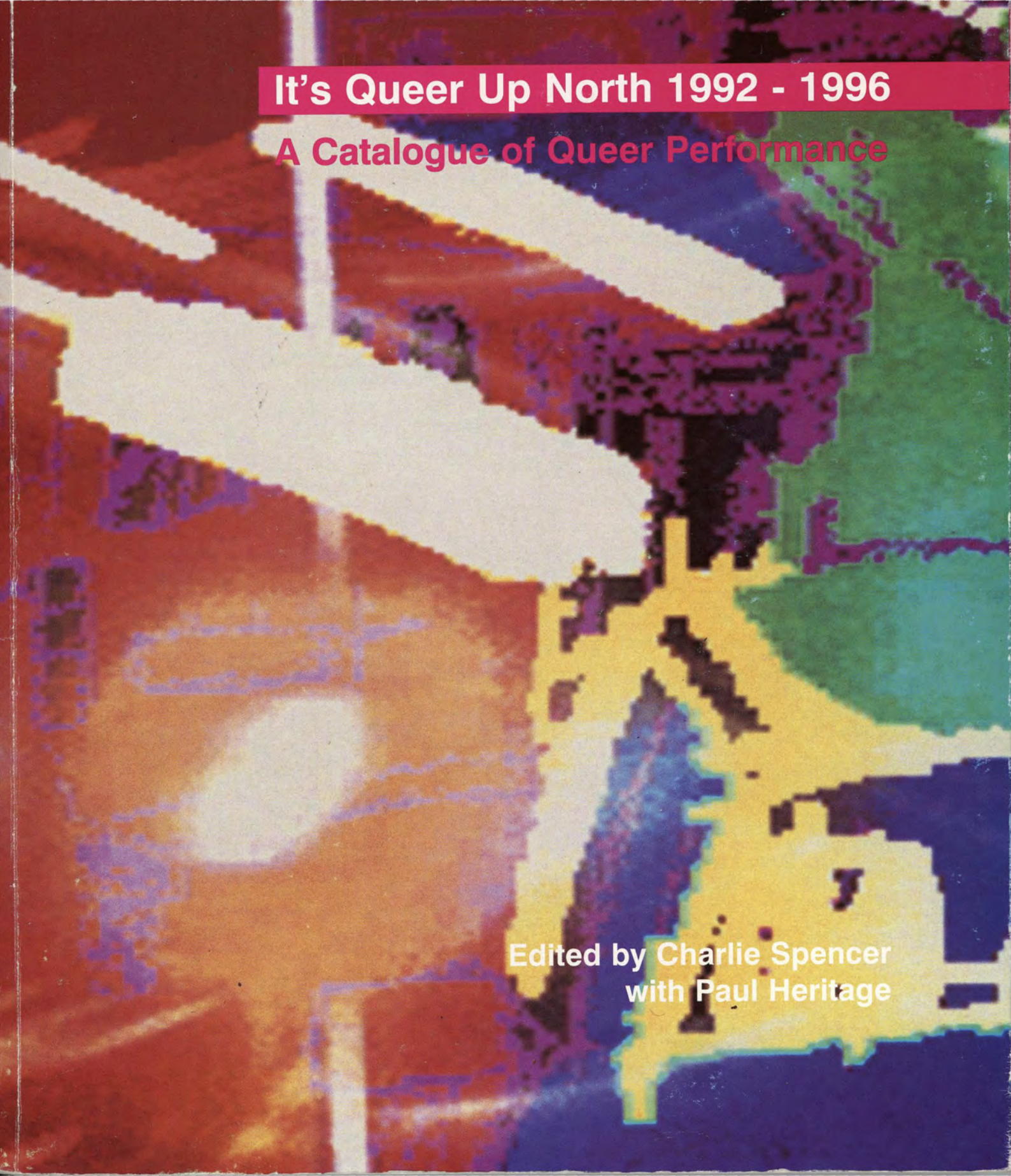

It's Queer Up North 1992 - 1996

A Catalogue of Queer Performance

Edited by Charlie Spencer
with Paul Heritage

It's Queer Up North 1992 - 1996

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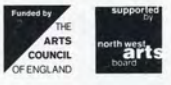

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Foreword

It's Queer Up North 1992 - 1996

It's Queer Up North has grown up, the '96 festival is the organisation's coming of age. It comes as a surprise to be taken seriously, especially when you feel you are still surviving on a wing and a prayer. Like most arts organisations It's Queer Up North is built on a certain schizophrenia. It was set up with a vision of what queer arts could do, yet in order to achieve that vision, It's Queer Up North has had to become very serious and seriously organised. You have to play the game to break the rules...

Manchester 1992 - the club night Flesh had just begun and there was a real sense of creativity and energy about queer clubland (the name 'It's Queer Up North' itself was originally a slogan from the first Flesh). Queer was an attitude not an identity. As an idea, 'Queer' may appear to have drowned in its own pretensions, but at least there was a sense of possibility, a sense of freedom from old preconceptions. Queer artists were finding a specific voice, particularly in the US, and the first festival's stated intentions were to provide a focus and a platform for their work and, rather grandly, to "help forge a queer culture in the UK".

It was Lois Weaver who spoke at the first festival and encapsulated much of the original idea. Trying to answer the impossible question, "what is the purpose of art?", Weaver suggested that art could allow you to go beyond current realities and to imagine new futures. This thought remains a guiding light. Far from being a flight from reality, this is a particularly important thing for lesbians and gay men to do - in fact, for all those considered outsiders. This seemed to be the essence of what queer arts could achieve - to give artists and audiences an opportunity to imagine their own queer futures.

The festival could only have blossomed like it has in a city such as Manchester, and the city remains central to the festival's identity (see Toby Manning's 'Topography' of Manchester here in the catalogue for a tour). It is a city with a large, vibrant lesbian and gay population and a 'gay village' in the city centre, which is almost unique in this country. This is seen as something positive by local government and institutions, not as a source of embarrassment, as in so many places. Amazingly, the festival is now seen as a crucial element in marketing Manchester - attracting visitors and helping to regenerate the city.

It's Queer Up North remains a showcase for new talent and new ideas but has developed a life of its own. In sheer terms of numbers, the growth of the festival has been incredible - from just 2000 attenders in 1992 to over 40000 in 1996. It has now become truly international in flavour - with artists from four continents in 1996. It began as a performance festival, and this remains the core of the work, but the festival has widened its scope to cover all artforms. After three annual festivals, It's Queer Up North is relaunched in 1996 as a biennial festival allowing us to develop larger projects, to commission and produce new work and to remain at the forefront of new developments. In short, to make sure that new ideas can become reality. However business-like the organisation must appear to be to survive, it exists in that way to ensure that queer artists continue to break the rules...

Gavin Barlow and Tanja Farman, Manchester, 1996

Message From Sydney

Sydney, with its proud reputation as gay and lesbian capital of the world, rivalling San Francisco, has as diverse a community as a SAPOTSB (straight acting, post op transsexual bi) could wish for. The Performance Space, Sydney's contemporary multi-disciplinary arts complex, has always been queerly energetic, successfully straddling the worlds of performance, theatre, film and visual arts, high and low art, theory and practice; and cLUB bENT is the star in our firmament. Supported by a bevy of dedicated artists, cLUB bENT is a rampant celebration of the radical elements of queer, from sub culture club acts to performance art. It has won the support of the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Festival and the hearts and minds of the audiences that flocked to see cLUB bENT night after night. So, it's no surprise that The Performance Space's first touring venture overseas should be cLUB bENT. For the It's Queer Up North Festival we introduce William Yang who has been photographically documenting the growth, pride and diversity of the Sydney communities since the Seventies. His coolly tender recollections of family and friends, past and present, provide insight into the delightful and disturbing complexities of contemporary Australia. We also send you Club Swing, rude girls without physical fear who leave you gasping for more. They've been parting lips and legs for our delectation on stage for a while here in Sydney, now it's Manchester's turn.

Angharad Wynne-Jones and Jonathan Parsons, Sydney, 1996

Club Swing

A Topography of Queer Manchester

Ask anybody whether it's queer up north and they'll probably direct you to Manchester's Canal Street, main drag of the city's gay village, a redeveloped, pedestrianised stretch that follows the Rochdale Canal. Canal Street's heyday is relatively new, refocusing attention from the parallel Bloom Street, which once claimed to be the gay village's heart. The gay scene is a palimpsest where the past is constantly being painted over by something newer, brighter, shinier: obscuring what went before quicker than time can fade it. The New Union, first bar on Canal Street, next to the lock, does have some history however - and a clientele to match: older, mostly working class gay men, motley, smeared-lipstick transvestites, butch lesbians. Yards away is the glass-fronted edifice of Manto, house music pumping out from the hi-tech bar, gymmed-up bodies adorned with designer clubwear, propping up the canal wall in summer, all that glass and water making it a narcissist's paradise. Just over the bridge is Metz, a relatively-recently converted warehouse that aims for an Amsterdam canalside feel, full of slightly more sedate media-types in their thirties, deep in conversation while Ella Fitzgerald trills gently in the background. Back across the bridge and a few yards further down the street you come to the Rembrandt, another older building, and a step back in time to clones, leather and bardykes. Next up is Via Fossa, Boddingtons' attempt to cash in on the pink pound, its advent-calendar, Hollywood olde worlde decor, ideal home for the 25-35 trendy set. Finally, the newest bar on the block is Velvet, a haven for the 90s lounge lizard, with its moderne interiors, laid-back music, chic drag queen fixtures, and comfy chairs.

Having completed this tour, you'd be forgiven for concluding that it's not really queer up north at all. Because all these different bars' clientele, for all their surface difference (what gay magazines like to call "diversity") aren't queer at all - they're gay. The distinction isn't a matter of pedantry, although the widespread misuse of the term "queer" (particularly in the gay media) has come close to obscuring its fundamental distinction from "gay".

Queer - less a movement than an attitude - began in America, growing out of a disparate band of misfits, punks, bisexuals, transvestites and gender outlaws, disillusioned and disenfranchised by both mainstream culture and gay culture. Gay culture had undergone the usual trajectory from underground to overground, seemingly losing its radicalism and danger in the process. An unfortunate by-product of greater public acceptance, or an attempt to find a niche in the mainstream on the establishment's terms? The late 80s' explosion of queer fanzines (queerzines), queer bands (homocore/queercore) and queer films insisted it was the latter, often reserving their deepest ire for the bourgeois, complacent, money-based culture that increasingly came to constitute and - worse - *represent* homosexuality. "You just don't understand do you," spat seminal Toronto zine *Bimbox*, "*You* are the problem, not Jesse Helms."

Queer threw out gay politics' rational, reasoned response to oppression, in favour of what, following on from Foucault, queer theorists term "transgression" - by which engagement with the very terms and tenets of the dominant culture is refused. While queer was a reaction to specific aspects of 90s culture, it had its precursors. In many ways the French writer Jean Genet is the dodgy uncle of "queer": a lifelong petty criminal and sexual deviant, Genet knew what society thought of him and threw it back in their faces, in life and work alike. "To every charge brought against me...from the bottom of my heart I shall answer yes." (*The Thief's Journal*) Genet's influence (direct or indirect) runs through queer culture like quicksilver.

The gay media was more than reluctant to take on the implications of queer - it, after all, was a primary target for attack. Queer's artistic manifestations were largely denigrated, while its superficial signifiers were co-opted by the gay mainstream. "In your face", "attitude", even the term "queer" itself were adopted as all-purpose pennants hung out to celebrate the never-ending party that is gayness. Nose-rings, tattoos and punk haircuts, intended (as Dick Hebdige points out in his classic account of punk subcultures *The Meaning Of Style*) to

breach taboos, and express resistance to the dominant culture, simply became standard adornments to know-nothing disco bunnies, shorn of any stylistic statement.

So is the only thing that's queer up north It's Queer Up North itself? That was certainly the impression of one audience member at the first (American-dominated) festival: "Don't you mean it's queer in *Manhattan*?" But although It's Queer Up North stands apart from gay Manchester (physically almost opposite, but conceptually worlds away from the New Union), it didn't come out of nowhere. Manchester has its queer topography - you just have to travel further afield than Canal Street to trace it.

A useful (if unlikely) companion for such a journey is German philospher Walter Benjamin, who found in the nineteenth century "flaneur" (the dandy on walkabout around the streets of Paris) the perfect image for the modern condition of *looking*. Benjamin's modern might have given way to our post-modern (some say), but the culture of looking is more entrenched than ever via TV, satellite, PCs and the internet. But to understand what's going on around you, you have to look beyond the glittering surface, to find the trace of history within the glossily "new". For instance Benjamin would probably have seen the glass frontage and pillars of Manto as invoking the nineteenth century Crystal Palace and Great Exhibition, revealing the designer-clad clientele as the bejewelled prize of late twentieth century capitalism.

So, from Via Fossa, retrace your steps, turn left into Princess Street and walk two hundred yards and you find yourself outside the Paradise Factory. These days owned by Peter Dalton and Carol Ainscow (owners of the Manto empire), it's housed in the old office building of Factory Records (what's in a name). It's appropriate as such that Factory should have spawned, through its club the Hacienda, the house-based club culture of which Paradise is typical. To get to the Hacienda, you need to head back up Princess Street towards the New Union, and turn left into Whitworth Street. On your way, shortly after crossing over the main artery of Oxford Road you'll pass the Brickhouse. These days it's a grim student-orientated pickup joint, but the building once housed the Archway, a gay club which, through its physical distance from the gay village also achieved a cultural distance from the gay mainstream (and its on-the-edge atmosphere made it at one time more popular than the Hacienda). A few hundred yards further along and you're outside the Hacienda itself. Looking at it now, particularly on a Saturday night, you might be puzzled at its reputation, its vast, sprawling queue of Top Shoppers hardly an advertisement for all that is culturally cutting edge, the venue long given over to punter-pleasing with a staple diet of Happy House and mainstream handbaggers. Factory boss Tony Wilson claims he's always espoused a "fuck the punters" philosophy, and while that may owe a great deal to retrospective gloss, certainly the Hacienda's import of acid house from Detroit and Chicago in 1987-88 was a bold step that owed more to giving people what's good for them rather than giving them what they want. (You see the IQUN tactic of nicking the best American ideas is long-established). Not that Wilson deserves all the credit. In the chaos that was Factory, music "policy" (for want of a better word) was left up to DJs like Mike Pickering and Dave Haslam. Says Haslam: "We were playing music that wasn't being played elsewhere. As a result the Hacienda became the focus for house music in Britain." And Manchester was established as home to an innovative, thriving and dynamic club culture. Suddenly Manchester was at the cultural cutting edge, a position it has maintained through baggy (as indie kids began to bring their night-time clubbing experience to their daytime guitar-bass-drums format) and - full circle - through queer.

But don't move on from the Hacienda just yet, because it was the Hacienda which eventually became the home for Manchester's main queer claim to fame - Flesh (promotor Paul Cons also used to manage the Hac). Where else could such an ambitious, controversial and innovative night have begun than in the club capital? Incensing PC homos with their use

of caged go-go girls and S&M floorshows, Flesh in many ways set the scene for It's Queer Up North. Spawning other, less impressive queer nights, Flesh did at least open the doors up to the idea of performance at clubs (even though its own stage shows moved increasingly towards glib superficiality), with IQUN performers like Angel Valentine getting their first breaks at Paradise and Home nightclubs. To get to Home, head back down Whitworth Street, twist by Piccadilly Station to Ducie House in one of the oldest areas of Manchester, all brick warehouses, canal basins and wrought-iron gates. Home was site of another innovative - though sadly short-lived - club, the Slut Hut, courtesy of A Bit Ginger, promoters, naturally, of Flesh. Taking its cue from American west coast fetish clubs, Slut Hut was a rubber and leather affair, porno videos banked all around the dance floor, members only (pun intended) but a memorable and exciting event.

In all this walking up and down Whitworth Street you'll have passed the Green Room at least twice. Twin railway arches, one glass-fronted, its renovated current self looks very different to the organisation that established a centre for cutting-edge performance art in the eighties, but the work continues unabated. The only difference is that these days the Green Room is reaping the reward for its pursuit of the more oppositional, challenging and visceral forms of live art. Inevitably, just as queer is ideologically oppositional, so is its art technically oppositional, often favouring leftfield or avantgarde practices. The Green Room, in supporting more challenging work, familiarised and created an audience for it, as well pioneering the use of club spaces like the Hacienda as performance spaces. But the Green Room's arched walls contain a wealth of queer history, having employed at various times IQUN directors Barlow and Farman, and almost every queer performer or writer in Manchester at some time or another (this one included). Partially abutting the Green Room is the Cornerhouse cinema and gallery, its brief to support work from outside the mainstream connecting the two organisations conceptually as well as physically. Cornerhouse has played a key role in introducing queer cinema to the public, not just via New Queer Cinema seasons (as in 1992), but by its long-standing championship of proto-queer film-makers such as Fassbinder, Fellini and Almodovar. Cornerhouse now regularly collaborates with IQUN (having jointly screened Bruce La Bruce's arty punkporn epics, for example), but also continues to programme work that is experimental and confrontational in the queerest sense.

The tour's nearly over. Walk back down Whitworth Street and into Princess Street again, turn left, pass the New Union and you find yourself outside number 48, home of It's Queer Up North. From its symbolic position at the front and to the left of Canal Street, IQUN is constantly trying to pull gay culture in a more radical direction. Over the years it's to be hoped that this will produce more than the sell-out audiences that IQUN regularly achieves, and that queer ideas will actually provoke some cultural change. And if it does, who knows how unrecognisable the gay map of Manchester might be in ten years time?

Toby Manning, Manchester, 1996

Unruly Bodies

> It's so much about the unruly body...Not the body as sex object or commodity but the body as a site of self-defined meaning, not subject to the regulations of Church or State. And where is such a body any more present than in the live, self-reflexive event of performance?
>
> "Body Politics" Alisa Soloman *The Village Voice* January 7th 1992

The unruly bodies of the artists that It's Queer Up North has brought to the stages of the North West in the last four years have spoken many and various stories. It would be hard to draw points of reference or comparison with such diversity, but as I reflect on the work that has been staged, two things emerge as important: the amount of work that has been based in the artist's own biography and the way in which the meeting between the actor and the spectator has frequently been such a sexy encounter.

As Tim Miller, one of the performers in the 1993 Festival writes:

> My work as a performance artist tries to dig as deep as it can at the things that make me bang my head against the wall. Jumping off from autobiography, I look for connections between life and the world around me, between myself and the audience.

Miller speaks of the attempt to connect real and fictional worlds, which has seemed a common search for the artists and the audience who have come to watch them at all three festivals. The direct dialogue that Miller sought with his audience has been central to what It's Queer Up North has sought to achieve over the years, not only in the conventional ways of questionnaires and market research but on the stage itself. The fictional boundaries between stage and audience, life and fantasy, have been dazzlingly crossed by the host of artists that we have been proud to welcome to the North West since 1992.

Such 'crossings' are certainly not new to gay theatre. The reorganisation of conventional relationships by lesbian and gay performers has often started with the primary theatrical relationship of the actor and spectator. As the performer breaks the conventional divide and reaches out to talk with a member of the public, a relationship is implicated that is thrillingly public in contrast to the enforced privacy in which so many gay men and women still live their lives.

In *My Queer Body*, which he presented for It's Queer Up North in 1993, Tim Miller began by touching parts of the audience's bodies - the fingers, necks, knees, heads of individual audience members - before engaging and addressing the separate parts of his own, eventually naked body on stage. The attempted elimination of this body in recent and distant histories is resisted in these constant re-stagings of the body itself. It's Queer Up North is just part of a spectrum of performing our queer bodies. As performers break theatrical rules so have lesbians and gay men spent their lives resisting the regulations that seek to bind the existence of our real bodies. Although we are, in a sense, performing all our lives, there are certain moments - historic, cultural, social and political - when we choose to placard and perform our bodies on public stages, taking the streets and creating our own space where we are normally denied. Manchester's Gay Mardi Gras joins with other Gay Pride marches and manifestations, creating a time and place to imagine and perform a phantasmagoric world where the body is played out from the very bottom to the top - from the boots to the haircuts, from the jock-straps to the bra-straps - from the piercings to the chainings of the bodies that march. The script is both improvised and familiar. Real bodies, real lives. We are both spectators and actors in our own drama. The real is temporarily displaced by the theatrical but as in all carnival the intention is that the world should never quite return to the same as before.

Perhaps that is the intention behind all theatre. But the difference from conventional theatre is that the memory is not only in the mind of the audience but the body of three thousand participants. Inhabiting those roles on the march - absorbing the gestures, words, actions, colours into our own bodies - is a reminder yet again of why theatre is such a dangerous act. And that we all have stories and we all have bodies so we can all make theatre.

It is that landscape of the body that has been one of the most significant sites of conflict and desire in the festivals that It's Queer Up North has staged since 1992. Our queer bodies, that cannot be held in place or controlled, that are vulnerable and violable by human agencies that possess, own and destroy them. Bodies with all their limitations and all their possibilities: terrifyingly and wonderfully human bodies. These unruly bodies where the metaphorical, political and social concerns of our age are performed.

The stories and testimonies that follow come from a selection of the artists who have, are and (we hope) will continue to perform with It's Queer Up North. They are both personal and common - words that echo from the bodies that have taken our stages. As we record them, however, we are wise to remember that it has been in the dialogue with the audience that the work has been created.

Paul Heritage, Manchester, 1996

Ain't Nothin' Like the Real Thing

This catalogue is a document, a relic, a scar, a trace, an imprint, a remnant.

The desire to preserve and remember a performance is powerful. Powerful enough to warrant the production of this 'catalogue of queer performance'. The desire to remember a performance is most significantly instigated by pleasure. Pleasure and desire, crucial to the documenter, crucial to the performer, the spectator, and, well, everyone else.

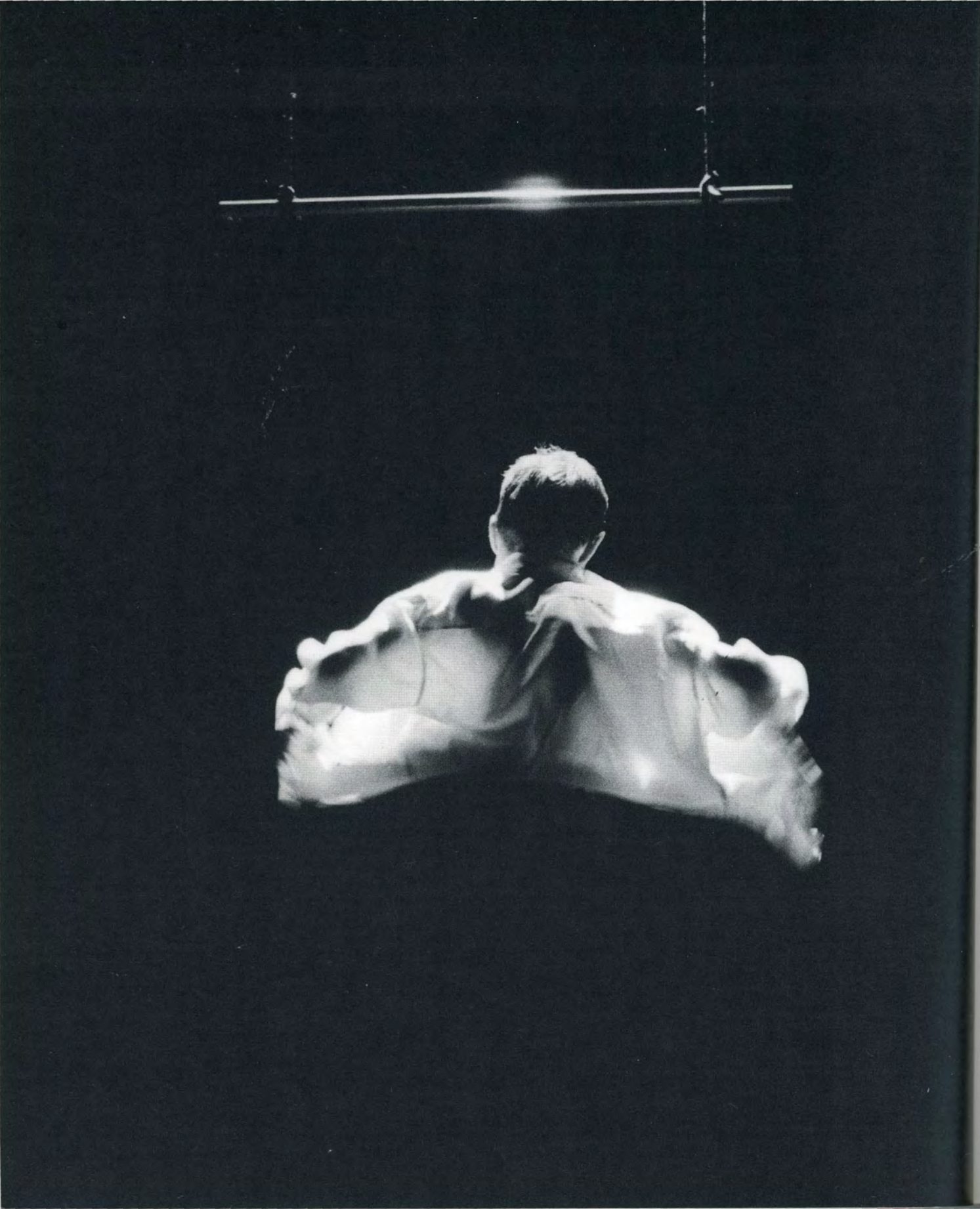
The process of performance moves us swiftly away from the primary experience. The curtain closes. The show is over. Lights come up on us, the audience, the witnesses. If we liked the show (or even a few moments of it) and sometimes even if we didn't, the art lives on in our heads. If asked what it was like, or about, we the witnesses would doubtless give a multitude of conflicting answers. And as time passes we lose details, the show transforms, we remember it in fragments, images, perhaps we hardly remember it at all. Because of the disappearing act [1] that performance plays on our minds you might buy a programme to the show, an artist might video her work, we at It's Queer Up North produce a catalogue - these act as aides memoire. Of course, the document itself can be enjoyed without having ever experienced the live event. But it 'ain't nothin' like the real thing.'

1 This notion of performance as 'disappearance' is from Peggy Phelan, Unmarked: the politics of performance, Routledge 1993, p.146.

So, if the performances themselves are the primary thing then I would suggest that the following artists' statements are a bit like reading someone writing in a second language. Even the written excerpts direct from the actual performances are removed from, second to the event. The body-work, movement, time and space which define performance are stripped away. This is not to say that the relics from live events are uninteresting or inauthentic. On the contrary! As a live art archivist I am passionate about the pleasures provided in these art-ifacts; love the review better than the show sometimes; love to put my finger on fast forward to my favorite bits when watching performance videos. Furthermore, the documentation surrounding performance is now often of as much interest to the live artist as the live-ness itself (see Leslie Hill's article).

I find the writings derived from performance quite spirited discourse. However, some would say the words about or from performance are decidedly un-lively, their very existence on the page signifying the death of that 'real' experience. Whichever way you see it though - the writings provided here do strain to come off the page to you the reader/audience to entertain you, and to offer insight. Somehow when these artists(not to be confused with the critic, the journalist, the programmer, the academic, all also represented within these margins) submit to the page, to the pinning down of their flickering ways, we as audience can get closer to the work, we become able to digest it in another, perhaps 'explanatory' or 'hardcopy' format. But the work won't really submit. Even performers who are friends of the written text, both within and around their art, (for example Kate Bornstein is sometimes a journalist, Peggy Shaw and Lois Weaver, with Sue-Ellen Case, are about to publish a book of their show scripts, in fact, most performers included in this catalogue are friendly with words), transform their performances in documenting them. They can't help it. That is the beauty and tragedy of the catalogue. As a document of queer work it provides some crucial evidence of the inevitable disappearing act live artists perform. It won't substitute for the experience, but at least with a catalogue, you can hold it in your hands, put it on a shelf, return to it any old time, and it feels good turning the pages.

Charlie Spencer, Manchester, 1996



Transsexual Lesbian Playwright Tells All

Kate Bornstein

My ancestors were performers. In life. The earliest shamanic rituals involved women and men exchanging genders. Old, old rituals. Top-notch performances. Life and death stuff. We're talking cross-cultural here. We're talking rising way way way above being a man or a woman. That's how my ancestors would fly. That's how my ancestors would talk with the goddesses and the gods. Old rituals.

I'd been a performer of one sort or another for over twenty-five years, and now I'm writing plays as well as performing in them. See, I had never seen my story on stage and I was looking. I used to go up to writers I knew. I used to wish you'd write my story. And I'm only just now realizing that you couldn't possibly. I write from the point of view of an S/M transsexual lesbian, ex-cult member, proud femme bottom and sometimes top shaman. And I wondered why no one was writing my story? I'm writing from the point of view of used-to-be-a-man, three husbands, father, first mate on an ocean-going yacht, minister, high-powered IBM sales type, pierre cardin three piece suitor, bar-mitzvah'd circumcised yuppie from the east coast. Not too many women write from that point of view. I write from the point of view of a used-to-be politically correct, wanna-be butch, dyke phone sex hostess, smooth talking, telemarketing, love slave, art slut, pagan tarot reader, maybe soon a grandmother, crystal palming, incense burning, not-man, not always a woman, fast becoming a marxist. And not too many men write from that point of view.

My ancestors didn't write much. I guess they didn't need to.

Y'know, people try to write about transsexuals and it's amusing, it's infuriating, it's patronizing, and it's why *I'm* writing about transsexuals now. I wrote one play in college twenty-one years ago. And one play last year. Both of them I pulled from my chest until they pulsed bleeding on the stage. Saint Kate of the bleeding heart. The first play was young love gone bad. Spun out my soul as just so much cotton candy romanticism. God it felt great. The second play was a harder birth. *Hidden: A Gender* is my transsexual voice the voice I speak with, cry with, roar with, moan with and laugh with, don't forget laugh with. I always hid that voice away. I always used your voice spoke your words sang your hit parade. Until I heard them whisper, my ancestors. And I whispered and you heard me and I said hey you weren't meant to hear that and you said tell us more. And that was the second play, the harder birth. The one I had to write.

I write when nothing else will bring me peace, when I burn, when I find myself asking and answering the same questions over and over. I write when I've begun to lose my sense of humor and it becomes a matter of my life and my death to get that sense of humor back and watch you laugh. I write in bottom space. I open up to you, I cut myself, I show you my fantasies. I get a kick out of that - oh yeah. I perform in top space. I cover myself with my character and take you where you never dreamed you could go. Yes. My ancestors did this. My instrument is not my pen or my typewriter, not my lover's Macintosh, not my cast of characters, not my body on stage. No, my instrument is my audience and oh how I love to play you. And to what end? I've come to see gender as a divisive social construct, and the gendered body as a somewhat dubious accomplishment. I write about this because I am a gender outlaw and my issues are gender issues. The way I see it now, the lesbian and gay community is as much oppressed for gender transgressions as for sexual distinction. We have more in common, you and I, than most people are willing to admit. See, I'm told I must be a man or a woman. One or the other. Oh, it's OK to be a transsexual, say some - just don't talk about it. Don't question your gender any more, just be a woman now - you went to so much trouble - just be satisfied. I am so not satisfied. My ancestors were not satisfied.

I write from the point of view of a gender outlaw because I don't want to hear: We don't want you in our club / We don't want you on our land / We don't want you in our march. And I say

opposite page; **Raimund Hoghe in *Meinwarts***
photo: Rosa Frank

I don't know why the separatists won't let me in - I'm probably the only lesbian to have successfully castrated a man and gone on to laugh about it on stage, in print and on national television. Hello, Geraldo, are you reading this?

My ancestors were not shunned. They were celebrated. Look, I know you try to fill in the blanks in my life. I write to let you know who I am so that you *can* fill in the blanks.

Hello, Mom, are you reading this?

Anyway, I work in theater because I really enjoy working *with* people, and theater is not an alone art. And current theatrical forms reflect a rigidly bi-polar gender system. They aren't fluid enough for what I want to say, and I feel that form and content in theater as in life should be complimentary, not adversarial, so I work on my own gender fluidity and sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't. And I work on the fluidity of my theatrical style - and sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't. My life and my theater - my form and my content - sort of do as I say and do as I do. Like my ancestors.

Kate Bornstein, San Francisco, 1994
(From her book, GENDER OUTLAW: ON MEN WOMEN AND THE REST OF US)

Kate Bornstein

> They hunched up into their puppets, their eyes like dark fireballs so lost, so focused. They sighed and breathed into them, shared their arms and their bodies and at times, it seemed, their very souls.
>
> Nicola Barker, *The Observer.*

How did it all begin? Ten years ago we both exhibited work in a lesbian art exhibition during the installing of it, we met and that's the beginning.

Our work, individually and collaboratively is created and drawn from our lives, often autobiographical but also inspired by stolen true stories of lives around us. Life is a duality of beauty and despair and so is our art.

It is our love of cities, the urbanization, the backs of factories and the insides of cathedrals, the vivid mix of cultures and the resulting creativity which gives extra appeal to living and working in Manchester. It has been our home for over ten years and is a challenging and disturbing place to work.

Parentage

Puppeteer - Nenagh Watson
In constructing the puppet figures Watson uses discarded objects combined with fabricated elements. She feels that a discarded object has a previous existence that accompanies it, etched within by usage of time. Urban waste echoes its environment and aligns to analogies of city life. The discarded is rescued, revived by recontextualization but not wholly transformed, adding to its poignancy and humour.

> It struck me at the time, and strikes me still, that to be able to create objects of such extraordinary ingenuity and beauty out of scrap is talent enough, but to create live magic around them, too, is simple genius.
>
> Nicola Barker, *The Observer* 22nd May 1994.

Creation of the illusion of life from an inanimate object is a constant exploration within Watson's work. The roots of the puppet figure lie within the tradition of shamanism, with superstition still echoing ancient fears of blasphemy and possession.

> The final blasphemy - that of creating the illusion of life. The flamboyant opposition of death and life, of the artificial and the real.
>
> Simon Pummell (on the Films of Ladislaw Starewicz), *Sight and Sound*, May 1995.

Making and performing have continued to be of equal importance. The theatre of puppets is essentially a theatre of integration - the ultimate in cross disciplinary work.

Painter - Rachael Field

> The bold figurative paintings of Rachael Field have a monumental quality describing the private sphere of women's lives within a broad political and public structure...The individual support within collective action is powerfully expressed.
>
> Emmanuel Cooper, The Sexual Perspective, Routledge, 1994.

Field is currently exploring computer animation to make painting work in the hyper media. Collecting visual and aural material - like notes for a book - reconstructing information via the computer. It needs raw input - communication through the wire - a broad stroke of paint in the minutiae of the microchip. Fat paint and thin chips. She is experimenting with how painting can be brought to life and taken back into performance. Field believes that moving images

show more emotion and can even convey the experience of the subjects. By moving through a portrait into what is in the head, we can literally show thought processes. To see the layered images inside the head, visualising the difference between what is real and what is imagined. The real and unreal mingle.

> A fully understood idea is a dead idea. My work has taught me that places of shadow are far more interesting than fully illuminated rooms.
>
> Bill Viola, unpublished notes on *The Passing*, 'Rites of Passage' catalogue, Tate Gallery.

Field's exploration of shadow images brings the intensity of her monumental paintings, her love of colour into the theatre, by literally filling screens with light, colour and often live painting. Her compositional eye sees the stage space as a huge canvas, whereby paintings are given the freedom to move and literally breathe. It is her vision as painter which has informed and challenged DOO COT's work. Stealing from the language of the fine artist to give a unique overview of the stage space. She describes her approach to theatre as mark making, adopting the European term 'scenography' translated as 'drawing in air'. The stage space a canvas with each intrusion: puppet, actor, music, sound, light equating a mark. The total equality of the different elements which go to create the final piece is paramount. It is an art of radical juxtaposition.

Creation

> An extraordinary fusion of painting, object and figure manipulation, live and recorded music, shadows and most recently computer animation.
>
> Stella Hall, The Rise and Rise of DOO COT, *Animations,* May 1995.

Collaboration is a process of conflict, it is born out of struggle, but one which sheds new light on each other's working process, eventually creating a hybrid. It is the ultimate in artificial procreation. DOO COT seek out other collaborators who contribute on a project basis. Sylvia Hallett, a straight forward composer, composes with sounds stolen from the street, lyrics become haunting melodies and strange ditties. Richard Jenkins sheds a gaiety of light, continually illuminating our lives and work. A new departure, new adventure straight from London: Anna Furse to pen and direct our new piece *Ultra Violet* out in 1996.

Performances to Date

We 2 Girls Together Clinging - Nenagh Watson's one woman autobiographical performance, out of a wardrobe (closet),1989.
Discarded Memories - Nothing is lost but it changes,1990.
Other Shadows - autobiographical shadow performance,1991.
Cages - the illusion of freedom just out of reach,1992.
Still Life - if you believe a puppet can live it can also die,1994.
House - stories from one house in the private rented sector told in shadow,1994.
Peacock- a stolen true story,1994.
Odd If You Dare - life against the odds,1995.

DOO COT, Manchester, 1996

opposite page: **DOO COT in *Peacock***
photo: Ann McGuinness

Leslie Hill strange relations

the brother/sister thing

Like the Brady Bunch brothers and sisters, our parents married in the mid seventies. The mother brought a daughter (me) and the father brought a son (Jeff). Despite the fact that Jeff and I opened our live performance of *strange relations* [1] by recounting our impressions of the wedding and of each other as strangers forced into a family relationship, the Glasgow audience rejected the knowledge that we were not 'really' related. In the bar afterwards, people insisted on a strong resemblance, some asked if we were twins. Much to our surprise, audience members seemed determined to read our performance as the celebration of an ideal (biological) sibling relationship regardless of the fact that the material does not lend itself easily to this interpretation. For starters, we look nothing alike. Further, we didn't behave nearly as sweetly to each other in our performance as Jane and Michael Banks did in Mary Poppins. At one point, for example, I strapped a grotesque Jeff Stryker dildo to my head, made Jeff (my brother) sit on the 'stool of repentance' and asked him aggressive questions about his sex life while Jeff (the dildo) pointed at him accusingly from a jarring proximity. How many nice sisters treat their brothers this way in public? Despite the fact that the performance was about, among other things, STDs, gerbil stuffing, vampires, 3-D porno films, and Freud's failure to explain the clitoris, and despite the fact that it involved audience participation in the form of a Tequila Slammer Stand and an HIV+ Kissing Booth, the brother/sister evening appeared to cast a strangely wholesome Disney spell over the audience.

1 CCA, Glasgow, October 1995.

The question is: why has our brother/sister relationship been seized upon as some sort of a queer Bobsey Twins [2] ideal? I have two thoughts about this which relate to two different interpretive communities present in the CCA cafe/bar. For the 'hetero-spectator' a lesbian/gay dynamic within a sister/brother relationship is ideal in that it defuses the incest threat and diminishes sibling rivalry (for sexual partners), facilitating the ultimate platonic male/female relationship. At the same time, the trendy and politically 'worthy' issues of homosexuality may seem more accessible (or easier to appropriate?) within the dominant heterosexual discourse of the nuclear family. For the 'homo-spectator' the gay brother/lesbian sister relationship seemed to bridge a perceived gap between our 'real' (heterosexual) family and our adopted (lesbian/gay) community. Citing the work within a brother/sister paradigm which consolidates male and female, gay and lesbian, family and community, and real and adopted, perhaps temporarily camouflages uncomfortable rifts between these groups. [3] For our relationship to function as a platonic ideal or a mystical point of unification, spectators seemed to need to believe that we were 'real' (i.e. biological) brother and sister, preferably twins. I view the Glasgow reception of *strange relations* as part of a general 90s trend (especially in fashion and publishing) to construct one big, self-reflexive Homo-community. [4] While the 1980s blanket term 'the lesbian and gay community' exposes the division between the two groups even where it seeks to unify them into one 'community', the 1990s preference for Queer politics, Queer theory, Queer performance and women with goatees seems to attempt to ameliorate this division and refashion two disparate groups into one trendy uber-Queer culture, a construct which I perceive as more or less spurious. [5] Any future performances of the piece will, thus, attempt to problematise the brother/sister retationship more rigorously to keep *strange relations* from becoming 'Happy Families'. [6]

2 The Bobsey Twins are younger, cuter boy & girl detective contemporaries of Nancy Drew and the Hardy Boys.

3 My friend Jen Harvie has two interesting thoughts on the subject. 1) that audiences might have wanted to see us as biological lesbian sister and gay brother so that homosexuality might be confirmed in a way that wonderfully (and doubly) 'infiltrates' and undermines both the heterosexual family and the heterosexuality of family; or, less optimistically, 2) to confirm homosexuality as biological in a way that protects 'true' (biological) heterosexuals.

4 The trend for homo-homogenisation is only one among many. In the opposite extreme, we are defined in terms so precise and fragmented as to be relatively meaningless with regard to notions of 'community'.

5 This is not to say that I promote essentialist naturalisations of innate differences between women and men, lesbians and gays, but simply that while the rainbow flag admittedly makes a good bumper sticker, it doesn't do it for me as a point of identification. Frankly, I perceive myself as having more in common with straight women than gay men.

6 In his article 'The Happy House O'Queers at 281 State', Michael Cowenthal reflects that his attempt to share a house with his partner, a lesbian couple and 'Spike the dyke dog', became 'an extended field study' in which housemates felt obliged to prove their status as members of 'the new generation of postsexist, coalition-building queers', a project which Cowenthal believes failed because of extreme internal and external pressures to regard their household first and foremost, 'as a metaphor.' Significantly, this essay appears in an anthology which is entitled Sister & Brother, despite the fact that it is not by nor is it about biological sisters and brothers. Joan Nestle & John Preston (eds.) Sister & Brother: Lesbians and Gay Men Write About Their Lives Together, (San Francisco: Harper) 1994, pp. 78, 84.

the video/performance thing

I was prompted to start working in video by my brother's diagnosis as HIV+. When I went to Seattle to stay with him after getting the news, I was surprised to find that Jeff had reinvented himself as new-age lesbian witch: brewing up nettle soups and slimy root teas; reading *and writing* feminist utopian novels; hosting Beltane parties; and talking about the deep and meaningful nature of lesbian relationships. I, to the contrary, was rebelling against the idea that women hear Enya music playing softly in the background every time they 'make love', and

had embarked upon a course of shallow, hedonistic behaviour.[7] I couldn't help noticing that Jeff and I were in the throws of a parodic [8] role-reversal, a reversal which I interpreted as a specific reaction to Jeff's HIV diagnosis, as well as a more general reaction to a crisis in which half of the community is perceived as 'endangered' while the other half is perceived as 'safe'.[9] I decided to start documenting us, a process which began a year later in March 1995. Although I find live work to be more interesting as an artist than 'video for video's sake', as an automythographer I am extremely interested in documentation and archives, and so video does have an obvious appeal. Predictably, the fear of mortality in our particular situation can also heighten the desire (on both our parts) to amass evidence of our existence. After watching the first tapes we made, I decided that Jeff and I should make a live piece together. So the candid video material actually gave rise to a live performance. I don't normally like the use of video in live work unless it is a live feed, so I decided that instead of switching back and forth between live and taped, we should do a continuous live performance in front of a film screen and that the (silent) video footage would be our 'set'. In this way we were able to give a technically simple, focused live performance which was simultaneously contextualised by larger-than-life home-movie style footage of ourselves in relation to our family and to the ghettos we live in. Currently I am using the video archives to create a self-contained video piece, *strange relations* for It's Queer Up North.

7 Which is when, by the way, I began my career as a performance artist.

8 Parodic because we were taking on the characteristics of each other's respective stereotypes, not of each other's personalities.

9 Thus, while the 'safety' of stereotypic nesty lesbian behaviours could gain sudden appeal to men who felt endangered, the mythification of the 'safe' lesbian with the sex appeal of last year's Habitat catalogue could, in turn, lead women to consciously 'dangerous' behaviours, as witnessed in the condom-envy phenomenon of the dental dam, which publicly affirms that women, too, have sex lives 'dangerous' enough to warrant protection.

the UK/USA thing

My performance career has been almost exclusively British-based and though I am writing this from my native land, I do not claim to know much about the internal mechanisms of the American performance scene (or if there even is one). The most immediately striking difference between British and American performance in my limited experience is in the actual venues.[10] In Glasgow I could expect to pass half a dozen people selling *The Big Issue* and twice as many scabby looking souls [11] eating lard and chip suppers in the street on my way through the pissing rain from Cowcaddens underground to the CCA. Once inside, however, I could be snug within a mini-world replete with its own reception desk, bookshop, award-winning restaurant, trendy bar, administrative offices, conference rooms, galleries, performance space and the nicest public toilets in town. In LA, I drove a new hire car through Beverly Hills, weaving in and out of Mercedes and Porche convertibles on my way to Highways, a clapped out warehouse with no bookshop, no gallery, no restaurant, no bar(!), no full-time employees and no carpet. While my impression of performance in Britain was that artists got a small piece of a small pie, my impression in LA was that artists were just barely scavenging the crumbs of a majorly huge pie and that really, baby, film was the only way to go. While the ICA shares The Mall with Buckingham Palace, Highways' closest neighbor in a landscape of commercial warehouses is La Panter Rosa,[12] a bar I wouldn't dream of entering without a concealed weapon. Significantly, the work I went to see at Highways was British. When I told Lois Keidan, ICA Live Arts director, that I was thinking of moving back to the States she said,'Don't. There's no funding. It's dying.' A few feet away I cold overhear American artist Denise Uyehara asking two of the Sacred Naked Nature Girls if either of them could bring a loaf of bread to rehearsal at her house the next day. It wasn't for a prop; it was for dinner. [13]

10 Although this is, of course, ultimately an indication of differences in infrastructure.

11 Often I was one of them.

12 The Pink Panther.

13 This sort of conversation is familiar enough, although in Glasgow the priority would been finding the resources to go out and get rat-arsed that night and never mind tomorrow's loaf.

I get the impression that among American artists Britain is regarded a something of a performance Mecca. All of the American artists I've spoken with (Ron Athey, Tim Miller, Iris Moore, Peggy Shaw, Lawrence Steger, Denise Uyehara and Lois Weaver), have toured or devised major work in Britain in the last two years. The reverse cannot be said of most of the British performers in my acquaintance. As far as I know 'ICA in the USA' [14] was the first British performance package of its kind to make it here. So maybe Lois is right and I should stay in Britain. There is a problem, however despite the wonderful world of officially funded institutional residencies and commissioned works, all the British performers I know are on

14 February 1996. Highways Performance Space, Santa Monica; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; and PS 122, New York.

the dole. As an American, I am not entitled to the dole, and formerly kept myself in visas and lager by doing a PhD. Now I need to find another way to support myself and I reckon this will be easier in the States, partly because practical work and academia are more integrated here and largely, of course, because here I have the rights of citizenship. Although funding is admittedly shite, I sense that there are some aspects to making work which may be easier Stateside. American artists of my generation have never been able to put their hopes in government funding and because of this I think that their strategies for independently networking, accessing equipment and creating or utilising alternative resources are, per force, highly developed.[15] Americans have an inspiring, contagious 'can-do' attitude and are incredibly generous with their resources, be they information, equipment, contacts or technology. For me the atmosphere in the US currently radiates a more exciting sense of entering a new millennium. Americans, for example, speak technology with the same general competency as the Dutch speak English, so coming here from Britain I feel as if I have gone forwards through a time warp. If I hadn't been living in Britain over the past few years I would never have had the opportunity to make and develop performance work in residency and on commission, an extremely important opportunity for any artist. In Britain, however, I don't think I could access the equipment to make the work I am currently making in video, non-linear hypertext narrative and multi-media CD-ROM. Perhaps I shall become as Peggy Shaw has described herself, an itinerant worker.

Leslie Hill, Texas, 1996

15 Tim Miller, for example, saw the need for a performance space in LA and founded Highways. One of the most talked about performances of 1995 was one that Athey, Moore and Steger made for an invited audience in a friend's garage. The debates over welfare /enterprise are endless and I cannot begin to address them in a short article, but I will say that while I am a socialist at heart, the ability of American artists to self-actualise impresses me.

Leslie Hill
photo: Alan Crumlish

Before they reached thirty, at a time when nobody had heard of AIDS. the younger of the two men said he could still imagine them being friends in fifty years. As old men they would think back - right back to their first evening together with the scratched records and the hits by Sandie Shaw, and Dusty Springfield, the Supremes and Lulu. When he died at the age of 35, the AIDS statistics were updated.

He'd wanted to be a magician or a jellybaby salesman, the writer told the journalists who had described him as a promising young talent. The 37-year old's obituaries spoke of the magic of his plays and the jellybabies he had sold in a cinema. The cause of death was not mentioned.

The postcard a friend with AIDS sent from Morocco shows a town in the wake of the earthquake. "Why do I choose cards like this?", he asks a year before his death, leaving the question unanswered. "I send you my best wishes and embrace you with all my heart."

"In the past people had often been less cautious," says the woman at the newspaper stand. "You used to put the change in people's hands." Nowadays, with AIDS around, she'd stopped doing that. She points to the glass-covered counter. "I just put the money down here, so I don't come into contact with anyone. I'm more careful now."

The man's skin seemed paper-thin. You could feel his bones through his T-shirt when you embraced him. As the stranger touches the back of the man's neck and his bare arm, he is reminded of a baby's skin. When he dies of AIDS, the 27-year-old smoothes baby oil onto one of his arms and hugs a teddy that had grown soft in his embraces.

He knows what should be done with people who have AIDS, a kiosk owner from Düsseldorf says: "Put 'em to sleep." A smile flickers across his face, "One quick bash on the head and they're gone once and for all."

He no longer has the courage to warm himself up against the young men he meets, the author with AIDS writes, and that he isn't remotely proud of the fact. Once the 35-year-old takes his video camera and films his bed with the two teddybears lying there and embracing as they used to.

When her son kissed the photo of Rock Hudson on the calendar hanging on the wall, the mother came into the room and was beside herself. The kiss didn't mean anything, he tried to explain. He had only been kissing paper. On the back of the photo it said that Rock Hudson could be reached through: "Universal International Films, Universal City, California, USA."

Raimund Hoghe, Düsseldorf, 1996

Translated by Mary Frau Gilbert
and Dr. Keith Bartlett

John Kelly I Want Your Myth

In my youth heroes existed as not much more than glimpses of artists and personalities, their work and contributions to culture witnessed on TV, in the movies, and in books. Reproductions of Renaissance paintings, Galina Ulanova dancing the Dying Swan on the Ed Sullivan show, The Doors, the song "Lola" by the Kinks - these snippets of magic were the hidden, the inaccessible, the desired. As a young man I was expected to revel in overpaid sports stars, politicians, military personnel, or Jesus Christ. I opted for my sampling of glorious freaks.

In the early 1970's an older friend from my high school brought me over to Manhattan from Jersey City on the PATH train, to the Anderson Theatre, next to the 4th Street bar, in what was then the very dark east village. The Cockettes, a group from San Francisco, were performing their epic staged travesty *Pearls Over Shanghai.* The theatre was less than a quarter full, the show having bombed as it supposedly hadn't lived up to New York expectations. For me the show was a profound revelation; live irreverent art. On this night I encountered two important heroes. One was a man who sauntered downstage wearing a long blue silk 30s thing, obviously deprived of undergarments, and sang "Shanghai Lil" while standing perfectly still in a pin spot. Hero #2 opened the second act - a large man who beautifully danced the Dying Swan in a white tutu and point shoes. A second whammy. Jersey City became an abstraction warranting retirement.

From that moment I embarked on a quest for dance technique. This took me uptown to the ballet academies and downtown to modern dance lofts, where I studied with former ballet stars, and, more interestingly, with Charles Weidman and James Waring. In my dance years I didn't encounter particular human idols - it was more likely specific choreographic or theatrical works that moved me into action.

Heroes exist to be emulated - the heady whiff of their myth can send us into raptures of creative striving, increasing our momentum and acquainting us with our foibles. They inspire us. Thus (eventually), my heroes of dance made way for those of visual art and music. Emulation and mimicry were the sound starting points in my obsession with the life and work of the Viennese Expressionist artist Egon Schiele. This began when Barbara Pearlman, my drawing teacher (and quite a massive hero herself) introduced me to his work. Something intangible invaded me this time, the two-dimensional image casting me into a relationship with an item that would become a major companion to my creative life - the mirror. The vehicle of the self-portrait, the door into the mysteries of the self. This was obviously related to my years in front of the dance studio mirror - but that had been about the bigger picture, the body as seen in full, moving from shape to shape, from a distance. This, on the other hand, was about grasping definitive or telling moments and giving them two dimensional life via the accumulated recording of detail, like (the progressive visual residue of) a puzzle. And this "visual diary" was highly active; I would find a pose, and to robust orchestral or meandering solo instrumental music, or opera, go on a journey of self-exploration and confrontation. Internal combustion with a residue. Egon Schiele, as my hero, pointed the way - I attempted to go through his open door - but to emerge into a place that I could call my own. Years later, in a live performance work (*Pass The Blutwurst, Bitte*, 1986), I found myself able to recreate this private experience on stage in front of an audience. My obsession with trying to understand Schiele's essence had helped me to discover my own.

As the visual and kinetic aspects of my heroic quest were realized, sounds started creeping into my psyche. In the mid 1970s I was visiting a friend on Fire Island, lying on a waterbed mattress in the sun. A sound came pouring out of the house - it made my ears ring, and my heart burst. It was "The Art Of Maria Callas", a stereo recording made late in her career. It introduced me to a vast world of music, language and emotion - the abstract sound of music conjuring feelings, times and places, lost and uncharted. I learned about opera while

drawing and painting to her recordings, and learned something about art from an artist who was unbelievably committed and essential, as in essence. A few years later, with the help of drugs and alcohol, I would re-invent myself in the guise of Dagmar Onassis, a punk diva who would lip-synch recordings of her "Mother", Maria Callas.

I've never known why I've wanted certain things. If I've loved something enough, I've found that I would want to inhabit this thing, to become it, to understand it not just with my eyes and my brain, but also with my body and my voice. Usually in front of an audience - people seated in a theatre - or myself in the mirror. Perhaps I am both an exhibitionist and a chameleon. Or maybe its just an introspective nature exploring itself in an external format. When I first saw the French film *Children of Paradise* I went directly home and cut up my bed sheets and made a costume to resemble the main character Batiste. My lonely and horny teenage years were spent listening to the words and music of Joni Mitchell, which later resulted in what critic Stephen Holden referred to as my "...worshipful interpretation of a flaxen-haired ingenue".

In response to a visit to East Berlin in 1983 I transformed myself into Waldemar Dix, a graffiti artist who escapes over a reconstruction of the Berlin Wall set up inside Performance Space 122 (in New York City). The Dying Swan I encountered in 1971 was Larry Ree, a heroic theatrical force I was able to learn first hand from when I danced as a ballerina in his Original Trockadero Gloxinia ballet company. And that singer from the Cockettes wound up being my upstairs neighbor. Funny how seeing the live heroes close-up tends to diminish or blur their initial impact; hopefully by this time the worshipful student is well on his or her way to concocting his or her own myth. So, we can outgrow our heroes. Or they can change as we change.

John Kelly, New York, 1996

John Kelly as Joni Mitchell
photo: Michael O'Brien

Robert Pacitti Civil

Civil is an exploration of liberty and disobedience as we near the end of the 20th Century.

My experience in 1995 of having a piece of work banned left a bitter taste in my mouth. The show *Geek* contained a scene where a woman pulled a union jack from her vagina to the dulcet tones of the National Anthem.

God Save the Queen.

With some hysterical press and a swiftly organised demonstration of skin-heads and war veterans, *Geek* became the first piece of British stage work to be banned for fifteen years.

My response one year on is *Civil.*

For many years I have been obsessed with 'outsiders', people for whom either their physical exterior or their behaviour has set them apart from 'the mass' as a choice or otherwise. My intrigue spans such luminaries as Joan of Arc, Howard Hughes, Charles Manson, and Koo Koo the bird girl through to Sid Vicious, Jean Cocteau, Orlan, and Quentin Crisp.

Indeed, Crisp's accounts of his life as laid out in THE NAKED CIVIL SERVANT have had a profound effect on my life. When first reading his book aged 14 I was not only offered an inspiration, but a green light.

I was born in 1967, the same year that 'homosexuality' became decriminalised, the same year that Nico sang "Chelsea Girls", the same year THE NAKED CIVIL SERVANT was first published. I am the bastard twin of these events - "We Are Family".

I was fortunate enough to meet Quentin Crisp recently in New York. Over a ten day period we spent time talking and eating and bitching. He is still an inspiration and he is still a green light. At 88 he is more determined and uncompromising than I could ever have dreamed.

One of Quentin's favourite lines is, "Do not have icons, do not have mentors." This encompasses his basic belief that if you idolise a great basketball player for example, if you aim to attain the same level of greatness, you will never surpass the level this person has already achieved. You will, at best, merely 'arrive'.

Do not have icons. Do not have mentors.

Hold dear all of the great and the brave and that's enough. I believe Quentin Crisp to be one of the surrogate parents of contemporary sexual identity. He has lived a life of direct action and he has left that green light on! Run.

ARM IN ARMED FORCES, from **CIVIL**

I have stood with soldiers for photographs
Their shirt sleeves rolled
Above the elbow.

I have danced with sailors decked in white
Whose sheer flirtation
I have admired.

With airmen I have always maintained
That my visual adornings were ever improved
By a dashing young captain
In eau de cologne.

With attention to detail
I often recall
A night I spent sparring which would end in a park
Where one ran the risk
Of disturbance...
From thugs.

And these boys in the forces
Whores on their mind,
But me
For consolation
However brave and however gallant
I was often to be left alone
At night
In a park
A member of the British Military
Sprinting from a locked embrace in one direction
Whilst members
Of the fist consensus
Drew rank
Around me.

Robert Pacitti, London, 1996

Jenni Potter From There to Eternity

On the morning of June 12th 1995 I found myself in a position that 16 years earlier I had thought was a lifetime away. I lost the closest person in my life, my best friend Brian King - an actor, writer and personality of immense proportions. My mind often travels back to the May of 1979. I was a shy 16 year old closet queen dressed as Dr. Who, winding my way down a seedy back street behind the Everyman Theatre in Liverpool. My journey was taking me to the Everyman Youth Theatre and to my first major life changing, life affirming event: the day I discovered drama, the day I discovered how accessible, exciting, funny, moving and ultimately rewarding sharing creative ideas with 40 other young people could be, improvising our way from hard hitting family dilemmas to landing on the moon in roller boots, and to the time I first met Brian. It was an instant relationship, a destined meeting of minds and personalities. We were a shimmering, glittering mixture of latent effeminacy, talent and acne. With the youth theatre and Brian I discovered I was more than a shy gawky under-confident teenager. Instead of the damp squib I'd convinced myself I'd always be, I was indeed a potential roman candle, shooting off colour and sparking brilliantly with the other human fireworks, sharing this unique, formative, fast and furious period of our lives. The Liverpool that was, for me, a formidable, imposing, masculine, heterosexual bully was transformed into a Xanadu that Kubla Khan and Olivia Newton-John could only have dreamed of. I became alive, and life suddenly had something to offer. I suppose it was when I first became aware of my life, and of life energy and the unconscious commitment of friendship.

Brian and I became the darlings of our youth theatre kingdom, a queen and queen who the girls felt safe with and the boys were just a little jealous of. There were tears when we left for a theatre company in Wolverhampton, and cheers when we came back, bigger, better and as out of our closets as two queens could be. We became larger than the life we created for ourselves, mini legends in our own rehearsal room. We grew together as club goers, drinkers and performers, blossoming hedonists looking for the next fabulous night out, the flamboyant early eighties pop music a perfect backdrop for our ever more complex and startling personalities. We were wild, the best dancers (although I was always secretly jealous of Brian as he was a better dancer than me), and AIDS was something that happened in America.

We formed a theatre company, Sex and Violence : Theatre Like Life. We wrote plays, we became the controversial cabaret duo The Beige Experience. Offstage as well as on, we were the physical embodiment of our art, and AIDS was something that happened in London. Separately and together we had life whirlwinding around us. Taking each stage as it came, growing stronger in our poverty, and blowing whatever cash that came our way immediately on the next great time, we were invincible arm flailing screamers, until AIDS was something that happened in Liverpool.

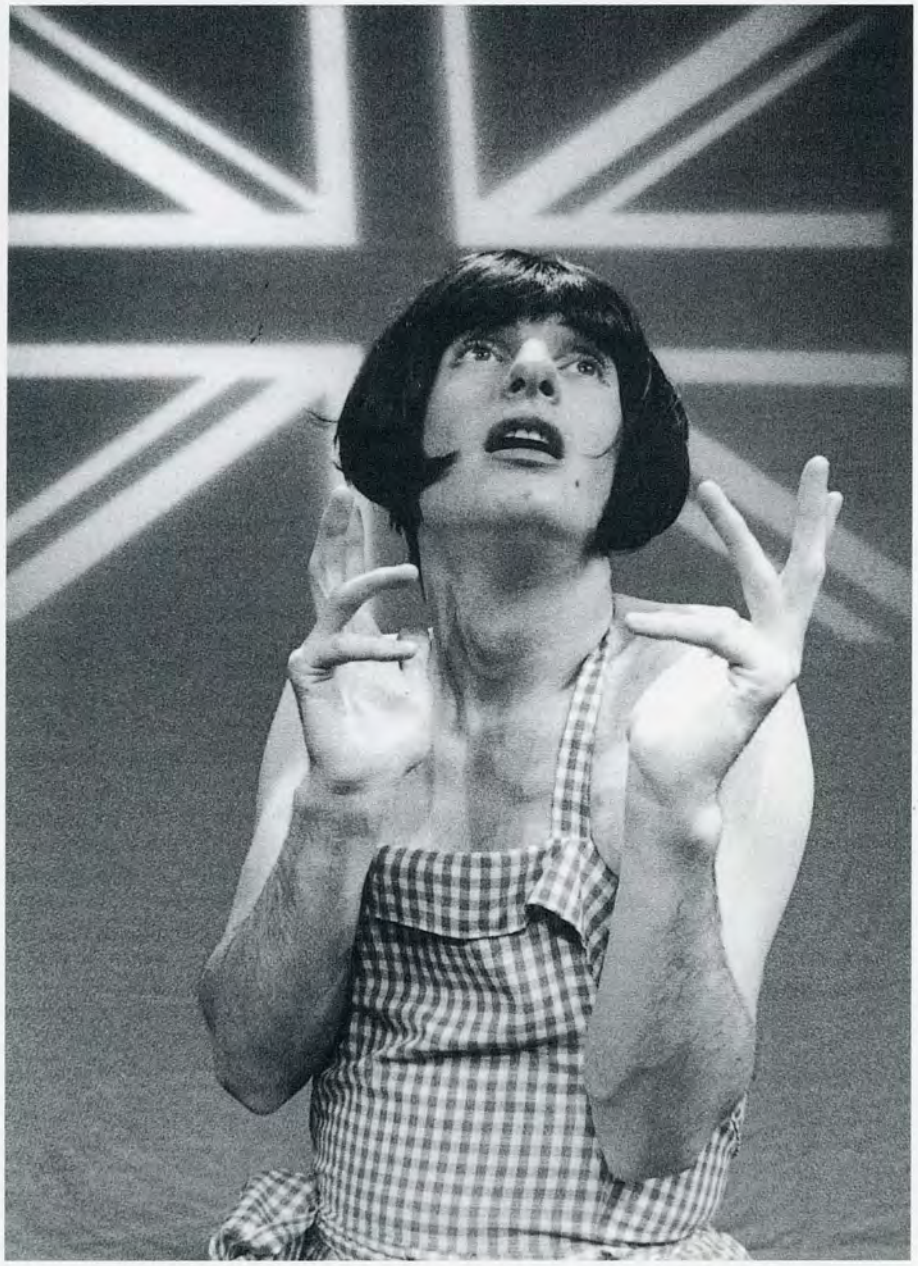
Life took another turn, and no matter how philosophical and prepared we tried to be, Brian was HIV+. The shag pile had been pulled away from beneath our feet, and life would never be the same again. Denial, anger, fear, alcohol and drugs, more art and more plays - the next four and a half years were a torrent of trailblazing emotion. Brian left for London, and I stayed here to form Pantomime Prods, son of Sex and Violence if you like, the company instrumental in resurrecting Chloe Poems, my alter ego. Chloe was originally part of The Beige Experience cabaret, along with Brian's Odette Du Poetress.

Our last production together was in *The Dickie Bird Waltz*, a North West Arts Board/Unity Theatre commission to launch their annual gay and lesbian performance award, now renamed The Brian King Award. It was a play I wrote with Brian firmly in mind. He was riveting as Jon, a stand-up comic with AIDS, aware of his impending death. It was a difficult thing for him to do and there were many traumas involved. Brian wasn't well, he was a dying man playing a dying man. Anyone who witnessed his performance couldn't fail to be moved by the dignity, depth and humour he brought to the role. It was his final theatrical triumph.

Brian is dead, but his life is still here. It is as evident in my psyche and work as it is in all the lives he touched. There is little sadness in my memories of Brian because his life has been lived. I'm comforted by the fact I am not alone in these memories. I know I share these experiences with many others. It is part of our lives, part of our art.

You were beautiful my friend.

Jenni Potter, London, 1996



Jenni Potter as *Chloe Poems*
photo: Robert Cook

Yair Qedar Words of His Own

Eighteen months ago I got a phone call from Noam Meiri, an actor and director. "Let's create an evening storytelling event of Israeli gay short stories," he suggested. The idea sounded fantastic, but impossible. There were no such texts known to us. It seemed that our hearts' wishes were leading us, blind-folded, to nowhere. However, I started to try and detect gay texts - from old literary magazines, from newspaper archives - to gather information on closeted writers in order to find them and persuade them to give permission to use their work.

Finally the show, called *Words of His Own: an evening of Israeli gay short stories*, was formed and performed during the Gay Pride week of 1994. Most of the responses were of astonishment, but some were of resentment - we were suspected of creating fiction, an imaginary body of literature. But we ourselves could not ignore the fact that in spite of this criticism, we were in reality creating a framework for artistic creation, that in the act of naming and declaring that gay literature exists in Israel, these texts could never again be perceived as mere shadows, hints or sub-texts.

It is important to note that Hebrew literature was established at the end of the nineteenth century by enthusiastic writers (some were Zionists), who aspired to construct a Hebrew culture as part of the larger initiative to revive the Jewish-national movement. Its incredible success was enabled by patrons - merchants of fairs and wood, bankers and prosperous families that financed some writers, established magazines and sponsored them, and enabled the dream of a Hebrew culture to come true.

Israeli gay culture deserves the same opportunity to thrive. It must be organized and sponsored, supported and arranged. Last July I arranged a Queer Quarterly in Israel. It provides a stage, a forum for communication, interaction and dialogue between artists. I believe that all that is not gathered and named will disappear as such.

I have read somewhere that discovering your gay sexuality is like a nightmare airplane journey. The plane takes off and then you find out that it is going to some unknown destination. You look around and discover that you are surrounded by people you dislike, you find them distasteful. You feel frustration, sadness, your destiny is out of your control and above all, there is no way out.

Being a mature gay person is like leaving the plane - leaving behind your regrets, accusations, and sorrows - and arriving in a new and different country. The gay Israeli experience is similar to landing in a cultural desert, you look around you and see nothing. This nothing is the very beginning - from which you can create a different theatre, write a new story.

Yair Qedar, Tel Aviv, 1996

Peggy Shaw You're Just Like My Father

I used to let myself take forever getting dressed
My mother watched me.
She loved me my mother.
She recognized me.
"You look just like your father," she said.
I put on a starched shirt
And I was my father.
I loved how my father's few Sunday shirts
Looked and smelled when they came back
From the Chinese laundry,
And had a piece of cardboard inside
To keep them rectangular and stiff.
Very stiff and starched.
They had peach colored bands around them
Keeping all the long sleeves
And tail tucked in.
When he unfolded his white shirt Sunday morning
It kept its rectangular shapes
All over the shirt and the cuffs.
And the cuffs were huge and flat and spreading
Out at the bottom of the sleeve
Cause it hadn't been folded for cufflinks.
I wanted to have a starched white shirt like his,
Keeping it safe all week,
Knowing it's in a drawer piled on top of other shirts
And the white folded boxer shorts.
Men's underwear folds so neatly and square,
Women's underwear doesn't have a real logic to it.
And my father had this great gesture after he shaved
Of patting his cheeks with cologne
And running his hands all around his face.
When I touched my own face like that, in a kind of a
Rough way, My mother would say,
"Don't touch your face like that, you'll wreck your skin."
But she liked my father's leathery skin
And the way he was pulling up his chin
The whole church service, away from the starched shirt collar.
My mother always held his hand in church,
And seemed fragile like she would break
If my father's shirt wasn't there
Keeping the world from caving her in.
Just the idea of the world
Could cave in my mother.
That's why I chose to be a boy
So I could wear white
Starched shirts
To keep the ugly world away from girls
And so girls could hold my hand
And rest their head on my shoulder
My clean white shoulder
STIFF with pleasure.

Peggy Shaw, New York, 1994

previous page: **Peggy Shaw in *You're Just Like My Father***
photo: Patrick Henry

On the origins of FAITH AND DANCING Lois Weaver

Lois Weaver

My mother always said I would need something to fall back on...

For a culture to thrive it needs continuity. That is what is so important about It's Queer Up North. It provides something to fall back on. It gives us a platform to come back to. It provides a place to pick up the thread from one year, one conversation, one piece of art and pull it through to the next.

Following the thread of conversations in our culture and in my work with Split Britches and Gay Sweatshop, I have moved through gay and lesbian politics, queer aesthetics, butch/femme identities on to the subject of femininity. And while some of us are exploring what it means to transgender from female to male, I want to look at the movement from female to femme. I want to understand what is feminine - from motherlove to natural disasters - and I want to move it from assimilation to resistance. While dancing the butch/femme cha cha in *Lust and Comfort,* I had a strong desire for the femme to dance on her own, to address the invisibility of the femme and how she's usually identified on the arm of a butch.

I am also interested in where the femme places her faith. Faith is what we do to side-step doubt. Doubt, like weakness, passivity and timidity, is a quality traditionally attributed to the feminine. When in doubt I take off my clothes. I am interested in how a good Southern Baptist girl and hometown cheerleader switches her faith in God the father to faith in her own naked body and its expression of things hoped for and evidence of things not seen. The striptease is a feminine dance of faith and this time the femme is dancing on her own.

The following is an excerpt from *Lust and Comfort* a Split Britches/Gay Sweatshop production that was hosted by It's Queer Up North in 1995 and was the beginning of a idea which has inspired *Faith and Dancing*, a Gay Sweatshop/It's Queer Up North commission for 1996.

Shall we dance?

You're going to dance with me. You're going to lead and I will follow. I will relinquish, surrender, yield, submit. I will be seized in a state of following, in a state of two steps and high heels. I will gaze into your eyes and you will know me. You will see me in the roundness of my shoulders as something that is yours. And I will know my shoulders belong to me.... only as they are reflected in your eyes. But watch carefully. Pay close attention as I glide across the floor in a cloud of sequins that appears to be hanging on the arm of a dinner suit. Observe carefully as my foot retreats to leave space for yours. Put your foot there. No there. Put your hand there in the small of my back. No, one hand. You're going to lead me. Don't you know how to lead? Don't make me have to tell you. Can't you read my mind? Try listening. Can't you hear it?

Listen to it. Feel it. See it.

Look how round... cha cha cha... I am... cha cha cha. How perfectly formed... cha cha cha. I wilt at the slightest compliment. I swoon at the sound of my own voice. Listen carefully...

My mother always said I would need something to fall back on. A couch or a pair of arms and even when I was at my best she said I would have to LOOK like I needed a little help...

But pay close attention...

Lois Weaver, New York, 1996

WILLIAM YANG Sadness

> I see myself as a photographic witness to our times. I feel compelled to perform these slide shows as social rituals to unburden myself of the things I have seen.

In *Sadness* two themes are woven together. In the first William rediscovers his Chinese heritage which was previously denied because of his total assimilation into the Australian culture. He travels back to places in North Queensland where he grew up. Here amid tropical landscapes we meet the extraordinary multi-racial members of his family who still live there.

In the second William shows a document of the past four years of his life as a social photographer in Sydney, with intimate glimpses of his friends, some famous, some not. When he looked at his collection of slides from this period he realised that he had been to more wakes than he had parties. The following are excerpts from the slide show *Sadness*.

My mother hasn't told me much about the family but there's one detail that she told me which I've never forgotten: Aunt Bessie's husband, William Fang Yuen, was murdered in North Queensland in the 1920's. That's where I'm going. I'm travelling north into the past and I want to look into my Uncle's murder.

My mother has regretted telling me that detail. Because I'm the sort of person who talks about that sort of thing, in public too. My mother would rather that the past be bottled up, never to be opened.

I've had a completely assimilated upbringing. We were brought up in the Western way. And I can understand why my mother did this, she only wanted to do what was best for us. She wanted to put us in the mainstream culture where there was more opportunity. Sadly, in this process, the Chinese side was lost and denied. I've felt very uneasy about being Chinese for most of my life.

Peter Tully's parents only found out he had AIDS two weeks before he died. There was denial there. To himself he denied he was dying.

"MOODY BITCH DIES OF AIDS". That was David's obituary for Peter in the *Star Observer*. It was political. Radicals believe the cause of death should be stated, otherwise it's like being swept back into the closet. Of course the family took a very dim view of this obituary.

Peter Tully died intestate, that is, he did not leave a will. By New South Wales law his estate went to his family. To be fair to them, they were devastated by his death, they felt they had been completely left out of the dying process (which of course they had) and they wanted to gather up everything he had touched.

But Peter had promised a lot of his things to his friends. David always maintains that Peter really wanted his remaining work to go to the Australian National Gallery and the Powerhouse Museum both of which have got large collections of his work.

If David had been the heterosexual defacto of the deceased he could have made a claim on the estate, but since he was the gay defacto he could not. Consequently he was very upset when the family came and took everything.

The Chinese believe that the true self, the real "I", is a spirit which never dies, which is eternal. At death the spirit sheds off the physical body like a garment and begins a journey in the other world.

I would like to wish all those spirits who have already departed, well. We should not pull them back to this physical world with our sadness. Let them go. They have a new journey to travel.

The sage Lao Tzu said, "There's no difference between the living and the dead. They are the same channel of vitality."

Loved ones are never lost. They are always here in the heart.

William Yang, Sydney, 1992

William Yang with projection of AIDS vigil from *Sadness*
photo: Peter Elfes

next page:
William Yang in *Sadness*

Queering the Pitch

In September of 1994 It's Queer Up North joined forces with two of the universities in Manchester to produce Queering the Pitch, an international conference on lesbian and gay performance, theatre and film which successfully brought together artists and academics from Europe and the United States.

The explicit aim was to stage a productive crossing of territories and disciplinary boundaries, and to begin to speak openly of the terms, limits and tensions manifest in the interface between theory and practice in each of the domains rather roughly marked as abstract and practical. We were familiar with the, by now rather tired, cliche that there's no theory without practice or practice without theory, but Queering the Pitch was supposed to be an arena in which we could attempt, collectively, to work out exactly what that might mean, and how an understanding of the other might enhance the performance of each respectively.

The possibility of staging such an encounter was perhaps facilitated by the virtual explosion of cultural work gathered around the concept of Queer both inside and outside the academy through the late 1980s and early 90s. In an initial wave of enthusiasm, the phenomenon of Queer seemed to open up the agenda of lesbian and gay politics and culture, and to imply a greater diversity of issues and possibilities than had previously been known. The political actions of groups like ACT UP, Queer Nation and OutRage, seemed to signal a new wave of belief in politics as a performative, strategy, and in the corresponding location of politics at the heart of representation. What this implied was that there was no distinction between politics and representation, between the political and something broadly defined as creative practice, and between identities such as gay and lesbian and something called a "representation" of them. We may always have believed in representation as though it were something we sought for a well defined group of people we knew the constituency of - but this implied something else. This implied more that those very identities - or at least the politics of them - was a matter of representation, that it is an effect not an origin of it. This put performance, the theatre of identities, back at the centre of a contestatory politics.

However the debate about Queer and its attendant concepts of performance and performativity is likely to be resolved (and there are still, clearly, many sides and many passionate engagements to it) one of its effects has been to draw parallels between, and to suggest the intersection of, performativity as a theatrical concept and the loose cluster of theoretical practices, relations and traditions known as performance.

It was this intersection that Queering the Pitch attempted to elaborate. In some senses it worked, as issues of performance reverberated through theoretical sessions, and theory echoed in the performances we saw and of which we spoke - sometimes, at cross purposes, sometimes across what have often been great voids of misunderstanding. In the end, and at the very least, the convergence of theory and practice in the conference space did a great deal to unsettle the common-sense separation between the two.

The two papers that follow attempt to reflect the divergent starting points from which the conference made its beginnings.

Sue-Ellen Case (a well known American feminist scholar and critic), who gave the keynote address with which the conference began, speaks here of what she sees as the difference in articulation of the concept of Queer in the United States (where its legacy is older) and in Europe. She voices her own uncertainties at the political effectivity of the concept and the divergence it implies from more established models of analyses of sexual and gender oppression in economic and patriarchal terms. These views are, of course, highly controversial and contestable in the spectrum of contemporary versions of political resistance, and in what is ultimately a playful and deliberately provocative style, Case teases out the grounds upon

which such debates can subsequently be played out.

Neil Bartlett, artistic director of both Gloria and the Lyric Theatre Hammersmith in London, examines in his piece "What Mainstream?" the evolution of theatre practice and his own involvement and evolution as a practitioner within it, in specifically gay terms. Resisting the argument that anything mainstream is necessarily bad, because tainted by the forces external to a fiercely guarded sense of "us" as opposed to "them", Bartlett poses an interesting challenge to received ideas about the separation between the mainstream and its somewhat idealised other.

Kate McGowan, Manchester, 1996

Queer Borders

Since I am not certain to whom I am speaking, I have written a short introduction to my talk in order to foreground a few of the assumptions behind it. I want to speak today about the status of the word "queer" primarily within the context of the United States. From my brief time in London, prior to this conference, I sensed that the term might operate quite differently here in Britain - it seems to be at a different historical moment. Yet it shares many of the same celebratory and problematic qualities with the term in the States. From my perspective, "queer" inhabits two environments - an activist, or social one and an academic, theoretical one. I shall attempt to swing through the two. Within the theoretical context, the ground of "queer" is found in lesbian and gay uses of poststructuralist theory. Poststructuralism provides the base for what we more narrowly consider to be the constructionist position in lesbian and gay discourse. Sorrowfully, this position has arisen as a critique and abandonment of what has been termed "lesbian feminism." "Queer dykes" tend to identify more with gay men and not at all with lesbian feminists. A certain discourse of disparagement runs along the "queer" borders. Since poststructuralism has risen to the status of diva theory in the past decade, its partnership with "queer," which has attained the status of chic has created a monopoly over political positioning. Thus, in this talk, you will find less a root, celebratory song of "queer" than a critical evaluation of the consequences of its status. Perhaps because it seems a bit further along in the States than here. Now, more recently,"queer" and poststructuralist theory have added a new partner to their firm: the term performativity. One function of this term has been to move the notion of performance out into exciting new areas of daily life and naturalized systems such as gender. Another, has been to abandon performance for the text which is now performative. These terms and their association before us, I would now like to proceed in another, hopefully slightly more entertaining or at least provocative tone.

The rise of the term "queer" has accompanied what seems to me to be the swift and complete commodification of lesbian and gay politics. How have things changed? Well, for example, the practice and theory of masquerade, what we thought was subversive cross-dressing, has literally, in the US, turned into a uniform. Recent Gay Pride parades sport a uniformed color guard of marines and the like, accompanying the flag. The people on the sidewalk cheer as the presumably "queer" or "gay" American flag and military march by. Queer underground 'zines (and that sounds like jeans) have gone glossy - *The Advocate* has been praised in the mainstream press for its new look and *Time* magazine is possibly launching a new journal aimed at this readership. Queer Nation has formed the Queer Shopping Network of New York. And in many social situations, "queer" seems to be constituted by body piercings, leather, and short haircuts. What was once a political movement seems now to be a "lifestyle" .[1]

And the academics? Some are concerned with Rock Hudson's body, some with k. d. lang's and Cindy Crawford's photo display in Vanity Fair; others, with the radical purchasing of dildoes-"subversive shopping"' as Danae Clark refers to it in her article "Commodity Lesbianism". "Queer" may be found on coffee mugs, T shirts, and postcards sold at Gay Pride parades and in new marketing chains across the country. One can buy "queer" and wear it. While much of this is liberatory in one sense, what was once a community, or subculture, is now a market sector, with disposable income, the need to identify through fashion, and the inclination to eat out. Pages of the *Lesbian News* are taken up with ads for car salespeople, insurance brokers, dentists and lawyers. Good. We are not necessarily poor, nor downwardly mobile. Lipstick lesbians are cute. Sex can be fun. We can see a Broadway production of *Angels in America* and Sandra Bernhard plays a lesbian character in Roseanne's weekly TV series. The questions remain: who is this "we" and how did all get in out of the rain under the umbrella term "Queer?" What does it mean that the term "queer" came about, as a "subversive" strategy in the late 1980s, early 1990s, along with the outbreak of the technological revolution and the final victory, in Europe, of global capitalism?

1 see Lauren Berlant and Elizabeth Freeman, Berlant, "Queer Nationality," in Fear of a Queer Planet, ed. Michael Warner. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993. 193-229.

I was reading Cherry Smyth's version of the history of "queer" in her book LESBIANS TALK QUEER NOTIONS From the lesbian perspective, she positions "queer" as an antiassimilationist strategy, on the one hand, and a result of the split with feminism on the other. I agree. Within feminist activism and theory, the year 1981 might be regarded as The Great Divide. In the States, the book THIS BRIDGE CALLED MY BACK signalled the organization of women of color apart from mainstream feminism. That same year a Barnard College conference staged the outbreak of open conflict between the lesbian s/m community and the feminist antiporn adherents - a conflict that never got resolved. And the first cases of a new "gay male cancer" were reported by the press. The debates among lesbians and feminists were hot and the rifts were deep. The "sex radicals" got sick of feminism's "missionary position," while the feminist critique stalled out in its persisent blindness to heterosexism.

Meanwhile, the AIDS crisis was beginning to forge new alliances between lesbians and gay men. Patriarchal privilege aside, gay men were in a life-or-death discussion about sexual practices - sex was a given, open focus in their community. The feminist community, where heterosexism forced a silencing of the debate they were afraid to continue, seemed to be formulating neo-puritanical prescriptions against erotic materials and the exploration of sexual pleasure. So lesbian feminists became dykes among gay men. The rise of the fundamentalist Right demanded a new, more aggressive political activism. The failure of government institutions to respond to the need for AIDS treatment became more and more reactionary. Smyth cites demonstrations, in 1987, around Clause 28 in Britain, and the formation of ACT UP in New York that same year. [2] ACT UP produced "live" agit-prop street performances mapped across the urban geography.

2 Smyth, Cherry. Lesbians Talk Queer Notions. London: Scarlet Press, 1992.

For a while. While some ACT UP organizations survived, others, such as the one in San Francisco and the one in Seattle split into ACTS UPS, or whatever. Lesbians split from gay men over the focus of concern: is AIDS a gay male disease, or how do we also address the problems of the category "women", straight or lesbian, of color who bear a high incidence of AIDS?

Within this environment, the term "Queer" ascended. Smyth records the founding of Queer Nation in 1990 as a response to frequent bashings of lesbians and gays in the East Village. She records that London's OutRage was formed at the same time. "Queer" was doing activist work. "Queer" was aggressive - the turning of the insult back upon those who would deploy it. It washed its hands of assimilationist strategies. Kiss Ins were staged in malls and on the streets. Sex-positive, it cut across differences: bisexuals, transgendered people, s/m practitioners - the "anti-normal" could be included in its embrace. It also claimed multicultural organization at its base. Then why, in the States, do we read things like the following? Cherrie Moraga, the lesbian Chicana poet and dramatist writes: "We discussed the limitations of 'Queer Nation,' whose leather-jacketed, shaved-headed white radicals and accompanying anglo-centricity were an alien-nation to most lesbians and gay men of color." [3] Or Michael Warner's description of the "queer community" in the introduction to his new anthology FEAR OF A QUEER PLANET: [4]

3 Moraga, Cherrie. The Last Generation. Boston: South End Press. 1993.147.

4 Berlant, Lauren and Elizabeth Freeman. "Queer Nationality", in Fear of a Queer Planet .

> In the lesbian and gay movement, to a much greater degree than in any comparable movement, the institutiuons of culture-building have been market-mediated.... Nonmarket forms of association... churches, kinship, traditional residence - have been less available for queers. Institutions of Queer culture have been dominated by those with capital: typically, middle-class white men. (xvii)

Or, in Terry Castle's book THE APPARITIONAL LESBIAN: "As soon as the lesbian is lumped in - for better or for worse - with her male homosexual counterpart, the singularity of her experience (sexual and otherwise) tends to become obscured... to the extent that 'queer theory' still

seems ... to denote primarily the study of male homosexuality, I find myself at odds with both its language and its universalizing aspirations." (12-13) Or, Charles Fernandez who finds "queer" to be a "melting pot" term of "bankrupt universalism." Did Queer Nation, as Lauren Berlant and Elizabeth Freeman declare, emulate liberal democracy? Was it, as they insist "voluntary and consensual, democratic and universalist in the way of many modern nationalisms."

Alexander Chee addresses this focus in his historical account of the origins of Queer Nation "The name stuck simply for the sake of marketing. The original idea was this: choose a name around each action, keep responsibility with each individual and not with an institution.... People are tired of groups with egos, processes, personality cults, and politicking. So far Queer Nation is individuals confronting individuals." [5] Chee underscores that any practice of continuity was a marketing choice. Individuals and change of tactics, venue and organization invigorate those who are "tired" of group processes. The interest, then, is not in collective agency, but in the individual action of intervention into the marketing process. In fact, if Chee is correct, Queer Nation arose as a contradiction to collective, group-process oriented politics. At the same time, it does seem to unfurl that same old banner of the individual that liberal democracy keeps hanging out to dry.

5 Chee, Alexander S. "A Queer Nationalism." Out/look Winter 1991.15-20.

Moreover, continue Berland and Freeman, Queer Nation conflates nation with capitalism - a "free" market economy. By "subversive shopping" it creates a "Queer National corporate strategy" designed to make consumer pleasure central to the transformation of public culture, thus linking the utopian promises of the commodity with those of the nation." (208) Now, while Queer Nation has already taken it on the chin, is down and almost out, the term "queer" continues to circulate, bearing those same structural resonances. "Queer" interrogates the "normal" except for the normalizing operations of capital and nation. It organizes in a corporate way: queer works more like a logo than a coalition: it asserts itself as an umbrella term without the hard rain of coalition-building. It's a Party with an open invitation, but in what neighborhood? Why do such differently-positioned writers and activists, such as Cherrie Moraga, Michael Warner, and Terry Castle all agree that while it claims to include everyone, its constituency is actually middle-class white gay men?

Right after those dykes slammed the door on the way out of feminism, the dowdy, old women-centered places closed down: most feminist and lesbian theaters, bookstores, and lesbian bars have almost disappeared. One of the underground movies making the circuit in the States last year is called *Last Night at Maud's* - about the last night at the oldest lesbian bar in San Francisco and about how those bars are closing. I walk the streets of West Hollywood and the Village in New York to jealously observe packed bar after bar of men. I stand in the book store A Different Light on a Saturday night in West Hollywood - one of four or five lesbians among, say, fifty gay men. I'm flipping through the 'zines. I'm checking out the special photo shots of daddy-boy-dykes in Quim. [6] Back on the streets. Everyone is looking good. I stand outside the gym in front of the huge windows, where I can watch every body working out. The women are looking strong. Slim. Young. I look down at my aging, overweight academic body. They've cleared us out, I think. It's true - the Birkenstocks are gone, so are what we used to call "women of size" and well, uh, older women. Two of my gay male friends call me up - they're freaking out because they're now in their 30s - how will they retain their sexual currency - do they have to become tops - do they have to go over to the leather scene where older men still find them desirable. So now we all have their problems, I think. Never mind, I'll go to the theater. I like *Angels in America* - it has a big cast and a big theme - a critique of nationalism and well, I'm pretty sure the angel is a lesbian... Anyway, there's some great one-person dyke shows at PS 122 and lots of new lesbian stand up comics. Or I can always go to the movies with my other professor friends and "read" as we say, something like *Single White Female* as signifying, as we also say, lesbian.

6 "Daddy Boy Dykes." Quim. Winter, 1991. 32-35.

I comfort myself with the thought that there are still those lesbian luxury cruises sponsored by Olivia records - if only I could afford one. Then I'm caught up short with this thought - those old dowdy hangouts, the ones Chee was in a hurry to get rid of with Queer Nation's emperor's new individualism - almost all of them were organized as collectives: theater collectives, bookstore collectives, food collectives, collective living quarters. Lesbian dowdy politics had been intrinsically tied to collective ownership and collective labor. They locked the mode of production to cultural production. Chee was right. They were "groups with egos, processes ... and politicking". Endless self-criticism, dialoguing.... and then there was interactive commodity dildoism.

The individualism that Chee described as the base for forming queer activism in contradiction to earlier, collective ways marked the rise of a new "I" that meant to correct that earlier, politically incorrect "I" of i-dentity politics founded within lesbian feminist practices. Chee's sense of individualism partners the poststructuralist moves around essentializing that earlier "I". It is actually a retro-use of that "I" that I want to employ here today - to recuperate certain of its strategies and strengths.

This old, dowdy "I" of i-dentity politics is not ontological, but positional - situated - as Donna Haraway would put it. "I" as a position provides a base of operations - a location for contradiction and coalition. It is the "I" of dialogue or the dialectic - not so much concerned with what deconstruction regards as the pollution of presence - this "I" regards "presence" as politically showing up. As a base of operations, it signals the old theatrical, the old dare I say communist, the old feminist collective dialogues of contradiction - "I know, let's do a show - I'll play," as Lois Weaver once said on stage to Peggy Shaw, "Katherine Hepburn to your Spencer Tracy." Or, in the old communist sense, "I know, let's redistribute the land - let's collectivize the labor - what? It's not fair, given your college education, your student loan, your expertise? How can we work this out?" Or, in the old feminist sense, I can still hear the voice of the African American activist Bernice Johnson Reagon, speaking to a group of feminists struggling over issues of ethnicity and sexual practice. She described the experience of building coalitions: "The first thing that happens is that the room don't feel like the room anymore, (the audience laughed). And it ain't home no more. It is not a womb no more. And you can't feel comfortable no more." [7] Yet, "The 'our' must include everybody you have to include in order for you to survive.... That's why we have to live in coalitions. Cause I ain't gonna let you live unless you let me live. Now there's danger in that, but there's also the possibility that we both can live - if you can stand it."

7 Bernice Johnson Reagan, "Coalition Politics: Turning the Century," Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology, ed Barbara Smith, Kitchen Table Press, 1983. 363.

The sound of dialogue, the collective, resounds in these threats and hurts of the clash of conflicting positions, or the joy of temporary agreement which, like Rome, is not made in a day, or by the fiat of a term like "queer" that sweeps down from the discourse to gather up oppositional positions by force of its own definition *as* embracing *as* multimulti, acting like the movies, or the old well-made plays that conclude all problems with a kiss, a marriage, or, in this case, a dildo. And "presence" which in this case, is showing up at activist disruptions, as Johnson clearly describes, reclaims the "live" - the body - the visible - looking for lesbians in the political sense. It is "live" performance as the play of positional masks, sweating flesh and clapping hands that inhabits what cyberpunks call the "meat". As Herbert Blau once wrote about live performance it is: "the fact that she who is performing can die there in front of your eyes; in fact, is doing so. Of all the performing arts, the theater stinks most of mortality." [8] For presence once abandoned, i-dentity once gone, promotes the new sense of performativity in which the body is a trope and performance part of the allure of reading and writing.

8 Blau Herbert. Take Up The Bodies. Urbana: University of Illinois Press. 1982. 83.

Now there is another "I" lurking out there - one which has been empowered for a while now - has been running things, in critical circles, at least. That "I" called itself an "agent," and

donned the trenchcoat and dark glasses of terms such as "subject position" and "agency." Sort of like early movie versions of the CIA. Then, as the 1980s progressed, with capital dispersing its production lines out into processing zones in the so-called Third World where you couldn't easily "see" the conditions, where it became decentered, dynamic, and even nomadic so that it could move whenever labor unrest began to heat up, this subversive, post-structuralist "I" threw off its subject position to emulate those market maneuvers.[9] "I'd like my subject position after my discourse, please," it says in all the best theoretical watering holes, those minor pools of cultural capital. The poststructuralist "I" moves among the seemingless subject-less theories, where it has actually been pumped it up to new levels beyond what the steroid-Nautilus body of Arnold Swarzenegger ever attained. As the pools of capital fuse into the largest monopolies in history, poststructuralist theorists, who have also decentered and then abandoned the subject position, as such, have become stars, whose salaries and lifestyles make the cover of the *New York Times* Sunday magazine and who have even spawned their own fanzines. The death of the author, indeed. We all know what a hot ticket a dying scene can be.

9 This passage refers to Deleuze and Guattari's notion of "nomadology" as well as other more widely used strategies. The homology of the poststructuralist subject with processing zones was taken from Grant H. Kester, "Out of Sight Out of Mind: The Imaginary Space of Postindustrial Culture." Social Text 11:2, Summer 1993 . 72-92.

I-dentity politics, still linked to the visible - looking for lesbians - the live body and its play of identity is today challenged by this shift to the performative on the one hand and virtual technologies on the other. As Allucquere Rosanne Stone, the transgendered cyberspaced performer once wrote in her article "Will the Real Body Please Stand Up?":

> The work of science is about bodies - not in an abstract sense, but in the complex and protean ways that we daily manifest ourselves as social beings, vulnerable to the powerful knowledges that surround us, and to the effects upon us of the transformative discourses of science and technology ... the work of cyberspace researchers ... assumes that the human body is "meat" - obsolete, as soon as consciousness can be uploaded into the network ... imaginal bodies ... but no refigured virtual body, no matter how beautiful, will slow the death of a cyberpunk with AIDS. [10]

10 Stone, Allucquere Rosanne. "Will the Real Body Please Stand Up?: Boundary Stories About Virtual Cultures," in Cyberspace: First Steps, ed. Michael Benedikt Cambridge, Mass: th e MIT Press, 1992. 81-118.

Second, this dialogical "I" is speaking in the coming era of cyberspace - gleefully celebrating virtual communities, bodies, access to pools of information, conversations, mind games across continents, while still, somehow, celebrating the "meat." This "I" feels the groundswell, the earthquake, "the earth move under its feet" as it stand at the end of print culture. The end of print culture. The end of print culture. It looks around to sympathize with those haunted by that dying culture - watching them obsess on its qualities of "absence" and melancholy. It also, dancing in its dialogical shoes, its collective memories, shudders, is afraid of the water, can't swim in those immense pools of capital - more than pools, now oceans among continents of capital running together to support this new cyber-everything. As queer swoops down to embrace by discursive fiat, capital rises up to embrace by global monopolies. The old dialectic "I" watches coalition give way to corporation.

So, "Queer" and poststructuralism came along in the late 1980s and early 1990s, along with the rise of techno-culture, the victory of global democracy, the end of print culture, and the growing market for representations of sexuality. What was I doing, then, during the '80s, when this all came about? When I couldn't find a place on the streets anymore, in the scene anymore, I took the '80s way out - I became a workaholic. It was, after all, hot times in the halls of ivory power. The early 1980s were a time when new theories of sexuality and gender were being imported from France. The psychoanalytic master narrative and its deconstruction were being read in Anglo translation. In fact, the speed and bulk of the import of this theory legitimized reading in translation - the old academic discipline of reading in the "original" was lost. At the same time, the exportation of US critical writing was on the rise. Through new postcolonial cultural critiques, English rose to a new international power, while academia sank to a new linguistic provincialism. Notably, at the same time, the USIA, the

United States Information Agency actively encouraged the exportation of "American" culture as the new, most important flank of its anti-Communist federal troops. As Armand Hammer, the art collector put it, in 1980, "the world is hungry for American culture" and that culture can create "subjects of freedom". Accordingly, "class" was on its way out as a critique.

I took all of this as an exciting political correction. Theories of sexuality finally offered the critical tools necessary to write lesbian theory. I wrote "Toward a Butch-Femme Aesthetic" for a conference in 1987 in what I thought was, for me, a liberating new campy style: I could make remarks as theory - I could camp it up as work. If the bars were disappearing, I could make an article into a bar. I was also persuaded by queer, in the beginning, and wrote "Tracking the Vampire" for Teresa de Lauretis's first queer theory conference. I argued against assimilation and for transgression. I read Jonathan Dollimore. I celebrated the "queer" kiss Oscar Wilde had written for Salome with the severed head of John. I was persuaded by arguments such as Alan Sinfield's in his study of Oscar Wilde, that queer better describes historical sexual practices and styles than the too historically-specific terms lesbian and gay. I was semiotizing and deconstructing everything in sight. The sheer force of the theory was exhilarating. Its scope was breathtaking - it could be applied to everything. Writing was on the upswing - print culture was flexing its pages. If I couldn't look good in the gym, I could pump up the discourse.

What I had neglected to note was that the way in which I didn't belong on the queer streets anymore was also resonating in the writing. The Great Divide of 1981 had produced a generation of theorists who were not interested in bringing any feminist principles forward into the critique. As many of the personal ads in the *Lesbian News* read: "No feminist need apply," so did many of the new critical strategies. Identity politics were so undone that to insist on any part of them was to be an "Ayatollah lesbian." When I went on leave from my department last year and wrestled a relief position from the dean, several of the junior professors wanted to hire a man who wore lipstick and identified as a lesbian. "Presence" was out. Cross-anything was in because visibility politics had also been deconstructed - looking for lesbians was essentialist. Some poststructuralist lesbian critics could actually see performance, not lesbians, but the binary - the pole, the slash-without agency and subject, they could see the pole that produced them. Even though aging had brought me bi-focals, I still could not see the bi-nary. Ultimately, I was only a critical theorist who lacked Lacan.

And here's where the category of experience and visibility somehow hook up. The 1990s ushered in the term "performativity". At first it seemed to be the great diaspora of performance out into the streets. Particularly since "performativity" was partnering "queer." The inaugural issue of the new journal *GLQ (Gay Lesbian Quarterly)* was dedicated to "queer performativity" as established by Judith Butler and Eve Sedgwick. I then discover through Sedgwick that performativity was ultimately located in Henry James's Prefaces to the New York edition of his work. On to Butler, who defined performativity as "the unanticipated resignifiability of highly invested terms." (28) And "queer" "as an interpellation that raises the question of the status of force and opposition, of stayability and variability, within performativity." (9) Deconstructive semiotic effects. It seems that performativity robs the allure of performance to enhance writing. In conjunction with the demise of visibility politics it marks the last round in the competition between the orders of the textual and the visible-writing wins. It's the trick for writing about performance. It's the turn from performer to spectator. If performance theory had, in this century, first been written by those who were involved in producing it, such as Brook, Grotowski, Blau, and Schechner, it was now in the hands of the spectators who were either looking at the slash, obsessing on the larmoyant absence of what is not there, managing to hoist their writing up the binary pole, or were turned inward, to the theater of reception. How could I, who had learned my theory partially by rolling around on rehearsal floors, write about "queer performativity," when it actually means something like

Henry James?

I was sitting blankly in front of my computer, with nothing left to write, when I noticed my screen saver had activated, and my written text had been replaced by multicolored, flying windows which seemed to be coming at me, from a great distance. They began as mere dots, then grew into full-fledged windows which trailed off, on one side, into a digital fragmentation of themselves. When I began to type once again, they disappeared and my print text once more commanded the screen. So, effectively, my political writing gave way to those windows, those icons of a software program that was "saving my screen." The scrim of print culture had been shot through with the dark screen of icons, representing Microsoft's success in the wildly expanding market of information systems. Corporate ownership of the tools of writing marked its territory in the very space of writing. The function of "saving" the writing screen flashed a corporate billboard, overwriting the script - the high capitalist version of putting the text "under erasure." The "window to the world" effect the computer produces, was claimed by Microsoft Windows.

Why hadn't I noticed this before - I mean, the demise of visibility politics aside, I had been writing on a computer for more than a decade and I, somehow pretended that I was not. My writing still assumed all the principles of print culture, without any accommodation to its electronic means of production. In fact, the critical practice of deconstruction, so involved with the basis of writing, the reorganization of visibility politics, and the obsessive critical observance of semiosis occurred at roughly the same time as the rise of the computer. In that same year of the Great Divide, 1981, I was haunting video arcades to, as a good feminist, play Ms. Pac Man and not critically noticing. The end of print culture was upon us and we panicked - sought ways to keep it alive and strong. Brought every allure to writing that we could - even that of performance.

With the demise of the Marxist critique, the mode of production was slipping by unnoticed. The tradition of Cixous and Irigaray, who studied women writing, the technologies of writing, had been abandoned. Yet the great sublation by the screen of information, entertainment, economic, and social structures was upon us. If we are writing, shopping, emailing, watching video clips, and playing games on the same screen, then we are writing out on the cyber-street. Gone is the blank page and the study or university as remove. The capitalist project of inferiority, beginning with Hamlet is at an end. Perhaps the obsession with it, in the rise of psychoanalytic discourse to the status of master narrative is a dirge - the funeral of its production.

And there, on the Internet, is the electronic reconstruction of Sappho - a lesbian bulletin board - the formation of a new lesbian virtual community. But how can you tell who is a lesbian, when all you have is an electronic address? Why does it matter? Is it dangerous to have a lesbian address out there on the information highway? Gertrude Stein, that old modernist lesbian certainly knew how to encrypt her address. Maybe something could be learned from that. And what about the screen space - must it be territorialized by corporate logos? Could there be a notion of a guerilla graphing of space that might deterritorialize where Microsoft advertises? What about performance? Those new CD-ROMS that have clips of different actors doing, say, the great monologues from Hamlet right there in the text. Composers involved in MIDI ensembles played on terminals across the country, and performers who would use the technology onstage, or make technology their new stage.

At the same time, the owners are back in a bigger way. Bill Gates, the head of Microsoft, is buying up the digital rights to whole art museums. You can see the National Gallery right in your home. But what will it mean in the future that Gates has the digital rights? Agents are back as well - in their traditional raincoat and dark glasses routine. What about the feds idea

to put a back-door chip in the machine that would allow them to eavesdrop? Pornography is back with a vengeance - reaching record sales in the form of CD-ROM and bulletin board lists. Some new, experimental porn, sure, but hundreds of thousands of images of women with their legs spread, only to be penetrated by a selection of objects that rate your game. Violence: *Doom* is obsessing young, mostly, men. The Brechtian gestus gone satellite. The information superhighway. Now there's a "we" and "us" handed to us on a technoplatter. We're all "queer" in cyberspace. Aren't "we"?

Sue Ellen Case, California, 1994

What Mainstream?

First of all, allow me to remind you that what I have to say is intended to provoke , not resolve, let me try and situate what I am going to say in the context of my own work to date. I am currently working as Artistic Director of the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, running the building as well as creating work for its main auditorium. I suppose, with reference to the title of this paper, that's about as mainstream as I get (or as anyone gets within the confines of British theatre). My previous work encompasses gay agitprop (Consenting Adults in Public, more gay rights and AIDS benefits than I care to remember), experimental theatre in a straight context (a central involvement with the early work of Theatre de Complicite, years of touring and teaching with experimental collectives), hard-core performance art (my own earliest work, five years of compering the National Review of Live Art), straight theatre (Molière at the Derby Playhouse, Racine, Marivaux at the National), lots of drag, the setting up and development of my own company, Gloria, which is evolving a distinct brand of music theatre which is never exactly gay but is always very heavily indebted to a gay perspective, a gay audience, gay performers and gay traditions of design and performance.

Sarrasine
Francois Testery and Beverly Klein

I have never used the word queer about myself, but I think my queerest works have been my book WHO WAS THAT MAN, my novel READY TO CATCH HIM SHOULD HE FALL, my all-female drag production of *Twelfth Night* for the Goodman Theatre, Chicago, and my trilogy of gay history pieces with Gloria; *A Vision of Love, Sarrasine* and *Night After Night.* My current project, pitching Maria Aitken and Bette Bourne against each other in an original adaptation of Wilde's DORIAN GRAY with setting by Ian MacNeil and music by Nicolas Bloomfield, is, come to think of it, so queer it can hardly walk.

My ultimate ambition in the theatre is to produce a Christmas musical and Racine's tragedy *Athalia* in rep, with the same company, and to play the two shows to the same audience. That's my idea of queer art.

Actually, first of all, let me try and remind those of you who were there at the time (and explain to those of you who are too young and gorgeous to have been there at the time) how this word 'mainstream' came to be so loaded.

I started making work with and for performers in 1979; I started to charge people to attend that work in 1982, when I toured this country and abroad in borrowed vans and by hitchhiking, playing collectively devised work in colleges and arts centres and living on the dole; I did that for five years. I made my home in London in 1983. In 1983 two things happened which are pertinent to my argument. I worked as an administrator/stage manager/workshop leader for a lesbian and gay company called Consenting Adults in Public, with whom I toured a play about AIDS (so far as I know, the first to be produced in this country), called *Antibody,* written by Louise Parker Kelley. I also was very closely involved with administrating the theatre programme of September in the Pink, which was a London-wide lesbian and gay arts festival subsidised by the GLC. Very quickly, while involved with these two projects, I learnt and assimilated the theory of lesbian and gay cultural production which was held as an article of faith by everyone I met, worked with and talked to, namely, that the issues of lesbian and gay life could only be addressed outside the mainstream.

What did this mean?

It meant, and means, several things:
1. Note the word 'issues'; an artwork was and still often is deemed to be lesbian or gay not because of its aesthetics, its cultural traditions, or the larger cultural politics of its creators but because of what it said it was about in its publicity material. What it really comes down to is that Gayness was a subject, first and last. It was what you talked about, not the way you talked. If there are no gay characters, it's not gay. This view of our work is still absolutely

current, so that, for instance, if I am producing *Dorian Gray*, people insist on anticipating the project in terms of its and my gayness. However, if I am producing a show based on the dreams and sexual fantasies of a frustrated adolescent, then I cease to be a gay person - because the show happens to be this year's Christmas show at the Lyric. The fact that it is for kids, and based on a text by Hans Christian Andersen means it isn't gay - the current theory that Andersen himself was gay hasn't reached the ears of either British audiences or the British critical establishment. So I am going to be a gay artist until mid November, and a not-gay artist over Christmas.

In 1983 the use of gay subject matter was deemed to necessarily exclude one from the mainstream; people wouldn't put it on. This assumption was by and large correct - although it did ignore or choose to ignore the long tradition of mainstream 'problem plays' with gay characters in them. The current situation, in which politically aggressive gay subject matter and characters is now a positive marketing factor for many mainstream managements, was absolutely undreamed of.

2. This belief that we were outside the mainstream was centrally based on the belief that the lesbian and gay audience was only to be found outside the mainstream. Any lesbians and gays who found their entertainment or their issues within the institutions of the mainstream were not thought about. People who went to musicals, to give one example, were just not relevant. Technically, they were deemed to be victims of false consciousness; they enjoyed things that they shouldn't have enjoyed.

3. Lesbian and gay work could only be housed in venues outside the mainstream because the work was necessarily too radical or controversial to be housed in the mainstream. An interesting footnote; 'controversial' and 'radical' were thought to mean the same thing. They still are. This was a big problem. It still is.

4. And this is the interesting one: Our exclusion from the mainstream did not disempower us; it inspired us. It was a source of great invigorating anger. Why was our work being kept outside the mainstream? Why were we being denied money, resources, press coverage? Why couldn't our works be put on in the mainstream? Didn't we have the right to be heard, to be given resources and space and support no matter how kinky our act or radical our politics?

This argument was the same whether you were talking about lesbian and gay theatre, black theatre or women's theatre. It is still absolutely current. Every conference I have ever been to (and I have been to many in the last ten years) and half the mail I receive as part of my job climaxes with the same question; why is our work corralled on the fringe; why aren't we allowed into the mainstream, when are we going to take over the mainstream? Why won't you put this play on? Why won't you book this company?

These are very good questions; but I think the framework from which they were originally derived, that of an absolute, antagonistic, necessary split between us and the mainstream, is long overdue for an overhaul. I think, in short, that it's old fashioned.

Let us now consider the prehistory of this framework.

Let me take the 1983 London GLC-funded festival September in the Pink as a benchmark. It wasn't the first, and was building on the practical and theoretical work of the pioneers of Gay Sweatshop in particular. But it was a model, a significant point. Artists who found no room to move or to speak (as authors, performers and producers) within the commercial theatre or the subsidised theatre created their own alternative. Because the mainstream would not allow us, we created our own margin, our own fringe, within which to operate. That division - between a fringe which is radical, politicised, uncompromised, gay-identified, small-scale, and poor, and a mainstream, which is conservative, apolitical, compromising, indifferent or hostile to positive gay identification either amongst its workers or its audience, large scale, and rich - still dominates our thinking, either consciously or unconsciously.

September In the Pink can stand in my argument as the classic location or model of the sense of 'them' and 'us' that still dominates our thinking - whether we are thinking about our audience or ourselves. 'They' are the problem; they are straight, they don't like us, they don't give us space or money, at best we must confront them and at worst ignore them; whereas we are... well, look around you; "we" are fabulous.

I must make clear that my admiration for the pioneers of the gay fringe is total. I will never forget, for instance the absolute, liberating thrill of seeing my first Sweatshop show, or the invaluable lessons learnt by working in a gay-separatist company (Consenting Adults in Public). I am more aware than anyone that my work would be impossible without theirs. So there. On with the argument.

Those of you who know me or know my work are probably wondering when this little essay is going to start getting complicated, not to say emotional. Well here it comes. I would like to lay down two challenges to this dominant model of what the mainstream is and isn't, and therefore what we are and aren't. The first is the challenge of the past. The second is the challenge of the present.

First of all, the past. Like most people I know working in the entertainment industry and the art world (it is an important part of my argument that the two go hand in hand) I started off quite extraordinarily ignorant of the history of gay people in my chosen profession. This of course is not surprising; the history of our peers and ancestors in the theatre and in entertainment is actually a history hidden (or rather, stolen) from us just like all our other histories. I had no idea that not only many of the authors but also many of the producers, performers, designers, and choreographers who I now think of as my peers were gay. Let's try a little test to see if this was just me being ignorant or not.
Who here can name any of the gay men working as part of the revolutionary artistic team at the Royal Court from 1956 to 1960?
Who here can name a ballet by Robert Helpmann?
What was Oliver Messel's first collaboration with Noel Coward?
Who can name three of the twenty eight plays dealing with explicitly homosexual themes reviewed by 'Plays and Players' in 1968?
Who can name three critically successful, top-billing drag queens whose careers peaked before 1950?
What is the date of the first modern play centring on the realistic depiction of a gay relationships (Answer 1891; subsidiary question; does it matter that the play was produced by J T Grein, the man who was responsible for the first productions of Ibsen in London?)
Who was the most influential in determining the position of gay culture in the field of photography; Angus McBean or Cecil Beaton?
Was George Chakiris gay, and if so, how does that make you feel about Bernstein and *West Side Story?*
Why is Billy Bigelow in *Carousel* dressed as a clone?
What are the connections between the following three shows: *The Prancing Queers, Queens Rhapsody* and *Soldiers in Skirts*?
Are you surprised to learn that the last two were, respectively, the top West End and number one touring box office earners of the first post-war season?
My ignorance was vast; I had no idea who Malcolm Scott was; that Frankie Howerd was gay; who Sondheim was; I knew nothing about Ivor Novello, never mind about Brian Epstein or Mrs Shufflewick. The point I want to make is that my first steps into working with and for gay people in the theatre did nothing to tamper with my ignorance. In fact, the opposite; it reinforced it.

I'll just repeat that. It reinforced it. That is because I accepted as a point of unarguable

principle that the mainstream was not only an irrelevance, but a danger. Because I was none too subtly led to believe the most extraordinary and extraordinarily contradictory version of gay cultural history. Firstly, I thought that there was no history of gay theatre - we were inventing the wheel - and we were having to invent it because there had never been a place for us in the mainstream. Secondly, (this is the contradiction) I thought that there had been some people who had worked in the mainstream, but that they were necessarily reactionary, sold out, compromised, irrelevant... worst of all, they were 'commercial'. They were the problem, not the solution.

At the time, I agreed with all of that.
I really did think that there never had been a place for us in the mainstream and that therefore there never would or should be. I simultaneously really did think that lesbian and gay artists should have equal access to arts resources. I think I thought that these resources should come entirely through the medium of subsidy, never through engagement with the commercial mainstream.

I still agree with some of it. I do think a lot of the work of our peers and pioneers is compromised and commercial.
The trouble is, I now sometimes find compromised and commercial art - mainstream art -fascinating, instructive, challenging and sometimes thrilling. I am no longer content to dismiss the work of Wilde, Byng, Scott, Eltinge, Shufflewick, Howerd, Ashton, Helpmann, Messel, Rattigan, Novello, Wilson, Maugham and Laughton as an irrelevance, or as the opposition, or as academic pre-history. I now think that the formulation of a gay aesthetic and a gay practice is what matters most to me, by which I mean the evolution through the years of distinct strands of gay cultural tradition. For example:
Gay dancing, from the West End chorus to the entire story of the Royal Ballet.
Gay design, from Oliver Messel to Richard Hudson.
Gay producers, from Beaumont to Codron.
Popular drag from La Rue and Scott to Savage and Fong.
Popular comedy from Howerd to Williams to Slattery and Clary.
Closet directing from Gaskill to Gill.
All musicals and musical comedies and all queen-produced and adored divas from Alice Delysia to Kim Criswell.
Closet dramas from Rattigan to Britten to Schaffer.
The troubled history of pantomime.
Male strippers and poseurs from the Seldoms to Lindsay Kemp.
To indicate just a few of my fascinations.

I think these parts of our history - almost all of which sprang from and operated within the mainstream - are particularly relevant to the idea of 'queer' theatre or performance. 'Queer' is being touted as something new. Personally I think it is only 'queer studies' as an offshoot of academe and the publishing industry that is new. I think that all the hallmarks of 'queer' theatre and performance - spectacle as transgression, emotional excess as both a tactic and a goal, the all-importance of eroticism, gender as masquerade, image interpretation as the subversion of image production, the prioritising of wit and aggression over authenticity and positive images, of internal contradiction over narrative coherence, the profound sense of an autonomous sensibility that can run rings around the dominant sensibility - well I think these are the backbones of the great legacy of mainstream gay in this country, not something invented by solo performance artists or independent cinema in the late 1980s. Please think about that.

Please also think about what it means to think of the audience for this legacy of work as "them" rather than "us". Consider for a moment that massive gay audience that has always and still

does find its greatest satisfactions and inspirations in the mainstream. Queens who go to musicals. Opera queens and people who enjoy politically suspect drag acts and strippers. Problem plays and soap opera. Star vehicles and production numbers. Ballets. How are we attempting to define ourselves if we reject or exclude this audience for our work, if we make work that is not for them and does not aspire to being for them?
What does it say about us as artists if we want to invent the wheel when there are already wheels?

One of the great articles of faith of the 1970s and 1980s refusal of the mainstream was that the mainstream audience was limited, reactionary, unreal, bourgeois - by which we meant that it excluded us. Whereas the fringe audience was potentially more diverse. However, what the refusal of the mainstream has meant in practice, sometimes, is that artists moved into the very small world of the arts centre and its audience and then stayed there for years, playing, it seems to me, to an audience that in fact is not only smaller but less diverse than that of, say, a commercial musical. The extraordinary thing is that such work then boldly claims to have retained the original politics of a drive towards a different, new audience, despite the fact that in fact it plays to such a small and limited audience. The fringe then becomes not a tactic or a resource, but an end in itself.

OK, enough history; now to my challenge from the present. You will recall that I said that in 1983 it was our rallying cry that we wanted access to the resources of the mainstream. I have indicated that I think we were very wrong to ignore the implications of the fact that in some ways we have had access to and power over the mainstream in all sorts of areas for a long time.

I now want to present us with a major problem. What happens to our cultural politics, and especially what happens to our pleas for more public funding, more sympathetic venues, if it turns out that actually we now have full access to the resources of the mainstream. You know the old line about the theatre being run by queers?
Well this is the 1990s, and it's true. You don't think so?

OK; leaving aside the kissing and dancing that's going on in the real mainstream (*Roseanne, Brookside*, and let's not even start to talk about the pop industry...) what are we going to do with the following examples, all taken from the very recent past.
Currently running theatres: Ian Brown, Paul Kerryson, Paul Iles, Stephen Daldry, Martin Duncan, Neil Bartlett, Giles Havergal, Phillip Headley...etc.
Currently producing, directing and choreographing the financial backbone of the theatre industry, the number one tour and West End musicals... well, far be it from me to name names, but we know who you are and that half of you are homosexuals ...
Currently working in major institutions; I remember someone in 1983 calling for a gay national theatre... well we've got it, and it's called the National Theatre. Last time I worked there there were seven plays in rep directed by gay men...

Now as I try these examples on for size I begin to worry that I'm being stupid, that I'm trying to make out that a few closet cases directing *Carousel,* Cocteau and Marivaux mean anything real in terms of cultural practice or politics ... well ... what about DV8 at the Nottingham Playhouse and the Royal Court, Stephen Daldry taking over the moral high ground at the Court, Tim Luscombe going from the Drill Hall into the West End, *Angels in America* sweeping the awards, the apotheosis of uncompromised high faggotry in numerous productions at the Coliseum and Covent Garden, Lily on tour, Michael Clark selling out at the Theatre Royal Brighton and being invited back to the Royal Ballet, the Arts Council funding me to tour *Night After Night* to Derry, Sheffield and Warwick in main houses; Mark Morris, Robert Lepage and Ian Brown's all-fag programme at the Traverse kicking off the Edinburgh

Festival, Michael Cashman's stomach-turningly out and accurate performance as a gay Merchant of Venice in the recent production at the West Yorkshire Playhouse .... it's not exactly a list of 'compromised' or 'commercial' or 'apolitical' artworks. They are all absolutely out, wouldn't you say? There are quite a few names, styles and careers there that in 1983 would have been very firmly considered fringe material only; definitely not mainstream.

What more do we want? Haven't we got enough power, influence, money? Well... I wonder. Some criticisms of my own thesis that we have had and continue to have the most extraordinary and pervasive access to the mainstream:

1. I am talking entirely about the access of men. This is one history where the compendium lesbian-and-gay cannot and must not be used - though in 1983, it was used by everyone all the time, interestingly enough. Name one dyke show, high art or low, experimental or commercial, that's been big. Name one out dyke artistic director. Name one dyke working at the National. Name one out dyke experimental artist attracting major critical acclaim and Arts Council funding. Answers on one sheet of A4 please. Is Lea Delaria going into the West End for two nights the start of something big? Who is going to stump the cash for Miriam Margolyes or Pam St Clement to revive *The Killing of Sister George* and will it matter? Does this all mean that for lesbian artists, the 1983 division between fringe and mainstream is still the relevant one?
2. Another cautionary note; many of these apparently gay events on my list are actually not mainstream in any useful sense. Gloria and DV8 play to tiny (though beautifully formed) audiences; *Eurovision* in the West End and Larry Kramer at Leicester were box office disasters - as was *Rope* just recently .
3. Another cautionary note; many of these projects are not as out as they appear to be. They are successful and seen to be successful precisely in so far as they escape the label gay and become 'real' art. For instance, I don't think *Angels in America* would ever have been produced in a million years by the National if it had been about British politicians and British sex. For instance about Thorpe and Heath or bringing us right up to date - about the thematic link between AIDS, gay people in the British entertainment industry and the Conservative party, instead of about Roy Cohn. Roy who? The producers and directors of the big musicals and the classic plays may be aesthetically as queer as coots but as far as the punters are concerned they are in closets so well armoured that they make Ivor Novello and Binkie Beaumont look like gay liberationists. When a work is really out, you can be almost certain that it is either protected by a high art context (DV8), marketed as thrillingly kinky *(Rope* or Brad Fraser) or as a charming comedy (Jonathan Harvey).

This next paragraph doesn't quite fit into my argument but it is an important point. I can remember a time, say, 1980, where going out as a gay person to a gay identified venue or event - Sweatshop, the Oval House, the ICA - was a completely different experience from going out to a mainstream venue, a proper theatre. The difference was that in the former you felt comfortable, you felt entitled to watch the show as a gay person, whereas in the latter you more or less tried to pass and didn't let your particular enthusiasms show. This now no longer seems to me to be the case. In the last few years I have seen gay people, in couples or in groups, going out and being out and laughing quite unhindered in venues like the Coliseum, the Sheffield Crucible, the Blackpool Grand, the Royal Court, Stratford East, the Donmar, the Prince of Wales, the West Yorkshire Playhouse, the Kings Glasgow. I think our confidence, our visibility, our newly learnt social skills of taking our pleasures everywhere, not just in spaces labelled gay - well I think all of that makes a real difference to what our idea of an audience is, what the difference between a mainstream and a fringe audience is or could be.

OK; I'm getting to the end now. Please let me be clear that I am not trying to argue that our problems are over. My little lists of achievements are short and arguable. What I am saying

is that we have got to think about our problems accurately, carefully and with some originality. The old judgements and strategies and geographies just will not do.

I'd like to end with three questions to you, and to us. These questions are an attempt to assess where we are and where we'd like to be. They also imply that 'we' might have to be a term we'll have to be very careful with, because the status and tactics of, for instance, male, female, English, Scottish, disabled, Asian and black within this room has and have been and therefore will be very different.

I don't think we should have the same goals, because we don't have the same histories. Sounds obvious, but my experience is that too often these discussions collapse into people trying to propose their own tactics and history as the most urgent and instructive. I have tried very much to talk of my own history and my own perspective. So here are my questions:

What does the non-mainstream offer you?

It offered me, at a crucial point in my own work an opportunity to invent the wheel; to return to the basics of politics, of commitment, of experiment, of primary gay identification, without any of the negative pressures of finance, of precedent, of having to please anybody but yourself. It offered me the pleasures of opposition.

That last one has been, in my experience, a very dangerous pleasure. Too often my refusal of or ignorance of the mainstream gave me a sense of my own work being 'experimental', 'difficult' or 'radical' or 'progressive' that was almost entirely spurious.

What does the mainstream offer you?

It has offered me the chance to pay myself and many other people union rates, to pay childcare for my female colleagues, it enables me to make artworks with more than five people in them on a regular basis. It allows me to use live music in my work (this may all sound a bit crass but these things matter a great deal to me). It offers me (and allows me to offer to other people) some kind of support, security and income, some possibility of getting beyond the ten-years-on-the fringe burn out that I saw crippling a whole generation of practitioners in 1983. But these are all incidental, actually. It offers me an arena of gay culture in this country, a culture that is not small or harassed or oppressed all the time but is large, venerable, assured, expansive (expansive enough to include singing and dancing as well as issues and politics), vulgar, gorgeous and complex.

It allows me to experiment in real terms with what now seems to me to be the greatest challenge, the only challenge, which is to make work which satisfies not only people like me but other people. I now think and feel, ten years on, that the real aesthetic and political challenge is to make work that can sell several hundred tickets a night for a six week run. Third question, and final sentence; is it really true for you and your colleagues that working in the mainstream or outside the mainstream is an either/or choice. Don't you want to have your cake and eat it? Can you have your cake and eat it?

Neil Bartlett, London, 1994

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William Yang is a Sydney based artist. He has had books published and many photographic exhibitions. His work is collected by major Australian galleries and the State Library of New South Wales. In 1993 he won the Higashikawa-Cho International Photographic Festival Award of International Photographer of the Year. He now concentrates on his monologues as his major works. *Sadness* is the third; the other two were *The Face of Buddha* and *China Diary.*
Kate McGowan is a lecturer in English and Cultural Studies at Manchester Metroplitan University.
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Neil Bartlett since the 1994 Queering the Pitch Conference has created several productions including: *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* (with Ian McKellen, Bette Bourne and Neil Tennant), the English-language premiere of Genet's *Splendid's* (with Julian Clary and Everett Quinton), *Romeo and Juliet* (with Emily Woof), *All Souls* (with Matthew Kelly, Dawn French and Rose English), *The Letter* (with Joanna Lumley).

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