

Pictures, Perverts, and Politics

Introduction to *The Passionate Camera: Photography and Bodies of Desire*

Deborah Bright

Decadent or liberating? Elitist or profoundly democratic? Trendy fashion statement or lasting revolution? Over the past decade, photographs explicitly contesting normative representations of sexuality and desire have stirred passionate public debate within and without the art world. Whether it concerned photographs of erotic subcultures, gay men and lesbians, transgendered and transsexual subjects, sex workers, preadolescent children, or provocatively posed teenagers in fashion spreads, these two-dimensional constructions on paper and film became, willy-nilly, protagonists in what right-wing populist and ex-presidential candidate Patrick Buchanan termed "the war for America's culture." The social instabilities produced by a changing economy and the political ascendancy of social and religious conservatives in the 1980s created a climate ripe for scapegoating -- not of the policies that promoted local disinvestment and the rapid redistribution of wealth, but of the corrupting "enemies within": immigrants, those on public assistance, young unemployed black men, unwed mothers, and gay men and lesbians who had gained significant political visibility since the late 1960s and who were making slow and fitful progress toward fuller recognition of their civil rights.

While the poor, urban blacks, and immigrants could be "managed" through punitive legislation and anti-affirmative action campaigns, sexual dissent -- most clearly articulated by educated middle-class feminists and queers -- was assailed at the symbolic level through the repeated public invocation of "traditional family values," organized media assaults on "political correctness" and "victim politics," and highly publicized political attacks on publicly funded art (particularly by women and queers) with sexual content. The name of Jesse Helms, Republican southern senator and flag-bearer for the Christian Right, became synonymous with calls for national legislation to protect "the vast middle-American population" from the kind of "patently offensive collection of

homo-erotic pornography and sexually explicit nudes of children" being financed by the National Endowment for the Arts.

What was it about photographs of sexually charged subjects that made them so vulnerable to accusations of "pornography" and "obscenity" -- as though these qualities were self-evident and inhered in the images, and not in the eyes of the beholder?¹ Why did the stakes seem so high where photographs were concerned? The dearth of critical and historical perspectives on photography's agency in the social construction of sexuality (in favor of appeals to "common sense" and "knowing pornography when I see it") that characterized so much of the emotionally polarized debate over the NEA and other censorship scandals indicated the urgent need for a book like *The Passionate Camera*. As editor, I sought to assemble a thoughtful and accessible collection of essays and works exploring a range of historical and contemporary photographic practices that challenge and disrupt the dominant social consensus around sexuality and its representations.

However, my intention for *The Passionate Camera* was not only to respond to political attacks. Another, more positive impetus for producing this book was to document and celebrate what conservatives and religious fundamentalists so fervently wish to suppress: the explosive growth of independent photographic works since the mid-1980s by a critical mass of artists and cultural producers who openly challenge the sexual status quo. This grassroots production was fostered, to a significant degree, by the atmosphere of militancy and extreme urgency that accompanied the AIDS pandemic. AIDS activists exposed and excoriated the political and religious right's cruel exploitation of the disease to stir up violence and bigotry against gays and other socially marginal groups, as well as the craven indifference of the majority of government officials, medical authorities, and journalists who seemed more concerned with reassuring "normal Americans" about their safety from the virus (often by stressing the "promiscuity" and "dangerous sex practices" of gay men), than with helping the thousands who were stricken and the hundreds of thousands about to be. The stakes, in other words, were nothing short of survival itself -- individually, communally, and politically. Silence, literally, meant death.

Many AIDS activists were members of the arts community that had been devastated by the epidemic. As public censorship accelerated and as social conservatives enacted punitive cultural legislation -- exemplified by the passage in 1988 of Section 28 of the British Local Government Act which prohibited state funding for cultural works "promoting homosexuality" or "the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship" -- a number of artists chose to put their cultural production in the service of an activist politics. They also challenged (less successfully) the prevailing myth that works of art should only address what is "transcendent" and "universal" -- that is, disengaged from immediate social struggle. What could be more universal, AIDS activists demanded, than survival itself? As Douglas Crimp put it, "We don't need to transcend the epidemic: we need to end it."

AIDS activism's imperative to historicize and critique the dominant sex-gender system that produces and polices (even as it is produced and policed by) homophobic categories of "normality" and "deviance," and to strategize effective political and cultural resistances to it, gave added impetus to the growth industry within the academy of what has come to be called "queer studies" -- a wide-ranging, energetic, cross-disciplinary critique of heteronormativity and its effects. Radical revisions of histories and theories of gender and sexuality by Michel Foucault, Jeffrey Weeks, Gayle Rubin, Monique Wittig, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Teresa De Lauretis and Judith Butler had an enormous impact on the work of younger artists by the mid 1980s, particularly those emerging from MFA programs in more progressive departments and art schools. Queer production is young: many of the contributors to *The Passionate Camera* are in their twenties and thirties.

Confronted with the imperative to act and show solidarity in the face of conservative attacks on artistic expression, the integrity of museum curatorship, the National Endowments, and academic freedom, historically conservative disciplines such as art history cautiously opened their conferences, symposia and publications to queer perspectives. An active gay and lesbian caucus organized within the College Art Association in 1990 to promote awareness of queer issues and activism among arts professionals. As I write this, the mail brings the latest

copy of the organization's academic quarterly, *Art Journal* -- a special theme issue on "the Gay and Lesbian Presence in Art." A decade ago, this could not have happened.²

A queer book, indeed

If the *Art Journal's* use of the phrase "gay and lesbian" has an old-fashioned ring to it, it is because that formula has, since the early 1990s, been largely superseded by the term "queer." Though they are often used interchangeably, they are not the same. The older terms, gay and lesbian, embody two polarities: one between the biological sexes, men and women; the other, between hetero and homosexuality as mutually exclusive modes of erotic object choice. The term "queer," on the other hand, connotes a radical assault on both of these naturalized sex-gender binaries. It embodies the notion of a society where, unlike our own, intimate and social relations among consenting adults can be sustained without being socially regulated either by genital anatomical differences and the power hierarchies ascribed to them, or by the public classification -- with real legal and material consequences -- of private acts into categories of "normality" and "deviance" in relation to their putative reproductive function. In other words, "queer" points to how all of us might live and love, regardless of how our bodies are marked. The short-lived radical action group Queer Nation branched off from ACT UP in 1990 to promote this utopian "national" consciousness and resist a compulsory, "totalizing" heterosexuality and its minoritizing discourses through street visibility actions and guerrilla media zaps.

While queer critiques ideally encompass the complicating of sexuality by gender, race, ethnicity, and class, nonetheless they often erase these distinctions and share with "gay and lesbian" a worldview that is implicitly white, affluent, and male -- the universal subject by default. Furthermore, misapplications of queer theory, particularly the writings of Butler and Marjorie Garber, have fostered a notion of gender as voluntarily (even playfully) chosen by a pre-existing autonomous subject, instead of that subject's being itself constituted,

named, and made intelligible through historically contingent categories such as gender, race, ethnicity, and class.

In the realm of popular culture, Madonna "justified her love" with both sexes, vogued her way to riches with her black gay male dancers, and produced her own polymorphous porn book, selling a consumable image of transgressive gender-fuck to millions of young people around the world. Nan Goldin and Andres Serrano turn comparable merchandising tricks in the art world; the former collecting lovers of both sexes, Tokyo hustlers, bohemian friends, club types, drug-addicted Bangkok prostitutes, and drag queens in her very personalized "family album," while perennial bad boy Serrano extravagantly poses kinky subjects in lyrical outdoor settings, upping the ante from his earlier Klan and morgue portraits. It's not that Madonna, Goldin, or Serrano are "bad" or "politically incorrect"; Madonna could be quite liberating to queer kids trying to negotiate survival in middle-class suburbia. But beyond striking a radical pose, these brands of slickly packaged "multi-sexualism" do little to challenge straight white power and its privileges, which is precisely why they are allowed to flourish.

Shadowing the pronounced shift to the right in the larger political arena, the radical anti-assimilationist critiques of the black, feminist and gay liberation movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s have given way to a civil libertarian "gay rights" agenda focused more on obtaining the right to conform to societal norms than on profoundly transforming them.³ The largest gay and lesbian lobbying groups such as the Human Rights Campaign Fund have concentrated their organizing efforts on removing the lingering barriers to full citizenship (for those who are already white and middle-class) such as openly serving in the military, winning legal recognition for same-sex unions, changing child custody and adoption laws, and securing the range of social and economic benefits now granted to straight married couples. It was partly their well-developed sense of entitlement to the services and benefits of the state and society that galvanized the fury and militancy of AIDS activism among middle-class white gay men; government officials and the media were treating them like "others," like pariahs who were expendable.

Those other Others (queers among them) including urban blacks, the working poor, and non-white immigrants have more compelling and urgent political battles to fight in a period of manufactured scarcity and shrinking access to adequate healthcare, education, and employment. This may partly account for the present scarcity, relative to works by middle-class whites, of writings and works by blacks, Latinos, Asians, Native Americans, and working-class queers of any race that foreground compulsory heterosexuality as a subject to be interrogated and troubled. When the dominant society has systematically deprived a community or racial group of valorized and dignified symbolic images of basic social identities and relations such as healthy young manhood and womanhood, and strong family life (and, in fact, has pathologized and demonized these groups' social formations and representations) their participation in queer struggle will necessarily look very different from that of those whose racial and class identities have been institutionalized as the gendered and sexualized ideal to which all must aspire.⁴ For example, it is precisely because blacks of both sexes were, and continue to be, violently and sexually objectified by whites that their relationship to sexual dissent is complicated both within and without their communities in ways hegemonic queer politics has mostly failed to account for. Afro-Caribbean author Makeda Silvera hints at these blind spots in her essay, "Man Royal and Sodomites":

The presence of an "out" Afro-Caribbean lesbian in our community is dealt with by suspicion and fear from both men and our heterosexual Black sisters. . . The one privilege within our group is heterosexual. . . There is the danger of being physically "disciplined" for speaking as a woman-identified-woman. And what of our white lesbian sisters and their community? . . . We remain outsiders in these groups, without images or political voices that echo our own. We know too clearly that, as non-white lesbians in this country, we are politically and socially at the very bottom of the heap. Denial of such differences robs us of our true visibility.⁵

Mindful of these histories of cultural erasure, *The Passionate Camera* remains strategically queer in its agendas. It is a collection of writings and works which, taken as a whole, trouble the power-ridden norms of gender and sexuality and their photographic representations across historical contexts, classes, and cultures within western industrial democracies. While the works and essays predominantly address same-sex expressions and desires, *The Passionate Camera* also includes (and seeks to make links among) works and writings about desires and expressions not so easily classified by modern or postmodern terminologies; about emphatically, even hysterically, "straight" practices in photography that can be read against the grain; about the complications and contradictions of production and reception across national, ethnic, and class lines; about practices that insist on the liberating power of reclaiming and recontextualizing sexist, classist, and racist images as objects of desire; and about the processes of censorship and state repression which strike at sex-dissident women across all classes and orientations, as much as they target gay men.

What Mrs. Grundy saw

This brings us back to the question of why *The Passionate Camera* is primarily concerned with photographs rather than with other representational media such as paintings, drawings, films, or videotapes. Certainly, my aim as editor was not to grant any unique aesthetic status to photographs as objects or even to claim any special preeminence for them as a mass communications medium; television outstripped photojournalism forty years ago in terms of market reach. Rather, I am interested in looking at photographs because they tend to get into trouble.

Photography, whether commercial, consumer, or artistic, has always had a vexed relationship to the depiction of sexually charged subjects, though what has been considered taboo has changed over time. Though he pursued his hobby in a pre-Freudian era when children (as long as they were white and middle class) were considered sexually innocent, author and photographic enthusiast Lewis Carroll betrayed his fear of social censure when he remarked of

the intimate portraits he made of friends' children: "I *wish* I dared dispense with *all* costume. Naked children are so perfectly pure and lovely; but Mrs. Grundy would be furious -- it would never do."⁶

Accounts of the recent battles among image-producers and anti-porn crusaders show that little has changed in 120 years, despite a rising standard of consumption and the loosening of social and sexual prohibitions this has brought. Mrs. Grundy is still busy. In recent years, widespread publicity around child abuse and child pornography has coalesced with toxic stereotypes of homosexuals as child-predators to produce a moral panic. Mapplethorpe's photographs of two young children of personal friends -- a naked boy frolicking on a chair and a toddler unself-consciously lifting the hem of her dress to reveal her pubis -- were branded by Helms and his allies as irrefutable "child obscenity." As Simon Watney points out,

The projection of adult anxieties onto the position of children is entirely congruent with the widespread attitude to family life which regards the home as a place of refuge, entirely beyond regulation, whilst at the same time acknowledging it as a site of fearful dangers, requiring extra-parental policing of many kinds, including the most elaborate legal manoeuvres to guarantee that no child is exposed to anything on television which might bring the slightest blush to adult cheeks.⁷

Indeed, as Carol Jacobsen notes in her essay in this volume, there have been alarming numbers of women photographers (and even several straight men) whose photographs and negatives have been seized by the police and their children's removal by the state threatened because they had photographed their children horsing around unclothed, then sought processing services from a commercial lab (which can be prosecuted for circulating child porn if it doesn't notify authorities of clients who make "suspicious" photographs). In one case, the photographer, an art professor, had discarded some work prints in a trashcan at her university where they were discovered by a janitor and turned over to police.⁸

These scandals, often given major play in the press and perpetrated in proximity to local elections, make county sheriffs and district attorneys look

good while they humiliate and punish "bad parents" and make other photographers, amateur and professional alike, think twice before photographing a naked body. Images and expressions produced by actual sex workers, needless to add, are the most threatening of all. Besieged on all sides -- by a vocal contingent of feminists who view sex work (and even normalized heterosexual relations) as coerced sexual slavery, and by religious leaders and conservative law enforcers who view any sexuality outside heterosexual marriage as a moral evil -- sex workers struggle against their criminalization and silencing by those who would "rescue" them from various forms of "false consciousness."

Photographs are easy targets for scandal because they are what semioticians term "open signs." They masquerade as compelling evidence of the real, while obscuring their status as (always already) mediated representations. As a result, they are assigned a credibility and persuasiveness that inspires belief. By contrast, paintings and drawings make their status as fabricated objects plain - - it's understood that they are constructions, not transparent chemical imprints of the visible. Unlike documentary films or TV programs, which can also be understood as direct transcriptions of reality, photographs are mostly viewed as isolated autonomous images, not as frames propelled in time by an edited narrative or sequence which mediates their reception in relatively controlled ways⁹ -- though this is no guarantee against misinterpretation, as Jacobsen's discussion of videotapes by and about sex workers indicates. And even if a photograph initially appears in a specific viewing context such as an advertisement, family photo album, or history book, it is easily extracted from that matrix and re-presented in other contexts for other purposes. Many a teenager's bedroom displays arrangements of images culled from sources as diverse as sports, rock, and fashion magazines to family snaps and greeting cards; all are reactivated as emblems of a particular individual's fantasies and pleasures.

Depending on the viewing context and a viewer's given psychic and social predispositions, any number of meanings can be made from any photograph, both consciously and unconsciously (as advertisers know so well). Meaning is

not sealed by the frame of the image. In photographic education and criticism, however, formalist methodologies dominated interpretative discourse until the early 1980s.¹⁰ Photographic signification was reduced to whatever could be extracted from a close reading of the image's structure -- its framing, vantage point, detail, and so on -- while modes and contexts of production and reception (e.g. Mrs. Grundy) were disregarded. The critical revolution produced by various postmodern and deconstructionist critiques -- from semiotics to psychoanalysis (via film theory) to postcolonial, feminist, and neo-Marxist critiques -- revolutionized photographic art practice and pedagogy even as it had already transformed literature and film studies by the late 1970s.

These new critiques would soon prove their mettle in theorizing, unmasking, and combating the misrepresentations and distorted public images (and the dominant social agendas they served) that suddenly engulfed gay men, lesbians, and others in the wake of AIDS. Trained art historians and critics such as Craig Owens, Douglas Crimp, Simon Watney, and Jan Zita Grover brought sophisticated visual analyses to bear on how mass media and art photographs constructed bigoted stereotypes of diseased homosexual bodies bearing the stigmata (lesions, emaciation) of their shame and depravity. After ACT UP/New York formed, artist affinity groups such as Gran Fury produced brilliant graphics for the various media "zaps" and street demos ACT UP organized.

Manufacturing a moral panic

The political objective of conservative politicians and religious leaders who launched the 1989 attack on separate NEA-funded exhibitions of photographs by Robert Mapplethorpe and Andres Serrano was to halt federal funding of non-profit cultural production, including independent scholarship and public television, as well as the arts. This was ideological warfare masquerading as deficit cutting, for the funds at stake were insignificant in the context of the entire federal budget. In fact, as business patrons and arts lobbyists tirelessly pointed out, the arts were a proven growth industry in terms of dollars and jobs generated in the service sector. Rather, conservatives accurately perceived that

the National Endowments for the Arts and Humanities were liberal Great Society programs invested in promoting limited forms of cultural democracy in the wake of violent racial unrest in the early 1960s. For all of its inherent bureaucratic diffidence, the NEA and its state arts agencies had fostered the growth of community-based art and art criticism during the 1970s and 80s, providing diverse, grassroots, and even oppositional voices with the modest means to survive and build an audience base outside the profit-driven arts and entertainment marketplaces.

Nurtured by NEA-funded alternative spaces such as Franklin Furnace and Artists Space in New York, Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (LACE), New Langton Arts and Camerawork in San Francisco, Randolph Street Gallery in Chicago, Nexus in Atlanta, the Visual Studies Workshop in Rochester, Mobius in Boston, Diverse Works in Houston, and Film In The Cities in Minneapolis-St. Paul, and publicized through (formerly) NEA-funded organs such as *Afterimage*, *Heresies*, *Artpaper*, *New Art Examiner*, *High Performance*, *Framework*, *Views*, *exposure*, *Nueva Luz*, *New Observations*, *Camerawork*, *Shift*, and *Art Papers*, images and works exploring new constructions and visions of sexuality and gender were produced, exhibited, and publicized, along with works by other socially and historically marginalized groups, including blacks, Asians, Native Americans, Latinos, sex workers, feminists, labor activists, and inner-city youth. It would be precisely these non-profit organizations that would bear the brunt of the funding cuts. It should be noted that cultural conservatives had tried to defund the Endowments eight years earlier, at the beginning of Ronald Reagan's first term in office, but had been beaten back by a coalition of business and arts lobbyists and their congressional allies. The only bones thrown to the Right at that time were the elimination of fellowships for art criticism and, tellingly, documentary photography projects. Both categories were attacked for having a "Marxist" bias.

Robert Mapplethorpe's posthumous retrospective, *The Perfect Moment*, which included a portfolio of small images of posed subjects from New York's gay male leather and s/m subcultures, was indeed "the perfect moment" for the Right to escalate a public attack on NEA-funded photography exhibits that had begun several months earlier when the Reverend Donald Wildmon's American

Family Association bombarded Congress with mass mailings about Andres Serrano's image, *Piss Christ*. The cultural establishment was caught flat-footed, arrogantly dismissing Representative Alphonse D'Amato and Jesse Helms as philistines who couldn't be taken seriously. When it became clear that the conservative Congressmen were scoring points in the media and among their constituents, however, the captains of culture fell back on a First Amendment "freedom of speech" defense, branding the Right as moralists and would-be censors. Conservatives countered that it wasn't a matter of censorship but of "liberal elites" using tax dollars to fund "obscene" art.

As feminist anthropologist Carole S. Vance pointed out, fundamentalist leaders and right-wing politicians had perfected an effective strategy at the symbolic level to both mobilize their own grassroots and simultaneously immobilize their opponents. By singling out individual photographs -- whether of a crucifix immersed in urine or of a leather man pissing in another man's mouth -- and isolating them from their contexts, conservatives could impute to these images whatever nefarious meanings and motives they wished, thereby framing the artists' supporters as defenders of "filth." Furthermore, by portraying art museums and the National Endowment as elitist purveyors of anti-Americanism and perversity, the Right fanned the durable flames of class resentment among their lower middle-class and working-class base whose livelihoods and families had been hardest hit by global economic changes.

It was at this juncture that cultural liberals made a crucial, but sadly inevitable, error by not challenging the Right's imputation of "obscenity" to works such as Mapplethorpe's. To be declared legally "obscene" in the U.S., a work must meet stringent requirements, including having an utter lack of "literary, artistic, political or scientific merit."¹¹ Intimidated by the mobilization of what appeared to be mass outrage and fearing for their remaining federal funding, politicians, museum directors, Endowment officials, the press, and other public-opinion leaders could not bring themselves to publicly defend Mapplethorpe's photographs -- nor the works of other queer and sex-radical artists who were under attack such as David Wojnarowicz, Karen Finley, Tim Miller, John Fleck, and Holly Hughes (and later, Barbara DeGenevieve and Mary

Alpern) -- as having "artistic merit" *precisely because* they artfully disrupted normalized assumptions about the "proper nature" of sexual desire.

Practically the only quarters from which these sorts of progressive arguments emanated were corners of the academy and alternative media cultures: videomakers, zines, AIDS activism, alternative rock and art spaces. Here, gay, lesbian, anti-censorship feminist, and other progressive voices vigorously protested the Right's regressive campaigns and created vibrant pockets of resistance. The Left -- already in considerable disarray -- was notable by its absence in mobilizing against homophobia and the censorship of sexual speech. A few respected voices such as Carole Vance managed to breach the public information barrier with a series of sharp insightful critiques of various overlapping anti-sex crusades in *Art in America*,¹² but hers was the exception. No such spokespersons appeared on talk radio, info-chat television or in the newspapers and weekly newsmagazines. In 1990, Congress passed legislation (later ruled unconstitutional) to force artists receiving public funds to sign "decency" oaths, and local acts of illegal situational censorship mushroomed. More insidiously, these scandals and their attendant publicity accelerated self-censoring among art professionals and institutions that backed off from controversial subjects rather than risk adverse publicity.

Resisting normality

It became clear, then, that bodies of criticism needed to be developed that would anchor and contextualize visual expressions of sexual dissent as an important democratic tradition with long subversive histories of their own, often linked to other narratives of social struggle. Feminists had already pioneered this terrain with their potent challenges to dominant social constructions of gender and the family, the latter institution privileged in the modern industrial state with socializing children into acceptable roles and traditionally maintaining a patriarchal sexual and economic order. As declining male wages after the 1960s necessitated two-earner families to maintain a middle-class living standard, the

old bargain of female economic dependency in exchange for male honor and protection became increasingly untenable.

New sexual and reproductive freedom brought by advanced birth control technologies, and increased educational and economic opportunities for middle-class women in the still-expanding economy of the 1960s, brought changes in the both the symbolic and material realms as women fought to wrest control of their images, their bodies, and their productive and reproductive labor in both public and private life. Feminist consciousness-raising, boycotts, and direct action had a marked impact on public representations of white middle-class women (the only women visible, aside from Aunt Jemima) in mainstream consumer advertising. No longer did they seem wholly obsessed with spotless glassware or with catching and keeping Prince Charming in their Maidenform bras.¹³

On the other hand, images of women's bodies have remained objects of intense and painful contention among feminists. The "porn wars" of the late 1970s and 1980s pitted those women who explored sexual subjects and eroticism as a necessary intervention in a territory historically reserved for male commerce and privilege against those who believed that any sexualized images of women's bodies, without exception, promoted misogyny and violence against women. For radical anti-porn feminists, anything that one woman found offensive in an image could be construed as contributing to the subordination of all women and would therefore be prosecutable under the kinds of legal reforms advocated by Catharine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin. As MacKinnon was willing to ally herself with cultural conservatives and the religious right in order to see such laws passed in 1984 by the city councils of Indianapolis and Minneapolis, the stakes in the porn wars were high, indeed.

The assumption of women's universal victimhood in relation to sexual images (and sexual desire itself) had galvanized a countervailing feminist activism by the early 1980s, spearheaded by progressive heterosexual feminists such as Ellen Willis, Dierdre English, and Paula Webster, who were also joined by Pat Califia and other urban lesbians who, along with gay men, were enjoying an renaissance of sexual visibility in the wake of the women's and gay liberation movements. In 1981, a San Francisco-based 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. The book unleashed a storm of protest by anti-porn feminists who saw in the pictures of bare-breasted, leather-clad women sporting whips, handcuffs and collars terrifying phantasms of male-identified violence. That same year, the Heresies Collective in New York published its famous Sex Issue as a protest against anti-porn organizing among feminists, and in 1982, over 800 women attended a scholarly conference exploring female sexuality at Barnard while Women Against Pornography led noisy and disruptive demonstrations outside.

The first independent commercial porn magazine by and for lesbians, *On Our Backs*, was founded by Debi Sundahl in 1984 and was emblematic of this militant defiance of cultural feminist "correctness." Even the magazine's name was an unsisterly jab at the scrupulously feminist *off our backs*. Fantasy images by photographers such as Honey Lee Cottrell and Morgan Gwenwald of seduction scenes, girl-gang sex, sculpted bodies, pierced labia and nipples, leather and lace, and eager fingers, fists, tongues and dildos filled each issue, accompanied by short erotic fiction pieces. Ever mindful of its grassroots mission, *On Our Backs* sponsored erotic photography contests for readers. Other lesbian porn magazines such as *Bad Attitude* and *Outrageous Women* followed, and lesbian porn videotape production flourished. Books such as *Caught Looking*, published by the Feminist Anti-Censorship Task Force (F.A.C.T.) in 1986, insisted on women's right to sexual and erotic agency, including both producing and consuming pornography. In its pages, *Caught Looking* presented a photographic smorgasbord of polysexuality: women and men arousing themselves and each other in every way imaginable, from all periods in photographed history. By showing such a wide-ranging selection of porn, *Caught Looking* sought both to demystify it and to demonstrate that it wasn't the instrumentally misogynistic product anti-porn feminists described. Rather, it catered to an array of nuanced fantasies and desires, utterly disrespectful of gender conventions.

Rejecting cultural feminism's desexualized ideal of "woman-identified" sisterhood, pro-sex dykes (as they often called themselves) promoted an assertively sexual stance, often looking for inspiration to gay male sexual

subcultures with their bars and sex clubs, eroticized codes of dress, explicit pornographies and inventive use of sex toys and props. In a decade of sexual backlash, this was a defiantly *political* agenda and melded well with AIDS activism's militant pro-sex message. With the founding of ACT UP in 1987, women activists appropriated countercultural emblems from both punk and working-class drag to signify their solidarity with the movement and its in-your-face militancy: black leather jackets, boots, tattoos, T-shirts with buttons and stickers, and bandannas. Side-by-side with gay men -- an historically unprecedented coalition -- AIDS-activist dykes advocated an explicit politics of "safe sex" and lots of it in the face of loud public abstinence campaigns, gay bashing, and sex-phobic scare-mongering in the press.

Among younger "gen-X dykes and fags" in their teens and early twenties, who shared no history with older feminist sex debates and showed little patience for them, a lively grassroots cultural production flourished in the form of zines: cheaply produced homemade magazines that had sprung from the "do-it-yourself" ethos of punk rock fanzines of the early 1980s. Zines were extremely small-scale and catered to queer subcultures including ethnic and racial groups, aficionados of specialized erotic tastes/ techniques, fans of particular cult/ camp icons from popular culture, religious survivors -- in short, anyone with access to a word processor, photocopier, and a dissatisfaction with what mainstream gay and lesbian periodicals such as *The Advocate*, *Genre*, *On Our Backs*, *Out*, *Poz*, *Ten Percent*, *Girlfriends*, and *Deneuve/Curve* had to offer. Names like *J.D.s*, *Cunt*, *Bimbox*, *Girljock*, *Bamboo Girl*, *Fierce Vagina*, *Anything That Moves*, *Whorezine*, *Jailhouse Turnout*, *Frighten the Horses*, and *Bitch Nation*, made explicit the anti-(gay/ feminist)-establishment sexual politics of zine culture. Zines exhibited all of the spunk, black humor and youthful brio of their Dada and Surrealist predecessors. Local alternative, gay and feminist bookstores carried the little publications and distribution networks formed. By 1991, the first international conference of queer zines, "Spew," was held at Randolph Street Gallery in Chicago and in 1996, New York's New Museum acknowledged the phenomenon in its interactive exhibition, "alt. youth. media."

Another manifestation of the new sexual militancy after the mid-1980s was lesbians' embracing of their own outlaw histories of early twentieth-century sexual inversion ("mannish" cross-dressing lesbians exemplified by Stephen in Radclyffe Hall's 1928 novel, *The Well of Loneliness*) and working-class "butch-femme" subcultures which had flourished in urban bars during the "dark ages" between World War 2 and Stonewall. Such gender-role identification had been scorned by many middle-class lesbian feminists as male-identified and anti-feminist. This condescending and judgmental attitude had effectively excluded and alienated an older generation of lesbians from the women's and gay liberation movements. As working-class femme writer Joan Nestle so eloquently lamented, feminists who rejected butches' and femmes' hard-won dignity (often at the end of a fist or policeman's club) had little to offer them.

The 1993 publication of *Stone Butch Blues*, Leslie Feinberg's fictionalized autobiography of a motorcycle-riding, working-class, "passing" pre-Stonewall butch, made the author an overnight celebrity on the lesbian culture circuit. The fantasy image of the young lean leather-jacketed, tattooed outlaw, having her strap-on fondled by her "tarted-up" girlfriend, was already being played out in the photographs of Gwenwald, Cottrell, Della Grace, and Jill Posener, among others. A dazzling selection of suit-and-tied, buzz-cut, booted, biker-jacketed, muscled, cigarette-dragging and dildo-wearing butches can be enjoyed in the recent publication, *Nothing But The Girl: The Blatant Lesbian Image* (1996), edited by Susie Bright and Posener.¹⁴ However, the "butch-femme" revival elided the social and psychological roots of those choices, including their class origins (i.e., the economic options available to working-class and poor women), and their significance in securing a longed-for coherence between a deeply felt "authentic" gender identity and its physical embodiment. For Leslie Feinberg, Doris Lunden, Marion Paull, and others, passing as a man in a society that equated gender with biology -- and allocated resources and privileges on that basis -- was not a playful semiotic subversion of an oppressive regulatory regime, but a necessary survival strategy within it.

Inevitably in consumer capitalism, when sub-cultural styles catch on among white middle-class youth, it means big business, especially if their

countercultural "look" can be skimmed off from its politics with a minimum of fuss. While the class dynamics of the rejection and the recuperation of "butch-femme" by middle-class dykes and self-identified bisexuals needs more discussion, the new sexual attitude had an enormous impact in the arena of fashion and retail in the early 1990s, particularly among young educated childless white women enjoying their unprecedented "post-feminist" economic mobility. In May 1993, *New York* magazine coined the term "lesbian chic" to capture the new visibility of lesbians among the political, entertainment, and sports elites in the U.S. Bill Clinton's first election produced a euphoria among queers who had campaigned hard for his victory and hoped for relief from conservative dominance in national government. After taking office in 1993, Clinton appointed Roberta Achtenberg, an open lesbian, as Assistant Secretary of Housing and Urban Development and in one of his first presidential actions, tried to lift the ban on gay men and lesbians openly serving in the military. Although this initiative was ultimately defeated by the Pentagon and its conservative allies in Congress, the attempt demonstrated the new access gay and lesbian lobbyists enjoyed during the first year of Clinton's administration.

In the professional sports and entertainment worlds, tennis champion Martina Navratilova and former Olympic diver Greg Louganis went public with their same-sex orientations and pop singer and soft-butch idol k. d. lang (who allowed herself to be "outed" and spoofed it in her already campy act) appeared on the August 1993 cover of *Vanity Fair* being "shaved" by teddy-clad super-model Cindy Crawford. That same year, the November issue of *Cosmopolitan*, that bible of "sex and the single girl," featured a lead article on "Being a Gay Woman in the 90's." Movies and television sit-coms began to cautiously incorporate sympathetic lesbian characters into their story lines while Madonna coyly advertised her switch-hitting ways. As Linda Dittmar's essay in this volume indicates, however, such mainstream appropriation of lesbian signs effectively "de-gay" them and transformed them into individual consumer choices any affluent woman, queer or straight, might make -- a hip "liberated" sisterhood for sale in the marketplace.¹⁵

Lacking alternative (not-for-profit) forms of visible association available to other groups such as kinship systems, churches, social-service clubs and educational institutions, community-building by middle-class metropolitan gay men and, to a lesser extent, lesbians had been largely mediated by consumption since Stonewall: clubs and bars, gyms, restaurants, periodicals, literature, phone-sex lines, tours and resorts, merchandise, and social services. If anti-censorship feminism and AIDS activism provided the motive force for many middle-class women's explorations and assertions of sexual agency in the late 1980s, middle-class white gay men were fighting to retain their two-decades-old gains in visibility and economic power within the gentrifying urban enclaves they had colonized for themselves in the Castro, the South End, Newtown, West Hollywood, and the West and East Villages -- a visibility and power that the AIDS epidemic and its social resulting backlash threatened to erode.

Inspired by the feminist and Black Power movements of the 1960s, a militant gay liberation movement had insisted upon public visibility by "coming out" and standing up to police predation and brutality, most notoriously in the 1969 Stonewall riots, the touchstone event of gay liberation. The post-Stonewall image of the proud, vigorously masculine gay white man in his late twenties -- typified by the clone look of the late 1970s and whose manifold sartorial symbols were catalogued by San Francisco photographer Hal Fischer in his small self-published book, *Gay Semiotics* (1977)¹⁶ -- affirmed male homosexuality as virile, legitimate, and healthy, as opposed to effeminate, deviant, and pathological. It was only in 1973, after all, that the American Psychiatric Association -- over the objections of numerous clinicians -- had removed homosexuality from its list of mental disorders.

Historically, male homosocial and sexual institutions and communities had evolved quite apart from those of women, reflecting the dichotomous spatial arrangements of gender in industrial societies: bourgeois women were defined in relation to (the unpaid labor of) marriage and family while men occupied the public sphere of wage labor outside the home. Men migrated to urban centers where there were jobs and where institutions existed that fostered "the life" -- a "queer" life lived parallel to and undetected by most heterosexuals.

Being forced to hide their desires from families, fellow workers, neighbors, and police did not mean gay men were invisible to each other. In his excellent study, *Gay New York*, historian George Chauncey charts the highly complex spatialities of urban homosexual male commerce and visibility (even across class and race lines) from the 1890s to the 1940s: the saloons, speakeasies, bars, cafeterias, drag balls, bathhouses, parks, and clubs.¹⁷ Here men could meet other men for companionship and sex and resist (to varying degrees) pressures of social conformity in the years before formal political organizing emerged. Chauncey's study reconstructs a multifaceted gay world that existed with a surprising amount of openness in New York until the 1930s when a cultural backlash spawned by the Depression produced stringent new laws aimed at suppressing public visibility of homosexuality in entertainment, employment, and social life. The postwar Red Scare with its publicized purges, witch-hunts, and linking of homosexuality to pathology and communism constructed the deep closets where most hid their queer lives between 1945 and 1970.

Photographs depicting or hinting at lived men's and women's transgressive desires in the years before Stonewall have become precious relics, treasured and woven into the narratives queers have constructed about their suppressed histories. From the anonymous tintypes, cartes-de-visite and snapshots found in thrift shops and flea markets, to the orientalist romps of Baron Wilhelm von Gloeden and campy "Christs" of F. Holland Day, to the "glamour generation" fashion photographers of the 1920s, to the beefcake "pin-ups" in physical culture magazines, images suggesting eroticized male-male relations from photography's beginnings to gay liberation have been lovingly excavated, published, and written about.

On the other hand, lesbian or "sapphic" photographs were almost exclusively produced by men as a staple fantasy of straight porn. As "normal women" were not believed (permitted) to be interested in sex outside of marriage and reproduction, no self-identified erotic image commerces by and for women developed until the 1970s, within the context of feminism. In her introduction to *Nothing But The Girl*, Susie Bright remarks that when she came out as a lesbian in 1974, the only book of contemporary erotic photographs of

women together she could find was David Hamilton's *Sisters*, a male fashion photographer's dewy images of long-haired blonds in romantic poses. "Lesbians might like to laugh or deny it now," Bright writes, "but this book graced many a 1970s dyke bedroom, often accompanied by the matching posters on the wall."¹⁸ The longing and labor to reconstruct a usable photographic past where women could look at and photograph each other with desire characterizes a number of the contributions by lesbians to *The Passionate Camera*.

The same holds true for non-white men and women whose desires and bodily image heritages are also marked and shaped by historical subordination. As among lesbians, the pornography debates opened a wedge between white and black gay men, the former defending porn with libertarian arguments privileging the individual consumer and his right to sexual pleasure while the latter's relationship to porn, as Kobena Mercer points out in his discussions of Mapplethorpe, is one of extreme ambivalence. As R. W. Connell has remarked: "To treat one's body as a private possession (the basis of the discourse of sexual rights within a capitalist society) is to refuse the issue of inequality among owners."¹⁹ Nonetheless, pornography was one of the few sites where eroticized photographs of black men's bodies were visible to other black men as well as to whites. These images frequently evoked an enduring repertoire of colonial-slavery stereotypes ranging from the primitive super-stud to the exotic feminized "house-boy," stereotypes used to justify white supremacy. Though fully aware of the oppressive dimensions of these staged representations, Mercer writes: "we are fascinated, we still want to look, even if we cannot find the images we want to see."²⁰ The active making of alternative meanings and exploiting the slippages of pornographic conventions to recode readings of black queer desire marks the works of a number of artists such as Lyle Ashton Harris, Glenn Ligon, Ajamu, Terence Facey, Danny Tisdale, Rotimi Fani-Kayode, and filmmakers such as Isaac Julien and the late Marlon Riggs.

While the greco-roman male nude enjoyed privileged status as the emblem of the European masculine ideal since the Renaissance, its "nakedness" (to invoke Sir Kenneth Clark's problematic distinction) was taboo -- nakedness being understood as eroticized and therefore sexually vulnerable. The erect penis

was understood in western culture to be the *echt* sign of penetrating male dominance over women and lesser males, yet it could only signify its governing power by remaining hidden. Its invisibility or, more accurately, its latent presence, signaled the sublimation of the passions by the intellect (indicating superior civilization) while simultaneously constructing a visible erotics of "others," scrupulously documented in criminal, medical, and pornographic archives. The fantasmatic projection of outsized genitals onto men and women of African descent is symptomatic. By the same token, priapic visibility -- or its tantalizing promise evident in telltale bulges -- made male desire "seeable" to homosexual men in a world that severely regulated and punished transgressions of male homosociality. Gay male pornography is nothing if not a visual encyclopedia of the aesthetics of penile and testicular presentation.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has argued that the homosocial bonds of male domination are constituted, in part, by the repudiation of erotic bonds among men. It was precisely the ability to project that eroticism onto others -- women, blacks, and homosexual men -- that guaranteed the masculine identity and superior status of (ostensibly heterosexual) white men. In the 1970s, when white feminist artists such as Judy Dater, Jackie Livingston, and Sylvia Sleigh sought to symbolically realign gender relations through representation, one of the most popular tactics was to make paintings and photographs of supine naked men -- their flaccid penises visibly cradled against their thighs. The effect was not exactly earth-shattering and did nothing to change real-world power relations, but the art-historical gesture was clear enough.

In his book, *Fully Exposed: The Male Nude in Photography*, Emmanuel Cooper recounts the critical reactions in the art press, ranging from disdain to outright hostility, which greeted the 1978 photographic exhibition, *The Male Nude*, at Marcuse Pfeifer Gallery in New York.²¹ Only six years later, hunky young white boys clad only in their form-fitting Calvins (and lovingly posed and lit by fashion photographer Bruce Weber) appealed overtly to gay male consumers in mainstream print and billboard advertising. Despite a full-fledged moral panic, fine-art monographs of Mapplethorpe, Weber, Duane Michaels, Arthur Tress, and Herb Ritts sell briskly in upscale bookstores and major

museum retrospectives are not uncommon. But it would be a mistake to read such class-restricted commerces as signs of real progress in social toleration. White middle-class queers may be welcomed by advertisers as a niche market, but they are still not regarded as full citizens in the eyes of the law.

As demonstrated in the highly politicized debates over gays in the military, "gay marriage" laws, and organized efforts to repeal local antidiscrimination statutes which include sexual orientation, changing a few class-specific images in the media is not the same as changing legalized bigotry and institutionalized ignorance. Only collective political action will accomplish this, action across a broad range of alliances and with a full consciousness of our own differences of privilege and struggle. As Rosemary Hennessy reminds us, "Redressing gay invisibility by promoting images of a seamlessly middle-class gay consumer or by inviting us to see queer identities only in terms of style, textuality, or performative play helps produce imaginary gay/queer subjects that keep invisible the divisions of wealth and labor that these images and knowledges depend on."²² Ensnared in our privileged sanctuaries of the academy and art studio where we can create contingent visual illusions of a fully habitable world, it's easy to forget how little has changed; how contained and "boxed in" our discourse is; how few lives we actually touch; how much fear of our "difference" and all that it represents still remains. While celebrating the vigorous growth of queer scholarship and photographic production over the past decade, I realize with a chill that *The Passionate Camera* could well become its memorial should the economic climate worsen and the repressive public tolerance we now labor under further dissipates.

An overview of the essays

The Passionate Camera is divided into three sections of essays, separated by two portfolio inserts of photographs. The essays represent a range of styles and genres of writing, from conventional scholarly contributions to more personalized forms, including memoir, short fiction, and self-interview. This heterogeneity reflects the necessary inventiveness of new queer cultural

production and criticism where the enforced silences, gaps, and elisions of history demand the overt deployment of a certain imaginative labor of reconstruction and reinvention on the part of artists and writers working with this material. But all were selected and organized to enhance the ways in which the individual contributions enrich and reflect each other and create a complex and rich critical framework for the photographic works featured in the portfolio sections. As I commissioned and assembled the essays, three distinct clusters emerged: roughly, those essays addressing various photographs from the (pre-Stonewall) past; practices and expressions from the more recent past and present; and finally, case studies where photographs played a key role in larger political and cultural debates around sexual dissent and queer visibility.

The first section of essays, "Trouble in the Archive," features provocative queer readings of photographs from diverse historical archives, including antique studio portraits, physical culture photographs, fashion and dance photography, art photographs, and personal pornography. In his essay, "Looking at a Photograph, Looking for a History," David Deitcher reads an anonymous mid-nineteenth-century studio portrait of two men, a brilliant demonstration of the kind of imaginative retrieval and historical reconstruction necessary for making such artifacts mean and creating a usable queer past. Michael Anton Budd's essay, "Every Man a Hero: Sculpting the Homoerotic in Physical Culture Photography," looks at photographs of male bodies from the late nineteenth-century physical culture movement, particularly the ways in which pose artists such as Eugen Sandow crossed class lines from the music-hall stage to physical culture entrepreneurship by constructing an eroticized "national" male body that was useful to a growing middle-class consumer economy in the age of imperialism.

In "Glamour and Desire in Homoerotic Photography, 1920--1945," Thomas Waugh discusses the "glamour generation" of studio photographers, *culturati*, dancers, and actors who formed tight social circles in New York and Europe during the interwar years, and who produced a new homoerotically-inflected visual pleasure in photography of the male body in fashion, advertising, entertainment, and the performing arts -- an eroticism suppressed when war

mobilization demanded a more "manly" iconography. In his carefully argued essay which follows, art historian James Smalls focuses on the photographs by one of the "glamour generation's" inner circle, Carl Van Vechten. Well known as a public patron of the Harlem Renaissance and portraitist of black celebrities, Van Vechten's privately posed studio images of interracial couples and black male nudes betray the complex and contradictory psychosexual character of the racial and sexual fetishization of black men's bodies among elite urban white gay men in the waning days of colonialism. Smalls shows how Van Vechten's photographs are sites of intersubjective regimes of power and desire that are fluid and multiple, producing spaces, as well, for black gay male and interracial erotic desire to manifest itself in a world where few such representations exist or are unilaterally dismissed as inherently racist and exploitative.

French Surrealism provided the fertile ground for the two photographers discussed in the essays by photographers Kaucyila Brooke and Mark Alice Durant. Brassai (Gyula Halasz) was emphatically "straight," prowling the sexual underground of nighttime Paris with his camera, while Pierre Molinier, who came to the Surrealist scene after the Second World War, was even too "bent" for Andre Breton who expelled him from Surrealist circles for the flagrance of his blasphemous perversity. In his essay, "Lost (and Found) in a Masquerade," Durant investigates the elaborate autoerotic world Molinier constructed in his provincial studio, populated by anatomically fantastic hybrids who gratified their creator's manifold desires for release from the limitations of the highly regulated bourgeois Catholic body. Brooke takes us on a more autobiographical journey, romancing Brassai's tuxedoed butches and coifed femmes across time and the complicated "roundabouts" of her own efforts to photograph and represent lesbian desire. Transgressing the voyeuristic distance which surrounds these photographs, Brooke reimagines Brassai's scenes through her own desiring lens, refusing Berenice Abbott's anguished admonition that such things must remain not only unspeakable, but unimaginable. Catherine Lord's short fiction piece, "Her Garden in Winter," echoes Deitcher's opening essay and provides a fitting closure to the section with its meditation on a found snapshot of one woman, photographed by another.

The second section, "Inverted Views and Dissident Desires," investigates more recent works and critical approaches to photographing outlaw desires since Stonewall. In 1971, photographer Larry Clark published his instant photo classic, *Tulsa*, followed in a little over a decade by *Teenage Lust*. Both books represented a quasi-autobiographical return to a highly sexed, white trash "bad boy" adolescence the photographer idealized. In his provocative reading of Clark's *oeuvre*, "Rough Boy Trade: Queer Desire/Straight Identity in Larry Clark's Photography," José Muñoz sees Clark as actively policing the border between *wanting to be* and *wanting to have*, but failing to stanch its homoerotic leakages. Even the presence of females in the photographed scenes fails to successfully contain the photographer's voyeuristic fascination with the straight boys he photographs and their homosocial "outlaw" rituals. It's not that Clark is a repressed homosexual, Muñoz reminds us, but that his "desiring lens" with which he photographs this "trade" subverts the seamless spectacle of heterosexuality the pictures promise to deliver.

David Wojnarowicz did not find his queer desires mirrored in post-Stonewall gay liberation when he set out in 1978 to make his first completed artwork, a photographic documentation of his fictitious "Rimbaud in New York." As Mysoon Rizk shows in her study of this little-known series, "Constructing Histories," this former hustler and talented street kid used his fabricated Rimbaud to create for himself a usable model for his budding identity as a queer artist-poet. In his essay, "Mark Morrisroe's Photographic Masquerade," David Joselit brings a more traditional formalist analysis to bear on the photographs of another kid hustler-turned-artist, Mark Morrisroe. Joselit traces Morrisroe's deployment of sandwiched negatives, disruptions of figure-ground relationships, and surface markings as analogous to the artist's efforts to "write a new life" for himself as a masquerader across gendered and corporeal boundaries, including the limits of his own impending mortality.

Liz Kotz steps back and takes a longer view of Morrisroe's generation of art photographers, clustered around Nan Goldin, who have been promoted in a number of recent exhibitions and catalogues as practitioners of a new kind of "intimate" documentary photography. The images are seen as mirroring the

artist's autobiography rather than neutrally presenting a selection of visual facts as in canonical modernist documentary. Besides Morrisroe and Goldin, this group includes out gay photographers Jack Pierson, David Armstrong, and Philip-Lorca diCorcia. In her essay, "Aesthetics of 'Intimacy,'" Kotz focuses on the works of Morrisroe, Goldin, Pierson, and German photographer Wolfgang Tillmans, analyzing what happens to that promised moment of private disclosure when these photographs are transformed into ubiquitous public commodities, photographic *punctums* available wholesale. Furthermore, what are the implications for queer politics of the largely uncritical embrace of this kind of work and its constructed discourse of the private?

In "Post-Negritude Reappropriation and the Black Male Nude," film scholar Mark A. Reid discusses the work of another photographer tragically taken by AIDS: Nigerian-born, U.S.-educated, and London-based Rotimi Fani-Kayode. Rotimi's upbringing as heir to a Yoruba dynasty, and the acknowledgment of his own queer desires in exile, presented seemingly irreconcilable choices. As Reid shows, however, Rotimi refused these dichotomous "either-ors," and created a vibrant living embodiment (in both senses) of his hybrid sexual and diasporic identity as a post-independence Afro-British queer.

The digitized multiple self-portraits of Yasumasa Morimura, a Japanese artist whose works have received significant exposure in the West, present another kind of post-imperialist hybrid queer identity, at once post-Japanese and post-European. Morimura appropriates his image referents from contexts as canonical as kabuki theater and western art history to the latest international icons of popular entertainment and fashion. As Paul Franklin elucidates in his essay, "Orienting the Asian Male Body in the Photography of Yasumasa Morimura," beyond mere pomo camping and dragging up for the camera, Morimura puts his fingers (quite literally) on the dark underside of white, Asian, and queer sexism and racism. As an out and proud "sissy boy" himself, Franklin identifies in his essay with Morimura's swishy strategies of seduction and refusal.

In their edited conversation "Black Widow," independent artists and brothers Lyle Ashton Harris and Thomas Allen Harris investigate the complex

autobiographical and political contexts that informed their collaborative photographic projects, *Brotherhood*, *Crossroads*, *Etcetera* and *Orisha Studies*. Both projects, as well as their independent works, follow in the tradition of African American art and literature that has been a process of giving shape to public selves that "protest the degradation of their ethnic group by the multiple forms of American racism." Drawing from both Black Power iconography and Yoruba mythology in these works, the Harris brothers create complex allegories invoking public and private desires, including the deeply taboo desires of siblings for each other.

Theater critic Alisa Solomon gives a complex and politically savvy reading of the iconography of lesbian "butch" in her essay, "Not Just a Passing Fancy: Notes on Butch." With humor and acuity, Solomon pokes holes in notions of gender-play as value-free (e.g. "lesbian chic") and grounds the power of the butch image in its disruptive and transgressive effects in terms of its intended audience. Butches address their butchness to women, thereby exposing the artifice of masculinity (and male power) itself. It is that repeated taunt, "Hey, whadda you? A boy or a girl?" that signals the destabilization of gender categories; a destabilization which provokes the severest violence by those desperate to maintain them and the promise of power they guarantee.

In her photo-essay which follows, "Looking-class Heroes: Dykes on Bikes Cruising Calendar Girls," artist Elizabeth Stephens recuperates the leather-clad "biker dyke" image for an erotic fantasy life rooted in her own white rural girlhood. Using her camera, she evokes the world of "Tool Girls" -- the scantily clad pin-up models who adorned the tool sales calendars in her father's machine shop and whose images were denied to her as objects of sexual fantasy by the homosocial rules of the male blue-collar workplace. In revenge, Stephens claims for herself the envied machismo of the outlaw Harley biker who never rides the "bitch pad," cruising the streets and making pictures of her perfect calendar girl. Closing the section, Catherine Lord revisits another remembered site of transgressive butchness in her short story, "Looking for My Museum." Reinvoking a time when feminism erased working-class bar culture from the

lesbian map, Lord gives us a loving portrait of Marion, the last stone butch at the Riv.

The third section, "Calculated Exposures in Risky Conditions," goes beyond questions of individual or sub-cultural expressive art practice to analyze the photographic production of sexual difference (or sameness) within the larger socio-economic contexts of consumer capitalism, right-wing and feminist anti-pornography campaigns, efforts to overturn anti-discrimination laws, and the demise of militant AIDS action by the mid-1990s. It is easy to mistake the profusion of queer image-making and theorizing such as that exhibited in the previous selections of essays and photographs for real progress in social transformation. This last group of essays is intended as a corrective to that perception. In fact, it becomes painfully clear that the new "queer visibility" we are celebrating has been achieved largely for the minority of queers already privileged by society and at the expense of the majority who are not. It has also come at the price of uncoupling queer politics from other struggles for social and economic justice as has been noted by more than a few critics on the left who are discomfited by the paradox of the emergence of queer media visibility precisely at the moment of conservatism's triumphant dismantling of the national welfare state and public political support for policies aimed at redressing discrimination based on race and sex.

Linda Dittmar explores this contradictory economy of queer visibility for lesbians in her essay "The Straight Goods: Lesbian Chic and Identity Capital on a Not-So-Queer Planet." Tracing the publicized phenomenon of "lesbian chic" in mainstream straight media and fashion photography, Dittmar demonstrates how fashion's photographic repackaging of conventional signifiers of strength and assertiveness in a man's world subtly function to contain the threat of the new prominence of high-powered professional white women, including lesbians, in the corporate, political, and entertainment worlds by the early 1990s. Images showing suave sophisticates sporting short haircuts, pinstripes, neckties, and cufflinks erase not only most real-life lesbians who are not affluent and assimilated into corporate upward mobility, but lesbians' countercultural histories and political agency as well. Even lesbian-targeted magazines such as

Curve and *Girlfriends*, while eschewing the corporate chic of mainstream "gay window" fashion, suture personal happiness to more modest consumption in a rosy world of whiteness (or light tan) that needs no changing.

In "Rock Hudson's Body," Richard Meyer looks at the movie and fanzine construction of the screen idol's starbody in publicity photos from the 1940s and 50s. Hudson's body was imaged as large to overflowing, yet gentle, playful, and open to a heterosexual female gaze in ways that most male romantic leads never allowed. Hudson's stardom was established on his roles in women's melodramas where he played the wholesome "hygienic" and domesticated counterpart to the untamed wildness and machismo of James Dean, Marlon Brando, and John Wayne. Hudson's homosexuality became public knowledge in 1985 due to his illness from AIDS and photos of the ailing star appeared in the press alongside his old movie stills. Such photographic "evidence" was intended by the press to map the physical signs of disease onto the "corrupting" effects of homosexuality itself. But Hudson's outing as a homosexual also exposed the actor's consummate skill at publicly performing heterosexual masculinity in his movie roles and, in the process, unmasked masculinity itself as an act -- a revelation for which the dying Hudson was reviled by the media.

Carol Jacobsen's contribution, "Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Sex Workers?" charts the censorship by anti-porn feminists of an exhibition Jacobsen curated of photographic and video works addressing sex work from the perspectives of those who do it, rather than from those who often speak for them from a patronizing distance. Jacobsen gives attention to how attacks on images by and about sex workers -- the "lowest of the low" in public sexual discourse -- are linked to attacks on images by feminist and queer artists generally. To choose to ignore, because of class privilege, the active suppression of speech by sex workers is to cooperate with those who would censor all sexual speech that doesn't conform to narrowly "correct" categories.

Erica Rand and Mary Patten, veterans of numerous activist campaigns around women's issues, AIDS organizing, and anti-discrimination law repeal efforts, recount the painful lessons learned in the field about how images of queers and queer activism are displaced, erased, and disappeared, not only by a

homophobic culture, but even by gays themselves and their sympathizers who are afraid of alienating mainstream society. Rand's in-depth discussion in her essay, "The Passionate Activist and the Political Camera," of conflicts over images -- first among dyke activists and then between such groups and community organizers who took charge of media publicity during anti-repeal campaigns in Maine -- shows how perceived divisions between local activists and outsiders (including academics), queers and straight working-class voters, grassroots organizers and "political professionals," impeded coalition-building and left no foundation for further organizing for progressive change, once the election was over. Leaders of the "Maine Won't Discriminate" campaign ran print and TV ads that kept visually identifiable queers out of sight, rather than directly confronting the distorted stereotypes of gays used in right-wing propaganda such as the notorious videotape, *The Gay Agenda*. Rand points out that such "de-gaying" strategies backfire -- as they did in Lewiston's local referendum -- because they do nothing to counter the negative images of queers already ingrained in public consciousness. Rand reflects on the limitations of grand media strategies altogether in producing real political change, arguing instead for increased sensitivity by organizers to local conditions and the development of situational strategies to address them.

In "The Thrill is Gone," a moving "post-mortem" on her years on the frontlines of ACT UP/Chicago and its women's caucus, Mary Patten re-reads photographs produced in the context of militant AIDS activism, discussing the effectiveness of such image interventions and their subsequent migrations from context to context: from street demos to campaigns to free political prisoners; from documents of angry blood-stained clashes with police to magazine ads. Recognizing the futility of claiming fixed ownership of photographic images and their meanings, Patten sees their appropriations as symptomatic of the ways in which capitalism coopts social revolution and turns it into style. In her concluding reflections on the political costs of queer visibility, Patten reminds us that progressive social activism doesn't stop when the cameras are switched off.

In her third short story, "The Family Jewels," which closes this final section, Catherine Lord evokes the isolation of growing up in a family which

kept photographs of itself, photographs which mirrored back private secrets and public lies and kept her narrator from recognizing, and recognizing herself in, some painfully longed-for truths.

The photographs

Two color portfolio sections, along with several independent and serial works interspersed among the essays, feature works by 38 artists, mostly from the U.S., along with the United Kingdom (4), Canada (3), Belgium (1), and Japan (1). All of the works were produced between 1988 and 1996. This selection was made after three years of active soliciting for slides and information through exhibitions, photography and art publications, institutional and personal networks, as well as by searching through magazines, newsletters, exhibition announcements, and conference proceedings. *The Passionate Camera's* bias toward the alternative (non-profit) U.S. queer art/media scene reflects my own context of practice; this is the milieu I know and whose political struggles and critical debates I actively engage as an artist, teacher, and critic. Despite the predictable predominance of works from urban California and New York where there are the largest queer communities, I received numerous queries and slides from geographically dispersed locales in the U.S., Canada, and United Kingdom, signifying the large diffusion of interest in queer critiques and practices.

Although personal biases inform any editorial project -- how can they not? -- I placed a priority on finding works by independent visual artists who identified as such in relation to the marketplace, as opposed to professional fashion and advertising photographers, free-lance photojournalists, professional pornographers, or documentarians of the sexual underground and its subcultures. I looked for works which put visual markers of sexual desire -- including erotic fantasies, bodies and genders -- under radical interrogation from the inside. I expressly avoided the quasi-documentary strategies typically seen in European publications from B. Taschen and Editions Stemmle (widely available in both queer and mainstream bookstores) which put on voyeuristic display their subjects' exoticism or abject sexual freakiness. I sought works which

showed a consciousness of their (and their makers') compound positionings within a complex productive web of embodied material and social conditions such as racial and ethnic difference, national heritage, and economic class, as well as current struggles around contested signs of health and illness, normality and deviance, personal desire and its organized regulation. Finally, I selected works which took visual pleasure -- that "radical kinaesthetic jolt" -- seriously as part of their strategic program.

Regrettably, space and production constraints were daunting and many deserving works could not be included. I felt the loss particularly keenly in relation to conceptual and multimedia works which use photographs in an expanded viewing context, works by important queer practitioners such as Nancy Davenport, Doug Ischar, Silvia Malagrino, Shani Mootoo, Connie Samaras, Susan Stewart, and Michael Yamamoto. I opted for coverage over depth, trying to represent a range of page-friendly and provocative works by many artists rather than presenting extended bodies of works by a few. Some of the artists agreed to extract photographic fragments from larger contexts, but this was not a sacrifice everyone was willing, or able, to make. Other artists were unwilling to show earlier works, or were not sufficiently satisfied with works in progress to release them for publication. While a number of these photographs have achieved recognition in the art marketplace, many others are too idiosyncratic, complicated, or content-loaded to pass themselves off as "universal human expressions." On the other hand, this is not a book that cultural conservatives will easily ignore, for not only does it bring together a critical mass of contemporary sex-radical images, but it surrounds them with a serious and articulate body of writing that anchors them, illuminates them, and grants them the legitimating historical frameworks they deserve.

Notes

1. The terms were often used interchangeably, though "obscenity" is a legal term, requiring the meeting of exceedingly stringent criteria (see note 11 below), while "pornography" is an entirely subjective "hot-button" term, more useful for hurling against images one fears or finds disgusting than for explaining anything about what those images depict, for whom they were

intended, or how they might be interpreted. As used in this essay, the term "pornography" will denote (non-judgmentally) images and materials produced primarily for the purpose of sexual arousal.

2. This assimilation of radical movements of sexual resistance into the halls of academe has not been greeted with universal joy. Many see it as the first step toward cooptation and containment by the ruling political center as situational "street politics" are transformed (deadened) into "discourse" with its meta-theories, specializations, and abstractions. See Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, "What Does Queer Theory Teach Us about X?" PMLA, May 1995, p. 343. In a closely argued and lucid essay, Rosemary Hennessy pinpoints the ways in which queer visibility has been a mixed success for pushing forward a radical social critique. See her "Queer Visibility in Commodity Culture," Cultural Critique, 29, Winter 1994-95, pp. 31--76.

3. See Barbara Smith, "Where's the Revolution?" The Nation, July 5, 1993, pp. 12--16, for an impassioned critique of the 1990s lesbian and gay movement's ideological and practical abandonment of its earlier alliances with feminist, left, and black progressives in favor of pursuing an "assimilationist 'civil rights' agenda". . . "despite the fact that the majority of 'queers' are people of color, female or working class."

4. 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 see Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, eds., This Bridged Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color, New York, Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1981, 1983.

5. Makeda 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, p. 36--43.

6. Helmut Gernsheim, Lewis Carroll, Photographer, New York, Dover, 1969, p. 21.

7. Simon Watney, Policing Desire: Pornography, AIDS and the Media, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1987, p. 66.

8. See Carol Jacobsen's reference to the Marilyn Zimmerman case (and others), in her essay in this volume.

9. See Laura Mulvey, "Magnificent Obsession," Parachute, March/April/May 1986, p. 7, for a useful capsule comparison of the interpretive operations of cinema and photography.

10. See Jan Zita Grover, "The Subject of Photography in the American Academy," Screen, Volume 27, Number 5, September--October 1986, pp. 38--48.

11. "According to what has come to be known as the 'three prongs' of the Miller [vs. California] standard, work can be found obscene only when it meets all three of the following criteria stated in the ruling: 1) the average person, applying contemporary community standards, would find that the work, taken as a whole, appeals to prurient interest; 2) the work depicts or describes, in a patently offensive way, sexual conduct specified by statute, and 3) the work, taken as a whole, lacks serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value." From Carole S. Vance, "Misunderstanding Obscenity," Art in America, May 1991.

12. See "The War on Culture," Art in America, September 1989; "Misunderstanding Obscenity," op. cit., and "Feminist Fundamentalism -- Women Against Images," Art in America, September 1993.

13. This is not to imply that public images of bourgeois white women are no longer problematic. Far from it, as ongoing critiques of the fashion, film/TV, advertising, entertainment, cosmetics and diet industries indicate. A woman still can't be too blond, affluent, young, or thin.

14. Susie Bright and Jill Posener, eds., Nothing But The Girl: The Blatant Lesbian Image, New York, Freedom Editions, and London, Wellington House, 1996. Also see Samois, ed., Coming to Power: Writings and Graphics on Lesbian S/M, Boston, Alyson Publications, 1982; Gon Buurman, Poseuses, Vrouwenportretten/Portraits of Women, Amsterdam, Schorer Foundation, the Gay and Lesbian Advisory Organization in Amsterdam, 1987; Della Grace, Love Bites, London, GMP, 1991; and Lily Burana, Roxxie and Linnea Due, eds., Dagger: On Butch Women, Pittsburgh and San Francisco, Cleis Press, 1994.

15. See Danae Clark, "Commodity Lesbianism," in The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader, op. cit., p. 186.

16. Hal Fischer, Gay Semiotics: A Photographic Study of Visual Coding Among Homosexual Men, Hal Fischer, 1977.

17. George Chauncey, Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890--1940, New York, Basic Books, 1994.
18. Susie Bright and Jill Posener, op. cit., p. 6. As Bright also acknowledges later in the book, "In the beginning, there was Tee. . ." The sensual art photographs of Tee A. Corinne were first published around this time (1974), and Corinne's images, like Barbara Hammer's independent films, were crucial pioneering works of lesbian erotic expression in a West Coast countercultural feminist context. Corinne's traveling slide shows of lesbian imageries from history and the present educated a whole generation of dykes in the 1970s and 80s, and her solarized photograph of two nude lesbians cradled in a passionate embrace, "Sinister Wisdom," quickly replaced David Hamilton's unconvincing version on those bedroom walls.
19. R.W. Connell, "Democracies of pleasure: thoughts on the goals of radical sexual politics," in Linda Nicholson and Steven Seidman, eds., Social Postmodernism: Beyond Identity Politics, Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 392.
20. Kobena Mercer and Isaac Julien, "True Confessions," in Thelma Golden, ed., Black Male: Representations of Masculinity in Contemporary Art, New York, The Whitney Museum of American Art, 1994, p. 194.
21. Emmanuel Cooper, Fully Exposed: The male nude in photography, London, Routledge, 1995, p. 183.
22. Rosemary Hennessy, op. cit., p. 69