- MARGARET MEAD

We need to stay in close touch with our gay brothers and sisters, and not approach our bisexuality as a "watered-down gayness" to gain acceptability among straights at the expense of homosexual acceptance. Our struggle is their struggle. If our same-sex identification were acceptable, I believe bisexuality would be acceptable. At the same time, we need to identify what exactly our unique issues are. This is what I propose as a plan of action:

- 1--compile a mailing list.
- 2--create a survey attached to a preliminary form of a newsletter. Find out what our community's general needs are. Ask how bisexuals identify themselves. Ask what they perceive as their issues, ask how they believe their issues are different from homosexual issues.
- 3--compile the results and publish them in a second newsletter with ideas for action on the issues found. Begin a search, if necessary, for people to begin dealing with those issues.
- 4--release news on bisexual issues to homosexual-oriented media.
- 5--encourage bisexual writers, studies of bisexuality, bisexual support groups.

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

We are excited about the efforts being made to organize a National Bisexual Network and we would like to participate in that process. Here is what we are willing and able to do at this point:

- ① We are willing to designate and support a number of our leadership to serve as a regional representative on a national steering committee.
- ② We are willing to send a representative(s) of our group to participate in the annual Conference.
- ③ We are willing to contribute material, i.e., articles, etc. to a newsletter and to assist in an editorial role in collaboration with others.
- ④ We are willing to contribute money as our group budget allows - and participate in fund raising activities.
- ⑤ We are willing to keep the network informed about our agenda and activities in the upper midwest through Wisconsin Area.

We look forward to being notified how things are developing and regards to establishing a national network.

and further information as to how we can become part of that process. Enclosed is a \$15.00 money order as part of our first contribution of seed money. You are now spread out all over creation but now close them the time that we must reach towards each other and write to increase our visibility in the community. We need our own movement. We are looking forward to further contact from you.

We are limited in spirit with you.

Please put us on the national mailing list

Mary Linger  
Founder and Spokesperson  
for the Bisexual Connection

P.O. Box 13158  
Mpls. Mn 55414  
1-612-645-4950

National Bisexual Network Questionnaire

There are many possible courses of action.  
(A) Building some strong national, <sup>interregional</sup> bisexual institutions like a newspaper, clearinghouse with an office to exchange information, etc. a media project (to try to get more bi issues covered in mainstream media) <sup>publish a "bi" guide to U.S. for this area's bisexual people as people can be aware of bi resources.</sup>  
C's Bisexuals Center, etc.

(B) Coalition building with gay communities, political institutions on issues of mutual concern - such as AIDS crisis and media coverage on AIDS prevention and reaching hard-to-reach populations.

(C) on planning a campaign to coincide with next year's Gay Pride March in Washington. Something along the line that 1988 is the year Bisexuals became visible because of wanting to claim a positive identity - despite AIDS crisis. There could be some real snazzy, attention-grabbing event at the event to call attention to Bi-pride.

### NORTH CAROLINA

Communication is the most fundamental need. You have made a good start by compiling a list of bisexual organizations across the country. Updating and disseminating updates to the list should be an important objective for the organization. In addition, the communication function should include staying with those on the mailing list upon receipt of interest to bisexuals. Some such events would be sponsored by bisexual organizations, while others should be sponsored by song groups, men's and women's groups, etc. Maybe a calendar of events would be a good format.

The support function would involve providing specific services to those who have begun or are considering beginning bisexual groups in towns across the country. Maybe two or three of the existing groups which are relatively strong and stable would be willing to submit prepared packets which a new organization would find helpful. These could be edited into a final version which the National Bisexual Network would then provide to new groups,

to help answer questions, make suggestions, point out pitfalls, etc. By asking existing groups to submit proposals, you (1) avoid having to do all of the work yourselves, (2) facilitate communication, by providing a project through which groups can interact and learn, and (3) give participants a sense that they have a vested interest in the organization - in effect, encourage them to "buy in" to the Network.

In response to the "Questions" section of your mailing of February 17, I believe that the statement of purpose/by-laws and the organizational structure are clearly the first priority. I would make them rough, to be refined as time goes on, so that a lot of time and energy is not sidetracked to this project.

The next priority, in my opinion, should be goal-setting. The immediate goals should be communication, support, and representing bisexuals' point of view to non-bisexual organizations.

### WASHINGTON D.C.

I therefore propose that if we are to prove ourselves to be 'not fence-sitters but bridge-builders', we begin with establishing ourselves in the gay-lesbian establishment.

There are a variety of means to do so. As mentioned above, there is the gay press, i.e. letters, articles, and editorials in gay and lesbian (local) newspapers and national magazines.

But in addition to these forums, there are parties and potlucks, 'Bi-Nights' in the bars, seminars and conferences in the community centers. Bi's need to participate in the national gay/lesbian organizations: the NGLTF (the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force), GLAA (Gay and Lesbian Activist Alliance) as well as GAMMA (the Gay and Married Men Association). Why? As stated above, these organizations are working for us - we should not hesitate to 'give something back'. But there is another 'political' reason: one of the accusations frequently leveled at bi's (especially in heterosexual relationships) is that when the going gets tough, the bi's go shopping - for a heterosexual relationship. If we are to gain the respect of the gay community we're going to have to earn it.

Finally, there's the heterosexual society. Again we suffer from ignorance as to what we are and are not. And as with the homosexual community, we will have to communicate through respected and established channels: in this instance special-interest publications that cover sexuality and human behavior, as well the general interest media: Penthouse and Forum, Playboy and Psychology Today. And then there are the electronic media: radio talk shows, Oprah, Donohue and Dr. Ruth.

C.

October 1, 1989

A Proposal from the  
North American Bisexual Network working group of the  
1990 San Francisco Conference on Bisexuality Committee.

What would a NABN do? (in decending order of importance)

- 1) Keep a central mailing/contact list of all bisexual groups worldwide.
- 2) Produce a quarterly (to start) newsletter which would be distributed to all bisexual groups worldwide.
- 3) Act as a central clearing house for information on bisexuality. Anyone writing to the NABN address could be directed to their nearest local bi group.
- 4) Produce information packets for individuals and groups, help distribute the work of the larger, more organized groups to smaller and newer groups.
- 5) Produce (with the assistance of local networks) a yearly Conference on Bisexuality, which would switch from coast to coast yearly.

What would the structure of NABN look like?

- 1) A loose coalition of all the bi groups in North America, with one group/network each year taking responsibility for some/all of NABN's work each year. For example, one group could produce the newsletter for a year while another dealt with the mailing lists and distributed information. The change-over could take place at the yearly Conference on Bisexuality.
- 2) The above loose coalition in conjunction with a Coordinating Committee (CC) voted in at each yearly Conference. The CC would have the responsibility of issuing public statements on bisexuality when appropriate. Examples of this would be writing to the annual Conference of AIDS Researchers about bisexuals and AIDS, writing to national lesbian and gay groups when they ignore bisexuals in their work, etc.

How would we create such an organization

- 1) Send out copies of this proposal and Conference info to the current NABN mailing list, as well as all bi groups in US and Canada.

- 2) Collect proposals from existing groups and send out packets to the entire mailing list. This would be the basis for the consensus proposal which would be worked out at the Conference.
- 3) Meet at the 1990 Conference in San Francisco and hammer out a Statement of Purpose and working structure during the four days of the Conference.
- 4) Present the consensus proposal to the final plenary at the Conference.
- 5) Get someone to agree to do the work of running NABN for the first year.

Major unanswered questions

- 1) Who would be a member of this organization? Any group who paid dues? Any individual?
- 2) Who would have decision making power? Would groups have more power than individuals? Larger groups over smaller groups? (Boston with 1,000 members vz. Vancouver with 20)
- 3) What would the funding source of the Network be? Would be rely solely on dues, or would we want to apply for not-for-profit status so we could apply for grants? Is it too early to worry about this?
- 4) Where would the permanent mailing address be?
- 5) How can we insure that people who can't come to the Conference still have a say in what gets decided? Can groups deputise a member to vote for them? Does that member get more weight than an individual?

Submitted by: Beth Reba Weise, Andrew Murray and Lisa Moore, the NABN working group of the 1990 San Francisco Conference on Bisexuality organizing committee.

Bi-Pol  
 1990 Conference  
 584 Castro St. #422  
 San Francisco, CA 94114  
 (415) 775-1990

d.

media committee (esp. Bill)  
Lauri

October 27, 1989

Dear Woody, Alan, Laura, Wayne, Ginny, Robyn, Len, Lianne  
and the rest of ECBN:

This letter is to:

formally request that any "surplus" funds in our ECBN  
account be allocated as scholarships for bisexual people  
of color and PWAs to enable both of these groups'  
attendance at the June 1990 conference in San Francisco,  
as well as to facilitate advertising efforts about the  
availability of this resource to these segments of our bi  
community.

This letter is also to discuss/explain my reasons for  
proposing the above and to invite and request further  
dialogue on this.

As I've already expressed to some of you personally, I was  
troubled and offended by several incidents of racism I  
witnessed or overheard at the May conference at Harvard.  
These incidents consisted mostly of negative attitudes and  
stereotypes expressed about black people. These beliefs  
were expressed by seasoned bi organizers core to our  
group. I'm not even saying they were conscious or  
intended, that's not the point. The effect is the point.  
The effect is that we have a weaker, more monolithic, more  
limited network because of it.

I certainly feel the limits and harm of institutionalized  
racism myself - both as a white woman with non-white  
partners and as the ECBN Steering Committee member in the  
Washington, D.C. area, especially when I realize how many  
people of color are not a part of Bi-Ways in DC -- a city  
that is 70% black and therefore how inadequately I am  
representing this bi heritage and cultural diversity that  
could enrich us all. This was particularly brought home  
to me upon my return from the conference, in June, when I  
read a report of the annual international AIDS conference,  
held in Montreal this year, at which one presenter  
reported that the incidence and prevalence of bisexuality  
is even higher in non-white communities than gayness is.  
I know what he means! This is why it is doubly important  
for us to take this challenge to integrate our network  
seriously and to not perpetuate the same racist mistakes  
that the women's and gay and lesbian movements have made  
before us.

Yesterday The Washington Post published the results of a  
new national study on race relations in the U.S. It  
showed something about the gap in white and black beliefs  
that I think is very common to our network too: blacks

and whites have greater contact now (than 10 years ago) but sharply different views on what's happened and what needs to be done to gain equality in this society. While white attitudes have somewhat improved, many whites also believe that black progress has gone "too far". (Give me a break!) This, in fact, relates to one of the racist beliefs I heard expressed by one of us at the conference - that it was impossible now for a white to get a good teaching job in inner city schools as all the jobs were going to blacks. Unexamined assumptions such as these divide us and hold us back, as bisexuals, as people, and I would like to see them examined in a more consciously anti-racist manner than now presently exists as a priority among us. (Yes, I am suggesting a theme for future conferences.)

The survey pointed out that "while whites tend to respond literally to what is asked, the response of many blacks is deepened by their direct daily experience with the practical results of past white racism: poverty, poor housing, inferior schools and inadequate health care." And, I would add - the fear and anger and damage to self-esteem insidiously re-enforced by incidents such as Howard Beach, Bensonhurst and campus hate crimes which re-occur all too frequently in this present climate of intolerance.

I don't want to hear that all the surplus is "spent" and so you're "concerned" but "can't" do anything. I would like to hear exactly how the proposed amount to be spent on ECBN administrative expenses at the Center relates to the overall total announced to us at the last Steering Committee meeting held at the May conference that Sunday, and what portion of it could be allocated for what I propose for June.

My only point is that we STOP seeing the bisexual community or our membership as white and stop seeing racism as someone else's cause to fight somewhere else some other time. People of color are not special exceptions or additions to "us".

This is an issue that any bi movement must address, even faster than the lesbian/gay movement(s) because the number of bisexually active people of color is far larger than those who exclusively identify as gay. I'm not talking about good-will gestures, I'm talking about thorough and on-going self-examination and re-orientation of resources and consciousness towards addressing and changing this racism among us and beyond us. Don't be afraid. We CAN call it that and still trust and struggle, and sometimes even disagree, and come out even stronger because of this.

There are models all around if only we will tap them.



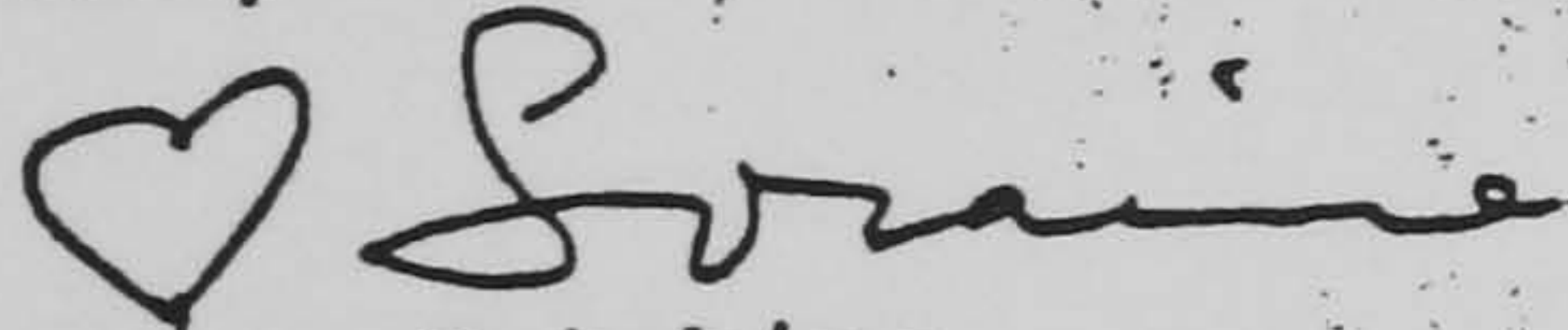
Once we see that racism pervades every level and aspect of our movement, as well as our society, we can begin changing. But denial won't do. It hurts too much.

I look forward to hearing your responses to this soon.

"...Not needing to clutch for power  
 not needing the light just to shine on me  
 I need to be one in the number  
 as we stand against tyranny.  
 We who believe in freedom cannot rest until it's won.  
 Struggling myself don't mean a whole lot  
 I've come to realize  
 That teaching others to stand and fight  
 Is the only way our struggle survives.  
 Until the killing of black men, black mothers' sons  
 is as important as the killing of white men, white  
 mothers' sons  
 We who believe in freedom cannot rest until it's won..."

-Bernice Reagon  
 SWEET HONEY IN THE ROCK

peace,



Loraine Hutchins  
 6104 3rd St., NW  
 Wash., DC 20011  
 202/882-4384

cc: ECBN Steering Committee  
 BBWN newsletter  
 BBMN newsletter  
 June 1990 conference/SF office  
 BICEP

**Abbreviations**

BABN	Bay Area Bisexual Network
BBWN	Boston Bisexual Women's Network
BiPOL	Bisexual Political wing of BABN
ECBN	East Coast Bisexual Network
FTM	Female-to-Male Transsexual
<i>GCN</i>	<i>Gay Community News</i>
GLHSNC	Gay and Lesbian Historical Society of Northern California
MTF	Male-to-Female Transsexual
NSMA	Northampton Sexual Minorities Archives
PMC	Pride March Committee
SBWN	Seattle Bisexual Women's Network
<i>TC</i>	<i>The Calendar</i>

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