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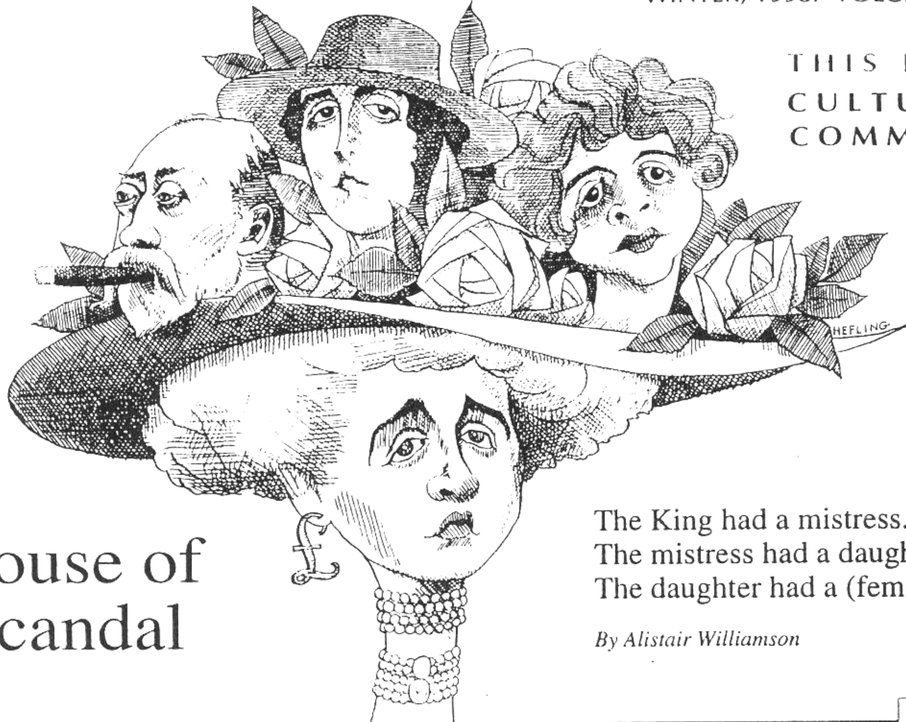


House of Scandal

The King had a mistress.
The mistress had a daughter.
The daughter had a (female) lover.

By Alistair Williamson

Armistead Maupin, back in "the City"

Reed Woodhouse plays Edmund White's *Farewell Symphony*

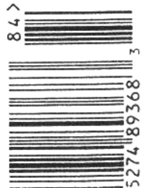
Robert Hilferty on that old phobic subtext

Sarah Schulman: The making of a market niche

Daniel Harris: The selling of the subculture

David Bergman: *Transgressive art lives!*

e homophobic agenda



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eview

indispensable? "*Lovers*," thinks Jeff, are those "who comfort and take care, those who hold each other, share each other's fears and dreams."

Mann's novel is a love story; it returns again and again to the question of *whom* we love and *how* we love—whether partners, friends, or family—and the permeable boundaries between those complex relationships. On the most intimate level, we ache for Jeff in his present predicament with Lloyd: few bombs are as devastating as the words from a lover, "There's no more passion." But Mann's scope is not so narrowly focused: he complicates the emotional and intellectual landscape by taking on a veritable laundry list of the Big Issues—family (of origin, of choice), class, age, sex (both private and public), death, and race—and it is this non-pedantic expansiveness that rescues the book from the brink of sentimentality.

Among the novel's few flaws might be counted its structure, which oscillates between present and past and may become distracting or wearisome to some readers. And yet, one of Mann's points is to illustrate the ways in which the past both informs the present and shapes the future. Higher on the distract-o-meter is the repetition of the lovers' pet names for each other: Jeff becomes "Cat" and Lloyd becomes "Dog." Sweet, but a little sugary when spread over 300 pages! Mann would have been wise to heed the advice of one of his own characters regarding the use of these nicknames: "Dawlings," Javitz tells his friends, "what was cute the first time becomes annoying the fifth and positively nauseating the tenth or eleventh." Here, as elsewhere, Javitz knows best. On the matter of cats, Mann relies heavily on the "significance" of these animals throughout the novel. Mr. Tompkins, the couple's fearless adopted feline, functions too much as a surrogate child, and the role of Junebug, Jeff's childhood kitty, is likewise over-determined. This treatment lapses easily into the sentimental; surely there's enough going on here that it's not necessary to freight the cats with emotional baggage, too.

Finally, Jeff himself sometimes comes across as being too shallow for a novel of this size. He's smart, sophisticated, and sensitive, but there are times when he's so obsessed with image, with the power of his own physical presence in the world, that we want to say "Enough with the sideburns and the chest-shaving and the boots already!" It's a difficult complaint to lodge against the novel because Jeff's concerns about post-thirty "hotness" in a culture (both homo and hetero) that's *obsessed* with youth are not insignificant; his fears are touchingly human ones, certainly "of the moment," ones shared by every gay man who has ever faced the loss of Youth. Even so, Jeff's continued harping about his own power to capture the attention of studly twenty-somethings (as well as his disdain for almost any man older than himself) often makes him seem juvenile and emotionally stunted in comparison to just about everyone else in the novel.

But Mann transcends his narrator's voice to create a compelling, richly textured narrative, packed with skillfully drawn secondary characters, that digs beneath the surface of our daily lives to examine the complicated ways in which we love one another. This is one for the gay time capsule. If those Scooby-Doo-loving physicists at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory want to blast a "Welcome to America" package into the stratosphere any time soon, they'd be wise to load a copy of *The Men from the Boys* into the cargo bay: few novels of recent years have rendered so convincingly the intricacies of gay life at the close of the 20th century.

The end of straightdom as we know it

JOE KNOWLES

Queers in Space: Communities | Public Places | Sites of Resistance
Edited by Gordon Brent Ingram, Anne-Marie Bouthillette, & Yolanda Retter
Bay Press, 1997

QUEER is more than a convenient shorthand for all creatures lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and in between. In many places of the English-speaking world, the term is still a harsh insult—which is why a lot of people, both gay and straight, wish to shun it, and why still many others embrace it. Its decorum-shattering vulgarity is its shortcoming, as well as a major strength. Something about the attractiveness of the term can be expressed in the first sentence of *Queers in Space*: "In this time of increasing displacement stemming from the globalization of capital and destruction of the biosphere, 'queer space,' used for refuge, habitation, and play, has expanded and diversified."

This sentence, like many others in this unwieldy volume, isn't exactly streamlined or even elegantly rough. Yet it does lay out the politics of queerdom concisely. The editors introduce their subject immediately in the context of global capitalism and the general deterioration of the planet; then they proceed to say that, in spite of this, "queer space" is only getting bigger and more complicated. To be queer in space is, to some extent, to be visible, or visibly abnormal. Even if you're momentarily invisible—an entire section of this book is devoted to the more ephemeral and shifting varieties of the sexual underground—the conditions of that invisibility are set by your abnormality. Like it or not, you're queer. So in this book, there is no room for Andrew Sullivan's "virtually normal" brand of assimilation. These essays and stories make readily apparent, for those who didn't already know, the axiom that queers are not all gay, and not all gay people are queer.

The first series of punches in the book come in the form of exercises in Jamisonian "cognitive mapping," which are individual, subjective maps of one's experience in work, leisure, transit, and consumption. The idea is that we reconcile these personal maps with the reality of the global economy, thereby coming to a broader understanding of the global implications of this or that lifestyle. For example, say you were to take a walk through New York City's trendy East Village, where you buy a

Joe Knowles is a freelance writer and a recent graduate of Berkeley. He has recently returned to San Francisco after a stint in New York.

shirt at The Gap, grab a burger around the corner, then meet a friend at one of the many gay bars. The map of your personal experience in this case might consist of a few square blocks, as well as the route to and from your flat. But what if your new shirt came from a Southeast Asian sweatshop, the burger from a cattle ranch in a clear-cut region of the Amazon, while the bar is mopped by an underpaid Haitian immigrant living with 17 roommates in Queens? Very quickly, one's daily activities can be seen to be intimately connected to, if not almost entirely supported by, the subjugation of the third world. The other goal of such "cognitive mapping," more central to the editors' purposes, is to conflate the diversity of queer perspectives into one (presumably politically useful) map of alliances. On both counts, the editors' success is limited.

Much of the problem is due to the very nature of anthologies. *Queers in Space* contains 30 articles, each of varying awareness of their spatial-political context. The editors do their best to draw and frame connections in introductions preceding each of the collection's five parts. Here Ingram *et al.* walk the line that many anthology editors have walked before: how much material to shoehorn into the editorial scheme; and how to resist the temptation to categorize. In the end, for all the diversity of perspectives presented, as the editors themselves are at pains to note, most of the contributions come from established queer urban centers in Western Europe and North America—the very regions of the world sitting atop the global economy's food chain. It is a central irony that the contributors cannot get away from painting a utopia that looks an awful lot like existing gay ghettos from Castro Street to Greenwich Village. Thus, for example, in his entry about the commercialized gay culture in Manchester, England, Stephen Quilley uncomfortably suggests that the development of that town's recent "Gay Village," a vibrant commercial center emblematic of the new de-industrialized "service economy," might be the model for queer urban space in the 21st century. Such space provides institutionalized, relatively stable queer havens—but at what cost? This space is often inaccessible to the less affluent, and eventually trampled by hip heterosexuals, forcing the tribe to move on. It's not unusual for queers to be the first wave of gentrification, displacing ethnic and working-class residents from long-held neighborhoods. The problem brings up a fundamental question: Can queer culture sustain itself without gay consumerism?

The findings of Alvaro Sanchez-Crispin and Alvaro Lopez-Lopez, authors of an entry on Mexico City, point to a troubling answer. Despite having more than twice the population of New York, Mexico City "lags behind many medium-sized American cities in the number of gay establishments per total population numbers." This lack, like others in the third world, can be attributed to cultural norms yet to be overcome. But if solid, tangible queer space is to depend on consumerism, how are these countries, who are too busy producing goods for the first world's consumption, ever going to create their own space? Clearly, there has to be a healthier alternative in building community. *Queers in Space* finds the only answer in activism.

Ty Geltmaker makes the most forceful argument, calling for activist appropriation of public space—especially privatized public space. Writing from Los Angeles, where the public sphere has all but evaporated, Geltmaker delivers a searing forty-page Mike Davis-style rant, chronicling, among other things, police surveillance and repression of Queer Nation and ACT-UP. Laraine Sommella interviews Maxine Wolf about the early history of the Lesbian Avengers and ACT-UP, and Carrie Moyer, in direct confrontation with consumer culture, reports on her history of guerrilla ad postering with photographer Sue Schaffner in the waning days of Dyke Action Machine!. The aim of all this activism is visibility, central to cultivating consciousness in the heterosexual public at large. "Raising awareness of homophobia, discrimination, and complacency," the editors write, "can pave the way for changes in planning and design, policy, and attitudes that have, up to this point, greatly limited queer self-expression, community building, and use of space."

What the authors have undertaken in *Queers in Space* is problematical, because the state of queerness is itself problematical, a space in which only the world's elite can afford to make "stable" queer territory. But this book is nonetheless aware of its own faults, and it does deserve credit for having recognized that the problem of forging sustainable community—queer or otherwise—is most fundamentally a problem of space, and it incites people to take that space. And though the roster of contributors may want for global diversity, it still provides a much more heterogeneous mosaic of queer voices than is generally available. For example, at a time when Gabriel Rotello inexplicably writes in his new book that "lesbians tend to be monogamous, if not for life at least for the duration of the relationship," it's refreshing to hear Pat Califia tout her promiscuity, or to hear Maxine Wolf recall tales of lesbian cruising at a Brooklyn beach in the 50's.

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