

Mirrors and Windowshoppers: Lesbians, Photography, and the Politics of Visibility

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I think that for many of us . . . the ability to attach intently to a few cultural objects, objects of high or popular culture or both, objects whose meaning seemed mysterious, excessive, or oblique in relation to the codes most readily available to us, became a prime resource of survival. We needed for there to be sites where the meanings didn't line up tidily with each other, and we learned to invest those sites with fascination and love.

(Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies*.)

Lesbians. Daggers. Vamps. Dykes. Stones. Soft Butches. Femmes. Riot Grrrrls. Outlaws. Lipstick Lezzies. Fag Wannabes. Vanillas. Baby Dykes. Drag Kings. Fuck-Buddies. MTFs and FTMs. Transsexuals. Crunchies. Tops. Leather Dykes. Intersexuals. Transgenderists. Bis. Queers. Butch Bottoms. Dyke Daddies. Perverts.

A roster of names and a panoply of corresponding images present themselves to us at the end of the twentieth century, each with its own codes and signifiers, nuanced differences on a scale of nameable sexual identities for women -- not all of whom would call themselves lesbians. What they share in common is a dissatisfaction with conventional binaristic categories of gender and the exclusiveness of cross-sex desire encoded in normative white bourgeois femininity. Recently, a small number of these identities have even been allowed to seep (in carefully measured doses) into women's advertising and fashion ("lesbian chic"), punk and metal rock, (Bikini Kill, L7, Tribe 8, Team Dresch, Sexpod) television (*Ellen, HeartBeat, L.A. Law, Tales of the City, Roseanne, Northern Exposure, Friends, Melrose Place, and the talk-show circuit*), Broadway (*Angels in America, Rent*), and mainstream movies (*Go Fish, The Incredibly True Adventure of*

2 Girls in Love, Bar Girls, Even Cowgirls Get the Blues, Antonia's Line, Thieves, Bound, Bastard Out of Carolina). Such incursions of "queer" signs into the mainstream image-scape both affirm the possibility of living out transgressive desires (at least, for middle-class white women) while injecting normative lifestyles with exotic whiffs of sexual freedom and "spice."

In the art world, recent high-profile exhibitions of photographs by Nan Goldin, Catherine Opie, and Andres Serrano present to affluent and middle-class audiences a vividly rendered bohemia of polysexuality and gender indeterminacy, though the explicitly objectified s/m acts that made Robert Mapplethorpe's "X Portfolio" so harrowing to consume are generally absent in these works. And unlike earlier noir documentations of sexual subcultural types by photographers such as Brassai, Lisette Model, or her student, Diane Arbus, these photographers render their subjects larger than life, in vibrant color and, in Opie's and Serrano's cases, monumentalize them as exemplary icons of proud autonomous selfhood in the late twentieth-century.

This transformation took place over a short period of time. It was in 1988 that writer Jan Zita Grover noted the problem of scarcity in subcultural representation as the structuring condition for how contemporary lesbians produced and consumed photographs of themselves.¹ Photographs of lesbian subjects made for subcultural consumption during the 1970s and early 80s by photographers such as JEB (Joan E. Biren), Bettye Lane, and Cathy Cade tended to fall into two categories: portraits of individual role-models such as Kate Millet and Audre Lorde, and of middle-class lesbian couples (usually white, sometimes with children) in scenes some later-day Norman Rockwell could have rendered **(figure 1)**.² Such "positive images" represented an ideal that was never pictured in the mainstream media. By posing proudly for the camera, lesbians publicly proclaimed their right to exist in a society which outlawed and repudiated their relationships and affirmed their participation in one of the long-standing rituals of normative family life -- a life from which many of them had been painfully expelled -- where snapshots of marriages, children, birthdays, and anniversaries affirmed the ongoing performance of family cohesiveness, happiness, and generational continuity.³

Within the past five years, such "greeting card" images of lesbian couples have appeared twice on the cover of Newsweek⁴ (**figure 2**) Within subcultural contexts and artistic bohémias, however, those positive images of straight-appearing (and straight-laced!) lesbians have seemingly been swept aside by an avalanche of sexually explicit and diverse lifestyle-coded photographs which, far from affirming "family values" of couplehood and stability, assert and privilege an autonomous, defiant, and highly sexualized individuality. How did this change come about so quickly and what does it mean? And how are we to understand this new sex-dissident visibility in an era of conservative backlash, when "traditional family values" have become such a cliché in the domestic political sphere?

For a provisional answer to these questions, we need to step back and take a longer look at the ongoing struggles of women, including lesbians, to represent themselves and their complex desires in a society which has always severely policed such images. What would appear to be paradoxical at first glance -- the proliferation of dissident sexual identities and imageries in a fearful and conservative time in the U.S. -- needs to be viewed within the much larger contexts of feminism and feminist conflicts over sexual images, the rise of the conservative right and its ongoing "culture war" against social liberalism, AIDS activism and its grassroots politics, and the needs of a rapidly changing consumption-driven economy.

My review of these historical frameworks will be necessarily compressed and simplified. It focuses primarily on photographs by and about middle-class white women in western industrialized societies such as the United States, Britain and Canada, women who by virtue of their skin color and access to higher education are already privileged and disproportionately represented in the mass media, art, and other image-consumption contexts. Among other communities within the U.S., including African-Americans, Latinas, Asians, and poor and working-class women of all ethnicities, the issues at stake in sexual dissent are further complicated by ongoing histories of racial and class-based exclusion and oppression. Working-class lesbians and gay men of color are among the most

brutalized of subcultural groups, a situation exacerbated by their over-determined media representations as prostitutes, hustlers, and drag queens (e.g., *Paris is Burning*, *The Crying Game*).⁵

In the Grover essay I cited earlier, the author reminds us that photographs not only "show" us provisional realities, but "erase" other realities simultaneously. Contrary to modernist aesthetic doctrine, no photograph is encountered in an interpretive vacuum, but is filtered through individual desire and memory -- the highly selective and fantasy-driven operations of the unconscious. Those positive images of lesbian couples that populated lesbian feminist print media during the 1970s and early 80s, and which have retained their appeal in more mainstream photo books celebrating gay families,⁶ showed images of commitment, well-being, social propriety, and economic stability. At the same time, they erased the bedroom, sex toys, lesbian bar culture, poverty, working-class butches, ethnic and racial differences, power asymmetries within and without the social constellation of the couple, non-traditional family models, and the diversity of sexual fantasy and its manifestations in role-playing and other forms of public signifying.

This erasure of economic, social, racial and sexual diversity -- even the sexual itself -- from these earlier lesbian photographs reflected the politics of the organized women's movement in its decade of greatest strength -- the late 1960s to late 1970s. This was before the movement lost momentum to a politically ascendant conservative backlash, heralded by the 1977 Hyde Amendment eliminating Medicaid funds for abortions, and the 1982 defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment.⁷ For many middle-class lesbians who came out after Stonewall (1969) and within the context of the second-wave women's movement in the U.S., sexual identity was integrated into their feminist gender-based politics to the degree that Ti-Grace Atkinson's slogan, "Feminism is the theory, but lesbianism is the practice," became something of a movement mantra. Lesbian feminist poet Adrienne Rich proposed the notion of a "lesbian continuum" where all women would be united together in a spiritual ideal of solidarity and sisterhood, loving each other *as women* beyond specificities of race, class, and sexual orientation. In contrast, French writer and radical lesbian theorist

Monique Wittig asserted that "lesbians are not women," for "'woman' has meaning only in heterosexual systems of thought and heterosexual economic systems."⁸ To be a lesbian, in other words, was to radically call into question the "naturalness" of the gender category "woman" with its implicit histories of oppression and subordination.

Such cultural feminist debates influenced photographers like Tee A. Corinne who had trained at Pratt Institute and worked in the San Francisco milieu of countercultural lesbian feminists in the late 1960s and 1970s. Like lesbian filmmaker Barbara Hammer, Corrine produced lyrically eroticized images of proud women-loving women, alone and paired, multi-racial and differently abled, powerfully autonomous in their gestures, poses and passions. **(figure 3)** However, Corrine's lack of explicitness, often achieved through solarizing or abstracting women's bodies into patterns or forms in nature, reflected the reticence of feminist photographers about making images of women's bodies that might be seen as prurient. As lesbian "scenes" had long been a staple of straight men's commercial pornography, lesbian feminists were particularly anxious that their images be strictly coded for female, rather than male, viewership. Raunchy poses, close-ups of genitals, signs of gender difference or the appearance of dominant/submissive sex-play were avoided.

Sexual objectification and anti-porn politics

Much attention among lesbian feminists in the 1970s was focused on the issue of women's "sexual objectification," or the representation of women as merely "bodies" or eroticized body parts, rather than as fully human subjects. Feminists engaged in lively critiques of all genres of visual culture, from fine art to advertising, even as African-American, Asian and Latina feminists were revising historical representations of raced womanhood. Artists and critics gathered in consciousness-raising groups and founded women's art organizations such as New York's Heresies Collective, Los Angeles' Women's Building, and Chicago's Artemisia Gallery to publicize feminist art and to thrash

out the difficult issues of producing and theorizing images of women's bodies from a feminist perspective.

But while feminists began to make their presence felt on the margins of the art world, images of female vulnerability and sexual availability seemed to be everywhere and *incessantly* marketed in the mainstream mass media: in ads, fashion magazines, beauty pageants, movies and television, the press and, most blatantly, in the pages of *Esquire*, *Playboy*, *Penthouse*, and *Hustler*. The explosion of soft-core porn/consumer men's magazines following the Supreme Court's relaxation of strictures on print pornography in the late 1950s and 1960s was another catalyst for women's heightened anxieties about the social stakes of sexual representation.⁹

For those who had suffered male incest, rape and battering -- as many as a third of all women, according to some studies -- or who worked in battered-women's shelters and rape crisis centers, it was easy to believe that this continuum of the marketable commodification of women's bodies was not benign, but actively contributed to men's degradation of and violence toward women. By the late 1970s, a women's anti-pornography movement grew out of feminist anti-violence organizing. But instead of concentrating its efforts on investigating the social, economic and psychic causes of actual male violence against women and women's mistreatment by the criminal justice system, it focused exclusively on pornographic images. Any images anti-porn activists considered to be degrading to women were "pornographic" and were to be rooted out and banned. Feminist lawyer Catharine MacKinnon developed a body of legal theory justifying this goal as a social necessity and developed strategies for pursuing cases in the courts and promoting legislative anti-porn initiatives.

Where other feminists, sex/gender theorists, free-speech advocates, and sexual minorities took pointed issue with anti-porn feminists was the latter's view of human sexual relations as inherently fixed and oppositional between the two biological sexes. In this unified dualistic system, sexuality was inherently male-dominated, violent and lustful, while women's sexual instincts were tender, wholesome and nurturing. Women were always already "victims" of male lust,

even in consensual heterosexual relations. Thus, any representation of sexuality or sexual pleasure -- regardless of who produced it or was its intended audience, whether homosexual, heterosexual, male or female -- was regarded by anti-porn activists as promoting violence against women.

By the late 1970s, the Christian Right had become a potent organized force in the Republican Party and its success in mobilizing its grassroots to elect Ronald Reagan to the presidency in 1980 made it a prominent player in national politics. In the new political climate, anti-porn feminists viewed an alliance with fundamentalists and conservatives as an instrumental vehicle for moving anti-porn bills through national and local legislatures. That religious conservatives wanted to ban public sexual speech as part of a larger agenda to restore traditional patriarchal order in both private and public life was a contradiction that seemed lost on their new feminist allies. Feminist and right-wing politicians joined forces in 1984 to push forward anti-porn legislation in Indianapolis and Minneapolis.

But anti-porn activists did not confine their targets to legalized porn; they also followed the right wing's lead in harassing and censoring works of art they found offensive. In 1992, an exhibition organized by feminist artist and video-maker Carol Jacobsen at the University of Michigan Law School of photographic and video works by and about sex workers was vandalized and eventually shut down by women students, heeding the directives of MacKinnon, now a professor at Michigan Law.¹⁰ Many other feminists, along with artists and gays and lesbians came to regard anti-porn feminists as censorious "new puritans." Gay men and lesbians, especially, knew that their ongoing struggle to openly identify themselves and to demand respect and equal treatment under the law were the real targets of right-wing campaigns to promote "traditional family values" and banish public sexual speech. And, as the AIDS epidemic was making all too clear, such silencing literally meant death.

Counter-Attack: Women Against Censorship meets psychoanalysis and the new gender studies

The successes of right-wing and feminist anti-porn forces in stirring up moral panics over sexual images galvanized a powerful counter-attack led by feminists and lesbians who were interested in expanding, rather than contracting, women's repertoires of the erotic. In 1981, *Heresies* published its famous "Sex Issue," featuring a variety of explicit erotic writings and artworks by lesbians. In San Francisco, a lesbian-feminist s/m support group, Samois, published *Coming To Power*, a daring anthology of writings, drawings and photographs exploring s/m fantasy and lesbian leather culture. Images by Morgan Gwenwald and Honey Lee Cottrell, among others, showed bare-breasted, leather-clad women sporting switchblades, whips, handcuffs, and key chains. Sometimes the subjects stood alone, leveling their gazes into the camera as though challenging the viewer; other times they appeared with lovers in deliberately salacious poses. Despite the low reproduction quality in the book, fetish display for the admiration and aesthetic delectation of the viewer was of paramount importance in these fantasy photographs.

Coming To Power unleashed a torrent of outrage and feminist protest for here were *women* who openly acknowledged (to the horror of anti-porn feminists) that the transgressive fantasy performance of dominance and submission was fundamental to their erotic pleasure. The following year (1982), the New York chapter of Women Against Pornography picketed, leafleted, and provoked institutional administrators to withdraw support from a scholarly conference at Barnard (attended by over 800 women) exploring female sexuality and sexual politics. In response, some of the organizers and participants in the Barnard Conference founded the Feminist Anti-Censorship Taskforce (F.A.C.T.) to combat anti-porn feminists and to educate women about a more complex view of human sexuality and its histories.

In 1986, F.A.C.T. published *Caught Looking: Feminism, Pornography and Censorship*, with essays by leading feminist sex researchers, writers, historians, and legal advocates such as Carole Vance, Kate Ellis, Ellen Willis, Pat Califia, Nan D. Hunter, Lisa Duggan, and Ann Snitow. The book was copiously illustrated with pornographic photographs from all periods in photographed history -- of individuals, couples and groups of every determinable gender, arousing

themselves and each other in multiple ways. On the cover was a photograph of a young woman in a lacy bustier, stocking-clad legs spread suggestively, eagerly devouring what appeared to be a porn novel. Her obvious pleasure and delight in consuming commodified pornography was precisely the point. Erotic fantasy, F.A.C.T. suggested, is not the exclusive domain of men, but is a normal and healthy aspect of women's sexual lives. The "bodice-ripper" is even named as a known genre of heterosexual women's erotic fiction, often featuring tall handsome strangers who ravish their swooning "victims."

New scholarship addressing the psychic operations of gendered spectatorship in relation to visual images, particularly Hollywood films, sparked rich debates among feminists, lesbians, and image-makers in the 1980s. In her groundbreaking essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975), feminist film scholar Laura Mulvey used classical Freudian theory to explicate the tight linkages between dominant modes of cinematic spectatorship and the oedipal, fetishistic, and narcissistic needs of unconscious male fantasy. Mulvey initially followed earlier feminist paradigms in theorizing these gendered spectatorial positions as fixed by biological sex ("woman as image, man as bearer of the look"), but her essay launched a whole new and exciting avenue of inquiry for a generation of film and photography scholars, men and women alike.¹¹

Studies of the psychoanalytic literature, particularly the works of Jacques Lacan, and explorations of the specificity of desire among different subjects revealed that in the unconscious, erotic fantasy is pervasive, highly nuanced, and does not neatly align with given gender differences. It can attach to any number of objects and censoring one kind of imagery does nothing to quell desire itself. As Simon Watney put it, "It is not pornography which is everywhere, but fantasy."¹² Gay men and lesbians recognized that they had always "homosexualized" images from straight popular culture to satisfy their fantasies and many lesbian photographers such as myself, the late Tessa Boffin, Jean Fraser, Nina Levitt, Lynette Molnar and others have gleefully "queered" straight icons in our photographic works. In her series *The Knight's Move* (1990), for example, Boffin staged photo tableaux posing lesbians as romantic historical and literary subjects, including as a dashing knight in armor, a leather and chain-mail-

clad knave, and as the eighteenth-century womanizer, Casanova. In my series *Dream Girls* (1990), I montaged my own self-portrait as a butch romantic lead into old Hollywood movie stills with leading ladies such as Linda Darnell, Katherine Hepburn and Natalie Wood. **(figure 4)** Also targeting Hollywood's star machine, Nina Levitt's photo series *Think Nothing Of It* (1990), appropriated a Hollywood publicity photograph showing actress Joan Crawford and film director Dorothy Arzner, enlarging particular details to highlight erotic signifying between the two women, one of whom was an acknowledged lesbian.

In her discussion of the Meese Commission on Pornography elsewhere in this volume, Carole Vance points out that it is the inability to stanch erotic fantasy that gives religious conservatives so much trouble. In the name of "protecting others," they are trying to protect themselves from emotions and desires they cannot control, that generate feelings of shame and disgust. F.A.C.T. squarely countered anti-porn feminists' arguments about the implicit violence of sexuality and sexual images by showing that sexual fantasies did not respect biological difference and often featured images of male submission and vulnerability. Instead of liberating women from male sexual oppression, F.A.C.T. argued, censorship only facilitated it by ceding to dominant male-oriented commerces all expressions and definitions of sexual pleasure and power, further silencing and shaming women as sexual subjects. What was needed, F.A.C.T. argued, was more sexual expression by and for women, not less.

In 1988, three lesbian artists from Vancouver, calling themselves Kiss & Tell, created a photographic exhibition that would eventually travel to fifteen cities on three continents, exploring how women viewers confront mixed cultural messages and personal ambivalences about looking at sexual images. Titled "Drawing the Line: an interactive photo event," Kiss & Tell mounted a series of 100 staged photographs by Susan Stewart of the same two women, Persimmon Blackridge and Lizard Jones, making simulated love in poses and gestures that ranged on an escalating scale of explicitness from tender gazes, fully clothed, to making love while being watched by a man, bondage, whipping, and anal penetration. The wall the photographs were mounted on was covered with white paper and marking pens were left in baskets nearby. Women viewers

were invited to literally "draw the line" where they felt that the photographs became offensive and write their comments. **(figure 5)** (Male viewers were barred from this "women only" public discussion on the wall, but could record their responses in a "Men's Book" provided.)

As Jan Zita Grover commented in a discussion of "Drawing the Line's" 1990 exhibition in San Francisco,¹³ women argued vehemently among themselves in their wall comments, no two agreeing about what, exactly, the pictures showed. The comments were "frequently more projective than descriptive," Grover wrote, suggesting that "the site of interpretation was not so much the photographs' contents" as viewers' own projections onto them. "This is what the man who raped me said that women liked," wrote one participant. Some women slashed through the photos with their markers, trying to cancel them out. "They responded," continued Grover, "as if they were gazing through a keyhole and deriving guilty pleasure from it, reacting in rage toward other viewers' enthusiasm."

Other women, in contrast, expressed frustration with the tameness of the action. "The wanking is fun but I could do without the romanticism," one viewer wrote. "Tear her shirt off!" wrote another. Grover concluded her remarks by noting that it was precisely the scarcity of lesbian sexual representation that made the stakes so high for lesbian viewers and produced internal policing. A show which represented lesbian desire so boldly in a world where such images were never seen in public exhibition spaces carried the burden of representing all lesbian desire. And of course, it could not. But new publications had begun to appear which were trying to plug the gap.

In 1984, Debi Sundahl founded *On Our Backs*, a lesbian porn magazine which featured explicit photographs of lesbian sex, fantasy rape scenes, group sex, sex toys, and gendered role-playing by photographers such as Cottrell, Gwenwald, Katie Niles, C.L. Prochazka, and Cookie (Annjohnna) Andrews-Hunt,¹⁴ along with editorials by Susie "Sexpert" Bright, an outspoken feminist writer, sex advocate, and women's erotica entrepreneur. The publication's title was an irreverent parody of the feminist tabloid *Off Our Backs* and Bright made it clear that the feminist "pc police" were not patrolling her world. In short order,

two more lesbian porn rags followed, *Bad Attitude* and *Outrageous Women*, signaling an historic first: a thriving, if small-scale, commercial porn industry by and for lesbians. Lesbian video production companies such as Tigress and Fatale marketed low-budget low-tech erotic videos to the new and rapidly growing home VCR market. Some feminist bookstores refused to carry the titles, but gay bookstores -- already well stocked with with gay men's porn videos, magazines, greeting cards, calendars and picture books -- happily added them to their inventories.

Staying sexy, staying alive in the age of AIDS

The AIDS pandemic, first noted among gay men in 1981, and which was devastating gay male communities in the U.S. by mid-decade, was initially ignored, then only grudgingly acknowledged as a national emergency by Ronald Reagan's administration. The press's reporting on the epidemic exacerbated a new wave of homophobic and bigoted violence toward gays and other sexual minorities. Reports on television and in the print media pandered to old stereotypes of homosexuals as anti-social corrupters of normal society and repeatedly blamed the spread of AIDS on "the gay lifestyle" rather than on a sexually transmitted virus.

In 1989, toxic stereotypes of gay men as AIDS carriers and perverted predators congealed in the larger-than-life ghost of photographer Robert Mapplethorpe who had recently died of the disease. Conservatives in Congress had long sought a strategy to defund the National Endowment for the Arts and Mapplethorpe's posthumous exhibition, *The Perfect Moment*, along with another exhibition of provocative photographs by Andres Serrano, had been partially funded through the agency. *The Perfect Moment* included the "X Portfolio" of photographs from the 1970s showing gay leather men, including Mapplethorpe himself, performing s/m scenes staged for the camera. The long litany of subsequent acts of censorship, harassment, recrimination, artists' "decency oaths," court battles, and the mobilization of congressional consensus to slash NEA funding and phase out the Endowment altogether, does not need to be

rehearsed here. But the censorship wars and the broader demonization of non-normative sexuality and sexual speech in the wake of Mapplethorpe provoked a militant response among gay and lesbian artists who joined forces with anti-censorship feminists, civil liberties lawyers, art-world sympathizers, and AIDS activists to vigorously defend the right to public sexual expression.

The most visible AIDS action group, ACT UP, was founded in New York in 1987 and included among its ranks many artists and arts professionals. Its affiliated artist collective, Gran Fury, produced a brilliantly sophisticated graphics campaign for use in demos and street actions.¹⁵ One of Gran Fury's most famous posters, which appeared on public buses in various cities, shows three young interracial couples kissing -- two gay and one straight. The copy reads: "Kissing doesn't kill. Greed and indifference do." Mimicking the hip multicultural look of Benetton's apparel ads, Gran Fury's poster at once affirmed the public expression of queer sexual desire and skewered the inhumanity of corporate and governmental policy.

Lesbians worked alongside gay men in ACT UP and in other direct action groups across the nation and abroad, forming women's caucuses to address AIDS prevention and health education among women and to counteract negative stereotypes of female sexuality and the publicly-funded promotion of abstinence ("just say no") to already sexually-active teens, rather than educating them about how the virus was transmitted and what precautions needed to be taken.¹⁶ Observing gay men's vigorous and defiant grassroots campaign to educate their community about safer sex practices and to celebrate expansive modes of sexual expression -- even in an epidemic -- inspired many urban lesbians to expand their own sexual repertoires and experiment with a much wider array of practices, venues, role-playing and toys.

In 1991, London-based photographers Tessa Boffin and Jean Fraser published *Stolen Glances: Lesbians Take Photographs*, the first attempt to situate post-Stonewall photographic practices by lesbians in a critical historical context. Though it only stayed in print for four years, it was a landmark publication and marked the increased visibility of lesbians due to AIDS activism and the new sexual militancy. Boffin and Fraser assembled a number of important

contemporary lesbian critics of visual media such as Jan Zita Grover, Elizabeth Wilson, Mandy Merck, Sue Golding, and Cindy Patton who excavated and explored lesbian identities and stereotypes across a variety of historical and cultural sites, including interwar Paris (Natalie Barney's circle, Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas, Berenice Abbott and friends); Alice Austen's privileged Victorian world of female love and ritual, and the Cold War era of lurid pulp novel portrayals of forbidden lesbian love. *Stolen Glances* included a broad range of contemporary expressions of lesbian desire and identity by white photographers such as Rosy Martin, Kaucyila Brooke, Hinda Schuman, Tee Corinne, Nina Levitt, Connie Samaras, and Lynette Molnar, and by black, West Indian and South Asian photographers such as Mumtaz Karimjee, Ingrid Pollard, Jacqui Duckworth, and Jackie Goldsby.

The appearance of a new "dyke street style" among young urban white lesbians made itself felt in *Stolen Glances*, particularly in the photographs of Della Grace, a London-based photographer whose works enjoyed wide circulation as postcards among lesbians and were collected in the book, *Love Bites* (1991) which gained notoriety by being banned by customs officials in both the U.S. and Canada.¹⁷ *Love Bites* showed women in their twenties, posing together and alone, pierced and tattooed, bleached and buzzed, and decked out in black leather motorcycle jackets, harnesses and other s/m paraphernalia, garter belts, fishnet stockings, jockey shorts, heavy work boots, and brandishing the occasional dildo. Most of the shots appeared to be staged for their erotic and fashion-fetish appeal (**figure 6**) -- often featuring sexual encounters in toilets, back alleys, or at industrial sites -- while others had the look of casual club shots. *Love Bites* sparkled with a sassy youthful energy which seemed less concerned with political resistance than with exulting in dyke nightlife and its correspondingly hip sartorial tastes.

This new lesbian look derived from politically-charged sources, however, including the revival of interest in "butch-femme" sub-cultural histories, and styles associated with militant direct action groups such as ACT UP and groups mobilized in Britain in the late 1980s to protest the enactment of anti-gay legislation by the Tory government.¹⁸ "Butch-femme" referenced the highly

regulated system of sub-cultural gender coding developed by working-class lesbians who socialized illegally during the "dark ages" between World War 2 and Stonewall, often in mafia-run bars in urban combat zones. In this era, the choice of whether to identify as butch or femme was a serious matter, determining one's social role and sense of security within a tightly knit community where police brutality was a constant threat.¹⁹ Following turn-of-the-century psychoanalytic theories of sexual inversion which made their desires intelligible to them, butch lesbians often felt as though they were men trapped in women's bodies. For post-Stonewall, post-feminist, and post-deconstructionist dykes, however, butch-femme was a turn-on. It was a poke at both "politically-correct" feminism and at religious and social conservatives who, of course, were advocating a return to traditional gender roles *by heterosexuals*. For university-educated dykes who were learning about new theories of gender in their women's studies, art, and cultural studies seminars, butch-femme role-playing even seemed politically subversive.

Political activists of both sexes adopted a militant look for street demos and actions, some of it borrowed from working-class British punk subcultures via the metal rock scene: piercing, tattoos, chains, black leather jackets, T-shirts with in-your-face political slogans or ACT UP's "Silence=Death" logo, buttons, pins, bandannas, and Doc Martens. Chanting slogans and inventively disrupting "business as usual," AIDS and anti-Clause 28 activists created imaginative "media zaps" that garnered national and international news coverage. In the conservative Reagan-Bush and Thatcherite Eighties, when the feminist and black civil rights movements, the socialist left and organized labor were demoralized and in disarray, militant queer organizing seemed to be the only visible site of energetic countercultural social protest.

AIDS mobilizing gave a boost to ongoing investigations of the role of sexual fear and fantasy in producing social regulation. The writings of Michel Foucault were of vital importance for the ways in which he explored how modern sexuality was produced by its discourses of repression in the industrialized West, beginning in the Victorian era when sexual expression was confined to the private procreative domain of heterosexual marriage and all

other sexual speech and acts were prohibited by law. Later, sexologists would name and identify homosexuality and heterosexuality as two distinct sexual identities. Heterosexuality needed an "other" -- homosexuality -- against which to establish its hegemony as the "natural" foundation of the bourgeois social order, located in the nuclear family.

Foucault's ideas were revised and elaborated by Judith Butler in her landmark book, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990).²⁰ Butler brought Foucault into the realm of feminist theory (Foucault had utterly ignored women in his writings), following in the footsteps of feminist anthropologist Gayle Rubin who had first theorized how the creation of a heterosexual "sex-gender" system was necessary to the maintenance of a patriarchal social order.²¹ Sexual differences are organized by societies in hierarchies that both privilege and punish and anthropologists observed that these hierarchies differ significantly among social groups. Things function smoothly as long as the dominant sexual order is perceived as the "natural" order and sexual dissent is stigmatized or kept invisible. The visibility of sexual "others" causes anxiety because it threatens to expose the instability of "normal sexuality," a sexual order that must labor to constantly reiterate its "naturalness" to sustain its power. Butler likened this reiteration to a repeated "performance" of heteronormativity (and its gender codes) in our culture.

Though her "performances" of heteronormative femininity for the camera had commenced over a decade earlier and had derived from a long tradition of feminist performance art, Cindy Sherman's brilliantly staged film stills and giant color photographs of herself posing as grotesques, seductresses, exotics, and ingenues both stimulated and "bodied forth" many of these cross-fertilizing ideas of postmodern gender discourse. By the mid-1980s, Sherman became the benchmark for photographers dealing with cultural codes of sexuality and gender. In one stroke, her photographs called into question not only mass media and cinematic representations of the reiterated performance of femininity, but all of those earnest positive images of "authentic" sub-cultural identities as well.

AIDS activism and the public discourses around sexuality it produced further highlighted this theatrical space of sex-gender performativity. Indeed,

sexual subcultures seemed to suddenly proliferate as Queer Nation, a short-lived sex-radical action group which branched off from ACT UP in 1990 to promote resistance to "straightness" and its multiple oppressions, included under its political umbrella all who resisted the hegemonic operations of heterosexuality, including progressive heterosexuals, gays and lesbians, bisexuals, transgendered and transsexual folk, intersexuals, and other "queers." Transsexual performance artist Kate Bornstein gave multiple-choice "gender quizzes" to her enthusiastic audiences, showing them how inconsistent and ambivalent their notions and fantasies around gender could be while Annie Sprinkle and Susie Bright spoofed the whole notion of sexual exclusivity. Traditional gender-roles were seen as oppressive and boring besides.

It was in this atmosphere of new openness to non-normative genders and sexual complexity that a self-identified "dyke daddy," Catherine Opie, began making monumental large-format color studio portraits of transsexual and transgendered friends and acquaintances in Los Angeles and San Francisco. Opie's close-up formal portraits of lesbians in facial-hair drag, each with her girl-punk nickname engraved in brass on the pictures' heavy black frames, embellished a 1992 interview with Butler in *Artforum* and launched a body of large-scale portrait work (1992--96) featuring both unknown and celebrity transsexuals, drag queens and kings, pierced, cut and tattooed subjects such as scandalous performance artist Ron Athey, and various other gender-benders posed starkly and regally against plain backdrops of brilliantly saturated hues. One of Opie's most riveting images was a self-portrait of her own nude upper back and head posed against a deep blue brocade backdrop. **(figure 7)** A stick-figure drawing of two women holding hands in front of a house was cut into the photographer's pale skin and outlined in her blood. The touching simplicity of the child-like image and its encoded aspirations for "family togetherness" clashed sharply with the graphic transcription of the pain voluntarily embraced by this adult queer body and hinted at its possible psychic underpinnings.

In 1994, the three women of Kiss & Tell published *Her Tongue on My Theory*, an extended post-mortem on "Drawing the Line," and a wide-ranging critical dialogue exploring the political histories, theory, and practice of art about

sexual desire from contemporary queer feminist perspectives. The conversational text was accompanied by images from their collaborative performance and video work, *TRUE INVERSIONS*, as well as by short sex-fantasy stories. The conversations touched on a number of issues, including feelings about posing for publicly distributed sexual photographs, feminist conflicts and ambivalences about sexuality, the freedom to invent new paradigms for lesbian desire, and the relationship of images to community-building. As Susan Stewart put it, "Lesbian photographs (published and unpublished) get circulated, passed hand to hand, discussed and debated within the community. There is a tremendous demand and need for self-representation by a community whose psychic survival depends on the sure knowledge that there are others like ourselves."²²

Kiss & Tell noted the effects of the widespread shift to "queer" identity politics in the early 1990s and debated the trade-offs for lesbians. The authors made the cogent observation that in this new queer world, much as in the older feminist and gay/lesbian worlds, the wide disparities in terms of the risks and privileges among "queer" subcultures, particularly as they split along lines of gender, race and class, are still rendered invisible. Lesbians tended to be erased in a movement dominated by gay men, even as they had been marginalized in a feminist movement dominated by straight women.²³ Lesbians from racial and ethnic subgroups risked being triply "disappeared": as women, as lesbians, and as non-whites. Queer visibility also ignored working-class and poor queers in its increasingly upscale market-mediated forms, except as lurid spectacle (e.g. as rural southern "white trash," or as urban black/latino drag queens). While evoking "outlaw" status might be a good turn-on for sex, Lizard Jones remarked, it's "maybe not a good basis for a politic." Certainly, it was a good turn-on for consumption.

As Queer As You Wanna Be: Sexual diversity and the marketplace

While boomers argue about identity politics, their kids surf it as a sexy fact of life.²⁴

The multiply amplified calls for a more "democratized" and diversely visible sexual expression from an array of political voices by the turn of the 1990s also resonated with ongoing changes in the national economy. For thirty years, the corporate drive for profits in the now-dominant retail/entertainment sector depended on constantly identifying new niche markets of consumers. While the corporate-run media sought, as always, to create a homogeneous, middle-class "American public" by erasing cultural and racial differences and promoting a notion of "common values," retail marketers and advertisers searched out overlooked sub-groups of middle-class consumers to whom they could sell a more upscale identity-based "lifestyle" with its own music, movies, television shows, fashions, periodicals, and other cultural commodities. The freedom "to be" became the freedom "to buy."

By the early 1980s, affluent urban gay men had been identified by corporate marketers as an untapped gold mine.²⁵ As middle-class white men earned the highest incomes, this demographic enjoyed maximum spending power and (usually) no financial dependents. In addition, gay men had always been trend-setters in male (and female) fashion, so the profitable "trickle-down" to the mainstream marketplace was already a given. Consumption played a large role in post-Stonewall urban gay life with the gentrification of identifiable gay neighborhoods in many cities with their own restaurants, bars, clubs, bathhouses, gyms, bookstores, and services. This creation of "community" through its consumer institutions was further exploited by mainstream corporations and even gay entrepreneurs who began to stimulate identity-based consumption on a much larger scale.

In 1984, Calvin Klein unveiled his first of many "gay window ads" -- ads which avoided explicit references to heterosexuality by depicting only one individual or same-sexed individuals in order to attract gay consumers without alienating straights.²⁶ A giant billboard in Manhattan featured a hunky young white male model, clad only in his Calvins. Photographed by Bruce Weber, the model posed with his eyes closed, as though lost in thought -- a strategy to mitigate his potential homoerotic charge for heterosexual male viewers (he's not looking at me!). This nod to straight male anxieties was abandoned by the 1990s,

however, as scantily clad butch men with sculpted bodies gazed boldly into the camera, inviting eroticized looks from all "comers." In the pages of gay-oriented consumer magazines, six of which started up or revamped their formats between 1991 and 1992, and in mail-order catalogues, muscle queens in shirts, briefs, and lounge-wear invited fantasy play with as much coy come-on as any female model from the old days, prompting journalists to note the new "male bimbo" phenomenon in fashion and advertising.²⁷

While heterosexual women -- who had always been the major target market, reflecting their role as primary consumers within the privatized contexts of mating and raising families -- and affluent white gay men were now firmly ensconced as identifiable consumer groups, middle-class white lesbians remained outside marketers' purviews until the early 1990s. "Lesbian chic" was a short-lived phenomenon in the media,²⁸ but it marked the new public visibility of high-powered women, including lesbians, among the entertainment, business and political elites in the years immediately following Bill Clinton's first election in 1992.²⁹ First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton represented a new baby-boomer breed of independent professional woman in that exemplary outpost of the Feminine Mystique. For the first time in U.S. history, the President appointed an out homosexual politician, Roberta Achtenberg, as assistant secretary of Housing and Urban Development, and named two never-married women, Donna Shalala and Janet Reno, to important cabinet posts. Indeed, an energetic feminist (rather than feminine) presence was felt in political Washington, but it was a presence that vaporized by the 1994 mid-term election and the so-called "angry white male" vote that turned Congress over to conservative Republicans.

In one of his first acts as President, Clinton sought to lift the ban on gay men and lesbians serving openly in the military, an effort that was vigorously resisted by the Pentagon and ultimately outflanked by conservatives, but which demonstrated the new top-level political access gay lobbyists, many of them lesbians, enjoyed in the public political sphere. In 1993, lesbian pop idol k.d. lang made the May cover of *New York* magazine and the August cover of *Vanity Fair*, and in June, the left-liberal *Nation* published its first queer theme issue. *Vogue's* July issue bid "goodbye to the last taboo" in an article touting the new lesbian

visibility and in November, *Cosmopolitan*, that bible of obsessive sexual strategizing for upwardly mobile "career girls," featured a lead article on "Being a Gay Woman in the 90's." "Gay women today are more visible than ever before," the magazine gushed. "Every syndicated television talk show has discussed lesbianism in the past year, or so it seems, and news shows like *20/20* have done segments on the topic." Sit-coms and soap operas incorporated sympathetic gay characters into their stories, as did Hollywood movies. In this more relaxed media-sanctioned atmosphere, a handful of white sports and entertainment figures openly confirmed (or did not challenge allegations of) their same-sex orientations, including Lang, Melissa Etheridge, Martina Navratilova, Lily Tomlin, Sandra Bernhard, and Janis Ian. But such revelations remain rare for "star power" in the entertainment, modeling and sports worlds derives from fans' fantasy-driven identifications with these (presumed straight) heroes and heroines. The corporate entities who own the bodies of movie stars and sports heroes are all too aware of the potential impact on profits should this illusion be shattered.³⁰

But despite the careful maintenance of the closets of established entertainment figures, the marketers for a younger generation of up-and-coming pop stars saw the profitable potential in exploiting the look of sexual difference. By splicing together gender signifiers (not blurring them androgynously, seventies-style) and skimming off the post-punk countercultural panache of ACT UP, Queer Nation, the Lesbian Avengers, and other sexual subcultures such as the black and Latino drag-ball scene vividly portrayed in Jennie Livingston's widely discussed film, *Paris is Burning* (1990), pop culture marketers could bring the exotic look of gender-fuck "realness" to white middle-class youth in a way parents wouldn't object to. Urban black hip-hop, after all, posed a much more radical threat. Madonna vogueed her way to riches, "justified her love" with both sexes, and produced her own polymorphous porno book, *Sex*. While it is easy to see the ways in which Madonna contained and defused the militant critiques of queer activism and radical sexual politics, she nonetheless brought its subversive ghost to the shopping mall. The *New York Times* confidently reassured readers after the 1992 release of her album *Erotica*: "in six

months to a year, this latest multimedia expression of Madonna's imagination will have played itself out. And then what?"³¹

But despite the fade-out of "lesbian chic" from the mainstream media by the end of 1994, the acknowledgment of a small but affluent lesbian niche market by vodka and liqueur advertisers, credit-card marketers, travel resorts, the entertainment industry, and apparel designers (notably absent is the cosmetics industry)³² made possible the proliferation of more lesbian consumer magazines beyond the decade-old *On Our Backs* and *Bad Attitude* (which became glossier), including *Deneuve* (whose name was changed to *Curve* when the French film star threatened to sue), and *Girlfriends*, both of which are published in Los Angeles and have national distribution.³³ **(figure 8)** As with their mainstream counterparts, editorial content in these new magazines reinforces consumption of the products marketed by advertisers while potentially controversial subjects such as political news, religion, AIDS, breast cancer, alcohol abuse, social class, and racial/ethnic diversity are largely ignored. Pages are filled with fashion reports, gossip, commentary on mainstream films, television and media offerings, travel features, and interviews with insiders in the entertainment and fashion worlds. As elsewhere, lesbians are encouraged to see themselves as a "young, hip, urban demographic" -- which means white, monied, in good health, and with the leisure time for fantasizing about the good life the ads present -- in other words, much like the heterosexual and cross-over consumers traditionally constructed by *Vogue*, *Elle*, and *Harper's Bazaar*.

But a vital counter-media underground has thrived among a number of younger "gen-X dykes and fags" who scorn the bourgeois market defined by such glossies and the blatant exclusion of those without high-paying jobs, clout, white skins, buff bodies, impeccably tailored tastes, and penthouse apartments. Evolving from the punk fanzine subcultures that flourished in and around the alternative rock scene during the 1980s, queer zine publishers adopt the "do it yourself" ethos of punk and turn out cheaply produced little magazines, printed on a word processor and featuring raw cut-and-paste graphics -- the clumsier and less slick, the better.³⁴ No seamless Photoshopped images here!

Reproduction is by means of a photocopier, often subversively commandeered at work or at school. **(figure 9)**

Zines cater to and create community among queer sub-groups ignored by the supposedly sub-cultural media and openly mock the latter's blatant suturing of "gays and lesbians" into normalized channels of consumption. A D-I-Y dyke video scene thrives in close proximity to zine and girl-rock cultures, pioneered in the early 1990s by Sadie Benning, a teenage dyke who recorded her coming-of-age with a Fisher-Price Pixelvision camera. Present-day "girl culture" videos such as *She's Real, Worse Than Queer*, *Mary Jane's Not a Virgin Anymore*, *Swallow*, and *Lady (Out)laws and Faggot Wannabes* form the visual counterpart to the riot grrrrl music scene and often reference it directly. The "in-your-face" feminist militancy of much of this production has militated against its easy assimilation by mainstream fashion -- for the moment, at least.

With names like *J.D.s*, *Cunt*, *Bimbox*, *Girljock*, *Sister Nobody*, *Bamboo Girl*, *Fierce Vagina*, *Whorezine*, *Bust*, *Jailhouse Turnout*, *Resister*, *Princess*, and *Bitch Nation*, dyke zines are raw, irreverent, funny, and subversive of any dominant assumptions about queer national (and mainstream) marketing. They are highly specialized as well, each catering to its own self-defined "demographic," whether fans of particular cult or camp icons, religious survivors, aficionados of specialized erotic tastes and fantasies, post-women's-movement feminists, working-class queers, or members of racial and ethnic groups. As with the interwar Dada and Surrealist magazines which were their spiritual and formal predecessors, pictorial content is purloined with illicit abandon, cut up and montaged to force its referents to fit the desires of these resolutely unofficial niche-markets.

In 1991, the first international conference of queer zines, "Spew," was held in Chicago at the alternative Randolph Street Gallery and in 1996, New York's New Museum acknowledged the phenomenon in its interactive exhibition, "alt. youth. media." The Internet, as well, has become a refuge for sub-groups of computer-literate queers who gather in chat rooms or post their photographs on Web pages in hopes of building radical community in cyberspace. But the economic advantages required for entry-level access remain a barrier to many

potential users, and -- as always -- corporate and governmental surveillance and attempts to censor such efforts are justified in the name of "protecting children."

Revisiting the conundrum with which I began this essay -- how it was possible in a conservative political era to witness an explosion of new sexual sub-cultural images for women -- it becomes clear that this profusion results from a number of intertwined political, social and economic factors. The women's movement both called into question dominant social representations of women and searched for new ways to express women's experiences and desires, including lesbian desires, without relying on male-identified stereotypes. Anti-porn feminists argued that sexual desire itself was so corrupted by patriarchal values as to be irretrievable for women's pleasure and that sexual images played an active role in producing male violence against women.

However, anti-porn feminists' efforts to censor sexual speech, along with the ascendance of social reaction embodied in the resurgent Right's cooptation of "family values" as its political standard, mobilized a strong reaction among feminists and lesbians and gays who, after two decades of slow progress toward gaining recognition of their civil rights, suddenly found themselves under siege. The AIDS epidemic reinforced the gravity of the situation as images of AIDS sufferers were exploited by the religious right and conservatives to persuade the public that homosexuals were the cause of their own misfortune and to advocate a return to stigmatizing and shaming "deviant" sexual behaviors, even sexuality itself.

The movement to empower women to acknowledge the legitimacy of sexual fantasy and to counteract negative social messages about women's bodies and desires generated a renaissance of erotic fiction, photography, and video by and for women by the late 1980s, both in mainstream and lesbian publishing markets. Lesbians who were deeply involved in AIDS organizing and activism also absorbed the defiantly political messages groups such as ACT UP promoted about safe sex and more of it, even in an epidemic. Lesbian artists and photographers worked within these campaigns, promoting the use of porn

fantasy, props, costumes and even s/m as safe-sex options and creating new fantasy images of proud sexy outlaws to show the way. The revival of interest in butch-femme roles among lesbians drew from their own transgressive history of post-World War 2 bar culture for its imagery, but without the deeply felt sense of authenticity and legitimacy those roles had conferred on older, more working-class, lesbians in the years before Stonewall. In a postmodern, "post-feminist," "deconstructionist" age, the naturalness and universality of all categories, including gender, had been stringently called into question.

Given that a capitalist economy must always expand its market reach, the identification of potentially profitable new consumer niches of middle-class white gay men and lesbians by the early 1990s produced a flood of "life-style" commodities targeted to these groups. The quest for social equality became conflated with the quest for the kind of confident sense of selfhood and unlimited pleasure promised by the ads to those with the resources to acquire them -- seductive images, indeed, for those who are still denied the right to marry, who have often been rejected by their families of origin, and whose intimate acts are still subject to arrest in nineteen states. But as the highly politicized debates over gays in the military, "gay marriage" laws, and organized efforts to repeal local anti-discrimination ordinances indicate, changing a few class-specific media images has little effect on pernicious institutionalized prejudice and ignorance, and can even work against such efforts. Certainly, the new market-place visibility of an affluent white gay minority has fueled the right wing's portrayal of *all* gays as white yuppies who clearly aren't in need of anti-discrimination laws ("special rights").

Public struggles over sexual images and identities -- whether among lesbians, feminists and queers, or between these groups and religious and social conservatives -- need to be seen within the larger (and profoundly eroticized) contexts of historical power relations between and among different social groups, including men and women; heterosexuals and queers; whites and non-whites; affluent and poor; First World and Third World. As Victor Burgin has noted,³⁵ "The only pertinent *political* question in relation to an 'identity' [or its photograph] is not 'Is it really coherent?' but 'What does it actually achieve?'"

NOTES

1. Jan Zita Grover, "Dykes In Context," Ten.8, No. 30, Autumn 1988: 38.
2. Joan E. Biren (JEB), Eye to Eye: Portraits of Lesbians. Washington, DC, Glad Hag Books, 1979.
3. See my "Exposing Family Values: Sexual Dissent and Family Photography," in A Family Affair: Gay and Lesbian Issues of Domestic Life (Christopher Scoates, curator), Atlanta College of Art Gallery, 1995.
4. The June 21, 1993 Newsweek cover (pictured) featured a smiling clean-cut, middle-class white lesbian couple with the banner line, "LESBIANS: Coming Out Strong. What Are the Limits of Tolerance?" The November 4, 1996 cover showed another white lesbian duo, pop singer Melissa Etheridge and her pregnant partner, Julie Cypher, with the banner, "We're Having a Baby -- Can Gay Families Gain Acceptance?"
5. See Barbara Smith, "Homophobia: Why Bring It Up?" in Henry Abelove et al., The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader, New York and London, Routledge, 1993. Also, Mikeda Silvera, "Man Royal and Sodomites: Some Thoughts on Afro-Caribbean Lesbians," in Lynne Fernie, ed., Sight Specific: Lesbians and Representation (exhibition catalogue), Toronto, A Space, 1988, and B. Ruby Rich, "When Difference Is (More Than) Skin Deep," in Martha Gever et al., Queer Looks: Perspectives on Lesbian and Gay Film and Video. New York and London, Routledge, 1993.
6. See John Getting, Couples: A Photographic Documentary of Gay and Lesbian Relationships. Hanover and London, University Press of New England, 1996; Making Love Visible: In Celebration of Gay and Lesbian Families, Photos by Geoff Manasse, interviews by Jean Swallow, Freedom, CA, The Crossing Press, 1995; also, see Sarah Wells' photographs in A Family Affair, *op.cit.*
7. The mainstream feminist movement also came under attack in the 1980s for its implicit white middle-class bias and blindness to the needs of nonwhite and poor women in an economy that was rapidly leaving them behind. And finally, a younger generation of middle-class women (including many lesbians) who came of age in the 1980s rejected the feminist label though they agreed with feminist goals of economic and sexual equality -- values they took for granted. In view of their own relative social equality and economic mobility, a "women's movement" seemed no longer needed -- a view the mass media and culture/entertainment industries actively fostered. See Susan Faludi, Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women, New York, Crown Books, 1991.
8. Monique Wittig, "The Straight Mind," in Russell Ferguson et al., Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures, Cambridge, The MIT Press, 1990.
9. In the Roth decision (1957), the Supreme Court established that "sex and obscenity are not synonymous." In the notorious Fanny Hill case (1966), the Court further ruled that "A [work] cannot be proscribed unless it is found to be utterly without redeeming social value. This is so even though the [work] is found to possess the requisite prurient appeal and to be patently offensive. Each of the three federal constitutional criteria is to be applied independently; the social values of the [work] can neither be weighted against nor canceled by its prurient appeal or patent offensiveness." In 1970, the President's Commission on Obscenity and Pornography

recommended the repeal of all laws prohibiting the distribution of sexually explicit materials to consenting adults and the implementation of a massive sex education program. See Marjorie Heins, Sex, Sin and Blasphemy: A Guide to America's Censorship Wars, New York, The New Press, 1993: 18--22.

10. Jacobsen was able to mobilize a team of civil-liberties lawyers, feminists against censorship, artist anti-censorship organizations, and colleagues nationwide to protest and bring pressure on the university to reinstate the show a year later. See Carol Jacobsen, "Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Sex Workers? The censoring of 'Porn'im'age'ry: Picturing Prostitutes," exposure 29: 2/3, 1994: 14. Also, Carole S. Vance, "Feminist Fundamentalism -- Women Against Images," Art in America, Summer 1993: 35.

11. Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Screen 16, No. 3, Autumn 1975: 6-18. The two foremost exponents of psychoanalytic theory in relation to photographic production and reception are Mary Kelly and Victor Burgin, both of whom were active in London when Mulvey's essay first appeared, and now teach in the U.S. Psychoanalytic criticism has had only limited influence in U.S. photographic discourse, compared to film and literary studies.

12. Simon Watney, Policing Desire: Pornography, AIDS and the Media. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1987: 74.

13. Jan Zita Grover, "Framing the Questions: Positive Imaging and Scarcity in Lesbian Photographs," in Tessa Boffin and Jean Fraser, eds., Stolen Glances: Lesbians Take Photographs. London, Pandora, 1991.

14. Works by these pioneering erotic photographers and others can be seen in Susie Bright and Jill Posener, eds., Nothing But The Girl: The Blatant Lesbian Image, New York: Freedom Editions, 1996.

15. See Douglas Crimp with Adam Rolston, AIDS Demo Graphics, Seattle, Bay Press, 1990.

16. See my "Lesbians, Photography and AIDS," in Stolen Glances, op. cit.: 173-183.

17. Della Grace, Love Bites, London, GMP Editions, 1991.

18. Specifically, Section 28 of the British Local Government Act (effective, May 1988) which prohibited local authorities from "intentionally promot[ing] homosexuality or publish[ing] material with the intention of promoting homosexuality" and "promot[ing] the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship." Section 28 was fought bitterly by gay rights groups who staged dramatic public demonstrations against its passage.

19. For histories of this period, see Lillian Faderman, Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian life in Twentieth-Century America, New York, Columbia, 1991, and Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis, Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: A History of a Lesbian Community, New York, Routledge, 1993. Also, the excellent videotape, Forbidden Love: The Unashamed Stories of Lesbian Lives, (Aerlyn Weissman and Lynne Fernie), 1992.

20. Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity, New York and London, Routledge, 1990.

21. Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex," in Rayna R. Reiter, ed., Toward an Anthropology of Women, New York, Monthly Review Press, 1975.

22. Kiss & Tell, Her Tongue on My Theory: Images, Essays and Fantasies, Vancouver, Press Gang Publishers, 1994: 52-53.
23. See Harmony Hammond's and Catherine Lord's introductions to the catalogue for their co-curated exhibition of works by lesbian artists, Gender, fucked, Seattle, Center on Contemporary Art, 1996.
24. Richard Goldstein, "The Culture War Is Over! We Won! (For Now)," Village Voice, November 19, 1996: 51.
25. Danae Clark, "Commodity Lesbianism," Camera Obscura 25/26, January/May 1991: 180-201. Also, Dan Baker, "A History in Ads: The Growth of the Gay and Lesbian Market," in Amy Gluckman and Betsy Reed, eds., Homo Economics. New York and London, Routledge, 1997. Absolut vodka was the first mainstream advertiser to market specifically to gays, beginning in 1979. As liquor companies are not patronized by the religious right, they are relatively immune from the threat of organized boycotts.
26. *Ibid.*, 188.
27. New gay consumer magazines which appeared in the early 1990s included Out, Genre, Poz, Ten Percent, Deneuve, and Girlfriends, along with a revamped The Advocate (purged of sex hotlines). Mail order catalogues such as International Male blatantly attract gay consumers with pages of well-endowed beefcake modeling form-fitting leisure-wear and briefs, sans airbrushing. Mainstream men's magazines such as Details also boast a sizable gay following. See Lena Williams, "Bodies Go Public: It's Men's Turn Now," New York Times, October 31, 1990: C1.
28. See Linda Dittmar, "The Straight Goods: Lesbian Chic and Identity Capital on a Not-So-Queer Planet," in Deborah Bright, ed., The Passionate Camera: Photography and Bodies of Desire, London and New York, Routledge, 1998. "Lesbian Chic" was dubbed by the May 1993 issue of New York magazine in its cover story on lesbians. Subtitled "The Bold, Brave New World of Gay Women," it named a trend signaled by the new visibility of lesbians in the political, entertainment and sports worlds.
29. See Donna Minkowitz, "High Anxiety: I Was a Stepford Queer at the Inaugural Ball," The Village Voice, February 2, 1993: 30. Reprinted in Amy Gluckman, *op. cit.*
30. See Michelangelo Signorile, Queer in America: Sex, the Media, and the Closets of Power, New York, Random House, 1993. Also, Vito Russo, The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies, New York, Harper and Row, 1981, 1987.
31. Stephen Holden, "Selling Sex and (Oh, Yes) a Record," New York Times, October 18, 1992.
32. In one of those fascinating ironies that abound in the social history of sexual mores, while the cosmetics industry adamantly refused to have its products associated with affluent white lesbians, black drag queen RuPaul sold make-up to straight women as a model for Max cosmetics!
33. Fara Warner, "More Marketers Aiming Ads at Lesbians," Wall Street Journal, May 19, 1995: B12.
34. S. Bryn Austin with Pam Gregg, "A Freak Among Freaks: The 'Zine Scene," in Arlene Stein, ed., Sisters, Sexperts, Queers: Beyond the Lesbian Nation, New York, Plume, 1993, p. 81.

35. Victor Burgin, in "Questions of Feminism: 25 Responses," October 71, Winter 1995: 13

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