

SAPPHO SPEAKS

The Lesbian and Gay Quarterly Journal at UCSD

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Gay Men in the Movies:

Where Have We Been?

by Thom Whitler

The portrayal of gay men in movies has changed over the last decade and a half: from the tortured self-hating Michael in *Boys in the Band*, to Luis Molina in *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, who develops from a seemingly shallow pleasure-seeker into a man with greater dignity and self-respect. There have been others and each of them has drawn varied responses from the American public. The portrayals of gay men in these movies have affected America's attitudes toward homosexual men as well as reflected how Americans view homosexuals.

Gay men have appeared in American cinema since the industry began in the 1920s. At first, they appeared in very minor roles and were never referred to as homosexuals, but slipped in as stereotyped jokes. The Motion Picture Production Code forbade homosexual-

ity per se; even the use of the word, reflecting the view of most Americans, that it rarely existed. It was something never discussed, not in private and especially not in public.

Through the Thirties, Forties and Fifties, gay men continued to show up in the movies, although they were still not referred to as gay. They were usually secretaries or some other stereotypical gay male role. They were always sissies and were always put down by the heterosexual male lead.

However, during the Fifties, gay male characters started getting bigger roles. But they were always portrayed as decadent men, full of evil, willing to entrap any young boy, or as sissies and queens, never anywhere in between. If you came across a gay character at this time, it was a pretty good bet that he would die a violent death by the end of the movie, usually by his own hand, reinforcing the idea that all homosexuals are sick and unhappy.

In 1961, the Motion Picture Production Code was amended. It acknowledged the existence of gay men. They could be referred to as such in films, giving them a label and reinforcing stereotypes. It was a small victory to admit we exist, but Americans continued to see homosexuals as outcasts. Most had never met a gay man and they figured that all homosexuals fit into one of two stereotypes: the weak, effeminate sissy or the decadent entraper. The "solution" to homosexuality continued to be suicide.

In the late Sixties, gays started coming out into the public eye in large numbers. In 1967, Mike Wallace interviewed homosexuals on *CBS Presents: The Homosexuals*. All of the people interviewed were sitting behind potted plants so the leaves would obscure their faces. Soon, the influence of the Motion Picture Association of America and the Catholic Office for Motion Pictures, *continued on page 3*

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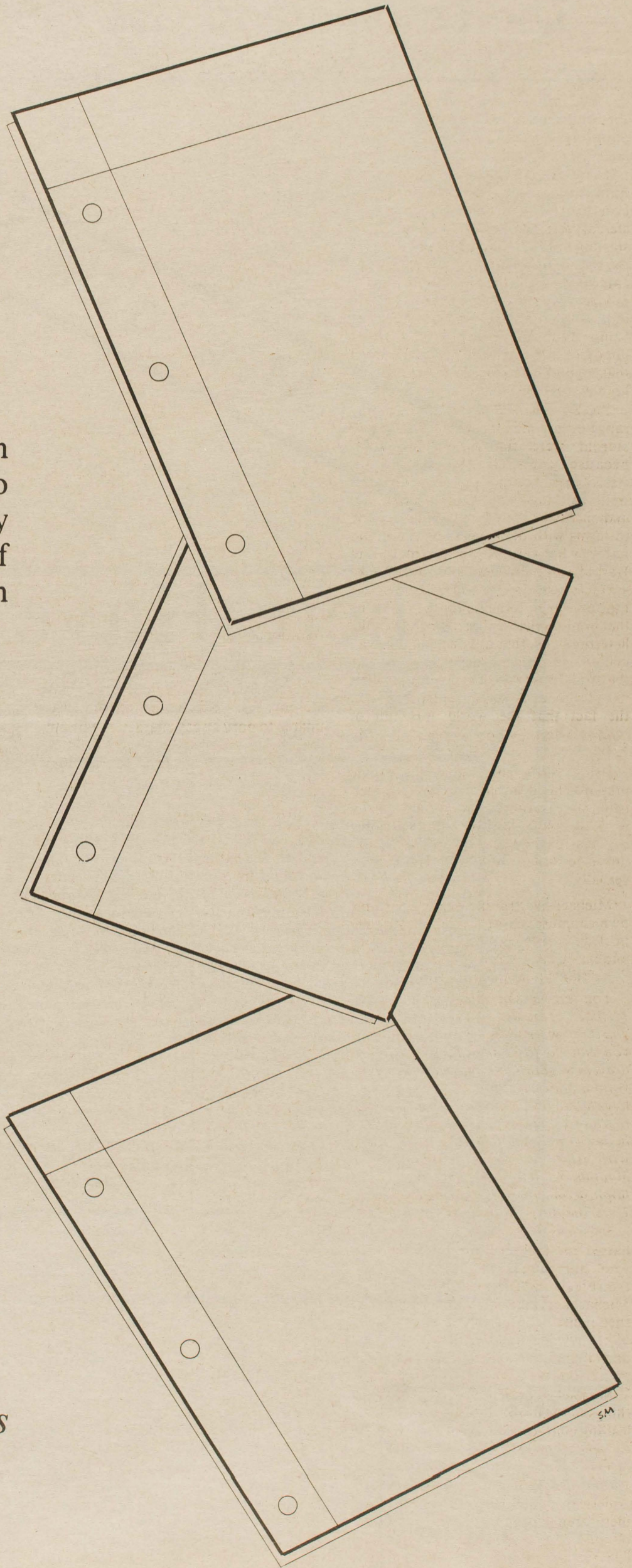
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Gay Men in Movies

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which released a list of the movies Catholics could and could not see, declined heavily. In 1968, the Motion Picture Production Code was abolished altogether and replaced with the rating system in use today.

There was a growing diversity of new homosexual characters onscreen, constantly working against old stereotypes. The explosion of gay films, starting in 1961, culminated in 1970 with the release of *The Boys in the Band*. This coincided with the explosion of the modern gay movement in America. In motion pictures, gay men were either being "cured," killed, or rendered impotent. Many Americans believed that a good heterosexual lay could cure homosexuality.

The Boys in the Band portrayed a wide range of gay men, of whom Emory and Harold were the easiest to accept because they fit the traditional stereotypes. Another character, Alan, as well as most of the heterosexual audience, was scared and couldn't come to terms with the gayness of Hank and Larry, who were as gay as Emory and Harold, but looked and acted like average heterosexual men. The movie thus presented to many for the first time that homosexuals could look and act like heterosexuals, that anyone could be gay and no one could tell just by looking. For the straight world, this meant that their moral standards were in jeopardy due to the fact that the world was full of homosexuals who weren't readily visible.

Using Hank and Larry, the movie presents the idea that there are gay men who are staunch supporters of a working, long-lasting, monogamous, gay relationship. They express affection for each other, physically as well as verbally.

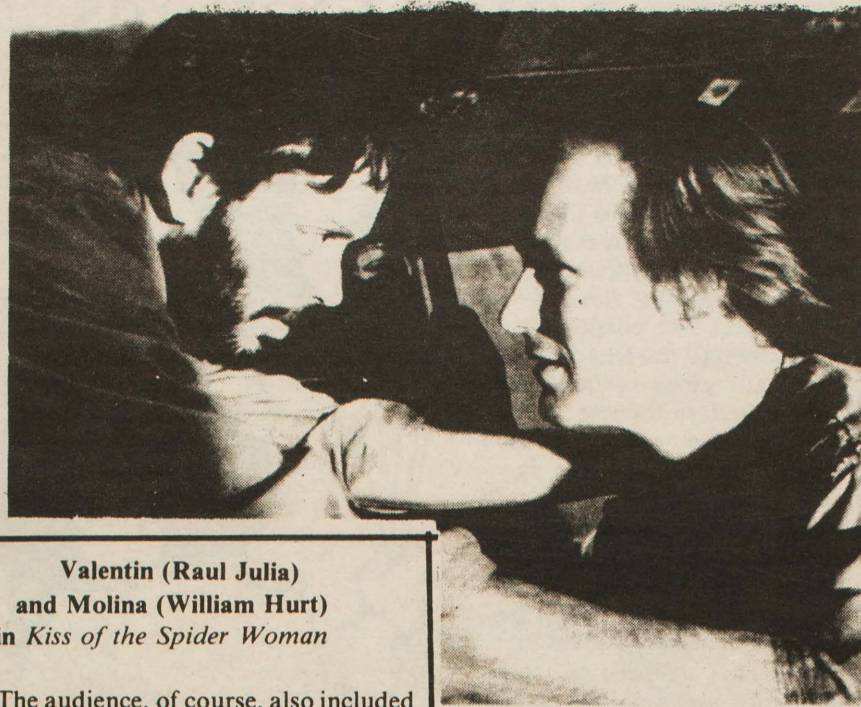
Michael has trouble dealing with his own homosexuality which accurately portrays internally-directed homophobia.

As Harold eloquently expresses it:

You are a sad and pathetic man, Michael. You are a homosexual, and you don't want to be, but there's nothing you can do to change it. Not all your prayers to your God. Not all the analysis your money can buy in the years you have left to live. You may one day be able to know a heterosexual life. If you want it desperately enough. If you pursue it with the fervor with which you annihilate. But you will always be homosexual as well, Michael. Always. Until the day you die.

This captures the essence of self-hatred for the generations of gay men who are taught to blame all their troubles on their homosexuality. Michael's crying and old-movie fantasies shed light on the falsehoods and illusions of Hollywood dreams, the dreams that had taught there were no homosexuals in polite society.

Michael represents all the negative things in the movie and "because he's the leading character it was his message that a very square America wanted to receive." (Vito Russo, *The Celluloid Closet*; p.177) The message this square American public received was that gay men aren't proud of who they are because they're ashamed of being gay. The Catholic Film Newsletter was part of this audience, saying, "the film comments with wit and passion on the desolation and waste which chill this way of life... with all its anxiety, bitterness, depression and solitude." (ibid,p.177)



Valentin (Raul Julia)
and Molina (William Hurt)
in *Kiss of the Spider Woman*

The audience, of course, also included gay males, "who had grown up thinking that they were the only homosexuals in the world. The film explored passing and not being able to pass, loving and not being able to love, and above all else, surviving in a world that denied one's existence." (ibid,p.177)

Quite a few of the gay men in the audience saw this film as a rejection of previous negative stereotypes. Through the Seventies, Hollywood stuck to its traditional gay stereotypes, although plays, books, magazines, and even television presented characters that were more human and challenged gay stereotypes. American cinema was unable to portray gay characters without their being sex-obsessed or sex-defined. The self-hatred of gays in the film industry was as much at fault as the ignorance of the general public, for Hollywood awaited "permission" from the American public before they would portray gays as a part of life.

While all of this was going on in America, Europeans were way ahead of Hollywood. In European cinema, "sexual acts did not form the framework in which the gay character existed. Affection entered the picture." (ibid,p.146) Yet most gays in British movies faced heavy moral and/or social penalties, which at times included the obligatory suicide.

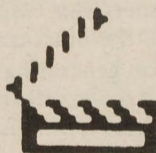
In 1975, the British exported a film to America that was destined to become a cult classic among both gays and heterosexuals. This film is *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. In the movie, Tim Curry plays Frank N Furter, a Transvestite from Transsexual Transylvania. He is androgynous, dressed in heels, fishnet stockings, corset and make-up. He creates a male monster for his sexual pleasure, Rocky. Rocky wears only a skimpy, gold bikini on a gorgeous frame. Frankie ends up having sex with Brad while Rocky has sex with Janet, Brad's fiance.

Brad and Janet symbolize the average couple. The movie satirizes the age-old fear with which straight society encounters "deviant" sexuality. It laughs at the stereotypes of gay males. It is very trappy and was considered one of the "gayest" films made at the time.

The audience for this movie consists mainly of young people of high school and college age. Thousands have seen it, some hundreds of times. They laugh at Brad and Janet as being nerds. Frankie is seen as sexy by heterosexual women and cool by heterosexual men. Many homophobic people go to the movie and laugh at Brad and Janet without realizing the movie is laughing at them. Some even think the movie is making fun of gays.

It seems that many young people flock to see this movie, because to their parents it represents what will happen if our sexual "standards" are relaxed, without realizing that in order for this movie to be so popular, even after eleven years, our sexual "standards" must already be relaxed.

A few years later, in 1979, France sent us *La Cage Aux Folles*. It was the most popular movie shown in America that dealt with homosexuality as a common, everyday thing. It has been on cable for quite a while, the stage show has returned to Broadway and has been on national tour, and there have been two sequels so far.



The movie deals with a young man, raised by gay male parents, one a drag queen, who is getting married. The father and mother of the bride, are very, very square. The drag queen is forced to play the boy's mother in order to entertain the bride's parents and to make the son look suitable for marriage. This leads to hilarious situation after hilarious situation. The movie said to gay men that they could lead successful lives, have long-term relationships, and even raise a child without pretense and without having to give up any of their gayness. Through this film Americans have brought homosexuality into their homes and shown it to their children. People are seeing that gays are people, too, and they lead lives just like everyone else.

In late 1984, the American public was introduced to a gay man who threatened their cryptic ideas of what homosexuals are and what they do. He was Harvey Milk and he is the subject of the documentary, *The Times of Harvey Milk*.

In 1981, Harvey Milk was gunned down, along with San Francisco Mayor George Moscone, by Dan White. White, a member of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors along with Milk, was a self-proclaimed "old-fashioned" politician, wanting to return to the values of the past. For him this meant the family, church, and no homosexuality. He was a major opponent of Milk and Moscone. When White was caught, the entire community demanded justice. Milk was mourned heavily by all.

The documentary was put together to honor a courageous man and to teach others what he had been fighting so hard for. He was a man who proudly declared his homosexuality to the public and continued to receive the support he needed. Milk was referred to as the Mayor of Castor Street, because he was the greatest representative the gay community had in San Francisco and he was the most openly gay politician. He fought hard for gay rights. In the process he made enemies, but he changed a lot of lives for the better. What made him really special, though, was that he fought to make San Francisco a better community for everyone.

The documentary shows Milk as one of the leaders in the gay liberation movement, constantly fighting for equal rights for homosexuals. Indeed, much of the credit for the defeat of Proposition 6, which would have barred gays from teaching in California schools, belongs to Milk. He knew he could help change people and their views of homosexuality, but only with time and commitment. He often stressed the importance of every gay person coming out as a way to force society to grant us our rights.

The audience for this documentary has consisted mainly of gays, college students, and gay supporters. Most of the people who have seen this documentary have come out with renewed respect for Harvey Milk. He was an example of how gay people have as much to offer to all communities as heterosexuals, sometimes even more.

For a straight audience, Milk is a reminder that anyone can be gay, and that sex isn't the main focus in every gay person's life. There are no distinctive behaviors or looks. These ideas scared a lot of people. Some people even claimed that the documentary was propaganda by gays to gain sympathy in a situation that was being exploited in their favor. They felt that White did the right thing when he shot Milk. They're the same people who feel homosexuality is a disease and the only way to "cure" it is to wipe it off the face of the earth. Fortunately, however, this attitude seems to come from an increasingly small, if pesky, minority. If we can judge by the Best Documentary Academy Award given *The Times of Harvey Milk*, Hollywood's attitudes have come a long way since the days of the Motion Picture Production Code.

In December, 1985, *A Chorus Line*, a movie that presents gays as complex individuals, was released. It follows a group of dancers as they audition for a Broadway show. The movie presents two different pictures of gay men.

One is very self-assured and open about his gayness. The other is self-torturing and closeted: his name is Paul. Paul is extremely shy and very unsure of himself. He is gay and knows it, but he feels guilty about it. He talks to Zack, the director, about being gay. He talks of the pain he has gone through trying to explain his homosexuality to his family. He has a very strong Catholic background and he was taught as a child that homosexuality is a sin God will never forgive. He tells Zack about sitting in a gay movie house where an older man sat next to him and did strange things to him that made him feel good and frightened him. He ran home, scared to death that he was going straight to hell. But he wanted to go back. He fought the urge to return. Zack assures him that there is nothing wrong with being gay. He talks to Paul and listens to him. Paul feels better and starts to accept himself as a gay person.

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Hot Sex: Exploring Safer Options

by Russell Lewis

There have been safe sex guidelines for gay men for the last five years. Especially at the outset of the AIDS crisis, many lists were phrased so that the words "No" or "Don't" appeared in front of many gay men's favorite sexual activities and/or bodily fluids.

Don't swallow semen

Do not rim

Do not have anal intercourse without a condom

Not only was it difficult to confront the reality of a fatal disease that could be transmitted sexually, but many gay men have found it difficult to be told "No" to certain sexual practices after having fought to shirk pervasive societal notions that their sexuality was abnormal.

As the AIDS epidemic has progressed, more detailed guidelines have been issued. For example, this one compiled by the Bay Area Physicians for human rights:

UNSAFE

Rimming

Fisting

Blood Contact

Sharing Sex Toys or Needles

Semen or Urine in Mouth

Anal Intercourse without a Condom

Vaginal Intercourse without a Condom

POSSIBLY SAFE

French Kissing (wet)

Anal Intercourse with a Condom

Sucking—stop before climax

Cunnilingus

Water Sports

SAFE

Massage, Hugging

Mutual Masturbation

Social Kissing (dry)

Body-to-body rubbing

Fantasy, Voyeurism, Exhibitionism

The meaning of the Safe and Unsafe categories are fairly clear. Possibly Safe contains practices that carry some risk for the transmission of HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus), which attacks immune system cells and can lead to AIDS. For example, in fellatio interruptus (sucking, but stopping before climax) there is some risk of transmission through pre-ejaculatory fluid. Vaginal secretions carry the same possible risk. Water sports (urine play), even where urine is not ingested, carry the risk of transmission of HIV through cuts or sores on the skin. French kissing

is in the possibly safe category because low concentrations of HIV have been found in the saliva of persons infected with the virus. HIV most likely makes its way into saliva via bleeding of gums due to vigorous toothbrushing, flossing, or periodontal disease. The possibility of HIV transmission into the bloodstream via traumatized gums cannot be completely ruled out. In the case of anal intercourse with a condom, the possibility exists that the condom may break or leak. This possibility has more to do with improper usage of the condom, or the rare defective condom. Condoms have been shown in laboratory tests to block HIV. (See page 5 for further condom information.)

As gay men have adjusted to these constraints, more attention has been placed on how to have hot sex without sharing body fluids.

How to have hot safe sex has to be of concern to everyone. As the gay community has hastened to point out, AIDS is not a "gay male disease," but a disease of the human species. AIDS is spreading throughout the world and will increasingly affect all segments of society.

This does not mean that the appropriate response to AIDS is to blame those groups who were unfortunate enough to be the first to be affected. The rational response is to learn from the survival strategies of those who have been living at risk for the longest. Reducing risk in sexual activity is a key survival strategy.

This presentation specifically discusses hot gay male low-risk sex, but it is hoped that others can employ the approach, if not all the practices.

In the interest of generating a little heat, and so that everyone will know just exactly what is being said, this discussion will be in the vernacular. That's right, *those* words will be used. Do not read on if *those* words offend you. But, if you read *The Koala*, they've probably lost most of their impact already.

I will also be including some advice and subjective evaluation. Lest you think I am an exhibitionist (and only my best friends know for sure), my aim is to show that it's OK to talk about sex and that we can use each other as resources for hot safe sex ideas.

Most items on the following lists of safe sex suggestions are derived from a safe sex seminar facilitator's handbook compiled by Luis Palacios-Jimenez and Michael Shernoff.

One sure way to expand your safe sex repertoire is by finding more ways to touch that aren't necessarily genital. Remember, the entire body is a potential erogenous zone. The most important sexual organ is between the ears, not the legs.

TOUCHING

Massages with warm oils

Showering together

Bubble baths together

Shaving each other (anywhere you want)

Hugging

Slow dancing

Getting somewhat more genital:

Touching through underwear

Dick whipping (cock fights)

Rubbing the balls and/or dick on the chest, face, etc

Rubbing cocks together

For those more aggressive moods:

Wrestling

Spanking

Pinching



LOVELY EVENING... I MUST SAY WE HAD NO IDEA YOU WERE SUCH A FUN COUPLE.

Comments: For showering together you might want to invest in some high quality soaps—glycerine soaps and foaming bath gels add sensual appeal. Showering/bathing together is great foreplay and afterplay. And you can get some great views drying someone off. Touching through underwear is also a tremendous turn-on, especially if it's the first time you're having sex with that person. The anticipation before opening up the "package" is half the fun. Wrestling and spanking can also be very satisfying, especially after a tense day, or when you need to work off aggression with your boyfriend or lover. Of course, all roughness should be consensual, and you should respect your partner's limits.

SUCKING & LICKING

The shaft of the dick (a hum, or harmonica job)

Armpits, the neck, the ears

Toes (shrimping)

Underwear, leather, or clothing-covered dick

Assholes covered with Saran Wrap

Chocolate syrup or hot fudge out of the navel

Balls (one, two, both, alternating)

Liquor out of the navel

Nipples

Comments: Hmmm...interesting...intriguing. If you haven't had a harmonica job, get someone to give you one soon. I haven't tried the Saran Wrap trick yet, but the textural implications are intriguing. Many men have very sensitive armpits, toes, and nipples—

combining these with genital stimulation can be very hot indeed.

MUTUAL MASTURBATION

Jerk off while sucking balls/having your balls sucked

J/O with a group of buddies

Onto someone in the middle of a group

Two dicks pressed together

On top of a washing machine in the spin cycle

In front of mirrors (see also Visual Sex)

J/O while playing with tits/having someone play with your tits

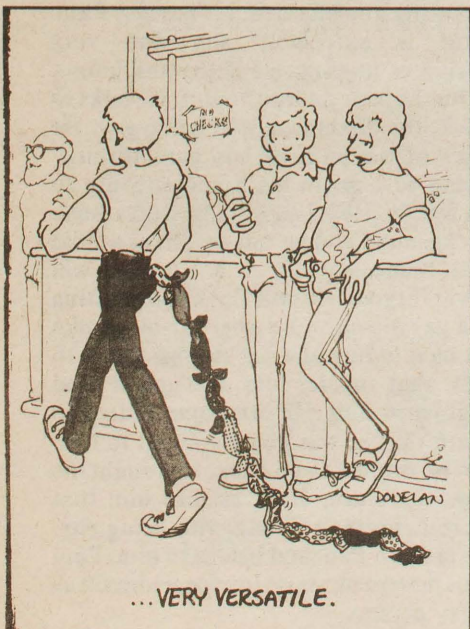
Discretely in a restaurant (under the table)

In an airplane

While driving

In a dirty movie house

Comments: There are many advantages to j/o. One is that everybody knows how to do it, since this is how most of us start. Another is that it is enormously economical—while you jack yourself off, your partner can be performing any number of wonderful acts elsewhere on your body, like sucking your balls or tits. Jacking someone else off can be challenging. Depending on the person, it can take perseverance and strong arm muscles, but it can be fun to be in control—talk about having someone by the balls! This business of doing it in offbeat locations is interesting. My first lover and I used to j/o each other on long car trips. My new lover and I enjoy it on short car trips, especially after a day at Black's Beach has made us horny. Doing *continued on page 5*



...VERY VERSATILE.

Hot Sex

continued from page 4

it in unusual locations is exciting, but by no means do I advocate public lewd behavior.

FUCKING

Between the thighs (the Princeton rub)
Armpits
Behind the knee
Under the chin
Up and down the crack of the ass
Into a foreskin (docking)
Using rubbers (see accompanying articles on condoms and lubricants)

Comments: In the Princeton rub (which I learned at UCSD), it is important to keep the thighs tightly together. One can also use one's thigh muscles to set up a nice fucker-fuckee rhythm. Hairy legs can be very stimulating for the topman, sometimes too stimulating. Generous use of a nice water-based lubricant helps things along considerably. The Princeton rub can be done with the fuckee on his back, stomach, or on all fours. In the first two positions, the bottom's genitals are automatically stimulated; while on all fours his partner can reach around easily. Frottage is the term used for rubbing to climax. Not all men readily cum this way, and some may not prefer it. But, there are plenty of ways to have an "on me not in me" orgasm.

CUMMING SUGGESTIONS

Onto a face
Onto a glass coffee table with a friend underneath it
Into his hair
Out the window
Onto a target (a bellybutton, for example)
Long-distance shooting contests
In a rubber and freeze it
In unison with a group of friends

Comments: Straddling someone's chest and cumming on their face can be very hot, but try not to get it in their eyes. Semen is alkaline and will sting and make the eyes red for a few hours. If this happens, rinse the eyes with cold water. In many cities, j/o groups have been formed for group sessions—it certainly would be a challenge to cum in unison.

VISUAL SEX

With videos
Costumes
Shower voyeurism
Instructing someone to do specific acts and then watching
Workout voyeurism
Stripping
Taking photos/home videos

Comments: One of the built-in benefits to being gay is having access to same-sex locker rooms. The high school gym did wonders for my early fantasy life, and UCSD's isn't bad either. But, once again, I caution you—look and don't touch in public. Also, be sensitive to the straight man who has caught your eye; don't gawk if you think your gaze is making him uncomfortable. And I have a feeling that the gym would not appreciate loitering for voyeuristic purposes, so just work your observations into your normal workout and shower period. Turning your lovemaking sessions into photo opportunities can be a lot of fun. Polaroids are great for instant home erotica, but some adult bookstores offer developing services if you want better quality pics. Let me tell you, having hot photos of you and your lover helps during periods of separation.

TALK SEX

Using telephone services
Dirty talk
Talk about unsafe sex
Computer sex (gay bulletin boards)
Watch a dirty movie and describe it over the phone to a friend

Over extension phones
Romantic talk
Verbalize fantasies
Leave sexy messages on a friend's answering machine

Comments: Well, thank goodness for the telephone. I wonder if Alexander Graham Bell was gay. I can't say that I've had too much telephone sex, but I have found that dirty talk during sex is a real turn-on. In our sexually inhibited culture, it takes some practice to get into it, and, as with many creative safe sex alternatives, it may take a while before you feel confident. If you want to try something with a partner, but feel a bit

unsure of yourself, tell him how you're feeling. This may decrease your apprehension, and may get him talking about what he wants to do.

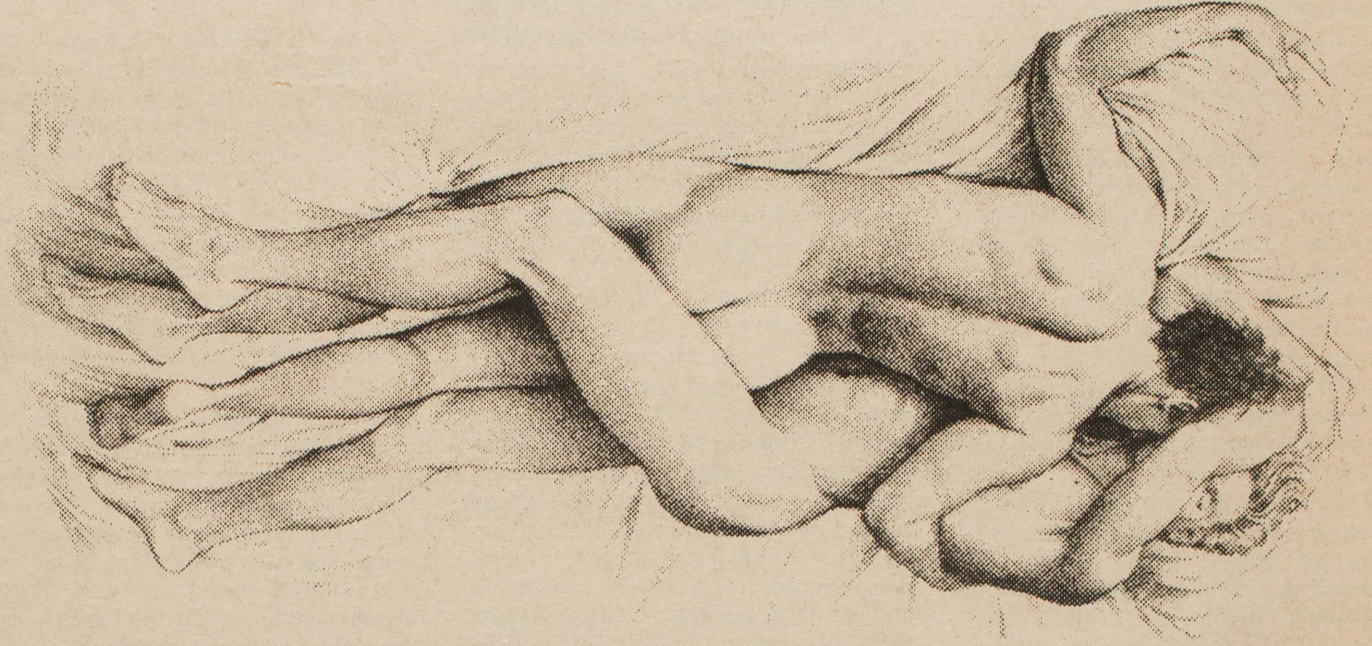
Far from being boring, safe sex can be very hot. Breaking away from "the two acts" means more opportunity for creativity and variety, not less. It may, however, require using your big head as much as your small one.

Please remember that nothing can change what we know to be true—sex between men is a beautiful, wonderful, and often very gratifying experience. As Luis Palacios-Jimenez and Michael Shernoff put it in their safe sex seminar

handbook:

Touching and gay sex are not bad simply because AIDS is on the scene. We all need to be touched, loved and to remain sexual, only with a few changes. Our needs to be touched or to be sexual are not bad because there is a health crisis going on.

Gay liberation today is about community and taking good care of ourselves and the other men in our community. We demonstrate gay pride by caring about ourselves and all of our sexual partners. We do this by only having safer sex every time we make love.



The Care and Fitting of Your Condom

Condoms stop HIV virus

Researchers at the University of California, San Francisco, recently proved in laboratory tests that the HIV virus (the viral agent which can lead to AIDS) cannot pass through either latex or natural skin condoms unless the condoms are ruptured. In the experiment, five brands of condoms were bought at drug stores. Approximately one teaspoon of fluid containing a high concentration of HIV was pumped under pressure into each condom. The outside of the condoms were then dipped into a virus-free culture fluid for 30 minutes. The culture fluid was tested continually over a three week period. No viruses were present in the culture fluid after this extensive testing period. The condoms, as expected, completely stopped the passage of HIV.

Condom usage tips

A few tips will help you get maximum protection from condoms in actual usage. The main reason rubbers fail is incorrect usage. They seldom break or leak due to manufacturing defects.

1. Keep a convenient supply of rubbers in a cool dry place for "every time" use.
2. Do not test rubbers by inflating or stretching them (and then use them with a partner.)
3. Open the package carefully. Tearing it open can damage the condom, especially if one's nails are long.
4. Press out the air in the receptacle tip before you put the rubber on—air bubbles cause rubbers to break. Plain-ended condoms require about a half-inch free at the tip to catch semen. A dab of lubricant in the tip will solve the air problem and greatly increase sensation.
5. Unroll the condom so that it covers the entire penis. If the man is uncircumcised, pull back the foreskin before covering the head with the condom. Fitting an erect penis with a condom insures the best fit, but if the

penis is soft, be sure to unroll the entire condom down to the base as the organ hardens. Eliminate any air bubbles.

6. Use plenty of water-soluble lubricant on the outside of the condom and on the anus or vagina before entry. Cavities that are too dry can pull condoms off and tear them as well. Oil-based lubricants like Crisco and Vaseline cause rubbers to deteriorate quickly and gum things up.

8. Hold on to the base of the rubber when you need to so that it won't slip off.

9. After ejaculating, hold on to the condom around the base to prevent spilling the cum or losing the rubber inside your partner. Withdraw slowly. Withdrawing before shooting is a good idea in case the condom has a tear. Never substitute the withdrawal method for wearing a condom—pre-cum fluid will still get into your partner and you may not time things perfectly.

10. Throw used rubbers away. Condoms should never be used more than once. Never go from one partner to another without cleaning yourself well and changing rubbers.

Lubricants

Some lubricants contain Nonoxynol-9, which has been shown to kill the HIV virus in the lab. By no means, however, do Nonoxynol-9 lubricants provide enough protection by themselves to abandon condom usage. The lining of the rectum is a far more complicated environment than a test-tube; Nonoxynol-9 simply provides a little extra insurance in case the condom breaks.

Oil-based lubricants, in addition to breaking down condoms, are very difficult to wash off, and so trap germs on the body. Also, most are packaged in dip-in containers, which facilitates the spread of germs from one person to another. If you do use an oil-based lube (for non-condom use), buy the small, "single session" containers.

Getting to know your condom

Many men do not like the idea of condoms; condoms are often seen as a turn-off and an interruption in sex. Using condoms comfortably takes some practice; integrating them into sex takes an adjustment in attitude.

Before using condoms with sexual partners, it's best to spend some time practicing how to put them on correctly and feeling what they're like. Try a number of them to see which ones you like. Imagine your favorite fantasy figures wearing condoms while you jerk off. Put a rubber on and stroke your cock. If you are circumcised, the receptacle tip is like the foreskin you never had.

Another way to get to know your condom is to use it on a dildo or other sex toy. Rubbers make the surface of toys slicker, saving wear and tear on your orifice.

Condoms in action

There are many ways to make putting a condom on a hot part of sex instead of an interruption. Put the condom on your man with your mouth. Or put it on part way and make him wonder how it's going to get the rest of the way on—nibble his nipples, suck his toes, make him beg you to finish the job.

When talking to a partner about using condoms, it is important to do so positively. Instead of "We can't do it without condoms," try "Because I like you, I want whatever happens between us to stay healthy." If you have done your homework on different types of condoms, you can say, "I like Brand X. It's gonna look real good on that nice meat of yours."

Much of the information compiled above is from The Hot & Healthy Times, a San Francisco-based publication exploring low-risk sexual alternatives.

The Dilemma of a Lesbian/Writer and the Poetics of Susan Griffin

by Julia Doughty

I get to this place over and over, where I'm in a clearing between the thickness. Where I can look up and out enough to be shocked. To say, my God, how strange, where I have been!

This theme of alienation and oddness is not redundant. It's real, it's very, very true. There are so many masks, ways to pass, to keep silent, to conform, to be absorbed into the universal. I want to find a way to write myself in, after years of attempting to be and being erased. To find words that are mine to speak to others.

It's a process of elimination, discarding old rationales. There's a different purpose here. There's a different purpose here. Someone died. No reason to keep the dead alive. This work is vital and I'm digging down to find the heart. I don't trust rational reason anymore. When I talk about form, it is essential to talk of feeling. My purpose here is not just to make structure. What I'm doing is as honest as can be.

This is an entry from my journal. In teaching about Sylvia Plath to a literature class, Susan Griffin was shocked to find what critics have said. She wrote "Waiting for Truth":

... Sylvia Plath's range of technical resources she put her was narrower head in an there are places I have been Everyone on the street was diseased. There are places you have been. Trying to speak the script claiming my mind, was it a dream or did I live, 'range of technical.' 'But I will not be afraid of voices nor of,' There are places we 'nor of pieces of paper.' have been.

Susan Griffin inspires me by naming this shared experience of loss and discovery, oppression and liberation. I came into poetry through the back door. I have been writing as long as I can remember. But I did not grant myself legitimacy until four years ago. And that authority has been found through a gradual process gained alongside vital recognitions. Like myself, Susan Griffin recognizes the inseparable connections of being a lesbian and a writer.

Learning to write has been a process of learning how to say the truth. And finding the language to do so. As a woman, such a task takes a lot of courage and effort, because the culture

of the white male has been so dominant and oppressive. I was very excited to read Griffin's essay, "Women and the Creative Process", where she describes our particular struggle. She says, "...our real experience is not reflected, is not talked about, and so we don't ever see it ourselves...We don't have the language to perceive and recognize our own experience." There is a struggle with the self of what should be said, what should be done.

I have this training of picking up after others, of keeping things clean, of being useful and serving. I have had to consciously alter my training; to learn to sit, to seemingly do nothing. To put writing first in my life continues to be a revolutionary act.

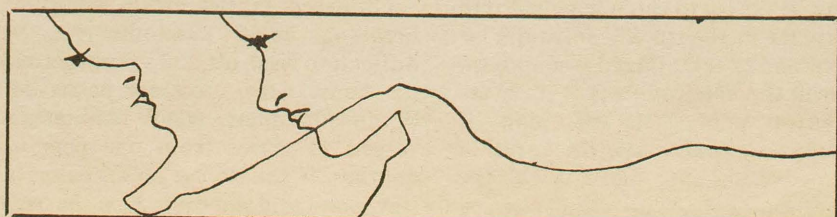
In the "Creative Process" essay, Griffin recalls that Virginia Woolf had said, "she did not want to ever underestimate what sacrifices she had made for her writing, that is, not to have a child." And Griffin adds that women have it difficult either way. I had thought that I could die and still be walking around and no one would notice. That my spirit would finally break from all that I would do for others, and yet no one would notice that I was no longer there, because my body would still be performing its expected functions, the movements would appear the same. I have seen my aunt become like this. I talk to her, but she's not really there. And she still cooks, does the laundry, gets her hair done every week, sleeps with my uncle.

... Or is genius instead like all the other parts that can die before naming a substance variable in shape and colour altered by circumstances and perishable.

Griffin calls the above part of a group of poems entitled "The Tiredness Cycle". I feel very, very lucky to have broken away from the tiredness cycle. I have had to grope in the dark, searching for words and models of inspiration. As Griffin puts it: "I feel that I can go back and find experiences that have been lost, through using the most simple language that I can manage...complex language is...a whole structure of civilization that's already alienated me from what's there..." She decides to leave her work "rough" in order to express the reality.

The issues when I began writing seriously were, "How to talk about pain, how to have courage to do so?" "How to not censor myself?" In her poem "A Woman Defending Herself Examines Her Own Character Witness", Griffin uses a question-answer format to say:

...The lies are still told, but I stopped hearing them.
...My own feelings became too loud.



My feelings saved me from insanity and death. And brought me to truth. But then, how to write about being lesbian? What about the prevalence of homophobia? How could I write and yet not write? Which consequence can I bear? It is a constant struggle, but I have become stronger. In her essay, "Lesbians and Literature", Griffin asserts:

...the fact of love between women, the fact that two women are able to be tender, to be sexual with each other, is one that affects every event in this society — psychic and political and sociological. For a writer the most savage censor is oneself. If...you have not admitted to yourself that you are a lesbian...this one fact, this little perception, is capable of radiating out and silencing a million other perceptions. It's capable, in fact, of distorting what you see as truth at all.

So by this struggle I've come to realize the most exciting moments of writing happen in the unknown, the things that get shoved in the back, that I have to quickly turn around for because they're behind my back. The things that are uncomfortable help me learn. It's a radicalizing process. Griffin has a similar approach which she describes in her "Notes on Writing Poetry":

And my passion leaning toward the difficult, the painful arrival. Therefore distrusting the easy and the comfortable...under the appearance of ease and comfort (the expected, the conventional) I always find a great effort to keep up appearances. So that the effort against this must be a kind of letting go...allowing failure. Rawness. Temporary lack of skills. (Loss of balance.)

Of course, my explorations into the unknown have not always been accepted or understood by some readers. But more and more, I'm trusting my senses and hearing my own voice. Daring to question the rules and traditional structures. Griffin describes what feminist writers are struggling against:

This emotional tone, a kind of ambivalent bitterness toward the universe and woman, informs much of modern poetry, such that there is a range from the anguished and ambivalent despair of Lawrence to the almost scientific usage of words, as sound units without sense, that is called concrete poetry...I must then find the place in myself where my words have authority, some true and untouched place that does not mutter what has been said before, that speaks feelingly, enough to electrify the rhythms of speech, and make in the very telling a proof of authenticity.

One of Susan Griffin's works that is most amazing to me is *Woman and Nature*. In that piece she was able to combine the male voice she heard in her head, and what she had been raised reading, with her own rebellious, original female voice. She had originally tried to struggle to order the voices, and finally followed her intuition and let the voices mingle, to combine prose and poetry, to let them "sing more than argue."

I admire the poem "Breviary" in which she quickly shows how the Church as an institution has condoned the violent oppression of women. In this poem a woman is raped then stabbed repeatedly and survives. Griffin uses simple language to tell the terrible event:

... K is for kneeling
W is for woman
B is for bless, and bread and blood
at the hands of a man,
H is for heathen and healing,
R is for rape, M is for massacre,
W is for woman and the words of the saints,
P is for picture and pool of blood
and for purity and prayer, for prayer and S is for she,
she,
she is in a white dress kneeling.

Having broken from my very strong Catholic upbringing, this poem has particular meaning to me. I call myself a "recovering Catholic" because the effects of the Church have been destructive and difficult to extricate from my life.

Griffin has recognized, as I had at a fairly young age, that our survival is dependent on women, that our "little" moments and crucial in contrast to men's plans for annihilation and fantastic, non-generative survival. She has written a long poem called "Prayer for Continuation" about this.

Susan Griffin is interested, as I am, in breaking out of traditions, of combining what it means to be lesbian and a writer. She wants to kill "the angel of the house," the one who says all the shoulds. "Don't say anything nasty. Don't say anything mean about anybody, don't get angry. Go and help everybody else, give your life for your husband or your children or your neighbour before you write these words."

The essays and poems referred to can be found in Susan Griffin's anthology, *Made From This Earth*, Harper and Row Publishers, New York, 1982.

Poem for Continuation is included in a special issue of the *New England Review and Breadloaf Quarterly*, *Writing in a Nuclear Age*, University Press of New England, Hanover, 1984.



This is the eternal boundary
in here is the line cutting
horizons marked from without
without words
the silence out there
and in here
words to describe the experience
lesbian
shut-up in unseen brackets
when words come,
guarded

all my silent lives
remembering experience
afraid to set them out on a range
that would kill

all the fear out there
brought in
so that no public place
is safe for testimony

I came home into arms that were so close
they seemed as if they were my own
that even without them,
alone,
I felt home

home is a shelter
battered and unknown
I want to share my secret with a woman
and then to tell it
out

This word to tell
is a symbol, a badge
and it represents
more than my own life
filled in with muted color

but words:
they are defended
as a man's jewels, precious
and marketable

miles of bad road
in search of the authentic
is too long and I am dying
or crazy for wanting

Julia Doughty



Bigotry and Betrayal at UCSD

by Brian Taylor

Dorm life was both the best and the worst of college times for me. The two years I spent in Argo Hall were so different from each other that you cannot compare them. I spent my first year on Argo 2, which was an all around great experience. The whole floor was very friendly and we often did things together. I think that we must have been the only floor that ate meals together.

I had a roommate that year and when he found out about me he was better about it than I myself. Since I had just started coming out, I was scared, and at first I couldn't handle my roommate knowing. Eventually, the whole floor knew. I had found some of my closest friends on that floor, and even the most doubtful of them handled the news well. A few acquaintances stopped speaking to me, but overall I had faith that people could understand.

That feeling of trust may just have been my downfall when I lived on Argo 6 the following year. Anyone who knows the reputation of that floor may wonder why I chose to live there, but since I had a single room I wasn't concerned. Because of the previous year's success with my dorm-mates I didn't go out of my way to keep it a secret, and soon two of my suite-mates figured out the truth. The two of them handled it great, so it seemed, and they assured me that there would be no problem. During that fall quarter, we became good friends and they seemed



completely secure with themselves on that issue.

But during the winter quarter a radical and deceptive change took place. I found out that one of the two, Jay, was talking behind my back. And when I confronted him the trouble had just begun. Soon written harassments were constantly displayed on my memo board and Jay visibly turned on me with verbal assaults and harassment. It got to the point where a mandatory meeting was called for both of us in hopes of stopping the problem. In that meeting I discovered that everyone in the suite had known and no one had liked living with a homosexual.

All of a sudden, these two good friends had become my enemies and declared, along with the rest, that because of AIDS my very presence was harmful to their well-being. After all, I was sharing the bathroom with them. Soon they demanded I stop using it and would not rest until they were informed that it was

safe. Massive attempts at educating them about documented fact were futile. They demanded that the San Diego AIDS Project come down in person to ease their anxieties. They responded to a SDAP hotline telephone number by crossing out the number and writing, "All faggots should die!"

When they demanded that I be restricted to using only a specific toilet, I felt another meeting had to be called, but this time with the whole suite and Resident Dean Judith Edwin being present. I was not at that meeting but received a full report on what happened. They would accept no one's word, not even the SDAP's, that living around me was safe. They all felt endangered and uncomfortable that a homosexual was sharing the toilets and showers with them.

Even my two "friends" who had once embraced my sexuality with open-mindedness and tolerance (to the point

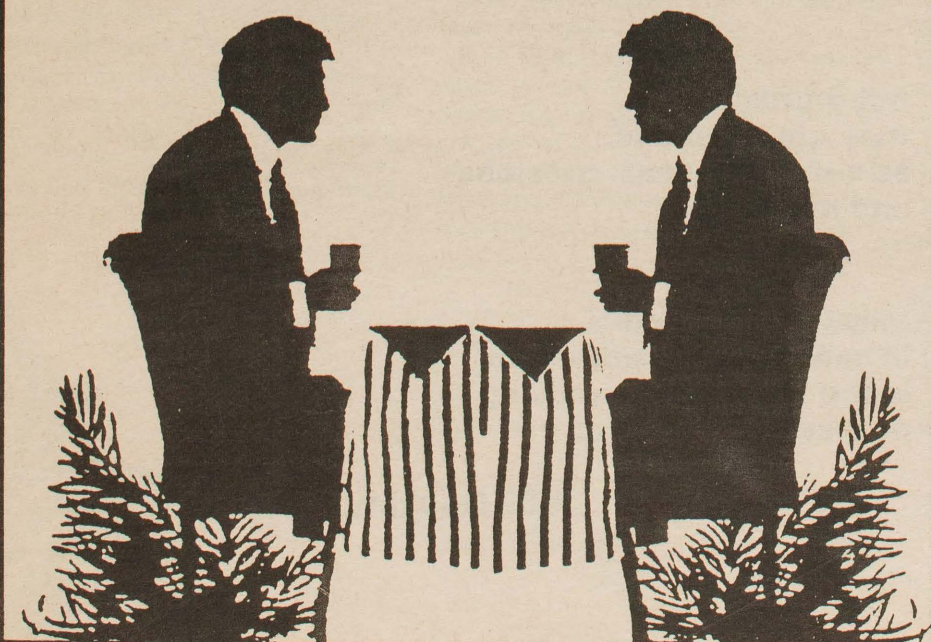
of feeling comfortable enough to walk stark naked around me) would not even shower while I was in the bathroom. I felt their hate continue even when the harassment seemed to disappear.

My plans to move out were kept so quiet that most of my friends did not know that I was moving to Hillcrest until after I was actually there. I guarded this secret so closely because I was fearful. I learned that those in my suite had wanted to hit me, but did not for fear of catching AIDS. Up until the time of my move I feared the worst. The morning that I was to leave the word "FAGGOT" was written across my memo board. On April 26th, five of my friends helped me move my belongings out of Argo Hall. It was done in less than an hour.

I found a personal in the *Koala* shortly after my departure. It read, "Ding dong, the homo's gone, the homo's gone, the homo's gone. Ding dong, the psycho homo's gone."

I believe their fear of AIDS was a hoax, a ploy, that was used successfully to get rid of me. My view of coming out has changed drastically. Where once I believed that all should know, I now hold that my sexuality is nobody's business but my own. I do not think I have become closeted, but I now consider my sexuality a very personal issue that need not be shared with everyone, and often should not be.

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Before Stonewall: A Discussion and Review

by Omar Lughud

Gay History is peculiar in its birth, not its discovery. This is the anomaly of deviance, the consequence of stigma: we become identified and identify ourselves as 'gay' or 'homosexual' when society singles us out for repression. Ancient Greece, the early Roman period and perhaps well into the eleventh century did not have 'homosexual' subcultures. Sexual behavior, homo- or heterosexual did not warrant tendentious definition. The issue was not so much who one had sex with as with the fact of sex itself. The 'homosexual' as a type or essence, as an identity was born of hatred, of societies gone uniform in their beliefs and tolerances.

Thus, we enter history as a paradox. Our identity, our unity, and to a great extent our practice, takes shape only after our repressors, those who wish our disappearance take power. In one respect, though, they succeed. In periods of extreme intolerance deviant subcultures are non-existent. Relationships become short and surreptitious, insuring against the punishment of recognition. Art and literature lose their unique enshrinement of the male form as only the gay man can portray him. Never a self-conscious political force until the twentieth century, the gay and lesbian take care to lighten even their general political leanings.

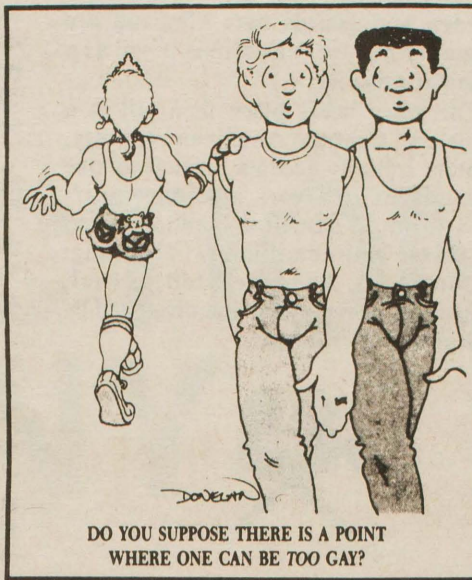
It is only with the relative lessening of intolerance that homosexuals regain or achieve their visibility. One could probably correlate accurately the degree of social and political tolerance with the strength of the gay subculture. As intolerance decreased, the subculture would inversely grow larger until, at some level of acceptance, it would disappear altogether, having lost its purpose and value.

It is with these thoughts on the visibility and invisibility of gays in history

that we come to review the film *Before Stonewall*. For as the film's title implies, there has been a disturbing tendency to disregard the history of the American gay movement prior to the 1969 Stonewall riots. In the majoritarian culture this tendency is to be expected; the disturbing element is the ignorance and indeed the indifference of gays themselves. A blackout ensures their erasure and disappearance from history, not only from without but within the gay community itself. *Before Stonewall* as a filmic documentary history following the first meek public expressions of homosexuality in the shorts and clubs of the 20s, through World War II and the McCarthyite 50s and into the permissive 60s, guarantees a revitalization of gay history as well as a permanent record.

The film combines interviews with newspaper clips, personal photographs and commentary; it tells a social history in personal terms, in the manner stigmatized deviants yearn to speak. The film is a coming out by those who did so too early and for those who have the luxury of tolerance.

As a movie it is full of wonderful stories and moments. Consider: a WAC tells Eisenhower that her own name will head the dismissal list he ordered her to make up of those women in the battalion known for their lesbian activity. She is silenced by Ike's personal secretary, who insists on her own name heading the list. The first speaker then informs Ike that a large majority of the women in the battalion are practicing lesbian behavior, among them the top decorated women in the military, decorated by the General himself. Silence. Ike replies: "Cancel the order." Or consider a reunion of aging men singing with tears running down their lashes "God bless us nelly queens". Such moments are interspersed with the more serious stories: a lesbian recounts her dismissal



from the military and her rejection by parents and friends after months of intimidation and pressure had forced her signature to a confession; and watch and listen in shock to the names of gay men and women publically exposed in newspaper stories: a career, a family and a life destroyed in a day.

But the film's most significant stories involve the ideological and structural development of the gay movement itself as a political achievement. Here the founders of the Matachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis give their accounts of the ideas that formed in the minds of a few men and women to grow into the first organizations. Then there is the excitement of discovery, when a first gay meeting brings the realization that others of the same persuasion also exist in the world. Gay politics had a different purpose then, more immediate and necessary. It sought to awaken gays to their omnipresence and thereby create a consciousness, the prerequisite to political forum. Its success hinged on advertisement, through literature and by word of mouth. It articulated a tactic

while providing a therapy. It made visible to an invisible population its right to appearance.

To be sure, the first open or out gays probably had little choice in the matter. Either too effeminate as men or too butch as women, their appearance and behavior already exposed them to the stigma of difference. One is therefore not surprised to see (and hear) their greater representation among those interviewed in the film. But perhaps this observation reflects a personal bias, my own, which suggests further thoughts on the matter. Recently in a gay discussion group I heard arguments over which "type" most accurately represents the gay community; and at a training session of student leaders I heard a *Dignity* (the Catholic Gay Organization) representative discuss the continuing but desirable disappearance of the "drag queen and bull dyke" from our ranks. Properly disgusted each time, I surprised myself in my uncensored reaction to those outside gender role expectations. I am ashamed at my embarrassment by association, at the ironic exclusion and implied segregation of my feelings. *Before Stonewall* as a title and a movie suggests, therefore, something further to me: that perhaps our own history is being subverted from within because of the cult of normalcy that seems so prevalent in the gay community. Gays trying to look and sound like straights; justifying their cultural and political assimilation not because of their common humanity but because of their straightness!

What those original members of the gay movement made possible was the gradual easing of intolerance. We who can disappear come out of our closets today because they, a smaller, more courageous minority, did so in the past. *Before Stonewall* recommends them to us and is an invaluable document to a history we can all be proud of.

Lunch and Desert at WCPC

by Russell Lewis

West Coast Production Company's dance floor doubles as a stage on Friday and Saturday nights through December 13 to present *Lunch and Desert*. The duo of one-act comedies romps through the challenges and tribulations of gay dating and relationships in the 80s.

"Lunch" finds Stephen, Vince, and their waitress, Emily, trying to figure out how Stephen should approach his relationship with Zane. More attention? Less attention? Casual? Caring?

At one point, Vince asks Stephen if he's talked to Zane about the situation. "Of course not! We're lovers, we don't talk," responds Stephen in a retort many in the audience can identify with.

Like so many of us, Stephen takes the torturous route of second-guessing his lover, instead of talking with him. "Lunch" turns his anxiety into a healthy helping of humor. As Devlin, who plays Emily the waitress puts it, "If we stopped being so serious about relationships, we'd all laugh at them."

"Desert" treats as universal a situation: the awkwardness of a first date. *Awkward* may be an understatement, as a New Wave lesbian, Carla, and her purportedly non-lesbian date discuss desire, love, and intimacy over desert in the New Waver's apartment. Most agree that "Desert" is



The dirt gets dished in *Lunch and Desert*, a New Wave comedy about dating and relationships in the Eighties. The show runs Friday and Saturday evenings through December 13.

the better written of the two. The pace is faster, the jokes more clever. Robyn Samuels and Sherry Hopwood, of San Diego's improvisation comedy troupes *Hot Flashes* and *Modern Times*, respectively, more than keep up with the script. Their physical antics are as funny as the dialogue—they literally have each other rolling in the aisles.

"Lunch," by comparison, is the more leisurely of the two, which only seems

appropriate. The two pieces work well together, giving us a glimpse at both men and women dealing with similar themes.

Both one-acts are peppered with San Diego references, especially "Lunch," which also lampoons the compulsive exerciser through the character Stephen. At one point, Stephen tries to figure out a vitamin combination that would make his relationship work better. Stephen is also a transplant; actor Jesse Haywood

gives him a cute Southern accent.

Producer/director Tom Vegh's staging of the production at WCPC is more for financial than for artistic reasons. But these light comedies do not suffer for the lack of a "real" stage. Indeed, it seems entirely appropriate that plays about gay dating and relationships should take place in one of San Diego's gay community landmarks. WCPC resident lightman James Houchen works well with the small space, managing to illuminate the actors without washing them out. And where else can you have a drink while you watch a play, then go dancing afterward without leaving the premises? Sounds like a great idea for a date, especially since there is no additional cover charge levied.

Admission to "Lunch and Desert" is \$6 on Fridays and \$7 on Saturdays. A student discount of one dollar applies for the Friday, December 5, and Saturday, December 6, performances. Reservations can be made by calling 295-3724. Tickets are available at the door at 6:30 p.m. on performance nights on a cash-only basis. The bar opens at 7 p.m. and the performance starts at 8 p.m. WCPC is located at 1845 Hancock Street near I-5 and Washington Street.

Gay Men in Movies

continued from page 3

Many of the people I know who saw this movie found Paul's speech to be very "heavy". No matter how they viewed homosexuality, Paul moved them deeply. His problem may have been foreign to them, but his emotions and fears were universal. Some of them, however, brushed Paul off as a weak, little "fag" and they saw his speech as a bunch of trash written for "queers".

Many Americans are still not yet ready, or willing, to see homosexuality as an acceptable way of life. For many people homosexuality is still seen as an illness that can be cured with the correct treatment, although the Psychiatrists Association dropped it from their list of mental disorders in 1972. Still, as a society, we teach that homosexuals cannot be "real men" and "real men" cannot be homosexual. The movies have reinforced this idea. Movie stars like Sylvester Stallone, Charles Bronson, Chuck Norris, Lee Marvin, Clint Eastwood, et al, don't help by portraying tough guys who show no emotions. Rocky, Rambo, and Dirty Harry would never accept homosexuality. In fact, in *Magnum Force*, Clint Eastwood is disgusted by a gay man, so he pulls out his gun and blows him away. Eastwood feeds fuel to the idea that homosexuality is sick and "our" only hope is to kill off all the homosexuals.

Most recently, going along with most of America, Hollywood has gone nostalgic, trying to recapture the myths of the Nuclear Family and the American Dream, ideas that have never accurately reflected the full range of our society's lifestyles. Instead of continuing a promising trend of developing ideas about sexuality and alternative families that emerged in the Seventies, Hollywood has, true to form, returned to the non-threatening, simplistic, commercial route.

Besides presenting stereotypes, most Hollywood films look at homosexuality only in terms of sex, to the exclusion of other aspects of gay personalities. They also attempt to depict the heterosexual model of family and marriage as the only legitimate way to live without really understanding what it means to be gay.

For a Hollywood film, *Making Love* takes an admirable stab at presenting these complicated issues. The film deals with Zack, a young married man who finds he can no longer repress his homosexuality. Instead of selling out and having the married couple get back together, the movie treats homosexuality as a viable way of life. Zack rejects his wife Claire's suggestion that they seek counseling, or that she "can learn to live with it." The film's depiction of gay life is extremely cautious and makes gay lovemaking look like heavy petting, but at least theatregoers did not run shrieking from the movie house before they got the message.

It aims for the heterosexual audience by using a marriage as a focal point. It is something they can relate to and they find it easier to understand what the characters are going through. This movie is one of the first to treat homosexuality as just another part of life and not as some deviant life form from another planet.

In order to find a truly positive gay character you have to go outside Hollywood. An excellent example of this is *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, released in 1985. It is a Brazilian film with American actors. The story is that of a gay man, Luis Molina, and his cellmate, Valentin.

Molina is in jail for molesting a boy. It is suggested that he is really being jailed for his homosexuality and that the molestation is just an excuse. The warden and guards hate him and are disgusted by him. Valentin is in jail as a political prisoner

The story takes place in a jail in a nameless Central American country. Molina initially accepts himself as one who cringes for favors, is seen by others as a form of damaged manhood, and possesses minimal moral training. Valentin is hard-hearted, cruel, suspicious of everyone, and disgusted by and afraid of Molina.



Molina tells stories from old movies to entertain himself and Valentin. His favorite movie is an old Nazi propaganda film, as Valentin points out. But Molina is interested solely in the romantic storyline. Molina prepares fantastic meals for himself and Valentin with food he gets from the warden in exchange for information on Valentin. He is told his information will secure his freedom quicker. But as he grows closer to Valentin, he tells less and less to the warden.

When Valentin eats poisoned food and becomes ill, Molina sits up day and night, caring for him. Slowly, Valentin comes to enjoy Molina's stories and his company. It gives him something to look forward to each day. One night, Molina confesses his love for Valentin. Valentin is flattered, but he doesn't know what to do. He doesn't understand how Molina can love a heterosexual man. Slowly, they grow together, sharing their hopes and fears. One night they touchingly make love.

Valentin has grown a little more gentle and compassionate, while Molina becomes a little more political. They begin to take each other seriously as human beings.

When Molina is finally released from prison, Valentin gives him a message to give to the underground in case he, Valentin, doesn't make it out alive. Molina is afraid of what will happen if he delivers the message. He does nothing for a couple of days, just sitting in his apartment. He finally decides to turn his back on his self-pity and quit hiding in the shadows, to live his life and be proud of who he is. He embraces life with a wholeness.

Molina decides to deliver Valentin's message. But he is unaware that the prison officials and police released him hoping that Valentin would give him such a message to deliver. As he gives the message to the underground contact, the police open fire. He runs, scared for his life. He is shot in the back and dies. He has sacrificed his life for the man he loves. He was killed for helping the underground, but he was also killed because he was homosexual.

William Hurt's portrayal of Molina marks a breakthrough in the public view of gay men. Molina is unabashedly, openly gay in body and spirit. He exists without pretense, sharing his fantasy life and his free expression of the spirit uninhibitedly with Valentin. He is a far cry from the stereotypical self-tortured gays seen in *The Boys in the Band*. He is a person whose sexuality pervades his life, but does not rule it. He is able to change and to survive. For the first time, in a non-gay film, we have a gay man giving his life for someone, one of the greatest acts of love.

The audiences that saw *Kiss of the Spider Woman* were treated to a big surprise. Many people I know were shocked at the openly gay character of Molina. A few people didn't like the movie because of such an open portrayal. But most people enjoyed Molina. For many it was the first time seeing a positive gay character onscreen.

The movie probably had the greatest impact on the gay community. Gays flocked to see a movie that dealt with a gay man as a human being. Molina shows that it is possible to be both sexual and political at the same time.

But it didn't get the immediate attention that such a top caliber film merits. At first, it was treated as a gay movie, shown mainly in art houses and small theaters in gay communities. Only when the movie received critical acclaim at the Cannes Film Festival did Hollywood decide to take it seriously. Only after the Academy nominated it for Best Picture, Best Director (Hector Babenco), and Best Actor (William Hurt), did distributors put it into wide release. They were more concerned with its sexual aspects than the human aspects it dealt with. It's as if Hollywood was saying, "You can't say we didn't give it attention. Now let us get back to making movies that people are really willing to pay to see."

Hollywood is afraid to take a chance anymore. They've decided to let television be the testing ground for controversial subjects. Hollywood would rather play it safe and keep on making money.

If gays are ever to be fully acceptable in cinema, audiences must notice that Hollywood isn't afraid to put gay men into motion pictures in positive major roles. Hollywood can't go back to the old portrayals, because people will no longer accept the old stereotypes. And they can't keep on doing what they've been doing because they'll stagnate.

The decision by the Motion Picture Association in 1961 to abolish the Motion Picture Production Code and make the gay lifestyle visible has meant a greater diversity in the presentation of gay life. The portrayal of gay men in motion pictures presented to American audiences has come a long way, from the self-tortured, self-pitying, suicidal sissies of yesteryear, to William Hurt winning an Oscar for portraying a gay man, a queen in fact. Hollywood has yet to put an openly gay man in a positive major role, which suggests major studios feel that America won't accept an openly gay, positive hero at this time. And they're probably right. Most Americans don't understand what being gay means. Their minds are full of the myths that Hollywood has helped feed them for years—the idea that there are only two types of gay men, sissies and tough guys; the idea that none of the great people in history were gay; the idea that homosexuality can be cured; and the idea that all homosexuals hate their lives. Myths about gays will be exploded in small ways, in small films as well as big films. For now, though, mainstream American cinema is on a boring shuffle toward sexual liberation, along with most of America.

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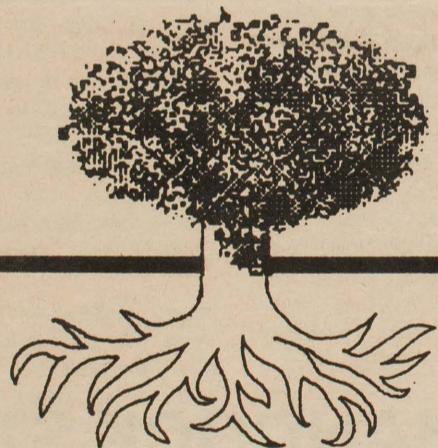
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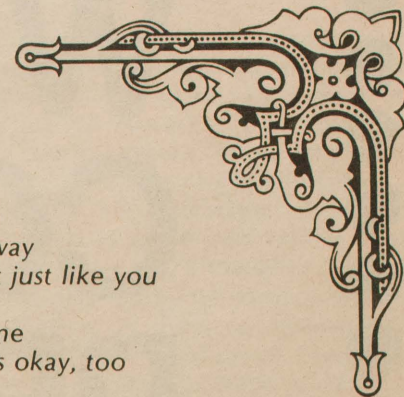
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If I told you I was gay

*If I told you I was gay
Would you turn and walk away
And scorn me cause I wasn't just like you
Or would you stay with me
Maybe spend the day with me
And tell me being different's okay, too*

*If I shocked you with this news
Would it give to you the blues
And bring your disappointment out in me
Or would it open your eyes
Making you realize
That my happiness is all you wish for me*

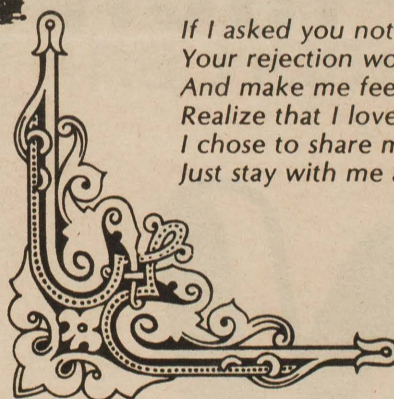
*If I revealed to you my soul
Would you think of me as whole
Or only half a woman who is strange
Would you turn away and ban me
Or try to understand me
And accept my friendship even with this change*

*If I talked of my distress
Would you think me any less
Or could you try to see my point of view
Maybe I don't "belong"
But I've felt this way so long
I am this way and I can't change for you*

*If I showed you my interior
Would you think you were superior
And look on me like a king looks on his peasants
Or like the God above me
Could you find that you still love me
And not feel threatened by my very presence*

*If I asked you not to toy with me
Your rejection would destroy me
And make me feel I couldn't be open again
Realize that I love you
I chose to share myself with you
Just stay with me as always as my friend*

-M.M.



Attention Gay Men

I'm an anthropology student at UCSD & I'm studying coming out for my senior thesis. If you'd be willing to be interviewed, please call Sheila at 453-4213— evenings. Confidentiality assured.

SAPPHO STAFF

Editor:
Thom Whitler

Contributors and Production Staff:
Julia Doughty, Russell Lewis, Omar Lughud, M.M., Brian Taylor, Thom Whitler, Weston

Advertising Representative:
Russell Lewis

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Send submissions to:

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