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Sarah E. Chinn and Kris Franklin

The (Queer) Revolution Will Not Be Liberalized

(on Karla Jay and Allen Young, eds., *Out of the Closets: Voices of Gay Liberation*, Twentieth Anniversary Edition [New York: NYUP, 1992]; and Richard D. Mohr, *Gay Ideas: Outing and Other Controversies* [Boston: Beacon, 1992])

Coming out has long been defined as the central organizing force of lesbian and gay politics. After all, every October 11, when National Coming Out Day rolls around, lesbians, bisexuals and gay men who are connected to some kind of queer community are seized with self-examination. To a certain extent, NCOD is our Yom Kippur, a day to remember our closeted pasts (or presents) and endeavour to live more queer-positive futures. Foucault's theories of the power relations of confession aside, coming out is regarded as the first step on the road to self-determination, visibility, action, even activism.

The opportunity to review these books in tandem, then, seemed to offer us a chance to reflect on the shift from coming out to outing, the furor at politically charged revelations that public figures from Malcolm Forbes to Chastity Bono to John Travolta might be one of *them* (or rather, since initially the outers were queer themselves, one of *us*) stirred up.¹ What happened between 1972, the publication date of *Out of the Closets*, and 1992, which saw the appearance of *Gay Ideas*? How had we moved from the voices of gay liberation to a book in which closets had become controversies?

These questions jockeyed with a larger issue of political agenda: Jay and Young's, Mohr's, ours. We knew we weren't coming at these texts from a position of neutrality. Indeed, we were skeptical about whether such neutrality could exist, whether it wouldn't be a genteel homophobia that denied the centrality of what Eve Sedgwick calls "the now chronic modern crisis of homo/heterosexual definition [that] has affected our culture" (11). Our concern was the importance of situating ourselves politically in relation to these texts.

After a while we realized that there was more at stake than a theoretical discussion of developments in the rhetoric of coming out. These texts see themselves as defining a political and cultural moment, a moment that we as twentysomething dykes are living in the aftermath of or working through. More to the point, our own personal and political histories directly intersect, intervene with and interrupt the narratives Jay and Young on the one hand and Mohr on the other construct. The defining ideas of coming out, community, activism, loss and mourning

that infuse both the 1972 and 1992 texts also work to constitute our own queer subjectivities.

Both of us have been actively involved in a peculiarly contemporary urban queer movement (or array of movements) that chooses as its primary form of expression tools that have been euphemized as "direct action politics." We've been Queer Nationals, Dyke Action Machines, and Lesbian Avengers. While we came to this style of activism from quite different places — Kris came out as an isolated teenager in western Florida, Sarah as a first year college student primarily involved in feminist and anti-imperialist politics — it has reinforced and even constructed a whole array of queer expectations: that naming entails and enlists power; that there's a tenuous and perhaps paradoxical balance between a politics of rights and politics of liberation; that queer achievement is simply assimilation if at the expense of the oppression of others; that there's no substitute for bodies on the street; that stopping traffic may not change the world but it might get us what we² want in the short run.³

These expectations were annealed by the long years between Stonewall and today. *Out of the Closets* represents the early moments of that process. A radically heterogenous text, it speaks the voices of drag queens, students, prisoners, teachers, lawyers, actors and activists. It holds poetry, speeches, resolutions, manifestoes, fairy tales, fantasies and confessions. While it's almost impossible to talk about a representative piece in the text, Allen Young's essay, "Out of the Closets, Into the Streets," attempts to embrace the entire gay liberation movement. The essay is among the longest in the book and subdivides into numerous sections in the style of an eighteenth-century philosophical tract: "On the Army," "On the Straight Movement," "On Gay Oppression," "On Sexism." Young's project is not just analysis, though: he's writing a manifesto for the gay revolutionary future.

Like most of the explicitly activist selections in the book (in other words, almost all), Young's essay imbricates homophobia with sexism and the constraints of a gendered world. "Gay liberation is a struggle against sexism" (7) for Young is axiomatic, for gathered into that term are sexual objectification, police brutality, coercive state institutions as well as misogyny and queer hating. More to the point, while collective lesbian and gay memory locates the Stonewall uprising of 1969 as the birthplace of queer militancy (we're thinking here of all the texts, films and organizations that have the word "Stonewall" as a historical and cultural marker in their titles), Young insists on the centrality of the larger, New Left "Movement" in his essay. He's a model radical, "a member of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and a writer for Liberation News Service (LNS)" (7) who, while he rejects its structural homophobia, comfortably inhabits the rhetoric of the Movement.

Young chronicles the actions of the fledgling Gay Liberation

Front — named, let's not forget, in solidarity with the North Vietnamese National Liberation Front, and not really a front at all. Throughout his essay we hear echoes of various radical movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s: in his term "gay brothers and sisters" resonates the locution of Black Power; likewise, "gay is good" echoes "black is beautiful"; analyses of male supremacy find their origin in radical feminism; critiques of consumerism and bar culture owe their insights equally to SDS and the Yippies. Young envisions a kind of cumulative revolution, in which recognition and new analyses of oppression are incorporated into the current critique. Put bluntly, Young believes that if we just keep making the movement more representative and liberatory, we can perfect the ideology that undergirds it. And a perfect ideology makes a complete, lasting, self-evident and self-perpetuating revolution.

Not all of Young's colleagues in this anthology share his faith in the good works of the New Left. In "Gay is Good," Martha Shelley's animosity towards the sexism and condescension of the Movement is palpable: "We're gonna make our own revolution because we're sick of revolutionary posters which depict straight he-man types and earth mothers, with guns and babies"(31). While her explicit anger is aimed at "liberals" (although it's not clear how broadly she applies the term), Shelley refuses to settle for a revolution of addition. The queer revolution is the only insurgency worth the name, and her insistence that "we will never go straight until you go gay"(34) names the centrality of the GLF critique of normative (however sensitive and supportive) heterosexuality. Sexual politics must be the focus of Shelley's revolution, destabilization of gender norms its primary objective. "We want you to be uneasy," she asserts, "a little less comfortable in your straight roles...[O]ur outrageous behavior comes out of our rage"(33).

The impulse towards discomfiting confrontation is one of the tactics of the GLF that has traveled best through history. The now notorious Queer Nation chant "we're here, we're queer, get used to it" (with its corollary, "we're here, we're queer, we're fabulous"), ACT UP and WHAM's sex-positive war-cry "suck my cock, lick my clit, anti-choice/Burroughs-Wellcome/ George Bush/the Catholic Church [pick your target] is full of shit," and the now classic "they say don't fuck, we say fuck you" carry shock value into the realm of cultural challenge.

A major element that has not survived from those heady days is the sense of endless possibility and at least tentative faith in the coherence of a political movement. Konstantin Berlandt's essay "My Soul Vanished from Sight: A California Saga of Gay Liberation" is an impressionistic account of growing up gay in Berkeley. Berlandt gives a guided tour of his early sexual experiences and longings, naming them one by one: Michael, Bob, Gene, Chris, Wally. His desires, his errant cock, his repression are major characters in the saga, Virgil to his Dante, leading him, penis first, towards liberation. Like Virgil, Berlandt's desires are

mysterious and self-obscuring, they speak in the code of liberal acceptability, when Berlandt himself needs radical change. When he does finally join gay liberation at Berkeley, he recreates the world in his new queer image. Unlike Young, for whom anonymous sex is dehumanizing and objectifying, Berlandt revels in gloryholes and tearoom scenes: "I like making it in a restroom. There's romance in the fear of being caught, the excitement of making it with a complete stranger...so sexually intimate and unafraid to put your cock in his mouth and taking his in yours and feeling strong because you can fuck" (44). Berlandt's liberation is bodily and sexual as well as political — he connects "feel like taking off my clothes. Do," with "[I] feel free" (53), theorizes the centrality of "fucking and being fucked and coming. Feeling natural, feeling high, feeling free" (54). The final invocation of the essay is "We are everywhere. How can we hide from each other?" (55), celebrating an inevitable, never-ending queer revolution. Berlandt's perfect world is not one of consciousness raisings and organizing meetings as Young's might be, nor of Shelley's queering of American culture. Nonetheless, like the majority of the essays in *Out of the Closets*, "My Soul Vanished From Sight" relies on a utopian vision, a struggle for a unified and liberated society.

It's difficult not to feel the powerful pull of nostalgia for such utopianism, particularly in the form of the prefigurative politics many contributors to this anthology espouse. A perhaps extreme example is John Knoebel's account of his participation in a collective gay male household, "Somewhere in the Right Direction." The four men in the collective shaped their lives around the group, dropping out of school to spend more time processing household issues, volunteering their apartment to the GLF as a meeting space, experimenting with nonexclusive sexual relationships, expelling members for "uncooperative behavior." The cooperative disbanded after five months. While the venture had turned out to be an interpersonal fiasco, Knoebel renewed his belief in the power of a collectivized structure and its importance to gay liberation.

More importantly, while Knoebel's apparent victory over cognitive dissonance resembles the inexhaustible faith that social scientist Leon Festinger found in millennialist cults, his rededication of energy is more than just rhetoric. It feels as inspiring as it does naive. Having worked through endless struggles between queer women and men, the pleasure we experienced in reading gay men unself-consciously calling each other "brother" and lesbians "sister" was tangible, however doomed. Similarly, we were struck by the solidarity and participation the writers in this text felt with and within black, latino, Native American and other ethnically-based liberation movements.

Almost all the contributors to *Out of the Closets* participated in a belief that culture is perfectible through some form of revolution. Many, like Young, saw ideological and political struggle as a locus for this

perfectibility, either as a means for revolution or as a component of it. Others, like Berlandt, claimed cultural and sexual mores as the battleground. But nearly all of these gay liberators saw themselves paving the road to a gay utopia. Moreover, the act of coming out itself represented an ideological as well as sexual affiliation. To be gay (rather than homosexual or homophilic) was to be part of a revolutionary community, to articulate an integrated personal and political identity.

This level of commitment to something (to anything) is hard to come by in post-Reagan/Bush oppositional politics. As L.A. Kauffman has observed, “[contemporary] radicals have adapted to the decade-long impossibility of...[progressive] change by concluding that real change is internal and interpersonal, not institutional” (13). Our goals are certainly more circumscribed than the revolutionary desires of most of the contributors to *Out of the Closets*. 1990s queer and other activists’ well-developed suspicion of easy victory and meaningful unity is not inherited from the GLF of 1969. Rather, it’s a legacy of the identity politics battles of the late 1970s onwards, and of a growing absorption of post-structuralist theories. We’ve come to wonder “what sort of politics demands...[an] advanced purchase on unity? Is the premature insistence on the goal of unity precisely the cause of an ever more bitter fragmentation among the ranks?” (Butler 14,15). A raised awareness of the pitfalls of coalitional politics and the assumption of unity (particularly when that supposed unity tacitly enforces homogeneity) is, perhaps, the most important lesson contemporary activists have internalized.

In their role not only as editors of the original text but as commentators on its 20th anniversary, Karla Jay and Allen Young have lived through these tactical and ideological changes. However, they’re far less sanguine about the politics they originally espoused than we are, and a great deal less complimentary. They consider the project of the text a “quixotic dream” (xxxiv), hobbled by “unwise extremism” (xxxviii), hopelessly mired in self-defeating idealism. More disheartening to us, they consistently (mis)read their younger selves with bad faith. A particularly egregious example comes in their analysis of Young’s own “Out of the Closets, Into the Streets.” Rather than reading Young’s declaration that “in a free society everyone will be gay” (29) in the context of his definition of gay as “not homosexual, but sexually free” (28), Jay and Young take this statement at face value. They blame his radicalism on youthful efforts to be “politically correct in the eyes of his radical peers, a sad example of conformity in a nonconformist setting” (xlii). This reading sets Young’s attempts to generalize sexual liberation up as a self-defeating prophecy. By strengthening their current argument, Jay and Young delegitimize the metaphorical value of Young’s comment, even as the contemporary use of the word “queer” to signify a non-specific, non-exclusive sexual subversion might back it up. They then sheepishly assure the reader that the now mature Young “enjoys the

friendship of heterosexuals, homosexuals and bisexuals without lecturing to them about their sexual behaviors" (xliiii).

This revisionism might be the result of the wisdom of years, but we doubt it. The studied tone of responsible adulthood that Jay and Young angle for in their 1992 introduction (the 20th anniversary text also includes the original 1972 introduction as well as that from the 1977 second edition) is by turns embarrassing and infuriating. Their defensiveness over several contributors' deployment of the word "pig" — a term so mainstreamed that Wayne and Garth use it with impunity — betrays a fervent wish not to be condemned for their now outmoded rhetoric. While they can't deny the police brutality that partially defined the radicalism of the 1960s and early '70s (Birmingham, Selma, Oakland, Attica, Kent State, Stonewall are all signifiers of that), they do their best to erase its stubborn survival. Rather, they claim that "most gay men and lesbians have come to conclude that police officers, like people in any other profession, run the gamut from good to bad."⁴

Ironically, both Jay and Young "like to think that [they] have maintained many of the values that are reflected in *Out of the Closets*" (i). They acknowledge the ongoing centrality of coming out to a queer politics, but their relation to their earlier radicalism is more complex than such a statement implies.⁵ At times, their tone is one of bitterness towards, perhaps even betrayal by the revolutionary project into which they poured their energies. As they themselves realized, "the ability of nongays to adjust to the presence of open gay men and lesbians, without giving up real power, proved the tenaciousness and resilience of male, white, middle-class heterosexual American society as we have always known it" (xxxix). Certainly both Jay and Young have abandoned many of the trappings of revolutionary practice. But their seemingly willful disregard of the power of that ideology, whatever its many weaknesses, issues not from a new-found pragmatism but from an underlying inability to move away from what Jay terms "Kierkegaardian dichotomies" of revolution now or never, of complete success or abject failure (li). Nonetheless, it's not that we want Jay and Young to be the same people they were in 1972; we just want them to respect and honor those people as much as we do, forgive them their excesses, and recognize their work as an essential foundation for contemporary queer activism.

Jay and Young seem unable to accept an imperfect revolution. Since they didn't achieve the⁶ gay utopia, the structures they thought would establish it must be not simply flawed but unacceptable, the utopia totally impossible. Jay's and Young's willingness to settle for reformist queer politics, or no politics at all⁷ doesn't feel like a sign of maturation; it feels more like they've given up in despair since the changes they had hoped to achieve "will not come easily and are surely not to come in our lifetime" (xliv).

Perhaps one of the advantages of the cynicism of the '90s is that

we're despair-proof. We have no choice but to recognize that our personal and community identities are deeply compromised by intersections of privilege and oppression. We have a sense, however un(in)formed, that revolution is not just around the corner, and that it's unclear whose revolution it would be — for whose benefit and at whose expense. In a postmodern twist, contemporary queer activists combine the revolutionary tactics of GLF — civil disobedience, guerrilla theater, phone zaps — with little expectation of meaningful institutional change. We take what we can get. While such a strategy is at best hand-to-mouth and at worst opportunist and situational, it is sustainable. It allows us to take joy in the incremental victories that Jay and Young feel that they have had to settle for.

We found Jay and Young's hopelessness deeply saddening, since we see ourselves as the inheritors of their political legacy. Richard Mohr, on the other hand, couldn't be happier. Where *Out of the Closets* saw gay solidarity and community as the key to a queer utopia, Mohr's liberal individualism barely acknowledges the presence of other people. His alienation is evident in his exclusive language: gay men and lesbians are "them" rather than "us" throughout the text.

Mohr's rejection of the possible pleasures and benefits of community are most pointed in his lead essay, "The Outing Controversy: Privacy and Dignity in Gay Ethics." The groundwork of this essay is often solid and insightful. Mohr defends outing not as a tactic but rather as an ethical response to homophobia. Rejecting oppositions to outing on the grounds of privacy rights, he draws an instructive distinction between the private — that which is personal and individual — and the secret. For Mohr, opponents of outing are defending not privacy but a false sense of entitlement to secrecy, the enforced cultural convention that being queer is shameful and should be kept quiet. By staying silent about the sexual orientation of people we know to be lesbian and gay we are not simply participating in our own oppression, we are encouraging the belief that we are at best invisible and at worst so disgusting that our sexuality cannot be discussed.

Not suprisingly, Mohr does not use terminology like "oppression." Rather he bases his argument on a principle of "dignity." To maintain other people's closets detracts from an individual's dignity. To ignore the closet is to increase one's own dignity — to refuse to be coerced into agreeing that lesbians and gay men deserve the invisibility culture imposes upon us. As Mohr succinctly puts it, "outing is living morally" (44).

Unlike the catch-as-catch-can structure of many of the essays in *Out of the Closets*, Mohr is self-consciously thorough. He's deeply concerned with convincing us that the framework of liberalism provides the correct, accurate, reasoned, foolproof reading of any cultural phenomenon, from outing to the NAMES Project Quilt to *Bowers v. Hardwick*.

Such an insistence on articulating a set of universal principles makes his lapses more glaring, however. His defense of outing is theoretically convincing and provides those of us who didn't care much for the debate or those who were maintaining it a useful construct for discussion. But despite his attempts to cover all bases he falls into the same kind of ideological inflexibility he abhors on the left. Experientially queers recognize a material difference between sins of omission and sins of commission: it's not clear what affirmative good spontaneous outing does, as opposed to the clear personal self-respect of refusing to lie. More to the point, the word "gay" does not occupy a singular hermeneutic space in U.S. cultures. Does saying "x is gay" have the same resonance in Nebraska as in New York, in Harlem as in Hollywood, in Minneapolis as in Macon?

Given Mohr's ideological perspective, we often found ourselves nodding our heads in agreement with his observations on gay oppression in the United States while simultaneously loathing the analysis that lay behind his insights. We admired his ability to thoroughly critique the ways in which both direct and insidious homophobia constrict the lives of lesbians and gay men. Nonetheless, this critique is as narrow as it is pointed. Mohr's outrage at homophobia comes close to petulance; it is grounded in a sense of entitlement to power that queer-hating confiscates. Mohr sees the way in which he is oppressed, but not the way in which oppression operates. He utterly refuses to acknowledge that power and powerlessness work on a complex of levels; his analyses operate on the assumption that once homophobic discrimination evaporates, the level playing field will have been achieved. This seemingly willful disregard of the inequities of American culture that pit race, class, gender, sexuality and a multiplicity of other identifications against each other sours Mohr's text beyond the boundaries of unpalatability. The ultimate myopia of this liberal analysis is its inability to envision inequality as endemic to the social system rather, than a temporary condition that can be corrected as soon as it is identified.

Mohr's fantasy of the typical closet case represents his failure to conceptualize the meanings and injustices welded onto cultural and linguistic difference. In the narrative of the closet Mohr unfolds, the closet case "tries to assure his happiness by maintaining his closet. He collects nice antiques, buys nice clothes, drinks nice wines and takes fun vacations that he might not be able to afford if he were openly gay....What the closet case does in maintaining his closet is barter away his self-respect...for happiness"(31). Mohr's closet case is right out of *Boys in the Band*, and just as universalized. To be honest, Mohr's closet doesn't sound at all bad. If being closeted means having access to comfortable accommodations, good and plentiful food, and cultural power and approbation, we should start recommending it to our friends.

At moments like these we were unsure whether Mohr was truly

aware of the stakes and pleasures of coming out. In the name of the individual, he sacrifices the power of coming out, of realizing that you are not "the only one."⁸ His defense of outing is so programmatic that he neglects the political and psychic work of coming out itself. Perhaps this is not wholly his fault, since our culture is more than happy to substitute the locution "outing oneself" for coming out. In Mohr's moral economy, there is no distinction between coming out and outing oneself, since to out someone else is not to offer a chance of community, but to increase one's own ethical currency. We're struck, and troubled, that Mohr is willing to erase the self-empowering process of coming out in order to strengthen his argument. Indeed, for all his liberal rhetoric, Mohr is far less humane than his radical counterparts in *Out of the Closets* — catchphrases like "personal dignity" and "natural law" seem oddly quantified and calibrated rather than principles that could improve our lives.

A point at which Mohr's text might represent embodied gay people is his section on hypermasculinity. In a highly convoluted (and ultimately unconvincing) chapter, "'Knights, Young Men, Boys': Masculine Worlds and Democratic Values," Mohr offers hypermasculine gay subjectivity as a model for "the most distinctive symbol for democratic values" (140). Through the frame of Wagner's *Parsifal*, which ends with the consecration of an all-male religious cult, Mohr explores a variety of signifiers of hypermasculine icons. His readings of ultrabutch representations by artists such as Tom of Finland are for the most part incisive — the defamiliarizing effect of seeing Tom's soldiers and sailors constructing each other as objects of desire can be seen as a subversion of hegemonic ideas of power and domination. But he makes no attempt to theorize Tom of Finland's use of Nazi iconography, for example, (except to say how sexy it is), or the fine line between rough play and sexual coercion that fantasy so often blurs. More to the point, we might take his claim that hypermasculine gay men could act as the "high priests" of an egalitarian culture in better faith if his ignorance of feminist theory on gendered subjectivity were not so evident and at times insulting.⁹ His use of ancient Athens as a prime example of participatory democracy is telling, since the dignity of Athenian citizens was afforded through an economy that depended upon totally disenfranchised populations of male slaves and all women. While his deployment of *Parsifal* as a model for an egalitarian male culture is intriguing, he cannot argue his way around its central premise — that female characters in the opera must be disposed of before this paragon of democracy can be achieved.

Perhaps the crux of Mohr's emphasis on democracy is his commitment to a no-holds-barred individualism. He ridicules the left for its outmoded allegiance to communitarian ideas, which he reads as necessarily coercive. Within him the fire of classical liberalism burns bright, despite his admission that such a political philosophy has

achieved little in the past twenty years of lesbian and gay lobbying, letter-writing, voting and phone-calling. Nonetheless, with a faith reminiscent of John Knoebel's tenacious adherence to the principle of communal living, he insists that "liberal values can still serve as proper guides for action among gays themselves during the time of the prophets. The practical failure of liberal humanism in gay politics does not mean that gays should seek their values in the range of communal, communistic, or communitarian ideals . . . instead, liberal values offer untapped potential to illuminate and liberate an understanding of why gay lives and gay life...are worth cherishing and fighting for"(4). His bitterness at what he reads as the nihilism of contemporary post-structuralist queer theorizing seems to emanate as much from the sense that the "generic worship of Saint Foucault," as he archly phrases it in one endnote (287), holds the academic trump cards at present as from a consciousness of misunderstood virtue.

Given his intense focus on the individual as the only subject worth theorizing, it's not surprising that the majority of Mohr's analyses of community treat not the phenomenon of a heterogeneous coalition of voices but rather the potential tyranny of "community standards," whether straight or gay. A community, however fragmented and unstable, represents at best a possible support for the already self-actualized gay subject, and at worst some claustrophobic "Leftist"¹⁰ mistake. Thus, where the radicals in *Out of the Closets* envision the individual as an inextricable actor in the quest for perfectible community, Mohr sees community's sole function as a possible tool in the individual's perfection.

Ultimately, however, Mohr and Jay and Young are striving for the same goal, though they would be loath to recognize it in one another. Both *Gay Ideas* and *Out of the Closets* aim for a unified, self-explanatory, all-purpose analysis of the queer condition, and an integrated solution to the dissonance of being lesbian or gay in a homophobic and heterosexist world. Their reactions to the potential failure of such a possibility resonate throughout their texts, Mohr in his almost equally divided anger at the structures of homophobia on one hand and the organized left on the other, Jay and Young through their revisionism and disavowal of their younger selves. Despite their ideological differences, *Gay Ideas* and *Out of the Closets* are generically closely related: they're imaginings of queer utopia, whether gender-free or hypermasculine, socialist or liberal, communitarian or individualist.

As we mentioned above, it is our misfortune and our privilege to have little expectation of our own perfectibility, communal or otherwise. That's not to say that we dismiss the aspirations of each text equally. Rather, we recognize that the struggles of the Gay Liberation Front, both their failures and their successes, built the foundation for our own political perspectives. It's also possible that Mohr is a too-easy

target for our disjointed but radical agenda. While we respect his refusal to compromise with a queer-hating culture, his insistence on the primacy of the individual and his arch and sometimes spiteful superciliousness¹¹ resemble too closely for our comfort the approach of the power structures we're committed to opposing. Yet we recognize the artificiality of our partisanship; despite ourselves we've created an activist genealogy in which the GLF represents our parents whose victories we cherish and whose mistakes we've had to work through. Within this scenario, though, we cast Mohr as the wicked stepqueer, eager to supplant our forebears in our affections.

Nonetheless, the politics of queerness are affiliative, not identificatory.¹² We may use much of the GLF's terminology, particularly as it relates to community, but we mean something quite different by it. Our coalitions do not form codified fronts of revolutionaries. Instead they develop strategically around specific issues, do their work and then disintegrate. There are ideological limits to coalition — Andrea Dworkin's temporary antiporn alliance with Jerry Falwell in the mid-1980s provides a poignant object lesson in the delicate membrane between issue-oriented solidarity and ideological prostitution. But we regard coalition as a valuable and often expedient tactic, not a marriage.

While we may have spared ourselves the potential agony of breaking up, we've also denied ourselves the comfortable certainties of marriage. Our political movements are, like many of their individual members, children of divorce. We cherish the romance of community, and treasure it when we experience it, but we're cautious about its dangers. Through this shifting balance of faith and cynicism we have found a way to survive, and even thrive.

Notes

¹ It's no coincidence that the term "outing" (like the term "wilding") was created by the mainstream press, *Newsweek* magazine specifically. In one of the first articles on the subject outside the lesbian and gay press (30 April 1990), David Gelman interviewed a number of closeted and out queers from Liz Smith to Tom Stoppard, as well as outraged straight people on the ethics of outing. In a frightening turn of events, we've heard several people refer to coming out as "outing yourself," as though the self-naming implicit in coming out has been ceded to the publicity and corollary assumed public humiliation of being outed.

² Our use of the pronoun "we" is deliberately unstable throughout this essay. We shift from the specifics of the experience and interpretations of two embodied individuals (Kris and Sarah) to the collective pronoun of an unspoken queer/activist consensus. This consensus has historically been college educated, middle class, urban, and primarily white. We recognize the artificiality of this presumed consensus, not only because it leaves out as many as it includes but also because we represent within it our own assumptions about a workable queer politics. Such shifting from the specific "we" to the putatively collective "we" appears seamless, but we are no less implicated in it.

³ Of course, not all of these principles were universally held by all the participants in Queer Nation groups around the country. However, they were what we saw as valuable in our own work in New York. Queer Nation/ New York's mission statement constituted itself as "a multicultural direct action group, dedicated to promoting queer visibility and fighting homophobia, homohatred and all oppressions any queer might face"; how activists within the group responded to and inhabited that statement changed from week to week.

⁴ This disingenuous claim rings especially hollow after the increase in police brutality in many oppressed communities. The high-profile violence against Rodney King in LA., the vicious beating of ACT UP member Chris Hennelly in New York, the brutality against queer protestors outside the 1992 Republican National Convention in Houston, the refusal for almost a year by Queens police to classify the murder of Julio Rivera as a bias crime, the deaths of two latino men at the hands of police within a year in New York City, and so on give the lie to Jay and Young's assertion.

⁵ Young is more circumspect than Jay about maintaining a radical outlook, however. His oppositional politics manifest themselves through personal grooming — "I wear a necktie at work but I have a beard" — or through carefully chosen public declaration living in "a small rural community[,] I do not walk hand in hand down Main Street with my boyfriend, nor do I wear buttons that say 'Freaking Fag Revolutionary' (which I wore in New York City in 1970). I have found many other ways, which I consider appropriate to the time and place, to let people know that I am a gay man," such as lobbying for gay rights legislation or subscribing to gay publications and mailing lists (liii).

⁶ We use the definite article deliberately. Many of the contributors to this text believed in the possibility and perfectibility of a single, unified gay utopia that would sustain every member of the gay revolution. Indeed, for these writers, it seemed axiomatic that they could theorize *the* revolution that lay just beyond the horizon. Their vision might be cloudy, they might not be able actually to see the promised land, but they had no doubts that it was real, and that it was there.

⁷ They completely abandon a critique of "looksism," a major component of 1970s gay liberation. Instead, they maintain that the "willingness of even politically minded gays and lesbians to accept the status quo on this issue is in part an affirmation of privacy rights and sexual freedom" This is far from the case. The mainstream success of Naomi Wolf's *The Beauty Myth*, an ongoing lesbian analysis of the politics of appearance and an increasingly sophisticated gay male critique of the connections between representation, misogyny and racism challenge this assertion.

⁸ Sarah's work with a coming out hotline at Columbia underscores the importance of a movement away from isolation in the process of coming out. Almost all the callers who are in the early stages of coming out ask the hotline staffers about their own coming out narratives, and are desperate to find other queer people to connect with. Needless to say, most of these callers recognize that a shared sexual orientation does not equal identical sympathies or subjectivities. But the desire for community is palpable.

⁹ The most glaring example of this is in his chapter on ACT UP. Mohr collapses the anti-pornography wing of feminism, which grew out of the cultural feminism of the 1970s, with the largely liberal feminist movement behind the Equal Rights Amendment in the early 1980s. A little reading in feminist history would have revealed that many of the feminist writers who supported the ERA, from

Gloria Steinem to Ellen Willis and Barbara Ehrenreich, opposed the Dworkin-McKinnon authored Minneapolis ordinance against pornography.

¹⁰ His locution, not ours, although it's marginally more respectful than "commies" — his phraseology of choice in his last book, *Gays/Justice*.

¹¹ See, for example, his essay in *Gays/Justice*. "The Ethics of Students and the Teaching of Ethics: A Lecturing," which (however self-consciously and self-mockingly) begins "I hate students," and blames college students for taking faculty away from the *real* work of the university.

¹² Thanks to Judith Butler for the language in which to define this central distinction.

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