A hand with a rainbow gradient background, holding a white card with a heart symbol. The hand is rendered in a stylized, textured manner, and the background transitions from red at the top to purple at the bottom. The text "WE WHO FEEL DIFFERENTLY" is overlaid on the hand in a bold, white, blocky font with a black outline.

# WE WHO FEEL DIFFERENTLY

**CARLOS MOTTA AND  
CRISTINA MOTTA  
EDITORS**



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CRISTINA MOTTA  
EDITORS

# WE WHO FEEL DIFFERENTLY

Carlos Motta, 2011

[wehohfeeldifferently.info](http://wehohfeeldifferently.info)

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**THIS PROJECT IS  
DEDICATED TO ALL  
THOSE HEROIC QUEERS  
OUT THERE WHO MAKE  
THE WORLD MORE  
INTERESTING AND  
BEAUTIFUL. ♡**

# WE WHO FEEL DIFFERENTLY

**A PROJECT BY CARLOS MOTTA**

*We Who Feel Differently* is a database documentary that addresses critical issues of contemporary queer culture. It features **Interviews** with fifty queer academicians, activists, artists, radicals, researchers, and others in Colombia, Norway, South Korea and the United States about the histories and development of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Intersex, Queer, and Questioning (LGBTIQQ) politics. The project discusses the notions of sexual difference, equality, citizenship and democracy in relation to sexual orientation and gender identity. This **Book** outlines five thematic threads drawn from the interviews in the form of a narrative. The project also presents an online **Journal** ([www.wewhofeeldifferently.info/journal.php](http://www.wewhofeeldifferently.info/journal.php)), a sporadic publication that presents in depth analyses and critiques of LGBTIQQ politics from queer perspectives.

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**SOMETIMES  
THE PROGRESS  
WILL BE SLOW  
AND DULL AND  
SOMETIMES  
IT WILL BE  
REVOLUTIONARY.  
WE DO NOT KNOW  
YET WHICH PATH  
TO TAKE, BUT WE  
KNOW WHERE WE  
ARE HEADING**

**CHOI  
HYUN-  
SOOK**

# PRESENTATION

**BY CARLOS MOTTA AND  
CRISTINA MOTTA**

*People are not provoked by those who are different. What is more provoking is our insecurity: When you say, "I am so sorry but I am different." That's much more provoking than saying "I am different," or "I have something to tell you, I can see something that you cannot see!"*

With these words, Norwegian Trans activist Esben Esther Pirelli Benestad situates sexual difference as a unique opportunity rather than as a social condemnation. "Difference" is a way of *being* in the world, and as such it represents a prospect of individual and collective empowerment, social and political enrichment, and freedom. Freedom implies the sovereignty to govern oneself: Being human is *being* beyond parameters, *being* without sex or gender constraints.

Has this ideal been attained in the four decades of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Intersex, Queer and Questioning politics?

*We Who Feel Differently* approaches this and other questions through fifty interviews with LGBTIQQ academicians, activists, artists, politicians, researchers and radicals from Colombia, Norway, South Korea, and the United States. The interviewees have been active participants in the cultural, legal, political, and social processes around sexual difference in their countries, and they frame the debates, expose the discourses and some of them critically discuss the LGBT Movement's agenda from queer perspectives.

This book presents five thematic threads drawn from the interviews, identified to construct a narrative that is representative, yet not comprehensive. This book is not a survey or a statistical study; it puts forth an assemblage of queer critiques of normative ways of thinking about sexual difference.

**The Equality Framework: Stop Begging for Tolerance** gathers opinions about the conceptual perspective that guides the claim for rights and validates their recognition by the State. This framework, founded on formal equality, causes significant doubts and frustrations, all of which start a productive discussion on the limits of legal formalism and liberal tolerance and the need for a more substantive moral debate and cultural transformation.

**Defying Assimilation: Beyond the LGBT Agenda** assembles perspectives on “difference.” It vindicates a critical and affective difference that expresses skepticism about legal responses, a firm reluctance to be assimilated, and a strong resistance to be conditioned and disciplined. The interviewees articulate ways to deal with these circumstances and the actions they have undertaken to empower themselves and others.

**Gender Talents** brings together the voices of trans and intersex activists and thinkers who reject the binary system that organizes gender and sexuality. Their ideas aim at broadening the possibilities of an individual beyond normative categorizations of identity. They also struggle to avoid classifications and to abolish all forms of control over non-normative lives and bodies.

**Silence, Stigma, Militancy and Systemic Transformation: From ACT UP to AIDS Today** offers a brief description of the *AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power* (ACT UP) in the United States and of some of the strategies used by this social movement to confront the government’s response to the AIDS epidemic from the perspective of some of its members. They also reflect on the status of AIDS today.

**Queering Art Discourses** provides an analysis of the reign of silence around the discourse of sexuality in art and discusses the works of cultural producers that attempt to break that silence.

**We Who Feel Differently** attempts to reclaim a queer “We” that values difference over sameness, a “We” that resists assimilation, and a “We” that embraces difference as a critical opportunity to construct a socially just world.

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TO BE EXPRESSED AS OPPOSED TO  
BEING SUPPRESSED AND ELIMINATED

DR. TIGER  
HOWARD  
DEVORE



# THE EQUALITY FRAMEWORK:

## STOP BEGGING FOR TOLERANCE

The last four decades have been productive in regard to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) rights activism and legal politics. Numerous countries in the Global North have improved the status of their LGBT citizens: Homosexuality has been de-criminalized, anti-discrimination bills have been implemented, and a heated debate on same-sex marriage has made gays and lesbians more visible. These changes, from a condition of absolute oppression to having a greater degree of social and political visibility, are partly the result of decades of grass roots community organizing and activism, institutional lobbying and political advocacy.

Many LGBT people have endorsed these achievements but, at the same time, they have been largely censured. Critics coming from within the legal field have judged that liberal reforms are unable to provide substantive equality. Queer critics, external to the legal sphere, have viewed these reforms as an extension of privileges to those who benefit from traditional hierarchies, such as those of class, ethnicity, gender, or race; or as conforming to heteronormativity.

The ideal of equal treatment under the law is at the heart of these changes. Equality establishes that all people should be treated equally under the law, and if they are “different,” they should have the equal right to be considered in terms of their differences. This principle works under the constraints derived from formal equality and state neutrality regarding moral debates and theories of the good life.

How well these reforms have performed, the scope of their achievements and their initial deployment vary from country to country. In Latin America, legal activism has been actively shaping, not without obstacles, a new political landscape in several countries. In Colombia, as pointed out by Marcela Sánchez, director of *Colombia Diversa*, an LGBT rights organization, “(...) the most important precedent is the 1991 Constitution. The articles related to equality and the free development of personality do not mention the issue of sexual orientation, but a wide interpretation of these articles served to encompass issues of non-normative sexuality.” Colombian activist and lawyer Mauricio Albarracín adds: “(...) During the 1990s, a very progressive jurisprudence concerning the protection of gays and lesbians was established. As of 1999, different bills proposing the recognition of the rights of same sex couples—basically, property and social security rights—were developed. In that context, in 2003 there was a bill supported by a group of activists, but when this initiative was defeated several activists decided that there should be an organization devoted to foster same-sex couples *de facto* recognition.”

Other countries, those that have already conquered formal equality, are currently concerned with the construction of a broader cultural framework that will prevail over formal equality and will search for a deeper transformation of social prejudices. This is the case of Norway, where the legal struggle over formal equality has been successful, but substantive equality, that is, the search for equal outcomes between the law and social life is, nevertheless, still pending. Karen Pinholt, Executive Director of LLH, *The Norwegian LGBT Association*, asserts that “(...) up to the middle of last year, when it was agreed that we should have full marriage rights, it was a legal question: To have equal rights under the law. Today we have put much of that legal fight behind us because those rights are there. The fight now is elsewhere. We aim at having not just legal equality, but also *real* equality in our everyday lives. Our main tool in that fight is to increase awareness and the competence in LGBT issues in the general population, but also with people who work with others professionally: Health workers, people working in schools and education, leaders in management, etc. Most often in Norwegian society, they would like to treat us equally, but there is a lack of competence on how to do it. This means they often just ignore us, and ignore the fact that we sometimes need some special considerations to be properly treated as equal.”

Those who have endorsed the legitimacy and inevitability of the legal framework, as Karen Pinholt has, believe “(...) that having the laws makes us equal. The legal framework is a strong and important signal for Norwegian society. Without that as a backing, all the negative things that we experience out in the real world derive from the fact that we are not equal before the law. Now that we are equal before the law, it is very difficult for our opponents

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DIANA  
NAVARRO

to say: 'I have the right to treat you badly.' Now they have to find other ways to make their arguments. Since we are equal before the law, they see that the society at large and the lawmakers recognize us as human beings with equal rights. That means that it is much more difficult to treat us badly, but that doesn't mean we are not treated badly. There are sub-communities in Norway where it is definitely not okay to be gay."

Mauricio Albarracín has also underscored the symbolic effect of legislation: "(...) In Colombia, a former *Ejército de Liberación Nacional* (ELN) guerrilla commented that recently he could finally be openly gay in his group. This is not representative, but I thought it was an indicator that something is happening, and what is happening is that issues addressed in public discussions are beginning to infiltrate non-traditional places, or places that were traditionally homophobic. I think public discussion is very important; I don't know how much it will contribute to people being more tolerant or less violent, but it does generate transformations and, at least, it brings a political project to light. In Colombia and in Latin America there is a political project that contemplates the recognition of gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender persons. Legal decisions transform reality insofar as they destabilize an order. It is not as though they magically change reality, but they introduce an *authoritative* point of view, and that point of view develops socially. I think this has been a beneficial influence in the case of couples. Court decisions entail several benefits; a strictly speaking political one is that those legal proceedings create a network, an ensemble of stakeholders who meet through their involvement in the lawsuit and continue to participate in order to guarantee the rights obtained. Their effect also implies the existence of a group of people who have worked on the issue and this generates growing adhesion. That group will work to preserve the change in the long term. Additionally, this may give rise to a cycle of protest, that is, a cycle of mobilization; because some rights have been obtained, people begin to realize that there are other rights that have not, or that there are other types of discrimination and violence, and they begin to work in those areas. This action triggers other movements and other mobilizations in other spheres. Another benefit is that by recognizing they have rights, same sex couples gain empowerment when faced with the authorities. People over 35, 40 or 45 years of age, who have been in a relationship for 15 years, decide to proclaim their union after having lived inside the closet. At present, law students read judgments that protect same sex couples and they question themselves about the ruling on marriage, different questions to those posed five or ten years earlier, because the context is different. The debate has shifted to a different place, there is a political discussion going on; politicians promise things, there are politicians who are openly gay or lesbian, and there are public policies. There have been many changes."

Norwegian LGBT rights advocate Kjell Erik Øie explains that “(...) There are two good things about legislation: One is that the government has said, ‘It is okay. We support it. We think it is great that you find each other.’ The other thing is that especially after we achieved the Partnership Law, we became very visible. Now that actually has changed because we have one law for everybody, the Marriage Act, but before, when we had to fill out official forms, we had to state whether or not we were married or lived in a partnership. Everybody knew the word partnership implied the difference between straight and gay people. After the Partnership Law came into effect, suddenly people talked about partnerships, legalized their partnerships, and straight people celebrated their gay and lesbian friends that wanted to live together. But now that we have the Marriage Act, and the Partnership Law is dead, we are invisible again.”

In Korea, where legal reforms on the basis of sexual difference are far from being part of the government’s agenda, the LGBT community is demanding its legal rights. PARK Kiho, Director of *Chingusai*, a Korean gay rights organization in Seoul, thinks: “(...) I get that question very often: ‘What changes have been made in people’s lives since you have started this organization?’ But it is always very difficult to answer because those changes aren’t quite apparent. Korea is a Confucianism-dominated and male-dominated society. Unlike in Western nations, no new laws or systems have been created that might prove the actual improvement in the lives of sexual minorities. Nothing legal has changed in the past 20 years. The changes that are visible to us are rather of an unofficial character: *Chingusai*’s office is much larger than before, more people visit us, and more people are speaking out. (...) Now there are six or seven more groups like *Chingusai*, and the number of clubs, blogs and websites where sexual minorities can express themselves has explosively increased.”

PARK Kiho also admits: “(...) I will have to agree that we need to learn from Western discourses; they have more variations and therefore they can more efficiently analyze or explain the present lives of sexual minorities. But all the historical stages that Western societies went through step by step, didn’t take place in Korea. Everything was imported at once somewhat recklessly, after which the Korean queer community faced a complex situation: Our actual lives are still oppressed, but the media is flourishing with images of an open society. To really change people’s lives, it is crucial to adapt Western discourses to the Korean terrain; and there is little difference between adapting and re-creating.”

The equality framework that has encouraged most of the legal victories for LGBT rights in various countries has produced distinctive dilemmas. One of them refers to the alleged moral neutrality that informs formal equality. Critics emphasize the need for a substantive debate on LGBT rights. The demand for neutrality, that is, the demand that the State remain impartial before the debate on what is the good life, without attempting to impose criteria

concerning the social morality on an individual's conduct, is a key principle of liberalism. This principle leads to reforms based on the idea of tolerance, but decisions and policies made in the name of tolerance have proven to be ineffective in terms of guaranteeing respect for the activities they intend to protect.

Tolerance is part of Åse Røthing's research project at the *University of Oslo*. "(...) School text books that teach about homosexuality usually start by saying that some people are homosexuals. At this point, they specifically go from *we* to *they*, which is a distinct move in the author's voice. The tolerance perspective is very much the focus. Homosexuality is said to be something that we should accept, assuming that the classroom is a collective heterosexual entity. Teachers and students tend to state the same kind of things: We have to accept homosexuals because *they* are just like *us* and they are *normal* people. (...) They teach tolerance, but at the same time this method for teaching sexuality is a way of reproducing heterosexuality as the norm, and it is also a way of reproducing the hetero-assumed students as a group that is allowed to draw the line of what is acceptable and to outline what sort of rights they have. Homosexuality is always presented as something that is okay, if it is *real*, but you shouldn't try it. It is like saying: 'If you think you might be attracted to one of your same sex friends, wait and see; it might pass off. If you are really sure you are homosexual, then it is fine. You should come out and tell your parents and your friends.' That is the implicit message. At the same time, the teachers and the books emphasize how difficult life is for many gays and lesbians in Norway and the difficulties they will presumably face. I think there is a good intention behind these statements. They intend to acknowledge the difficulties and homo-negativism that exist in Norwegian society. It is like saying: 'You will feel lonely and your parents might not like it. It will be difficult for you out there.' And at the same time, they are saying: 'Homosexuality is fully okay in Norwegian society today, it is not a problem; but in Iran, on the contrary, they have death penalties. (...) I have also heard students saying: 'If I discovered I was gay, I would commit suicide.' (...) Homosexuality is presented as something problematic, and you should really avoid it and pray to God you will never be there. It is not attractive at all. It is not presented as something that you might like or something you should try out and that might bring you a good life. None of the good stories of queer lives are made visible."

The arguments that guide this educational perspective are grounded on a soft idea of tolerance, completely independent of whether these sexual practices are good or bad. "(...) Although homosexuality is now equal according to the Norwegian legislation, and anti-gay discrimination bills have also protected it, it is still seen culturally as something inferior to heterosexuality," comments Tone Hellesund, queer researcher at the *Stein Rokkan Institute for*

*Social Studies of The University of Bergen*. “‘The good life’ in Norway, what all parents want for their children, the best life you can get, is still very much a heterosexual life. Even though as a homosexual, you can still have a ‘good life’ by having children, getting married and living in harmony as a nuclear family, I think most Norwegians see heterosexuality as the ideal life.”

The deficiencies in a substantive debate on the morality of same sex sexuality and the excessive preeminence of the formal equality paradigm create remarkable incoherencies. Åse Røthing provides an example: “(...) When *Norwegianness* and Norwegian culture is defined in relationship to others, gay rights and tolerance of homosexuality seem to represent it. In a way, *Norwegianness* is heterosexuals being tolerant towards homosexuals. But some pictures in the textbooks will create these kinds of contrasts. Take a look at this picture: This is about ways of living before and now. It is about marriage and families. In one picture, you have two men and a little girl in the middle reading a paper in the park, and in another one, there is a Masai man and a handful of Masai women in the background. It is a really primitive and dark picture. The first picture’s caption says that homosexual partnerships are allowed in Norway. The second picture’s caption says that Masai men can have several wives. Consequently, they make this opposition between the really pre-modern Masai and the modern Norwegians. The Masai are supposed to be seen as the definite opposite of gender equality, which is *the* ideal in Norway. One of the interesting things here is that in this picture a gay couple is representing gender equality, but this book was published before gay couples actually had the right to adopt children. Therefore, this picture is representing Norway as a country that was gay-friendlier than it actually was at the time. It is very paradoxical. But what happens in the chapters about sexuality is different. There are two different sections: One on cultural norms that usually deals with gender and sexuality and another more traditional chapter on sexuality. And in that chapter the we is definitely heterosexual.”

For Colombian activist and academician Franklin Gil Hernández, these deficiencies have also distorted the LGBT Movement’s agenda: “(...) A Movement based on sexual issues should be talking about other things. I feel that the movement speaks very little about sexuality, very little about proposing changes to this society, about how to experience sex, how to experience solidarity beyond marriage, beyond a couple; it speaks very little about (...) other proposals. I understand that having rights is very important, but the agenda should be more ambitious in the sense of proposing a more structured change in the sexual order, an order that continues to discriminate; even with gay marriage, there are many items that are left outside the agenda.”

Colombian anthropologist Fernando Serrano confirms Gil’s idea: “(...) What is happening to the movement at present is that its effervescence

for the affirmation of identity (...) has made it forget other transversal spaces: Class issues, labor problems, health policies. (...) We have to think about how to construct another articulation that does not eliminate differences and that does not solve things merely by naming them. But what do we do to avoid the answer being: Here is the section of homosexual bodies; here is the section of black bodies; here is the section of indigenous bodies?"

"(...) But the important thing is to question what a '(sexual) minority' is, and what is to come in the future." Says Korean minorities activist MONG Choi. "For instance, should LGBT people adjust themselves, though somewhat segmented, to the existing system, such as the marriage system, or should they fight for completely new rights? The existing system and capitalism engage with one another. I think the main task for us now is to change this capitalist society."

Furthermore, American activist and novelist Sarah Schulman warns us against equating a rhetoric of equality rights with progress: "(...) We are constantly being told that things are so much better and we have made so much progress. I really think we have an enormous amount of change, but change is not the same thing as progress. The way gay people are contained, made secondary, and diminished is far more sophisticated now than it was twenty years ago. (...) Gay people are being told that the only things they need are marriage and military service and that everything else is fine. We are being told we are completely treated fairly in every way and that we are an integrated part of this country. Thirty years ago, to be anti-gay was a normative thing. Most people did not know anything about gay people; they did not know they knew gay people, or what gay people's hopes were. Today everybody in this country knows an openly gay person, sees them on television, in their families, and understands what gay people stand for and/or want, so to be anti-gay today is much more dramatically vicious and cruel than it was in the past when you did not know the names and faces of the people you were affecting. (...) In that context, in the U.S. we have lost every ballot measure, thirty-one out of thirty-one, in the last few years, meaning a huge number of people in this country are viciously anti-gay and willing to vote anti-gay. We also have a president who does not support gay people, so we are in a situation where the opposition has a more negative meaning than it did twenty years ago, yet we are supposed to pretend this means nothing and has no impact on us, the real people, our relatives and neighbors. Why are we being told this condition of profound oppression is actually progress? It is not."

# FROM IDENTITY POLITICS TO QUEER POLITICS: THE RISKS OF ASSIMILATION

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For queer theorists and activists, the “identity politics” that inform legal reforms tend to *essentialize* homosexuality, to reify identity categories, and to assimilate the subjects it has created. Tone Hellesund considers that “(...) homosexuality is still seen as *the truth* about a human being. In Norwegian, we use the word *legning*; we speak of *homofil legning*, a homosexual inclination, which I see as a very essentialist framing of sexuality. That is a term that is very much used in the public debate and in every day conversations amongst general people. It is assumed that if you are a homosexual, you have this ‘inborn inclination’; your core is that you were born a homosexual, and there is nothing you can do about it. This is a very strong story in the Norwegian context. In order to gain citizenship rights, to give homosexuals more space and to give us the right to live as ordinary citizens, there has been a discourse focusing on homosexuality as an *essence*, thus promoting an essentialist agenda. There has also been a strong focus on the suffering of homosexuals. The suicide narrative is very strong in Norway, particularly since a report was published in 1999 that showed a higher occurrence of suicide attempts among young homosexuals than among heterosexuals. Those statistics have been used heavily by the homosexual organization to claim rights. On the one hand, the focus on inborn identities, the essentialist understanding of homosexuality as a fundamental difference, the focus on suffering and the cry for tolerance, have been the roots that have led to obtaining citizenship rights. On the other hand, I think it is a very problematic discourse. Even today, when we have citizenship rights, that narrative is holding homosexuals down as something fundamentally different, as something that should be tolerated and felt sorry for.”

According to Ellen Mortensen, Director of the *Center for Women’s and Gender Research* at the *University of Bergen*, the use of this strategy has paved the way for the success of the legal reforms, but “(...) the theoretical foundation for the political work done is not queer theory but identity politics. Something that is peculiar to the Scandinavian countries is that there is quite a short distance between certain academicians, especially in the social sciences, and the policy makers. For instance, within academic feminism, they were instrumental forwarding many of these equal rights law proposals when it comes to gender. Likewise, within the gay and lesbian community that is still fueled by what I would call identity politics and the clear-cut categories of gay and straight. They have been able to make successful political impact precisely

because of this strategy. They have made these legislation proposals on the basis that for instance, gays and lesbians are a minority group that should have equal rights. It has not been made on the basis of queer theory, because that muddles the terrain.”

MONG Choi highlights the community-centered behavior that takes place in Korea. “(...) Korea’s sexual minority movement is quite similar to that of the United States. It has placed LGBT identities, coming out of the closet, forming communities, helping each other and taking political action when needed as its core mandates. However, this whole identity-centered movement deserves to be criticized. People satisfy and confine themselves within their own communities with their happy and friendly personal lifestyles and are not able to question their rights at political and social levels. They think: ‘Is there really a problem? Can’t we just talk it over?’ (...) We thought that we needed to go one step forward from this identity-based movement, and that is why we founded the *Sexual Minorities Committee* of the *Democratic Labor Party* (DLP). But the sexual minority issues proposed by the committee had their limits too. They couldn’t be made into a general agenda because they are restricted within the boundaries of the community’s specialized needs. So nowadays we take action in a more general sphere, covering many kinds of minorities such as immigrant workers and immigrant women. We discuss minorities’ housing rights and labor rights and those things that we need to protect from capitalism.”

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Cultural prejudices may arise from clear-cut identity categories according to Norman Anderssen, Social Psychology Professor at the *University of Bergen*. “(...) If you talk about gender or sexual categories, the clearer you make these distinctions and the more you thematize them, the easier it is for people to have certain opinions about some of these categories. It is a kind of logic, whereby the more you insist that there are homosexuals, bisexuals and heterosexuals, the more you let people have opinions about these groups. To really dissolve negative attitudes, we need to dissolve our concepts and notions of sexual distinctions, including gender. This is a very radical position in line with general queer theory: As long as we have these very strong categories, we will also have negative attitudes.”

When asked whether she thought capitalism as a system has provided the space and the conditions to form and enact LGBT identities, CHOI Hyun-sook, a Korean sexual minorities activist and former out-lesbian presidential candidate, affirmed: “(...) I actually doubt whether it is capitalism that made possible the identity formation of sexual minorities. It is true that many cultural and academic discourses, especially feminist discourses, developed within the capitalist system; and that thanks to these discourses, we were able to question the so-called normality, which only approved of heterosexuality. These discourses threw a light on the various and unique people who were living in

obscurity. But they were always there and what they didn't have was a name. (...) LGBT identities are not something imported from the West; they existed at all times, in Korea, in India, in Thailand. (...) Western theories just made it possible for them to identify themselves as LGBT. I think that Korean LGBT people have different identities, different cultures and different lives from those in the United States or Europe. I can't agree that capitalism itself played a major role on sexual minority identity formation; it can opportunistically stand on the side of sexual minorities, but it ultimately aims at reinforcing normative family values."

Recognizing the often-rigid perceptions of the international LGBT Movement of what being gay *should be*, that is, a way of reproducing conventional notions of family values and social respectability, Karen Pinholt has intended to build an agenda that "(...) makes sure that everyone who is LGBT can be that in exactly the way they want to be. You have the right as a person to define who you are and live that life, and others should not limit you. That also means that as an LGBT movement, I can't tell other people how to be gay or that they are being gay in a wrong way. The Gay Movement, in an attempt to find the gay identity, which is an important quest, has been moving on so fast that it has lost a lot of people. Some feel that being on the back of a truck in a Pride Parade wearing next to nothing and dancing to disco music is a normal way to be gay. Whereas others think that getting married and getting 2.3 kids, or whatever is the average, is a normal way to be gay, because you are supposed to be part of the gay culture. My objection is to both. I think that we should work towards making it possible to be gay exactly in the way you are gay, and to recognize that there are gays in all sectors of Norwegian society. There is no right or wrong way to be gay. There is only one thing that is wrong, and that is living a life you don't want to live."

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## HOW DID WE GET HERE? THE SAME-SEX MARRIAGE DEBATE

One of the central issues in the struggle between LGBT rights activism and queer thinkers and activists is same-sex marriage. The assimilationist character of same-sex marriage, condemned by queer activists and theorists, clashes with the emancipatory consequences granted to this legislation by rights activists, who see in this law the definite step to gain full citizenship and equality.

Tone Hellesund offers a chronology and assessment of this subject in Norway: "(...) After the period of focusing on visibility, gaining individual rights, and anti-discrimination laws, the work for partnership or marriage rights

WHAT HAPPENS WITH  
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started in the late 1980s. That has basically been the focus since then, the right to marry. You can see that in many different ways. You could see it as a reflection of the political climate of these decades: To focus on family values and respectability; on homosexuals being good, respectable and family oriented citizens has been a very strategic and wise way of framing the cause. What has been interesting is that the critique of the nuclear family and marriage, those kinds of debates that were present in the 1970s disappeared from the public agenda in the 1990s and the 2000s. There have been very few opposing voices in the public. Although many of us have been critical of the family and the respectability orientation of the Norwegian Movement, many of us still agree that to gain marriage rights has been an important step in the achievement of citizenship rights. Achieving the 'Gender Equal Marriage Law' in 2009 was kind of the final victory in regard to gaining full citizenship rights as queers in Norway. Despite the fact that many of us want to abolish marriage, we can still see that the right to marry has been an important step."

One of the most compelling arguments in favor of same-sex marriage is the economic and institutional protection it might provide. Arnfinn Andersen, sociologist at the *Gender Research Institute* at the *University of Oslo* believes that "(...) the struggle to get the same rights as heterosexual married people in this country was a way to get formal citizenship, not only as it pertains to the law, but also as a way of recognizing our status as citizens in equal terms. I would say that the idea of marriage was a good platform to make Norwegians aware of our inequality because everything in the social democratic society is organized around marriage: Pension systems, the rights you have when you have a baby, etc."

Colombian political philosopher María Mercedes Gómez offers an interesting perspective regarding the practical consequences of political stances when she says: "(...) It is much easier to say that one does not agree with gay marriage because it repeats the traditional pattern if one does not need health insurance, or protecting one's children, or a residency visa. I always take into account what the scope of my political stance is at every moment, and what I can do to make sure that my political stance does not repeat or generate a form of injustice. Marriage generates a series of individual rights that are valid and necessary for people who do not have other privileges, and in that sense I think the option must exist. The consequence may be that instead of undergoing a radical transformation, society will move along lines that will continue to be unfair for many: For example, having access to certain individual rights only through marriage. But since the space for radical transformation does not seem to be a possibility in the short term, I think that one must work strategically so that the people who want and need this right may exercise it."

Critics of this legal strategy coincide on several arguments. For example, some support the feminist perspective that judges marriage as a patriarchal and repressive institution. Esteban Restrepo, Professor of Law at the *Universidad de los Andes* in Bogotá, asks: “(...) Why consider that the core of LGBT movement has to be the family issue? That is a mistake, firstly because we want to colonize the most oppressive institution, the one in which people have been more oppressed, traditionally. How is it possible that if women have criticized for years the pattern of traditional family, we should wish to conquer marriage, that profoundly alienating and subordinating institution? Then comes the question of normalization. The sector of activism that has promoted the family issue is that liberal sector within the gay community, which says; we are equal, we are not a threat, the only thing that renders us different from you is that we like persons of the same sex, but that is restrained to the bedroom. As for the rest, we are like everyone else; we don't rape children or kill them. Might it not be that a long period of subordination creates a series of different cultures that are important to preserve, and that it would be an obvious mistake to lose? The monogamous dynamics will turn against the gay community itself or against the LGBT community: Before, they did not allow us to get married; now the ideal thing is to be married. (...) The other issue is that the fact that same sex couples are allowed to get married and may adopt children does not imply that homophobia is over, because homophobia exists in people's minds; homophobia is a prejudice, and prejudices are lodged in a very complex way in people's minds, in educational processes, in processes of basic socialization, at school, at home. To transform this, the Law has a minimal potential; it may raise the issue, it may show a hidden social phenomenon, it may normalize it in the sense that it begins to refer to the situation of many persons as an issue of political concern, it may lead to self-questionings, but transformations are always followed – and this has been shown in the context of the United States – by a homophobic backlash. The homophobic forces within society resist. This occurs in every sphere: When in 1954 the United States Supreme Court prohibited racial segregation in schools, George Wallace, the governor of Alabama said: 'I won't comply, I simply won't comply; here our cultural life is based on the separation of white and black persons, the United States Supreme Court of Justice cannot come and tell me that I have to accept blacks in my children's school; I'm not going to do it! Why wouldn't the same thing happen in an issue, homosexuality, which is linked to one of the greatest anxieties in Western culture?'”

For American radical queer activist Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore, “(...) the message of assimilation is the 'We're just like you' mentality. When gay people say: 'We are just like straight people, we have no differences, except for who we might want to have sex with.' Marriage, military inclusion, adoption, ordination

to the priesthood and hate crimes legislation have become the corner stones of gay assimilation. As queers we grew up in a world that basically wanted us to die or disappear. I think we shouldn't grow up and want to become part of that same world and change nothing. The issue of gays in the military is the most obvious. Instead of saying we want to be part of the military, we should be saying that the U.S. is responsible for more violence in the world than any other country, bombing, terrorizing, plundering indigenous resources, and establishing corporate control everywhere. We should be saying that we need to end the military, which is a dominant institution of imperial, colonial and genocidal violence. I would say the majority of us grew up in the ruins of marriage. Why are we now saying that is what we want? What does marriage mean? For decades, queers had been finding ways to live and love outside of marriage, and with the 'assimilationist agenda,' it is all thrown in the trash."

Ryan Conrad, American queer activist and founding member of the collective *Against Equality* delivers "(...) a materialist class critique to actually talk about marriage, to wipe away this gloss of affect that portrays marriage as being about love and family, when it is actually a social contract between two people and the state and the transfers of property, power and money between them. I think it is really hard for people to step back from this sheen that has been put over marriage. Gay and lesbian activists have been digging up this rhetoric of affect and love, questioning how love can be outlawed, and it is actually not what everyone is talking about but a distraction from actually talking about how sexual identity decides whether people live or die, have access to healthcare or not, can move across borders, and access jobs. People aren't talking about that piece. The class critique is huge for me and comes from an urban/rural critique as well. Not to suggest that there aren't poor people in urban settings, but in Maine in particular rural equals poverty. For me there is always a critique of urban gays with more money than the rest of us setting the agenda while people outside of major urban centers don't have access to any resources and are most at risk for poverty and HIV. It is pretty ridiculous how urban-centric the conversation has become, something which is part of the class critique as well."

Meanwhile, Colombian lawyer and activist Germán Rincón focuses on the assimilationist outcomes of same-sex marriage. "(...) In legal terms we have a second-class citizenship, not a fifth-class any longer, but a second-class one. We have made a lot of progress, but from a social perspective we are far behind and at this moment there is a wave of conservatism. Our homosexual life was undercover; now that we have entered the public life, and are legitimized as individuals and as couples, we have become part of the heterosexual antiseptic, antibacterial *little* model. Only couples, only with one person, in what conditions yes, in what conditions no, all that regulated model. People say 'now we can't be

promiscuous because we are legal' and I think that is a terrible loss; there are people who wonder: Who got us into this? There are gay persons who disagree, especially with regard to the property rights issue, because they believe that if they take a young boy in, in a week he will take away from them half of their patrimony. This has generated a terrible impact."

In addition, the devaluation of different ways of being in the world and the exclusion of diverse vital experiences are regrettable outcomes of demanding inclusion in this normative model. Germán Rincón thinks that "(...) in Colombia, same sex couples were violently pulled out of the closet, whether they liked it or not. (...) That hegemonic model has made us lose our underground status, which had wonderful advantages. We have to begin talking about discourses other than the hegemonic model; I have strongly positioned the question of triples, not of couples but of triples, the relationships between three persons on the affective, the erotic, the genital, and the family plane. It is the issue of the social family and not the biological one; the construction of family based on the social and not the biological relations. From an academic point of view, we have to start delivering the discourse, in the social movement we have to deliver the discourse. In Colombia we have made progress; in the issue of pensions, jurisprudence has established that if for instance, a man dies, two women receive pensions. We are waiting for the same to happen when a gay dies, that the two lovers receive pensions and to extend this further, to move forward along those lines."

Ellen Mortensen has similar concerns: "(...) Some of us have voiced critiques of the tendency within the gay community to go 'straight.' Not to choose straight partners, but to live straight lives. Whereas if you take people like Judith Halberstam, who talks for another form of temporality and another form of understanding of location, you see that there are certain ways in which the gay and lesbian community has a history of greater freedom when it comes to sexual practices and to individual life paths that are not necessarily conforming to general values in society; respectable and bourgeois values of conduct. You have people like Leo Bersani, who wants to be a 'homo.' He doesn't want to become a housebroken general citizen, but one that embraces his own liberty as a life project."

For Franklin Gil Hernández, "(...) Marriage is a bourgeois value. (...) Let us have a debate on marriage, which is an untouchable institution from a social point of view. It is important to request it, but once it has been requested, there must be a debate on the institution. What types of relationships does it propose? Family is a very violent institution. Why defend an institution that is violent? There are other ways of being together that may function well, and perhaps they are more tranquil, more fair."

María Mercedes Gómez contributes to this line of reasoning adding that “(...) the reforms generated by same-sex couple marriages do not produce any changes in society; they consolidate a given value; they reproduce the liberal model of marriage and family, and there is absolutely no type of threat to what Judith Butler has called the idea of ‘Nation,’ which is actually jeopardized by adoption. Adoption renders what is happening in Latin America evident: Some statistics say that 20 percent of the families are traditional families; the rest are other kinds of families, not necessarily homoparental ones. They can be extensive families, or there can be two mothers, or two fathers, single mothers or fathers. Adoption would imply State justification for something that is already happening, and this generates an unspeakable anxiety, because what is at stake is the notion of social cohesion, the notion of ‘Nation,’ the notion of a country’s ‘identity.’”

From a different perspective American art critic and AIDS activist Douglas Crimp explains that “(...) something of an enormous shift happened in the wave of AIDS toward a conservative gay culture where issues like fighting for equal rights to marriage and to fight in the military took precedence over what I think of as a truly queer culture, which is a culture that wants to change how we think about forms of human relations in a much more general sense. I still feel very much what I learned from early second wave feminism, which was the critique of marriage as an institution and how marriage actually served governance as a way of managing the complexity of relations that are possible among people. (...) One of the greatest gains of the gay liberation movement and the general liberation movements around sexuality and gender was the possibility of rethinking all kinds of questions of affective relationships so that among gay men, for example, if you stop thinking about finding Mr. Right, finding a lover or finding a marriage partner, and rather think about possibly sexualizing friendship, maintaining friendly relations with people with whom you have had a romantic relationship or having fuck buddies, then a whole proliferation of ways of connecting with others opens up.”

“Sexuality shouldn’t be a way to prioritize people’s lives,” affirms Arnfinn Andersen, but “(...) you get benefits based on whom you are having sex with, since you are legally recognized as a couple. A better way of organizing this would be based on the needs that people have when sharing a household. We have family relationships that are more complex, but we are supporting only one type of structure: Marriage. Should we replicate the heterosexual model?”



# DEFYING ASSIMILATION: BEYOND THE LGBT AGENDA

Several theoretical and ideological perspectives support the opposition to the equality framework and to the mainstream LGTB Movement's mission, based on the search for formal equality. Queer activists and theorists strongly object to this politics due to the failure of this framework to achieve substantial equality and the assimilationist consequences that it entails. Others, representing the left side of the political spectrum, base their objections on the existing and extreme social inequalities this model is unable to modify. This rejection also comes from those who believe that gay and lesbian organizations have lost their purpose, are committed to simplistic and objectionable motivations, and have been absorbed by the *status quo*.

## CRITICAL AND AFFECTIVE DIFFERENCE

The first line of reasoning of those who resist to be assimilated is to emphasize every trait, attribute, and quality that makes them different. Some do this from a personal and a very determined viewpoint, as Norwegian lesbian pioneer Karen-Christine Friele who, having worked for several decades as leader of *The Norwegian LGBT Association* to achieve legal and formal equality, affirms: "(...) Even if I am as old as 75, I have always enjoyed what you call diversity.

I have never presented us as ‘we are as good as you’ or ‘we are just like you,’ because we are not. I don’t know how heterosexuals are, I only know how we are. I think it is stupid to do so because the point of this all is to accept that we are different, that we are unique, that we represent a color, (...) we are different.” In a similar vein, American sex therapist and intersex activist Dr. Tiger Howard Devore, declares: “(...) We are gender different: We are not equal. I don’t want to be like heterosexuals ever. That is the last thing; otherwise I would have been a heterosexual... as if I had a choice! I don’t want to have the rights that heterosexuals have, I want to have the rights that other human beings have. We are different, but we are not different meaning that we should be subjugated, separated, destroyed, discriminated against or the objects of prejudice, none of that. We are good human beings and rights have to be extended to all human beings, not just heterosexuals.”

Why would “(...) we want our individuality recognized within the existent structure rather than asserting our difference and doing our own thing?”, wonders Ryan Conrad. “Why seek affirmation from the thing you think is messed up in the first place? That shift has definitely happened since the late 1990s when I was in high school and it seems now it is a desperate push for affirmation and inclusion.”

Dr. Tiger Howard Devore further insists: “We are different, we are going to be different, we are going to look different, we are going to feel differently, we are going to sound differently, we are going to speak differently, we are going to have different activities on the weekends. When we get together in the corporate coffee lounge, we are going to talk about different stuff than our heterosexual work mates who have kids in school, unless we have kids too. The fact is that that difference is never going to go away. Saying that we are equal or that we are the same is silly. It is not going to happen that way.”

Norwegian trans activist and sex therapist Esben Esther Pirelli Benestad’s personal experience is: “(...) I do not provoke people and people are not provoked by those who are different. I think what is more provoking is our insecurity: When you say ‘excuse me’ or ‘I am so sorry but I am different.’ That’s much more provoking than saying ‘I am different,’ or ‘I have something to tell you, I can see something that you cannot see!’ I think it is much better to promote euphoria. People are not disturbed by euphoria, but most people are disturbed by dysphoria.”

American lesbian artist and feminist Harmony Hammond shares this perspective, but is concerned about the possible indetermination of these ideas. “(...) I have to say that I don’t think *equality* and *sameness* are the same thing. I believe in equality but not in sameness. The discussion about the politics of difference versus sameness has taken many different forms over the decades. Currently it is focused around the right to same sex marriage. (...) A

place where it gets problematic for me (...) is around the whole notion of being 'queer.' I like the notion of 'queerness' and a queer identity as a fluid continuum of sexualities. But in the last few years, the notion of 'queer' has been co-opted. It has become so open that it undermines its radical potential."

Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore upholds difference vindicating its accomplishments in regard to creative and original forms of inter-personal connections and relations, deploring the normalization of sexual practices and the disarticulation of the right to be different. "(...) When I identify as 'queer,' it is just not about being queer sexually, it is about being queer in every way: It is a way of creating alternatives to mainstream notions of love, who you fuck, what you look like, how you eat, and how you live."

A project of *queering* our understanding of affective relations is part of Arnfinn Andersen's research, because they operate on different levels: "(...) A friendship is quite different from living together as a couple, for example. I have been discussing how it is to be a couple and/or to be a friend since ideas of intimacy arise from both of these relationships. You should be close to a friend, but you should also be close to your partner. An idea of equality is a part of friendship but is also a part of being a couple. This means that friendship has become a cohesive way to organize social structures. People don't lose the ground when their partners leave because they have friends that are also very close to them. People build structures for their lives that make it safer and more secure. This is a way of *queering* the question of intimacy and to understand new forms of solidarity in the society. (...) It is more common today to say that you have had sex with a friend. There was a taboo around that question. I think this shifts an understanding of sexuality as a division between a friend and a partner. It could be other things, such as the way you understand yourself, your ideas in life, etc., that make distinctions between social relationships."

This expanded notion of affection within gay and queer cultures, which represented an alternative way of loving in the past, largely got lost within contemporary political rhetoric. American novelist Edmund White reflects on the way the gay community in the 1970s, "(...) looked down on monogamy and I think the gay leaders of the 1970s would be appalled to see how many gays now want to be married and monogamous. Pre-AIDS, the idea was to be free, overthrow the heterosexual model, and try to invent something new. Part of that was to separate out the various functions that accumulated in a relationship with one person in heterosexual companionate marriage that, we thought, did not work. It was ending in divorce; it was a disaster. (...) We thought you should have 'tricks' for one night stand for sex, 'fuck buddies' you would see on a regular basis for sex, a 'lover' who might be somebody you would live and have a physical relationship with or sleep in the same bed and kiss, but maybe not have sex or just occasionally, etc. I think a lot of gay life is still being lived

this way, but I think gays have become so prudish that they do not like to admit it anymore. We thought it was a positive experiment, I think AIDS changed all that.”

Douglas Crimp would “(...) even say that one could have many more than three figures. For example you could say there is one person you have vanilla sex with and another person you have S&M sex with. You could proliferate it in so many ways. (...) That is exactly what marriage does, it becomes you and me against the world instead of a much more communal sense of sex and friendship. It is not simply about sex, although it is about an erotics of friendship, and sex is certainly central to it. I actually don't think it is possible to get every kind of sex you could want out of one person.”

Crimp recalls that “(...) in the 1970s the ethos of gay liberation was that you should never cut yourself off from anything, like if you say you are just a top then you are denying the part of yourself that is a bottom or vice versa. If you say you are only interested in *real* men, you are denying a part of yourself that is interested in femininity. Of course that is a utopian rhetoric but there is a truth to it so far as that you don't really know until you have tried it, maybe more than once even, or tried it in the right circumstances. This is also about a kind of denial of the unconscious; the notion that you could actually know yourself and know your desire.”

Colombian queer theorist and art historian Víctor Manuel Rodríguez points out that “(...) sexuality always de-stabilizes any ideas of hegemonic order, both individual and social. Because of my age I remember that Bogotá's queer scene in the 1980s permitted some forms of articulation and solidarity that were strictly queer in the sense that they were not circumscribed to the LGBT community exclusively, but to all the 'weird' people who gathered together in public and private spaces and who shared the idea that we were not 'normal.' But of course, today those scenarios of solidarity, of collective fight against normality are not there because there has been a proliferation of a gay popular culture: There are 140 gay pubs in Bogotá, for example, that guarantee socialization spaces for some, and represent normalizing spaces that must be resisted, for others.”

“(...) I feel that the city has also been the subject of normalization practices,” continues Rodríguez, “(...) and that at present the proliferation of those things that we might term 'counter-cultural' are somehow normalized. Things happen, but mostly in spaces that have become normalized, that is, the normalization of gay life forces us to explore other spaces. These counter-cultural sexual expressions have somehow become relegated to a space in which one must pay to see.”

# WHAT IS THE ALTERNATIVE? SOCIAL JUSTICE

A particularly sharp critique of the political drive of the mainstream LGBTB Movement comes from the queer left, which identifies racism, classism, militarism, and capitalism as being validated and legitimated by the Movement in its attempt to conquer equality on its own terms. Isn't a queer agenda a suitable place to build an activism and politics of solidarity?

Ryan Conrad refers to this matter in his description of the scope of the work of *Against Equality*: "(...) We are actually suggesting the idea of equality in the *status quo* and the systems and institutions that already exist were designed for a hetero-supremacist society that is classist and racist. Maybe we should be investing our energy into transformative ways of meeting our material and affective needs, dealing with harm and violence in our community and addressing whatever the ideas of nationhood and national security are."

"(...) When we talk about equality," Conrad says, "(...) we are talking about this idea that we need to have equal stake in these hugely problematic, and I would say, deadly institutions. We are against that. Some people at events we have done say we are not *against* equality but for *real* equality, or against this sham of equality. I guess if that is how you need to frame it for yourself to get what we are saying, then that is right, we are for *radical equity*. We are talking about economic justice and social justice on a broad scale and not just single-issue identity politics that none of us feel invested in."

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Similarly, American queer activist Kenyon Farrow explains the origin of the organization *Queers for Economic Justice* (QEJ), which he directed for five years. The name "(...) was intentionally chosen because the founders wanted to make sure we were talking about these issues in terms of a queer politics and queer political ends versus an LGBT lens. People sometimes use the term 'queer' to be all encompassing of different sexual orientations and gender identities. It is also about actually naming the Lesbian and Gay Rights Movement as a product that is about assimilating into what already exists in terms of a well-fed, well-scrubbed, middle class, bourgeoisie with white values, and the term 'queer' being a politic that values the different ways in which the community is gendered and made up of different people of color who use a range of other terms that aren't necessarily gay and lesbian terms. It also says it is okay to be 'deviant,' that you do not have to assimilate to a more 'normal' model in order to be accepted. 'Economic Justice' was chosen versus, say, 'Economic Empowerment,' or 'Equality' because *QEJ* has an anti-capitalist, and socialist lens in terms of how it sees economic justice. We are not talking about ways

in which to assimilate poor, low-income, or queer people into the dominant capitalist system or framework. We are talking about wealth redistribution largely, and though we sometimes are working very specifically on local policies that impact low-income LGBT people in order to make conditions better for negotiating some of the systems poor people have to negotiate, we also understand that it is morally objectionable that people are poor in a country that has so much wealth, and we understand poverty as systemic and institutionalized, rather than only about getting people training to be able to access better jobs, or education. In a situation where the labor movement has been gutted in a lot of ways by the Right, what we are seeing in Wisconsin right now to us in terms of public workers losing, or threatening to have their benefits cut while their right to collectively bargain is being undermined, we see these as queer issues and central to how we see the world.”

This resistance covers what Farrow calls “(...) the four-pillar mainstream issues of the U.S. LGBT Movement including: Marriage equality, ‘Don’t Ask Don’t Tell,’ hate crimes inclusion, and the ‘Employee Non-Discrimination Act.’ First of all, marriage equality is an issue that primarily benefits upper class, wealthy, often white gays and lesbians who have property or health insurance that they want to give their partner. If you are a poor queer with no health insurance or no job to speak of, and certainly no property, marriage as the singular issue in the way that it has framed as the panacea for all that ill the LGBT community doesn’t work. We know many poor straight people who are married for whom marriage did not bring about any major economic shifts. We also see that kind of marriage equality movement tied to a conservative, and neo-conservative agenda around privatization, so that the state itself can take less responsibility for helping people through different kinds of social safety net programs. If everybody is supposed to be married and all of your social and economic needs are taken care of in your home then the state owes you nothing. This is what we are seeing in Wisconsin with the pension debate, where a neo conservative movement is advancing that agenda, so we are opposed to marriage on those standpoints.”

Farrow goes on to assert that “(...) we are also opposed to dropping the ban on gays in the military and advocating for gay inclusion in the military because of the impact of the military industrial complex on the U.S. budgets, where about half of the U.S. budget comes down to military spending, and can be cut from major portions of how much money is available to help people with health care and a range of other needs. We are also opposed to what the military and U.S. war machine does in other countries. Supporting human rights of gays and lesbians in the U.S. does not make any sense alongside being able and kill, maim, and destroy gays and lesbians in Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, and the many places where the U.S. is doing all kinds of imperialist military

operations. This is similar to our position toward hate crime legislation in terms of expanding the prison system in the U.S., which is already the largest the world has ever seen in human civilization and primarily impacts people of color, including queer people who were locked up. The ‘Employee Non-Discrimination Act,’ finally, is not a real plan towards economic justice. It is not talking about livable wages or economic sustainability; it is merely a plan for working people to figure out some legal system for filing discrimination cases. We see, in terms of race, religion, or gender that discrimination cases are actually quite difficult to win and we are opposed to the mainstream movement.”

Franklin Gil Hernández refers to the limited political scope of the Movement in terms of social classes. “(...) The LGBT Movement has a class bias and it is important to bear this in mind. It is a middle-class movement and this is not by chance. It happens not only in Colombia, but also in all parts of the world, because there is an organization related to consumption. Gay neighborhoods, I believe everywhere in the world, are located in the most bourgeois districts in the city; here it can be found in Chapinero. The question is, what benefits do people from the popular sectors obtain from what has been achieved, for example, in Bogotá, for it is a very unequal city with much segregation by class. Here poor people are far and isolated, and one wonders, if public policies are aimed at educated middle-class persons who are familiar with up-to-date information, who are politicized, what happens with those people from the neighborhoods where, in addition to the rest, there are armed groups.”

According to Diana Navarro, in Colombia “(...) public policies have taken care of fragmenting populations, there isn’t a real social articulation, and that leads to every person being concerned with their own small interests instead of practicing the solidarity that would be expected for the whole of Colombian society to have access to the exercise of their rights.”

Activist and member of *Solidarity for LGBT Human Rights of Korea*, Jeongyol says: “(...) The main precepts of our organization are action and solidarity. (...) For example, at an anti-war demonstration, we understand that (...) protesting war as an LGBT means much more than protesting solely for political reasons. (...) We think it is important to show solidarity to non-LGBT subjects as well, and we try to do that as much as possible. We take part in collective actions, campaigns and rallies that treat different subjects, to let everyone know that we are there, that we are one of them. We hope that when our members confront an obstacle, those who seek social change will come and support us as we support them. (...) In 2003, one of our teen members committed suicide. At that time we were participating in the anti-Iraq War demonstrations, and he was with us all the time. After his suicide, we spoke of him at a demonstration, about the situation that drove this young person,

deserted by his family and school, to kill himself. Protesting war and sexual minority discrimination may seem like two separate problems, but they are not. When we organized a memorial ceremony for him, among the people that came were those who we met at the anti-war rally, more than 300 of them! So many people came that there wasn't enough space for everybody. We mourned together and encouraged each other. This makes me believe that those who we communicate with now will someday show solidarity to us."

Building networks of critical solidarity is also important for CHOI Hyun-sook: "(...) Capitalism is the system that reinforces family values, heterosexualism, and patriarchy. Capitalism demands from families to constantly reproduce labor, something that reinforces a culture of family values, which in our context equals a male-centered patriarchy. The distinction between normal and abnormal according to family values is capitalism's running dog. This is why left-wing parties meet with anti-capitalists. (...) Capitalism seems to be the dominant system in the world, but it is also exposing its dark side, such as with the recent financial crisis. I believe that our actions are constantly making small holes in the capitalist system and that as these holes create a network, society will become a more just place. Sometimes the progress will be slow and dull and sometimes it will be revolutionary. We do not know yet which path to take, but we know where we are heading."

"People call us utopist," confesses Ryan Conrad. "(...) But why be anything less? Why set low goals or limit your vision? Utopia is not a place we are going to get to; it is a process, a way of envisioning a future. It is important not to lose that. People want to be pragmatic and identify marriage as the winnable thing, but this seems ideologically ridiculous to me. Why would you compromise a vision of the world you want to live in for crumbs from a table you don't want to sit at? I get frustrated with this concept of gay pragmatism, like we just have to be pragmatic, and invest in incremental change. Incremental change towards what? A world that sucks? A world that is totally classist, racist, and hetero-supremacist? I'm not working towards that."

# BACK TO THE MARGINS: SURPASSING THE STATUS QUO

Those who believe that the LGBT Movement has lost its path insightfully criticize it. They emphasize its deviations and errors. They specially criticize the surrendering of the Movement to the *status quo*.

## CRITIQUES

41 Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore believes that “(...) unfortunately gay liberation failed. It failed because the original goals, end of the Church, end of the State, end of the nuclear family, end of U.S. militarism, a broad agenda of sexual liberation, none of that has happened. The reason it failed for me is because it turned inwards, it became part of the mainstream and it became part of the institutional structures. I am not interested in becoming part of those structures in any form. I don’t even want my own structure. I believe in building something on the margins, whatever that means, and I am interested in infiltrating the mainstream media. I am interested in creating our own media structures, I am interested in creating radical alternatives, but not in terms of a narrow policy or legal framework. I think some of those legal battles are important, like the battle against sodomy, the battle to be able to determine your gender identity, or the battle to put an end to the prison system. Becoming part of the *National Gay Lesbian Task Force* (NGLTF) and changing it or something, doesn’t do anything. It will still be an institution that does nothing except take people’s money and speak to the center. I don’t want to speak to the center. I am fine with speaking in the center and saying what I want.”

For Kenyon Farrow, “(...) economic justice issues and massive imprisonment are so clearly based on race and class and the ability or opportunity to access material resources as well as the likelihood of your body and physical presence to be criminalized by the state. The national mainstream equality movement in the LGBT population is not dealing with these issues because they think in order to win the policy agenda they set, they have to present the LGBT community as ‘normal’ as middle America. Meaning the community and all of its promotion, advocacy, TV shows, sitcoms, all that has to present as white, middle-class, and heteronormative as possible in order to get approval from white, straight America. The movement isn’t interested in challenging larger structures of racism or economic deprivation because it sees value in assimilating the few gay and lesbians who can assimilate into white, middle-class, Christian, capitalist patriarchy. As Bell Hooks once said: ‘If that is

your goal, you will then only talk about poverty, wealth distribution, and racial justice in ways that are very tokenized.”

Farrow is “(...) more interested in a debate around what justice really is. What is the vision? I do not think the LGBT Movement has a vision for where it is going. I think it has made politically expedient choices without actual vision for change or consideration of their policy choices and what these campaigns ultimately mean. I think this is reflected in the work itself. ‘Don’t Ask Don’t Tell’ was dropped in some respects, mostly by court order and not advocacy work. With gay marriage, work done at the state level resulted in thirty different state constitutions, so it was a colossal failure if you want to quantify the same sex marriage movement. It resulted in fierce opposition and worse policy for LGBT folks resulting in organizations that are swimming and do not know what to do next.”

Ryan Conrad’s assessment of the mainstream LGBT Movement is severe: “(...) The professionalization of gay and lesbian activist organizations has a lot to do with it. Within the non-profit sector you answer to your funders and do what your funders want you to do: A hierarchy of people with money still get to decide what happens. *Equality Maine* is a perfect example of this. They hosted a series of community dialogues and I actually went to one thinking, ‘Ugh, it’s *Equality Maine*, I’m not going to agree with anything they have to say: I gave them the benefit of the doubt because it was a community dialogue, right? Wrong. It was a presentation on how they were going to win gay marriage. They didn’t ask any questions; they had charts showing their strategies and their next steps if gay marriage passed in the referendum. This isn’t a community dialogue. I kept thinking: ‘How did we get here? We didn’t ask questions yet?’ This comes from super professionalized organizing, like the *National Gay and Lesbian Task Force* (NGLTF), which gives you a \$100,000 to work on gay marriage. *Gay and Lesbian Advocates and Defenders* (GLAD) based in Boston, applied for grants from *Maine Community Foundations Equity Fund* to do gay marriage advocacy in Maine. So, people from Boston were coming to Maine and instead of listening and asking people what they wanted, out-of-state organizations began to zap local resources to do what they wanted. That is what continues to happen. I think it is because of the non-profit industrial complex, where career activists answer to a group of upper class gay funders that want to consolidate power privilege and property through this thing we call marriage.”

Sarah Schulman believes that “(...) there is an incredible fear, (...) I see it in every field. This is a time of incredible conformity and everyone, including teachers and writers, whatever their role, are terrified about making power structures over them uncomfortable. They fear losing access, money, and respect. Everything is run by fear so people are afraid of alienating the powers

that be and trying interesting new things because they are afraid someone is going to look down on them and they will no longer be invited to the party.”

Schulman goes on to confess: “(...) I am afraid too. I am frightened all the time, but I do not let the fears determine my behavior. How I act and whether or not I am afraid are two separate things in my process. I think questions such as, is this doable, reasonable, and morally sound? What are the consequences going to be when I do this? I know I will make some people mad but can I actually achieve something positive? If I think I can be effective, I allow myself to feel afraid. The problem is when people act because they are afraid. These two things need to be separated. It is okay to feel uncomfortable. If you are going to create anything worthy, you are going to feel uncomfortable and other people are going to make you feel uncomfortable, and that has to be accepted as part of life. If you want to feel safe all the time, you will never be able to do anything. (...) It is very hard to change institutions. That is why we build alternative institutions.”

## **ACTION**

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Queer activists stand against hegemonic power and propose alternatives, build plans of action and construct agendas designed by and for marginalized people. Decentralizing power by speaking from “the margins” to “the margins” is a way of tackling the Movement’s failures, but more importantly, of meeting the urgent needs of underrepresented communities.

Action and education are strategies to surpass fear. Kenyon Farrow provides an example of the type of work developed at *Queers for Economic Justice* where “(...) to combat the challenges we face in respect to homelessness, we work specifically in the adult shelter system in New York City. (...) First we train a team of facilitators who run support groups in the adult shelter system in New York City. In addition to doing those trainings, we hold ‘Train the Trainers’ workshops, to train members of the community to provide support. Being homeless, you are so far removed from generally being able to participate in certain kinds of places and institutions in society, but also being queer because so much of the LGBT infrastructure is based in places of commerce such as bars and clubs, gay coffee shops, bookshops, and restaurants. (...) Folks get marginalized so actually being in the shelter itself provides a space to build some level of community and support within the shelter as well as help others connect to different kinds of service or advocacy so that they can either get out of the shelter system and get housing or get access to the kind of welfare and public assistance benefits that will help stabilize their income. We also begin to organize these folks to be able to challenge the actual shelter based on issues that are relevant to all homeless

people, whether it is around conditions in a particular shelter such as food or security guards targeting queer folks, or other folks in the shelter. This work ends up informing our citywide campaigns around the shelter system.”

Similarly, Ryan Conrad is engaged with the organization *Outright L/A* in Maine, an LGBTQ youth drop-in center that is open once a week, where “(...) we do outreach programs training service providers like teachers and healthcare practitioners to create safe and affirming environments for queer and trans youth. Much of the work I do involves directly working with queer and trans youth, mostly kids living in poverty in small towns and Catholic environments.” Additionally, Ryan lives “(...) in a queer collective house in my town in Maine. (...) It has become a queer beacon safe house space where we hold social events and have film showings, dance parties, and some lecture style stuff, but primarily cultural and social queer events in a town that doesn’t have a queer meeting point, where there is no gay bar.”

Addressing the lack of meeting and community spaces, Korean teen activist Jinki speaks about her motivations to start *Rateen*: “(...) Even in Seoul there is no decent place where sexual minority teens can get together, and it is almost impossible even to meet someone like you in the local areas. So there was practically no base that our culture or activism could stem from. The existing online communities mostly focus on meeting people and dating; after realizing my sexual orientation, I knew these groups couldn’t solve my issues. (...) All I ever needed was someone telling me ‘Yeah, you’re okay the way you are.’ But there was no place that could give me such consolation, so I formed *Rateen*.” Jinki goes on to explain that “(...) *Rateen* differs from the existing communities in two aspects: First, everything is organized and run solely by teenagers; whatever orientation, whether you are lesbian, gay, transgender or anything else, we all gather as one; and secondly, we provide shelter for sexual minority teens so that we can share our thoughts and develop our own culture.” At *Rateen* members “(...) pay the basic expenses out of our pockets. We never receive participation fees for the seminar; they are held in public meeting rooms and are offered for free.” *Rateen* is not only an online community, “(...) we meet off-line too. Once a month we do seminars on sexual orientation theories and social issues. And every August 15th (Independence Day of Korea) we hold an (...) annual event, we do a lot of things: Queer film screenings, open counseling, lectures and recreational programs. People get to know each other and exchange information.”

Trans activist Diana Navarro also started an organization in Bogotá to confront the urgent challenges faced by her community. “At *Corporación Opción por el Derecho de Hacer y el Deber de Hacer* we develop all sorts of affirmative actions aimed at achieving the restoration of the rights of persons practicing prostitution, or activities associated to prostitution, and of



Bogotá's transgender population, particularly transvestites, transformists and transsexuals. (...) We do a lot of work on political incidence. We participate in local committees working on the formulation of both district and local public policies for the development and implementation of actions, the organization of the population's participation, the categorization of existing groups. (...) My work began not only as a result of my sexual orientation or my gender identity; what was a determining factor for my work was the practice of prostitution. There I was able to get in touch with a different reality."

Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore speaks about *Gay Shame*, another example of a self-initiated organization that "(...) wanted to (...) create a radical alternative to 'Gay Pride.' Instead of having an endless gated procession of corporate floats, we thought we would just invite people for free into a space to share skills and strategies for resistance. We had bands, music, dancing and also people talking about welfare reform, trans liberation, or gentrification in New York. We thought we could make culture on our own terms. When I moved to San Francisco we started *Gay Shame* there along similar lines, it was a 'direct action extravaganza'; we were committed to challenging the hypocrisy, not just of mainstream gay people but also of all hypocrites. We would throw together these very elaborate events like the 'Gay Shame Awards' where we awarded the most hypocritical gay people for their service to the community. We had categories like "(...) 'helping right wingers cope,' 'exploiting our youth,' an 'award for celebrities who should never have come out in the first place,' etc. The award was a burning rainbow flag. What was really interesting about *Gay Shame*'s actions, was that we wanted to create a spectacle. We wanted to create something that used the militancy of *ACT UP*, but fused it with spectacle, to focus on reclaiming the streets in an anti-capitalist, extravagant way, so that people would be drawn in."



# GENDER TALENTS

## THE PATH TOWARDS A SEXLESS AND GENDERLESS SOCIETY

The implicit endorsement of a binary organization of gender and sexuality as well as the assimilationist effect attached to it, are not the only (un)intended consequences of the identity-based approach. An even more problematic corollary is produced: The construction of identities implies an explicit rigidity in the categorization of gender. This, in turn, excludes not only those unable or reluctant to be categorized, but also a very marginalized segment of the population: Transgender and intersex people.

Ellen Mortensen speaks about a 'hierarchy of oppression' when she deals with the rivalry between different identity groups based on race, ethnicity and gender, in the search towards equality rights. Even if, as she asserts, gender is today "(...) at the same level of all the other issues: Age, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion, etc.," this hierarchy of oppression has found its way to persist, within a great variety of non-normative genders and sexualities.

Esteban Restrepo thinks "(...) the acronym LGBT is, up to a certain point, a perverse one, which was invented in the United States within a very peculiar context of activism, with its own socio-cultural and economic context, which is not directly translatable to us. To speak of LGBT in Asia or in Africa is a

contradiction, because those categories are not trans-historically or culturally stable. But sometimes strategy precedes theory and the everyday needs to precede theory, and one has to be pragmatic. In the acronym 'LGBT,' the 'G' has taken it all; we see diverse sexualities through the optics of gay men, and of a certain type of gay men. In that measure, I believe lesbians have been rendered invisible, as have the much more perverse ways in which they are being subdued, punished doubly due to the combination of sexism and homophobia. Bisexuals are invisible. What does being bisexual in contemporary societies mean? Like Kenji Yoshino remarks, bisexuals are included in a sort of contract of epistemic elimination between heterosexuals and homosexuals. For many homosexuals, bisexuals are confused heterosexuals or people who want to experiment, and the same goes for homosexuals. There is also the transgender problem; trying to make a judge understand what a transgender is, is already a practically impossible matter. We are not carrying out serious work with trans, but what does a small organization with scarce resources that must confront a society with this existential diversity do? It is these persons who really experience everyday violence in the hardest, most perverse way; who face the greatest barriers, who find themselves in situations of real impoverishment."

There is a first problem of definition and characterization. Justus Einfeld, trans activist and Co-Director of *Global Action of Trans\*Equality* (GATE) affirms, " (...) I don't think anybody can define a trans person in a clearly defined setting. We prefer to work on gender identity issues and gender identity rights that are broadly rooted in critical gender studies and feminism. We consider these foundations from perspectives of people who transgress gender norms because we have found that perpetrators of violence, for example, don't really care how people self identify, but rather attack anybody who they perceive as transgressing gender norms. This can be a person who is visibly transgendered or androgynous, but it can also be a person who crosses gender boundaries in other ways, for example, gay men with a sway in their hips, lesbian women who look a little too butch, heterosexual women in a powerful position, and so on. While these are all transgressions of gender norms, many of these people would never self-identify as trans and we would never claim for them to be trans. While we are deeply rooted within the trans movement we also feel we need to take multiple needs into account when pressing for trans rights in order to frame our struggle in a broader spectrum addressing the transgression of gender norms as well as looking critically at gender norms in general."

Regarding the needs of trans people, he thinks " (...) they are similar in most parts of the world. There are always issues around holistic recognition of our gender identities, both in legal terms but also in medical terms. There are always issues around violence, discrimination, harassment, and accessing employment, work and healthcare. However, the severity of these issues varies

greatly from country to country and from culture to culture. In some places access to healthcare is more important and in other places direct violence by strangers or by family members is a more direct need so the emphasis is different in different parts of the world.”

There are many varieties between male and female, Justus Einfeld asserts. “I personally believe we should question why states and governments register gender in the first place. Any registration of any characteristic is always used to make distinctions between people and I believe governments should not make distinctions between men and women. The registration of gender is very closely linked to the military. The first national registration of citizens was done by Napoleon in France because he wanted to know who the boys were so he could draft them for his wars. Registration of men and women by governments has always been very closely linked to being able to draft one half of society to be part of the military. Any gender registration has always been started with the purpose of identifying men to draft them for the military. Over the course of time it became a free floating thing of its own, especially in countries with no military draft. Registering men and women can be useful in terms of monitoring discrimination, knowing how many men and how many women are in specific places in society, but I firmly believe this can be done with statistical methods as well, without coming down to the individual person.”

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Classifications constraint flexibility and restrict ambiguity. They exclude the very essence of lives such as American performer Mx. Justin Vivian Bond's, who, throughout v's life, has been “(...) gender fluid and sometimes identified as more male or more female, (...) when I was younger (...) I didn't have a way out really. I have been very aggressive about saying I am trans in work and in life, but other than my work, people can take nothing other than my word for this expression. This is fine but I started to think about when I become older maybe I won't have the strength or the energy or the mental facilities to constantly be asserting my transness, so I decided to start making a public and medical record of my transness as well as having my body be the record of my transness. Hopefully, in twenty or thirty years, when I am an old person, there will have been a lot of changes and a lot more room for trans people in medical establishments and in places where we go to be taken care of when we are old. I do not want to be lumped in with the old men, and would probably prefer to be with old women, or old trans people. I just decided that it was important for me to have a physical and medical record of my transness, not so much for now, but for later.”

“(...) Generally speaking, whenever society privileges its way of understanding the world, its norms, its classifications of human beings, we all lose,” says Colombian intersex activist Joshua Pimiento Montoya. “(...) That family lost a valuable member; society, his society, lost a being who had a

place, who should have had a place. Defending tooth and nail any classification system imposed upon human beings is already a problem. Why not let us be, why not let us be happy? If a person living a particular experience finds more meaning to his/her life and may simply be, the rest will also be happier and will be in greater harmony; it is a global benefit. But to stop classifying is very complicated, culture has that vocation; it classifies us, it organizes us. Cultural change is important, but sometimes, as is the case of the struggle within the LGBT movement itself, the fact of not being heteronormative does not imply not being normative and not demanding that the other be a good gay person: 'Zero feathers, with the feet on the ground, and serious,' or 'I want to have a relationship with a man, not with little women,' those things end up hurting us. Whoever feels that this *is* his essence, casting feathers away or whatever; let him do so. What is the urgency to put pressure on him, to shape him in a certain way and not let him be?"

Pimiento further expresses: "(...) While we can handle certain classifications that sometimes orient us, we must understand that reality always goes beyond them, fortunately. All the time there are situations that confirm that there isn't an ideal way to classify that covers everything and that is really fair; let us take classifications as transient things, let us not cling to them; if necessary, let us use them to vindicate rights, but we must not allow them to become a kind of truth and of legitimization to impose it upon others, or even upon oneself, because we will end up being the victims of that process."

Colombian trans activist Diana Navarro vindicates self-definition. "(...) We depend on self-definition, on self-determination, on the person's self-construction. If you come with a beard and a mustache, wearing a suit and you tell me you are a trans person, (...) you are a trans person. Many of us express our gender in vehement ways, but others prefer to consider themselves, construct themselves, act in a certain way, but have a contrary gender".

Justus Eisfeld goes a step further and favors "(...) the societal benefits to embracing gender diversity and giving people more ways to express themselves. When you give people the ability to be themselves in more than two defined categories you open up ways for people to live, which sparks diversity. Diversity sparks creativity and I think it is important to look at what we contribute to society in terms of our views and our experiences. This contribution that we make to society is something we need to stress and convey to other people. I believe in positive examples."

Ruin is interested in the social reactions to sexual ambiguity and states the lack of need for medical treatment. "(...) I made up my mind not to have surgery first and considered its political effects afterwards. When I introduce myself as a transgender, I usually don't clarify whether I'm MTF or FTM. A lot of people mistake me as an FTM, others get confused thinking: 'From how he/she

acts he/she is a woman but from the way he/she looks he/she must be a man...’ I find these reactions interesting so I make use of them often.”

Endorsing this statement in favor of gender flexibility and moving ahead in an attempt to *use* language positively to name and understand non-normative sexualities, Esben Esther Pirelli Benestad creates new categories: “(...) Language is our main way of communicating as human beings. We can’t get rid of categories so I believe in them. Humans will categorize however hard we try not to and I want to be in a dialogue with the existing terms. If I tried to introduce and to construct a totally different language that I would find more appropriate, I wouldn’t be able to communicate. I believe in changing things a little more gradually. I am sure you have heard me use the word ‘talent.’ I talk about trans talents, ‘Androgen Insensitivity Talent,’ ‘Intersex Talent,’ etc., because in that way I am opposing medicalizing terms like ‘syndrome,’ ‘misshape,’ and others that aren’t very good as labels. For example, I also use the word ‘phenomenon.’ I think it is much better for a human being to be a phenomenon than to be a kind of walking disease or walking misfortune. In that way I try to add to the language words that are much more positive. ‘Talent’ is a positive word. My talent for being trans is a very strong one. When I tried to suppress it, it made me quite depressed. I think that is true for all strong talents: I am sure that if one had tried to stop Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart from making music, he would have become depressed because he would have felt that he had something in there that wanted to come out! He could hear it in his head and he wanted us to hear it too!”

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Esben Esther believes “(...) the general public knows very little about trans ‘talents.’ I too was as ignorant as anybody back then. I had to search for information on transsexuality in books and encyclopedias, and wherever I read, it said I was a sick person. Honestly, I didn’t feel very sick, I didn’t even run a fever! I thought these books were wrong. Their ideas were burdening me with a diagnosis that was unnecessary. A diagnosis that made something that is precious to me into something that is ill and wrong. This sparked the necessity for me to be political and to open up space to the ‘unusual’ human being: You are not sick, you are not disturbed but you certainly do disturb. My work today entails being a therapist to individuals and to couples but I am also trying to assist those that are disturbed by me. Instead of accepting the label ‘disturbing,’ I like to assist those I disturb. I disturb psychiatry, I disturb psychology; I disturb a lot of people. My wife and I have a favorite lecture we give called ‘Gender Euphoria,’ in which we quote Marcel Proust: ‘(...) The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes...’”

In a strong assertion against the gender binary, Esben Esther declares that “(...) there is a struggle between those who believe in a more fluid way of perceiving gender, those who believe that there are far more genders than two.

We operate with seven and if you propose an eighth one it will be welcomed. The seven genders are based on people we have actually met. They do not represent an ethereal map that we want to impose. The first is what we call the 'Female Genders,' and we put them in plural to indicate that there are many colors within that category as well. Then the 'Male Genders.' Then the 'Inter Genders,' or the 'Intersex Genders,' which are also a group that has been made ill. Here we have the 'Klinefelter Phenomenon,' the 'Turner Phenomenon' and the 'Androgen Insensitivity Phenomenon.' Note that in medical terms these are called 'syndromes,' but for me they are 'phenomenons.' (...) Then you have the 'Trans Genders,' where I belong, which is also another rainbow of people, of ways to express oneself. There are several ways to more or less change your body to make it a good 'place' to be. Then there are people who refuse gender, you could call them 'Gender Refusers.' They say gender is not for them. Those I have met have been very political about their position. Then you have the 'Personal Genders.' I met someone I called Oscar who has long blond hair, beautiful make up, female clothes, a bulge and no breasts. I asked Oscar: 'What pronoun do you want me to use when I talk to and about you?' Oscar said: 'He.' So I asked him: 'What gender are you Oscar, I am a little confused?' and he said: 'I am Oscar. I do gender *my way*. I don't want to be in any categories.' The seventh gender is the 'Eunuch Genders.' There are the *Hijras* or the *Khusras* of India who may or may not see themselves as belonging to that category. There is an organized group called 'Eunuch Genders,' which are somatic males that want to remove their testicles because they feel that those testicles aren't 'them.' Of course they are entitled to do that. I believe in self-determined gender."

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The binary system to organize gender and sexuality not only reduces the scope of individual vital experiences; it also establishes a scheme of social exclusion and discrimination with deep consequences. A significant one is the absence of medical access for those who intend to receive hormonal or surgical treatment. "(...) 'Gender Identity Disorder' (GID) is listed as a mental disorder in Korea," says trans activist Hanmuji. "(...) Doctors know it exists, but don't know how to treat it. When we visit the doctor, we ourselves have to explain to him/her what we need: 'I'm transgender, and I need hormone replacement therapy' or 'I need a mastectomy and a hysterectomy.' If the doctor refuses, we will consult someone else. We have to do this over and over until someone finally accepts to treat us."

In Norway, says trans activist Tarald Stein, "(...) in 1999, the possibility to have gender reassignment treatment was shut. But that same year, the *Harry Benjamin Resource Center* was started by transsexuals, to get the possibility of treatment for that group. During the past ten years they have developed in a conservative way, and now they clearly express that they are the only organization in the country for people to get the 'transsexualism' diagnosis.

Only people with this diagnosis can get treatment in Norway; you can't get it for any other expression of gender identity. There has been a gap between the transvestites, mostly male-to-female, and the transsexuals, because there are a lot of people that fall in between those categories. You have some transgender people who don't qualify for the diagnosis, and therefore the transsexual organization won't help them."

In Korea "(...) insurance coverage of transgender treatments is a double-edged problem," affirms Ruin. "(...) Without insurance, the black market grows and stabilizes the price at a lower rate. In fact, isn't institutionalization also an illegal process of the things that were, until now, easily tolerated? It reflects the desire to control everything outside governmental supervision. So some activists are hesitant of institutionalizing, rather choosing to raise the black market itself and circulate it within the community, along with networks with several gender-conscious doctors."

Regarding the right for medical and professional assistance, Diana Navarro declares that in Colombia "(...) we are totally screwed by *Act 100*. Under *Act 100*, all those processes of sexual reassignment or body transformation are considered aesthetic procedures and they are not covered by the Social Security. Regarding that, all processes are blocked, and now, with all those decrees on social emergency, it is even worse because we had managed to get some doctors to offer the possibility of a hormone treatment for persons who want to go ahead with that transit up to the point they want to reach. Not all transgender persons want to be sexually reassigned; it is valid to appropriate a number of things from that categorization in a positive way, but here in Colombia, the authorities use this in a negative way. We participated in the campaign against the pathologization of transsexuality and we had internal debates within the group because many workmates believed that if we were considered sick persons they would have to cure us, we could have access to treatments because we were affected by 'Gender Dysphoria,' and I said to them: It is a misunderstanding, because what they will cure is the psychological incongruence you have with your anatomical sex, so that you may feel comfortable with your biological sex, not for you to obtain the gender you wish to belong to. Colombia's Constitution offers us a wide spectrum of possibilities; we can appropriate a number of things: Health is a constitutional right, and so is a dignified life and the free development of one's personality. In terms of legislative advancements, Colombia is in the vanguard, but in terms of recognition, of the establishment of actions that may lead to people being able to exercise all those constitutional rights in an appropriate way, we are fried."

Discrimination and exclusion are present always throughout the State's actions. Even if the fundamental right to autonomy is protected, the power to be oneself has drastic limitations, as Diana Navarro explains. "(...) We have no

access to health, we have no services with a differential perspective that renders them adequate for our specificities and our needs; we don't have that. I was telling a senator: What the hell do I care about a right to the free development of personality if I have no access to medical care, I cannot transform my body to adapt it and be faithful to the feminine or masculine ideal I aspire to, which is not a simple whim, which is not a simple invention, it is a need of mine, and a need that requires a psychological, medical, interdisciplinary accompaniment. How am I going to develop my personality freely if I don't have the right to health, if I don't have the right to work because I dress like a woman being a man. How am I going to have the right to the free development of my personality if I do not have access to decent housing?"

These limits begin with the very first obligation of the state to give citizens an ID number. As Ruin makes it clear, this is a major concern, because it is the condition to be entitled to all other rights. "(...) The biggest issue is the Resident Registration Number (The 13-digit national identification number system of Korea. The first six digits consist of the resident's birth date, in the form of YYMMDD, and the first of the latter seven digits indicates the resident's sex; an odd number if a man, an even number if a woman). The RRN is almost a prerequisite for a proper life in Korea. They ask for it on all sorts of occasions. For transgender persons, the sex indicated on the RRN and the apparent or identified sex is discordant, and therefore they are looked at suspiciously. The RRN is also required when you look for a job, so transgender people are often unemployed or work temporary jobs. Some transgender persons look almost 20 years younger due to their hormone treatments and they are more than often asked for their RRN cards at bars and even when buying cigarettes. Sometimes they are even suspected of carrying someone else's card."

In Norway, says Esben Esther Pirelli Benestad, "(...) we have gendered ID cards. Mine is 03054946375. The number 3 says that I have a dick. However hard I have tried to hide it, this number discloses me. In the Norwegian passport you are also either a man or a woman. I tried to get two pictures in it since I quite often also appear as a man. It is no problem for me to be and to express myself as a man. I wanted two pictures so I could feel as secure in my female expression as in my male expression. Others have tried to do the same thing but we all met a brick wall."

For Diana Navarro these forms of control curtail even the right to hold her name. "(...) I have not changed my name because I have a political position in this regard. What is the point of my name being Diana Navarro San Juan in my ID if the male gender variable is going to continue appearing? They are not recognizing me in my full dimension. I don't think it is worthwhile. Many of my workmates feel attracted by that and they think it is a step forward, but I don't consider it thus, I consider that the variable of sex must be eliminated from IDs.

In the new IDs, in the billion ID quotas, it has already been eliminated, but in the old IDs, it still continues to appear, so we, the people who obtained their IDs before the year 2000 continue to have the same problem.”

Kenyon Farrow calls attention to the severe consequences of state regulated identification in U.S. prisons. “(...) The situation in the prison system is very similar to the shelter system in the sense that in most places, if you are trans identified you have to go to whatever prison your biological documentation dictates. Some places have queer specific wings in the prison and oftentimes queer and trans folks are put in protective custody, which is really solitary confinement, it is not as though there is a separate place in prisons where they place queer people, but they use it in order to supposedly keep them safe from various kinds of violence, sexual assault, and rape within the prison. Solitary confinement is twenty-three hours a day lockdown, with one hour spent outside on the yard. You are still in an actual cage outside, so it is like you are out in the open space with the other prisoners, but you are in a twelve foot cage so you have to exercise and do whatever you are going to do in that cage to keep you protected. Many queer and trans folks, even if they have been targeted for or have experienced certain kinds of violence or rape in prisons, will rather be in with the general population. Who wants to be in solitary confinement? Sometimes folks have advocated to be removed from general population and then when they find out that they are actually in solitary confinement they try to get back and that is another sort of challenge. Sometimes it depends on the warden or guards who may think you will cause problems in the general population, which basically means you are targeted in all these different ways, so they will keep you in solitary confinement as long as they can.”

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Mx. Justin Vivian Bond celebrates the fact that “(...) they just changed the law, I think in New York or maybe in the Federal Government, that you no longer have to have surgery in order to get gender confirmed by a doctor, which makes it easier for people to have their gender changed on their passports. Once your gender is changed on your passport it becomes easier in smaller, more local ways to get your gender changed. Of course the gender choices on a passport are still ‘M’ and ‘F’! If I write male or female, either one, I am lying, because I am neither. I would like to see a ‘T’ in the box, or a ‘T’ and circle. Let the other two be boxes!”

“(...) As far as pronouns, previously, I always went with ‘He’ because it was easier. Now I am at a point where I am more confident to assert what works for me. There have always been attempts within language to find gender-neutral pronouns. I was speaking at a conference on sex and gender and the person introducing me asked which pronoun I would prefer, and I was flustered by the question. He suggested calling me ‘They’ because gender genesis people like to be referred to that way. I told him, okay, try it. There were two people who spoke ahead of me and when he got to my introduction, I had forgotten our previous

conversation and he started referring to me as 'They,' and looking over at me. My friend Matt was sitting next to me and I was like, 'who is he talking about?'; and then I realized that I was 'They,' and thought, 'oh God, that really doesn't work for me.' I had to think about it more. There are pronouns such as 'Z,' 'Hir' and all these different ones that felt awkward to me so I decided I was going to be Mx. Justin Vivian Bond, because I felt like it was a more rounded expression of who I am. I then decided to be 'V' because I like the way 'V' is written with two united sides of equal strength. Also in French *vie*, means life. So I made 'V' my pronoun."

## SOMEWHERE BETWEEN MALE AND FEMALE: INTERSEXUALITY

The biological condition of an individual whose sexuality is divided between male and female characteristics is called intersexuality. The medicalization of this condition, its treatment as pathology, and the poor medical ethics concerning the treatment of the infants are urgent issues for intersex activists internationally. Also, the moral admissibility of intrusive medical practices, the scope of certain definitions, the relations between intersexuality and sexual orientation, and between intersex and transgender people are the main subjects addressed throughout these interviews.

Dr. Tiger Howard Devore offers a definition of intersexuality in the following terms: "(...) What we call intersex people are children that are born somewhere between male and female. The resting state of mammal tissue is female, so once a child is conceived, if nothing were to happen to that fetus, it would be born with genitalia that looks female and that doesn't matter from the standpoint of the chromosomes or anything else. What matters are the hormonal effects on the child. As it develops, the child moves basically from female to male in many steps and the genitals literally change how they look and function over the time of gestation. If there is a stopping in that masculinization, especially the external genitalia, then that child is noticed often at birth as being between the sexes or having ambiguous genitalia."

"(...) What happens to them socially and physically?" asks Norwegian researcher Marit Vaala Rasmussen. "How do the medical system, the state administration and the law, deal with these conditions? Usually intersex children are given an assigned gender pretty early, and then they are treated either with hormones or with surgery, or both, at a rather early time in their lives. I chose to define intersex in a way that also includes other larger out-groups that are often not thought of as intersex, like individuals that have Turner Syndrome and Klinefelter's Syndrome."



## THE CURATIVE PERSPECTIVE

Perhaps the most vital question about intersexuality is its conception as a pathology that needs medical intervention. Marit Vaala Rasmussen, Joshua Pimiento Montoya, Dr. Tiger Howard Devore and Norwegian medical doctor Kirsti Malterud frame this controversy.

For Marit Vaala Rasmussen “(...) the ethics concerning intersexuality can be very difficult because (...) there is a medical reality to take into account. This is not necessarily a matter of choosing between creating a woman, creating a man, or letting the child be, because this last option is in a way a naïve approach. It is so in relation to the fact of planning to raise a child that is gender indifferent in a very gender categorized society. (...) There is a quality of gender that is actually related to good health: To be a person with normal sex also means that you have a higher probability to be a healthy person and not develop different kinds of diseases that are related to your hormone levels. This is an issue that is also relevant to people who transition within a transsexual context, because once they have transitioned, they have a higher probability to get gender specific disorders. Physically speaking, they are transforming themselves into the opposite sex that their bodies are equipped for, and so they have to find the perfect balance with artificial hormones, and this can be tricky.”

Joshua Pimiento Montoya, on the contrary, considers that “(...) there are some medical aspects, but they are minimal. One of those cases is the syndrome termed Suprarenal Hyperplasia, because if it affects the body's electrolytes, the person may suffer dehydration. But I think this occurs in a minor proportion. What we are talking about here is how medicine has somehow vested itself with an authority to define who is who in many senses, but based on the body, on the materiality of this body. Since it is the authority regarding the knowledge of that body, it is supposed to be the one in charge of defining, but in the framework of a system that only recognizes two possibilities, not just in terms of sex but also of identity. If you are a man you must have a penis of a certain size and oriented towards penetration, and if you are a woman, you must have a vagina that may be penetrated.”

Dr. Tiger Howard Devore endorses Pimiento's position and affirms: “(...) There are a few medically necessary considerations around kids who are born with hormonal imbalance that causes them to waste all the salt out of their system. They would die rapidly if they didn't get hormonal intervention. That is one type. Almost all the rest of the intersex kids that we force changes on, it is all cosmetic and not one doctor is going to tell you it is medically necessary, except for the discomfort of the parents for how the kid is going to be accepted into society. The idea is to fix this kid up so they look 'right,' but medical considerations from the standpoint of just the health of the child, there

are only a few very specific considerations that we can find out pretty quick and treat relatively easily. All the rest of it is about how we think these kids are supposed to look so that everybody else is comfortable.”

Kirsti Malterud goes a step further:“(…)The authority of the medical advice is very strong, too strong perhaps. I don’t think the medical experts in that field are very reflective on the cultural construction of gender, unfortunately. Having worked for many years in the service of transgender people, which was somehow a surgical view on gender, I would prefer a society where the voice of the girl in the film (*XXY*, by Lucía Puenzo, Argentina 2007) would be heard. Let her be herself and don’t let her parents have a need to protect her from all the terrible things that would happen, if they make the decision for her.”

Malterud wonders what is to be done in “(…) the case of the birth of a person whose genitals are ambiguous, and read through these binary lenses. If a person is not assigned as male or female, he or she cannot have access to certain rights. What do they say at school? There is a whole institutional, cultural, social influence that makes it very difficult to find third, fourth, fifth places, but somehow this is a wager, because this exists. In practice they exist, they are there; suffice it to see what people are like, the enormous diversity of ways of thinking, ways of being, but also of body forms and ways of relating to those bodies. That binary system is very precarious and very oppressive. I think the pressure to define, to decide, has its source there and not necessarily in people’s experiences, although occasionally, and this must not be denied, an intersex person does not assume a role, a totally masculine or a totally feminine identity. This happens to many trans-sexual persons, many of them heterosexual, who feel that they are men or that they are women, and who feel they have nothing to do with the ‘T’ of LGBT; who are oriented, and that generates tensions. I would say this is the source of the pressure; many of us try to find meaning to our life and an important part of this is taking the place that has been somehow predefined for you.”

Some consider chirurgical medical intervention on babies as a form of mutilation. Esben Esther Pirelli Benestad remarks that “(…) surgeons, in Norway, operate on babies’ genitals because they do not fit one of the two predominant gender categories, it is genital mutilation, just as they do in Somalia.” Dr. Tiger Howard Devore also thinks of early medical intervention as a mutilation equivalent to female circumcision; he denounces “(…) the hypocrisy of the female circumcision condemnation, which came out in Congress and we wanted to question why in a discussion about genital surgery on kids, Congress would be willing to end this surgery for Muslim kids in Saudi Arabia, but not for American kids in every American city in this country, we ran into a debate about religious traditions behind circumcision and were told Congress couldn’t

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issue a blanket statement making it illegal to do genital surgery on infants without their consent because 'what do we do about circumcision?' For me, the answer isn't that hard, circumcision continues in the way it has been done for thousands and thousands of years, by somebody who is part of that religious organization. Every doctor in every hospital doesn't circumcize every male child that is born, it is easy, but they make it hard."

When asked whether waiting would be the best option for a child to decide for itself what to do with its body, Devore said: "(...) This is what all of us who are born intersex are trying to get the medical establishment to do, to wait, to let the child make a determination about what their sex of identity is so that when they are three, four or five, they begin to tell you if they think they are a boy or girl and they show you by the kinds of ways that they pick toys, how they refer to themselves, or by the clothing they prefer. By the time they are eleven, twelve, thirteen, they make a decision about what kind of puberty they want to have. Do they want to have a feminizing puberty and end up looking like a girl, do they want to have a masculinizing puberty and end up looking like a boy or do they want something else? Do they want to have a puberty that is natural to their own personal physiology go with that? There are some kids who will identify as being neither male nor female and that is very difficult for parents and heterosexual people because they want their kid to be heterosexual too. They want their kid to be either male or female, to grow up like they did and to find an opposite sex partner, have children, a family and to have that kind of life, but that doesn't always fit for an intersex person."

## TACTICAL TRANS-INTERSEX ALLIANCES

The connection between intersexuality and sexual orientation is multifaceted. Even though sexual orientation cannot be predicted for intersex persons, associations are repeatedly made. Dr. Tiger Howard Devore explains these complex relations in the following terms: "(...) Sociologically the gay and lesbian community has for a very long time, or actually I should say the artistic community has for a very long time been the place for people who are sexually different to go to. These people identify as being counter culture and that is why I talk about the people who I see as being sexually different, as being different from the mainstream. Whenever people who are different are looking for a place where they will be accepted, as opposed to receiving prejudice, being

kept down, refused privilege, or kept from being able to advance in the things that are most important to them, they go to these fringe communities. Lesbians and gays have won a lot of recognition in Western society. We are at a place where lesbians and gays really have a political force. Queer others and sexually different others do get some value out of associating themselves with these groups. The lesbian and gay communities have been pretty willing to accept people who are sexually different, like the heterosexual sadomasochistic types and all the rest of the people who express sexuality in a different way. Those who cross gender behavior from the standpoint of what the mainstream sees as the sexual binary almost always gravitate toward the gay and lesbian subcultures and communities. There is some power in that, in numbers; and political organizations that are already established, and have their in-roads to various powers-to-be as well as with corporations have the money to support political pursuits.”

Is that a good or a bad thing? He wonders:“(…) I can’t really be sure. Regarding sexuality, because I do identify as intersex, then homosexuality is the bad thing right? We don’t want to be homosexual, but if I am intersex, when is it that I am homosexual? Am I homosexual when I sleep with a male partner because I happen to look male, or am I homosexual if I sleep with a female partner because I am really intersex? Am I only homosexual when I sleep with another intersex person, and how do we define that? How do we make sure it is really an intersex person so we can be sure I am really homosexual? From the standpoint of the gay and lesbian movement, are intersex people just more homosexuals jumping on the bandwagon? Well no, it is kind of hard given our very strict definitions that are completely gender biased and binary. What is the sexuality of the intersex person? What if they don’t identify as male or female? You know we all get to look at these definitional questions when we try to make sense of how we are going to arrange our prejudices.”

The relation between intersexuality and transgenderism is not straightforward either. Marit Vaala Rasmussen explains these difficulties. “(…) People are just starting to understand homosexuality. They are maybe starting to understand transsexualism and the difference between transsexuals and transvestites. So intersex gets added to those groups. I think it is really interesting that the actual surgery is never talked about, the techniques for creating bodies, because this is what you do with the knives: You take tissue, human flesh, and then you transform it into something else. Of course, not all the techniques are the same, but the whole idea of transforming one type of flesh into another is inherited from the trans surgery, and this is never talked about because neither of the two groups wants to be associated with the other or discuss the different kinds of surgery. These are the kind of paradoxes that I find very intriguing.”

Justus Einfeld highlights the significance of this relation in strategic terms. "(...) For many intersex people, bodily variety and not gender identity is really the issue. Many intersex people can be happy with the gender they were raised and are happy to conform to those gender norms. That isn't true for all intersex people of course, and that is where the overlap is, but a lot of the issues center around genital bodily variety and respect for the rights of children to have an intact body, whatever that may mean. These are all issues that are not very central to trans people. That being said, we have worked to support intersex activists in their work and to connect with intersex activists. We will continue this work because we do feel we have a duty to support the build-up of an intersex movement just as we have a duty to support a trans movement and we will support the intersex movement as they build their own structures in any way with that we can."

That is also Dr. Tiger Howard Devore's position when he calls attention upon the value of tactical alliances with trans organizations. "(...) There are people who are intersex who don't want to be called transsexual. That is a bad word to them, and they don't like that association. (...) I think there is strength in numbers. I think we are fighting for many of the same things and are stupid not to associate. I think we need to be able to bring the rights of gender and sexually different people forward and I don't care if you identify as intersex or trans sex or queer or gender different. I think as a group we need to be able to work together, bring our money and organizations together to make this change happen within a larger society. As long as we are jealous and fight about turf, within this kind of a movement, it is going to be very hard for progress to occur."



# SILENCE, STIGMA, MILITANCY AND SYSTEMIC TRANSFORMATION: FROM ACT UP TO AIDS TODAY

## ACT UP

In the mid 1980s a group of activists founded *ACT UP- The AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power*, a grass roots civil movement that responded using “direct action” and civil disobedience to the inefficacy and irresponsibility of the U.S Government regarding the AIDS epidemic. Silence, stigma, discrimination and lack of government action toward AIDS and its victims not only resulted in millions of deaths, but also unveiled the racist, classist and homophobic tyranny of American politics. *ACT UP* achieved monumental effects. The perseverance of its members, the urgency of their actions and their militancy changed the course of the epidemic in terms of medical research, access to drugs and treatment, and policy making.

Eric Sawyer, co-founder of *ACT UP NY, Housing Works, Health Global Access Program* (Health GAP) and currently working at *UNAIDS* explains *ACT UP's modus operandi*: “*ACT UP* took many of its own development queues for the early gay and lesbian liberation and the anti-war movements. We decided

really early on that we were going to use 'Robert's Rules of Order'; that we were going to be an equalitarian organization where everybody's voice had equal weight and that we were going to do a majority rule voting process to determine what we would do. We decided that members of our group would facilitate discussions, that anyone could present ideas, and that we wanted to do 'in your face' street theatre type demonstrations that would be non violent in nature, but that would draw public attention to our issues."

These demonstrations were a form of "direct action," which according to Sarah Schulman, also an *ACT UP* member, "was a concept that came from Martin Luther King, Gandhi, and the early labor movement. The idea was to actively take an action that creates the condition you need in order to move forward. You are not involved so much in theory, but much more involved in the application of theory to practice. (...) Martin Luther King's piece, *Letter from Birmingham Jail* outlines exactly what the *ACT UP* strategy was. Even though we did not study Doctor King, we absorbed that this was the way to go. First, you highly educate yourself so that you completely understand all the issues, then you propose a solution to the powers that be; a solution that is entirely winnable, reasonable and doable. When they oppose you, they are now in a position where they are unreasonable, so you do direct-action to force them, or embarrass them into having to respond to you. That is the strategic sequence and that is how *ACT UP* was effective."

Embarrassing and "(...) drawing attention to governmental leaders who were shirking their responsibilities," was one of *ACT UP*'s strategies, comments Eric Sawyer. "(...) Ronald Reagan never said the word 'AIDS' or talked about HIV for the first seven years of his presidency, so we basically called him a murderer. We did things like constructing a concentration camp on the back of a float-bed truck for gay pride parade in 1987; the first *ACT UP* presence in New York City's gay pride demonstration. We literally, me with my power tools and some friends, constructed a tower on the flatbed of a pickup truck using two-by-fours for a fence post and barbed wire and mesh to make a concentration camp on the back of the truck with a rifle tower up by the cab. I sat on the roof in a suit with a Ronald Reagan mask on and wearing yellow rubber gloves, laughing and pointing at the AIDS victims that were dressed in black, while people in police and military uniforms with masks and rubber gloves walked around the perimeter of the concentration camp. The banner on the side of the float said 'Test Drugs, Not People.'"

"(...) At *ACT UP*," says Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore, a younger member of *ACT UP San Francisco* "(...) there was no shame about being HIV positive, the shame was on the government, the politicians, the Church, and the demagogues around the world who were facilitating the mass murder of people with HIV/AIDS. (...) Many people who became my queer heroes, or at least

people who I respect, I found out about it in their obituaries. David Wojnarowicz is an example, I read his obituary and I was like, 'Oh, this person sounds great.' 'Fags' living on the margins were dying, so there was that urgency around needing to engage in direct action immediately to change the *status quo*. (...) There was a really integrated politic where people said: 'You can't fight AIDS without fighting misogyny, racism, classism and homophobia.' It was all tied together."

A tactical way of challenging the *status quo* was infiltrating the mass media with clear messages, says Eric Sawyer. "(...) We quickly learned that street theater and sexy images, graphics and gimmicks were really effective at drawing media attention. We quickly learned that the media was really lazy, and stupid, and never properly represented the images or the issues that we were trying to draw attention to in their articles. We learned that if we had posters and graphics that clearly spelled out the intent of the demonstration and our demands, the message would get conveyed to the public."

The message was successfully conveyed according to Sarah Schulman when "(...) *ACT UP* realized people would die because of what the Catholic Church was doing and that we had a moral right to go into their church and interrupt their mass. We went to St. Patrick's Cathedral and did 'Stop the Church,' one of *ACT UP*'s famous direct actions. Today, you can get condoms in public schools and people's lives have been saved because we took that action. At this time people asked how we could go into a church to disrupt mass and we believed gay people's lives equaled the church, that the church was not more important than gay people's lives."

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## REPRESENTATION OF AIDS

Douglas Crimp, also an *ACT UP* member, was preoccupied by the representation of AIDS and responded to the crisis by editing "AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism," a special issue of the journal *October*. "My intention was simple. I was interested in the fact that there was an art world response to AIDS. There were many people in the art world that became ill and died from AIDS. I was interested in the notion that you could use the monetary value of art to raise money for AIDS, whereas I thought that a political subject like AIDS could actually be taken on by culture as a subject." The issue took a "(...) mixed approach to writing about AIDS. For example, Leo Bersani's famous essay 'Is the Rectum a Grave?' was published alongside people who had no academic credentials, who were activists working in the movement, such as a prostitute who was doing activist work around prostitutes and AIDS."

One of Crimp's concerns and the subject of his famous essay "How to Have Promiscuity in an Epidemic," was the "(...) raging debate within queer communities at that time, really between what we might call the pro-sex activists and the more conservative voices that were saying gay people should basically stop having sex or stop having sex with too many people, as if somehow having sex with only one person, if you happen to be already infected, was going to make a difference. (...) I was very struck by the return to clichés of homophobic discourse and wanted to show the way in which gay people themselves had fallen back on a discourse that labeled gay people as, for example, immature and irresponsible, within attempts to do something about AIDS. My interest wasn't to try to think about how you could maintain a healthy sexuality in relation to this epidemic through safe sex practices, but about how you could maintain a pro-sex positive position. How you could think about promiscuity and what we had learned from the wide-ranging experiences of having sex with many different people for many different purposes: For pure pleasure, for discovering things about yourself that you didn't already know through an encounter with another, etc. How you could actually understand that as having given us the tools to invent the safe sex discourse in the first place. How, for example, you could have a viable public sexual culture in terms of bars, bathhouses, and sex clubs and so forth that would also become venues for the transmission of knowledge about safe sex practices. (...) Things changed very drastically after AIDS, not only because of repressive forces. I think that the crisis itself, and people dying cast a long shadow over the pleasures of gay culture; not only were bathhouses and sex clubs closed by city ordinances in 1985, but also people just weren't going out as much and taking as much pleasure in gay life, partly because they were afraid, but also people were busy fighting the situation or taking care of lovers and friends. The explosion of a public sexual culture, which had happened between Stonewall and the early 1980s was really shut down."

Douglas Crimp goes on to assert, "(...) Something of an enormous shift happened in the wave of AIDS toward a conservative gay culture where issues like fighting for equal rights to marriage and to fight in the military took precedence over what I think of as a truly queer culture, which is a culture that wants to change how we think about forms of human relations in a much more general sense. I still feel very much what I learned from early second wave feminism, which was the critique of marriage as an institution and how marriage actually served governance as a way of managing the complexity of relations that are possible among people."

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# THE DEMISE OF ACT UP

Addressing the conservative shift referenced by Crimp above, Sarah Schulman reflects on the possible reasons why “(...) *ACT UP* fell apart,” when she says: “(...) The rate of death was so profound; the dying of leadership and the psychological consequences on members surrounded by mass death for so many years had enormous impact on people.”

Sawyer adds: “I think the demise of *ACT UP* (...) began when the HIV ‘cocktail’ was approved. That primarily happened for two reasons: Firstly, when effective treatments became available all of our friends stopped dying; it was no longer a ‘war siege,’ where the community had to engage as if we were fighting a war. The fact that people were getting on treatments and their health was being restored, and that the number of deaths was dramatically reducing, ended the crisis siege. Many people who weren’t infected and who had careers, or whatever, went back to their normal lives.” Schulman confirms and critically expands Sawyer’s idea: “(...) The invention of protease inhibitors and AIDS medications, which became available to people who could afford them and lived in a manner in which they were able to manage taking them, those people abandoned all the other people for whom that was not the case.”

Sarah Schulman adds: “(...) The election of Clinton was hugely disruptive to building independent activist movements because people gave him too much power and had too much faith in him, so members began working in the Democratic Party and got lost as they became part of the system.” Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore also believes that people felt like, “(...) We don’t need *ACT UP* any more, we don’t need to be on the streets, we need to be in the board rooms, we need to be making policy, he’ll (Clinton) let us into the room, we need to be acting more normal and respectable and aiming for his ear.”

Explaining his personal reasons for having slowed down on his work on AIDS, Crimp says: “(...) Like many of the people I know that were involved in *ACT UP* in fighting the AIDS crisis, I felt burnt out. You could only do it for a certain amount of time while coping with everything else. It may have had to do with my own seroconversion as it happened somewhat simultaneously. I felt I had done a body of work and that I also wanted to do and think about other things to give myself a break. Prior to the invention of the ‘cocktail’ another thing happened, which was the gradual recognition over time within *ACT UP* of the structural extent of the crisis of health care in the United States. We have seen recently, under Obama’s presidency, how utterly retractable health care is in this country. AIDS was mapped onto that, and we were no longer just thinking about dealing with the question of say, drugs into bodies, but also the incredible discrepancy between the way rich and poor people could access those drugs once they

came through the pipeline. We began taking on a much bigger political issue, which felt insurmountable to some people. It became more consciously on all of our parts a huge global issue.”

Eric Sawyer further explains how the focus began to shift “(...) from the United States or the developed world countries to center on the developing world. We were getting access to treatment, programs and safety nets in the U.S., Canada, France, and Germany, etc. But the developing world had access to nothing, so the focus of activism changed. I was one of the first people that started organizing international things because I was getting invited to many conferences, global meetings of the *United Nations*, the *World Health Organization*, and other associations of nurses, and medical doctors, to speak about AIDS activism, about living with HIV and about housing issues. I started meeting many people living with HIV from developing countries who couldn't even get aspirin and who couldn't get the most basic treatment.”

## THE PRESENT

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Is the crisis over? Eric Sawyer responds: “(...) There is still a huge crisis in the developing world. We are making a certain level of progress on that crisis, but for example in 2006 there was a declaration of commitment signed at the UN by just under 200 countries, where they made commitments to reduce the number of new infections and the number of deaths by HIV every year. They made a commitment to get everyone access to HIV medications by December of 2010. We are in 2011 now, and while *The World Health Organization* (WHO) and *UNAIDS*' statistics say that around 15 million people need to be on HIV medications today, we have just over 5 million people on HIV treatment around the world. Only a third of people who need treatment today are on HIV medication. We have failed as a global society in obtaining the 'Commitment to Universal Access.' There will be a meeting in June 2011, which is one of the things that I am working on now, where governments will negotiate a new commitment to delineate the global HIV response by governments for the next five or ten years.”

Tackling the perception of HIV/AIDS in the United States today, Sawyer says, “(...) there has been a huge generational divide between queer youth and my generation or the generation that immediately followed me. Most young people today, including queer people and queer activists, grew up after the HIV virus was discovered, and after the HIV epidemic was widely known. Most of them became teenagers and young adults after the AIDS 'cocktail' came to the market, so now we are in 2011, and many of them think of HIV as a chronic

illness that you can take medication for and live a healthy life. They don't see AIDS as a crisis. They don't have a sense of urgency, they don't fear HIV, and so they are not that concerned about getting HIV, they engage in unsafe behavior, they are unwisely and unacceptably exposing themselves to the risk of HIV infection and many of them are getting HIV."

Crimp reflects on why this change of attitude may be taking place: "(...) Certainly, even for someone who was as involved in it as I was and as someone who deals with being HIV positive and takes the medications, HIV/AIDS doesn't have the same meaning as it did then. The epidemic is also different for me than it is for many people, such as people in this country and other countries who do not have access to drugs and health care. I think relative to younger generations in the United States there is no memory whatsoever, I mean there can't be memory, they were born after all of this happened. (...) The sort of sense of a community dealing with a crisis at once is gone because it no longer feels like a crisis. (...) There is a big difference between a disease that will almost certainly kill you and one that will almost certainly not. Even when I seroconverted, the 'cocktail' was just starting and I remember my doctor saying to me at one point that I would not likely die of AIDS. (...) I remember when the presence of AIDS was in the newspaper every single day. In fact, I remember fighting to get it in the newspapers every single day when it was not being covered as much as we were experiencing it. I remember reading all kinds of articles on the subject daily and I also remember reading obituaries of people who had died of AIDS every single day. For many years my writing tried to follow and engage these various materials. Now you can go for weeks at a time and never see an article about AIDS in the New York press."

Eric Sawyer is also concerned about how "(...) pharmaceutical companies present ads and commercials of men climbing a mountain or running a marathon while they are taking this latest approved HIV medication. People think that one pill is going to allow them to run marathons and climb mountains, not knowing that there are horrendous side effects, that drugs don't work for everybody, that people are developing neuropathy, diabetes, liver and kidney problems, wasting syndromes, cardiovascular disease, peripheral vascular disease, and a whole laundry list of side effects that are debilitating and often kill people far earlier than someone would die if they weren't HIV infected and getting these complications that are caused by the drug's side effects."

## A CURRENT EXAMPLE

Kenyon Farrow suggests AIDS is still a crisis in the United States, as it pertains to minority communities that have less access to treatment or infrequent access to HIV tests. He provides the example of incarcerated minorities: “(...) There is no arching policy or approach in terms of HIV transmission in prison, other than it is illegal to have sex in prisons, and illegal to have drug paraphernalia, or do tattooing, which are some ways in which transmission may happen, but primarily sexual contact is what we are talking about. (...) There is really no strategy. What is interesting about the prison system and HIV, which goes against a lot of narratives that people think, is that of all the people who have HIV in U.S. prisons, only about nine percent of them contract HIV in prison. Ninety-one percent of them came to prison HIV positive, and many find out when they are in prison because it is the first time they have ever been offered an HIV test. (...) There is public health research mounting that is beginning to point to the connections between massive imprisonment and the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the U.S. If we consider New York City, which has one of the highest HIV rates in the country, about ten percent of all people with HIV in the United States live in New York City. Looking at New York City neighborhoods that have the highest HIV rates and incarceration rates, it is almost a one for one match, with the exception of Chelsea being the outlier, because that is where white gay men also impacted by the epidemic live. Seventy percent of prisoners in New York State come from seven neighborhoods in New York City, all Black or Latino neighborhoods.”

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Farrow continues: “ (...) If you think about that and think about a high percentage of people who are constantly being moved in and out of the state prison system, the social and sexual networks and dynamics change as people are constantly changing partners because of the impact of prison. Public Health researchers are actually looking at massive imprisonment in the U.S. as an actual driver of HIV transmission and to a far less extent sex that may be happening in prisons itself, though some studies look at this, even in states like Georgia, which criminalizes sex between prisoners. (...) There was one study done by the *Center for Disease Control* (CDC) and they concluded most prisoners were trying to figure out ways to have protected sex, using Saran wrap, and a range of different things, as condoms were not available or were considered contraband. It is not as though people in prison are not trying to protect themselves. The other interesting thing about that study was that a lot of sex that was happening, about thirty to forty percent of it, was with guards and other staff rather than with other prisoners, so there is also a relationship between coercion and systems of security or the conditions in which prisoners

sleep with guards in order to be able to get certain kinds of privileges. These are just some of the ways HIV transmission and prison connection defies what people often think.”

## BAREBACKING

When asked to give his perspective on the gay sub-culture of “Barebacking”; communities of gay men that engage in unprotected sex and oftentimes seek to get intentionally infected with the HIV virus, Eric Sawyer replied:“(…) I think it has become desirable because it is new and dangerous. It is exciting because it is something you are not supposed to be doing. There was a time period when pornographers felt a sense of responsibility to ensure that all of their actors engaged in safe sex and they made big deal of showing people putting on condoms. There was an effort to try to eroticize condom use. Then a few people started saying: ‘Well fuck that, it’s really hot to take a load of cum up your ass,’ and started doing bare backing videos, and then it was like: ‘Oh, my god did you see that? Oh, my god that’s so hot!’ So it became edgy and in vogue to say: ‘Oh fuck it, don’t tell us how to fuck.’ Barebacking porno became cool and it is really awful because it is encouraging many people to take risks that they are eventually going to really regret.”

On the same subject, Douglas Crimp said:“(…) I myself don’t know what to think of a culture that involves notions of wanting to belong to the group of the infected, that sense of belonging that Tim Dean theorizes (in *Unlimited Intimacy* 2009) as a kind of historical kinship. It is a kind of metaphor that I am not sure what I think of, the notion of the virus as connecting you to all the other people who have transmitted the virus. I don’t actually know what drives barebacking and I think probably most of barebacking culture, and this is only just an assumption, takes place among people who are already infected. I think the people who are tops and the people who are bottoms may take for granted already having the virus and are not particularly worried about the so-called ‘reinfection.’”

Crimp further reflects:“(…) It is very abstract for a young person to say: ‘This disease means that I will have to see a doctor every three months as part of the standard care, and that I will have to take medications for the rest of my life, medications which have side effects, medications which mean I must be conscious every day of taking them at a particular time and not taking them may mean developing a resistance that could become dangerous to me.’ All of the things that have to do with managing a disease are not transparent. You don’t recognize the reality of managing a chronic disease until you have one.

It may not be AIDS, it could be diabetes, it could be many things, but the kind of drag it is to deal with managing a disease is something that changes your life. I think young people who expose themselves, whether deliberately or not, to risk are not really fully conscious sometimes. Maybe some of the people in barebacking culture are conscious, maybe they have friends who know what it takes to manage the disease.”

Finally, Crimp says:“(…) The trouble is that the question of mortality is different when you are young. For example, when you first lose a parent, there is something about that loss in and of itself that disturbs one’s psyche terribly. But one of the aspects of that disturbance is that you are confronted with death, not just your parent’s death but also your own. The encounter with death in general is like that: It is always double. When you lose someone you also recognize your eventual death and as you grow older, mortality becomes more present in your life in many ways. It could be because of an extreme illness or many deaths in your life or because you begin to lose your youthful vitality and don’t have the energy you once had. There are many ways that mortality becomes something we absorb as an aspect of living. This was always a consideration when we talked about the problem of teaching young people about safe sex, as an aspect of youth is the feeling that you will live forever, you haven’t confronted mortality yet, you are invincible.”



# QUEERING ART DISCOURSES

The relation between art and homosexuality is complex. Artists, writers, performers, filmmakers, as well as art critics and art historians have developed lifelong critical projects that situate the importance, articulation and recognition of sexuality as central to artistic production. The notion of a queer art; an art that represents, names, discusses, engages and insists on sexual difference is a fundamental part of art discourses. Queer art, however, has been consistently silenced and censored by the *status quo*, the art market and institutions. Sexual difference is often relegated, according to American art historian Jonathan D. Katz to “a biographical category.”

## SILENCE

Speaking about the value of art as a register of what wants to be told but also of what wants to remain hidden, Katz affirms,“(…) pictures can say things written materials cannot. Words carry political significance and legal weight, but pictures can evade things. You can notice things in a picture or not. You can make something available to one audience, while excluding another. Pictures have the ability to articulate a scene in a number of different social and political registers and so we have this extraordinary archive of queer American history

and queer art history that we never thought to look at precisely because we have never approached it this way.”

Katz has “(...) begun to curate what I think will be a series of national exhibitions attempting to end the blacklist on sexuality that has been in play since 1989 with the censorship of the Robert Mapplethorpe exhibition at the *Corcoran Gallery*. (...) I would say there is a shortage of queer discursive frames, and until there is a greater acknowledgement of the discursive import of sexuality, it will not matter how many works by queer artists museums buy. It is also the case that because of this reign of silence, we have actually falsified American art history.” Katz suggests there has been a self-conscious effort to erase themes of sexuality from art history. “(...) It is not just self-conscious, it is aggressively policed.”

Responding to whether or not he thought American morality was responsible for such policing, he replied: “(...) I think what is at the top of the list is money. We once had an idea of the museum as in the service of the public interest and in some sense trying to elevate the public through exposure to culture. However patronizing that 19th century model, what has happened in museums over the last 25 years is the way in which they have become an extension of private capital. We see this most readily in the case of the *L.A. MOCA* (Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art) when after financial problems, a major donor dictates the terms under which the museum will reinvigorate itself by selecting a new director who is an art dealer. The process becomes full circle because collectors are telling museums to hire dealers, making current directors nervous; and that is because we effectively have high volume commodities. Essentially, the focus of our forms of inquiry shifts to allow market forces to mitigate against the discussion of sexuality. Ellsworth Kelly told me once that if people found out he is queer, it would hurt the price of his work. Worrying about prices and what the imputation of his queerness would do to the price of an artwork, tells you a little something.”

Colombian art historian Víctor Manuel Rodríguez also believes art has been distanced from a discourse of sexuality. “(...) The relationship between art and sexuality in Latin America has been a relationship that has been constructed through silence regarding that sexuality; it is not a question of demanding that people should speak about it, but of showing other ways in which silence operates, which does not necessarily imply vindicating silence as a strategy of self-representation and cultural fight. Silence functions as a strategy of the historical artistic discourse but also as a strategy of resistance, and such is the case of the gay couple that purchases the painting because it allows them to hang the image of the naked man in their sitting-room while at the same time they can keep the secret of their sexuality, since what they have is a work of art, and they can thus avoid the violence of homophobia.” He perceives “(...) a double

record in the development of these artistic works: On the one hand, there is the subject of the cultural construction of sexuality, and on the other, how these works hold a critical dialogue with respect to the art institution.”

Korean lesbian activist and cultural producer Susu thinks there is art that addresses issues of sexual difference in Korea, “(...) but it is not part of the mainstream. Most queer artists are kept in the dark. Only a couple of gay artists are invited to large scale exhibitions held at national museums; and even they are not perceived precisely as queer artists dealing with homosexuality, but simply as individual artists who have their own unique style.” Susu mentions the work of “(...) Oh In-hwan, which focuses on the invisible presence of gay sexuality. One of his works is about old gay bars in Jongno, which are more than a hundred of them, clustered but hidden. He spread out a map on the floor and placed incense or scented objects on the spots that corresponded to the locations of the gay bars. He used smell to express the invisible. Another work by him is a poster for a holiday party he had with his gay friends. The guest list is written on it, but because their names couldn’t be legible, all names are blacked out. The core of Oh In-hwan’s work is showing the *unshowable*.” Oh’s work however, “(...) is normally understood as postmodern art. His works are read as interactive and participatory projects; art that goes beyond the borders of visibility... However, it is not so much interpreted in relation to the general queer culture or history. (...) When a new discourse comes in from overseas, for instance post-colonialism, every critic uses it as his or her methodology; and if it doesn’t really fit in, they look for another discourse. So all the feminism-related works are scattered about, not being able to form a stream. Artists like Oh In-hwan himself must have seen some of those works without understanding their significance. (...) It becomes almost impossible for young queer artists to continue doing work on sexuality, gender or feminism, because the evaluation of the work always shifts along with new trends and does not maintain a consistent context. If your work isn’t applicable to the latest discourse, there is no place for it in an exhibition. Artists are bound to consider adapting their work to this mold.”

This compulsory heterosexuality is reaffirmed broadly in American culture, as Sarah Shulman demonstrates when she speaks about the different cultural realms: “(...) Theatre is so conservative in this country it is shocking, and I am an insider. (...) Theatre is obsessed with telling the one story they think is at the center of the culture, which is the coming of age of the white male, (...) it is the only story that is seen as important. Literature is different because it is a mass art form and publishers want to sell as many books as possible to reach a wide audience, so all different kinds of people can publish books. (...) Still, the dominant apparatus containing this genre remains the white straight male as the emblematic voice of the culture. There are a few exceptions, but they are

...TO NAME, TO  
PRESENT. IF YOU  
DO NOT NAME, YOU  
DO NOT HAVE A  
CULTURAL HISTORY  
AND IF YOU DON'T  
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always decontextualized, like Toni Morrison or someone like that. We went from Hemingway and Fitzgerald to Bellow and Roth, and now we are on to Franzen, so it is always the replaceable straight white male author dominating the culture of publishing. Cinema is about niche, so there is the *Black Queer Film Festival*, the *Arab-American Film Festival*, and so on. People cannot get seen in the mainstream, so they produce work at a very low budget. (...) The work is only shown in queer environments and you can't get the money to move the work forward, so it remains a satellite around this impenetrable dominant culture that never sees any of this as part of the world, people who spend their whole lives looking in the mirror and thinking it is a window with no idea what is going on outside (...)"

Edmund White, too, is also concerned with the exclusively heterosexual expectations of creative work. He believes they subvert cherished values such as universalism. "(...) Universalism was an idea the French invented in the 18th century and it was a very progressive idea at the time because it basically said a black woman from the Antilles and a white man from Paris are the same, they are both individuals and they are citizens. The kind of universalism of that period was very progressive. Now, when people use the word 'universal' it is almost always reactionary, because they are really trying to say that if you are not writing about a white heterosexual man, then you are not writing about something universal, your work is too particular, you are only writing about a Chinese Lesbian, for example, and who could possibly care about that? Straight male critics still dominate the literary field, so the reception of literature, whether it is in universities or critical establishments, is still informed by these tastes and prejudices, that are defended by being called 'universal.'"

## BREAKING THE SILENCE

American artist Emily Roysdon has attempted to break that silence by resisting to the dominant forces of what we may deem impossible. She developed the concept of "Ecstatic Resistance," which she articulates as: "(...) The horizon of the impossible is always shifting. At one point, it was impossible to think black people would be free in America. At another, it was impossible to see women voting. Thinking about politics as a system of impossibilities, where people control the imaginary of what is possible to be, I started to think through "Ecstatic Resistance" as a force against that. The "ecstatic" is about an encounter to me; is an encounter where you get turned on just enough that your boundaries shift for a minute. I am interested in work that brings you to this place and presents an alternate reality as a possibility, works that somehow physically

affect you. (...) I am positing it as a relation between, an encounter you can have with a person, an artwork, or your own self I guess. It is the encounter that addresses our concept of the other, and my desire is to position that encounter as present and ecstatic because I want it to be developmental and challenging.”

Throughout her career as an artist, writer, editor and curator, Harmony Hammond has actively resisted the forces of invisibility by naming and representing lesbian artists. Speaking about the “Lesbian Art and Artists” issue of the 1970s feminist publication *Heresies*, which she co-edited, Hammond highlights the importance she saw in the act of naming: “(...) To name, to make present. If you do not name, you do not have a cultural history, you do not exist in a sense. Everybody understood that as a basic thing. (...) We also wanted to go back and bring some historical lesbian artists into the magazine to create a visual and textual conversation about what it meant to be a lesbian artist in that time and place. We found there was not much we could draw on historically and that we had a lot of trouble getting women willing to be named.” One of the things she did was “(...) to look at work by women who identify as lesbians and as artists to see if there was some thread or commonality of theme, approach, or whatever. But there just was not a common thread. This was informative.” Hammond says: “(...) I had full political awareness of what I was doing. (...) You do not take on editing a lesbian issue of a magazine, or organizing a lesbian show unless you have full awareness of the political gesture of your actions. (...) If the artist is out as lesbian, she is part of the discourse, even if the art is abstract. That was difficult to deal with; what we would now say is a ‘queer’ reading of the work.”

Art critic Douglas Crimp “(...) is motivated by the notion of making available a kind of queer culture that I think has a lot to teach us about how we could be queer in the present beyond the kind of conservative identity-based, rights-based, normative gay culture of today.” He is working on a book about Andy Warhol’s films: “(...) I have a chapter on *Chelsea Girls*, which is a canonical and probably the most important Warhol film, but there is not great literature on it. My essay is called ‘Misfitting Together.’ The title is taken from a Warhol quotation where he says people presumed that people from *The Factory* all thought alike but were in fact just a group of Misfits ‘misfitting’ together. I used this idea to think the double screen projection in *Chelsea Girls*. Actually, Yvonne Rainer wrote a review of the film when it came out and she talked about how watching *Chelsea Girls* is about watching the line between the two frames. I take this as a kind of deconstruction of the notion of the couple, or the idea that ‘two become one’ because in Warhol two does not become one: It is a resistance to the notion of coupling. (...) It is about that kind of reclamation of accessing that notion of queer which pre-existed what we think of it. I mean we

think of that as the time of abject sadness among gay people, as prior to their liberation, but of course it was a much richer scene than that.”

Working together with a collective of cultural producers in Bogotá, Víctor Manuel Rodríguez, “(...) presented the exhibition ‘Yo no soy esa’ (I am not that woman), which inquired into the different forms of resistance of the queer Bogotá of the 1980s. It attempted to establish a connection between artworks and non-official sexual practices within a framework of resistance both to the normalization of queer lives during that period and to the art institution. Such is the case of Miguel Ángel Rojas. In the 1970s and 1980s, he produced a series of photographs showing the spaces for gay encounters in theaters, public bathrooms and parks. The first time he was asked to exhibit in a gallery, he showed these photographs in a 0.5 millimeter in diameter format. Nobody sees anything, and I wonder: What is this work resisting? What it is resisting is, precisely, that this queer world be transformed into art and strengthen the art institution. It seems to say: This world is not for you. This world is not at the service of artistic *voyeurism*, so to speak. The work always resists being seen, being understood, and there is a scenario that renders translation impossible. One sees this photograph, and if one does not form part of the universe of this subculture, one can hardly realize that one is in the restroom of the Faenza Theater, looking at someone who is returning the gaze.”

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Through live performance, Mx. Justin Vivian Bond has found a way to resist heteronormativity and to denounce American conservative politics. As “Kiki” of the performance duo “Kiki and Herb”: “(...) I railed against Reagan and Bush. I railed against the war. I took on homophobia by talking about creating a gay son for myself. I talked about women’s issues, as a woman who had her children taken from her because she was too wild. I could say everything in this crazy way because people would understand my character as a drunk. One of the classic lines was: ‘The saddest day of my life was the day John Hinckley missed when he tried to assassinate President Reagan,’ and then I would go off in this dirty rant about Reagan. It was funny.”

Bond “(...) was always interested in performing. (...) I found that when I was performing I was in control of what I was presenting to people, because if I would be walking down the street or if I was at school I never knew how I was being perceived. When I was on stage, performing, I knew exactly what I was putting out, and people seemed to respond positively to what I did. I have never felt safe in a crowd, but I have always felt safe in front of one.”

“(...) There were so many people out there who were uninstructed and suffering, like a seventeen-year-old boy living in a small town in Missouri, so the idea that you could actually reach and reassure these people was interesting, I liked it.” Says Edmund White, who has written more than 25 books, most of them with gay characters. “(...) When I wrote *States of Desire*, I wanted to travel and

actually meet some of these people. When I wrote *A Boy's Own Story*, I wanted to show an in-depth portrait of one of these people, although it is fictional."

Sarah Schulman considers the act of representing queer subjects to be a fundamental act of resistance: "(...) I have published sixteen books, including novels and non-fiction books. Each has gay, lesbian, or HIV-positive protagonists and people as its primary subject matter. As a playwright, I have produced plays with queer subject matter and am now writing movies featuring lesbian and queer protagonists." Additionally, she has "(...) always approached things by creating my own institutions. When Jim Hubbard and I founded the *MIX Festival* 25 years ago, it was because mainstream gay festivals were not showing formally inventive work and the experimental community was not interested in queer work. Now there are people showing in that festival who were not alive when we started it. What we learned is how creating venue creates artists. When people see they can go somewhere and see work that is about them, they become motivated to make work, but if their story is not ever represented they become alienated from the entire process, so we have done this alternative institution building. (...) I have learned to set my own agenda and create my own institutions."

## CENSORSHIP

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Jonathan D. Katz addresses censorship when referring to the recent removal of David Wojnarowicz's video "Fire In My Belly" from the exhibition "Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture," an exhibition he co-curated at the *National Portrait Gallery*.

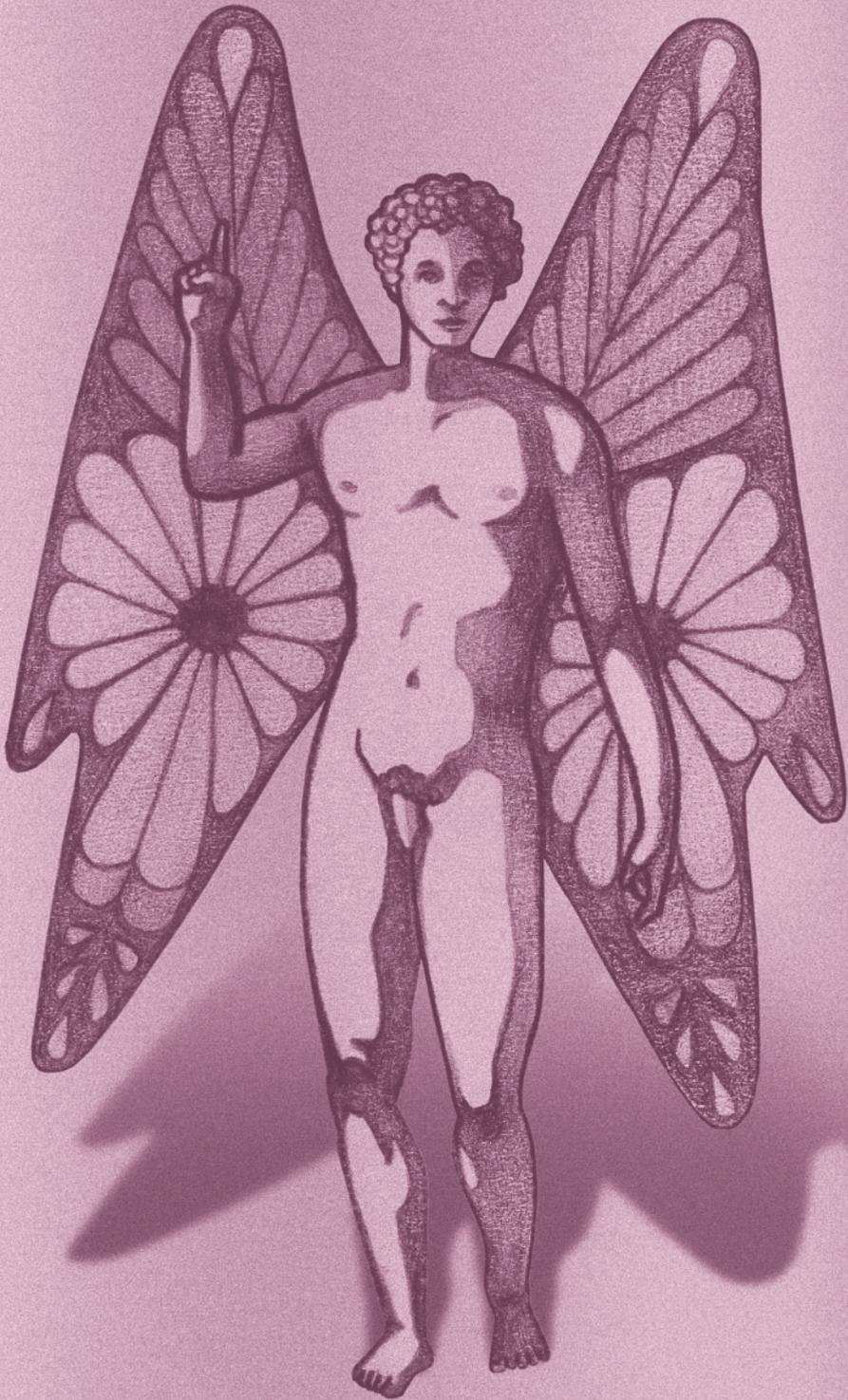
"(...) The Right, as all ideologues claim, wants to supplant a notion of a pluralistic democracy with an idea of a singular vision dominated exclusively by their perspective. They want to supplant discourse with abject props and look away from precedence, back to a realm of surety in which their particular ethnic grouping was unquestionably dominant. That vision of America is, thank God, dead except within the ideological Right, but they are doing their best to use the politics of representation to weepily bring us back to small town America and its fictive constructs, and to there by soldering an increasingly fragmented movement around an America that never was."

"(...) Since the Mapplethorpe exhibition in 1989 there has been a blacklisting on sexuality from art," Katz asserts. "(...) Here we are in 2011 and my show is the first major queer show, which is ridiculous after years where queerness is in evidence in the realms of music and film and television and other power centers in American life. Yet the museum world, which understands

itself as progressive and is credited as such, is now behind international banking in its political openness. What worried me was the social and political gesture that was intended to ultimately kill the blacklist has, at least for now, the distinct prospect of having reinvigorated it. It is funny, we will see in the next couple of years whether or not this show had its intended effect, but it has created so much controversy, I am not entirely clicked whether a museum will take sexuality under consideration. In this sense the Right got what they wanted out of this. They want pages, they want commentary, they want to make themselves central to definitions of culture and they have done that. Now when we make exhibitions about ourselves we necessarily must reference or address them. Any museum proposal that goes forward is going to have to talk about what happens when *The Catholic League* attacks. They achieve this act, not on their own, let us be clear, but because Republican leadership jumped into bed with them as a needs of appealing to a tea party base.”

Katz further says: “(...) The show was up for a month before they attacked and I would not be surprised if they did focus groups trying to find a handy way to get it censored. Paradoxically, this shows a certain form of progress because in previous years, you could simply identify a work as queer and it would be killed. They can’t be nakedly homophobic any more so they find new ways of getting what they want and in America, the discourse of religious offense, which called the work ‘hate speech,’ appropriating our language and using our strategies against us. It is not about religion to be sure; it is not even about our sexuality, it is just about gay power. It is about playing the old game of divide and conquer and building your base by in-common hating. That is a cynical, hateful anti-American politics that has moved alongside other American political developments since the founding of this country and it continues to deliver, which is why they do it. Old habits die hard.”

Regarding the moment of normalization of mainstream gay politics, Katz sees equivalences in the realm of art. “(...) I see a lot of work about normalization, which essentially embraces the idea of queerness by playing with the prospect of mutability, either in gender terms or in erotic terms. It is also interesting how many of the aesthetics of resistance or dissonants of the work are now reanimating punk modes and other historical modes of resistance. Under queerness you really don’t want to claim any kind of essentializing identity or history, so there are gay artists who aren’t invested in queerness because they don’t care or understand it, but there are also queer and post queer artists who are interested in exploring the limitations of the queer discursive frame from a position that understands what that politics was able to proffer and unable to see.”



# THE INTERVIEWEES

## SELF-PRESENTATIONS

**We Who Feel Differently** is composed of interviews with fifty queer academicians, activists, artists, politicians, radicals, and others in Colombia, Norway, South Korea and the United States.

### **Mauricio Albarracín (Colombia)**

I have had a very legal life in the sense that when I began to study law I also became engaged in activism in favor of the rights of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons.

### **Hossein Alizadeh (USA)**

I am the Middle East and North Africa Program Coordinator for the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC).

### **Arnfinn Andersen (Norway)**

I am a sociologist working at the Gender Research Institute in the University of

Oslo. My current project is on friendship; on how friendship has changed in society, on how some people have ten friends and others don't have any friends at all.

### **Norman Anderssen (Norway)**

I am a professor of social psychology at the *University of Bergen*. I have had two main research topics: Health behaviors using standardized and survey methods, as well as statistical procedures, etc., and gay and lesbian issues.

### **Virgilio Barco (Colombia)**

Six years ago, together with four other persons I founded *Colombia Diversa*.

### **Mx. Justin Vivian Bond (USA)**

I am an artist, a performer, a singer/songwriter, a writer and a painter.

**CHEON Jae-woo (Korea)**

I am 40 years old, gay, and living in Seoul. I work as a doctor and I have been a member of *Chingusai* since its early days. I am also part of a gay chorus called *G-Voice*.

**CHOI Hyun-sook (Korea)**

I joined sexual minority activism in 2004 and have been an activist ever since. I founded the *Sexual Minority Committee* in Korea's New *Progressive Party* (NPP). In 2007, I fought against the "Anti-Discrimination Act" for not including discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation. That same year, a decision was made in the Party to put forth an out-homosexual candidate in the following year's general elections. I ran for office in 2008.

**Ryan Conrad (USA)**

I am the founding member of *Against Equality*, an online publishing, arts collective and archive doing work to challenge the idea that queer and trans people need to be included in heteronormative institutions.

**Douglas Crimp (USA)**

I have been working as an art critic since 1970. I took a big swerve in my career as editor of a cultural journal called *October* when during the AIDS crisis I decided to do a special issue on the subject of AIDS. This propelled me into the AIDS activist movement.

**Dr. Tiger Howard Devore, PhD (USA)**

I have a PhD in clinical psychology and I am a Certified Sex Therapist. I have been working with people who are sexually different and I have been advocating for their rights for 30 years.

**Justus Eisfeld (USA)**

I am a trans activist. I have been working for *Global Action for Trans\* Equality* (GATE) as co-director together with Mauro Cabral.

**Dag Ø. Endsjø (Norway)**

I am a professor of Religious Studies at the *University of Bergen* and the leader of the *Norwegian Human Rights Alliance* in Oslo, an independent alliance of twelve human rights organizations working against discrimination based on grounds of sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, gender, ethnicity, etc.

**Kenyon Farrow (USA)**

For the last five years I have worked in different capacities within the organization *Queers for Economic Justice*. *QEJ* does community organizing, advocacy, research, leadership development, and work on economic justice issues that impact the LGBT community in the United States.

**Karen-Christine Friele (Norway)**

I am nearly 75 years old. At the age of 26, I joined the gay and lesbian movement.

### **María Mercedes Gómez (Colombia)**

My academic career began with philosophy. For many years, I devoted myself to the field of epistemology. (...) I always had a great interest in literature, political philosophy, psychoanalysis and cinematography. At a given moment, I dedicated myself to political philosophy, and at a later stage, to legal philosophy, all this with a strong interest in the way in which cultural models, literature, films, and to a certain extent music, have a bearing on the construction of subjectivity. This led me to ponder on the legal issue, and more specifically, to inquire into the spaces of justice related to groups that had not been traditionally represented in those abstract images of subjectivity.

### **Harmony Hammond (USA)**

I do community work in the village, have been a volunteer in the Fire Department for ten years, and I am an artist and writer in the community of Santa Fe. I am part of bicoastal, intergenerational art and queer art communities.

### **Hanmuji (Korea)**

I am what people normally call FTM, but I identify myself as a trans man. The word “to” in “Female-to-Male” has so many connotations that I feel I can’t fully express myself by saying that I have transitioned from female to male. In general, trans people try to erase their past before the surgery. But I still want to embrace the time when I had women’s breasts, although they were so burdensome and hideous.

### **Tone Hellesund (Norway)**

I work at the *Rokkan Centre for Social Studies*, in Bergen. I have a PhD in cultural anthropology and I am interested in different kinds of themes revolving around gender and sexuality, as well as around inclusion and exclusion, normalcy and difference.

### **Franklin Gil Hernández (Colombia)**

I work at the *School of Gender Studies* at the *National University*. I occupy a hybrid place because I have participated in the LGBT social movement, I was the spokesman for the *Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals and Trans Table* in Bogotá, and I am engaged in academic issues.

### **Jeongyol (Korea)**

I have been an active member of the *Solidarity for LGBT Human Rights of Korea* for almost 13 years. The current issues I am working on are HIV/AIDS, LGBT teens and labor.

### **Jinki (Korea)**

I am 21 years old. I tell people that I am a lesbian out of convenience, but I am searching for a word that better suits me. Four years ago I formed *Rateeen*, an online community for sexual minority teens and I am still running it.

### **K (Korea)**

I am a lesbian activist and have been a member of the *Korean Lesbian Counseling Center* since 2003.

### Jonathan D. Katz (USA)

I have begun to curate what I think will be a series of national exhibitions attempting to end the blacklist on sexuality that has been in play since 1989 with the censorship of the Robert Mapplethorpe exhibition at the *Corcoran Gallery*.

### KIM Sungjin (Korea)

I have been working as a culture coordinator in Korea for about 10 years. I usually plan and produce festivals and events. A couple of years ago I started doing projects in the gay community. Presently, I am making a book with a collective of gay men.

### Hans Wiggo Kristiansen (Norway)

I am a social anthropologist; I did my fieldwork in 1993 in Santiago de Chile, where I wrote a thesis on male homosexual identity, mostly in the poor neighborhoods of Chile. After that I worked at the *NOVA* Research Institute (Norwegian Social Research), where I worked on a large-scale research project on the living conditions of gays and lesbians in Norway, which was published in 1999.

**Kirsti Malterud (Norway):** I am a Norwegian medical doctor living in Bergen. I am 60 years old, a general practitioner and a professor of general practice. In the last few years I have been doing and supervising research on lesbian health and on health services for lesbian women. I am a lesbian myself.

### MONG Choi (Korea)

I entered a lesbian rights group in 2004, which led me to become a sexual minorities activist. I formed an organization called *Mujigae Hwaldong* (Rainbow Action) along with many activists.

### Ellen Mortensen (Norway)

I am a Professor at the Department of Literature and Head of the *Center for Women's and Gender Research* at the *University of Bergen*.

### Diana Navarro (Colombia)

I am thirty-seven years old, and I am the Director of the *Corporación Opción por el Derecho de Hacer y el Deber de Hacer*. I am a well-known transgender person in Bogotá.

### Joshua Pimiento Montoya (Colombia)

I am an anthropologist from the *National University of Colombia* and I am currently taking a Master's course in Public Health.

### PARK Kiho (Korea)

I am the director of *Chingusai* (Between Friends), a Korean gay rights organization. *Chingusai's* core members are gay men and our activities focus on promoting sexual minority human rights, developing cultural diversity and human rights sensibility, etc.

### Karen Pinholt (Norway)

I am the President, the elected leader of the board, and the Executive Director of *LLH, The Norwegian LGBT Association*.

### **Esben Esther Pirelli Benestad (Norway)**

I was named Esben, which is a typical Norwegian male name, when I was born, so I added the Esther and the Pirelli later, because for me there is no point in being either a man or a woman. I am a trans person; that is my gender, so to speak. I think the double name, Esben for the male and Esther for the female, suits me very well. I am a medical doctor, a pharmatherapist and an Associate Professor at the *University of Agder* in Southern Norway.

### **Marit Vaula Rasmussen (Norway)**

I am 29 years old and I am a doctoral candidate in Social Anthropology. My doctoral project is about the intersex conditions in Norway, also called “Disorders of Sex Development” (DSD). I am interested in the larger scale of these themes, such as the history of medicine, the law and the nation-state.

### **Esteban Restrepo (Colombia)**

I am currently a professor at the *University of Los Andes* Law School.

### **Germán Rincón (Colombia)**

I am a lawyer. I have carried out activism from the juridical sphere, without neglecting the social issue. In a parallel way, I organized study groups and the Pride March in Bogotá.

### **Víctor Manuel Rodríguez (Colombia)**

My connection with the subject of sexuality comprises two components: An academic and investigative one, for I pursued studies and obtained my PhD at *Rochester University* in New York and one

of the central subjects in my academic training was queer studies, and on the other hand, I am involved in a sort of activism within the local artistic milieu.

### **Åse Røthing (Norway)**

I am a researcher for a strategic research program of the *University of Oslo*, called “Cultural Complexity in Norway.”

### **Emily Roysdon (USA)**

I identify myself as an artist, a writer, and an organizer.

### **Ruin (Korea)**

I usually introduce myself as an MTF transgender lesbian. I am also a vegetarian and a cat lover. I started thinking about gender issues in 2004, and two years later I became an activist.

### **Marcela Sánchez (Colombia)**

I am a social worker, a feminist, and I have worked with issues of women’s participation in politics, sexual and reproductive health, and violence against women. I am the Director of *Colombia Diversa*.

### **Eric Sawyer (USA)**

I am a co-founder of *ACT UP* (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) in New York, of *Housing Works* and of *Health GAP*. I now work for *UNAIDS*, whose Secretariat is responsible for the primary policy setting and program development involving HIV, and for coordinating the efforts of all UN system organizations against AIDS.

**Sarah Schulman (USA)**

As a writer, I have published sixteen books, including novels and non-fiction books. Each has gay, lesbian, or HIV-positive protagonists and people as its primary subject matter. As a playwright, I have produced plays with queer subject matter and am now writing movies featuring lesbian and queer protagonists. As an activist, I have participated in foundational political movements in this country.

**Fernando Serrano (Colombia)**

I am an anthropologist. At present I am in charge of the so-called “LGBT Community Centers Strategy,” which is a part of Bogotá’s LGBT public policy, and which seeks the development of a series of services for that specific community and for the community at large, on issues of sexual and gender diversity.

**Tarald Stein (Norway)**

I am a 31 year old trans man, transgender, transsexual, everything goes... I work at the *LLH, The Norwegian LGBT Association* in Oslo. I am working on a new project titled “Gender Diversity,” in which we are trying not to have an identity focus, but to base our work mostly on the needs of the transgender population.

**Susu (Korea)**

I work independently. My activism is mainly concerned with the art and culture of sexual minorities, but also with everything that relates to my life and identity.

**Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore (USA)**

I am a writer, activist, editor, social critic, a bit of a troublemaker, and a contrarian. My work is about challenging the violence of the assimilationist gay movement.

**Mara Viveros (Colombia)**

My initial training was as an economist, but I later became an anthropologist.

**Edmund White (USA):** I have written maybe twenty-five books. I recently finished a novel that will come out next year, titled *Jack Holmes and His Friend*, which is about a straight and a gay man who are best friends in New York in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. I am currently working on a memoir about my life in Paris in the 1980s.

**Kjell Erik Øie (Norway)**

I have been working on gay and lesbian issues from two different positions: I was the president of the *National Lesbian and Gay Task Force* in Norway for four years. Previously, I had held two positions in the Norwegian government, first as Deputy Minister at the *Ministry for Children and Equality*, and later as a political advisor to the Minister.

**[www.wewhofeeldifferently.info/  
interviews.php](http://www.wewhofeeldifferently.info/interviews.php)**

# EDITORS' BIOGRAPHIES

## CARLOS MOTTA

is a multi-disciplinary artist whose work draws upon political history in an attempt to create counter narratives that recognize the inclusion of suppressed histories, communities, identities and ideologies. Motta's work has been presented at internationally in venues such as *Guggenheim Museum*, New York; *MoMA/PS1 Contemporary Art Center*, New York; *Institute of Contemporary Art*, Philadelphia; *Museo de Arte del Banco de la Republica*, Bogotá; *Serralves Museum*, Porto; *National Museum of Contemporary Art*, Athens; *CCS Bard Hessel Museum of Art*, Annandale-on-Hudson; *San Francisco Art Institute* and *Hebbel am Ufer*, Berlin. Carlos Motta is a graduate of the *Whitney Independent Study Program* and was named a *Guggenheim Foundation Fellow* in 2008. He is part of the faculty at *Parsons The New School of Design* and *The Milton Avery Graduate School of the Arts* at Bard College.

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## CRISTINA MOTTA

holds a law degree from *Universidad de los Andes*, Bogotá, Colombia, with a Specialist Diploma in Political Science from *Université de Paris*, France, and LL.M. from *Harvard University*, United States. She received a *Fullbright* scholarship for her graduate studies in the United States. She has been a teacher and researcher as well as Director of the *Center for Socio-Legal Studies* at *Universidad de los Andes*. Her areas of expertise include access to justice, right to information, public corruption, and the relation between gender and law. Her works include investigations for the *World Bank* and the *United Nations Population Fund*. She has also been a professor at the Law Faculty of *Universidad de San Andrés* in Argentina. She is the author of several books and essays on women's rights and ethics. Her writings have been published in Colombia, Argentina, and the United States.

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### Illustrations' List

"Our Hand" (based on an illustration of La lotería mexicana) [page 3](#)

"Our Lust" (based on a photograph of a photograph of a French S&M performance) [pages 8-9](#)

"Our Chains" (based on an unidentified photograph at the *Schwules Museum* in Berlin) [page 14](#)

"Our Liberation" (partially based on a figured of the Socialist mural by Max Linger on the Leipziger Strasse in Berlin) [page 32](#)

"Our Music" (based on a photograph at the *Schwules Museum* in Berlin) [page 46](#)

"We Androgyne" (based on a found photograph) [page 57](#)

"We Siren" (based on an illustration of La lotería mexicana) [page 64](#)

"Our Tradition" (partially based on a found photograph of a Chinese eunuch) [page 76](#)

"We Angel" (based on the cover of the magazine "Gay Power" by Alan Daugherty) [page 86](#)

"Our World" (based on an illustration of La lotería mexicana) [page 96](#)

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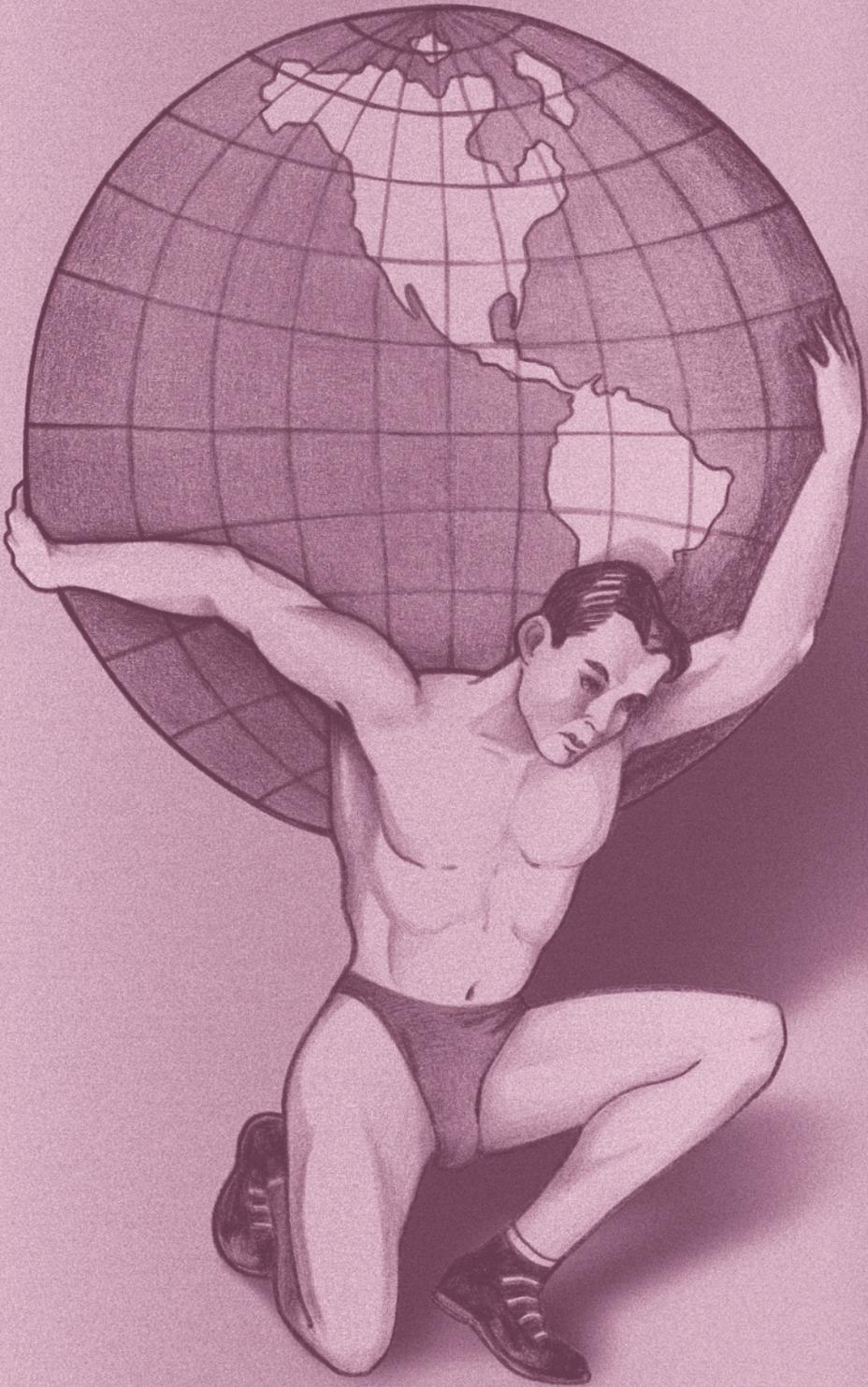
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## Elsewhere

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