



corpūs



Vol. 3, No. 1
Fall 2005

ISBN 0-9759225-3-X

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CORPUS

An HIV Prevention Publication

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Front cover art Viet Le, "untitled," 2004, Cibachrome print, dimension variable, from the series *Pictures of You*

Back cover art Eugene Rodriguez, "Exhausted," 2003, oil on panels, 75" x 50" x 2"

Pp. ii-iii Giovanni Koll, "Charly," 2003, digital photograph, 8.375" x 12" (altered)

P. 1 Eduardo Aparicio, "Blue Love," 1993, print from color negative, 8.375" x 8.375" (altered), from the series *Manholes*



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CORPUS



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Foreword

George Ayala

I was having dinner with a younger work colleague recently. We talked about school, family, food, and work. He was curious about agency fraternization policy and wanted my take on this issue. He wondered why people felt so uptight about sex that involved two consenting adults (into my forties, I am learning to settle more comfortably into my role as mentor). I discovered quickly that an abstract conversation with him about professional boundaries and power differentials inside of an organizational hierarchy, however stimulating, was falling on deaf ears. My younger colleague is, after all, a student of the gay rights movement and a proponent of sexual and reproductive freedoms for all people – as am I. Abruptly cutting through our mini-debate, I asked him how he thought his work colleagues would feel if he consented to a sexual relationship with another co-worker or supervisor. He admitted that it had never occurred to him that others would be affected by his sexual choices. I realized more clearly than ever that this is precisely the paradoxical challenge facing us in HIV prevention.

The struggle for greater sexual freedoms that characterized some aspects of the gay liberation movement in the United States certainly requires that we remain assertive in our efforts to challenge all forms of social oppression

Pr logo

George Ayala

Recientemente, estuve cenando con un joven colega en el trabajo. Conversamos sobre la escuela, la familia, la comida y el trabajo. El tenía curiosidad sobre la política de fraternidad de la agencia y quería saber mi opinión sobre este asunto. El se preguntaba por qué la gente se siente tan tensa sobre el sexo cuando dos adultos con consenso mutuo están involucrados sexualmente (en mis cuarentas, estoy aprendiendo a instalarme más cómodamente en mi papel de mentor). Prontamente descubrí que una conversación abstracta, con él, sobre los límites profesionales y poderes diferenciales dentro de una jerarquía organizativa, a pesar de ser estimulante, estaba cayendo en oídos sordos. Mi joven colega es, después de todo, un estudiante del movimiento para los derechos gay y es un proponente de la libertad sexual y reproductiva para toda la gente; tal como yo lo soy. Interrumpiendo abruptamente nuestro mini-debate, le pregunté acerca de qué pensaría él sobre cómo se sentirían sus colegas de trabajo si él consintiera tener una relación sexual con otro colega de trabajo o un supervisor. El admitió que nunca se le había ocurrido que otros serían afectados por sus decisiones sexuales. Me di cuenta, más claramente que nunca, que esto es precisamente el reto paradójico que enfrentamos en la prevención del VIH.

La lucha por libertades sexuales más amplias que

including, homophobia. Homophobia undermines our HIV prevention efforts because it denies many gay people access to societal resources afforded to heterosexuals, leads to social isolation and therefore diminished self-worth. Diminished self-worth often manifests itself in weakened regard for others. As consenting gay men, we have come to believe that sexual freedom means that we can do with our bodies what we please. And while this is true, it is only part of what freedom should suggest.

I have known HIV/AIDS for more than half my life. I wear it on my body, play it in my mind, and speak it in my heart. In those twenty-five years I have watched grey hair frame my face like frost on a pane of glass. I take great pleasure in getting skin care tips from friends also in their forties (thanks Robert)! My love handles grow more and more willing for loving. Hair loss and gains confuse me as do the intense insatiability of libido's peaks and the sometimes-welcomed quiet of its not-so-low valleys. No one told me that sexual magnetism could be predicated on confident knowing and experience, not just boyish curiosity. I am re-dis-covering my body and only beginning to understand the depth of my love for other men. I am also realizing that the choices that I make about sex not only affect me but other people. While my body is mine to do with as I wish, it is a body I share with others. This is one of the many gifts the gay liberation movement and aging have to offer—a certain kind of necessary mindfulness of others.

caracterizan algunos aspectos del movimiento de liberación gay en Estados Unidos requiere ciertamente que nos mantengamos asertivos en nuestros esfuerzos para retar todas la formas de opresión social, incluyendo a la homofobia. La homofobia socava nuestros esfuerzos de prevención del VIH porque niega, a mucha gente gay, el acceso a recursos sociales asequibles para los heterosexuales, lleva al aislamiento social y por lo tanto disminuye la valoración personal. A menudo, la valoración personal reducida se manifiesta así misma en un débil interés por otros. Como hombres gay consensuados, hemos llegado a creer que la liberación sexual significa que nosotros podemos hacer lo que queramos con nuestros cuerpos. Y mientras esto es cierto, es solamente parte de lo que la liberación debería sugerir.

He conocido al VIH/SIDA durante más de la mitad de mi vida. Lo llevo puesto en mi cuerpo, lo juego en mi mente, lo hablo en mi corazón. En esos veinticinco años he visto al cabello gris enmarcar mi cara como escarcha en un panel de vidrio. Me da mucho gusto recibir consejitos para el cuidado de la piel de amigos que también están en sus cuarentas (¡gracias Robert!). Mis rollitos crecen más y más, dispuestos a amar. La pérdida del cabello y el aumento de peso me confunde al igual que lo hace la intensa insaciabilidad de los picos de la libido, y el a veces bienvenido silencio de sus valles no tan bajos. Nadie pudo decirme que el magnetismo sexual podría ser predicado en una experiencia y conocimiento confidente, no solamente como

I like to think that *Corpus* in part, is an opportunity for gay men to practice mindfulness as we see ourselves reflected on the written/painted page. Edited with the loving hand and critical eye of one of my mentors and friends, Robert Reid-Pharr, this fourth issue offers glimpses of gay life and sex from different places in time and “seasons” of gay men’s lives. *Corpus 4* doesn’t just add complexity to the HIV prevention challenges we must navigate, but also offers clues to some of its creative solutions.



J.Diaz, Peace at Joshua Tree, 2005, digital photograph, 3 x 4

una curiosidad juvenil. Yo estoy redescubriendo mi cuerpo y solamente empezando a comprender la profundidad de mi amor por otros hombres. Mientras mi cuerpo es mío para hacer con él lo que yo quiera, es un cuerpo que comparto con otros. Este es uno de los tantos regalos que el movimiento de la liberación gay y el envejecimiento tienen para ofrecer: cierto tipo de cuidado necesario para con los demás.

Me gusta pensar que, en parte, *Corpus* es una oportunidad para que los hombres gay practiquen ese cuidado, al vernos a nosotros mismos reflejados en la página escrita/pintada. Editado con el toque cariñoso y el ojo crítico de Robert Reid-Pharr, uno de mis mentores y amigos, esta cuarta edición ofrece un vistazo de la vida y el sexo gay desde lugares diferentes en tiempo y “temporadas” de las vidas de los hombres gay. *Corpus 4* no solamente agrega complejidad a los retos de la prevención del VIH en los que debemos navegar, sino que también nos da pistas para algunas de sus soluciones creativas.

Introduction

Robert F. Reid-Pharr

Let us resolve not to pass in dark silence. Allow not a single death to remain unrecorded, un-avenged. Fight back like dying men. Take revenge, sacred and sweet. Prick the index finger. Squeeze hard. Let diseased blood splatter the faces of our enemies. Wash them clean as newborn Christians. Take pity but not prisoners.

These were the words of the young, the prayers of brave, gallant, dedicated men. Strong, beautiful brothers sharing rage, bitterness and whispered commitments. Love, community, communion, a world no longer overwhelmed by death. These were our banners. We agreed to fight back, to act even when no action seemed possible, to declare victory even as we knew that losing was inevitable. We were revolutionaries then, brazen schemers who talked of assassinations and spectacular suicides over Proseco and pâté. Conditional sentences (“If it were me I would . . .”) became strange, gaudy markers of an even stranger, even gaudier lack of options. Drop the blow-dryer into one’s bath water, fall suddenly into the path of an approaching G train, take vitamins, work out, call relatives or schedule a long overdue trip to Africa. The options were ridiculous, never possessing the requisite scale or grace necessary for the tasks at hand. One could escape with dignity in tact but not reason.

Introducci n

Robert F. Reid-Pharr

Decidamos no pasar a una oscuridad silente. No permitamos que ni una tan sola muerte quede sin grabar, sin vengar. Pelea como hombres que perecen. Venganza, dulce y sagrada. Pínchate el dedo índice. Aprieta fuerte. Deja que la sangre enferma salpique las caras de nuestros enemigos. Lávalos y límpialos como nuevos cristianos renacidos. Toma la pena pero no los prisioneros.

Estas fueron las palabras de los hombres jóvenes dedicados, los nobles pregoneros del valor. Hermosos hermanos fuertes compartiendo la furia, la amargura y los compromisos susurrados. Amor, comunidad, comunión, un mundo que ya no es abrumado por la muerte. Estas fueron nuestras banderas. Nosotros estuvimos de acuerdo en contraatacar, en actuar hasta cuando ninguna acción parecía posible, en declarar victoria hasta cuando sabíamos que perder era inevitable. En ese entonces nosotros éramos revolucionarios, descarados maquinadores que hablaban de asesinatos espectaculares y suicidios, dándole al Proseco y a la empanada. Oraciones condicionales (“Si fuera yo, yo hubiera. . .”) se convirtieron en notas extrañas y vulgares de una falta de opciones aún más extrañas y más vulgares. Dejar caer la secadora de cabello en el agua de la tina de baño de uno, caerse súbitamente en el camino de un tren G que se aproxima, tomar vitaminas, ejercitar, llamar a los parientes o agendar un viaje retrasado a África. Las opciones eran ridículas, sin nunca poseer el criterio requerido, o la gracia necesaria para las faenas inminentes. Uno podía escapar con la dignidad intacta pero no la razón.

Yo creo que *Corpus 4* marca un alejamiento radical de este momento en nuestra historia, un cambio en las maneras que

Corpus 4 marks, I believe, a radical departure from this moment in our history, a change in the ways that many of us, aging revolutionaries all, approach the difficult questions surrounding HIV and AIDS, particularly as these relate to our communities, our politics, our social commitments and our sex. Of course there is at least marginally good news to be considered. There have been significant and sometimes dramatic changes in what many of us took five, ten or twenty years ago to be the absolute reality of HIV infection. Pain, disease, shame, frightful and frightening death, the ridiculous become real. These are certainly realities with which we continue to grapple. At the same time, however, we have entered a moment in which it seems the ugly face of AIDS has been rouged and powdered. Illness continually lurks but appears somehow less likely to confront one on the main thoroughfares. In Brooklyn, the bus shelters are continuously decked out with advertisements featuring handsome models, sporty and grinning as they extol the virtues of competing HIV medications. Clean young pink and brown faces broadcast bundles of hope to wind-chilled commuters. They project a cheeriness that belies their ever having known fear, despair, bitter loneliness, ever having spent an evening quaking in private rage over the absence of grand friendship or enduring love. There is of course a strange dissonance that takes place for many of us as Madison Avenue reminds its diseased public of how very lucky and lovely the survivor’s life really is. Perfect bodies, perfect teeth, gym-manicured torsos. No history, no present, only

muchos de nosotros, todos revolucionarios añejados, nos aproximamos a las preguntas difíciles alrededor del VIH y SIDA, en particular cuando éstas se relacionan a nuestras comunidades, nuestras políticas, nuestros compromisos sociales y nuestro sexo. Por su puesto que por lo menos existen noticias marginales buenas para ser consideradas. Han habido cambios significativos y a veces dramáticos en la manera en que muchos de nosotros pensábamos que era la realidad absoluta de la infección del VIH hace cinco, diez o veinte años. Dolor, enfermedad, vergüenza, la muerte horrible y espantosa, lo ridículo se convirtió en realidad. Ciertamente, estas son realidades que todavía continuamos afrontando. Sin embargo, al mismo tiempo, hemos entrado a un momento en el cual parece que la cara fea del SIDA ha sido ruborizada y empolvada. La enfermedad está continuamente al asecho pero de alguna manera parece que es menos probable que lo confronte a uno en los principales caminos. En Brooklyn las paradas de autobuses están continuamente emperifolladas con anuncios que muestran hermosos modelos, deportivos y sonrientes, mientras alaban las virtudes de los medicamentos del VIH en competencia. Las caras jóvenes rosadas y morenas o de color café emiten un montón de esperanza a viajeros diarios friolentos. Ellos proyectan una jovialidad que contradice que ellos, alguna vez, hayan conocido el miedo, la desesperación, la amarga soledad; a que alguna vez hubieran pasado una noche estremeciéndose en una furia privada por la ausencia de una grandiosa amistad o un amor perdurable. Por supuesto que existe una extraña disonancia que para muchos de nosotros ocurre cuando la Avenida Madison recuerda a su público enfermo de la suertuda y lo verdaderamente adorable que es la vida de los sobrevivientes. Cuerpos perfectos, dientes perfectos, torsos con manicuría de gimnasio. Sin historia, sin

the future, one overflowing with mountain bikes and the outrageous fun of surprise birthday parties.

Few seem to have noticed, however, that both HIV disease and the persons dealing with HIV disease continue to develop and indeed to age. We do so, moreover, in the face of the conceit that everyone knows everything about HIV and its effects but in which many of us continue in our confusion and bewilderment. The truth of the matter is that we have remarkably limited information about how it is that one might thrive as a social and sexual being effected by HIV and living in a body and a community for that matter that constantly change and deteriorate regardless of the grand wonders of medicine or the more mundane wonders of gyms and nail salons. The result is that as we mature with and through HIV, many of us become even more isolated in our struggles. It is in this way that to live with HIV today involves a rather peculiar species of managed risk. Not only must one ask how long the everyday magic of three-pronged regimens will last but also how one might continue healthy development within communities that seem so very uncomfortable with normal processes of maturation. This fourth issue of *Corpus* is a first attempt on the part of a particularly gifted group of writers and artists to at least begin to approach some of these questions. The answers are certainly not easy or obvious, but then again neither are we.

presente, solamente el futuro, uno rebosando con bicicletas de montaña y la diversión extravagante de las fiestas sorpresas de cumpleaños.

Pocos parecen haber notado, sin embargo, que ambos, la enfermedad del VIH y las personas lidiando con la enfermedad del VIH continúan desarrollándose y, sobre todo, envejeciendo. Nosotros lo hacemos, además, con la cara de la presunción de que todos saben todo sobre el VIH y sus efectos, pero en el cual muchos de nosotros continuamos en nuestra confusión y aturdimiento. La verdad de las cosas es que nosotros tenemos información notablemente limitada sobre cómo es que uno puede progresar como un ser social y sexual afectado por el VIH y vivir en un cuerpo y en una comunidad, en cuanto a que cambia consistentemente, se deteriora sin importar las grandes maravillas de la medicina o las maravillas más mundanas de los gimnasios y salones de uñas. El resultado es que a medida que nosotros maduramos con y a través del VIH, muchos de nosotros nos volvemos más aislados en nuestras luchas. Es de esta manera que vivir actualmente con el VIH involucra unas especies de manejo de riesgo bastante peculiares. Uno no solamente tiene que preguntarse cuánto tiempo durará la magia diaria de los regímenes de tres, sino que también cómo uno puede continuar un desarrollo saludable dentro de las comunidades que parecen tan incómodas con los procesos normales de maduración. Esta cuarta edición de *Corpus* es un primer intento por parte de un grupo de escritores y artistas particularmente dotados para que al menos se comience con la aproximación hacia algunas de estas preguntas. Ciertamente las respuestas no son fáciles ni obvias pero de nuevo, tampoco nosotros lo somos.



Alex in Wonderland

Osuna, as told to Patrick Pato Hebert

I went through many things. I went through low self-esteem, thoughts of prostitution and suicide. I was raped. I wanted people to have sex with me because I thought that would make me feel wanted. It was like chasing the white rabbit. I guess that rabbit was perfection. I stopped looking for it because I found out I should just love myself. If there were no sadness, life wouldn't be life. So I stopped chasing the white rabbit.

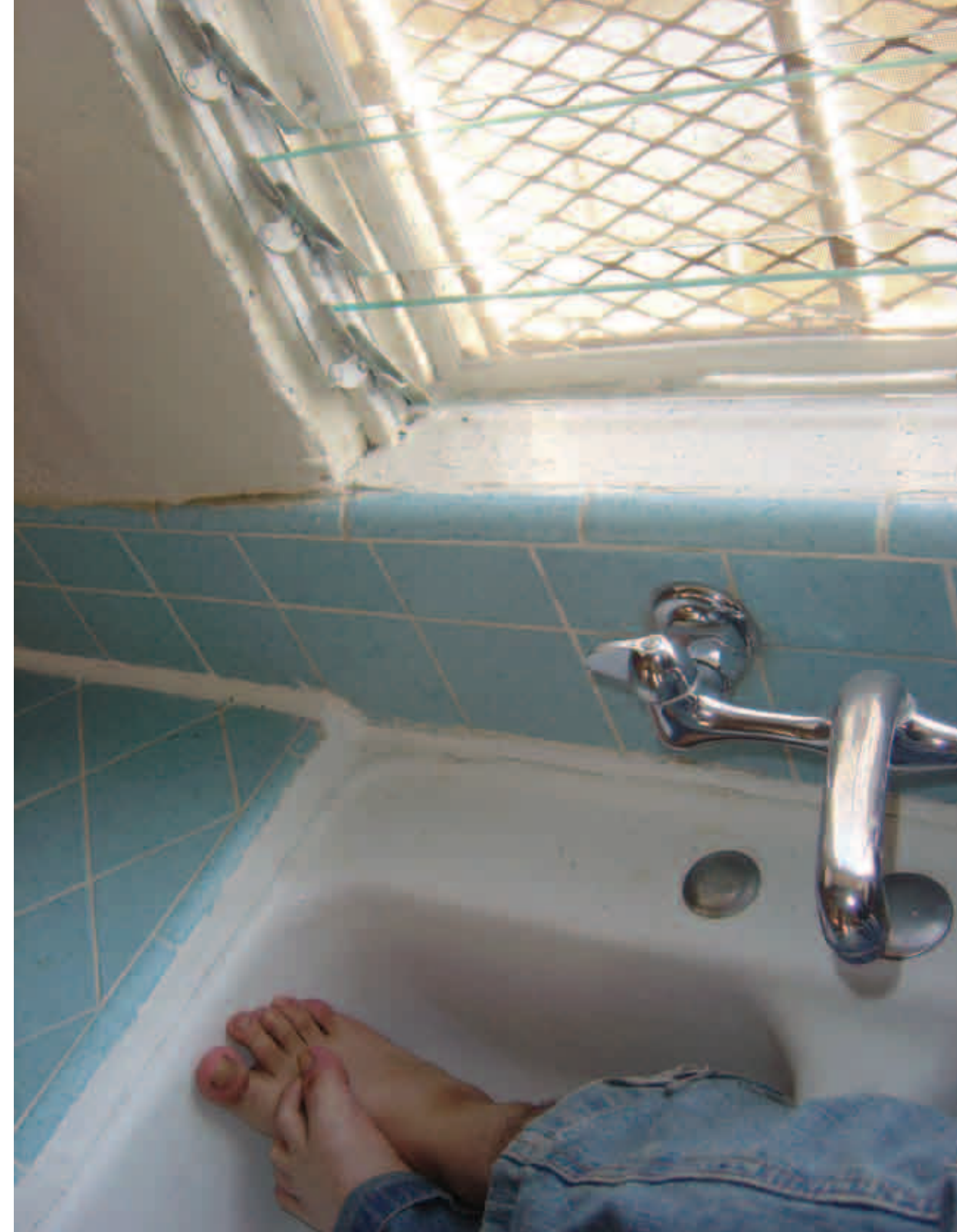
I made these pictures because of what I went through while chasing the white rabbit. I felt ugly, which is kind of a contradiction when you see the pictures. But when I was 16 or 17, I felt like I didn't have any power or control. Even after I made the pictures I didn't like them. They weren't a fairy tale, or something that had happened to other people. They were *my* reality, *my* scars.

Now when I look at these pictures I feel happy that I'm a little stronger, ready for what will happen next. It would have been such a big error to commit suicide. Life is imperfect like me. We all go through things. In April 2004, my mom died. My poor dad—the next week his father died. Two weeks later, my uncle committed suicide. If I hadn't stopped chasing the white rabbit, I probably would have died during that surreal month. If I hadn't realized my own power, my own beauty, I would have died with them.

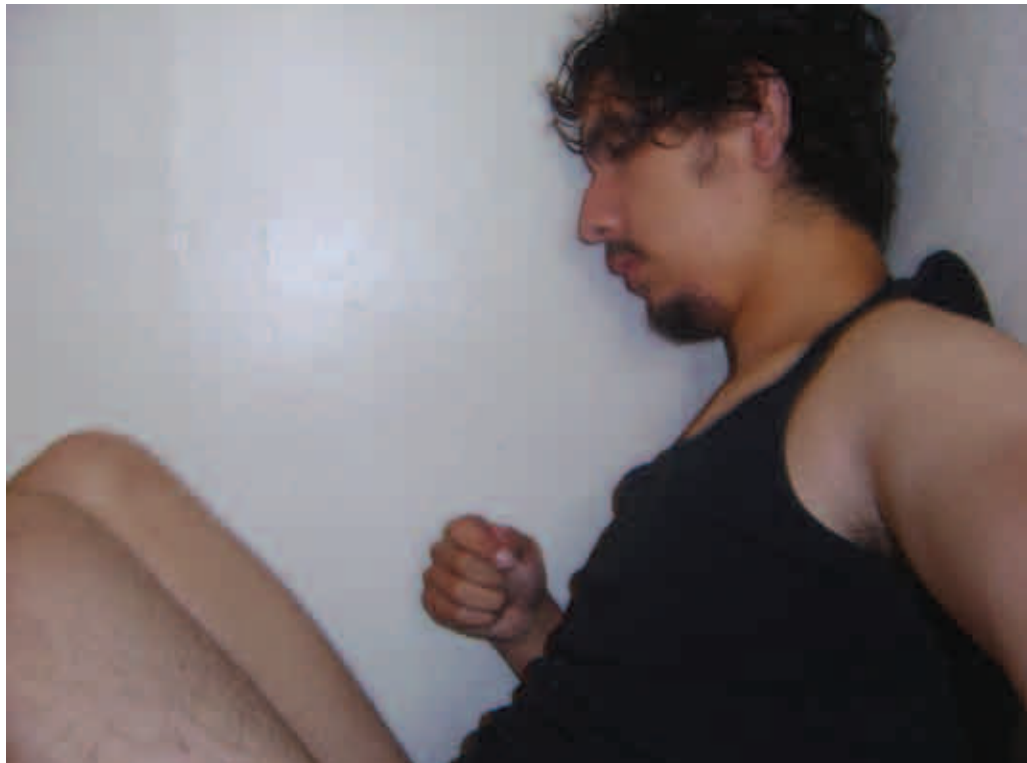
The rest of my family members expected me to cry because I was gay, to be weak or whatever. I didn't cry at all. I haven't even cried yet. That worries me, but I guess I cried enough while chasing the white rabbit.

When all those deaths first happened, I didn't even tell my friends. My sister told one friend, and he told everyone else. I wasn't expecting that. I didn't want attention. I hate attention. But that was a contradiction for me. During that time, in my head I wanted to be naked to the world. But I didn't tell anybody about the deaths. And yet I wanted to die, so I was kind of jealous of my mom. Then I realized that was stupid. I'm living and she's not.

Sometimes I wonder, am I the disease or the cure? Am I making people feel better or worse with this work? But I like these pictures because of how they make me feel. I haven't been in love yet. It scares me because I see what my friends go through when they're in love, crying, getting upset. I haven't been through that yet. But when I look at these pictures, I feel like I can survive love.









Glad About You:

An Exchange Between Allen Wright and Tim m T. West

There is a sensuality that marks the attraction between many young brothers and the men who guide them. It is a beautiful tension that for some men, like the anxious first steps of a first slow dance (with another guy), is a careful play of trust and surrender. The following dis/closure is an exchange between two black gay men, two friends, two men who have grown to love and respect the sensuality of language and who experience its beauty in the exchanges with one another. There is an intimacy in the writing between these men that is not unlike the intimacy expressed in the hugs between them when they happen upon chance meetings at Black Prides or activist conferences.

And such is the nature of this exchange between me, and my dear friend Allen Wright. We had yet another random meeting of the hearts on Christopher Street during Black Pride in 2003. I wanted to stay around him a bit, and he came to a reading I did from “Red Dirt Revival” in Ft. Greene Brooklyn. It was a landscape that not unlike some of the places in Chicago and Oakland, where we respectively reside, remind of places where black men have dared to love and dance with and make love to each other fiercely. This is for those who remember our legacy, the clubs, the losses, the icons, and for those who long to remember even as their memory is the story passed down to them. It’s the postmodern afro homo “nostalgia without memory” that is being relayed, yet again, though these very pages.

Tim’m T. West
July, 2004

PHOTO of TW: Vincenzo for Vincent Multi-Media



August 05, 2003

Tim’m,

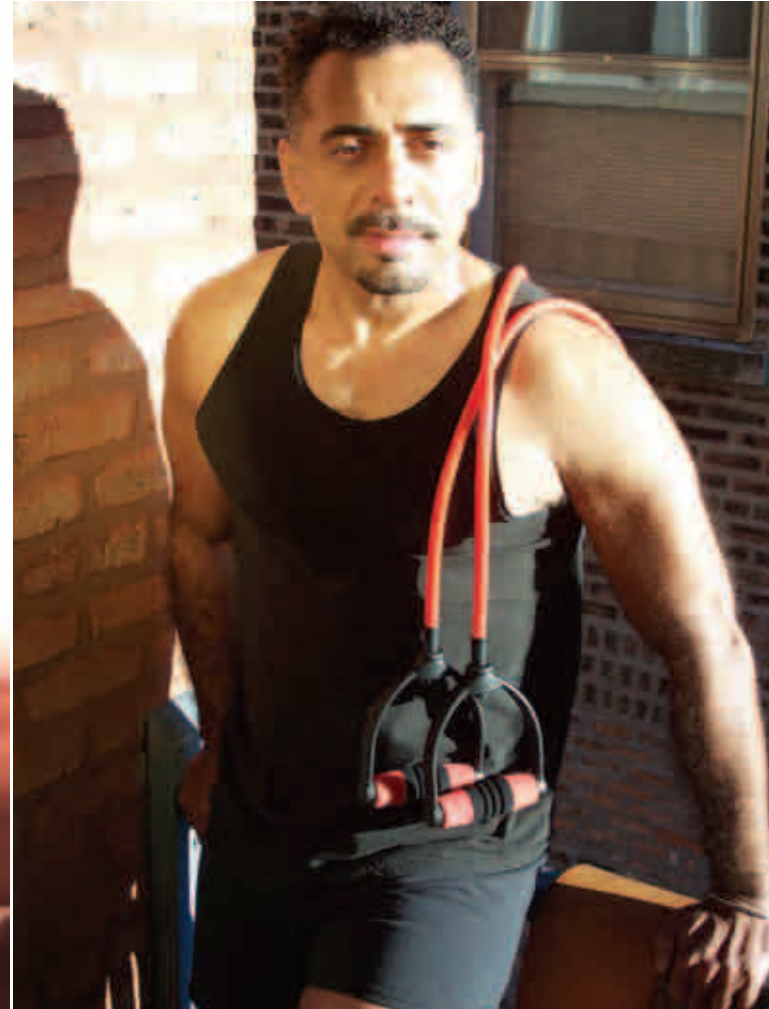
I question if my ramblings in your ear, fighting against all the distractions my beautiful Brooklyn offers, quite conveyed what I wanted. Or if this equally spontaneous message will help. But here goes, the Cliff Notes version.

I’m a reformed club-tart from that small, windy town masquerading as a city. My pursuit of “higher learning” has been sporadic at best, despite the support and encouragement to be yet another doctor in the family – though this time, not a “bleeder.” And I’m getting ahead of myself.

My flights to the Garage in NY, the Clubhouse in DC, the Limelight in ATL and the “Fuck with it Frankie!!!” Warehouse here at home brought much joy and somehow, through the fog of it all, a belief that our swirling, banji, sissy, butch stories needed telling. I was alone in this thinking for a long time, and (even by a man who spoke love) was thought of as the strange one. The silence was suffocating. I regret I wasn’t stronger. But I escaped Mississippi North/Chicago.

New York, 1986–1999, Other Countries: Black Gay Men Writing, GMAD, Essex, Joe Beam, Melvin Dixon, Audre Lorde, Asotto Saint/Yves Lubin, Donald Woods, Jewel Gomez, Marlon Riggs, Pam Sneed, Guy-Mark Foster, Craig Harris, Pomo Afro Homos, Samuel Delany, Gale Jackson, Bil Wright, Bayard Rustin, Ron Brown, Sapphire ... So many others, so much noise and light and music and flesh and blood and breath. Some close, some not. All sustained me and helped me make sense of my world. With some I broke bread, like with Mr. Rustin, with others I was only a satellite, like with

PHOTO of AW: P. Rossano Cameron, PRC Designs & Productions



Ms. Lorde. Some even wrote of our clumsy stabs to touch each other deeply. And for a time, it was family. Thrilling, challenging, joyous, nurturing family—until the deaths started. And the silence threatened. Then, armed with fear, anger, love and my brother’s weapons, I stood on stages and told the stories, too. A long time ago, now. Though, I recently saw a few who remembered – and appreciated. And the Adodi love I’ve received for newer tellings allows me to think, hmmm ... Maybe there is something more to say.

This is where you come in. Despite the sociopolitical gay-ing in this country, and above the black, gay soap operas littering New York Times bestseller lists, the silence has returned. The DL vortex insists on it. Insists on running backwards, eroticizing lies, and I have been left hungry. But your words, your passion, your courage, your beauty, your humor, your generosity fill me in ways I’d nearly forgotten could be filled. You help me make sense of my world again. And though I’ll never have those magical days in NY again, there is noise and light and music and ... on the horizon. Thank you, Tim’m. When Mark Durham and I spoke of you recently, he noted that Essex would have loved you. Yeah—yeah, he would have. So, as Essex would have, no doubt, told you—at the very least once, *take care of your blessings*.

If this bit of rambling good intention made you in any way uncomfortable, LOL!!!, cuz I think I can come across as a bit much, erase it. Except for the following:

Yo, Tim’m:
I read your book, it’s aight.

A big hug to you,
Allen Wright

August 05, 2003

Allen (beautiful presence that you are),

poetry sometimes fails me
even when it comes out “aiight”
my breath,
sometime be so heavy and thick with passion
that I oft times do not wish to cuddle it
so sometime I spit me back out
leaving me somewhere between the page-flip
and the next pages.
and I remember that I write because
I have always longed to feel filled

but there is something very familiar about your voice
a memory I do not carry but perhaps inherited
and so I indulge a nostalgia without memory
a crude indication of my postpomo existence
brothas like me ... we were not there
and yet somehow the reverb of a Warehouse treble
or a queen scream, or a gay grind
hangs above and shakes us like Morrison’s beloved ghost
so we don’t forget
sweat, dances with urgency, smiling through pain

we rescued house beatz from the edges of cliffs
dusted off Assoto, and Melvin, and Pat Parker
pretended we knew them like we know our mama’s kitchen
dream of house music and romanticize something mo real
than keepin’ it real DL caricature and delusion

and I accept the challenge to channel
what some before me did not, perhaps say,
fallen and frail, jailed by the end-all

of dilapidated T-cells and shame
I imagine what they might have said...

tell the truth
tell the real truth
do not forget we
Mississippi humpback chewbacca love
Southside pubs and one night nigga honeymoons
moonshine in bourgie wine glasses
black boys who love black boys fiercely
tryin' to love themselves

and there's something in your gaze
that sticks on me like the pull-away of a good kiss
something in your barrytoned whispers to me
beyond that ramble that you do
overwhelmed and joyous to still be rememberin'
and celebratin'
that sucks me in to your memory
and I too, indulge this sweet dance
we do with eyes ...

I accept you like I accept your nigga-huggs
I accept you, like I am finally accepting who I was at 19
feeling I was born 10 or 20 years too late
feeling that I was meant to be among them and you
loving you, losing you, longing for you
and screaming for my future self
to inscribe and archive
that life, indeed, holds beauty
even in the wear and tear of lonely nights
even in the ironic aftersulk of fanglory

and I remember my breath
imperfect as it be
and I remember that you continue to
remember me.

glad about you, too
(you make me feel very wonderful about all I do)

Tim'm



J. Diaz, twins, 2005, digital photograph, 5.25 x 3.9

PALIMPSEST

John Keene

(Preface: The excerpt that follows is an adapted chapter from a novel-in-progress, entitled Palimpsest. Comprising two parallel narrative tracks separated by a span of 200 years (1804 and 2004), this passage explores the shifting relationship between (John) Estis, a black Revolutionary War hero in his early 50s, who lives in Boston, and Simeon Walker, the fugitive who arrives one night during a spring thunderstorm.)

Estis lay quietly in bed beneath his blanket, the evening at the Abyssinian Society’s annual Harvest Dinner still ripe in his mind. Beside him, Simeon slept swaddled in penumbra, emitting a soft but steady rasp, as if he were dragging a small, wooden spoon back and forth across a washboard. Its rhythm, like the conjoined fragrances of rosewater, sweat and pomade that rose from Simeon’s covered bulk, captivated Estis, carrying him off from reflection into reverie.

Less than a half-hour before, they had climbed into bed. The lamp table candle was guttering in its brass holder, the aroma of the rosemary-scented beeswax slowly diffusing throughout the room. In the hearth, the remains of a small fire crackled. Estis had closed the windows facing the street, as well as the door to the bedchamber, but a chilly draft had found its way in. The cold air, which was keeping him awake, also aroused a desire for closeness, touch. He moved under the covers until his foot pressed against the back of Simeon’s heels and his elbow fit into the crook of the younger man’s nightshirted back. Simeon stirred, momentarily growing silent and slinging one of his dark, hairy arms atop the blanket, then resumed his snoring.

Simeon, like many a slave or ex-slave, Estis had observed, could sleep under almost any conditions. Estis also had once been able to close his eyes and plunge into a slumber, whether lamps were burning or not, whether he lay on a frozen shed floor or the ember-strewn straw of a stable. This skill had proved useful not only during the first half of his life, when he worked Lathrop’s tobacco fields in Connecticut, but an invaluable asset during the Revolutionary War. Once he entered his 40s, however, he’d periodically struggled to fall asleep without a cup or two of his homemade *Lightning* or a hard day at his used-clothing shop, and if his various ailments were acting up, particularly the pains in his stomach or jaw, he was unable to nod off at all. When these insomniac nights initially occurred, which was years before Simeon had appeared on his doorstep, he would head to his workroom to recite poems or play his fiddle until he tired himself out. But eventually his memory for lyrics had begun to falter, and then his fingers had started cramping up after several hours of play, after which he suffered occasional palsy in his right hand, so he’d decided upon sitting

silently in the darkness, allowing it to wash over and fill him until dawn pierced the shutters and it was time to fetch water from the backyard pump, press his clothes for the day, review his personal ledger, and say a prayer, for another day, month, year—at the very least for a night of uninterrupted sleep.

One thing he’d long ago stopped praying for was that his former companion Amedee, with whom he had broken in this bedstead and, indeed, this house, would pine for his old life in the city and divorce his haughty, high-toned wife and fail in his wig-and-dressing business and, in a moment fusing desperation and clarity, see Estis as his sole salvation—but Amedee wasn’t coming back, Estis knew, *ever*, so he no longer sacrificed a breath to what was once his overriding hope.

Since Simeon had moved from his cot bed in the cellar to Estis’s large bed, in late May, however, Estis found it much easier to sleep, even when the younger man accidentally awakened him. For the first few months that they slept together, Simeon’s past had continued to roil his dreams. Fear, rage, the memories of what and whom he had left behind and how he had done all lay claim to him, as did the extrasensory vigilance and control that had allowed him to spend days in a sycamore canopy near the boatyards without tumbling out, or remain silent and barely breathing under a tarpaulin until dawn while the pettiauger on which he stowed cut slowly down the Chesapeake towards the frigate on which he’d sailed north, or to withstand the vicissitudes Estis had either learned or imagined some of the older crew members had subjected to him to, especially when he had first been hired out in his adolescent years to one of the merchant boats.

When these emotions and past shadows seized him in his sleep, Simeon would kick away the covers and thrash about the bed. He might hook a leg over Estis’s thighs, as if to pin the older man, or seize his shoulders and begin grappling, his snores transforming into broken phrases, shouts, his fingers curling into fists. Estis supposed he was fighting past struggles to which the dreams served as direct portals, and held none of these nocturnal battles against him.

Usually Estis wriggled free and shook him until he awoke. Simeon’s ready response was to apologize, profusely, in his honeyed bass, and head for the door, as though returning to his basement lodgings. It took only a pat from Estis on the mattress, however, to bring him back. Simeon would slip under the covers, but leave a gulf between them, and forming a cordon of bed linen around himself, attempt to

wind his dark heft up so unobtrusively that he might disappear within the sheets' folds. This always made Estis smile, since there was no way that Simeon, who had steadily thickened his short, broad frame since he arrived, was going to vanish into anything.

The night battles had persisted through August, and then, as if he'd finally defeated his oneiric foes, Simeon began to sleep more tranquilly. Estis figured that he was finally growing used to his surroundings, just as he had been growing increasingly accustomed to his new identity, his new self and the life that accompanied it, which Estis had spent the entire spring and summer helping him to create. Around the time that his dreams calmed, he no longer failed to answer when Estis, or anyone else, called him "Simeon," let alone "Mr. Walker"—and Estis strove not to slip up and call him "Scipio," the name he'd shed, he'd told Estis, as soon as he'd set foot on the Boston dock. Simeon, in fact, never referred to himself as Scipio any more—he cast the name like ashes to the sea and did not mourn it. He also seldom recounted his years under his former master in Maryland, who had "rented" him to those captains whose name he now refused to utter, or his experiences on the Chesapeake, or in Kingstown or Norfolk or New York City. In truth, he was no longer the haggard fugitive who had turned up at Estis's pantry door during the thunderstorm the previous March. He now embodied his new present, as Estis's trainee and friend, and his new *past*, as the free, itinerant sign-painter, with some sea travel under his waistcoat, who had decided to establish himself in the capital. He was so completely Simeon during his waking hours—and perhaps during his drowsing ones as well—that there were moments when Estis forgot that another Simeon—*Scipio*—had existed at all.

At the used-clothing store, this new reality, their reality, held sway. Simeon had committed the New England portion of the national map above Estis's work desk to memory, down to the contours of Massachusetts' mountains and inlets. He could recite the peddler Carvalho's descriptions of country towns and terrain so completely that he no longer hesitated to describe his fictional birthplace or the invented story of his upbringing. He was *only* Simeon Walker, the son of the freedwoman Isobel, who had lived along the Housatonic, and a slave named John whose face he barely recalled. His mother had died of a



J. Diaz, *love is simple*, 2005, digital photograph, 3.5 x 2.63

blood-borne illness when he was in his teens, and his siblings had scattered, leaving him no family and no prospects, thus sending him down to the bustle of Manhattan's wharves and, for a period, the maritime life. A friend in the City, originally from Connecticut, had recommended him to Estis, and so now here he was. Other than Estis, no one else had heard any other account, which both agreed was best.

Although Estis was particularly leery of Simeon's interactions with whites, including the non-slave holding masses of the Bay State, who nevertheless had no stake in maintaining his freedom. Neither he nor Simeon had forgotten that according to the law, Simeon was not only a fugitive, but still enslaved. Estis had cautioned him early on to remain vague about his Atlantic itinerary, because as a port city Boston drew visitors from across the Atlantic world, and talk of the sea especially drew men's interests. He thought the risk of someone spotting Simeon was small, but not inconceivable. Marylanders and even Englishmen from the Caribbean colonies did venture this far north. As great a danger was that someone might hear one of his accounts, place a name or be related to someone who knew someone else; a chain of associations might become a noose. Some of Estis's regular customers were or worked with men who traversed great swaths of territory as if they were crossing through the Common. At any rate, Estis had not come across an advertisement for his return in any of the gazettes or the handbills that were so common in certain parts of town. How would it read, he sometimes wondered?

*Likely Negro named Scipio
short but powerfully built very dark
late 20s X-shaped marking on his left shoulder
skilled at building and marine trades
speaks several languages ran away
from the Maryland capital in May
a sufficient reward to be given for news
of him or his return contact Oscar Havergood*

So they were careful. Even among their fellow Boston blacks, although Estis saw no real perils for Simeon among them. As queer as they probably considered him, living alone and unmarried, staying studiously away from church, wearing his leather breeches and crimson coat at all times of the year, and cursing white politicians and real estate agents and constables at every opportunity, he had no real enemies among them. Most were friends or acquaintances, and he had led a number of the men his age in battle against the British. That esteem had not faded in two decades. Every day of his adult life, moreover, he'd put his profound belief in solidarity and charity into practice, which was one reason he'd help to found the Abyssinian Society. There wasn't a black Bostonian, he ventured, who didn't know this.

Yet he knew not to be complacent. Newcomers like Simeon, though with less to lose, were arriving every day, and one never could be fully sure, when the question of a reward loomed, or at the very least of knowledge that could, for a price, be useful to whites. So Estis and Simeon maintained their tale to everyone, no matter how much either thought about lowering their guard.

Simeon rolled over onto his back, flopping his arm onto Estis's stomach. The blow, though soft, made him wince, for Estis was already experiencing his usual stomach ache, and he wondered whether this pain, like the ones that often struck his jaws and neck were harbingers of something more serious. He hadn't called upon Dr. Wiswell in a while; Martha's homemade tinctures and potions had sufficed. But he watched what he ate anyways, even at special events like the Society's dinners. He'd pared down his diet to a minimum: a daily morning sliced apple, unless he felt too dyspeptic or gassy; plums, berries and roasted walnuts he also picked from his yard, as well as a piece of jerky, for midday; and stewed oats or potatoes. If he went out for cribbage or cards, he passed on food altogether. On those evenings once a week when his niece brought by jellies or cakes or her mother's own rich concoctions, he might indulge himself a little, though he gladly offered up the feast to Simeon. He knew his *Lightning* ought to be on his list of things to forgo, or at least enjoy sparingly, but he couldn't imagine doing so, especially now that Simeon also enjoyed sharing some with him every night. At the dinner, he now recalled, he'd sampled only a little of his tortoise soup, some yam-raisin pudding, and the Newport wine that George and Eliza Cherry always brought up for special occasions. Several cups of it had made the need for his regular nightcap unnecessary. Glancing over at Simeon, he conjectured that the wine, and the exquisite meal, which Simeon had devoured, also made his dreams more serene. That thought worked like an analgesic, and his stomach no longer ached. Then Estis sat up. He had to pee.

He levered Simeon's arm out of the way and rose. Because the two men shared the bed, Estis kept two chamber pots beneath it, his own zinc one on Simeon's side, and a battered but wide tin bowl on his. He'd had to teach Simeon how to use one—while Simeon no longer befouled his stairs or his cellar floor, he didn't want the younger man to clomp downstairs and head for the bushes every time he needed to relieve himself—but quickly realized that just one pot between them not only filled up quickly but increased the potential for a grand mess in the darkness, as well as a stench that not even burning tallow could dispel. He grabbed his chamber pot and glided into the shadows. The candlelight threw his elongated silhouette across the facing wall, so that it loomed above him, as tall and powerful as he had once felt. But now, he thought to himself, his body was gradually but surely deserting him. Yet he was succeeding in saving another man's life—was there any greater power than that?

He hitched up his nightshirt and guided the metal rim to his pelvis. He was trying to be as quiet as possible, though given how soundly Simeon was sleeping, it probably didn't matter. The snoring continued with mechanical consistency, even as Simeon turned again and now lay supine.

When Estis finished, he realized he was aroused. He wasn't surprised; this happened all the time. Often the sight or sound, or thought alone, of Simeon, his very presence—aroused him. For Estis, even glimpsing his muscular, downy shoulders or calves by candlelight was enough to provoke the most intense phantasies. When they were undressing or washing up, he had to harness every fiber of his will to control his desire. Simeon, who was hardly modest, at least in a physical sense, in public, was even less so in intimate quarters. He had, after all, spent years at sea, in addition to his time in bondage on land, and in both cases, just as in the military, maintaining one's dignity was almost always at base a mental act. Simeon made no effort to conceal himself, and evinced no shame in doing so.

He also evinced no shame, nor embarrassment at Estis's nudity; when the older man stripped or relieved himself before him, Simeon was as affectless as a statue. Estis assumed his lean but silvery chest and thighs were still fit enough not to provoke disgust, but he perceived no arousal either. In fact, Estis had never noted him getting aroused at all, which confused him a bit, because Simeon, despite his earthiness, rarely talked about women, except in a rather general and pleasant manner. In this he was not especially different from most of the other black men Estis knew, who only spoke of the females they were closest to with a pronounced respect and protectiveness, and would not broach the subjects of their lust, such as the prostitutes prowling the edges of the Common, except perhaps during a long evening of games and merrymaking in all-male company. In the sole, specific mention of a woman that Estis could recall, Simeon had spoken over supper of one of his stays with a crew in the Virgin Islands. He was only seventeen, and because of the almost preternatural cruelty of the captain, he'd thought about escaping once the *Newcastle* had docked, living off the land, and eventually finding a wife there. One of his fellow crewmen, a freedman, had been reared in the north of the island in St. Lucy's Parish, and had several eligible sisters living there. Simeon had then broken off his account to recount his year on the *Newcastle*, which had included a near-rebellion in which he was only a peripheral participant, and the subsequent punishment he'd endured upon returning to Annapolis. From that point onward, Estis tried to discern any conventional hints of desire—for women, for a female companion, for a whore, for marriage—but Simeon's words and actions yielded nothing. This aspect of his slate was unchanged from the day he arrived: blank.

Simeon withheld little else from Estis, however, and was liberal in his affection. As Estis sat at his worktable, carving a piece of wood or tightening his fiddle strings, he would feel the younger man's broad,

calloused palms on his neck or ears. Simeon would leave them there as they spoke, as Estis worked, the warmth of the connection moving between their flesh. On some evenings, as they sat side by side in the parlor, singing or recounting the events of the day, Simeon would take Estis's hand in his and hold it tightly, occasionally going so far as to knot their fingers. Estis thought he ought not read too much in such expressions, given Simeon's nature and past and his own experiences. He had walked arm in arm with many a man, lain spooned with others, and such times had meant nothing more than the purest form of amity men could share. Still he cherished Simeon's touch, whenever it came, whatever it meant.

For his part, Estis had repeatedly mentioned his departed companion, Amedee, providing Simeon with the fragmented biography of a man that he hadn't spoken to in almost three years. He had described how they had secured the mortgage for and built this house on Pinckney Street together, from the foundation up, and how, when Amedee had abruptly decided to get married and close down his hairdressing shop, he'd decided, perhaps out of spite or revenge—but why, Estis wanted to know, what had he ever done to harm Amedee?—or, worst of all, Estis thought, indifference, to contract with a wealthy, white speculator from Beverly who'd tried to convince, cajole and bully Estis into selling off his rights, before promptly and successfully suing to divide the building in two. It pained Estis even to recount it. He doubted that Simeon grasped the depth of the betrayal—not even his sister Martha, who'd witnessed the entire ordeal, fully appreciated it—though he'd made clear more than once that the dividing wall, which both delivered and restrained the noises of the renters next door, remained an underlying source of torment.

But he had left the specifics of his life with Amedee an unfinished sketch. Sometimes he felt he had no words at his disposal to describe it, or the words that came were simply inadequate, as if he were trying to carve wood with only one hand, or with dulled tools. At other times he wanted to draw upon a larger story he hoped might capture it, and impress Simeon with understanding, though the only one that came to mind was the story of Jonathan and David, and he wasn't sure which figure correlated to whom. Despite his reputation for bluntness, and the knowledge that Simeon had spent much time at sea, where male friendships predominated and the natural order often capsized, on this topic utter candor eluded him. What exactly should he say, and how? How much? His friendship with and support of Simeon hadn't trod upon that ground at all. He occasionally hoped it would, but at the same time, he had already resigned himself to the events of the past, particularly Amedee's departure, and after the first night that Simeon—Scipio—slept on the cot in his cellar, he'd resolved that his chief goal was the same as Simeon's: to get the younger man on his feet, free, and capable of living his life as he planned.

Estis opened the window. He immediately heard the mewling of a cat—was it in heat?—in a nearby thicket. Checking that no one was below or approaching from either direction, he emptied the full pot

onto the brick sidewalk. A gust of wind, however, blew much of the yellow liquid out onto the cobblestoned street. It also blew in the mixed aromas of manure, and dry leaves, and the brackish Bay, and garbage and oily rags burning in some distant pits: late autumn. The cold air made him shiver, so Estis shook the tin dry and shut the window. He walked slowly and carefully towards the bed, replacing the pot beneath his end of the footboard. Then he extinguished the wick between his moistened fingertips. The room surrendered to the blackness. Still aroused, he groped his way to the bed, crawled under the sheets, and leaving a narrow gulf between himself and Simeon, turned his back and pulled the cover up to his throat.

Although he was tired, he still wasn't yet ready to sleep. Instead, his mind glided back to the Society dinner. He and Simeon, who wore the dove-gray wool Spencer coat, matching waistcoat, and white breeches that Estis had pulled from his recent acquisitions just for this purpose, had walked the six blocks to the Second Baptist Church, which sat at the base of Cambridge Street, not far from Estis's shop. As was his custom, he brought his fiddle; once upon a time, he and Amedee, who was blessed with a sterling voice, had performed as a duo to great acclaim at such events, but in recent years, Estis joined the Society's Ensemble for only a tune or two that he knew by heart. The annual dinner, like the other social events the Society held, aimed to raise monies for a variety of causes, including an anti-slavery fund, a Samaritan orphanage, and a Common Pool, for widows, indigents, newly-freed slaves, fugitives, and the infirm. Many of the Society's members also took part in the services Reverend Frederick Prévost held at the church, whose primary congregation was white, and had been collecting funds for several years to build their own Meeting House, in the current, red-brick style, on one of Beacon Hill's unoccupied lots, so a small portion of the proceeds would be allocated for this purpose as well.

A number of those attending the dinner had already met Simeon at various points during the summer. Only after he and Estis had cemented their bond of trust and practiced the story of his past enough that it sounded convincing did Estis think it safe for him to leave the house and begin working in the shop. At no point had they encountered any probing or undue questions from any of their fellow black Bostonians. Some among them had sheltered fugitives, including relatives, before, or were escapees themselves. There was not a person, Estis knew, who did not have a story that might or ought never be revealed. Simeon's charm had fostered something close to quick fellowship with some of them. At Estis's shop, he had chatted with Robert Blackwell and Henry Cope, who both also dealt in clothes and had their own shops in Brattle Street; the laborer Primus Turner and his wife May; young Tuck Gardiner, the metalsmith; Estis's nephew and assistant Nathaniel, and his fiancée Susannah; and young Crispus-Attucks Wilson, who hoped to read law but was working as a waiter. During the Negro Election Day festivities, he had conversed with the newspaper agent George Cornwell, his wife Hannah, the Chappelles,

and the Barbadoses, while the mariner Peter Rounsaville had talked him up at Faneuil Hall, believing wholly, it appeared, in Simeon's invented life story. And on one of his first ferry rides across the Charles to Cambridge, Simeon's conversational companion had been one of the most prominent blacks in the town, the doctor and landowner Alexander Warfield.

There were a few people present, whom Simeon hadn't already met, like Mrs. Samuel Bullocks and Jupiter Livermore, whose habits of prying and volubility worried Estis even in the best circumstances, but during the conversational hour before the meal, Simeon had glided effortlessly among them, leading Livermore, who prided himself on his wit, to remark to Estis that his "new friend" was "fitting" quite well. Most fortuitously for Estis, Simeon also hadn't yet run into Charles Earls, who was rather infamous for his carousing with young laborers. At the dinner he was preoccupied with a new young mulatto Estis had spoken with outside the State House during one of his sales calls, and gave Simeon no more than a polite but perfunctory review.

During one mid-summer trip to the market, Estis had introduced Simeon to the widow Elizabeth Lowe and her unmarried daughter, Ginevra. Both women immediately took to Simeon. To Estis, the reason was clearest in Ginevra's case. Her previous betrothals had all fallen through, and while it was unlikely that people with any standing would marry their daughter off to an unknown with a obscure past and no income or resources in general to speak of, the pool of single freemen, including widowers, always remained small. For a single woman advancing into her thirties, like Ginevra, it was miniscule. Despite Mrs. Lowe's suggestion, neither Estis nor Simeon had attempted to call upon the women, and neither had run into them at all since. During a break between courses, however, Estis observed Ginevra hovering over Simeon. During another break, they fell into quick intimacy. Later, during the music period, they had danced together to several extemporized overtures. Watching them, Estis felt his jealousy starting to rise—as if Simeon were his, as if he had ever had full claim to another man, even Amedee!—and he'd restrained himself from cutting in, taking Ginevra off to a corner of the hall, and dressing her down. Instead, he left them alone, and reminded himself that Simeon was going to make his own choices, which very well might include a wife. He also acknowledged now as he lay in the dark that watching the pair had also excited other passions, especially the sight of Simeon's large hand in the small of Ginevra's bodice, his thighs fast against red lawn dress....

To distract himself, he'd turned to his sister Martha and her husband Jeremy, who were sitting next to him in a circle of conversationalists, and listened to Joseph Barbados's account of a trip to see his brother and sister-in-law in Philadelphia. Barbados and his wife had hired a carriage, which had cost a small fortune—two month's wages!— and had stocked up on provisions for the journey, in case they could not find inns

that would lodge them, and—then a hand grazed his jacket sleeve, and he looked up to see Simeon standing behind him, his face smiling and expectant, as if he expected Estis now to join him on the floor. Estis returned the smile, trying to suppress his relief. He gestured for Simeon to join them. Ginevra, he saw, was deep in conversation with another bachelor, the elderly widower Oliver Russell, and Simeon appeared not to care. For a few more hours they listened, expounded and laughed, and then, when the church's grandfather clock struck eleven, they walked back up the Hill, with Martha, Jeremy, and a band of other revelers. Once in the house, they went straight up to bed. Estis thought about broaching the subject of Ginevra, but Simeon was already asleep before he could do so.

Estis stretched out. He was starting to drowse, but the specific image of Simeon waist to waist with Ginevra Lowe lingered. Perhaps it was the wine, or the evening's cheer, or one aspect of his will giving way to another, but he felt more daring than he had in quite some time. He slipped his hand up under his nightshirt, and began to stroke himself. He had never done this before—out of respect, out of discretion, since neither fear nor shame were in the equation—while Simeon slept beside him. Usually he crept down to the cellar or waited for those rare periods when Simeon went out on his own. But he was as aroused as he had ever been and he could hear Simeon's snores, low and regular, which emboldened him. He was trying to be careful, making sure not to jerk his arm or rustle the sheets. He turned his mouth towards his pillow to stifle the coming cries. Slowly he moved his hand, feeling the foreskin glide back and forth, as he recalled Simeon and Ginevra deftly cutting the floor, weaving in and out of the other couples, the fabric of Simeon's coat straining against his shoulders, his buttocks pushing his tails out, and as one air gave way to another, the sweat was beading on Simeon's brow, rilling down his cheeks, collecting on the slope of his upper lip, and he turned, and spun, and thrust his hips forward—and Estis rose and cut in, taking Simeon's leading hand in his own, resting the other one in the small of his back, and he moved closer, until their chests, jaws, crotches came together—and he smelled Simeon's wine-flavored breath, felt it warming his ear, he could not make out what he was saying, the words moved up his neck, then came lips—and Simeon was behind him now, his calloused fingers between Estis's thighs, his heavy sex pushing, against Estis, into him—and for a second Estis clearly heard the moans that had been snores, and felt the hard arms clasping him, the teeth biting his shoulder, the hands that were so expertly drawing out his own moans, bringing him to the breaking point...

Estis lay in bed, fast asleep. Wrapped around him, Simeon also slept, the covers swaddling them both. He emitted a soft but steady rasp, as if he were dragging a small, wooden spoon back and forth across a tin washboard, and its rhythm, like the conjoined fragrances of rosewater, sweat and pomade that scented the bedding, slowly diffused throughout their dreams.

Muse

Tim m T. West

03.02.04

a thespian I'll be your lesbian if you ax me right
chop categorical complexes, be ya lady tonight
when my inner man's stubbornness is all that's left, it ain't right
so I'mma push baritone whispers sayin "nigga, last night was tyte."
and we can get so punch drunk, they'll call us Sade lickens
running fingers where tattoos touch, giggle and blush
bust while others burst, I'll promise never to hurt
be some U-Haul lesbians assured they movin to heaven
play butch you play softer, hoop at West 4th: you my watcher
and then we'll flip it, me night nurse, you my own private doctor
cuz real men ain't threatened by real men who know the real ain't really real
a man who can cry with me is made of steel
Is made of alphabets with no determinate order
we invent our own language, traverse our own borders
open ourselves to ourselves to see what's under the under
and it's ovah, like an apple to the eye of stevie wonder

see I have loved men too scarred to love me back
my eyes whisper assurance I ain't leavin when sky turns black
but sometimes we so relaxed we can't affirm that back
gaze elsewhere, missing the eye candy in search for wack macks
and that's the light some can't see, loving you is loving me
but an unloved lover will always flee eventually
yet I dare myself to be stronger than that, in loving you
men who I share dances with, sangria, and soul foods
They don't want man to marry man, I wanna marry all of you
1 to 1 is insufficient for the breath I feel for the crew
West 4th stops to BBQs and DayOs remains a muse
Even when it gets under a sistah skin at NYU
that I was bold enough to affirm my predilection for dudes

If we don't affirm each other, then who? and that's truth
And I await my return to the land of RA and Venus
Where brothas seek affirmation in brothas beyond the penis
so when I come back, dust off your shoes, we gone party into night
I'm ya lesbian, remember ... don't forget to ax me right



J. Diaz, man whole in moonlight, 2005, digital photograph, 5.25 x 3.9

Latex

Khary Polk

Colin has a face of porcelain. He reminds me of the ceramic *Lladró* figurines my mother keeps on display behind glass in her curio stand, their blue and slate complexions glossy and perfect from the kiln’s high fire. His face belongs on the body of a boy in middle school. The men waiting in the cafeteria line stare at the two of us behind our lunch table, wondering if we are in the right place, if we are here to eat, too. Their attentions key squarely upon Colin, however. His youth is shameless. They can’t look away—the wonder of pubescence is too great. Perhaps his balls will drop before their very eyes.

It is a cold and quiet morning at GMHC. Though it is overcast outside, skylights wash the interior of the lunchroom in a dull silvery glow. We’re here to recruit volunteers for research studies, most of which focus on the sex lives of gay men. As people pass by our table we beckon them closer, offering them brochures, blow-pops, and a grab from our fishbowl of multicolored condoms.

Go on, we say. They’re free.

“Y’all got any Magnums?” a man asks.

“Nope, only the ones in there,” Colin says.

The man shakes the bowl and looks again, like we might not know what we’re talking about.

“You need to get you some Magnums. The boys ain’t using these Durexes at all.” He waves a red packet of puckered latex in the air. “I keep trying to tell the folks here and up at GMAD, but they act like they don’t hear me.”

“Why don’t they use them?” I ask.

“Rashes, child. They claim they’re allergic to them.”

“That’s funny,” Colin says. “They never seem to give me a problem.”

The man cuts his eyes at Colin and breaks into laughter.

L tex

Khary Polk

Colin tiene cara de porcelana. Él me recuerda a las figuras de cerámica de Lladró que mi madre tiene en el mostrador de vidrio de curiosidades, sus complexiones perfectas y glaseadas de azul pizarra por la alta temperatura del fuego del horno. Su cara pertenece al cuerpo de un chico de colegio. Los hombres que esperan en la fila de la cafetería nos miran fijamente detrás de nuestras mesas de comer, imaginándose si nosotros estamos en el lugar correcto, si es que también nosotros estamos aquí para comer. Sin embargo, su atención se ubica firmemente en Colin. Su juventud es descarada. Ellos no pueden ver a otro lado—la maravilla de la pubescencia es demasiado inmensa. Tal vez se le caigan los huevos ante sus propios ojos.

Es una mañana fría y callada en GMHC. Aunque está nublado, los tragaluces llenan el interior de la cafetería con un resplandor plateado oscuro. Estamos aquí para reclutar voluntarios para un estudio de investigación, el cual se enfoca sobre todo en las vidas sexuales de los hombres gay. Cuando la gente pasa por nuestra mesa, la llamamos para que se acerque, ofreciéndoles folletos, bombones, y que agarren condones multicolores de nuestro tazón de vidrio.

“Agarren”, decimos. “Son gratis”.

“¿Ustedes tienen Magnums?”, pregunta un hombre.

“No, solamente los que están allí”, dice Colin.

El hombre sacude el tazón y mira otra vez, como si nosotros no supiéramos de lo que estamos hablando.

“Ustedes necesitan tener algunos Magnums. Los chicos no usan estos Durexes para nada”. Él ondea en el aire un paquete de látex arrugado. “Yo trato de decirle a la gente aquí y allá en GMAD, pero actúan como si no me escucharan”.

“¿Por qué no los usan?”, pregunto.

“Sarpullidos, niño. Ellos dicen que les causan alergias”.

“Eso es chistoso”, dice Colin. “Parece que ellos nunca me dan problemas”.

“Me neither, honey.” His tone is rich and golden. “Ain’t he precious? Talking like he grown. I got something he can grow on, now ... you mind if I take a few more of these?”

“Not at all,” I say. “Take as many as you like.”

“Oooh, I’ma get one of every color, too.”

I flinch when older guys hit on Colin. I want to leave the room and go find a Grownup. But I guess he’s used to it. Believe me when I tell you I’m not hating on him, either—he’s way too kiddie porn for my taste. (I tend to like my boys the way I like my sneakers: sullied, with a touch of age to them.) Colin does what he can to dull that youthful luster of his, though, rocking the “I woke up in the East Village this morning and, you know, they don’t believe in showering” look, so popular among disaffected white boys. Truth told, I kinda dig the whole “bed head” aesthetic; I just know I can’t get away with it. The line between black bohemian and dirty nigger is a fine one.

Colin and I sit next to a piano played by a man I believe to be the Sweetest Homosexual On Earth. In another life he might have been a high school English teacher, knowingly introducing awkward and wayward youths to the work of James Baldwin, Audre Lorde, and Tennessee Williams. He’s moving through a medley of gay ditties, many of them songs from Broadway shows I’ll never ever see but have learned to

El hombre dirige su mirada a Colin y suelta unas carcajadas.

“A mi tampoco, cariño”. Su tono es rico y dorado. “Él es precioso, ¿cierto? Hablando como si fuera un adulto. Yo tengo algo con lo que puede terminar de crecer; ahora, ¿les importa si tomo más de estos?”

“No, para nada”, digo. “Agarra todos los que gustes”.

“Ayyy, voy a agarrar uno de cada color también”.

Me sobresalto cuando tipos viejos coquetean con Colin. Quiero salir del cuarto y buscar a un adulto. Pero supongo que él está acostumbrado a eso. Créanme cuando digo que yo no lo estoy perreando tampoco—él es como porno demasiado chiquillo para mi gusto. (Los chicos suelen gustarme de la misma manera que me gustan mis zapatos de lona: manchados, con un toque añejo). Colin hace lo que puede para apagar ese lustre de juventud suyo que tiene, aunque, meciendo su apariencia de “Yo me levanté en la Villa Este esta mañana y, tú sabes, ellos no creen en bañarse”, que es tan popular entre los chicos blancos desafectados. A decir verdad, yo más o menos entiendo la onda estética de “cabeza de cama”, sólo sé que yo no puedo salirme con la mía. La línea entre negro bohemio y negro sucio es muy fina.

Colin y yo nos sentamos junto a un piano que tocaba un hombre que yo creo es el Homosexual Más Dulce en la Tierra. En otra vida pudo haber sido profesor

appreciate out of respect for my elders. I clap at the necessary intervals; he knows he has a fan in me.

Of course, most of this is show. Colin is no ingénue; he spends the shift regaling me with back room war stories, the latest party drug combos, and the STDs his friends pick up like Madonna remixes. And me? I’m anything *but* a candy striper assiduously tending to the needs of my patients, winning them over with my stellar bedside manner and secret stash of blow-pops. We slip into these characters as easily as we slip out the doors of Gay Men’s Health Crisis when our shift is finished; we will turn our cell phones back on (alongside our libidos) and walk the shallow streets of Chelsea again, playground of dirty pretty things.

Before then, I pass time by cruising the lunchroom. I’m never sure what I’m looking for, but I’m always fascinated by what I might find. Colin tells me I’m thrifting.

I am not thrifting.

“You are, too,” he says. “It’s like you’re at the Salvation Army looking for bargains.”

“Whatever, dude. I just asked you if you think that guy is cute.” That guy: body of an action figure cast in bronze, black knit cap, tee shirt, jeans and biker boots, sitting in line with his legs crossed, quietly reading *Love in the Time of Cholera*. He turns the page and looks up into my eyes.

de inglés de bachillerato, a sabiendas presentándoles a los jóvenes en edades difíciles y rebeldes el trabajo de James Baldwin, Audre Lorde y Tennessee Williams. Se está moviendo en una mezcla de musiquitas gay, muchas de ellas canciones de los shows de Broadway que yo nunca veré pero que he aprendido a apreciar por respeto a mis mayores. Aplaudo en los intervalos necesarios; él sabe que soy su admirador.

Por supuesto que mucho de todo esto es show. Colin no es un joven ingenuo; él se pasa la hora de trabajo entreteniéndome con las historias de guerra en los cuartos de atrás, las fiestas más recientes de combinación de drogas y las ITS que sus amigos contrajeron, como si fuera un “remix” de Madonna. ¿Y yo? Soy cualquier cosa *menos* un estriper dulce que diligentemente atiende las necesidades de sus pacientes, ganándomelos con mis maneras estelares de cabecera y mis escondites secretos de bombones. Nosotros nos metemos en estos personajes con igual facilidad que cuando nos escabullimos por la puerta de Gay Men’s Health Crisis una vez que nuestro horario de trabajo ha terminado. Vamos, encendemos nuestros teléfonos móviles (al igual que nuestra libido) y caminamos otra vez, las calles superficiales de Chelsea, un campo de juego de cosas bonitas y sucias.

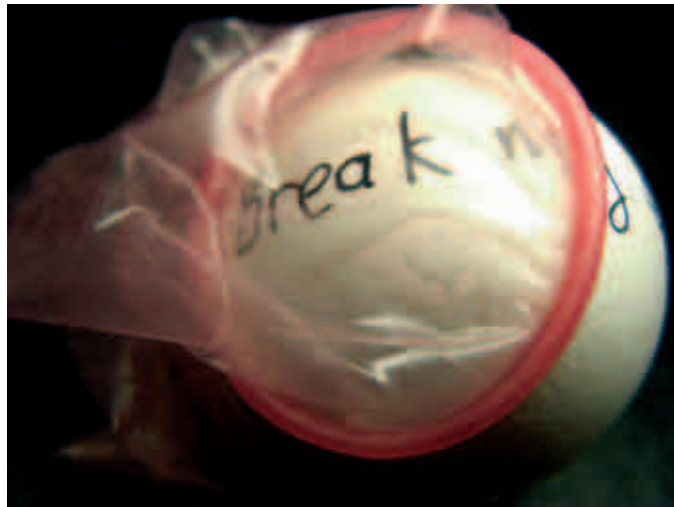
Antes de eso, paso un tiempo mirando en la cafetería. Nunca estoy seguro de lo que busco, pero siempre estoy fascinado por lo que pueda encontrar. Colin me dice que ando a la deriva.

Colin stretches his arms and yawns. “Yeah, he’s cute. If you’re into that kind of thing.”

“Oh fuck off,” I mutter, poking him in his side.

“Quit it! I gotta go pee. Later, bug chaser.”

The line moves forward. The man looks at me again with lucid eyes and shifts two seats closer to the Lunch Ladies serving burgers and tater tots, two seats closer to me. I smile at him; he mirrors me back. Blood rushes my cheeks. I look away, catch my breath, and develop a fleeting interest in the collages and watercolors upon the walls. *Are these the products of art therapy?* I seek his eyes once more but they aren’t where I left them. They have moved from the Márquez in his lap to the point of his left boot that arches up towards the skylights. I wait for him, but he doesn’t budge. I am losing my will. I exhale and prepare to cut my losses—kiss the moment goodbye—when he looks up, giggles, and gives a



J. Diaz, Break my eye 2005, digital photograph, 3.5 x 2.63

Yo no ando a la deriva.

“Sí lo estás”, dice él. “Es como si estuvieras en el Salvation Army, buscando gangas”.

“Lo que sea, hombre. Yo sólo te pregunté si tú pensabas que ese tipo es guapo”. Ese tipo: cuerpo de figura de acción, hecho en bronce, gorra negra tejida, camiseta, jeans y botas de motociclista, sentado en línea con sus piernas cruzadas, calladamente leyendo *El amor en los tiempos del cólera*. Le da vuelta a la página y me mira directamente a los ojos.

Colin estira sus brazos y bosteza. “Ya, él es bonito. Si es que a ti te gusta ese tipo de cosa”.

“No jodas”, murmulo, haciéndole cosquilla en su costado.

“¡Para! Tengo que ir a mear. Hasta luego, cazador de bichos”.

La fila se mueve hacia adelante. El hombre me mira de nuevo con unos ojos lucios y se cambia a dos asientos más cerca de mí, cercano a las señoras que atienden el almuerzo, sirviendo hamburguesas y croquetas de papa. Yo le sonrío; él me responde. La sangre se me sube a las mejillas. Mira hacia otro lado, respiro profundo, y desarrollo un interés efímero en los collages y en los colores de agua de las paredes. ¿Son estos los productos del arte de la terapia? Yo busco sus ojos una vez más, pero no los encuentro

nod and a smile. *You fucker*, I fire back through my grin.

This is fun, but it can’t go on forever. Something’s gotta give. When lunch ends at two, these windows of opportunity will close. Coaches will become pumpkins once again, horse mice, and princes Chelsea boys. We haven’t got much time.

“Hey,” I say from across the gap. “Blow-pop?”

He rises and walks the three steps to my table.

“Thanks. What’s all this?” he asks, pointing to the pamphlets and cards on the tabletop.

“It’s information about different research studies—I don’t know, you might be interested in some of them. This one wants to know whether drinking alcohol affects your ability to take your HIV meds on time. *Project Drama* is investigating the link between drug use and risky sex behavior, and this last one wants to know if antidepressants can help curb sexual compulsion ...”

I look up from the brochures and note the confusion on his face.

“You’re not here for lunch?” he asks.

“No. I’m just here to recruit participants.”

“Ha. So you’re tricking for test subjects.”

donde los dejé. Ellos se han movido del Márquez en sus piernas al punto de su bota izquierda que se arquea hacia arriba, a los tragaluces. Yo lo espero, pero él no se mueve. Estoy perdiendo mi voluntad. Exhalo y me preparo para ver mis pérdidas—dar el beso de despedida al momento—cuando sube su mirada, ríe tontamente, me saluda con la cabeza y sonrío. *Cabrón*, se lo lanzo con mi sonrisa.

Esto es divertido, pero no puede durar por siempre. Algo tiene que ceder. Cuando la hora de la comida termine a las dos, estas ventanas de oportunidad se cerrarán. Los carruajes se convertirán en calabazas una vez más, los caballos en ratones y las princesas en chicos de Chelsea. Nosotros no tenemos mucho tiempo.

“Hey”, digo desde donde estoy. “¿Bombones?”

Él se levanta y camina los tres pasos hasta mi mesa.

“Gracias. ¿Qué es todo esto?”, pregunta, señalando los folletos y las tarjetas encima de la mesa.

“Es información sobre diferentes estudios de investigación—no sé, tal vez te interesen algunos de ellos. Este quiere saber si el beber alcohol afecta tu capacidad para tomar tus medicamentos del VIH a tiempo. El Proyecto Drama está investigando la relación entre el uso de droga y el

“Um...” He’s knocking my hustle. I shrug my shoulders. “Kinda?”

“Do they teach you the bait-and-switch back at the lab, or is that something you picked up on your own?”

This situation and everything attached to it is becoming decidedly unsexy. An explanation is in order.

“My bad,” I say. “I saw you. You made me smile. I was trying to be ... sociable? I didn’t mean to—”

“Turn me on?” he says, laughing out loud. “Relax, man. Hey, I’m hungry. Come eat with me.”

I look around. Colin is nowhere in sight.

“I probably should stay here. What with the condoms and all.”

“You sure? It’s free.”

I start to answer just as Colin comes back to the table. I lose my words.

“You know what? Don’t worry about it.” The man drops the candy on the table. “Have a good one.”

“Wait a minute,” I say, touching his arm. He stops. “Colin, I’m going to go on break for a little while. You can hold it down on your own, right?”

comportamiento de riesgo; y este último quiere saber si los antidepresivos pueden ayudar a frenar la compulsión sexual”.

Levanto la mirada de los folletos y noto la confusión en su cara.

“¿No has venido aquí para comer?”, pregunta.

“No. Sólo he venido a reclutar participantes”.

“Ja. Entonces estás pescando sujetos para las pruebas”.

“Hm...” El imita mi ajeteo. Encojo mis hombros. “¿Más o menos?”

“¿En el laboratorio te enseñan la táctica para engancharlos, o es algo que aprendiste tú solo?”

Esta situación y todo lo relacionado a ella se está convirtiendo indudablemente en poco sexy. Es preciso una explicación.

“Es mi culpa”, digo. “Te vi. Me hiciste sonreír. Yo estaba tratando de ser... ¿sociable? No quise...”

“¿Excitarme?”, dice, riendo muy fuerte. “Tranquilo, hombre. Hey, tengo hambre. Ven a comer conmigo”.

Miro a mis alrededores. Colin no se ve por ningún lado.

“*Fa shizzle!*” Colin grins.

We go through the line. Getting my tray, I realize I’ve seen my Lunch Lady before. He was at the Hound last Labor Day weekend, dancing naked and fellating a go-go boy on the bar. I remember his long body moving with the wizened grace of a tenured dance professor, still holding audiences captive once a year. Today he flips burgers on the lunch assembly line. His grey ponytail nestles in his hairnet like a sleepy cat.

“Hi. Turkey, beef, or veggie?” he asks.

“Turkey burger, please. Thanks.”

“You bet.”

We join two men and one woman eating at a circular table in the middle of the lunchroom. I nod my hellos and listen at the buoyancy of the woman’s voice floating above those of her friends. I sometimes forget this is not a Men’s-Only dining club—women have found a place at these tables as well.

For a moment I eat in silence, almost without regard to my companion on my right. He is watching me. Tilting his head, he checks me out from different angles. He asks how my food is.

“It’s good.” I take a bigger bite. “Yours?”

“Could be better. The veggie burger’s a little dry.”

“Probablemente debería quedarme aquí. Con esto de los condones y todo lo demás”.

“¿Estás seguro? Es gratis”.

Empecé a contestarle justo en el momento que regresa Colin a la mesa. Perdí mis palabras.

“¿Sabes qué?, no te preocupes”. El hombre deja caer el dulce sobre la mesa. “Que la pases bien”.

“Espera un minuto”, le digo, tocando su brazo. El se detiene. “Colin, tomaré mi descanso por un rato. Tú puedes con el paquete, ¿cierto?”

“Por supuesto”, Colin hace muecas sonriendo.

Hacemos cola. Al coger mi bandeja, me doy cuenta que antes he visto a la señora de la comida. El pasado fin de semana, el día del trabajo, estaba en la Jauría, bailando desnudo y haciéndole sexo oral a un chico go-go en la barra. Recuerdo su largo cuerpo moviéndose con una gracia arrugada de un profesor de danza vitalicio que aún tiene audiencias cautivas una vez al año. Hoy, él le da vuelta a las hamburguesas en la cola de ensamblaje de almuerzos. Su cola de caballo se arrulla en su redecilla como un gato durmiente.

“Hola. ¿Pavo, carne o vegetal?”, pregunta.

“Hamburguesa de pavo, por favor. Gracias”.

“Sale”.

“Sorry to hear that. Want a bite?”

He takes the bun from my offered hand and squeezes it until ketchup and mayo run at the edges. I watch as he chews slowly, mulling over the meat and condiments.

“Why are you here?” he asks.

“Work.” I pop a tater tot in my mouth.

“Nah. Your friend Lolita over there, *he’s* working.” At the top of the lunchroom Colin presides over three queens eagerly filling out brochures. “But you,” he says, “You’re casing.”

“Gimme back my burger. Look, you left it all smushy.” I turn and find his eyes again. They fence me in. “Hey. Sorry about the sales pitch earlier. Thanks for calling me on my shit.”

He shrugs. “Whatever.” He returns to his veggie burger.

“Man. I fucking hate this job. Being a condom boy sucks.”

“Being a what?”

“A condom boy. We’re like foot soldiers of HIV prevention. This is just one of our gigs. Normally we’re giving out condoms in bars and clubs or standing on the street, passing out cards for research studies.”

Nosotros nos sentamos junto a dos hombres y una mujer que comen en una mesa circular en el centro de la cafetería. Asiento con mi cabeza los saludos y escucho el vigor de la voz de la mujer que flota por encima de la voz de sus amigos. A veces olvido que esto no es un club de cena sólo para hombres—también las mujeres han encontrado un lugar en estas mesas.

Por un momento, como en silencio, casi sin poner atención a mi acompañante de mi lado derecho. El me está mirando. Inclinando su cabeza, me inspecciona desde diferentes ángulos. Me pregunta cómo está mi comida.

“Está bien”. Le doy una mordida más grande. “¿La tuya?”

“Podría ser mejor. La hamburguesa de vegetales está un poco seca”.

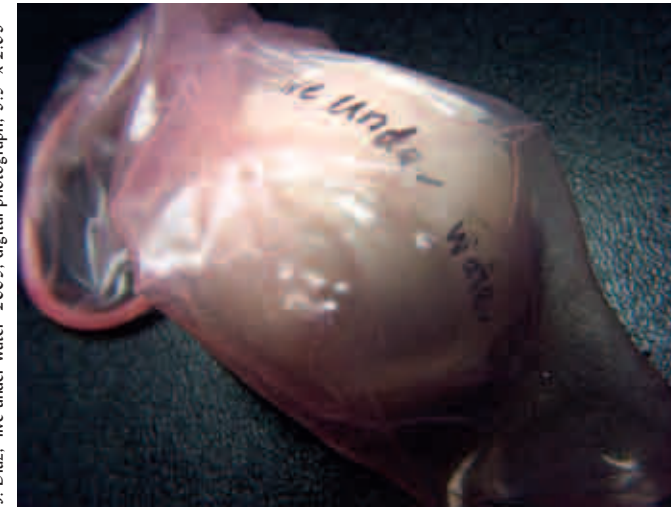
“Que pena escuchar eso. ¿Quieres una mordida?”

Coge un panecillo de mi mano y lo aprieta hasta que el ketchup y la mayonesa escurren en los bordes del panecillo. Lo miro cuando mastica suavemente, meditando sobre la carne y los condimentos.

“¿Por qué estás aquí?”, me pregunta.

“Trabajo”. Me pongo una croqueta de papa en mi boca.

J. Diaz, live under water 2005, digital photograph, 3.5 x 2.63



“That’s a funny name,” he says.

“It’s a funny job.”

“Sounds like a position on a porn shoot, somewhere next to the fluffer.”

I sip at my juice-from-concentrate. “Good call. One of my bosses is a porn star. He came up with the name.”

“No shit?”

“Yep. He still does a movie every now and then, but he makes his living throwing parties around Manhattan. He likes having condoms around—makes him look good. Our agency sends us over to work his Fetish nights at the Hound. He

“No. Allá, tu amiga Lolita, *él* está trabajando”. Al frene de la cafetería, Colin está lidiando con tres loquitas ansiosas por llenar los folletos. “Pero tú”, dice, “estás examinando”.

“Regrésame mi hamburguesa. Mira, la dejaste toda embarrada”. Me doy la vuelta y encuentro sus ojos otra vez. Ellos me encierran. “Hey, disculpa por la promoción de venta hace un rato. Gracias por señalarme mis mierdas”.

Encoge sus hombros. “No importa”. Él regresa a su hamburguesa de vegetales.

“Hombre, verdaderamente odio este trabajo. Ser el chico del condón es jodido”.

“¿Ser qué?”

“El chico del condón. Nosotros somos como soldados de infantería para la prevención del VIH. Este es sólo uno de nuestros trabajitos. Normalmente, nosotros estamos distribuyendo condones en los bares y los clubes o estamos en la calle, pasando tarjetas sobre estudios de investigación”.

“Ese es un nombre gracioso”, dijo.

“Es un trabajo gracioso”.

“Suena como a un puesto en una filmación porno, algo parecido al que alista los penes”.

doesn't remember our names, he just calls us his condom boys."

"You?" He's laughing at me. "At the Hound? Around all those daddies and leather queens?"

"Just call me Chicken Little." I reach over to his tray and take the last tater tot. "I guess that's part of the draw, though. They only hire twinks for this job. We're the cigarette girls of the 21st century."

He likes this. He grins, I giggle, he touches the top of my knee.

"You're no twink, babe. There's more than cream filling in that head of yours."

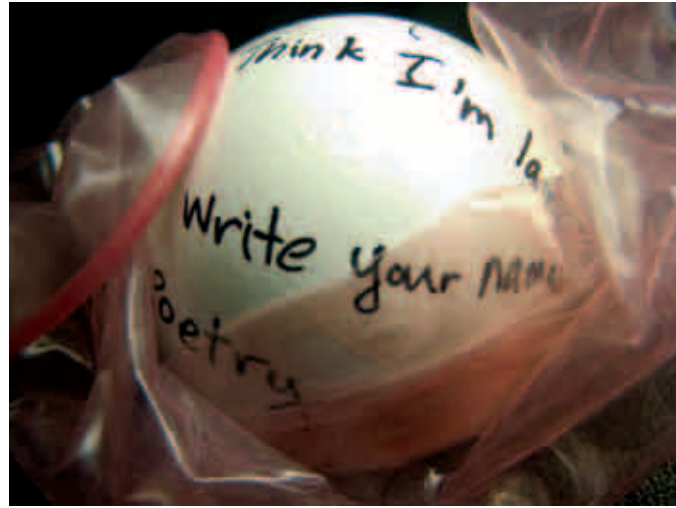
"Maybe. Sometimes it's easier to play dumb."

"Any room left for dessert, fellas?" It's our Lunch Lady again, bringing us a warm plate of peach cobbler saddled with scoops of ice cream. He winks at me. "Thought you two might want to end the meal on a sweet note."

"Chet, my man! Showing the love once again."

"What can I say? I take care of my people." Chet bends down and gives both of us kisses. "Your partner over there," he says to me, "think he'd mind a piece?"

"I bet he'd love one."



J. Diaz, write your name 2005, digital photograph, 3.5 x 2.63

Sorbo mi jugo de concentrado. "Bien dicho. Uno de mis jefes es una estrella porno. El se inventó el nombre".

"¿No jodas?"

"Sip. El todavía hace películas de vez en cuando, pero él se arregla la vida organizando fiestas en todo Manhattan. A él le gusta tener condones por todos lados—lo hace verse bien. Nuestra agencia nos envía a nosotros a trabajar sus noches de fetiche en la Jauría.

"¿Tú?" El se ríe de mí. "¿En la Jauría? ¿En medio de todos los viejos y locas?"

"Solamente llámame Pequeño Pollo". Alargo mi mano hasta su bandeja y cojo la última croqueta de papa. "Supongo que eso es parte del cebo. Ellos solamente contratan chicos muñequitos para este trabajo. Nosotros somos las chicas del cigarrillo del siglo 21".

"Well alright! You guys eat up, the cobbler's getting cold." He rubs our shoulders and walks away.

"That Chet. He's a real good guy."

"Yeah," I say. "Great dancer, too."

Together we spoon cobbler and cream, considering our desserts as we watch the lunchroom clear out.

Outside of GMHC we wait for Colin to make his exit. He didn't want to walk down the twelve flights of stairs. Instead, he chose to wait for the doddering elevator to rise to its full height, take him in, and slowly shuffle its rickety car to the ground. There's no telling when he'll come out.

The wind has picked up considerably since morning. My hoodie and windbreaker barely suffice. My lunch date, impervious in his fitted leather jacket, keeps me company.

"You smoke?" he asks.

"No. Not tobacco, anyway." I watch him rifle through his pockets. He pulls out a soft pack. "Ah. I see you're a Marlboro Man."

"Since junior high," he says, flicking open his lighter.

A él le gusta esto. Me hace muecas, yo sonrío, él me toca por encima de la rodilla.

"Tú no eres un muñequito, bebé. Hay más que relleno de crema en tu cabeza".

"Tal vez. A veces es más fácil hacerse el tonto".

"Hombres, ¿tienen espacio para postre?" Es nuestra señora del almuerzo otra vez, trayéndonos un plato caliente de tarta de melocotón cubierta con unas cucharadas de helado. Me guiña el ojo. "Pensé que a ustedes dos les gustaría terminar su comida con una nota dulce".

"Chet, mi tipo. Mostrando el amor otra vez".

"¿Qué puedo decir? Yo cuido a mi gente". Chet se agacha y nos da besos a los dos. "Tu compañero por allá", me dice, "¿crees que quiere un trozo?"

"Te apuesto a que le encantará uno".

"¡Muy bien! Ustedes coman que la tarta se está enfriando". Frota nuestros hombros y se va.

"Ese Chet. Es un bueno tipo".

"Sí", digo. "También es un buen bailaror".

“Cancer killed the Marlboro Man, you know.”
I pull my hands from my hoodie and make a windshield. He gets a light.

“Uh huh.” He exhales to the left of me.
“Killed the cigarette girl, too.”

I lean in. He holds my face. We kiss.

“I should get going.”

“Ok,” I say, and hug him once more.

“Take care of yourself. You got my info.
Reach out.”



J. Diaz, Think I m Lame 2005, digital photograph, 3.2 x 4.25

Juntos cuchareamos la tarta y el helado,
considerando nuestros postres mientras vemos
que la cafetería queda vacía.

Afuera de GMHC esperamos que salga Colin. El
no quiso caminar los doce pisos de escaleras. En
su lugar, escogió esperar hasta que llegara a su
máxima altura el viejo ascensor, lo dejara entrar y
lentamente lo sacudiera hasta llegar abajo. No se
puede decir cuándo saldrá de allí.

El viento se ha intensificado considerablemente
desde la mañana. Mi suéter y protector de cara
apenas son suficiente. Mi cita de almuerzo,
insensible en su chamarra de cuero ajustada, me
acompaña.

“¿Fumas?”, me pregunta.

“No. Bueno, tabaco no”. Lo miro buscando en
sus bolsillos. Lo miro sacar un paquete suave.
“Ah, veo que eres un hombre Marlboro”.

“Desde la preparatoria”, dice, dando golpecitos a
su encendedor.

“El cáncer mató al hombre Marlboro, sabes”. Yo
saco mis manos de mi suéter y las uso como
parabrisas. Él lo enciende.

“Aja”. Él exhala a mi izquierda. “También mató
a la chica del cigarrillo”.

Me recuesto. Él sostiene mi cara. Nos besamos.

He walks away.

I huddle close to the building’s glass façade. I
look through the door. Any minute now Colin
will come. I am warmer now and shuddering.
He’s gone and left me something large to ponder:
*If cancer killed the cigarette girl, what becomes of the
condom boy?*

“Debo irme”.

“Está bien”, digo, y lo abrazo una vez más.

“Cuidate. Tienes mis datos. Búscame”.

Él se aleja.

Me arrimo más cerca a la fachada de vidrio del
edificio. Miro a través de la puerta. Colin saldrá
en cualquier momento. Ahora, estoy más caliente
y estremeciéndome. Él se fue y me dejó con algo
muy grande en que pensar: *Si el cáncer mató a la
chica del cigarrillo, ¿qué será del chico del condón?*

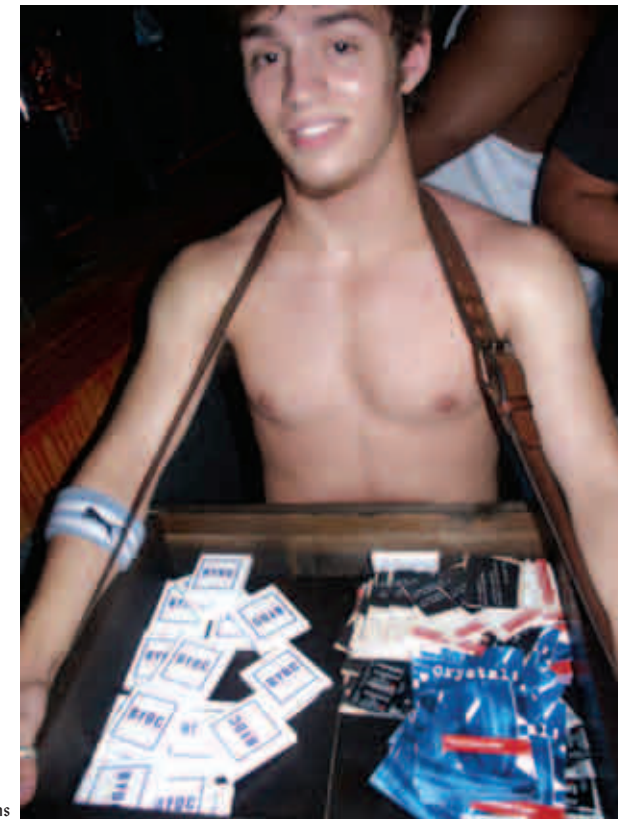


PHOTO: Daniel Nardicio Productions

pictures of you

Viet Le

The photographic series entitled *pictures of you* consists of over twenty gay male subjects; the images are mainly of male nudes in their own domestic spaces. These images explore masculinity, vulnerability, loss, race, sexuality and the politics of desire.

All images are untitled, from the *pictures of you* series, 2004, Cibachrome prints, dimensions variable





Paper Whites (Narcissus)

Viet Le

Cloaked bulbs
binned in a nursery:

a mute promise, failed metaphor
I carry crinkling
in a paper bag, home.

Transplanted,
buried desire,
long-limbed stalks reach
for firmament,
leaves curved blunt,
fingers unfurling.

after all
this time, thirsting
under the sharp cold-flamed light
of the snow-laden kitchen window—

the veined buds,
heads nodding,
sheathed
upright, waiting:

outline of pistil,
stamen,

a hopeful whisper:

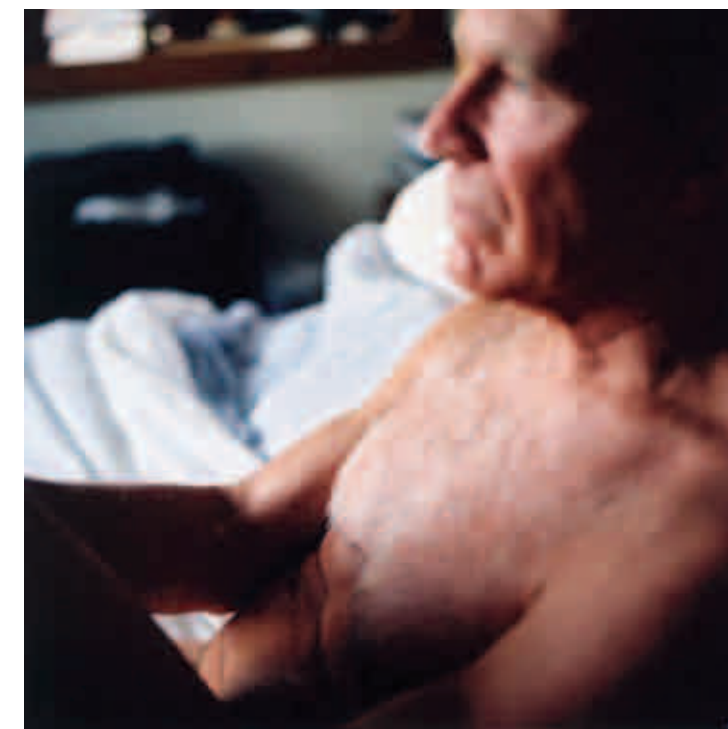
flare of trumpet blossoms—
unyielding, sex-pungent,
yes, the thrill of
tenderness manifest, want
unraveled.

But not yet:

now the forced blooms
are still not
an exhalation,
exultant declarative, and

may never be;
now,

only
the green
gesture of longing.









Notes from the Life of the Brown Boy and the White Man

Ronaldo V. Wilson

Joey, the Brown Boy, and Ricky

In Kenya, there is a white man with cotton-white hair standing against a backdrop of shields that look like hardened zebra hides matted onto wood. What excites the brown boy is the blue button-down shirt which cloaks the traveler who has found himself in front of a row of shields, posing for a picture.

Joey, the white man’s travel partner, has given him a pair of wraparound black shades that give the poseur what the brown boy interprets as *drive*. This force cuts from the photo out to the brown boy who says: *Now this photo is hot. I’d fuck you in this one.*

It is because the picture is cold and the man in it is lipless, red, white, balding save the spray of stark hair which haloes his head. It is because the African sun makes him look like a specimen among stone, a yachtsman, a man on vacation, a husband, a man with no time for fun, a dumb man, a harmless passenger, a fucker, a blow job’s mindless recipient.

As the brown boy sits in this new world, crosslegged on a bed with the photograph and the white man at his disposal, he listens to him play the piano. Against this music, he realizes that his own work is entirely mobile, his thoughts racing in the prospect of finding any white man who will not only listen but who will also pay attention, and be willing to feed him whatever he wants.

Get him to show him his neighbors penthouse. Get him to show him their two thousand dollar puppy that will chew at their feet and remind the brown boy of an insect, rodent, or pest.

A Story:

The traveler is in charge of his neighbor’s yorkshire for a weekend. This dog, named “BonBon,” the white man believes is a test. The dog’s owners, a very rich and eccentric married couple, have invited him to dinner five times, only to cancel each date. Watching the dog, he knows will get him, finally, into their apartment. It does. In fact for the favor, her owners even loaned the traveler a car which they gave a number.

No. 90 is a brand new Durango that the Yorkshire’s owners would like him to use to not only transport their dog, but to pick them up at Newark when they return from skiing. The white man refuses. He can’t drive that far. Besides, it’s what he calls “the catch,” the real price he has to pay to use No. 90 for the weekend.

Once, before a trip, one of the pet’s owners, who the white man calls “the beautiful wife” was rushing — grabbing her dog, then her daughter, and one duffle bag after another — only to leave behind sixty-thousand dollars of jewels in a leather Louis Vuitton bag. She didn’t want to take them in the first place, but the husband wanted her to show off the “antique jewelry” at a dinner in Vale. When they realized the jewels were missing, they phoned the hotel from the limousine. The staff ran out, no bag.

A week later, the police called the couple and said they had their bag, buddled in their local precinct’s safe. Even though someone returned it, jewels intact, the two thousand dollar reward the pair posted went unclaimed.

In the white man’s apartment, when the beautiful wife confessed — “I would give the reward to whoever returned my bag, if only I knew who it was,” — the white man sung back, “_____, why it was I.” She returned: “Silly, it can’t be you_____, I know she was a woman,” And they both laughed at his stupid joke.

The brown boy remembers the story, mostly because of this joke tied to the mark of desperation in his trying to win over the beautiful wife. But he is more impressed that the white man, who has finally made it into their home to watch Bon Bon while they are away, cannot wait to show off the opulence of the couple’s possessions.

In their apartment, the brown boy is stunned by the paintings, not by the paintings themselves, but the paint *in* the paintings, especially the bile green drops of it floating out into the room. In fact, the whole room seemed a green blur, a smudge in his brain, the oil smothering him in as though he were trapped with them in a small, lit closet, crowded in by masterpiece after masterpiece, while BonBon shut behind a door, scratched at it, longing to roll on the Persian rugs.

In the photograph, the white man in Africa is adorned with a wood carved medallion that sprouts teeth and is wired with feathers. It’s confusing. What animal gave form to that wood, what lion those teeth, what bird, stripped of those feathers? Over his shoulders, in the blue horizon that sits in the chest of Listerine air spilling from the white man’s mouth, the brown boy realizes he cannot always be in control of what he decides to look at. So when the white man shows him pictures of Ricky, a young Pinoy he met while traveling the Phillipines, the brown boy says *I’m sorry, I have to confiscate these photos*, removing four from the stack and laying them in a row.

In the photo on the left, Ricky is acting active, tussling his hair with hands forced into his head by his own hard and slightly scarred up arms. He is pushing into his hair with no trace of wanting anything but to be taken. Ricky's forehead is old, miscolored, poor and overly shadowed. But even with this, the brown boy has only moments to make sense of Ricky. How long will the pet sitter play the piano and sing while the brown boy takes over his photographs? How long will it take for the brown boy to have to figure out that he is not exactly like Ricky? Though close in his want and submission, the brown boy exceeds Ricky in his power and control. How long will he have to laugh, out loud, at Ricky's small upturned penis shooting out, eager to be needed?

In another photo which the brown boy has placed a few inches to the right of the first, Ricky's hands are gigantic, his arms, guns. Ricky seems to be emphasizing something, pushing into the picture his own joy, making the take, *all physical*. Ignoring the growlings of the two thousand dollar animal that the white man has taken into his own home, the brown boy suspends himself in Ricky's hands, feels the push of them out into space towards him. Is this emphatic push what Ricky's hard little brown cock suggests in the photo less than an inch to the left? Who would ever want that? Who?

What the brown boy wanted was to capture all four photos, reading them like he used to read pictures of algae, bone, plants, and animals in the *International Wildlife Encyclopedia* that lined his mother's sewing room. Remembering a span of yellow fish fanned out in water, escaping the camera, the brown boy thinks:

I've never been to the Philippines nor Africa.

In a rush, he constructs this thought into the the third photo he placed to the right of the second. Here, Ricky is cropped: his crossed arms and winning smile flatter the sense of content that wipes across his entire face, a mood he most likely borrowed from the face of a drop dead model.

The brown boy wonders if these photos were gifts Ricky gave to the white man in the hope that he would bring him all the way from the Phillipines to New York to his tiny apartment in the *Estonia*. Did the white man announce his modest digs to Ricky as he announced them to the brown boy? Did he call his home *a closet in the Estonia* as Ricky lifted his body on the bed into a perfect planch? *I'll hold however long it takes me to get to America*, Ricky may have thought while the fourth photo was snapped, his legs perfectly extended.

The brown boy thinks this because the photos are pathetic, and Ricky is going nowhere, that they are really extentions of the brown boy's own loss. Like Ricky, he is stuck, dumb and flexing, an isolate, which the white man will travel right through.

It is because of this thought that the brown boy stops looking at Ricky, planching, and gives the white man a writing assignment: *Write a poem in which you speak as yourself in a photo of you in Africa*. The brown boy finds another picture. In it, the white man is almost invisible in the shot of dusk giving way to night in Morocco. He asks him to use this one because there is nothing in the background but one black surface, where he barely turns out, a red shadow.

Joey has a fat face.

He tells the white man this, because Joey, his travel partner, is a medical student from Hawaii and at the top of his class. But even though the brown boy wants to hate Joey, he cannot. After all, he saw Joey's face and the photographs of Ricky, two brown boys in one, almost at once. And after all, Joey did take the portraits of his traveler in Africa! Besides, the brown boy, who is beautiful, is not threatened by Joey. Because when he asked the white man whether or not he thought Joey was beautiful, too, he answered: *Joey is beautiful in his own way*.

The brown boy knows this means nothing. He stares at the veins along his own wrists, the map of them green and strong, the red brimming just below his skin, the black hiding, the pink burning, the shadows coursing, deft, around his forearm. What he wants is a mirror so he can look at his jawbone flying out from his face in two pointed yet balanced directions, his own body cutting out and away from his self, which tells him he is perfect and relentlessly free from ever being called any thing like, *beautiful in his own way*.

The Brown Boy Opens His Mouth Under Water

Three thousand and twenty-one miles away from the red house and his white man, the brown boy has become an endless hole, his mouth flooded with the water from the pool at *24 Hour Fitness*, where he dazzles yellow and squat pool-sitters who gawk in awe, his butterflying arms hurling out to break the water's surface. When he is tired, the brown boy floats just under it, holding his mouth open like a whale shark, taking in the liquid to the back of his mouth, where his throat begins.

What he is trying to both remember and abandon is the bottle-thick stranger he force-fed himself only hours before at the *Regency Theater*. The owner of the dick, a balding white, at first fled when the brown boy sat one row and one seat behind him. After being there four hours and discouraged by his dismissal, thinking, *I lost him*, the brown boy left the theater to feed himself a quesadilla and a Chicken

Chalupa from *Taco Bell*. What was he after, devouring the fried unbleached flour, the fat bread going straight to his gut, a filling satisfying only enough to draw him back into the theater, a hole which he thought he could exit?

In the light of the movie screen, where the buttons of his cell phone were barely visible, a call, its heavy vibrate shook him only momentarily from the screen, where a white woman was being force-fed a corn cob that she spit out: *pptttbbbbb*. Unable to ignore his white man's name, appearing in black on his cell phone's green, lit face, he shut it.

In the film, three brown bodies, one man, and two women were going at it—one woman was more aggressive in her fucking than the other. The brown boy saw himself in her, the way she slammed her pussy into the brown man's face, while he fucked the other. The brown boy thought—“*She's thinking, 'You may be fucking her, but you will think of me!'*”

What the brown boy tries to remember is that he is a rational creature, that he can forget one thing to remember the next. But that his being whole has to do with his being able to exist at the end of pleasure, free, his whole body reeling at the tip of his lips. So when he swallowed one cock, he did not forget about the one he had in his mouth just moments before. How could he?

He dreamed of one, and a white man walked in, wearing powder blue jeans, his button fly, wide open—his plaid shirt, almost blank from wash, skirting around his strong and square stomach. He smelled like smoke, oblivious to the hairs that leapt through the opening where his big dick fell out.

The brown boy knew what he was getting into, because he felt the wart. He even asked the white man what it was. But before he asked and got the reply, *It's just a wart*, the brown boy placed his thumb over it, so as not to be tempted to deep throat what might infect.

No matter how high the dirty white man pushed into his face, no matter how much it thrilled him to be making the white man arc up with all his focus and might, he would not take it all the way in. It was so close to what the brown boy wanted, so much more than being surrounded by the two old whites before this—one with the bug eyes, flicking up into space waiting for the brown boy to deliver him—the other, a biker white mustache, floating above a cock, larger than any he had ever before touched or sucked.

When the balding white man saw what the brown boy could do, or what he was, or what his mouth seemed to promise, he sat next to him. The brown boy, at that moment, would forget all of the others:

the fat white, who beckoned him then brushed him off, who wanted only to be stared at; the skeleton, whose hand was bone and worn skin, one finger flashing a diamond horse shoe ring, his cock, boy small and thin. The brown boy would remember that neither the skeleton's balls dangling, nor his face, a mass of constricted lines, would ever be enough.

When the balding white, finally, sat next to him, the brown boy got exactly what he wanted. It was so thick. It was so clean, the hair at the base, rough, but not clipped, the thick opening up to thicker. Was this a sign from heaven? What could he want any more than what, at that moment, he had?

The screen showed a white woman in a cage, who was being serviced by a “veterinarian,” who pretended that she was an animal in heat. He would have to feed her his cock: *It's the only cure*.

The cage, the leash, the way the film cut, in its opening credits, to several women bound by wrists to ropes, one fainting, her whole body's collapse: Her loss to gravity was where the brown boy saw his own, a bottomless drop, waiting to be caught by whatever, at last, it hoped to hit.

If he takes it in to the base, he feels transcendent. He feels free, his whole self, melting into the act, his knees hitting the concrete like weights, his whole body sinking below his boots. He can't look up because the balding man will not let him, turns his head down and in—to suck, *only*—opening the brown boy's throat to what they both know is an end.

A child being hit in the head, who is too smart for it. The sound of a cup hitting the sides of a glass. The hardness of his key strokes, writing. How will the brown boy return to this, return to the reflex of the balding white man's cock starting to pulse, his big hands dropping down to jack him off, grabbing and stroking the brown boy, hard below the seat?—What more can he handle?—What more can he give but to take, his head being pushed down, harder, the stem ticking down his throat, cum.

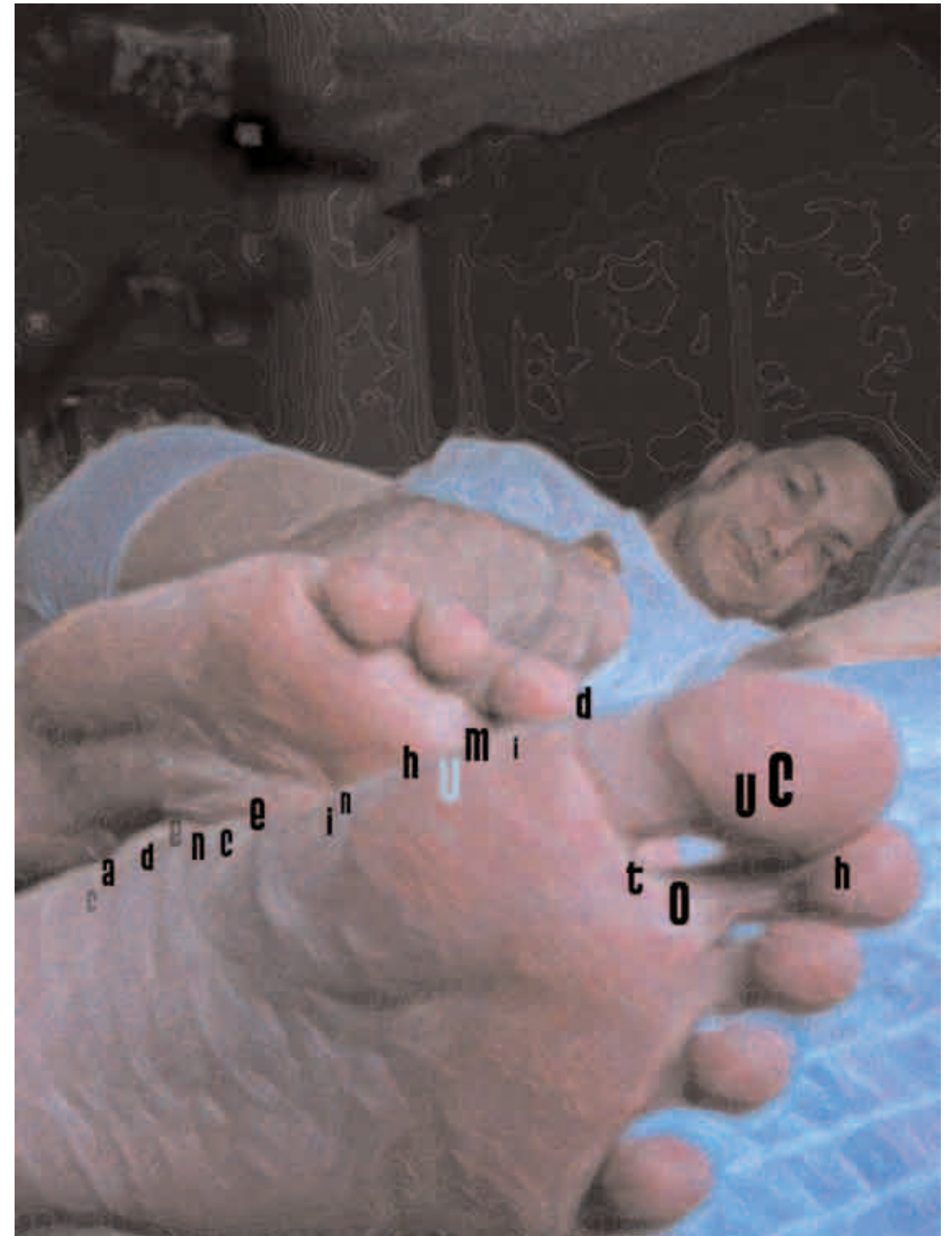
What drives him to suck, drives him to spit, to run, to not wipe off, to escape, not after the bald man who walks away, but away from what he became as he sucked. He runs—he runs in the light to the bathroom, where he eats soap and gargles, drinks hot water from the faucet, and gargles more. Spits. He forces himself to vomit, first on the floor, then into the toilet. Instead of cleaning himself, he cleans the floor as best as he can in his panic with the toilet paper. He has left his Taco Bell in chunks, the tan, fat and traces of the bald man's cum, a dizzying on the floor.

He leaves that him there, blood eyed, behind, so when he bolts out the bathroom past the line of men standing at the door, he knows that he has managed to pull himself back together.

He will drive in the fog. He will lean into the front of the car, looking out at the street in the dark, full of what he cannot forget. He will look, dazed, forward, staring through the glass at what he can make out in the white haze. He will call his white man back. He will speak as though his mouth were not itchy and dead, as though his body were not shaken and wishing that he were flying instead of driving.

In the pool, he opens his mouth, takes in the water to the back, letting it touch the end of his beautiful throat—swallows—his body pulling forward against a wall he imagines in his mouth, the whole of him releasing, floating and forgetting.

FACING PAGE: J. Diaz, Come to Bed, 2005, digital photograph, 7.5 x 5.63



old school sex

Darieck Scott

Like most Americans, I have a love, sometimes secret, sometimes not, for absolutes: The comforts of a solid good vs. evil distinction, however justifiably scorned by the intellect, can be irresistibly seductive. For the interval of time in which you can maintain a belief in such things, knowing exactly where good prospers and evil lurks makes you feel muscularly coherent, like a great living cudgel or a vast blunt gavel, slamming down peremptorily upon the enemy and establishing for all time the irreducible Truth. My favored definitions of good and evil are perhaps unlike those of most Americans, however: I like to believe that Sex is good. Evil is anything that constrains It: governments, Gods Judeo-Christian and Islamic, protective parents, any purveyor of a sexual morality requiring anything more stringent than consent. Such absolute convictions can lead you into peculiar moral and political cul-de-sacs: Despite having learned my feminist principles at the feet of Catharine MacKinnon, my allegiance to a notion of Dionysian sexual abandon I cannot concretely describe sometimes tugs more strongly than my intellectual education; thus I pause before the Kobe Bryant case, and think: But isn't what she's complaining about just bad sex? And isn't Kobe sexy, a trait which ought to weigh more heavily in adjudication of such matters than it usually does? And I think odd, utterly pedestrian things like, well, even if Bush, the avatar of All That is Truly Evil and Perfidious, gets re-elected, there'll still be dick out there.

My training makes me aware of the more or less convincing (and certainly doctrinaire) Foucauldian thesis here: That it is only the exercise of "biopolitics," in which a given society's ruling powers promote the relentless classification of basically aleatory human activity under the guise of the pursuit of knowledge—for the purposes of producing, and thus harnessing and controlling, the very objects of their study (us)—that creates the conditions for various otherwise arcane prohibitions on sexual behavior to be marshaled under the rubric of an invented "sexuality": in which, then, deluded persons like me can then locate the Grail. Nevertheless I'm provisionally proposing, at least for the duration of this essay, that the Sex I (like to) believe is an artifact of one of those "disqualified knowledges" that Foucault finds so intriguing—even if what disqualifies it is Foucault himself. These knowledges, Foucault says, are



All images by Eduardo Aparicio from the series *Machos y locas*, 1991-94, print from color neg., dimensions variable

Sexo de la vieja escuela

Darieck Scott

Como la mayoría de los americanos, tengo un amor, a veces secreto, a veces no, para los absolutos: Las comodidades de un bueno sólido versus la malvada distinción, aunque sea justificablemente despreciada por el intelecto, puede ser irresistiblemente seductor. Para el intervalo de tiempo en el cual puedes mantener una creencia en tales cosas, saber exactamente dónde lo bueno prospera y la maldad está al asecho, te hace sentir fuertemente coherente, como un gran garrote viviente o como un enorme martillo desafilado, golpeando perentoriamente al enemigo y estableciendo para todo el tiempo la irreducible Verdad. Mis definiciones favoritas de lo bueno y la maldad quizás no sean como la de la mayoría de los americanos, sin embargo: Me gusta creer que el Sexo es bueno. La maldad es algo que lo restringe: gobiernos, dioses judío-cristianos e islámicos, padres protectores, cualquier promulgador de moralidad sexual que requiere de algo más estricto que el consentimiento. Dichas convicciones absolutas pueden llevarte a una moral peculiar y a una política de callejón sin salida: A pesar de haber aprendido mis principios feministas a los pies de Catharine MacKinnon, mi lealtad a la noción del abandono sexual Dionisiano no puedo describirla concretamente, porque a veces hala más fuerte que mi educación intelectual. Así, hago una pausa ante el caso de Kobe Bryan, y pienso: ¿Pero ella no es que sólo se está quejando de un mal sexo? Y, ¿que Kobe no es sexy?, ¿una característica que debería pesar más de lo acostumbrado en la adjudicación de dichos asuntos? Y pienso extrañado, totalmente cosas mundanas, como, bueno, si hasta Bush, que es la encarnación de Todo Eso es Maldad Verdadera y Pérfido, es re-elegido, todavía habrán gilipollas por allí.

Mi entrenamiento me hace percatarme de la más o menos convencedora (y ciertamente doctrinaria) tesis Foucaultiana: Que solamente es el ejercicio de las "bio-políticas", en el que un poder predominante determinado de la sociedad promueve la incesante clasificación de la actividad humana básicamente aleatoria con el disfraz de la búsqueda del conocimiento—para el propósito de producir, y así mismo enjaezando y controlando los meros objetos de su estudio (nosotros)—que crea las condiciones para varias, de lo contrario, prohibiciones arcanas en la conducta sexual que se formalizarán bajo la rúbrica de una "sexualidad" inventada, en la cual, personas engañadas como yo, entonces puedan localizar el Cáliz. No obstante estoy proponiendo provisionalmente, por lo menos en la duración de este ensayo, de que el Sexo en el que yo creo (me gusta) es un artificio de uno de esos "conocimientos descalificados" que Foucault encontró tan intrigante (aunque sea el mismo Foucault el que lo descalifica). Foucault dice, estos conocimientos comprenden la "memoria cruda" de las luchas del combate en los terrenos de la ideología, cultural, social y político.(1) Me gustaría sugerir que la historia de un chico negro gay que crece para convertirse en gay en Estados Unidos y en Europa durante la (hasta ahora eterna) Era del SIDA es dicha

comprised of the “raw memory” of struggles, of combat on ideological, cultural, social, political terrains.ⁱ I would like to suggest that the history of a black boy growing up to become gay in the U.S. and Europe during the (so far eternal) Age of AIDS is just such a memory, recording in individual microcosm the struggle waged in culture and health policy to replace one set of sexual expectations and sexual acts with another: This particular disqualified knowledge, in part, traces the rise and fall of “safe sex.”

My fervent faith in Sex no doubt has its origins in Sexual Revolution slogans I was too young to understand but old enough to absorb through the osmotic processes of acculturation and maturation during the mid-to-late 70s. Its sermons were delivered in the form of salacious rumors and lewd boasts on the part of my randy Louisiana cousins (both male and female) and my even randier uncles, tales of whose exploits became the legends of my adolescence and provided me with, if not the scriptures, then certainly the oral scripts, of my own hoped-for future ascension. This message that Sex was the highest and best of all worldly goods, capable of transfiguring each soul devoted to it, was underlined by every TV show from soap opera to sitcom to police drama to expurgated feature film, in which adult bodies flashing chest hair and tightly packed crotches while trading wink-wink innuendoes and sharing secret smiles as they disappeared behind bedroom doors before fade-out taunted me with the promise of an

memoria, grabando en un microcosmo individual las luchas emprendidas en la cultura y en las políticas de salud para reemplazar a un grupo de expectativas sexuales y actos sexuales con otros: En particular, este conocimiento descalificado sigue, en parte, al surgimiento y caída del “sexo seguro”.

Sin duda, mi ferviente fe en el Sexo tiene sus orígenes en los slogans de la Revolución Sexual que no podía entender por ser tan joven, pero era lo suficientemente grande para absorberlos a través del proceso osmótico de aculturación y madurez a mediados y finales de los años 70. Sus sermones se entregan en la forma de rumores salaces, lujuriosos alardes por parte de mis primos patanes de Louisiana (ambos, hombres y mujeres) y de mis tíos, aún más patanes; cuentos cuyas hazañas se volvieron las leyendas de mi adolescencia y me brindaron, si es que no fueron las escrituras, definitivamente los guiones orales de mi propia esperanza para la futura ascensión. Este mensaje de que el Sexo era la cosa más grande y mejor de todas las cosas en el mundo, capaz de transfigurar cada alma devota a él, era subrayado en cada show de televisión, desde telenovelas hasta comedias, dramas policíacos y películas estelares expurgadas en las cuales el vello intermitente del pecho de los cuerpos adultos y de los paquetes apretados en las entrepiernas mientras intercambiaban insinuaciones con guiños de ojos y compartían sonrisas secretas al momento que desaparecían detrás de las puertas de las recámaras antes de

experience so powerfully transformative that it had to be hidden from the view of the uninitiated: Sex was utopia, and Sex was esoteric.

I imagine this was a not-uncommon experience amongst American youth of the period. And of course the development of this belief follows a familiar logic of desire: “the very distance that separates us from the object, the fact that the object is visible and accessible only through the distorting lens of prohibitions and obstacles, generates the magical aura that makes it so fascinating.”ⁱⁱ Thus the 70s were from my childish perspective, living in both the southern U.S. and West Germany, a golden age of sexual abandon that I expected to be eternal, a Canaan lying in obscure sight but from which I was temporarily barred by the accident of youth. Various episodes of “experimentation”—among which I include a not-particularly traumatic molestation at the tender age of five by a much older boy—could neither match nor quell the intensity of my yearning to enter and fully establish citizenship in the Promised Land. During those years, I don’t think I willingly joined in a conversation with a peer or older child, or sat down to watch a TV show or listen to a record, without hoping to see, hear about, or somehow be magically ushered into participating in some sexual scenario. And I cannot say I’m sure, even today, that I’ve substantially broken the habit (and habits of mind, be they mindfully or heedlessly practiced, are the foundation of any faith, any clinging to a structure of absolute truths).

que la desaparición gradual se burlara de mí con la promesa de una experiencia tan poderosamente transformativa que tenía que esconderse de los aún no habían sido iniciados: El Sexo era la utopía; y el Sexo era esotérico.

Me imagino que esto era una experiencia común entre la juventud americana de esa época. Y por supuesto que el desarrollo de esta creencia sigue una lógica familiar del deseo: “La misma distancia que nos separa de nuestro objeto, el hecho de que el objeto sea visible y accesible solamente a través de los lentes distorsionados de la prohibición y obstáculos, genera el aura mágica que lo hace tan fascinante”.⁽²⁾ Además, la década de los 70 fue, desde mi perspectiva pueril, vivir en ambos, en el sur de Estados Unidos y en Alemania Occidental, una era de oro de desenfreno sexual que yo esperaba fuera eterna, un Canaan tendido en la oscura mirada pero de la cual yo estaba temporalmente excluido por el accidente de la juventud. Varios episodios de “experimentación” (entre los que yo incluyo un abuso no particularmente traumático a la tierna edad de 5 años por un chico mucho mayor) no podría igualar ni sofocar la intensidad de mi anhelo para entrar y completamente establecer la ciudadanía en la Tierra Prometida. Durante esos años, yo no creo que por voluntad yo me haya incorporado a una conversación con chicos de mi edad o mayores, o que me haya sentado a ver un programa de televisión o escuchar una grabación, sin esperar ver, escuchar, o de alguna manera ser mágicamente invitado a participar en algún

Two not unrelated constellations of social, political and cultural meaning and practice prevented my entry into Canaan: One, it turned out that my sexual interests were almost entirely in other males, which meant, among other things, that my pathway to sexual liberation (and my membership in the fraternity of sexy sexual men) would be a good deal more complicated than my TV shows had led me to anticipate. Two, the growing HIV epidemic, in its various iterations as Scourge and Plague, swiftly and brutally converted my fuzzy worship of a fuzzily ideal Sex into nostalgia.

The virus was helped in performing this alchemy by the fact that I was young, barely able to acknowledge that I was gay, and thus easy-intended?—prey to neoconservative commentaries in the mainstream press, which gleefully tolled the death of “promiscuous sex,” and could barely conceal their *schadenfreude* now that the hedonistic homosexuals were “paying the price.” Such motivated readings of history (to say nothing of etiology) became the commonsense bromides quickly taken up by most informed straight people at the time, among whom I wished to be numbered. And the basic analysis, that anything resembling a Sexual Revolution, “free love,” blah blah blah is dead and implicitly proven to have been a foolish illusion at best, yet remains a truism: Recently I picked up a new novel about the early 80s, *Gutterboys* (2004) by Alvin Orloff, the back cover of which tells us that the novel, “a twisted tale of

escenario sexual. Y no puedo decir que estoy seguro, hasta hoy, que yo he roto substancialmente el hábito (y los hábitos de la mente, ya sean consciente o incautamente practicados, son la fundación de cualquier fe, aferrándose de cualquier manera a una estructura de verdades absolutas).

Dos constelaciones no relacionadas de significado social, político y cultural (y la práctica) impidieron que yo entrara a Canaan: Uno, resulta que mis intereses sexuales fueron completamente en otros hombres, lo que significó, entre otras cosas, que mi camino hacia la liberación sexual (y mi membresía a la fraternidad de los hombres sexuales sexy) sería mucho más complicado que lo que mis shows de televisión me habían hecho anticipar. Dos, la creciente epidemia del VIH, en sus varias iteraciones como Azote y Plaga, convirtió rápida y brutalmente mi borrosa idolatría de un sexo borroso e ideal en nostalgia.

Al virus le ayudo a hacer esta alquimia el hecho de que yo era muy joven, apenas capaz de reconocer que yo era gay, y por lo tanto presa fácil (¿deliberado?) de los comentarios neoconservadores en los medios populares, que con regocijo tañeron la muerte del “sexo promiscuo” y que apenas podían ocultar su *schadenfreude* (regocijo de la desgracia ajena) ahora que los homosexuales hedonistas estaban “pagando el precio”. Dichas lecturas motivadas de la historia (para no decir nada de la etiología) se convirtieron en las trivialidades comunes que

steamy gay sex,” “portrays a carnal world of orgiastic delights that may never exist again.” Similarly Alan Hollinghurst’s *The Swimming-Pool Library* (1988), a complex novel that ranges throughout the 20th century and is centrally about the articulation of British imperialism to class- and race-defined homoeroticism if it is about anything, is first and foremost, according to the informative blurb on the back of the American Vintage edition, a “darkly erotic novel of homosexuality before the scourge of AIDS; an elegy ... for ways of life that can no longer be lived with impunity.” The less-than-subtle appeal of both blurbs is to those who want to read literate, explicit accounts of gay sex; but the gratuitous historicizing work these advertisements do speaks to the common conviction—for the blurb-writers, at any rate—that it is either de rigueur necessity or more “responsible” to cordon off the sex the authors describe as a long-ago-concluded event, like the Last Supper. (As if reading novel blurbs really heightens the risk of people running out to have condomless sex – and never mind that the characters of Hollinghurst’s *The Folding Star* (1994) and *The Spell* (1998) have just as much sex in the 90s as those in *Library*.) Perhaps these kinds of description are part of a sinister market test, a dry run for an ad campaign that will sell time machines? In which case I’m sold – I’ll take orgiastic delights and twisted, steamy sex over Dubya and the occupation of Iraq any day.

The cheap version of time travel I was actually sold – nostalgia – is perhaps the emptiest and

la gente, heterosexual informada, captaba rápidamente en ese tiempo (entre los cuales deseo ser numerado). Y el análisis básico, de que cualquier cosa que se parezca a la Revolución Sexual, “amor libre”, bla, bla, bla, está muerta e implícitamente probada de haber sido, a lo mucho, una tonta ilusión, todavía se mantiene como una perogrullada. Recientemente recogí un libro sobre el comienzo de los 80, *Gutterboys* (2004), de Alvin Orloff, la contra portada nos dice que la novela, “en un cuento retorcido sobre el sexo gay”, “pinta un mundo carnal del deleite orgiástico que tal vez nunca vuelva a existir”. Similarmente, *The Swimming-Pool Library* de Alan Hollinghurst (1988), una novela compleja que se extiende a través de todo el siglo XX y se centra en la articulación del imperialismo británico en el definido homo-erotismo sobre la clase y raza, si es que es sobre algo, es primero y, ante todo, de acuerdo a la nota informativa en la contraportada de la edición American Vintage, una novela oscuramente erótica sobre la homosexualidad antes de la plaga del SIDA, una elegía... para unos estilos de vida que ya no se pueden vivir sin impunidad”. El llamado, no tan sutil de ambas notas, es para aquellos que quieren leer literalmente historias explícitas de sexo gay; pero el trabajo gratuito de historización es que estos trabajos sí hablan de la convicción común (al menos, para los escritores de las notas) ya sea de la necesidad de rigor o de más “responsabilidad” en acordar el sexo que los autores describen como un evento que concluyó hace mucho tiempo, como La Última Cena. (Como si la

most painful kind of nostalgia: It is not a fascinated encounter with worlds and ways long dead like a 15th century Florentine's entranced love of the ancient world, not even a *Big Chill* Baby Boomer's wistful reflection upon a period she didn't really enjoy all that much but is now convinced that she did because it's been repackaged with musical retrospectives and updated takes on the outdated fashions. It is instead a yearning for the magnificence of a period I was alive to witness but unable to really experience; as if, struck blind, deaf and paraplegic by some malady during all the Weimar years, I am cured at last in 1933.

Of course, following that familiar logic of desire, my nostalgic yearning for what too quickly had become a kind of Old School Sex, my belief in its transformative magic, merely intensified; its promise was all the more persuasive, precisely because the promise had been renege.

good sex / bad sex / old sex

The *New York Times* recently reported that two leading scholars in the field of "happiness economics," having surveyed a vast databank of social surveys since the 90s and using the best econometric techniques, have concluded that it is a measurable truth that the more sex you have, the happier you are likely to be.ⁱⁱⁱ I cite this not to salt my recalcitrant position vis-à-vis Saint Foucault, whose less than sanguine views about the aspirations to power inherent in such deployments of "science" are well known, but to

lectura de las notas sobre la novela incrementarían verdaderamente el riesgo de que las personas salgan corriendo a tener sexo sin condón, sin importar que los personajes de la novela de Hollinghurst, *The Folding Star* (1994) y *The Spell* (1998), tienen la misma cantidad de sexo de los 90 que aquellos en la *Library*.) ¿Quizá este tipo de descripciones forman parte de una prueba siniestra del mercado, un simulacro de una campaña de anuncios que venderá máquinas del tiempo? En tal caso estoy convencido (en cualquier momento yo escogeré los deleites orgiásticos y el sexo caliente y retorcido en lugar de Dubya y la ocupación de Irak).

La versión barata del viaje del tiempo que me vendieron, la nostalgia, es quizá el tipo de nostalgia más vacía y dolorosa: No es un encuentro fascinante con mundos y maneras hace tiempo muertas como la entrada del amor en la Florentina del siglo XV del mundo antiguo, tampoco la reflexión melancólica del bebé del auge del *Big Chill* de un período que ella no disfrutó mucho pero que ahora está convencida que lo hizo porque ha sido re-empaquetado con música retrospectiva y tomas actualizadas en las viejas modas. Es, en cambio, un anhelo por la magnificencia del período en el que estuve vivo para presenciarlo, pero incapaz de experimentarlo verdaderamente; como si de golpe quedara ciego, sordo y parapléjico por una dolencia durante los años de Weimar, al fin estoy curado en 1933.

Por supuesto, siguiendo esa lógica conocida del deseo, mi añoranza nostálgica de lo que demasiado

remark upon the appeal of Sex—which is underlined by the fact that the study's researchers relied upon self-reports of both happiness and frequency of sexual activity (so that at the very least we can surmise that those who answered the surveys were *hopeful* they *would* be happier were they having more sex, even if they weren't really getting very much). According to the reporter, Eric Dash, this is an unsurprising conclusion. For me, the key question is that raised by Leonore Tiefer, a psychiatry professor at NYU, who asks, "Does it matter if it is good sex or bad sex?"

When I was in my twenties, in the 80s and part of the 90s — all sex was good sex, for the predictable and probably more or less universal (at least among males) reasons: I was delighted just to be "getting" or "having" sex; and, as I had insufficient experience to serve as comparison for the sex I was lucky enough to be having, I had no idea what really aroused me or made me happiest sexually, so consequently everything did (ah, for those innocent days!).

What became clear only in retrospect was that this always-good sex circa 1987-1994 shared a common set of lineaments, which we can usefully if not entirely accurately refer to as "safe sex" (though it was really just I and my various partners' particular accommodation to, and adjustment of, the condoms-condoms-everywhere guidelines of the official health information agencies). I spent the early part of

rápido se ha vuelto en el Sexo de la vieja escuela, mi creencia en su magia transformativa, apenas intensificada; su promesa fue más persuasiva, precisamente porque la promesa no se llevó a cabo.

sexo bueno / sexo malo / sexo viejo

El *New York Times* reportó recientemente que dos eruditos expertos en el campo de la "felicidad económica", después de haber inspeccionado un vasto banco de datos de encuestas desde los 90 y haber usado las mejores técnicas de econometría, han concluido que es una verdad medible que entre más sexo tiene uno, es más probable que uno esté más feliz.⁽³⁾ Cito esto, no para echar sal a mi recalcitrante posición frente al Santo Foucault, cuyas opiniones menos optimistas sobre las aspiraciones al poder inherente en dichos despliegues de la "ciencia" son bien conocidos, sino para remarcar la atracción del Sexo (el cual está subrayado por el hecho que las investigaciones del estudio dependen de reportes personales de la felicidad y la frecuencia de la actividad sexual; así que por lo menos, podemos conjeturar que aquellos que respondieron las encuestas estaban esperanzados de que ellos serían más felices al tener más sexo, aunque en realidad no tuviera mucho). De acuerdo al reportero, Eric Dash, esta es una conclusión nada sorprendente. Para mí, la pregunta clave es la que hizo Leonore Tiefer, profesor de psiquiatría en NYU, quien pregunta, "¿Importa si el sexo es bueno o malo?"



my twenties being unsure I was gay, and shy and afraid once I knew I was, the middle part of my twenties being monogamous, and then, after my partner and I had negotiated opening things up, I was slow to round into form. I was precisely 30 when I started to be the kind of ho I really am, so the sex I had during that seven-year span was with a very small sub-subset of men—probably no more than twenty. Undoubtedly this tiny sampling wildly skews my impression of what sex was like then, but framing the period in the broadest strokes leads me to suppose that my experience was not highly unusual, even if I cannot claim it to be typical: I moved to San Francisco in 1989, at the tail end of an aggressive AIDS prevention and risk reduction effort on the part of community-based and government agencies which had become known as the “San Francisco Model.” This was two years after the closure of the last gay bathhouse in the city, and three years prior to the opening of the safe sex-only sex clubs, Eros and Blowbuddies.^{iv} During this time, the kinds of sexual encounters I had outside my relationship predominantly involved cocksucking, kissing, and mutual jacking-off. Condoms were never asked for by either party for oral sex. Occasionally—but not at all often—the possibility of fucking was raised; and more rarely still, was agreed to. In the latter instances condoms were always used—once, only once, did I have to ask for them. Almost no one asked whether I was a top or a bottom, and those who did were generally considerably older, the surviving beneficiaries of the lost decade of orgiastic delights. No one asked me

Cuando andaba en mis veintes, en los 80 y parte de los 90, todo el sexo era bueno, por las predecibles y probablemente por las razones más o menos universales (por lo menos entre los hombres). Yo estaba encantado con sólo “conseguir” o “tener” sexo; y como no tenía suficiente experiencia que sirviera como comparación del sexo que tenía suerte de estar teniendo, no tenía ni idea de lo que realmente me excitaba o me hacía feliz sexualmente, consecuentemente todo me hacía feliz (¡ay, esos días de inocencia!).

Lo que claró solamente en retrospectiva fue que este sexo siempre-bueno alrededor de 1987-1994 compartía un grupo de lineamientos comunes, los cuales nosotros podemos utilizar y hasta referirnos completamente con exactitud, como el “sexo seguro” (aunque verdaderamente sólo era yo y las acomodaciones y ajustes de mis parejas con las guías de condones-condones por todos lados de las agencias de información oficial de la salud). Pasé una parte de mis veintes con la inseguridad de ser gay, y tímido y asustado una vez que supe que lo era, la mitad de mis veintes fue monógama, y entonces, después de que mi pareja y yo habíamos negociado abrir las cosas, es cuando poco a poco me puse en forma. Precisamente tenía 30 años cuando empecé a ser el tipo de puto que verdaderamente soy, así que el sexo que tuve durante el periodo de siete años fue con un pequeño grupo de hombres (probablemente no más de veinte). Sin duda alguna, esta pequeña muestra distorsiona alocadamente mi impresión de lo que era el sexo entonces, pero al enmarcar el periodo con los pincelazos más amplios, me lleva a suponer que mi experiencia no era tan inusual, aunque yo no pueda afirmar que era típica: Yo me mudé a San Francisco en 1989, al final de la cola de los esfuerzos agresivos en la prevención del SIDA y la reducción de riesgo por parte de las organizaciones de base comunitaria y agencias gubernamentales que se dieron a conocer como el “modelo de San Francisco”. Esto fue dos años después de que se cerraran los últimos baños-saunas gay en la ciudad, y tres años antes de que se abrieran los clubes de sexo seguro solamente, “Eros” y “Blowbuddies”.⁽⁴⁾ Durante este tiempo, los tipos de encuentros sexuales que tuve fuera de la relación involucraban predominantemente mamadas, besos y masturbación. Nunca, ninguna de las personas involucradas, preguntaba por condones para tener sexo oral. Ocasionalmente, pero para nada a menudo, la posibilidad de coger surgía; y más raro aún, se accedía a tal petición. En esta última instancia, los condones siempre se usaron (una vez, solamente una vez, tuve que pedirlos). Casi nadie preguntaba si yo era activo o pasivo, y los que lo hicieron eran por lo general considerablemente viejos, los sobrevivientes beneficiarios de la década perdida de los deleites orgiásticos. Nadie me pregunta mi estatus del VIH, tampoco yo les pregunté a ninguna de mis parejas; la idea era de que debíamos de suponer que todos éramos positivos (una suposición nada irrazonable, aunque no era exacta, en ese tiempo en San Francisco), pero para mí, el estatus del VIH era, como muchos otros lo han señalado, simplemente un tema incómodo y definitivamente nada sexy del cual charlar. No recuerdo ninguna desviación de este grupo de prácticas durante ese tiempo; y recuerdo, muy poco, sobre la forma de la discusión previa con mis parejas sexuales sobre los aspectos anticipados en el encuentro, ya sea de lo que íbamos a hacer o

about my HIV status, nor did I ask any of my partners; the idea was that we were all to assume everyone was positive (a not unreasonable assumption, though again not accurate, in San Francisco at the time), but for me, HIV status was, as many others have pointed out, just an awkward and decidedly un-sexy subject to chat about. I recall no deviations from this set of practices during that time; and I recall very little in the way of prior discussion with sex partners about any anticipated aspect of the encounter, whether about what we would do or how it would be done. Presumably since the common denominator in these encounters was me, the nonverbal signals I gave contributed greatly to assuring that these would be the parameters of the sexual acts I participated in. (Curiously, these encounters were very much like the far more infrequent and more frenzied ones I'd had as a teenager.) But even so, the encounters seemed very easily to flow into the shape they almost invariably took. I experienced them—though only in retrospect—as a kind of agreed-upon set of rules, a regime, a School, as it were, of sex.

And, from the viewpoint of this young and still relatively inexperienced young black gay man, this was good sex, so long as it lasted. But it was clear, at least on some level, that it was not ideal Sex: for in my fantasies I was always getting fucked.

These fantasy scenarios represented for me the ecstatic abandon I generally sought and

cómo lo íbamos a hacer. Supuestamente ya que era yo el denominador común en estos encuentros, las señas no verbales que daba contribuían enormemente para asegurar que estos serían los parámetros de los actos sexuales en los que participaba. (Curiosamente, estos encuentros eran bastante parecidos a los más infrecuentes y más frenéticos encuentros que tuve durante mi adolescencia.) Pero hasta en eso, los encuentros parecían fluir fácilmente en la forma que invariablemente siempre tomaban. Los experimenté (aunque sólo retrospectivamente) como un tipo de grupo de reglas acordadas, un régimen, una Escuela, como lo era, de Sexo.

Y, desde el punto de vista de este joven y todavía relativamente inexperimentado hombre joven negro gay, esto era buen sexo, hasta lo que duró. Pero era claro, por lo menos hasta cierto punto, que no era el Sexo ideal: En mis fantasías siempre era yo al que se cogían.

Estos escenarios de fantasía representaban para mí el abandono extático que yo generalmente buscaba y a veces experimentaba en el sexo que yo en realidad estaba teniendo. Pero ellos también hicieron de la cogida (por supuesto que sin condones; la existencia de los condones ni tan siquiera era contemplada en mi universo de fantasía) sus logros climáticos centrales, la apoteosis del extasy: Y esta no era la norma de mi vida sexual en ese tiempo. En esta cultura embrutecida con imágenes, es costumbre culpar a varios comportamientos considerados no

sometimes experienced in the sex I was actually having. But they also made fucking—condomless, of course; the existence of condoms was not even contemplated in my fantasy universe—their *central* climactic accomplishment, the apotheosis of ecstasy: and this was not the norm for my sexual life at the time. In this image-besotted culture, it is customary to blame various behaviors deemed unhealthy or otherwise unproductive on the insidious effects of “bad” images, the subtle colonizing of our fantasies by sinister venal image-makers. And it is to some extent true that my fucking-centered fantasies, at base conditioned though they must have been (and are) by humanity’s long, long obsession with propagation, were nonetheless, as someone learning to participate in sexual acts that could not produce children, in some ways guided by, influenced by, the narratives of pornography. (Of course, as scholars of the viewership of movies and TV shows have demonstrated, there is no simple one-to-one imitative process of monkey-see, monkey-do for the consumer of image and narrative. The viewer revises what she sees or reads, in her own fantasmatic experience of the story, accepting some elements, transforming or deleting or struggling with others. Thus the depictions of sex that make the act of fucking their centerpiece cannot be said to simply produce their imitations in the realms of our individual fantasies, nor do they in any transparent way generate a desire to live out what they depict; that is, they do not *only* have these effects – though in my own case they had a

saludables o, por el contrario, no productivos en los efectos insidiosos de las “malas” imágenes, la colonialización sutil de nuestras fantasías por los siniestros y venales hechores de imágenes. Y hasta cierto punto es cierto que mis fantasías centradas en coger, condicionadas de base como si lo hubieran sido (y lo son) por la larga, larga obsesión de la humanidad con la propagación, eran, sin embargo, como alguien aprendiendo a participar en actos sexuales que no podían producir niños, en algunas formas guiados por, influidos por, las narrativas de la pornografía. (Por supuesto, como los eruditos de las audiencias de las películas y los shows de televisión han demostrado, que no hay un proceso de imitación simple de cara a cara para el consumidor de lo que ve el mono, lo que hace el mono, de imagen y narrativa. El televidente revisa lo que él ve o lee, en su propia experiencia fantasmagórica de la historia, aceptando algunos elementos, transformando o borrando o luchando contra otros. Por lo tanto, las representaciones de sexo que convierten el acto de coger en su foco principal no se puede decir que simplemente producen sus imitaciones en el reino de nuestras fantasías individuales, ni tampoco, de ninguna manera transparente, generan ningún deseo para vivir lo que ellos representan; eso quiere decir que ellos no *solamente* tienen esos efectos (aunque en mi propio caso tuvieron un efecto particular en estas líneas.) La mayoría de porno / erótica que he visto y leído (ignoren la inútil distinción entre las dos categorías), no enfatiza ni esconde, ni

partial effect along these lines.) Most porn/erotica I've seen and read (ignore the useless distinction between the two categories), does not emphasize or hides, or simply fantasizes away the use of condoms for fucking. In standard gay visual porn since the late 80s, condoms are used for anal penetration but the rolling on of the condom is almost always one of the many moments excised from the final product (and probably it's not filmed at all). There are any number of effects of this narrative convention: One is that the glistening penis reflecting light like no other part of the actor's body becomes slightly dissociated from the man—and the act—itsself. It is as if where the penis was in the previous scene a living, integral part of the actor's body, it is transformed into something unreal, a magic wand. Arguably this simply accentuates what already frames the camera's-eye view—an obsessive focus on the dick. But as a related effect, its magic is a bit of a downer; I spy the thin cylindrical rim of non-flesh-colored plastic where shaft meets pubic hair and I am reminded that something different *could* be playing out on the screen – a condomless fuck, a naked fuck. Rather than deflating the fantasy or extinguishing desire, or, in accordance with a doctrinaire San Francisco Model approach, sobering us with the recognition that HIV transmission must be prevented, insofar as the condom is recognized at all, its appearance as the thwarting of fantasy stokes desire, since desire always feeds on its own frustration. Thus my desires, my fantasies of the satisfaction of

simplemente fantasea disipando el uso del condón al coger. En la porno gay visual estándar, los condones se utilizan en la penetración anal desde finales de los 80, pero la abertura de la envoltura del condón es, casi siempre, uno de esos momentos editados del producto final (y probablemente ni si quiera lo filman). Existe una variedad de efectos de esta narrativa convencional: Una es que el resplandeciente pene reflejado en la luz, como ninguna otra parte del cuerpo del actor, se convierte como si fuera algo desligado del hombre, y del acto, en sí mismo. Es como si donde estuvo el pene en la escena anterior una parte viva e integral del cuerpo del actor es transformada en algo irreal, una varita mágica. Se puede argumentar que esto simplemente acentúa lo que ya enmarca el enfoque del lente de la cámara: un enfoque obsesivo en la verga. Pero como un efecto relacionado, su magia es un poco deprimente; espío el delgado borde cilíndrico del plástico sin color a carne donde el palo se junta con el vello púbico y me recuerdan que algo diferente *podría* estar pasando en la pantalla (una cogida sin condón, una cogida desnuda). En lugar de desinflar la fantasía o extinguir el deseo, o, en conformidad con el abordaje de la doctrina del modelo de San Francisco, desembriagándonos con el reconocimiento que la transmisión del VIH debe ser prevenida, hasta cierto punto, reconociendo del todo al condón; su apariencia como la frustración de la fantasía atiza el deseo, ya que el deseo siempre se alimenta de su propia frustración. Así que mis deseos, mis fantasías de

yearning, which are always being displaced from one local satisfaction to another suddenly more vibrantly attractive object, are inflamed for the *real* fuck, real Sex, for which no amount of convincingly faked passion in the ensuing action will substitute. The advent of DVD as the new technology for privately-enjoyed fantasies has coincided with both the re-release of old gay porn films, marketed as “pre-condom classics,” and the appearance of a genre of “bareback” films. The interest in both draws from the same well, but the latter are especially noteworthy, because the viewer's pleasure is centered around *not seeing* a condom: The sex is the same as in a porn film using condoms, and of course the usual complaint against condom use—it just doesn't feel good—doesn't obtain when you're simply *watching* someone else have sex; except that it does, not physically, but psychically.

The dissonance between fantasy and activity, especially in the sexual realm, is of course commonplace, as is the psychic investment of desire in what is prohibited. What seems to me interestingly specific about the gap between ideal and practice here is the extent to which, for me and I imagine for others, a notion about an historical period becomes identified with, becomes the content of, that ideal. This dynamic in the operation of nostalgia is also familiar, since popular consent for many a political agenda has been mobilized by summoning up the image of a better past. But it is an intriguing mutation of this dynamic to be seduced by the image of

la satisfacción de la añoranza, las que siempre están siendo desplazadas de una satisfacción local a otro objeto repentino más vibrantemente atractivo, son inflados para la *verdadera* cogida, Sexo verdadero, lo que ninguna cantidad de convencimiento de la falsa pasión en la acción resultante substituirá. El advenimiento de los DVD como la nueva tecnología para disfrutar privadamente las fantasías ha coincidido con el re-estreno de películas gay porno, comercializadas como “clásicos pre-condón”, y la aparición del género de películas de “coger sin condón”. El interés de ambos sacan del mismo pozo, pero las últimas son especialmente notables, porque el placer de la audiencia se centra en *no ver* un condón: El sexo es el mismo de las películas pornos que usan condones, y por su puesto la queja de siempre contra el uso del condón (simplemente no se siente bien) no se adquiere cuando simplemente tú estás *mirando* a otros que tienen sexo; con la excepción que sí lo haces, no físicamente, si no que psíquicamente.

La disonancia entre la fantasía y la actividad, especialmente en el reino sexual, por supuesto que es común, así como es la inversión psíquica del deseo en lo que es prohibido. Lo que me parece a mí, especialmente interesante aquí sobre el vacío entre lo ideal y la práctica, es la extensión a la que, para mí y me imagino que para otros, la noción de una época histórica que se identifica con, se convierte en el contenido de, ese ideal. Esta dinámica en el funcionamiento de la nostalgia también es familiar, ya que el

better *sex* in the past. Surely this animates the fascination many have for excavation of the sexual practices of the ancient world; demonstrating proof that sexual regimes other than those offered by Christianity lie at the foundation of Western cultures is one announced aim of these historical inquiries, but certainly a current in the interest of such work to those who consume it lies in its ability to convincingly bring to life an image of unlimited nookie (or at least nookie not limited in the ways it is now) which the passage of time bars us from enjoying. And this must be even more true for, say, the buyers of *The Mammoth Book of Historical Erotica* (1999) and of several gay erotica novels produced by the British company Idol Books in the late 90s that were set in different periods of European history, and which invariably concluded with a survey that asked readers to identify their ideal erotic novel by first choosing an historical setting: “Roman, Ancient World, Medieval, Renaissance, Elizabethan, Restoration, Victorian, Edwardian, 1920s & 1930s.”

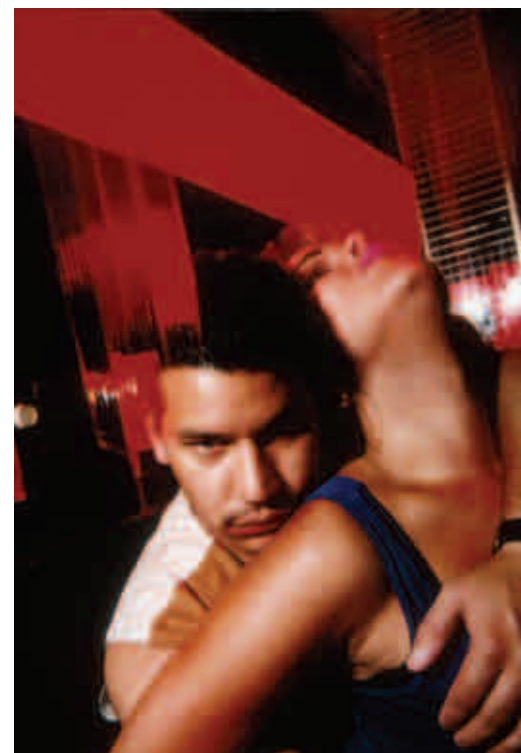
The relation between sexual ideals (Sex) and the past—a relation which overlays, and extends beyond the usual narrative of aging, in which we (especially men) hanker for those youthful days when our sexual powers seemed limitless—can perhaps be illuminated by Herbert Marcuse, formerly philosopher *celebre* of sexual liberation (though his thought was always more complicated than his image), who is now, like pre-condom classics, enjoying a bit of a revival.

consentimiento popular, que para muchos es una agenda política, ha sido movilizado con la evocación de la imagen de un mejor pasado. Pero el ser seducido por la imagen de mejor sexo en el pasado es una mutación intrigante de la dinámica. Claro que esto anima la fascinación que muchos tienen de excavar las prácticas sexuales del mundo antiguo; demostrando la prueba que otros regímenes sexuales no ofrecidos por el cristianismo yacen en la fundación de las culturas occidentales, es un objetivo anunciado de estas indagaciones históricas, pero ciertamente son una corriente en el interés de dicho trabajo para aquellos que consumen, y se sitúa en su habilidad convincente de traer a la vida una imagen de cogidas ilimitadas (o por lo menos cogidas no limitadas como lo son en la actualidad) el cual el paso del tiempo nos impide disfrutar. Y esto debe ser todavía más cierto para, digamos, los compradores de *The Mammoth Book of Historical Erotica* (1999) y de varias novelas gay eróticas producidas por la compañía británica Idol Books a finales de los 90 que se desarrollaron en diferentes períodos de la historia europea, y la cual concluyó invariablemente con una encuesta que les pedía a los lectores que identificaran su novela erótica ideal al escoger primero un ambiente histórico: “Romano, Mundo Antiguo, Medieval, Renacimiento, Elizabetano, Restauración, Victoriano, Edwardiano, los 20 y 30”.

La relación entre ideales sexuales (Sexo) y el pasado, una relación que reviste y se extiende más allá de la acostumbrada narrativa sobre el

Marcuse redacts Freud’s conception of the pleasure principle, arguing that pleasure is not simply a product of the idiotic urgings of the pre-conscious id, but something constituted by social processes and thus bearing the discernible marks of its nascence. For Marcuse, pleasure does not exist in nature; only satisfaction of want does. Simple satisfaction of want becomes pleasure because the socius, in order to establish its cohesion and order, enforces a series of prohibitions that get internalized by its members as renunciations and repressions. Pleasure is the result of creative attempts to find satisfaction against, within, around, in defiance of and accommodation with the demands of the social order. Pleasure is thus a social product, pleasure is in fact a product of alienation: “What distinguishes pleasure from the blind satisfaction

of want is the instinct’s refusal to exhaust itself in immediate satisfaction, its ability to build up and use barriers for intensifying fulfillment.”^v The individual ego sublates the drives of the id, organizing and sublimating them, in such a way that its conscious or



envejecimiento, en el cual nosotros, especialmente los hombres, anhelamos esos días de juventud cuando nuestros poderes sexuales parecían sin límites; tal vez podría ser iluminado por Herbert Marcuse, un antiguo célebre filósofo de la liberación sexual (aunque su pensamiento fue siempre más complicado que su imagen), quien ahora está, como un clásico pre-condón, disfrutando un poco de renacimiento. Marcuse redacta la concepción de Freud sobre el principio del placer, argumentando que el placer no es simplemente el producto del tonto deseo del id pre-consciente, sino algo constituido por los procesos sociales, llevando así las marcas discernibles de su nacimiento. Para Marcuse, el placer no existe en la naturaleza; sólo existe la satisfacción del querer. La simple satisfacción del querer se convierte en placer porque el socius, impone una serie de prohibiciones que son internalizadas por sus miembros como renunciaciones y represiones, para poder establecer su cohesión y orden. El placer es el resultado de los intentos creativos para encontrar la satisfacción en contra de, dentro de, alrededor de, en defensa y desafío de y acomodación con las demandas del orden social. El placer, consecuentemente, es un producto social. De hecho, el placer es un producto de la alienación: “Lo que distingue el placer de la ciega satisfacción del querer es la negativa del instinto de agotarse así mismo en una satisfacción inmediata, su habilidad de construir y utilizar barreras para intensificar la satisfacción”.⁽⁵⁾ El ego individual contradice los impulsos del id, organizando y sublimándolos, de

unconscious recognition of the pleasure principle is a record of a lost state of integral satisfaction, where needs and wants are gratified. The drive for pleasure is in part a *memory* that haunts the mind; it recalls an historical state—for Marcuse, a stage in the phylogeny of the human species, before, or precursor to, the domination of the ruling powers of society. Thus pleasure and memory are bound, and they are dually forms of cognition. “The memory of gratification is at the origin of all thinking, and the impulse to recapture past gratification is the hidden driving power behind the process of thought” (31).

Erotic pleasure (and its subset, sexual pleasure) and memory are deeply related to one another; memory is the foundation for pleasure; the pleasure of Eros and sex is memory. Hence, my belief in, yearning for, capital-s Sex. The fact that the integrally satisfying past I’m referring to here existed only twenty to thirty years ago may be a particularly strange example of the subjective compression of time so commonly noted as a hallmark of our Information Age. More dishearteningly, it suggests the sheer decisive power of the Right’s still-regnant idea of HIV/AIDS as a kind of absolute limit to the unfettered promiscuities it so feared (and fears), and which its rhetoric served to render all the more appealing and fantasmatically seductive.

To wit: the passage from one set of sexual practices to another.

tal manera que su reconocimiento conciente o inconsciente del principio del placer es un archivo de un estado integral de satisfacción perdida, donde las necesidades y los deseos son gratificados. El impulso para el placer es en parte un recuerdo que persigue a la mente; recuerda un estado histórico—para Marcuse, en la etapa de filigénesis de la especie humana, antes, o precursor de la dominación de los poderes dominantes en la sociedad. Por lo tanto, el placer y la memoria están atados y ellos son dobles formas de cognición. “La memoria de la gratificación está en el origen de todo pensamiento, y el impulso para recapturar graficaciones pasadas es el poder escondido estimulador detrás del proceso de pensamiento”.(31)

El placer erótico (y su sub-grupos, placer sexual) y la memoria están profundamente relacionados entre sí; la memoria es la fundación para el placer; el placer de Eros y el sexo es la memoria. Por lo tanto, tengo mi creencia en y anhelo para la letra mayúscula S de Sexo. El hecho de que el pasado integralmente satisfactorio al que me estoy refiriendo aquí solamente existió entre veinte y treinta años atrás y puede ser particularmente un ejemplo extraño de la comprensión subjetiva del tiempo tan comúnmente mencionado como el sello de nuestra Época de la Información. Lo más desalentador es que sugiere el poder vertical decisivo de la todavía reinante idea de la derecha de que el VIH/SIDA es como un tipo de límite

the new sex is old sex

Round about 1997 or so, I (very belatedly) began to notice the changes that evidently had been in full swing around me for years.

One guy, Carter, a tall gorgeously-muscled Californian, in the midst of perhaps the fourth or fifth time we had sex (and the fact that this was one of serial encounters may have made a difference, in his mind), while I lay half-stuporous on my back, straddled me, took my dick in his hand and slowly sat on it. No condom. I was nonplussed; this hadn’t happened before. But as Carter didn’t stay there for long—and as I had other matters on my mind (such as it existed at that moment)—I chose not to think much about it. And since Carter moved not long thereafter, I gave it no further thought. Subsequently I and my partner also left San Francisco for Austin, Texas, a town that I’ll always resent for being the catapult that hurled Bush upon the world, and for the steadfast resistance of its gay male population to my charms. The number of my sexual encounters dipped to zero—except when I visited San Francisco, which I did about four times during my two-year stint in Dubya’s home state. On one such visit, I met Adrian, a slender, impressively endowed Southern man of Lebanese descent, who did exactly what Carter had done; but where Carter had simply stared at me with a curious expression in his eyes that seemed to combine lust with defiance and dominance, Adrian cheerfully announced, “We’re *not* fucking. We’re

absoluto de las promiscuidades liberadas que tanto temía (y teme) y cuya retórica sirve para rendir todo lo que es más llamativo y fantásticamente seductor.

Es decir: El paso de un grupo de prácticas sexuales a otro.

El sexo nuevo es sexo viejo

Alrededor de 1997, más o menos, yo (muy tardíamente) empecé a notar los cambios que evidentemente han estado girando a mi alrededor durante años.

Un tipo, Carter, un californiano hermosamente alto y musculoso, a mitad de (quizá) nuestra cuarta o quinta vez que teníamos sexo (y el hecho de que este era uno de una serie de encuentros habrá hecho la diferencia, en su cabeza), mientras que yo estaba medio estupefacto acostado boca arriba, se subió sobre mí, agarró mi verga con su mano y se sentó en ella suavemente. Sin condón. Yo estaba perplejo; esto no había pasado antes. Pero como Carter no se quedó allí por mucho tiempo, y como yo tenía otras cosas en la cabeza (tales como que saliera de allí en ese momento), decidí no darle mucha importancia. Y desde que Carter se mudó poco tiempo después, no pensé más en ello. Subsecuentemente yo y mi pareja también nos fuimos de San Francisco a Austin, Texas, un pueblo que siempre resentiré por ser la catapulta que lanzó a Bush al mundo y, para mi encanto, por la constante resistencia de su población de hombres gay. El número de mis

just doing three strokes.” I laughed, though I was again somewhat aghast. I worried a bit more about this lapse from safe sex orthodoxy than I had the previous encounter; but then I returned to Austin, land of default monogamy, and eventually ceased to ponder it. My partner changed jobs, and as a result we moved back to San Francisco—whereupon my sexual explorations became much more frequent than they had been before my departure from the city (starvation diets are often followed by binge-eating), and soon I could no longer ignore what I’d so far refused to consider.

Rafele, a Neapolitan sex bomb ten years my junior, cruised me at Tower Video. After realizing we couldn’t satisfy the sudden attraction between us that afternoon, we agreed to meet the next day. Once the time and place were settled, I turned to leave, but Rafele stopped me. “Oh, I forgot to ask,” he said. “Are you HIV-positive?” My astonishment was only slightly less than it had been with Carter and Adrian; this also had never before happened in my casual sex experiences. Just as with them, I simply acquiesced in the violation of what I’d thought were the rules, and answered. But I was curious. “Why?” I asked him. “Do you want to bareback?” “Oh no,” Rafele shrugged. “I always have safe sex.” I have no idea whether this is true—though Rafele did say that he was a volunteer for the Stop AIDS Project at the time, and, at least according to the accounts of a mutual friend, he was having sex with lots of men in the city (in fact a couple of years later he could be found hawking his very considerable

encuentros sexuales fue en picada hasta llegar a cero, a excepción de cuando visitaba San Francisco, lo cual hice como cuatro veces durante mis dos años limitados en el estado natal de Dubya. En una de esas visitas, conocí a Adrián, un hombre sureño de descendencia libanesa, delgado e impresionantemente dotado, que hizo exactamente lo que hizo Carter; pero donde Carter simplemente me miraba fijamente con una expresión curiosa en sus ojos que parecían combinar lujuria con desafío y dominio, Adrian, alegremente anunció, “nosotros no vamos a coger. Sólo haremos tres pajas”. Reí, aunque de nuevo yo estaba consternado. Me preocupé un poco más sobre este lapso de la ortodoxia sin un sexo seguro que del previo encuentro que tuve; pero después regresé a Austin, la tierra de la monogamia defectuosa, y con el tiempo dejé de pensar en ello. Mi pareja cambió de trabajo y como resultado nos mudamos de nuevo a San Francisco, donde mis exploraciones sexuales se volvieron más frecuentes de lo que habían sido antes de salir de la ciudad (dietas de hambre a menudo son seguidas por banquetes descontrolados), y pronto ya no podía ignorar lo que por mucho tiempo me había negado a considerar.

Rafele, una bomba sexual napolitana diez años menor que yo, ligó conmigo en Tower Video. Después de darnos cuenta que no podíamos satisfacer la súbita atracción entre nosotros dos esa tarde, acordamos en vernos el próximo día. Al acordar la hora y el lugar, me di la vuelta para retirarme, pero Rafele me detuvo: “Ah, se me

skills and wares on rentboy.com). But Rafele was true to his word when it came to fucking me, if perhaps a bit less so regarding coming in my mouth, which he was very anxious to do (and did rather spectacularly, I might add). A few months later, James, another would-be trick, an even younger Australian-Persian dancer I met outside a sex club, wanted to play with both my partner and me, though he was going in as we were leaving. James asked Rafele’s question, and gave the same response when I asked him about barebacking; I don’t know whether he was being honest, since the three of us never found a time to tryst. Dillon, a New Zealander “mostly-bottom” of my age, with whom I had repeated encounters for over a year, one day began poking my anus with the dripping tip of his penis when we were lying in bed. After a brief internal struggle in which I labored to produce words I was simply unaccustomed to having to say (and rather resented having to), I said, “We’ll need a condom for that.” He immediately desisted, seeming to lose interest. On subsequent occasions he did fuck me, with a condom—except for two “slips,” which resulted from one-part-drunkenness and one-part-intention on his side, and on my side, from the fact that my ass was in the air and my face was in the pillow and I didn’t see (though I suppose I could have, if I’d thought it necessary to) whether the condom was still on or not (it wasn’t).

These were not atypical encounters: In the three years since I’ve returned to San Francisco I’ve had sex with probably double the number of men during the years 1987-1994, so the sample of evidence now is larger (though still by no means large), but I don’t think casting a wider net has

olvidaba preguntarte”, dijo. “¿Eres VIH positivo?” Mi asombro fue poco menos que el que tuve con Carter y Adrian; esto tampoco me había pasado antes en mi experiencias de sexo casual. Al igual que con ellos, simplemente consentí en la violación de lo que yo pensaba que eran las reglas y las respuestas. Pero yo tenía curiosidad. “¿Por qué?”, le pregunté. “¿Quieres coger sin condón?” “Ay, no”, Rafele encogió sus hombros. “Yo siempre tengo sexo seguro”. No tengo idea si esto es cierto o no (aunque Rafele dijo que era voluntario de Stop AIDS Project durante ese tiempo, y, por lo menos de acuerdo a historias de un amigo en común, él estaba teniendo sexo con muchos hombres en la ciudad; de hecho, un par de años después se le podía encontrar pregonando sus considerables habilidades y mercancías en rentboy.com). Pero Rafele cumplió su palabra cuando se trataba de cogerme, aunque quizá menos rígido en cuanto a terminar en mi boca, algo que estaba deseoso de hacer (y tengo que agregar que lo hizo más que espectacular). Después de un par de meses, James, otro ligue, todavía más joven, bailarín austro-persa que conocí afuera de un club de sexo, quería jugar con ambos, mi pareja y yo, aunque iba entrando al momento que nosotros nos íbamos. James hizo la misma pregunta que Rafele, y dio la misma respuesta cuando le pregunté sobre coger sin condón; yo no sé si estaba siendo honesto ya que los tres nunca encontramos el tiempo para citarnos. Dillon, un neozelandés de mi edad “en su mayor parte pasivo”, con quien repetí mis encuentros durante más de un año, un día empezó a puyar mi ano con la punta de su pene goteando cuando estábamos acostados en la cama. Después de un gran esfuerzo mental en el cual trabajé para

made the difference. These days, fucking is almost always on the agenda for my casual encounters (not usually at my urging), and fifty percent of the time my partners seem willing to fuck without a condom; top/bottom is almost always asked; HIV status is sometimes queried: This obtains with men younger or older than me, of color or white, American, European, Australasian. I have not had very satisfying conversations about this matter with any of my various men (and this failure is largely my responsibility), but one thing Dillon said to me did catch a bit of fire in my imagination. I was telling him more or less what I've detailed above. His response: "Oh, I've had *tons* of unsafe sex."

producir las palabras que simplemente no estaba acostumbrado a decir (y más que nada resentí tener que hacerlo), dije, "Para eso necesitaremos un condón". Desistió inmediatamente, aparentando perder interés. En ocasiones subsecuentes, él sí me cogió con un condón—a excepción de dos "deslices", los que resultaron en parte por una borrachera y por la intención que él tuvo, y por mi parte, por el hecho de que mi culo estaba en el aire y mi cara estaba en la cama y no vi (aunque supongo que pude haberlo hecho, si es que hubiera pensado que era necesario) si el condón todavía estaba puesto o no (no lo estaba).

Estos no eran encuentros atípicos: En los tres años después de mi regreso a San Francisco probablemente he tenido sexo con el doble de número de hombres que durante los años de 1987 a 1994, así que la muestra de evidencia ahora es más grande (aunque todavía de ninguna manera grande),

Which made me seriously wonder if there wasn't something I was missing. Had the halcyon days of orgiastic delight come back when I wasn't paying attention? Was everyone having "risky" sex, throwing aside caution to exult in the legendary abandon of the past?

Of course, everyone wasn't, but in part the answer was yes, as we all know. HIV treatments had sufficiently advanced since the nadir years of the mid-80s, when my sexual life was still in its cradle; in many cases, death could be forestalled, complications controlled. The vaunted San Francisco Model of prevention was now referenced in headlines followed by the words "seen to fail" (HAART, the HIV-drug cocktail treatment regimen, often carries the same headline, but never mind). Amid the flourishing of circuit parties and abounding new venues and opportunities for gay men to pay up, preen and put out, "the third generation of young gay men reinvented for themselves a new hedonism reminiscent of the 1970s," according to historian Les Wright.^{vi} For a time, the gay press was full of "debates," generally of an unproductive and misleading nature, about the dangers and delights of barebacking. (Is it too early not to have to mention the ridiculous *Rolling Stone*-created hysteria about so-called bug-chasing?) The unsurprising results of the sex and happiness surveys correspond, unsurprisingly, with reports of a rise in HIV infection rates among young gay men. All of which means that the sexual regime which I and my few partners of the late 80s and early 90s followed has become Old School

pero yo no pienso que tener un reparto más amplio ha hecho la diferencia. Hoy en día, coger casi siempre está en la agenda para mis encuentros casuales (no es que usualmente sean mis deseos), y cincuenta por ciento de las veces, mis parejas parecen estar dispuestos a coger sin condón; activo o pasivo, casi siempre se pregunta; estatus del VIH a veces es requerido: Esto se obtiene de hombres más jóvenes o viejos que yo, de color o blancos, americanos, europeos, australianos. Yo no he tenido conversaciones muy satisfactorias sobre este asunto con ninguno de mis varios hombres (y este fracaso en gran parte es mi responsabilidad), pero una cosa que Dillon dijo sí encendió un poco mi imaginación. Yo le estaba diciendo más o menos lo que he detallado antes. Su respuesta: "Ay, he tenido *montón* de sexo sin protección".

Lo que seriamente me hizo pensar si no había algo que yo me estaba perdiendo. ¿Habían regresado los días venturosos del deleite orgiástico cuando yo no estaba poniendo atención? ¿Todos estaban teniendo sexo "peligroso", haciendo a un lado la precaución para regocijarse en el abandono del legendario pasado?

Claro que no todos lo estaban haciendo, pero en parte, la respuesta era que sí, como todos lo sabemos. Los tratamientos para el VIH habían avanzado lo suficiente desde los peores años a mediados de los 80, cuando mi vida sexual todavía estaba en su cuna; en muchos casos, la muerte se podía prevenir, las complicaciones se



Sex—while the *old* Old School I so cherished and pined for is, for worse and for better, present again.

I say worse for the obvious reasons. My purpose in this essay is to slant decidedly toward the “better,” a stance which depends, almost as obviously, upon my faith-in-defiance-of- (medical)facts attachment to Sex. The demise of safe sex is or may be epidemiologically disastrous, but if, for a moment, we sift out the crushing need to halt the spread of the virus and cure its disease, if we look only at the sex gay men are having or want to have (or are watching or fantasizing about), it is possible to understand, or at least begin to understand, to intuit, those disastrous sexual acts and fantasies as *protest*, as the kind of linkage between sexual liberation and political liberation that has been mostly dismissed since AIDS has come to inflect Western discourses about (male homo)sexuality.

Recall Marcuse’s observation that the drive for pleasure is a form of memory, and pleasure/memory is a kind of cognition. The Starsky-and-Hutch-style images that trail behind my idealized conception of Sex like silly attendant fairies, sanitized and ersatz though those images were, underpinned and framed though they were by a political reality in which public commitment to the social welfare state and for the cheapest kinds of juridical rights-structured “equal opportunity” were fast eroding, are nevertheless images of the partial triumph of

podían controlar. El alardeante modelo de prevención de San Francisco era, ahora, una referencia en los encabezados de prensa, seguidos por las palabras “parece fallar” (HAART, el régimen del cóctel de medicamentos contra el VIH, a menudo también lleva los mismos encabezados, pero no importa). En medio del florecimiento de las fiestas de *circuit* y la abundancia de nuevos lugares y oportunidades para que los hombres gay pudieran pagar, arreglarse y mostrarse, “la tercera generación de los hombres jóvenes gay reinventaron para ellos mismos un nuevo hedonismo recordando los 70”, de acuerdo al historiador Les Wright.(6) Por una temporada, la prensa gay estaba llena de “debates”, generalmente de una naturaleza improductiva y engañosa, sobre los peligros y deleites de sexo anal sin condón. (¿Es demasiado temprano no tener que mencionar la ridícula histeria creada por *Rolling Stone* sobre el llamado caza-bicho?) Los resultados no inesperados de las encuestas sobre sexo y felicidad corresponden, como se podía esperar, con reportes en el crecimiento de la tasa de infección por VIH entre hombres jóvenes gay. Todo lo que quiere decir que el régimen sexual al cual yo y mis pocas parejas sexuales a finales de los 80 y principio de los 90 seguíamos, se ha convertido en el Sexo de la vieja escuela; mientras que el *viejo* sexo retro que tanto quería y anhelaba, para mal o para bien, está presente de nuevo.

Digo que peor por las obvias razones. Mi propósito en este ensayo es inclinarme

the Sexual Revolution—that is, images recording a social and political re-ordering of the public and private discourses and practices of sex. Foucault would of course say that the thing being liberated was a creation of the very social structure supposedly repressing it. And Marcuse, loosely thought to be the high priest of the Sexual Revolution, was actually critical of some aspects of what we associate with that social transformation. He follows Freud’s contention that in the non-technological past it was necessary to sublimate the demands of the sexual drive in toilsome work; but Marcuse argues that such sublimation, the deflection of sexuality from its aim, was politically useful because it heightened consciousness of your unhappiness, it triggered the psychic sense-memory of a freedom work had forced you to renounce. The capitalist consumer society, by contrast, blunts the operation of memory and dulls the conscious recognition of unhappiness, by, for example, absorbing sex into consumption, entertainment and the workplace (advertising the secretary and the junior executive as sexy and virile, the office itself as a hotbed of potential sexual intrigue, making available through mass production cheaply available sexy clothing, etc.), and by forcing the aims of Eros to shrink, to become one-dimensional, focused entirely on the satisfaction of genital (indeed, heterosexual) sexuality. Marcuse calls this repressive desublimation: the range of socially permissible satisfactions are enlarged, sexuality is liberalized, but only in socially controllable or manipulable

decisivamente hacia lo “mejor”, una postura que depende, casi obviamente, de mi fe en el desafío de los hechos (médicos) atados al Sexo. La muerte del sexo seguro es o puede ser epidemiológicamente desastrosa, pero si por un momento nosotros cernimos la aplastante necesidad de parar el esparcimiento del virus y curar su enfermedad, si sólo vemos el sexo que los hombres gay están teniendo o quieren tener (o están mirando o con el que tienen fantasías), es posible comprender, o por lo menos empezar a comprender, a intuir, esos actos sexuales y fantasías desastrosas como *protesta*, como el tipo de vínculos entre la liberación sexual y la liberación política que en gran parte ha sido desestimada desde que el SIDA ha venido a torcer los discursos occidentales sobre la (homo)sexualidad (del hombre).

Recordemos la observación de Marcuse, que el deseo por el placer es una forma de memoria, y placer / memoria es un tipo de cognición. Las imágenes al estilo de Starsky y Hutch que van detrás de mi concepción idealizada del Sexo como tontas hadas asistentes, saneadas y artificiales; aunque esas imágenes eran, apuntaladas y enmarcadas, aunque lo fueran por una realidad política, en el que el compromiso público por el bienestar social y por las clases más baratas de derechos jurídicos estructurados de “oportunidades igualitarias”, fueron erosionadas rápidamente, no obstante son imágenes del triunfo parcial de la Revolución Sexual—eso es, las imágenes que graban un re-ordenamiento social y

forms. Where “sublimation becomes the cognitive power which defeats suppression while bowing to it,”^{vii} repressive desublimation brings about a kind of numb tolerance and lack of conscious awareness of the reality of what has been lost.

Since the consciousness of one’s unhappiness (and thus the potential recognition of the injustices that have created it) results from sublimation, you could argue that the inculcation of safe sex strictures as life-saving necessities for my generation of gay men *re*sublimated a highly desublimated gay male sexuality, forcibly deflecting sexual satisfaction away from its relentless focus on penetration. You certainly couldn’t be unaware of a certain degree of unhappiness in sex during the mid 80s to early 90s, of the disjunct between fantasy and reality, between what used to be and what is; and perhaps this sexual dissatisfaction was as much a part of the political activism around AIDS and gay rights during that period as was the necessity of finding strategies to stem the decimation of the community.

Does this mean that the return of “unsafe” sex is a return to the false (and deadly) manipulated “liberation” Marcuse could argue the 70s Sexual Revolution to have partly been, a retreat to the unconscious suicidal torpor of repressive desublimation? I think not. One good reason you can’t go home again (especially a home you never really inhabited) is that the experience of

político de los discursos y prácticas públicas y privadas del sexo. Por supuesto que Foucault hubiera dicho que la cosa que está siendo liberada es una creación de la misma estructura social que supuestamente la reprime. Y Marcuse, vagamente considerado como el cura más alto de la Revolución Sexual, en verdad era crítico de algunos aspectos de lo que nosotros asociamos con esa transformación sexual. El seguía el argumento de Freud de que en el pasado sin tecnología era necesario sublimar las demandas del deseo sexual en trabajo de castigo; pero Marcuse argumenta que dicha sublimación, la desviación del objetivo de la sexualidad, era políticamente útil, porque intensificaba la conciencia de tu infelicidad, disparaba la memoria sensorial de la psiquis de un trabajo de libertad que te obligó a renunciar. La sociedad capitalista consumista, por contraste, insensibiliza el funcionamiento de la memoria y opaca el reconocimiento consciente de la infelicidad, por ejemplo, al absorber el sexo dentro del consumo, la diversión y el lugar de trabajo (anunciando a la secretaria y al joven ejecutivo como sexy y viril, la misma oficina como una cama caliente de intriga potencialmente sexual, generando disponibilidad de vestimentas baratas a través de la producción masiva, etc.) y al obligar a que los objetivos de Eros se encojan, para que se conviertan unidimensionales, enfocados completamente en la satisfacción de la sexualidad (ciertamente heterosexual) genital. Marcuse llama a esto la de-sublimación represiva: El rango de satisfacciones socialmente permisibles son ampliadas, la

your return is saturated with your consciousness of doing so for the purpose of recapturing an experience of satisfaction mostly understood to be so in retrospect. Admittedly it is a dubious proposition to take my obsession with the pre-AIDS ancient world of sexual abandon as the vector through which to consider gay men’s sexual choices today to have “tons” of unsafe sex, since many making such choices would not narrate them in terms of a desire to recapture a lost freedom, and many others would be too young to have direct memories of the period (though they have, like I do, access to the images). Still: I make the claim, however anecdotal and subjective its basis, that both adherence to and rejection of (or deviation from) safe sex practices are undergirded, framed, by the culturally-reproduced recollection of that “first” post-Stonewall generation of gay men’s activities, that golden age example that achieves its apotheosis through the supposed end imposed upon it by the tragic narrative of HIV, that period that becomes golden because of the absence of the condom.

Obviously if you fuck bareback, you are not having the kind of experience “they” had in the golden age(s), when the anxiety of HIV transmission was absent (and indeed, unimagined). Is not the bareback fuck tainted—which is to say framed, transposed from the realm of unconscious desire to the pit’s-edge of consciousness—by the knowledge of what it risks, even when that knowledge asserts itself

sexualidad es liberada, pero solamente en formas controladas o manipuladas socialmente. Donde la “sublimación se convierte en el poder cognitivo, el cual derrota a la supresión mientras que se somete a ello”,⁽⁷⁾ la de-sublimación represiva trae un tipo de tolerancia paralizada y la falta de conocimiento conciente de la realidad de lo que se ha perdido.

Desde que el conocimiento de la infelicidad de uno (y hasta cierto punto del reconocimiento potencial de las injusticias que han creado) resulta de la sublimación, usted puede argumentar que la inculcación de las restricciones del sexo seguro como un salvavidas para las necesidades de mi generación de hombres gay *re*-sublimó una sexualidad gay altamente de-sublimada, desviando obligadamente la satisfacción sexual lejos de su incesante enfoque en la penetración. Usted seguramente no podría ignorar cierto grado de infelicidad en el sexo, a mediados de los 80 y a principio de los 90, de la disyunción entre la fantasía y la realidad, entre lo que era y lo que es; y quizá esta insatisfacción sexual fue igualmente parte del activismo político alrededor del SIDA y de los derechos de gays durante ese período, como lo fue la necesidad de encontrar estrategias para parar la destrucción de la comunidad.

¿Esto quiere decir que el regreso del sexo “desprotegido” es un regreso a la falsa (y devastadora) “liberación” manipulada que Marcuse pudo argumentar en que la Revolución Sexual de los 70, pudo haber sido, en parte, una retirada de la apatía inconscientemente suicida de la de-

merely as a frisson of danger and transgression? The notion of “tainted” frequently (almost always?) appears as a retrospective categorization; we do not know the “untainted” thing exists until it has been marred. The identification of taint is an intellection of the aggrieved. The consequence of this invention of the mind, this deployment of the symbolic, is that the past, which is always irretrievable, is no longer even repeatable; the “untainted” state is forever removed from grasp by the cognition that in light of present condition, it once did exist, but of course it cannot now be recovered as it was, in its truly untainted state. Pre-AIDS fucking, which was generally condomless, only becomes the vaunted thing I can call the naked fuck *after* it has ceased to exist, and it only acquires its *specific* power to fascinate, its specific iteration as an object of desire, at the point when conditions make it impossible to repeat it. In this respect it becomes an impossible ideal, with all the beauty and pain that attends impossible ideals; it becomes an icon, a figure, invested with the energies of yearning and unbalancing desire that present themselves to consciousness or become the forms of consciousness.

The naked fuck as an elusive object of desire allows us to see that the wish for it, the practice of approximating it that runs in risky defiance of what official discourse never fails to remind us is our own self-interest, is not merely the perverse wish for infantile satisfactions of the

sublimación represiva? Yo pienso que no. Una buena razón por la que no puedes ir a tu hogar (especialmente un hogar que en verdad nunca habitaste) es que la experiencia de tu regreso está saturada con tu conciencia de hacerlo con el propósito de recapturar una experiencia de satisfacción para ser comprendida mayormente así, en retrospectiva. Hay que admitir que tomar mi obsesión con el mundo antiguo pre-SIDA del abandono sexual como el vector a través del cual hoy se consideran las elecciones sexuales de los hombres gay para tener “mucho” sexo sin protección, es una propuesta dudosa, ya que muchos de los que están tomando esta decisión no las narrarían en términos de un deseo para recapturar una libertad perdida, y muchos otros serían muy jóvenes para tener recuerdos directos del período (aunque ellos han tenido acceso, como yo, a las imágenes). Todavía: Yo afirmo, aunque sus bases sean anecdóticas y subjetivas, que ambos, la adhesión a y el rechazo a las (o desviación de) prácticas de sexo seguro son apuntaladas y enmarcadas por la recolección producida culturalmente de esa “primera” generación de hombres gay activistas post Stonewall, ese ejemplo de edad de oro que logra sus apoteosis a través del supuesto final impuesto en ella por la trágica narrativa del VIH, ese periodo que se hace dorado por la falta del condón.

Obviamente que si coges sin condón, no tienes el mismo tipo de experiencia que “ellos” tuvieron en la(s) era(s) de oro, cuando estaba ausente la ansiedad por la transmisión del VIH (y de hecho,

pleasure principle. It is also a protest against loss, and against the injustices that condition that loss. It is, oddly, a sublimated act: sex—fucking, without a condom—as the sublimation of Sex, as the frustrated act deflected from its aim that prods the consciousness and produces the record of a struggle: Sex as a disqualified knowledge. What then is the yearning for Sex a yearning for? Possibly something we could call, with a very small *f*, freedom.

The sensation, the thrill, the risk of getting fucked or fucking without a condom, with the naked flesh that stands in for the (fantasy of) liberation, the fetish of the untrammelled self-without-bounds, the self-as-body-in-the-world, is probably *not* worth dying for, or even worth entering into a six-pill daily regimen for the rest of your life. At the same time, in the moment that it is desired and done, getting fucked/fucking is what living *is*, what life is: It’s not *worth* anything much; its exchange value is minimal, the heft of its pleasure is ephemeral and evanescent, but it is the experience itself, what the coin is meant to stand for. This is by no means to say that it is unmediated, pure, good, right; it is shot through—of course—by power relations (which is to say, inequalities of a savage and inhumane nature), by fictions (man/woman, top/bottom, etc.), and entered into for diverse reasons. But it can be the approximation, perhaps the intoxication, of living in and as an animal and human body—or imagining that you *might*. And sometimes that’s the best kind of freedom available.

inimaginable). ¿No es que la cogida sin condón está contaminada; es decir, que es una conspiración, transpuesta del reino del deseo inconsciente al borde del pozo de la conciencia—por el conocimiento de lo que se pone en riesgo, hasta cuando ese conocimiento se afirma meramente con un momento escalofriante de peligro y trasgresión? La noción de la “contaminación” frecuentemente (¿casi siempre?) aparece como una categorización retrospectiva. Nosotros no sabemos que la cosa “descontaminada” existe hasta que ha sido dañada. La identificación de la contaminación es una intelección del agravio. La consecuencia de esta invención de la mente, este despliegue de lo simbólico, es que el pasado, el cual siempre es irrecuperable, ya no es ni siquiera repetible. El estado “descontaminado” se remueve por siempre de la captura por la cognición, que a la luz de la condición presente, existió una vez, pero por supuesto que no puede ser recuperado como era, en su verdadero estado descontaminado. La cogida pre-SIDA, que por lo general era sin condón, solamente se convierte en algo de que alardear, a la que puedo llamar la cogida desnuda *después* de que ha dejado de existir, y solamente adquiere su poder específico para fascinar, su iteración específica como un objeto del deseo, en el punto en que las condiciones lo hacen imposible de repetirse. En este aspecto, se convierte en una idea imposible, con toda la belleza y dolor que acompañan a los ideales imposibles; se convierte en un icono, una figura, vestidas con energías del anhelo y de un deseo desequilibrado que se presentan a la conciencia o se convierten en las formas de la conciencia.

On some level, Sex is still to me a great Mystery, an expansive field of knowledge for which descriptive and analytic terms often fail. So it can seem, anyway, when I think of it from outside It, when I am not “having” It, suffused with and deluded by the desire for It. When I am doing It, It can seem confined to the physical and sensual, a confluence of nerve and neuronal responses summoned up in Pavlovian fashion by the rote repetition of a short list of prescribed acts. But sometimes not—sometimes when I am doing or having It I am also *being* It, and it is again a Mystery, It is all that matters or could matter even though It seems, at one and the same time, like the defiance of significance or meaning itself. And then, always, I don’t even realize how Mysterious It is until later, when I lie back, close my eyes, and remember.

ⁱ Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the College de France, 1975-76*, trans. David Macy, ed. Arnold I. Davidson (New York: Picador, 2003) 9, 8.

ⁱⁱ Slavoj Zizek, *Iraq: the Borrowed Kettle* (New York: Verso, 2004) 177.

ⁱⁱⁱ Eric Dash, “Sex May Be Happiness, but Wealth Isn’t Sexiness,” *The New York Times* 11 July 2004: 4:14.

^{iv} See www.gaytubs.com and www.shapingsf.org/ezine/gay/files/90sexpan.html.

^v Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955, 1966) 227.

La cogida desnuda como un objeto del deseo elusivo nos permite ver que el deseo por ella, la práctica de hacerlo parecido, que fluye en desafíos peligrosos de lo que el discurso oficial nunca falla en recordarnos, es nuestro propio interés, no es meramente el perverso deseo de las satisfacciones infantiles del principio del placer. También es una protesta en contra de la pérdida y en contra de las injusticias que condicionan esa pérdida. Es, curiosamente, un acto sublimado: El sexo, coger, sin condón) como la sublimación del Sexo, como el acto frustrado desviado de su objetivo que incita a la conciencia y produce los apuntes de una lucha: El Sexo es un conocimiento descalificado. Entonces, ¿Para qué anhelo es el anhelo por el Sexo? Posiblemente algo que podríamos llamar, con una l muy pequeña, libertad.

La sensación, la excitación, el riesgo de que se lo cojan a uno o coger sin condón, con la carne desnuda que se substituye a la (fantasía de la) liberación, el fetiche de uno mismo sin límites ni trabas, el uno mismo como un cuerpo en el mundo, probablemente *no* valga la pena morir por él, ni tampoco vale la pena entrar a un régimen de seis píldoras al día por el resto de tu vida. Al mismo tiempo, en el momento en el que se desea y se hace, que se lo cojan a uno/coger es lo que vivir *es*, lo que la vida *es*: No *vale* mucho más; su valor de intercambio es mínimo, el peso de su placer es efímero y evanescente, pero es la experiencia en sí misma, lo que la moneda está supuesta a simbolizar. Esto para nada significa

^{vi} Les Wright, “San Francisco,” *Queer Sites: Gay Urban Histories since 1600*, ed. David Higgs (New York: Routledge, 1999) 187.

^{vii} Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964) 76.

que no es mediada, pura, buena, correcta; es, por supuesto, disparada por las relaciones de poder (lo que quiere decir, desigualdades de una naturaleza salvaje e inhumana), por las ficciones (hombre/mujer, activo/pasivo, etc.); e investigada por diversas razones. Pero puede ser la aproximación, tal vez la intoxicación, de vivir en y como un animal y cuerpo humano—o imaginándote de que tú *podrías*. Y a veces, ese es el mejor tipo de libertad disponible.

Hasta cierto punto, el Sexo todavía es un gran Misterio para mí, un campo de conocimiento expansivo para el cual los términos descriptivos y analíticos fallan a menudo. Así que, de todos modos, puede parecer que cuando pienso en ello desde afuera, cuando no “lo” estoy teniendo, cargado y engañado por el deseo hacia él. Cuando yo “lo” estoy haciendo, podría parecer confiado en lo físico y sensual, una confluencia de nervio y respuestas de neuronas convocadas en la moda Pavloviana por la repetición rutinaria de una corta lista de actos prescriptos. Pero algunas veces no; a veces cuando yo “lo” estoy haciendo o “lo” estoy teniendo, yo también “lo” estoy *siendo*, y de nuevo, es un Misterio, es todo “lo” que importa o podría importar aunque “lo” parezca, de una vez y al mismo tiempo, como el desafío de su propio significado o sentido. Y siempre después, ni me doy cuenta de “lo” tan Misterioso que es, hasta más tarde; cuando me acuerdo, cierro mis ojos y recuerdo.

Horse Philosophy

Robert F. Reid-Pharr

He is a reasonable young man, the one over-bundled in khaki and blue, carefully shielding himself from the dampness that clings so nonchalantly to the red-green glitter of late December New York. He is reasonable and true, this pleasant, unspectacularly brown young man, edging himself neatly into the hard, dingy plastic of one, just one, corner seat on the Manhattan bound F train, all the while holding his knapsack politely on uncrossed knees. He is self-contained and cool, trim and unspectacularly brown, with hands, as trim and brown as the man himself, that expertly balance a worn copy of a difficult, hermetic, badly translated work of race theory on the makeshift tower he has produced from knapsack, uncrossed legs, and hard dingy plastic, the entire structure rocking like a well-built sky-scraper to the rhythms of the slow moving train.

With reason and care, his vaguely full lips tightly shut, he reads, refusing even the suggestion of that vulgar mouthing of ideas and emotion so often practiced on the F line. He finds, however, reasonable, bundled, pleasant, trim and true as he is, that he is puzzled. His heavy eyebrows pinch together in consternation, furtive fingers ring the inside of his collar, pausing briefly to pull at the wiry, unruly hairs that peek out from the top of his cotton undershirt. He has read this text many times, studied it extensively; indeed he teaches it often himself, always with great success. And yet, this thing, this clumsy, bitter and somewhat impolite companion remains a stranger. It seems somehow to take from him but never really to give back, much like the fat grey kitten who resides with disconcerting feline self composure in the luxury of his Brooklyn flat.

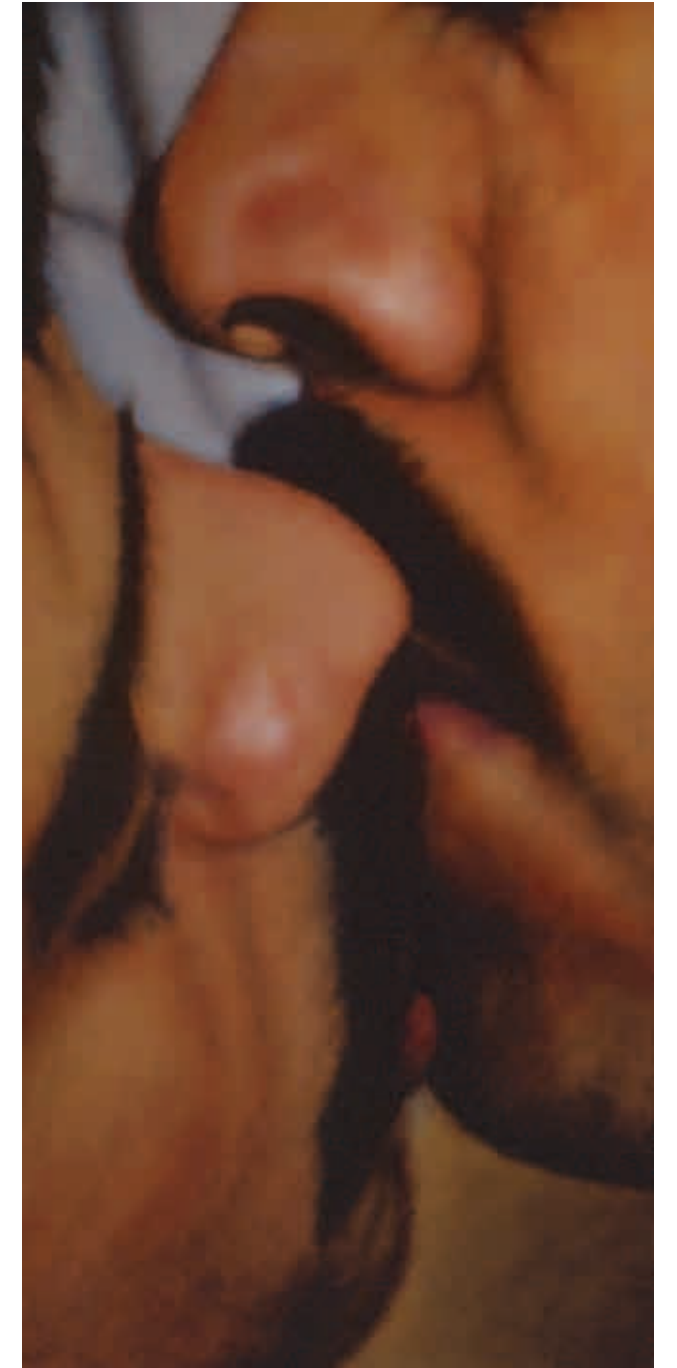
Reaching into his knapsack, his irritations and urgencies shielded from the other Manhattan bound passengers by the composure that he maintains as the train leaves the tunnel, revealing the humdrum squalor of Brooklyn's southwestern border (the ugly bridges, the clapboard houses, the hideous canals, the oversized billboards, the funky, ridiculous splendor of it all) he retrieves from deep within the pack a small notebook. It is a handsome, delicate, red leather rectangle, the size of a cheap romance novel. He likes the feel of it, both physical and mental. Indeed he overvalues the words that he has carefully copied into it as the book, with its blank pages, red leather cover, its weight the same as that of cheap romances, was presented to him by thoughtful friends on the eve of a long trip abroad. They have penned, "bon voyage, and remember to write!" on the inside of the front cover. He unfortunately forgot their entreaties on his long European tour but he keeps it with him constantly now, re-printing in his clear, even hand, passages from texts that confuse him, words that he wants to believe but that he senses are necessarily incorrect: As the train wobbles along and as his knees press even more tightly one into the other he writes:

There is a zone of non-being, an extraordinarily sterile and arid region, an utterly naked declivity where an authentic upheaval can be born. In most cases, the black man lacks the advantage of being able to accomplish this descent into a real hell.¹

He finishes his task, not an easy one on the hard plastic seats of a wobbling, damp, poorly heated train, and re-reads the passage as the F line plunges again into the steel and concrete gloom of the tunnel. Then after much consideration and with absolute seriousness he adds his own dull commentary beneath the difficult passage, "I wonder if the man had ever been to Brooklyn."

Things had gone well at the club. Brown was, in fact, somewhat of a hit. Rather, he had been able to turn his awkward posings into shockingly valuable sexual coin. The only problem was that as usual everybody wanted to be fucked.

"New York, city of eight million bottoms," Brown mumbles out loud as he finishes his shower and uses the already damp towel to wipe water and little rubbery balls of left over cum from pecan tinted skin. Still, one shouldn't complain, he thought. Though he had not been fucked himself he *had* topped two guys and turned down at least two others. Moreover, he had been very satisfied with the quality of the men who had pressed themselves on him. The first, a forty-



Eugene Rodriguez, Deseo, 1999, Oil on panels, 52 x 24.5 x 2

something, chestnut-haired chatty fellow from Chelsea turned out to be an incredibly proficient kisser with blue eyes exactly the color of the summer sky over North Carolina. Blue had spotted Brown almost the minute he'd walked into the club and followed hawkishly as he made his way around the simple maze of rooms and cubicles. Eventually after maneuvering Brown into one of the darker corners of the maze and then again into an unused cubicle he proved conclusively that he knew exactly what to do with the tongue, how to suck with hunger and passion on the pink softness of vaguely full lips. Blue kissed, in fact, like a top, hard and aggressive, with wetness and passion that portended athletic fucking; thick hairy belly, muscular chest, broad pink-tinged back, a good sized arched-cock, all enveloped by pecan arms and mahogany legs.

“Wow!” he had said, in that friendly chatty Chelsea fellow sort of way, “What do you like to do?”

Brown, still infinitely reasonable with his sweaty back, pouty lips, great dark almond eyes, tense mahogany nipples and buttocks that looked as firm as unripe melons but felt in the hand like great mounds of milky cheese wrapped in silk, said with both reason and conviction, “I like to get fucked.”

“Damn! *You're* a bottom?” the chatty, forty something had responded with blue eyed incredulity. And with that the young man looked with his dark almond Brooklyn eyes into the watery round blues of Chelsea and the two, a bit embarrassed but still polite, settled down to a friendly bout of sixty nine and frottage. They ended when one or the other suggested that they find a third and the two left the room together. Only by then the simple maze of rooms and cubicles had somehow grown infinitely more complicated and Brown became separated from Blue and attached himself to Red.

*Not surprisingly, then, and even though his prose and some of his reasoning depend upon it, Fanon rejects the European model entirely, and demands instead that all human beings collaborate together in the invention of new ways to create what he calls “the new man, whom Europe has been incapable of bringing to triumphant birth.”*²

The facilities were of course less than perfect, the health inspector having been by sometime earlier to shut down both steam room *and* sauna. And of course New York being New York a Jacuzzi was completely out of the question. Predictably then the young man became bored by all the stalking and cautious self-monitoring that took place between rooms and cubicles and decided, reasonably enough, to take a seat on one of the uncomfortable, metal benches that were constantly sprayed and wiped by the particularly conscientious cleaning staff.”

Reinigungskraft,” he thought, priding himself on remembering this random word from the lists of German nouns he had long since studied. *Reinigungskraft, Volkshochschule, Lebensmittel, Schwul, Sauberkeit, Gesundheit, Blut.* And then after he had tired of counting common German nouns and nearly exhausted himself conjugating irregular Spanish verbs, he slipped—again predictably—into the regrettable gloominess brought about when one starts imagining a world in which it would not seem totally uncouth to lose oneself in a difficult, hermetic, badly translated work of race theory while seated on an uncomfortable metal bench in a sex club in the middle of Manhattan. But fortunately before boredom gave way fully to gloom Red appeared.

It is perhaps worth noting here that it is not nearly as easy as one might imagine, this process of maintaining a reasonable, level headed demeanor. What with the wobbling of drafty trains, the vacant chatter of pleasant forty-something Chelsea fellows, the unceremonious closures of steam rooms *and* saunas, not to mention German nouns, Spanish verbs and pressing, if incongruous, desires to pick up where one has left off in difficult, hermetic, badly translated works of race theory, it is understandable that even the most reasonable of reasonable young brown men might forget themselves, might forget to avert their almond glances away from red-headed, barrel chested, boyishly attractive body builders, the ones dressed only in standard issue white towels, just barely large enough to cover their deliciously ballooning, body-builder buttocks.

We might properly overlook Brown's lack of discretion then as he caught the eye of Red who also lacking discretion made the uncouth gesture of dropping his hand below a heavy clutch of stomach muscles to squeeze himself in a thoroughly vulgar fashion through that ridiculously impractical towel. Moreover, we will certainly have to sympathize with Brown's amazement, his provincial Brooklyn wonder, as Red smiled at him broadly and winked just before slipping his key into the lock of his door. And as a matter of simple Christian charity we will have to ignore Brown's forgetting, at least for a moment, badly translated race theory, pulling himself with alacrity from his uncomfortable metal bench and following Red into a small, dimly lit room where to Brown's amazement Red quickly removed first his own then Brown's undersized towels, sat himself on the single bed that filled the small space and began to give Brown a vigorous blowjob, the kind that hurt, teeth, tongue, suction, the occasional strand of spittle dropping from Red's mouth to the white sheets of the single bed, so that Brown, still attempting to maintain composure, and thoughtful enough to place a reassuring hand on the half dollar sized spot of pink skin in the midst of Red's tangerine colored hair, found himself grimacing, flinching and wondering if Red intended to bite the thing off.

And perhaps if we muster enough generosity and tolerance we might be able to empathize—if only briefly—with Brown’s sense of surprise as Red hauled his two hundred plus pounds of muscle onto the bed and positioned himself in front of Brown’s young, trim pecan tinted body to reveal an impossibly chiseled expanse of gym manicured masculinity; tangerine hair giving way to thick neck, oversized, rounded shoulders beginning the great inverted triangle of flesh that culminated in a school girl’s waist only to explode again in two great, perfectly symmetrical mounds of gluteus flesh. One begins, in fact, to gain a sense of Brown’s struggles, his many demons, reasonable and otherwise, as we watch him drop his face to those mounds, separate them with trim fingers and begin his greedy ministrations with a tongue that perfectly matched the pink of the hole that puckered and wept with each naughty flick. What forces one to draw in the breath, however, that bit of narrative detail that may force dear readers to place delicate hands at the napes of sculptured necks, is Brown’s taking that stinging pecan penis of his and pressing it, slamming some might say, hard against the pinkness of Red’s small deliciously weeping and puckering hole. Indeed Brown became so, dare I say it, unreasonable, that Red, previously silent except for the odd moan and the occasional, “yeah baby” was forced to tilt back his tangerine head, pull thin lips over perfect teeth and interject a bit of caution into this already impossibly unreasonable moment.

“Hey there, let’s keep it safe.” Red offered with much decorum, sending Brown hunting for latex and lubrication.

And then the fumbling, trembling, pressing, aching, spitting, pushing, sweating, the shifting, probing, arching, wrangling, squirming, shaking, biting and Brown was inside. Then Red, his muscles overwhelming the small bed, his tangerine head tilted back like a she dog baying at the moon, revealed to Brown the one place where he was *not* tight. For Brown knew, moments after rolling the condom onto his penis, seconds after offering a reassuring kiss and instantly upon entering the warmth and wetness of Red’s body that he was most certainly not the first person to have enjoyed this ride.

So with force and speed and not a small amount of rhythm Brown threw himself into Red, fast and faster still, the sweat from his forehead landing like wet snow on Red’s great muscled shoulders, pecan penis pulled out to near withdrawal then quickly returned with an upward stroke that kept time with Red’s downward arch. And when he tired Brown leaned hard onto Red’s back, pressed him down to the small bed, grabbed a lock of tangerine hair with one hand and pressed the thumb of the other into Red’s mouth until continually pumping into those yielding mounds of gluteus flesh he began to sense, to intuit, to feel.

“Oh my God, Oh my God, I’m close.”

With that the crazy tickle began somewhere deep inside Brown’s own hole. He felt it advance between tensed buttocks, course through the wickedly sensitive space between penis and anus to attack his taut testicles. And then he pulled out so quickly that Red gasped, yelped really. And again that fumbling trembling, pressing, aching, spitting, pushing, sweating as Brown struggled with the condom, getting it off just in time to come, without reason, direction or the least bit of decorum all over Red’s expansive back and his own pecan stomach.

The “white man” is a distinct image in Asian-African minds. This image has nothing to do with biology, for, from a biological point of view, what a “white man” is, is not interesting. Scientifically speaking the leaders of Asia and Africa know that there is no such thing as race. It is, therefore, only from a historical or sociological point of view that the image of “white man” means anything. In Asian-African eyes, a “white man” is a man with blue eyes, a white skin, and blond hair, and that “white man” wishes fervently that his eyes remain forever blue, his skin forever white, and hair forever, blond, and he wishes this for his children and his children’s children.³

After passing several very pleasant post-coital moments with Red, who informed Brown that his impressive musculature was due in part to his having lost his job some months earlier allowing him to drastically increase his gym schedule, Brown left to clean his own semen and Red’s saliva from his body.

“New York, city of eight million bottoms.”

Brown was of course preparing to leave the club now that he had spent time with Blue and Red, turned down two others, showered, and meticulously removed soap, saliva and semen from his body. He only wanted now, as would have been the case with any reasonable Brooklynite, to get back onto his train before the afternoon rush. Indeed he intended to dry himself, gather his things, head for the station and return to his struggles with that difficult, hermetic, badly translated work of race theory. But then of course there was the matter of White.

White had been watching Brown shower and Brown had carefully ignored him though he had, in fact, noted the nonchalant manner in which White stood against the wall, his hands resting on the top fold of his towel, one foot crossed loosely over the other. He had also noted that White possessed neither the physical presence of Red nor the Chelsea fellow friendliness of Blue. At least he assumed not as white stared at him with an expression that might have denoted either desire *or* malice. No one could have been more surprised than Brown then when after rubbing the already damp towel down a long graceful expanse of pecan thigh, flipping it over buttocks the shape of unripe melons, using it to massage taut almond nipples and carefully drying each well manicured toe on his buffed and polished feet, he followed White out of the showers, through the maze, past both Blue *and* Red and into another non-descript cubicle, without a single word being exchanged. Things were indeed going very well at the club that day.

It could not have been the kissing. For indeed White kissed no more proficiently than Blue. Nor was it White's body. For as Brown felt the slackness of the muscles in White's arms, back and thighs he found himself missing the careful sculpturing of Red. One might have concluded that it *was* the drugs, the poppers that White had offered and Brown had accepted. And certainly when the rush came and Brown felt his heart quicken and the top, only the top, of his head lighten, he did not resist as White laid him on the bed and pressed his even sized cock between his pinkish lips, while simultaneously bowing his own head between pecan-tinted thighs searching out that sensitive hole, the color of which Brown himself could not have described. Indeed Brown yielded quite easily, sucked greedily at deeply thrusting penis, slobbered over hairy testicles the size of walnuts, while his partner smothered himself in the milky cheese texture of splayed buttocks, the two settling into a rhythm of six and nine that far exceeded what Brown and Blue had accomplished earlier.

And when White pulled himself away and roughly pulled the length of Brown's pecan body along with him, lifting one, just one, leg over his shoulder while turning the reasonable young man onto his side, Brown did understand what White had to offer. He did relish the secure, even, relentless push of White's even sized cock against his own tightly sealed hole. And when White pushed too far and the reasonable young man feared of yielding too much he did pull away. So White pushed again and again Brown did pull. And they went on that way, pushing and pulling, pulling and pushing until Brown started hurting, felt pain in his stomach similar to the kind he felt right before the onset of the burning insult of a cramp. It was then that he repeated a sentence he had heard someplace else.

“Hey there, let's keep it safe.”

With that White pulled away, gathered himself and fished out a condom from a small kit that he kept on the table that stood beside the bed. And without fumbling or trembling, sweating or wrangling he rolled the thin layer of latex onto his even sized penis, placed one, just one, of Brown's gracefully shaped pecan thighs over his shoulder and in a moment of push and pull that Brown would later think of as symphonic White and Brown were one.

Do you know, gentle reader, what it is to be fucked and fucked well by a man who holds one's body like the pages of some ancient and precious manuscript, the very man who stinks with the smell of the sweaty funk he has drawn from between one's own thighs, the man who relishes the animal look on the face, the delicate quiver inside the body as passion surpasses reason? For Brown, White was such a man. This is indeed why he arched his trim body so elegantly onto White's thrusting form, why he stretched out his thin hands to more firmly grip White's straining buttocks. And when White changed rhythm, somehow managing to maneuver Brown onto his stomach without removing the joy of that even penis, Brown did not resist or falter. Instead his pose was more elegant still, his body that much more securely attached to White's.

There was grace beyond comprehension then, passion beyond understanding as White again slipped Brown the bottle of poppers, somehow incongruous with its shade of pecan so similar to Brown's. So when White pulled away again and removed the condom, when he kissed hard against Brown's pinkish lips, leaving behind the funky smell of Brown's own colorless hole, Brown did not this time pull as White pushed. Instead he achieved that grace, that stretch, that impossible arch and gave himself, gave everything, lips, tongue, mouth, hands, ass, cock, poppers' rush to White.

“Goddamn! Goddamn!”

White withdrew and stained Brown's pecan-tinged back.

Done. Free.

He is a reasonable young man, the one over-bundled in khaki and blue, carefully shielding himself from the dampness that clings so nonchalantly to the red-green glitter of late December New York. He is reasonable and true, this pleasant, unspectacularly brown young man, edging himself neatly into the hard, dingy plastic of one, just one, corner seat on the Brooklyn bound F train, all the while holding his knapsack politely on uncrossed knees. He is self-contained and cool, trim and unspectacularly brown, with hands, as trim and brown as the man himself, that expertly balance a small red leather notebook on the makeshift tower he has produced from knapsack, uncrossed legs, and hard dingy plastic, the entire structure rocking like a well-built sky-scraper to the rhythms of the slow moving train.

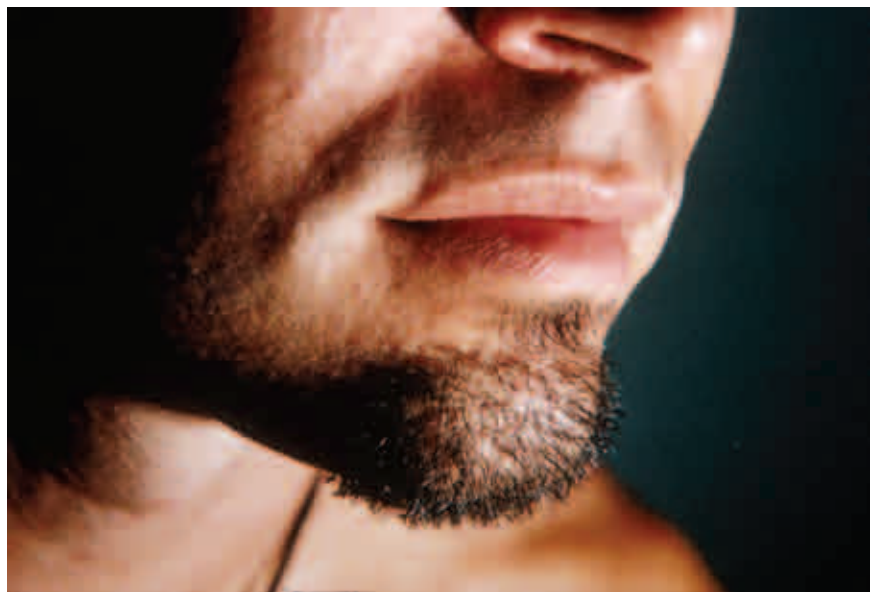
As he writes in his even, clear hand the train suddenly leaves the gloom of the tunnel to reveal the humdrum squalor of Brooklyn's southwestern border (the ugly bridges, the clapboard houses, the hideous canals, the oversized billboards, the funky, ridiculous splendor of it all). But Brown sees none of this. Instead he is immersed in his task, absolutely resolute in his desire to settle some difficult concept of race theory that seems to bother him now more than usual. He reads the note that he has just written, his lips moving slightly as he ponders whether he has really gotten at the true sense of an important matter he hopes to settle:

“It may indeed be true as all of the most significant students of revolution have informed us, (Fanon, James and Wright come most quickly to mind) that the revolutionary act is by necessity a destructive and violent act. Rather, the work of the revolutionary is always to tear down the basic structures of society as these are the very structures by which his domination (dominion?) is managed and maintained. That said, I must wonder why it is that no one has imagined a necessarily self-pleasuring and indeed celebratory aspect to this destruction. It seems somehow counterintuitive to suggest that one should not

only sacrifice oneself but that one should have a bad time while doing so. Instead, I wonder if the element that is left out of revolutionary analysis is precisely pleasure, the way in which if the revolutionary is to give himself over to the cause, the movement, the unforeseeable and unknowable future then he should (I really want to say must) enjoy himself."

With that, the young man replaced the notebook, opened his legs wide, placed his knapsack squarely on the seat beside him and looked out the window before the last of the ugly billboards passed from view as the car wobbled into the tunnel again.

- 1 . Frantz Fanon, Black Skin/White Masks (New York: Grove Press, 1967).
- 2 . Edward W. Said, Freud and the Non-European (New York: Verso, 2003).
- 3 . Richard Wright, White Man Listen (New York: Harper, 1957).



Eduardo Aparicio, Untitled 1993, Type C Print, dimensions variable

asskisser

Tim m West

papa said never to kiss nobody's ass
but I have defied him before.
succumbing to urges
repressed I confess
that it is boys and men I want to dance with,
foreplay with their shadows,
chase their scent with my own,
predict the intentions of
soft stares chest hairs. I swear
i'm knowing and glowing like love
and that's where it all starts.
so I part his innocence
I'm so into this.

he look and feel sweet to me.
I am a sometimes-I-feel-like-a-nut almond-joy boy
he, a chocolate dipped treat
I wanna eat all over
especially his... ask me next verse
If I've grown more comfortable with taboos
with the foreshadowing of papa's
"never kiss nobody's ass."
but back to him that man
and his skin.

he smiles in a way that lures my tongue
gives it flow across feet-toes
like dirtysouth clean laundry hanging.
I lick my alphabet careful kindergarten-like

on the firm base of his thigh
I smell his heat, his want.
my papa...I have defied him before
so let go that ghost
back to the boy
I want more.

there near the innie
there at umbilical center
a third eye looking back
at my tongue's own wetness
begging for its rain dance-drip
its careful kiss
don't ever wanna miss a spot
so drop down and
flip with my strong-soft grip
his hip rotate this mate this
man-o'-mine so fine
that his smile makes me forget
papa's warning "never, never" he said.

and I now know that this symbolic kissing
of the derriere is more than just a dare
is giving in not just to this man-beauty
I aim to please
but my own pleasure and my own needs
and my own me not papa's me.
I inhale the salt of his neck
and peck the pecs I bet
this will be the sweetest stand
I'll ever take against the man I call papa.
so I please me by kissing
an ass so beautiful
that it pushes my memory against any thoughts

that I might be as
nasty as this tender act
no longer me nor my identity
will I ever mask.

papa, papa don't be mad
I did more than kiss that ass.
and it was good.
but me too papa
me too.



J. Diaz, Pitch me up sum 2005, digital photograph, 3 x 4

CyberBears

photos by David De Jesus, Ken Slater and Mike Zillion

San Francisco based CyberBears encourages us to “think bear” with their large collection of adult films and imagery. They state that their website “is for bears and bear admirers, who appreciate husky, hairy, masculine men.”

Three of their photographers opened up their vast archives to *Corpus*. CyberBears works with bears and bear fans from around the web. The following images were culled from their collection of photo shoot auditions for prospective models, as well as production stills from recent and upcoming titles.

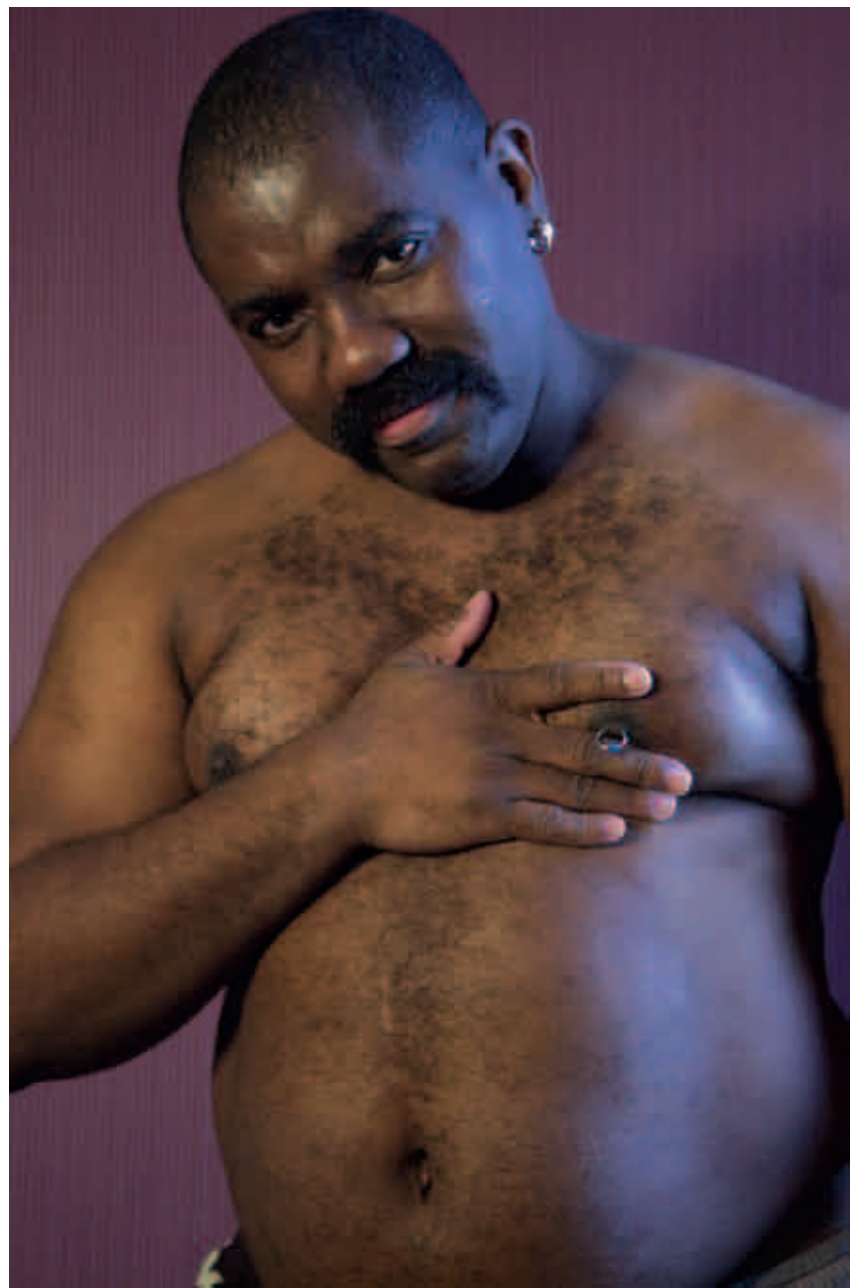
The group began with a desire to see men differently, beyond muscle boys, twinkies, size queens and the other expected categories of packaged gay erotics.

While the archive contains thousands of hot images of bears, we pulled a handful of images that reveal a different kind of allure. In this edit, men are not only large, furry and frolicking, but also bashful, silly, introspective, awkward, calm, vulnerable, unsure, open, *sexy*.

For more information, or further looks into a kind of gay sensuality seldom celebrated in the smoothed-out mainstream press, visit cyberbears.com.



David De Jesus



Ken Slater



Ken Slater



Ken Slater



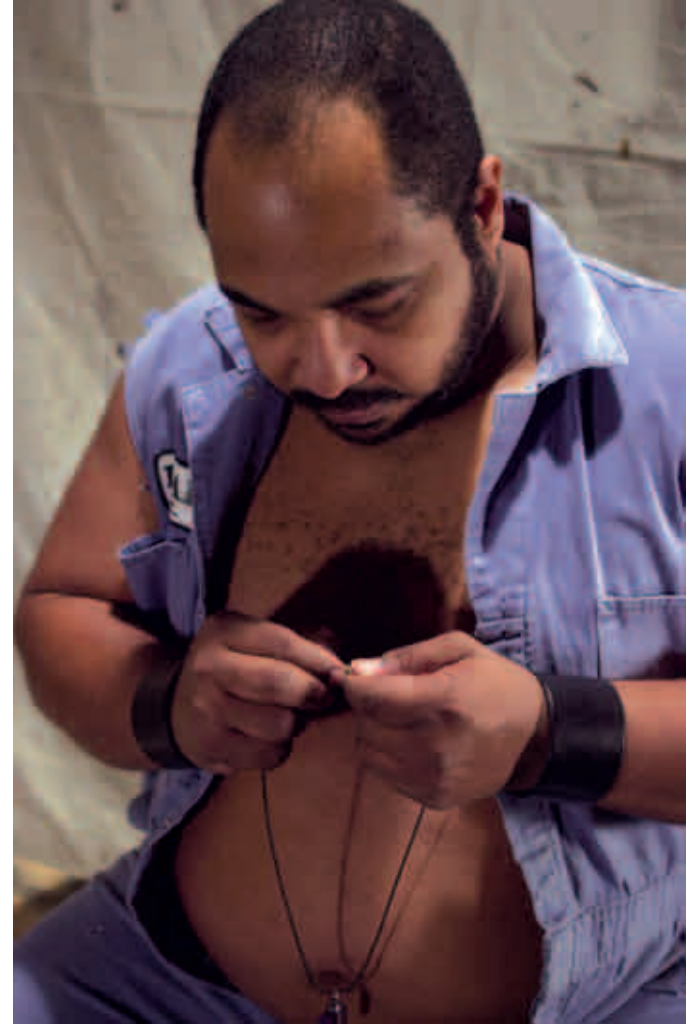
David De Jesus



Mike Zillion



Mike Zillion



Mike Zillion



Ken Slater



Ken Slater

Beauty and All Its Drama: An Interview with Morisane Shiroma

Robert Diaz

NOTE FROM THE INTERVIEWER

Choosing to write this particular interview for *Corpus* might seem queer and misplaced to some. After all, this is a publication which—according to a previous foreword—is about “the sex gay men have: how we feel about our sex; how we perform beautifully masculinities and femininities inside our sex; and how we seek to learn about our own and each other’s bodies before, during, and after sex” (Ayala, 54). On the contrary, this dialogue with Morisane Shiroma (Sunny) does not contain a plethora of sexually explicit descriptions. Sunny’s words plainly do not contain a lot of “sex” per se. Explicitly no. Implicitly yes.

Rarely does talk about personal sexual practices occur. When the speaker does discuss sex acts, she refers to them under the ubiquitous term “safe sex”. Already we see various issues a word such as “safe” evokes; the pressure it puts on the word “sex” runs the gamut of acts specific to the interview’s readers. Great weight is placed on what acts can be included as “safe” or “unsafe”. Fortunately the traditionally explicit nature of *Corpus* offers a much-needed hand in this arena. The magazine discusses the “nitty gritty” of sex—all its material/immaterial accoutrements—precisely to refuse its flattening. Its writers avoid the emptying of sex’s complexity with the goal of a broader and more effective HIV prevention message hidden within the pages.

Frankly I do wish that more discussion of sex occurred. For its lack may also reduce what “sex” is for Sunny; an HIV positive (and she is adamant that this be stated) transgender identified female whose sexual practices primarily revolve around or are at the very least affected by these identities. The actual embodiment of sex on the page can serve as a point of connection with those who identify similarly and those who do not. Indeed, assertions of her own sexual practices might expand the publication’s prevention message; fecundly widen the scope of these stories beyond the bodies of “gay” or “men” or “manhood” and beyond the feelings of “pleasure” or “pain” or “shame”; to critique the very rigidity of these entities by exploring the muddled interstices that cannot be easily compartmentalized when a transgender, male to female, sexually active HIV-positive person speaks.

Then again, one can argue that it is precisely the challenge presented by sex’s absence (or implicit manifestation) which shares this publication’s core ideals. If *Corpus* is indeed about “the physically and

emotionally messy sexuality we sometimes practice” (ix), a magazine which through its title refers to our *bodies*, then its is completely imaginable how one can and must sometimes *not* always discuss sex through the directly sexual physical contact we have with ourselves and others. We must also touch upon other “basic and animalistic” facets of our material selves, other ways that our bodies and sex come to the forefront when dealing with beauty, aging, HIV, AIDS, transitioning, etc.

Sunny dictates which image I use in this interview. She is adamant that her own aesthetics—particularly how her body can and should be perceived by others—come to the foreground. Morisane insists that what she considers to be beautiful about herself and her surroundings be printed. She then highlights: What about our own vanity and its relationship to survival? What about the correlations between our notions of bodily beauty and the ways that other factors—such as our HIV status, or our transgender identity, or our desire to slow aging, or our traumatic experiences that are (dis)connected to HIV—heighten or reduce these concerns? Sunny makes a poignant case that it is precisely her aesthetics—her will to decide what is beautiful and how she can manifest this in all her capabilities—that inevitably and quite powerfully allow her to live. They are the needed tools to go through and against the physical realities of having AIDS. Her astute self-perception, simultaneously applied to the numerous other people she has encountered, allow her to continue and flourish.

I want to end this note with a phrase from Martin Manalansan’s new book *Global Divas*; what he coins as “*the byuti and drama of everyday life*” (89). I am intrigued by this phrase because of its usage: It describes Filipino *baklas* trying to survive everyday existence and everyday contestations of identity in New York City and in The United States. The use of everyday occurrences and their connection to notions of *byuti* (the *bakla* slang word for beauty) as the take-off point for the book resonates. These become key tropes that encourage all the Gay Filipino subjects spoken about to continually strive, to basically live. The stories Sunny shares are no different. They are the most quotidian stories around her own existence. Yet as stories of “simple” everyday *bakla* Filipino “dramas” have a wider resonance, these glimpses of Sunny’s life do so as well. Yes it is expected that people will dis-agree with some of her statements and agree with others. Nonetheless, it is precisely the needed contradictions and parallels given to her readers that might and hopefully will eliminate various anxieties around being different from her. *Not* being HIV-positive, *not* having AIDS, *not* being transgendered, *not* being comfortable in our own skins—these can be points of connections rather than nodes of divergence.

INTERVIEW

Robert: When did you realize that you were Transgendered?

Sunny: Well, I think there are two parts of me that (knew) I had that chance. One when I was very little, very little. At that time I recall asking my mom, “How come my sister can wear that and I cannot wear this? I want to keep my hair longer, why can she and I cannot?” And all that was there, all the time. I think from that point on I was already a transgender myself. I guess that was one time.

And then a later time was when I became (HIV-positive), when I did not have anything else with me, when I had no job, no responsibility. You know, I don't have to be someone because of my business, because of my religion, all that; that “I had to be this way”. Because of HIV, I lost most of it and including my religion too. Back then they didn't understand (the) HIV virus. So to me it was a harsh way to put us, or separate us, but still I could practice (my religion). I think when I really detach my responsibility or detach all those things I felt I had to do as a “man”, as “male”, (that is) when I became (transgendered). And (when) I don't have to play man, or male, that's when I start coming to my senses again.

But to me at that time (being) transgender meant (looking like) drag queens. They all look(ed) like men in dresses, and it wasn't my thing. And I don't want to go that way. That was (not) my thing. (Then) I was lucky. It was in 2000, I was invited to a Transgender Asian American conference for three days. When I went there, that really gave me a good knowledge because I met somebody who was exactly like me, and doing what she was doing and on top of it she looked great. Her name was ASIA from APIT. Yes, she was pretty. I don't know if she started hormones. But she was another person who wasn't on hormones doing what she was doing, (getting) involved and I said, “Oh, that's me”.

R: I just want to clarify an important point you might be alluding to. Do you mean that HIV was crucial to realizing and coming to terms with your personal transgender identity—to fully coming out as this identity? Did it become a means for you to open up?

S: Definitely, yeah I think so. It took me a long time. I tried to take HIV and turn it around to be a positive thing in my life because it destroyed basically my 10 years since 1990s. And I don't want



(the) rest of my life to have that. So, honestly, HIV helped me to be who I am now, being a transgender. And I am—and I use this word—very “at ease” and very comfortable in my life. And that’s it, you know.

R: Can you describe how you felt when you found out you were HIV-positive?

S: I was ready when I went to get tested. Because when I finally got tested in 1990, it was the peak. To me the (start of) peak was (in) 1985. That was peak to me. I mean from my experience, since my friends started to die from 1983; you know one person, and then two or three a year (would continue to die). So it was not easy. So, (the) end of 1990s was a horrible situation. Yet my business was kicking and I was doing so much work and (putting out more) collections, going all over the world, at the same time in my mind conscious that I was infected.

R: Why did you think that you were infected previous to getting tested?

S: Because I—you know the people who died—we all went to the same places. You know, like bathhouses for example. And in the early eighties, before that too I came and my friends in New York, they were into “drugs and sex, and rock and roll” and it was totally free so I just went along with it and I enjoyed it. So I’m sure I was infected back then already with all my friends when I was going around. But I was lucky I didn’t come out physically (as having HIV). Everyone they just came out and they were rushed into the hospital.

R: And it took you only until last year (2003) to come out publicly about your HIV status?

S: Yes

R: When did you come out to yourself then? When did you start accepting or realizing that this is going to be your life?

S: You mean living with HIV? You know I think the process for HIV and AIDS, or I guess any kind of disease, you know, is about...(pause in the interview). Well, anyone with this disease I think first comes denial. I was in so (many) long years of denial. That includes: I didn’t want to know about (it), I totally wanted to hide it, and that was most of the years when I was diagnosed.

R: In the beginning, what were the small things, the most everyday occurrences that made you embarrassed about having HIV?

S: I think this is applicable to everyone who are (*sic*) in denial stage like I was. Because we don’t want the public to know that we have the HIV virus. So the medicine we have to take on time (the ones we have to) open up to take and put it in our mouth (becomes very difficult). It was difficult to have lunch out when I was with people that I didn’t want to know (about) my HIV status. It was difficult. I had to somehow hide it. (For example), you know the pill cases are four boxes, so mine was basically the morning and the evening chunk. So there were two boxes in the middle. I put all the vitamins there. So if I needed to take (them), I opened the first box with the eight meds and put it in my mouth and then offered the second box of vitamins and asked, “You want some?” (or) “You want this?” And that was my way of hiding it. The orange pill was huge, the color was there, and I took three. And I’m sure that the other people . . . they don’t have to say anything to me—they’ll look at it and know it.

R: This is a sensitive question. How does HIV/AIDS affect your perspectives on sex or sexuality?

S: Oh I see. A lot. For example, if I say (it) straight, when I had sex (before being out), I am not telling the other person my HIV status. Of course we are having safe sex but at the same time not telling him, I don’t think this is the right thing. But still, having safe sex, the climax, right before I cum, I stop to cum, because I knowing that there is a virus that there is (inside) a sperm. And I try to stop that because there is a virus in my body, just before it cums, it just stops.

R: So it seems that HIV and AIDS affects even that moment, in the pleasure of ejaculation or release.

S: Oh yes definitely.

R: During that time when you found out your “status”, I am aware that you had a partner, when did Philip find out? How did you react, how did you feel?

S: I had a business with Philip, my fashion business. I started my own, but it grew so fast I need someone, I couldn’t do it on my own. I asked him to help. He started to help. So, after we closed our business in the 1990’s, Philip just couldn’t live in New York City, facing (the truth). Because all those years—like eight years of our business—our business became our baby. (The) baby started

growing from small baby to adolescent, to mature, to (being) gone. It really hurt him and it hurt me too at the same time. And so Philip wanted to go back to San Francisco and see whether he can heal himself, because we put our heart and soul in the business. That is why it hurt us more I guess. And then when he went there and he called me, about, not too long later and he had this high fever and he had to check into the hospital.

R: Since you know that Philip didn't give HIV to you, does that make it easier?

S: Yes.

R: When did he start showing signs of having the disease, did he need help?

S: I talked to him periodically, all the time, checking out (his) health. He found a boyfriend. I was very happy for him. I was still single but anyway. Then I went to (San Francisco to visit him), because I was traveling too much because of my business. Although the company was closed, I had this contract for licensing business so I still had to do that to go around the world. So every time I had a trip outside I tried to stop over in San Francisco and then come back to New York. So I was seeing him all the time, and I told his boyfriend named Jerry, "Jerry, if something happens in the future and you cannot handle the situation, please do call me. I'll be here. I'll come take the next flight and come here". And he did. That was, I don't remember how long it was. But it took about a year, and in 1990 it (his health) deteriorated fast, and Philip also knew that he didn't want to go onto AZT and therapy because of other people's passing.

And he became blind and then really, Jerry couldn't handle much more of the situation . . . that Philip is (indeed) going to die. He called me. So I went there right away. So I stayed there three months. I left everything behind, (even) the business because it wasn't as important. It is (more) important yet to be with Philip at the last time of his life. (It) is more important than just trying to make my career or making my responsibilities. That I could do somehow, somehow but Philip can't take this back. I really had a good time in the last three months staying with him, sit (*sic*) next to him. He could not see, he could not move. Basically he is like a (vegetable) but his brain is still going but he could not speak because it was so painful that he couldn't talk, but I know Philip for so long that we had a sign, "You know Philip, if you want it, blink eyes once, if you don't blink twice so we know". That was our sign. And he did it. He was so cute. He was like a vegetable but his brain was there.

R: Can you share a story you remember around experiencing Philip for those three months, when you fully dealt with the fact that he did have AIDS and was dying.

S: One trip I came back to New York, just for a few days at least. Then, when I came back I bought two t-shirts. One was a big rose flower printed on the front. The other one was a sunflower, (a) big one (and) it was beautiful. There were two t-shirts. I didn't know which one to get and I just got both of them. And when I went back to see Philip and I asked Philip which one he liked and he did the blinking stuff and he said, he answers that he wants the sunflower. And, because he had a lot of tubes going around and everything I had to cut the back, you know like when you check into the hospital, the gown, and I cut the shoulders so he can go through the tubes and all and he put it on and he gave me a big smile.

R: At that time that Philip had died, were you already taking hormones or transitioning?

S: I learned who I was much later. Philip passed away in 1994 and I think I started in 2001.

R: It seems like you're comfortable in your skin.

S: Oh yeah, of course. It's amazing when I became (or) when I started taking hormones. I mean, I hid a lot of things from the other girls too. And (now) I see my changes. This is me. (I ask myself) why I didn't do this before. I wish I started before! I look so good and enjoy being a girl, and (pity) all the years I lost. I could have done more.

R: Since Philip, have you ever fallen in love again?

S: So far, no. I am in a relationship but it's not love. Somebody said to me, my lesbian friend who I haven't seen in so long, who haven't yet seen my change (and) they got interested. They said, "S, you have boobs, can I touch it?" You know, all the interesting guy things. Anyway, I told them about the relationship and she said, "S, you're not in love are you?" That's when I first realized it. Yeah, I'm not in love. I am in a relationship but just because I believe in (the desire) to have a relationship more than anything. I am trained that I am not in love. I think my boyfriend is not in love. I think this is true, if I ask him he will say yeah. He knows of all the T-girls (transgender girls), I am the best catch at this moment, at this time. So he'd rather spend a good time with me, than try to be single or try to look for other girls.

R: So, does this realization hurt you?

S: No, it doesn't hurt me, because I am not in love.

R: So what makes it easy to say this?

S: Because I finally acknowledged (the point) mentioned by my lesbian friend. "Oh, that's right, he is not in love and I am not in love". He provides me (with) what I want. I don't think its "need" but what I "want". And you know being transgendered, the guys wouldn't openly take (a) transgender person to their family and introduce (her/him). (But) his family is also willing to accept me and invite me to all the family affairs: Christmas, Thanksgiving, New Years. Even for my birthday, they came for a surprise.

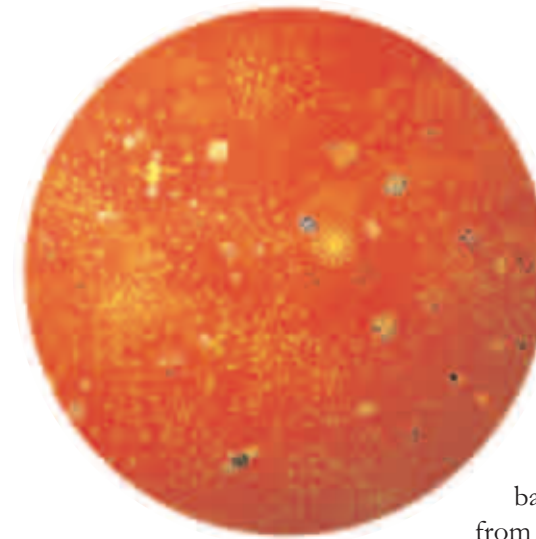
R: Does he know your HIV status?

S: Oh yeah, it has to be open in a relationship.

R: Is he HIV positive?

S: He's negative, but periodically he takes the test. And we both know what safe sex is, so there is nothing to worry about.

R: Why did you paint this art work on the wall? Why did you create it? What inspired you?



S: I was really in a bad shape the last time I checked in (the hospital). I was in this apartment, in the bedroom. I couldn't wake up, and I couldn't physically move my body from (the) bed to ask for help. I was down to weight, I think 80. I was really sick, like to me it was a skeleton with a high fever. But anyway so when I checked in, I thought "I am not going to live longer".

Somehow, I always try to be positive I guess. I tried to bounce back. My parents came to see me of course and I could sense it from their eyes, they were hiding what they see. But I could tell.

Amazingly I guess it didn't take me long. I literally wasn't ready to get kicked out from the hospital but I was (anyway). I guess it's the insurance problem. I don't know, I wanted to stay two more days but they wouldn't let me. After I came back and when I got well, I decided to have a lot of color in my apartment. So I started reading Feng-Sui and all that. I didn't get anything. I didn't understand how it works. The only thing I got was that Red is a good color. So I said, "Okay, red" and (for) the other colors I picked whatever. Then I wanted to paint, I didn't know what I was going to paint but whatever. Instead I said, "Well since I am going to paint, I don't want to paint (just any of) the walls". This was the wall (the dining room wall). It was always blank. Sometimes I put a mirror to make it bigger. I said, "This is it." I put paint in the center and a string and pencil. The base is black but then the next color as you can see is orange and then a green.

And after that, it was beautiful. It was surprising. Wow, this is my place. I was so impressed (with) myself. At the same time, I said, "Well, its just going to be about me". You know, "my work". Do I want this in my house? It's just "me, me". Because you know, when I was sick, all these people gave me support and love and I wanted to be surrounded by people's love and good energy especially at that Time. So I asked my friends "Will you put you heart in this circle?" And also I asked each person to sign their names and date in black around.

R: You mentioned that your life has been prolonged, and that you have bounced back from these experiences because of your strength. How do you feel about aging?

S: Oh my goodness. You know my age. I was born in 1957 so now I am forty-seven, or forty-eight. I'm not quite sure. At the same time, you know the HIV meds (medications) makes (*sic*) physically the face and the entire body change (from) one body to another. I really had a hard time. At the same time, (I had to take) this particular medication (and) that's it. But I had no choice. So, I had to take the medication and almost at the same time—I think a few months later—I was taking hormones. But at the same time, I felt that taking the hormone will make me prettier. But it did not. Instead, the AIDS meds override (*sic*) so strongly the hormones. But I got the boobs. So, that was very difficult for me.

At the same time, (within) my age group of people who were positive, AIDS is coming and after (being older than) 40 years, it definitely starts to show. And that plays a lot too. And I recently noticed today, I had a dinner with my brother and my family a few nights ago. I look(ed) at my brother's face and my face and I thought "Oh god, there is a drastic difference" . . . I said, "Gosh, I look so much older than he does". Yeah, physically, I am sagging and dry. I am so much drier. I noticed that (and) it says something.

R: Does this frighten you?

S: No, just because my health is doing good. Just because there is TV shows like Extreme Makeover to educate me and there are miracles, temporary enhancements.

R: Based on my various experiences with you, you seem to 'pass' well and have not been singled as a "transgendered male to female" individual. Is this important to you?

S: I think, not only in the transgender world, but also in the gay community or straight community too. It's always better somehow if you look better. Regardless of passing or not, it's about "the look". If that transgender doesn't look good, or if the transgender for example does not pass as a woman, or in a heterosexual community if someone is not handsome, people, especially the (real) girls in public, they will see them in totally different way. I have been luck(y) in that sense. I don't want to diss other girls. The important thing is to understand. And I always try to say to the girls, if someone is trying, if the girl is trying to look like a woman, I can see in the hair, the nails, make-up, even if she looks like a man in drag, still that person made effort, and try to connect with herself inside and outside. That effort (is) there and I say, "You look great" because she does look great. There is a connection between the inside and outside.

R: How do other girls see you at transgender bars or spaces?

S: They see me as an outsider. Just because I am not working there, as a sex worker or others. But that is how I see it. That is what others have told me. They saw me as a rich girl who doesn't want to do much. Which is not true. I can pull it off but only for a few hours.

R: What made you think about Transgender advocacy?

S: Because of my age too, I wanted to make a difference with the younger generation of transgenders: to have a better life, easier situation in public. They (the heterosexual community) don't have to accept it, like (they don't necessarily accept) the gay community, but they should understand. I want to make it my goal and I want to make it as short as possible. You know, I don't want that a hundred years from now we accept. That's something I want to leave behind me when I go. I will be very happy.

We all get older. Somehow when we are younger, we never thought of it, because we are going through the process of changing to our childhood to being an adult. I always thought I will be changing to be better. But not so.

R: Do you think HIV is a factor in "not changing for the better"?

S: No, well, because of HIV but at the same time because I am aging. Because of parents, you know, it (nature) gives equally to everyone. We live, die. We go peak and we climb.

R: I remember recently that you had fallen from your apartment and that this was a difficult experience.

S: Yeah, I fell backward. Oh my goodness, that was scary. Scary at the same time because you know, (it was similar to) people with car accidents at the same time. They have a sense of bits and pieces coming and that was exactly it. You know I hit my corner head, and then the side of my face and arm, and my legs were up. Then, my blood is going down (to my head). And then (I said), "Oh no S you cannot go, you cannot go like this, because...it's not pretty!" I thought, "How vein of me, thinking about this." I am about to pass and I have the vanity to say that. God, that helps a lot though. I said, "S, somehow somehow you have to pull yourself together, and go back home and rest." You don't want to let anyone to (*sic*) see you falling down on the street.

R: Was it harder to recover from this fall?

S: It was difficult, since I hurt my leg, and that made it difficult to go up and down. So I can walk in the apartment, but going up and down the stairs, especially because of the accident I always remembered, it took me a while.

Because my immune system is lower. At the same time it got my head, like “What’s wrong with me?” Little things, little weaknesses when they start appearing, surface in my life, I start questioning. I try to somehow connect it to the virus, sometimes it’s not, sometimes it is. But, I think I am getting better. At that time I am depressed, I am sure a lot of HIV positive people feel the same way, when they face it. I think people think, “How do we overcome this depression. Turn it around and move forward?”

R: I think, from what I have heard so far, beauty has become such an important key to your recovery.

S: Yeah, I think beauty and love. I think beauty is a selfishness I have as a human being and I don’t know anyone else who has this. I know I do.

R: But it is useful and very productive. Do you still get episodes of deep depression?

S: It comes it goes. Yes I do.

R: What causes it, the HIV or the hormones?



S: This is coming from HIV. Mental things to me, just myself I am talking, it's about HIV.

R: Were you ever suicidal?

S: Yes, I was. I never tried since I was conscious.

R: In what part of your life were you suicidal?

S: A couple of years ago, maybe two, three years ago. That was a couple of times that I was in the hospital. I needed to change my AIDS meds and I took hormones. And (the) HIV medication was stronger and so I was not getting the look I wanted and at the same time I was diagnosed with Cancer on top of it. But it's not in my body right now, I am in remission.

R: What type of Cancer?

S: Colon cancer. So, I was like really mentally not in a good place. So I got really tired, to keep living positively. I asked, “S, do you want to keep it going, on top of this, cancer?” That really got me so stressed and that is when I saw my doctor. I didn’t realize how stressed I was but that’s when I went to the doctor’s office and started to burst out crying. And my doctor gave me anti-depressants.

R: So now another form of medicine seems to be a part of your life.

S: Oh gosh yes. I never liked to take medicine, even for allergies. Now I have to take many.

R: Have the anti-depressants worked?

S: Yes it is working.

R: And you have been diagnosed with AIDS?

S: Yes. Diagnosed with AIDS was in 1993.

R: What is your strongest fear connected to having AIDS?

- S:** Strongest fear? My strongest fear is to infect other people. That is the strongest, to make sure not to infect others.
- R:** How is your t-cell count?
- S:** Just 260. But I started from 46.
- R:** Do you feel optimistic?
- S:** I am thinking and I guess not, not so much.
- R:** How come?
- S:** Because, it's a good problem I am facing, and maybe people who are HIV positive. Because I feel very normal right now, I want to do something as my career (again). Of course the work I do at APICHA (Asian and Pacific Islander Coalition on HIV/AIDS) is rewarding (and) I will definitely keep it. But, I just need to, want to find my passion. It was fun. I had that experience with my old company. When it goes and dies, it hurts me because I put so much effort into it. But I want to do it all over again, and I am looking (for) what is it. Sometimes it has crossed my mind about fashion but I think not. But something about art, something about art. It's not so much about money but something I want to express.
- R:** Has there ever been a day you have forgotten about your HIV status after being diagnosed?
- S:** Oh no. No. Because the medication has to be taken. But it doesn't bother me knowing that I am HIV positive, knowing that I have to take medication to continue to live. So, its become a part of my life, to take the medication is to keep myself somewhat normal, and to survive.
- R:** If you were to give other transgendered people advise, what would it be?
- S:** Honesty. Honesty in everything. Honesty in being transgender or being HIV positive. Honesty, people always take it well. And it helps me not to worry about many things. It helps me not to worry about "Why did I say this to that person, etc." Honesty makes my life easier. It is difficult though. It is difficult yes.

- R:** Difficult in what way?
- S:** Just because I wanted to not reveal so much of myself to others. Its not a secret but I have (hesitance) to reveal that (myself) to others.
- R:** Yet there seems to be a way in which the desire to inspire comes from the revelation of who you are. Do you think this is a part of you now? Do you want to reveal your life so people can see themselves in it?
- S:** Definitely. It's just one of my (goals). I am just one (part) of (many) people's lives. But if someone can see my life and get something out of it that will be great. Yeah.





Beautiful Men

Laurie Toby Edison (photographs)

Debbie Notkin (text)

Here's the basic mixed message: the media, mainstream and gay, wants us all to believe that we're ugly, because then we'll buy the things they want us to buy to make ourselves beautiful and distract ourselves from our ugliness.

The self-help world wants us to have "self-esteem," to care for ourselves because we're important.

Well, it's damn hard to feel important if you think you're ugly.

So photographer Laurie Toby Edison is setting out to prove (among other things) that beauty is a *lot* more than we think it is. Sure, the buffed gym rat with the oiled skin is beautiful, and hot, and desirable. But Edison wants you to know that he's not the whole story of male beauty.

Hombres Hermosos

Laurie Toby Edison (fotografías)

Debbie Notkin (texto)

Aquí está el mensaje básico mixto: los medios de comunicación principales y gay, quieren que todos nosotros creamos que somos feos, porque así compraremos las cosas que ellos quieren que nosotros compremos para

hacernos bellos y distraernos de nuestra fealdad.

El mundo de auto ayuda quiere que nosotros tengamos "autoestima", para que nos cuidemos a nosotros mismos, porque somos importantes.

Bueno, es muy difícil sentirse importante si tú crees que eres feo.

Por lo tanto, la fotógrafa Laurie Toby Edison se ha propuesto probar (entre otras cosas) que la belleza es mucho más de lo que nosotros pensamos. Seguramente que el musculoso obsesionado del gimnasio es hermoso con su piel aceitada,



For her photographic suite, published as *Familiar Men: A Book of Nudes* (Shifting Focus Press, 2004), she took pictures of dozens of beautiful naked men, across the widest possible spectrum of age, size, race, ethnicity, body type, profession, and physical ability.

Looking at these pictures, you may well find that you can't figure out some of the most basic things about the models. Are they gay? Some of them are. Are they HIV-positive? A couple of them are. Which ones? You can't tell. Just as you can't tell which ones are disc jockeys and which ones are archaeologists and which ones own their own businesses.

What you can tell is that they're all beautiful, each in his individual private way, each in his own skin. Take a good long look at each one of them, and for good measure, strip and check out your mirror. You can learn to like what you see.

caliente y deseable. Pero Edison quiere que tú sepas que él no es toda la historia de la belleza del hombre.

Para su composición fotográfica, publicada bajo el nombre de *Hombres Familiares: Un libro de desnudos* (Shifting Focus Press, 2004), ella tomó fotografías de docenas de hombres desnudos, a partir de una variedad lo más amplia posible en cuanto a edad, tamaño, raza, etnia, tipo de cuerpo, profesión, y habilidad física.

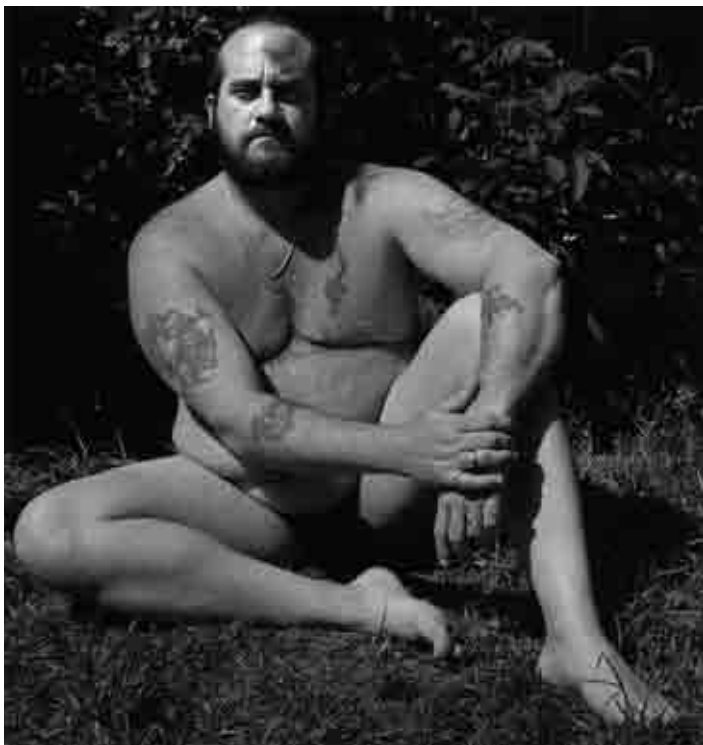
Al ver estas fotografías, tú tal vez encuentres que no puedes comprender algunas de las cosas más básicas de los modelos. ¿Ellos son gay? Algunos de ellos lo son. ¿Ellos son VIH positivo? Un par de ellos lo son. ¿Cuáles? No puedes distinguirlos. Así como tampoco puedes decir cuáles son disc-jockeys y cuáles son arqueólogos y cuáles son propietarios de sus propios negocios.

Lo que puedes decir es que todos ellos son hermosos, cada uno a su manera, en particular y privada, cada uno en su propia piel. Mira detenidamente a cada uno de ellos, para una buena medida, desnúdate y mírate en el espejo. Tú puedes aprender a que te guste lo que miras.













Familiar Men: A Book of Nudes
 (ISBN 0-9743343-0-8)
 and prints of Edison's work
 are available at
www.laurietobyedison.com



THE GAMBLE

Samuel R. Delany

1) *What is the nature of the gamble?*

Twenty-five years ago I would have answered that question fairly simply: “I’m gambling on science.” Today, that’s a lot more difficult to say. Is science what scientists say? Is science what doctors say? Is science what the people who write forms (for insurance companies, for patients, for doctors, for “the public”) say, in order to qualify what they say to go along with the reigning wisdom?

2) Today, when you get an HIV test, and the test comes back negative, the form from the Diagnostic Center that runs the test says:

“HIV—1 AB W/CONFIRM., NY

“HIV—I AB, E/A nonreactive, no reactive

“No HIV-1 antibodies detected.

“A non-reactive test result does not exclude the possibility of HIV-1 infection, since seroconversion is variable. If clinically indicated, repeat testing of a new sample(s) in three months is suggested.”

In short, the test would seem to prove nothing. It only defers the knowledge of infection by three months, or, indeed, to whenever the next test is administered. Neither the indication “HIV-” nor the words “HIV negative” occur anywhere on the test results. The term is, indeed, a fiction—a reassuring term of distinction that has been more or less demanded by patients, and that, indeed, doctors have largely accepted—to counter the equally fictitious narrative of the testee who, once he or she is tested, is, by the very force of the act, pulled into a population to which health itself is totally and forever denied but rather deferred, test after test after test, until, presumably, death.

I think this is a perfectly reasonable reading of the text on the paper one receives, of some of the rhetoric the moves around it. The test itself and its results I have no problem accepting as science. The question is: To what extent is the rhetoric around it science?

La Apuesta

Samuel R. Delany

1) ¿Cuál es la naturaleza de la apuesta?

Hace veinticinco años, yo hubiera respondido esa pregunta bastante simple: “Estoy apostándole a la ciencia”. Hoy, eso es más difícil de decir. ¿La ciencia es lo que los científicos dicen? ¿La ciencia es lo que los doctores dicen? ¿La ciencia es lo que las personas que escriben formularios (para seguros de compañías, para pacientes, para doctores, para “el público”) dicen, con el propósito de acreditar lo que hacen para ir de la mano con la sabiduría dominante?

2) En la actualidad, cuando te haces la prueba del VIH y la prueba regresa negativa, el formulario que regresa del centro de diagnóstico que realizó la prueba dice:

“VIH-1 AB W/ CONFIRMADO, NY

“VIH-IAB, E/A sin reacción, no reactivo

“No se detectaron anticuerpos VIH-1

“El resultado de una prueba no reactiva no excluye la posibilidad de la infección por VIH-1, ya que la sero-conversión es variable. Se sugiere repetir la prueba de una(s) nueva(s) muestra(s) en tres meses, si se indica clínicamente”.

En breve, la prueba parecería no probar nada. Solamente postergaba el conocimiento sobre la infección por tres meses, o, verdaderamente, hasta cuando la próxima prueba sea administrada. Ni la indicación “VIH-”, ni las palabras “VIH negativo” aparecen en ningún lugar en los resultados de la prueba. El término es, verdaderamente, una ficción, un término reafirmante de la distinción que más o menos ha sido demandada por los pacientes y que los doctores han aceptado ampliamente—para contrarrestar la narrativa igualmente ficticia de los que se hacen la prueba que, una vez que él o ella se la hace, es, por la propia fuerza del acto, halado a una población para la cual la salud en si misma es totalmente y para siempre negada, más bien bastante postergada, prueba tras prueba tras prueba, hasta, presuntamente, la muerte.

3) I got my first HIV test in June of 1988, when I was 46 years old, six years after I first heard of AIDS. It was at the end of a three-year period during which I was certain that I had AIDS. But the results were negative. As well, after the lesions that had appeared on my lower legs in April of 1985, there had been no other symptoms—and the first time I went to a doctor since I'd been convinced I'd been infected, he diagnosed the lesions as a “psoriasis-like” condition (and not the Kaposi’s lesions that, for three years, I’d assumed they were), which have since been much improved with a cortisone cream.

For the next seven years I got tested twice a year. Again in all cases, by the conventions of that reigning fiction, I was “HIV-.” Since ’88 I have been tested once a year. In all cases I have been “HIV-.” I am now 62 years old. My most recent test results were returned on June 1, 2004. I include a xerox copy of the test results returned by the Diagnostic Center:

4) Here is a statement lifted from a conversation recorded in my journal with a twenty-nine year old Pennsylvania AIDS educator from late in 2003: “I assume there must be about ten million cases of AIDS minimum, in the United States alone—maybe one out of ten has been detected. The tests are inconclusive—they say so right on the paper they send back to you. I figure that, whatever the official figures says, you can assume there’s a case of AIDS, somewhere in the country, for every test that’s been given”—

Yo pienso que esta es una lectura perfectamente razonable del texto en el papel que uno recibe, de algo de la retórica que se mueve a su alrededor. No tengo problemas en aceptar como ciencia a la propia prueba y sus resultados. La pregunta es: ¿Hasta qué punto es la retórica a su alrededor una ciencia?

3) Yo me hice la primera prueba de VIH en junio de 1988, cuando tenía 46 años de edad, seis años después de haber escuchado por primera vez sobre el SIDA. Fue al final de un período de tres años durante el cual yo estaba seguro que tenía SIDA. Pero los resultados fueron negativos. Como tal, las lesiones que habían aparecido en la parte inferior de mis piernas en abril de 1985, no hubo otros síntomas y la primera vez que fui a un doctor, desde que estaba convencido de que había sido infectado, él diagnosticó las lesiones como una condición “parecida a la psoriasis” (y no las lesiones de Kaposi que, durante tres años, yo había supuesto que eran), las que han mejorado bastante con una crema de cortisona.

Durante los siete años siguientes me hice la prueba dos veces por año. De nuevo en todos los casos, por las reglas convencionales de la ficción dominante, yo era “VIH-.” Desde el 88 me he hecho la prueba una vez por año. En todos los casos he sido “VIH-.” Ahora tengo 62 años de edad. Los resultados de mi prueba más reciente se entregaron el 1 de junio de 2004. Incluyó una fotocopia de los resultados de la prueba entregados por el centro de diagnóstico.

Quest Diagnostics

PATIENT INFORMATION: **DELANY, SAMUEL R** REPORT STATUS: **Final**

QUEST DIAGNOSTICS INCORPORATED ORDERING PHYSICIAN

REPORTED: 06/01/2004 11:30 DOB: 04/01/1942 Age: 62 GENDER: M

Test Name	In Range	Out of Range	Reference Range	Lab
URINALYSIS W/ALBUMIN (Continued)				
URINALYSIS, COMPLETE (Continued)				
WBC	None		<or=5 cells/hpf	
BACTERIA	None		None Seen /hpf	
RBC	None		<or=3 cells/hpf	
MICROALBUMIN, URINE				TBR
CREATININE, RANDOM URINE	1227		mg/L	
MICROALBUMIN, URINE	7		0 - 30 mg/g Creat.	
CHLAMYDIA/GC DNA, PCR			Negative	TBR
C.TRACHOMATIS DNA, PCR				
N.GONORRHOEAE DNA, PCR			No acceptable specimen was received	
			Negative	
			No acceptable specimen was received	
HIV-1 AB W/CONFIRM., NY				TBR
HIV-1 AB, EIA	Nonreactive,		Nonreactive	

No HIV-1 antibodies detected.
A nonreactive test result does not exclude the possibility of HIV-1 infection, since seroconversion is variable.
If clinically indicated, repeat testing of a new sample(s) in three months is suggested.

Government regulations require the assurance of patient confidentiality. New York State Public Health Law, including Article 27F, details for providers their responsibility and authority regarding partner/contact notification.

GLUCOSE, FASTING Reference Range: Non Diabetics < 6.0% TBR

STREPTOCOCCUS, GRP A CULT TBR

STREPTOCOCCUS, GRP A CULT Final* TBR

STREPTOCOCCUS, GRP A CULT No group A streptococci isolated

Performing Laboratory Information:
TBR Quest Diagnostics One Malvern Avenue Teterboro, NJ 07608 Laboratory Director: William E. Tarr, M.D.

DELANY, SAMUEL R - 43821044 Page 2 - End of Report

Figure 1: Quest Diagnostic Form, courtesy of S. Delany

though I note with three afternoons of research on line, I have not been able to come up with the number of ELISA tests performed since they were made available in 1984. The CDC, whose most recent figures date from December, 2002, says that in the United States there are eight-hundred and eighty thousand, five-hundred and seventy-five—that is to say, slightly under a million.

Is there anything “scientific” in what this young man says?

Talking to another young man, in April of 2004, also an AIDS educator, I recorded the following in my journal: “I’ve been instructed by my supervisor to tell my clients that one out of five people in New York City has syphilis.”

Is there anything scientific in *either* of these claims?

In a recent issue of a *New Yorker*-sized glossy magazine for women, a health column bylined by a “Dr. Beth,” refers to the “virus that causes syphilis.” Since most medical texts (responsible, reputable) tell us that syphilis is caused by a spirochete (*Tripomena pallidum*), is this in any way scientific?

Is there anything scientific about:

Acupuncture?

Chinese herbal medicine?

4) Esta es una declaración obtenida de una conversación con un educador de SIDA de Pensilvania de veintinueve años de edad a finales del 2003 que anoté en mi diario: “Supongo que debe haber un mínimo de diez millones de casos de SIDA en Estados Unidos solamente, tal vez uno de cada diez ha sido detectado. Las pruebas son inconclusas, dicen eso exactamente en el papel que te regresan. Yo calculo que, cualquiera sean los números oficiales, tú puedes suponer que hay un caso de SIDA, en algún lugar del país, por cada prueba que se ha entregado”; aunque yo noto que con tres tardes de investigación que realicé en línea, no he podido conseguir el número de pruebas ELISA que se han hecho desde que se hicieron disponibles en 1984. El CDC, cuyos cálculos más recientes son de diciembre de 2002, dicen que en Estados Unidos hay ochocientos ochenta mil quinientos setenta y cinco, quiere decir, un poco por debajo del millón.

¿Hay algo “científico” en lo que dice este joven?

Al hablar con otro joven, en abril de 2004, también un educador de SIDA, anoté lo siguiente en mi diario: “He sido instruido por mi supervisor para que les diga a mis clientes que una de cada cinco personas en Nueva York tiene sífilis”.

¿Hay algo científico en alguna de estas afirmaciones?

En una edición reciente de la revista del tamaño

Reiki? [A mode of “energy healing” in which the practitioner moves his or her hands over the patient’s body, gathering or moving around the “energy,” “concentrating” the “good” energy and “discarding” the “bad”—usually without touching the patient.]

Not to mention astrology, tarot cards, and “certified” TV psychics.

The husband of a good friend practices a number of these. “And enough of it works,” she says, “so that I have no difficulty believing he’s providing a useful and needed service. Besides, he’s an extremely responsible man, too. If he thinks for a moment there’s a medical problem involved that falls outside his purview, he’s very quick to tell you to see a western doctor.” Nevertheless, this same woman was horrified when her best friend of many years in the Midwest was diagnosed with breast cancer and insisted on spending a year in “alternative” medical treatment. “I really had to ask myself how much Phil—yes, and me—had contributed to that. Indeed, it was only when her third herbalist, after three weeks of treatment, announced that the cancer was ‘not responding’ and demanded she see a western doctor, that she finally consented. A double mastectomy and a long session of chemotherapy later, the woman is still alive. “But,” said my friend, “you just don’t know.”

And where is the science in all of this?

del *New Yorker*, brillante, para mujeres, una columna de salud firmada por una “Dra. Beth”, se refiere al “virus que causa la sífilis”. Ya que la mayoría de los textos médicos (responsables y con reputación) nos dicen que la sífilis es causada por una espiroqueta (*Tripomena pallidum*), ¿De alguna manera esto es científico?

Hay algo de científico sobre:

¿Acupuntura?

¿Hierbas medicinales chinas?

¿Reiki? (Un modelo de “energía curativa” en el cual el profesional mueve sus manos por encima del cuerpo del paciente, recogiendo o moviendo la “energía”, “concentrando” la “buena” energía y “descartando” la “mala”; usualmente sin tocar al paciente).

Sin mencionar la astrología, la cartas del tarot, y los psíquicos “certificados” en la TV.

El esposo de una buena amiga practica algunos de éstos. “Y bastante de ello trabaja”, dice ella, “así que yo no tengo dificultad en creer que lo que está proveyendo es un servicio útil y necesario. Además, él también es un hombre extremadamente responsable. Si por un momento él piensa que hay un problema médico fuera de su alcance, él rápidamente te dice que veas a un doctor de medicina occidental”. Sin embargo, esta misma mujer estaba horrorizada cuando su mejor amiga de muchos años en el

When “western doctors” regularly suggest that patients try alternative methods, either because they suspect that the patients want to, or that it won’t hurt, what has happened to the “scientific”? When I was discussing this with a friend, he said: “Well, some of it seems to make people feel better. What do you want? An article in *Scientific American*?”

To which my personal answer is: You’re damned right I do—and that’s only *after* half a dozen other refereed articles in notable, respected medical journals have appeared.

5) I am gambling on the high probability that AIDS is not spread orally, i. e., by mouth-to-penis contact or by penis-to-mouth contact, with or without the passage or ingesting of pre-cum or cum: I am gambling on the fact (a word I use rarely) that studies I have read in reputable scientific venues and that strike me as responsibly operationalized show no evidence that the virus

Medioeste fue diagnosticada con cáncer de mama e insistió en pasar un año en tratamiento médico “alternativo”. “Yo verdaderamente tuve que preguntarme cuánto Phil (sí, y yo) habíamos contribuido a eso. De hecho, solamente después de que su tercer herbalista anunció que el cáncer “no estaba respondiendo” y demandó que ella viera a un doctor de medicina occidental, fue cuando ella consintió. Después de una mastectomía doble y una larga sesión de quimioterapia, la mujer todavía está viva. “Pero”, dijo mi amiga, “simplemente no sabes”.

¿Y dónde está la ciencia en todo esto?

¿Qué ha pasado a lo “científico” cuando un “doctor de medicina occidental” regularmente sugiere que los pacientes prueben métodos alternativos, ya sea porque ellos sospechan que los pacientes quieren hacerlo, o porque no los va a dañar? Cuando yo estaba discutiendo esto con un amigo, él dijo: “Bueno, algo de eso parece que hace que la gente se sienta mejor. ¿Qué quieres? ¿Un artículo en *Scientific American*?”

A lo cual mi respuesta personal es: No tengas duda que sí lo quiero y eso solamente después de que una media docena de otros artículos arbitrados aparezcan en revistas médicas respetables.

5) Yo estoy apostando a la alta probabilidad de que el SIDA no se transmite oralmente, i. e., contacto de la boca con el pene o contacto del pene con la boca, con o sin el

can be passed through oral sex (mouth-to-penis; penis-to-mouth) between human males.

What do I mean by responsibly operationalized? First and foremost, that no hearsay is accepted as evidence within the study proper.

Consider the following logic: If what we are trying to determine is transmission routes for HIV (which behaviors will pass the virus on and which will not), then the one thing we cannot under any circumstance accept as evidence is asking someone who has been diagnosed as HIV-positive what sexual behavior transmitted the virus to him or her. The reason we can’t accept such statements as evidence is because to accept them assumes that the answer to our question is known, rather than unknown.

It has nothing to do with whether the informant is right or wrong, mistaken or accurate, honest or lying. Rather it introduces material that throws off the statistical balance of the portrait of behaviors.

A study that seeks to give an accurate statistical picture of which behaviors lead to seroconversion and which do not, has to start with a sampling of people all of whom test negative. Then, these people must be regularly asked about (and the answers tabulated in writing) the specific sexual acts each indulges in, over a period of time—three months, six month, a year. Finally, they must all be tested for seroconversion *again*, and the behaviors must be

paso o ingestión del pre-semen o semen: Yo estoy apostando al hecho (una palabra que uso raramente) que los estudios que he leído en lugares científicos respetables y que me impresionan como responsables en sus procedimientos operacionales, no muestran evidencia de que el virus pueda ser transmitido por el sexo oral (boca a pene; pene a boca) entre varones humanos.

¿Qué quiero decir con ser responsables con sus procedimientos operacionales? Antes que nada, que ningún rumor se acepta como evidencia dentro del estudio apropiado.

Considere la siguiente lógica: Si lo que estamos tratando de determinar son las rutas de transmisión del VIH (cuáles conductas pasarán el virus y cuáles no), entonces, la cosa que no podemos aceptar como evidencia bajo ninguna circunstancia es preguntarle a cualquier persona que ha sido diagnosticada VIH positivo cuál comportamiento sexual le transmitió el virus a él o a ella. La razón por la que no podemos aceptar dichas declaraciones como evidencias es porque al aceptarlas suponemos que la respuesta a nuestra pregunta es conocida, en lugar de desconocida.

No tiene nada que ver con que si la información es correcta o incorrecta, equivocada o precisa, honesta o una mentira. Tiene que ver con que introduce material que desequilibra el balance estadístico de la imagen de los comportamientos.

Closed for Repairs
All images by Eduardo Aparicio, from the series *Manholes*, 1991-94,
prints from color negative, dimensions variable



tabulated against the seroconversions and lack of seroconversions.

To my knowledge this sort of study—which I call a monitored study, which is to say, it accepts only monitored evidence and excludes hearsay—has only been done three times in the United States. The results of the first and largest of these studies was published as far back as 1987. Though the study was done in America, its results appeared in the British medical journal *The Lancet* for Saturday February 14th: “Risk Factors for Seroconversion to Human Immunodeficiency Virus Among Male Homosexuals,” by Kingsley, Kaslo, Rinaldo *et alia*, which I republished as an “Appendix” to my novel *The Mad Man* (Kasak Books, New York City), in 1995. It involved 2508 gay men, all of whom were sero-negative at the start of the study. At the end of six months, there had been 98 seroconversions among them.

Briefly, 95 of the men who seroconverted had indulged in receptive anal intercourse at least once. For the three others there is a chance of “misclassification,” i.e., they either did engage in receptive anal sex or were misreported. (Something about the study itself makes this a reasonable suggestion: the men’s reports were incomplete or the questions were poorly administered—easy enough to occur in two-and-a-half thousand cases.) Five seroconverters, indeed, had engaged in receptive anal intercourse *only* once during the six months of the study. As well, another population of 147 men in the study only engaged in receptive oral sex, *none* of whom

Un estudio que busque dar un panorama estadístico preciso de cuáles conductas llevan a la sero-conversión y cuáles no, tiene que empezar con una muestra de todas las personas que han dado pruebas negativas. Luego, a estas personas se les debe preguntar con regularidad sobre (y las respuestas tabuladas por escrito) los actos sexuales específicos que goza, en un período de tiempo (tres meses, seis meses, un año). Finalmente, todos deben recibir la prueba para la sero-conversión *otra vez*, y las conductas deben ser tabuladas junto a las sero-conversiones y a la falta de sero-conversiones.

Que yo sepa, este tipo de estudio (al cual yo llamo estudio de monitoreo, que quiere decir que acepta solamente evidencia monitoreada y excluye rumores) solamente se ha hecho tres veces en Estados Unidos. Los resultados del primer y más grande estudio fueron publicados hace tiempo, en 1987. Aunque el estudio fue hecho en América, sus resultados aparecieron en la revista médica británica *The Lancet*, un sábado 14 de febrero: “Factores de Riesgo de Sero-conversión con el Virus de Inmunodeficiencia Humana entre Hombres Homosexuales”, por Kingsley, Kaslo, Rinaldo, et alia, lo cual yo publiqué como un “apéndice” en mi novela *El hombre enloquecido* (Kasak Books, Ciudad de Nueva York), en 1995. Involucraba a 2.508 hombres gay, todos eran sero-negativos al inicio del estudio. Al final de los seis meses, hubieron 98 sero-conversiones entre ellos.

Brevemente, 95 de los hombres que se sero-

seroconverted. The study concluded that “Receptive anal intercourse was the only sexual practice shown to be independently associated with an increased risk of seroconversion to HIV in this study . . .” and “The absence of detectable risk for seroconversion due to receptive oral-genital intercourse is striking.”

Since the Kingsley, Kaslo, Rinaldo study there have been two other such studies—one published in JAMA (*The Journal of the American Medical Association*) in 1990. The test sample was a thousand male homosexuals from San Francisco. The third test became available on-line in 2000 with several hundred participants. The statistical portrait of transmission routes is the same for all three studies. No anomalies are reported between them, though the monitoring processes were notably different. In the JAMA study, the participants were monitored only at the beginning and the end of the study, but not throughout the entire period.

6) Why is basing one’s behavior (i.e., indulging in no unprotected anal intercourse with men whose HIV status is not known but freely indulging in unprotected oral sex) on such studies still very much a gamble—so great a gamble that one could not reasonably suggest that anyone else take the same one?

First, three studies are simply not enough to change a high probability into anything like a scientific certainty. But no more studies have been done. (No studies at all have been done

convirtieron habían gozado de penetración anal receptiva por lo menos una vez. Para los otros tres existe la posibilidad de una “clasificación incorrecta”, i.e., ya sea que sí tuvieron sexo anal receptivo y fueron reportados erróneamente. (Algo sobre el estudio en sí mismo hace que esto sea una sugerencia razonable: Los reportes de los hombres eran incompletos o las preguntas fueron administradas pobremente; muy fácil que ocurra en dos mil quinientos casos). Cinco seroconvertidos, realmente habían participado en penetración anal receptiva *solamente* una vez durante los seis meses del estudio. De igual manera, una población de 147 hombres en el estudio solamente había participado en sexo oral receptivo, ninguno de ellos se sero-convirtió. El estudio concluyó que “La penetración anal receptiva era la única práctica sexual que mostró ser asociada independientemente con el incremento del riesgo de sero-conversión con VIH en este estudio...” y “la ausencia de riesgos detectables para la sero-conversión por sexo oral genital es notable”.

Después del estudio de Kingsey, Kaslo y Rinaldo, ha habido dos estudios parecidos, uno publicado en JAMA (*The Journal of the American Medical Association*) en 1990. La muestra de la prueba fueron mil hombres homosexuales de San Francisco. El tercer estudio se hizo disponible en el Internet en el 2000, con cientos de participantes. El panorama estadístico de las rutas de transmisión es la misma en los tres estudios. No se reportan anomalías entre ellos, aunque los procesos de monitoreo fueron

with heterosexual women, so that there is no statistical evidence at all available that AIDS can be transmitted to women through vaginal sex—though there are barns full of hearsay.) Regularly, people send me “studies” in which the statistics wildly contravene those of these reports: this one with six hundred participants, seven of whom “developed AIDS from oral sex” (and the tester has no doubt about their “honesty”), or a friend of a friend (name unknown) who “certainly got it orally.” In all cases, however, it is fairly clear that these are hearsay, at least in the manner described above. Someone, however honest, is making a judgment—either the tester or the participant—from statements gathered about infection *after* seroconversion.

Two points: seven out of six hundred (more than one percent) contravenes the statistic of the monitored studies that *have* been done so wildly that any statistician would have to raise an eyebrow. Second, in none of the cases that have been shown to me does the set up of the “test” seem even vaguely aware that hearsay *must* be operationally weeded out of the “evidence” if the study is to be meaningful.

7) Let me state it right out: There is another aspect of the “gamble” that is equally problematic to discuss—indeed, it is *why* I want operationalized information based on refereed articles in respected medical journals. A gamble suggests that, for whatever set of reasons, you make your choice, you stake your claim, and you stick to it. You don’t change in the middle.

notablemente diferentes. En el estudio de *JAMA*, los participantes fueron monitoreados solamente al principio y al final del estudio, pero no durante todo el periodo.

6) ¿Por qué sigue siendo una gran apuesta basar nuestras conductas (i.e., gozar del coito anal con protección con hombres cuyo estatus de VIH es desconocido pero gozar libremente del sexo oral sin protección) en dichos estudios; una gran apuesta que razonablemente uno no puede sugerir que otros también la hagan?

Primero, tres estudios simplemente no son suficiente para cambiar una alta probabilidad en algo de certeza científica. Pero no se han realizado más estudios. (No se ha hecho ningún estudio con mujeres heterosexuales, así que no existen, para nada, evidencias estadísticas de que el SIDA puede ser transmitido a las mujeres por sexo vaginal; aunque existen montones de rumores.) Regularmente, la gente me envía “estudios” cuyas estadísticas exageradamente contradicen las de estos reportes: Este con seiscientos participantes, siete de ellos “desarrollaron el SIDA por el sexo oral” (y el ensayador no duda de la “honestidad” de ellos), o un amigo de un amigo (nombre desconocido) que “con seguridad lo contrajo oralmente”. En todos los casos, sin embargo, es bastante claro que estos son rumores, por lo menos en la manera que fueron descritos anteriormente. Alguien, si bien honesto, está juzgando, ya sea al ensayador o al participante, basado en declaraciones recogidas sobre la infección *después* de la sero-

Unfortunately, however, life does not work that way.

But because it doesn’t, that is precisely *why* I want the information that I base the explanations of what goes on in my life to be rigorously operationalized. All information that falls outside such rigorously operationalized standards, we call hearsay.

I accept hearsay evidence into my life and base some of my behavior on it all the time. When I decide whether to go to see a movie or not, the evidence that goes into my decision is ninety percent hearsay. I am also blatantly aware that fifty to ninety-five percent of that hearsay evidence is likely to be not the estimation of friends who have actually seen the picture and returned with a considered judgment, but comes rather from the movie marketers themselves, who



Don't Leave Me This Way

conversión.

Dos puntos: Siete de seiscientos (más del uno por ciento) contravienen las estadísticas de los estudios monitoreados que *se han hecho* desordenadamente, que harían fruncir el ceño a cualquier estadista. Segundo, en ninguno de los casos que me han mostrado la preparación de la “prueba” parece ni siquiera vagamente enterada de que el rumor debe eliminarse operacionalmente de la “evidencia”, si es que el estudio va a ser significativo.

7) Permítanme decirlo claramente: Existe otro aspecto de la “apuesta” que es igualmente problemático discutir; en verdad, es el porqué yo quiero información operacional basada en artículos arbitrados en revistas médicas respetables. Una apuesta sugiere que, cualquiera sea el conjunto de razones, tú tomas tus opciones, delimitas tus posiciones, y te aferras a ella. Tú no la cambias a medio camino.

Desafortunadamente, sin embargo, la vida no funciona de esa manera.

Pero porque no lo hace, es precisamente el *porqué* yo quiero que la información en la que yo baso las explicaciones de lo que pasa en mi vida sean rigurosamente operacionales. Toda la información que cae fuera de dicha operacionalidad rigurosa estándar, la llamamos rumor.

have spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on newspaper advertisements, posters, and TV commercials to make the film's presence known and to make it seem of interest at whatever level they can. That is to say, not only is it hearsay, it is blatantly biased hearsay, with a hugely commercial motive that completely swamps any concept of truth or accuracy.

If the problem of biased hearsay were just a matter of movies, than life would be a wonderful thing. But in a consumer society, biased hearsay controls pretty much the entire field of evidence I have to make my decisions on for pretty much any commodity I purchase or expose myself to; it *is* the field of the arts, popular to high-brow. It *is* the field of all house-hold utilities, foods, and daily comforts. It is entirely the field of politics.

What happens to medical knowledge in such a society? What happens when there is a disease, such as AIDS, which can be contracted in the pursuit of public pleasure and is still incurable, if not quite as irrevocably fatal as it was a decade ago?

8) Highly operationalized evidence is what allows planes to fly, antibiotics to kill bacteria, car engines to turn over, mills to grind (exceedingly small or otherwise), TVs to work, cloth to be woven, lights to come on when we flip the switch, cell phones and computers to function, food to come out of cans unspoiled—and books to be readable, on all levels. (I know of no one in the book business, writing, publishing, printing,

Yo acepto rumores como evidencia en mi vida y baso algunas de mis conductas en eso todo el tiempo. Cuando decido si voy o no a ver una película, el noventa por ciento de la evidencia que conduce a mi decisión es por rumor. Yo también estoy evidentemente conciente que del cincuenta al noventa y cinco por ciento de esa evidencia de rumores es más probable que no sea la estimación de amigos que en realidad han presenciado la película y regresaron con un juicio considerado, sino que viene del mercadeo de las mismas películas que han gastado cientos de miles de dólares en anuncios en periódicos, carteles, y comerciales en la TV para que se sepa de la película y para hacerla parecer interesante a cualquier nivel que puedan. Esto quiere decir que no sólo es un rumor, sino que es un rumor parcial influenciado, con un enorme motivo comercial que hunde completamente cualquier concepto sobre la verdad o veracidad.

Si el problema del rumor parcial fuese solamente una cosa de películas, entonces la vida sería una cosa maravillosa. Pero en una sociedad consumista, el rumor parcial controla más o menos todo el campo de evidencia en el que yo tengo que tomar mis decisiones casi para toda la mercancía que compro o a la que me expongo. El campo de las artes *es* popular para los intelectuales. Es el campo de los servicios públicos de la casa, las comidas, y las comodidades diarias. Es completamente el campo de la política.

¿Qué le pasa al conocimiento médico en dicha

who is not aware of the falling off of the professional competency in proof-reading over the last twenty-five years—which is purely a lowering of operationalized standards.) One might even say that a web of operationalized evidence nets the society we live in within a grid of expectations that even the most skeptical philosopher might call “truth” (or something close to it); we trust to it practically from the moment we first glance at a clock in the morning, before rising from bed, and throughout the day, along with whatever work is done, whatever play is indulged in.

Sometimes this grid fails. Perhaps it is simply a phenomenon of the contemporary world: But whenever we believe we have fallen out of the grid, hearsay inflates at a rate that to call exponential is the most inadequate of metaphors.

9) The last time, during “public sex,” someone whom I'd never seen or met before put his cock up my ass and came was during the spring of 1981. It was in a place called Fantasy Land, on the corner of Eighth Avenue and 47th Street, in the same building as a pornographic movie theater, then called the Hollywood. From the street, you entered a minuscule lobby where the freight elevator for the building opened up. You rode up to the 4th floor and got off in a room that was a small gay bookstore, which also sold male videos and sex toys. For the three dollar admission, you went through a door into a loft space that had been decorated to look like Central Park's “Rambles” at night: park benches,

sociedad? ¿Qué pasa cuando existe una enfermedad, como el SIDA, que se puede contraer en la búsqueda del placer público y que es todavía incurable, si es que no es del todo irrevocablemente fatal como lo era hace una década?

8) La evidencia sumamente operacional es lo que permite que los aviones vuelen, los antibióticos maten bacterias, los motores de los carros enciendan, los molinos muelan (excediendo lo pequeño o lo contrario), los TV funcionen, las telas sean tejidas, las luces se enciendan cuando nosotros movemos el interruptor, los teléfonos móviles y las computadoras funcionen, las comidas salgan de las latas sin estar malas; y los libros que sean legibles en todos los niveles. (No conozco a nadie en el negocio de los libros, la escritura, la publicación, la imprenta, que no sea conocedor de la caída de la competencia profesional en la corrección de texto durante los últimos veinte cinco años; lo que es puramente una reducción de los estándares operacionales). Uno hasta podría decir que la telaraña de evidencia operacional teje a la sociedad en la que vivimos dentro de una cuadrícula de expectativas que hasta el filósofo más escéptico podría llamar “verdad” (o algo parecido); nosotros confiamos en esto desde el momento en que miramos al reloj por primera vez en la mañana, antes de levantarnos de la cama, y durante el día, junto con cualquier trabajo que se haga, cualquier diversión que se disfrute.

Algunas veces esta cuadrícula falla. Quizá

park lights, plastic bushes, and usually half a dozen guys wandering around who had come there a few minutes before—though people rarely did anything, at least when I was there.

Off to one side, around a corner and on a raised platform, stood a wall of padlocked gym lockers, a wrack of weights, and a bench press—presumably this was for those who fantasized sex in a high school or college locker room. I don't believe I ever saw anyone even hanging out in this area.

To the back was a stairwell leading down into another loft area on the floor below, this one fairly roomy. The walls were black. A jukebox stood to one side, near a couple of pinball



Illegal in Texas

simplemente sea un fenómeno del mundo contemporáneo: Pero cuando nosotros creemos que nos hemos salido de la cuadrícula, el rumor se infla a una velocidad que llamarla exponencial es la metáfora más inadecuada.

9) La última vez que durante el “sexo público” alguien a quien yo nunca había visto o conocido antes puso su verga en mi culo y acabo, fue durante la primavera de 1981. Fue en un lugar conocido como La Tierra de la Fantasía, en la esquina de la Octava Avenida y la calle 47, en el mismo edificio donde estaba el cine pornográfico que en esos tiempos se llama Hollywood. Desde la calle, tú entrabas a una minúscula sala de espera donde el ascensor de carga del edificio se abría.

Tú subías hasta el 4to piso y te salías en un cuarto que era una pequeña librería gay, que también vendía videos de hombres y juguetes sexuales. Por los tres dólares para la admisión, tú entrabas por una puerta que daba a un espacio sin divisiones que había sido decorado para parecer como las “Ramblas” del Parque Central en la noche: Bancas del parque, luces del parque, arbustos de plástico y por lo general una media docena de tipos que andaban por allí que habían llegado unos minutos antes; aunque la gente rara vez hacía algo, por lo menos cuando yo estuve allí.

A un lado, al dar la vuelta en una esquina, en una plataforma elevada estaba una pared de vestuarios con candados, unas pesas, una banca para pectorales (supuestamente esto era para aquellos que fantaseaban con el sexo en un vestuario del bachillerato o la universidad). No

machines (not plugged in). Padded with industrial carpeting, a number of waist-high shelves were fixed to two of the walls—with ladders up to a second tier, as though they were bunk beds. At one side was a glass-fronted concession counter, which was completely empty. My sense is that this was an area the owners had not yet completed—perhaps it was to be a “gay bar” or a “theater lobby.” Because you could sit or even stretch out on the shelves around the wall, it's the only place I ever had actual sex, or saw people having actual sex in the dozen odd times I visited.

In November '81, I was a stocky thirty-nine year old—with glasses.

One Thursday afternoon at about four thirty, when I had dropped in for the afternoon, a fairly ordinary-looking Hispanic fellow, in a tweed cap and tan slacks, half a dozen years my junior, came onto me very heavily—and, soon, had my jeans down about my ankles and, as we stretched out on one of the shelves, grunting and thrusting, shot his load up my ass. As I recall, he was not particularly friendly. I think, once he was finished, he smiled and asked if I was all right. But by the time I had my pants up, he was gone. I recall thinking, as I sat on the rug-covered ledge, “I could have done without that.”

Generally, I tend to get off on what gets my partner off. By and large, however, getting fucked is not my particular thing. During a sex life in which I was easily averaging between a dozen and

creo que haya visto a alguien en esta área alguna vez.

En la parte trasera había una escalera que llevaba hacia otro cuarto sin divisiones en el piso de abajo, éste era bastante espacioso. Las paredes eran negras. Un tocadiscos automático de moneda estaba a un lado, cerca de un par de maquinas de pin-ball (no enchufadas). Cubiertos con carpeta industrial, en dos de las paredes se encontraban unos estantes a la altura de la cintura, con gradas hacia arriba a un segundo nivel, como si fueran literas. A un lado estaba un mostrador de concesionarios con la parte delantera de vidrio, que estaba completamente vacío. Yo presentía que esta era una área que los dueños todavía no habían completado; quizá estaba supuesto para ser un “bar gay” o una “sala de espera de teatro”. Como tú podías sentarte y hasta estirarte en los estantes en las paredes, fue en el único lugar donde tuve sexo de verdad, o vi a personas tener sexo de verdad en las raras docenas de veces que lo visité.

En noviembre del 81, yo era un robusto de treinta y nueve años de edad, con lentes.

Una tarde de jueves alrededor de las cuatro treinta, cuando yo había llegado en la tarde, un tipo hispano con apariencia bastante ordinaria, con una gorra tejida de lana y con pantalones color bronceado, media docena de años menor que yo, me embistió fuertemente y, rápidamente, tenía mis jeans abajo por mis tobillos y, cuando nos estirábamos en uno de los estantes, gruñendo

three-dozen encounters of one sort or another a week, I was probably indulging in insertive anal sex perhaps ten times a year, and receptive anal sex perhaps twice a year. The overwhelming number of my encounters—and the ones I enjoyed the most—were oral, with receptive to active three to one.

Perhaps four months later, I heard my first mention of the “gay cancer,” Kaposi’s sarcoma, which had begun appearing, only in the last few months, with unprecedented frequency among gay men.

10) Sometimes in 1983, after I had heard half a dozen mentions of it on various news reports, I asked a doctor about AIDS. He was a young man in his early thirties, who had recently finished his residency and was working in a clinic that specialized in cancer research. “Kaposi’s sarcoma?” I asked him. “What is it? They keep referring to lesions, but where do they show up?”

“I think it’s some kind of skin cancer,” he said. “This stuff they’re talking about is supposed to be transmitted sexually: I would imagine the lesions show up around the genitals.”

Is there anything scientific in the young doctor’s statement?

11) Kaposi’s sarcoma is a cancer of the mesodermic capillary linings. Often about the size of mussel or clam shells, its irregular purple lesions show up on the skin, anywhere on the

y envistiéndonos, terminó en mi culo. Como lo recuerdo, él no fue particularmente amigable. Yo creo que, ya que había terminado, sonrió y preguntó si yo estaba bien. Pero para cuando yo me había subido los pantalones, ya se había ido. Recuerdo haber pensado, mientras estaba sentado en la repisa cubierta con alfombra, “Yo pude haber estado bien sin eso”.

Generalmente, yo tiendo a terminar con cosas que hacen terminar a mi pareja. Por lo general, sin embargo, que me cojan no es mi gusto en particular. Durante una vida sexual en la que fácilmente yo estaba teniendo un promedio de una a tres docenas de encuentros de cualquier tipo por semana, probablemente estaba disfrutando del sexo anal insertivo diez veces al año, y recibía sexo anal receptivo dos veces al año. El inmenso número de mis encuentros (y los que más disfruté) fueron orales, de receptivo a activo, tres a uno.

Quizá cuatro meses más tarde, yo oí mi primer mención sobre el “cáncer gay”, sarcoma de Kaposi, que había empezado a aparecer, solamente en los últimos meses, entre los hombres gay en cantidades sin precedente.

10) Algunas veces en 1983, después de haber escuchado media docena de menciones en varios reportes de periódicos, le pregunté a un doctor sobre el SIDA. El era un hombre joven en sus treinta, que recientemente había terminado su residencia y estaba trabajando en una clínica que se especializaba en la investigación del cáncer. “¿Sarcoma de Kaposi?”, le pregunté. ¿“Qué es? Ellos continúan diciendo que son lesiones, ¿pero

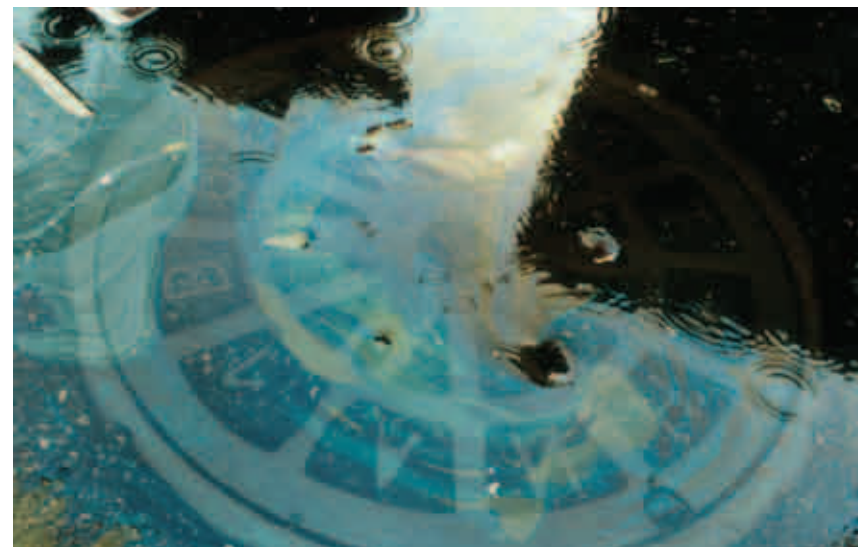
body, arms, face or torso, though most often they appear on the lower legs.

Three or four years after I spoke to my young doctor, the above would be a “scientific fact” most urban gay men would “know.”

12) *Chip, how many unprotected oral receptive encounters have you had since 1982?*

I can’t be sure, but I would say a conservative estimate is that between ’82 and ’88, when I started at the University of Massachusetts, I was having between three and five hundred encounters a year. Between ’88 and 2000, the number probably went down to about a hundred-seventy-five a year: Heavy cruising was limited to the summers. Since I’ve been teaching in Philadelphia, thanks to venues such as the Sansom Theater and the Forum, it’s probably gone back up to at least two-hundred-fifty a year. Roughly that makes somewhere between 5,800 and 7,000.

While my HIV test is not, certainly everything



en dónde aparecen?”

“Creo que es un tipo de cáncer de la piel”, dijo. “Esta cosa de la que hablan es supuestamente transmitida sexualmente: Me imagino que las lesiones aparecen alrededor de los genitales”.

¿Hay algo científico en la declaración de este joven doctor?

11) El sarcoma de Kaposi es un cáncer de la cubierta capilar mesodérmica. A menudo tienen el tamaño de la concha del mejillón o de las almejas, sus lesiones púrpura irregulares aparecen en la piel, en cualquier parte del cuerpo, brazos, cara o torso, aunque es más frecuente que aparezcan en las partes inferiores de las piernas.

Tres o cuatro años después de que hablara con mi doctor, lo antes mencionado sería un “hecho científico” que la mayoría de lo hombres gay urbanos conocerían.

12) *Chip, ¿cuántos encuentros de sexo oral receptivo sin protección has tenido desde 1982?*

Yo no puedo estar seguro, pero diría que un estimado conservador es entre el 82 y el 88, cuando empecé en la Universidad de Massachusetts, yo estaba teniendo entre trescientos y quinientos encuentros por año. Entre el 88 y el 2000, el número probablemente bajó hasta más o menos unos ciento setenta y cinco por año. El ligue más fuerte estaba limitado a los veranos. Desde

else I have said above must be considered hearsay: I could be crazy. I could be mistaken. (Few of these encounters—or what I did during them—I wrote down.) I could be making it all up—from either the best, or from the worst, intentions.

For what it’s worth, however, mistaken or not, I perceive what I say as “the truth.”

13) In the warm late afternoon of May 8th, in 2004, in Philadelphia, I wandered down 12th Street’s red brick sidewalk to the corner of Pine Street, by the occasional boxed glass windows slanting out from the cellars of the old houses, under the trees, to Giovanni’s Room, the gay bookstore on the corner, where, later that evening, I was scheduled to read from my autobiography, *The Motion of Light in Water*, which had just been returned to print by the University of Minnesota Press. I had told a number of my students at Temple University that the reading was at seven o’clock. Dutifully, they’d promised to come. A month before, my doctor had changed my hypertension medication—putting me back on an Ace-inhibitor, Lesiprinol: and, as when I had taken Vasotec, a few years before, I had developed a slight but persistent cough: five percent of people who take it do. It seemed to be my pattern. Most of the time it was okay, but two or three times a day it produced a two or three minute coughing fit: not what you wanted to happen in the midst of a reading.

When, at about five-thirty, I stepped up into the

que estuve enseñando en Philadelphia, gracias a los lugares como el Cine Sansom y el Forum, probablemente ha subido a por lo menos doscientos cincuenta por año.

Aproximadamente, eso hace que sean entre 5.800 y 7.000.

Mientras que mi prueba del VIH no lo es, por seguro todo lo demás que he dicho antes debe considerarse un rumor: Yo podría estar loco. Yo podría estar equivocado. (Pocos de estos encuentros, o lo que hice durante ellos, los escribí). Yo podría estar inventándolo todo ya sea con las mejores o peores intenciones.

Para lo que vale, sin embargo, equivocado o no, yo percibo que lo que digo es “la verdad”.

13) En una tarde cálida al final del día del 8 de mayo de 2004, en Philadelphia, yo vagaba en las aceras de ladrillos rojos de la calle 12va, hacia la esquina de la calle Pine, por las encajadas ventanas de vidrio ocasionalmente inclinadas hacia afuera desde las salas de depósitos de las casas viejas, debajo de los árboles, hacia el Cuarto de Geovanni, la librería gay en la esquina, en donde, más tarde ese día, yo estaba programado para leer mi autobiografía, *The Motion of Light in Water (El movimiento de la luz en el agua)*, la cual acaba de ser enviada a imprenta por la casa editora de la universidad de Minnesota. Yo les había dicho a un número de mis estudiantes en Temple University que mi lectura era a las siete en punto. Obedientemente prometieron llegar. Un mes antes, mi doctor me había cambiado mi

bookstore, I told the clerk I’d just wanted to stop by to tell them that everything was on track.

But, even as I was talking with the clerk, with her blond tipped hair and nose ring, I noticed the flyer lying on the counter that announced my reading said 6:30pm!

Yes, the reading was not at seven but a half an hour earlier. That’s what had gone out on all the announcements to the various local papers.

“Oh, dear,” I said. “I’m glad I stopped by, then.”

I figured I had time to go home—I lived a block-and-a-half away—grab a quick shower and change my clothes. Wondering how many of my students would come in half an hour late, that’s what I did. At six-thirty, in the circle of folding chairs set around the gray rug in the upstairs space, among the wall bookshelves, only five people had turned out to hear me. One was a young sociologist from Temple, John, who had come with a friend, and one, Chuck, was a thirty-one year old English graduate student friend. The other two were a young, pleasant-faced couple, male and female.

With my audience of four (plus the owner and a book clerk), the reading took about forty minutes. No one came in at seven. A fairly lively discussion bloomed afterwards, however, which ran on another forty minutes among the half-dozen of us there. When it was done, the sociologist, John, and his friend and Chuck

medicamento para la hipertensión, recetándome de nuevo un inhibidor-Ace, Lesiprinol; y, al igual que cuando había tomado Vasotec, unos años antes, yo había desarrollado una pequeña, pero consistente tos: Cinco por ciento de las personas que lo toman lo desarrollan. Parecía que era mi patrón. La mayoría del tiempo estaba bien, pero de dos a tres veces al día producía un ataque de tos que duraba de dos a tres minutos: No es lo que quieres que pase en medio de una lectura.

Alrededor de las cinco y treinta, cuando entré en la librería, le dije a la empleada que yo sólo me detuve para decirles que todo estaba en marcha.

Pero, hasta cuando estaba hablando con la empleada, con su pelo de puntas rubias y su arete en la nariz, vi que el volante en el mostrador que anunciaba la lectura decía a las ¡6:30 p.m.!

Sí, la lectura no era a las siete si no media hora más temprano. Eso es lo que había salido en todos los anuncios de los diferentes periódicos locales.

“Ay bendito”, dije. “Que bueno que pasé, entonces”.

Pensé que tenía tiempo para ir a casa (vivía a una cuadra y media) a bañarme y cambiarme de ropa. Eso fue lo que hice, preguntándome cuántos de mis estudiantes vendrían media hora tarde. A las seis treinta, en el círculo de las sillas plegadizas arregladas alrededor de una alfombra gris en el espacio de arriba, entre los libreros, solamente

cornered me and suggested that we go off to get some dinner at a bar/restaurant called Fergie's a few blocks north, just up from Walnut on Sansom Street.

As we were walking up the tree-lined sidewalk, the leaves silent in summer under the darkening sky, John introduced me to his friend, a little blond bull of a weightlifter—probably in his middle thirties. He wore an orange T-shirt and marine fatigue pants. His head was shaved and he had a boyishly friendly face. “This is B.J. He’s a prostitute and porn star. I had him in to talk to my class last week . . .” And little B.J. gave me a warm handshake in a large meaty hand.

Our graduate student, Chuck (straight and currently having some problems with his live-in girlfriend, which is why she hadn’t come), looked quite as surprised as I felt—though I did a better job of not showing it. (Only two weeks before at the CUNY Graduate Center up in New York someone else had been introduced to me more or less the same way.) The conversation with B.J. that evening was memorable: B.J. was HIV positive—and had been so for the last ten years, he was quick to tell us. He is certain he picked up the virus through oral sex: “Oh, yeah. Lot’s of people say you can’t get it orally. But, believe me, I’m walking proof that you can.”

In what is certainly more than a hundred conversations over the last twenty years with people who were HIV positive, while I have talked with numerous people who were fairly sure

cinco personas habían llegado a escucharme. Uno era un joven sociólogo de Temple, John, quien había llegado con un amigo, y otro, Chuck, era un amigo inglés estudiante graduado, de treinta y un años de edad. Los otros dos eran una joven pareja, hombre y mujer, de caras agradables.

Con mi audiencia de cuatro (más el dueño y el dependiente de la librería), la lectura tomó más o menos cuarenta minutos. *Nadie* llegó a las siete. Sin embargo, una discusión bastante animada floreció después entre nosotros, la que duró unos cuarenta minutos más. Cuando había terminado, el sociólogo, John y su amigo y Chuck me arrinconaron y sugirieron que fuéramos a cenar a un bar/restaurante llamado Fergie’s, unas cuantas cuadras al norte, justo adelante de Walnut, en la calle Sansom.

Mientras caminábamos en la acera de líneas de árboles con las hojas silenciosas en el verano, debajo de un oscurecido cielo, John me presentó a su amigo, un pequeño toro rubio, levanta-pesa, probablemente en sus treintas. El vestía una camiseta naranja con unos pantalones de faena de marino. Tenía la cabeza rapada y una cara juvenil amigable. “Este es B.J. Él es un prostituto y una estrella porno. Lo tuve en mi clase para que les platicara la semana pasada...” Y el pequeño B.J. me dio un saludo de manos cálido con una enorme y gruesa mano.

Nuestro estudiante graduado, Chuck (hétero y que actualmente está teniendo problemas con su

Friday Night Fantasy Date



you *could* get the virus orally, B.J. is the first person I personally have spoken who claimed to have gotten it that way.

The conversation went on through dinner—not an argument, by any means. I am, after all, gambling. I picked at B.J.’s and John’s long, limp French fries, darker than McDonald’s. B. J. and Chuck each took a polite handful of my stained-gold pop-corn shrimp. I could always be wrong. I did a lot of questioning and a lot of listening.

Elbows on the dark wood table under the shadows from his pumped-up forearms, B.J. was very knowledgeable about the biochemistry of the human immunodeficiency virus—though he knew about none of the three transmission route tests and was surprised to find out what they

novia que vive con él, y por lo cual no había llegado), se veía tan sorprendido como yo me sentía; aunque yo disimulé mejor que él al no mostrar mi sorpresa. (Solamente dos semanas antes en el Centro Graduado de CUNY en Nueva York me presentaron a alguien más o menos de la misma forma.) La conversación con B.J. esa noche fue memorable: B.J. era VIH positivo, y lo había sido por lo menos durante los últimos diez años. El está seguro que *contrajo* el virus a través del sexo oral: “Ah, sí. Mucha gente dice que no puedes contraerlo oralmente. Pero, créeme, yo soy prueba viviente de que sí puedes”.

Lo que es cierto es que en más de cien conversaciones durante los últimos veinte años con gente que eran VIH positiva, mientras que he conversado con numerosas personas que estaban bastante seguras que tú podías contraer el virus oralmente, B.J. es la primer persona con la que personalmente he hablado que afirma haberlo contraído de esa manera.

La conversación continuó durante toda la cena, ni una pelea, de ninguna manera. Después de todo, yo estoy apostando. Cojo las papas fritas delgadas, blandas y más oscuras que las de McDonald, de B.J. y Jonh,. B.J. y Chuck, tomaron cada uno un puñado moderado de mis camarones de rosetas doradas. Yo siempre puedo estar equivocado. Hice muchas preguntas y escuché bastante.

Con sus codos sobre la mesa de madera negra debajo de las sombras de sus musculosos

actually said. He was surprised that I knew a fair amount about the biochemistry too: which protein receptors the virus affixes to on the cell membrane, which proteins it has to push aside in order to do it.

Most of that information I first learned when my daughter, who is now thirty, was in the 9th grade and doing a school report on the organic chemistry of the HIV virus; much of it came from a very thorough *Scientific American* article that we had read and reread. I'd typed up her report for her. But just because that information is seventeen years old does not mean it's out of date, any more than is Kingley, Kaslo, Rinaldo *et al.*

As a gay porn star and prostitute—and probably because, frankly, he's gorgeous—B.J. has had a *great* deal more sex than I have, by a large factor. And it's been a lot wilder. The number of encounters I've had in the last ten years you could—for B.J.—easily multiply by three, five, seven . . . We found this out quickly, at dinner. Much of his professional work was before he seroconverted, back, at age 23, though he has given up on neither profession. He is rigorous about performing with condoms. He, too, calls himself an AIDS educator (as well as a sex worker), and says that he is deeply concerned with getting information out to people.

When Chuck and I finally walked John and B.J. back to John's ground floor flat, and we had left them at John's apartment, with its piles of books around the walls, I said to Chuck: "Oh, you

antebrazos, B.J., era bastante conocedor sobre la bioquímica del virus del SIDA; aunque no sabía sobre ninguna de las tres pruebas de la ruta de transmisión y estaba sorprendido de lo que en realidad decían. Él estaba completamente sorprendido que yo supiera bastante sobre la bioquímica también: A qué receptores de proteínas se pega el virus en la membrana de la célula, cuáles proteínas tiene que hacer a un lado para poder hacerlo.

Mucha de esa información la aprendí por primera vez cuando mi hija, que ahora tiene treinta años, estaba en noveno grado y hacía un reporte de la escuela sobre la química orgánica del VIH; gran parte del reporte salió de un artículo bastante completo del *Scientific American* que habíamos leído y re-leído. Yo le había escrito a máquina el reporte. Pero solamente porque esa información tiene diecisiete años, no significa que está pasada de fecha, no más que Kingley, Kaslo, Rinald, et al.

Como una estrella porno y prostituto (y probablemente porque, francamente, él es hermosísimo) B.J. ha tenido muchísimo *más* sexo del que yo he tenido, por un enorme factor. Y ha sido más salvaje. El número de encuentros que he tenido durante los últimos diez años podría, para B.J., fácilmente multiplicarse por tres, cinco, siete. . . Nos dimos cuenta de esto rápidamente, en la cena. Gran parte de su trabajo profesional fue antes de sero-convertirse, entonces a la edad de 23 años, aunque ya dejó ambas profesiones. Él es riguroso sobre hacerlo con condones. Él, también se hace llamar educador del SIDA (al

know—I just thought what I *really* should have asked B.J.: Was he ever in an orgy or orgy-like situation, around the time or in the months before he seroconverted, either on a job or during a film shoot, where someone who had taken a load of cum in his mouth might have licked out his asshole within five, ten, or fifteen minutes. I think *that* would have to count for getting the virus anally—though he might have been unaware of it, or not even noted it—because no one stuck a dick up his ass. Of course that's something that, if it happened to him, he might not even have remembered it. But I *still* think, from the kinds of things he was talking about in his general sex life, there's a greater statistical chance that he picked the virus up that way than that he got it through sucking. The problem is, straight people—who, alas, are the ones doing most of the research—don't think of questions like that."

Under darkened trees, Chuck said: "Jesus Christ, Chip—I have *never* heard people talk about sex the way *you* guys were talking about it!" He had been silent all through the heated and vigorous dinner conversation about numbers, positions, encounters, when and where . . . "I mean, never—in my *life!* Over a *hundred* partners a year . . .! I didn't even know there *was* sex like that. I mean, people actually *doing* it. My *God!*—! And you say you're on the *low* end of gay activity, because you're getting old . . .!"

I wasn't even sure he'd had heard my question.

igual que trabajador del sexo), y dice que él está profundamente preocupado en hacer llegar la información a la gente.

Cuando Chuck y yo finalmente encaminamos a John y B.J. a la planta baja, y los dejamos en el apartamento de John, con el montón de libros en las paredes, le dije a Chuck: "Ah, sabes, acabo de pensar en lo que en realidad le debería haber preguntado a B.J.: ¿Estuvo alguna vez en una orgía o en una situación parecida a una orgía, en esos tiempos o en los meses antes de su sero-conversión, ya sea en un trabajo durante una filmación, donde alguien que hubiera recibido el semen en su boca puedo haberle lamido el culo a los cinco, diez o quince minutos? Yo pienso que eso debería de contar como recibir el virus analmente; aunque él pudo haber estado inconsciente de eso, o ni siquiera lo haya notado, porque nadie le metió la verga en el culo. Claro, eso es algo que, si le pasó a él, tal vez ni lo recuerde. Pero todavía pienso, por las cosas de las que estaba hablando de su vida sexual en general, que existe estadísticamente una mayor probabilidad que él contrajo el virus de esa manera a que él lo haya contraído por mamar. El problema es la gente hétero, que, ay, están haciendo la mayoría de las investigaciones, no piensan en preguntas como esa".

Debajo de unos árboles oscurecidos, Chuck dijo: "¡Bendito, Chip, yo nunca he escuchado a gente hablar sobre el sexo de la manera en que ustedes estaban hablando!". Él había estado callado durante toda la candente y vigorosa conversación

14) A few days later, I left Philadelphia specifically to go up and visit an old fuck buddy of twenty years standing in upstate New York. He met me in his truck at the train station, and we went to get a motel room. For the past two years (and past two years alone), we have been having unprotected anal sex. Why? Because he really likes it. Somewhat to my surprise, I found I really like it too—though, since '81, he's the only one I've ever done it with. He has showed me his HIV test: It reads the same as mine, and he too gets tested every year. He swears up and down that he has not been fucked since he was twenty. For half a dozen character-related reasons, I believe him. Now in his mid-forties, he's pretty set in his sexual ways—though what he does, he does spectacularly well. He's a working-class white guy, Catholic, with a thing for older black men. A hot and heavy six-week affair back when he was twenty-eight and I was forty-five now simmers along at a couple of phone calls a month and two or three meetings a year—often less. He still lives in a trailer park with his parents and a shifting population of cats, nieces, and nephews of several shades and ethnicities. (His older sister had/has the same predilection for non-caucasians as he does; and grandma loves them all—and has raised most of them.) Those two or three times a year I have sex with him, it's wild and wonderful and a great change from my main squeeze of fourteen years. And sometimes you really just have to trust people, especially if they are old friends—and this is someone who is an older friend than even my steady life companion, with whom sex is regular, always

de la cena, sobre números, posiciones, encuentros, cuándo y dónde... “¡Digo, nunca en mi vida! ¡Más de cien parejas al año...! Yo ni siquiera sabía que existía ese tipo de sexo. Digo, la gente en verdad haciéndolo. ¡Dios mío! ¡Y tú dices que tú estás en el declive de la actividad gay porque te estás poniendo viejo...!

Yo ni estaba seguro si él había escuchado mi pregunta.

14) Después de un par de días, salí de Philadelphia específicamente para ir a visitar a un viejo sexo-amigol de veinte años de suplente al norte del estado de Nueva York. Él me encontró con su camión en la estación de tren, y nos fuimos a conseguir un cuarto de motel. Durante los últimos dos años (y solamente durante los dos últimos años) nosotros habíamos estado teniendo sexo anal sin protección. ¿Por qué? Porque a él verdaderamente le gusta. Para mi sorpresa, me di cuenta que a mi me gusta también, aunque desde el 81 él es el único con quien lo he hecho. Me mostró la prueba del VIH. Tenía el mismo resultado que la mía, y también se hace la prueba cada año. Jura que no ha sido cogido desde los veinte años. Por media docena de razones relacionadas a la personalidad, yo le creo. Ahora, a mitad de sus cuarentas, él está bastante establecido en sus maneras sexuales, aunque lo que él hace, lo hace espectacularmente bien. Él es un hombre blanco de clase trabajadora, católico, con una obsesión con hombres viejos negros. Un candente y fuerte amorío de seis

oral, and, because it's what both of us really like a lot as day-to-day fare, is always reassuring and emotionally fulfilling.

In terms of the gamble, however, one could easily say the unprotected anal sex that has crept into my last year-and-a-half visits with my fuck buddy is insane—or that it introduces an insane factor. I will be the first to admit it. But there it is. Factor it in.



Whitehaven

15) A day after leaving upstate New York, back in Philadelphia, I dropped in at the Sansom Street movie theater, where I sucked off three guys. One came in my mouth. Two didn't.

16) Over the next week I developed a major sore throat. This, I thought, has got to be strep. And

semanas en aquel entonces, cuando él tenía veintiocho años y yo treinta y cinco, ahora se sosiega en un par de llamadas telefónicas al mes y dos o tres encuentros al año; a menudo menos. El todavía vive en un parque de trailers con sus padres y con una población cambiante de gatos, sobrinas, sobrinos de diferentes colores y etnias. (Su hermana mayor tenía/tiene la misma predilección para los no caucásicos al igual que él; y a la abuela le encantan todos; y los ha criado casi a todos). Esas dos o tres veces al año cuando tengo sexo con él, es salvaje y maravilloso, y un gran cambio de mi ligue principal de catorce años. Y algunas veces tú verdaderamente tienes que confiar en la gente, especialmente si son viejos amigos, y éste es alguien que es una amistad más vieja que mi compañía de vida estable, con quien el sexo es regular, siempre oral, y, porque es lo que a ambos en verdad nos gusta mucho como cosa de todos los días, siempre da confianza y llena emocionalmente.

En términos de la apuesta, sin embargo, uno podría fácilmente decir que el sexo anal sin protección que se me ha trepado en el último año y medio en mis visitas con mi sexo-amigo es una locura, o que introduce un factor de disparate. Yo seré el primero en admitirlo. Pero allí está. Hagan la cuenta.

15) Un día después de haber salido del norte del estado de Nueva York, de regreso en Philadelphia, pasé por el cine en la calle Sansom, donde mamé a tres tipos. Uno terminó en mi

when, on my way to my office at school, I mentioned that I had a bad sore throat to another one of my graduate students, he told me: “I had strep throat just about a week ago. It’s going around—half a dozen of my students have had it.”

The fact that it was apparently a factor in recent school life greatly relieved me. Schools and work are places where things like that spread like prairie fires. Still, it was not till the last couple of days of the month when I finally visited my doctor’s office back in New York—with no encounters at all between then and now: just as responsible as you’d expect a sixty-two year old professor to be. Not that I was always thus. (By now, even swallowing olive oil felt like sandpaper over my lower throat and larynx.) Yes, my throat was *very* red, my Indian Family Practitioner told me, as she sat back after peering in with her conical light.

“What about oral gonorrhea?” I said. (While, between the age of 19 and 26, I had twelve cases of gonorrhea, since 1968 I’ve had no STDs that I know of, save three or four cases of a-specific urethritis, though I have been tested for syphilis and gonorrhea dozens of times. But you have to be certain.) “It’s not thrush or anything like that, is it?” I asked. Like lesions on the lower legs, oral thrush is often an indicator of AIDS.

“No,” she told me. “It’s certainly not thrush. That you can check visually. It could be

boca. Dos no lo hicieron.

16) Durante la semana siguiente, desarrollé un dolor de garganta. Esto, pensé, debe ser un estrepito. Y cuando, en camino a mi oficina en la escuela, mencioné que tenía la garganta mala a otro de mis estudiantes graduados, él me dijo: “Yo tuve la garganta mala por estrepito hace una semana. Anda dándole a la gente; media docena de mis estudiantes lo han tenido”.

El hecho que aparentemente era un factor en la vida reciente de la escuela me alivió bastante. Las escuelas y el trabajo son lugares donde las cosas como esas se riegan como fuego en planicie. Sin embargo, no fue hasta los últimos días del mes cuando finalmente fui a la clínica del doctor en Nueva York, sin ningún encuentro entre entonces y ahora: Tan responsable, como esperarías que fuese un profesor de sesenta y dos años de edad. No es que siempre fui así. (Para este tiempo, hasta tragar aceite de oliva se sentía como una lija en la parte inferior de mi garganta y la laringe). Sí, mi garganta estaba bastante roja, me lo dijo mi médico familiar indio, mientras que se sentaba después de haberme mirado con atención con su luz cónica.

“¿Qué sobre gonorrea oral?”, dije. (Entre la edad de 19 a 26 años, yo tuve doce casos de gonorrea, desde 1968 no he tenido ninguna ITS que yo sepa, tres o cuatro casos específicos de urethritis, aunque me he hecho la prueba de la sífilis y de gonorrea docenas de veces. Pero tienes que estar seguro.) “No es afta o algo así, ¿verdad?”,

Chlamydia, though. We usually test for both gonorrhea and Chlamydia at the same time.”

That afternoon, of course, the doctor’s office was out of gonorrhea testing swabs, though they had the Chlamydia ones. So, at a white topped testing desk by the stand-up scale, besides walls of files with colored tabs, another nurse—this one male, solid, handsome, and dead black—thrust a couple of long wooden white-tipped swabs into my throat, one for Chlamydia and one for strep—and I got another HIV test, the most recent; the one I’ve included here.

“Look,” the Practitioner told me, returning, “I’m going to proscribe you an antibiotic that, if it’s either of those, will clear it up: Zithromax and Cipro.” Take them both at once; and if that’s what you’ve got, you’ll be over it in a day or so.”

And so, that evening, at Albert’s Pharmacy on 86th Street, across from the sprawling new CVS that is pushing Mr. Pommerantz, in his tiny business, toward retirement (his bald head visible just over the top of the boxes piled high on his second counter, in front of which Jennie, his brassy, big-hearted Hispanic assistant, has been helping him run the place for thirty years now), beside the glassed-in shelves of vitamins and holistic medicines and copper bracelets and strap-on magnets (which, he says, all but the vitamins are embarrassing junk, but which he must sell because people ask for them), I picked up the big red pill and the big white one, and downed them on the way home.

pregunté. Como las lesiones en la parte inferior de las piernas, el afta oral a menudo es un indicador del SIDA.

“No”, me dijo. “Es seguro que no es afta. Eso lo puedes revisar visualmente. Pero podría ser clamidia. Por lo general nosotros hacemos la prueba para las dos, gonorrea y clamidia, al mismo tiempo”.

Esa tarde, por supuesto, la oficina del doctor no tenía torundas para pruebas de gonorrea, aunque tenía las de clamidia. Así que, en un escritorio de pruebas con la superficie blanca junto a la báscula de pie, al lado de paredes de archivos con etiquetas de colores, otro enfermero (este era un hombre sólido, guapo, bien negro) me metió un par de torundas de madera con la punta blanca en mi garganta, una para clamidia y la otra para estrepito y me hice otra prueba de VIH, la más reciente; la que he incluido aquí.

“Mira”, me dijo el médico al regresar, “Te voy a recetar un antibiótico que si es uno de esos, lo vamos a limpiar: Zinthromax y Cipro”. Tómatelos al mismo tiempo; y si es eso lo que tú tienes, te recuperarás en uno o dos días”.

Y entonces, esa tarde, en la farmacia de Albert en la calle 86, al otro lado del nuevo CVS que se expande y está empujando al señor Pommerantz a jubilarse de su pequeño negocio (su cabeza calva visible justo por encima de las cajas amontonadas en su segundo mostrador, en frente del cual Jennie, su metálica asistente hispana de

A few days later, the test was back.

It was negative for strep throat.

It was negative for Chlamydia.

No sample had been submitted for gonorrhea.

It was negative for HIV antibodies.

In forty-eight hours the soar throat was gone—or at least it had retreated back to the faint cough that is the standard side effect of some people—like me—to Ace-inhibitors.

17) I hope you can see why I consider my sexual life a gamble. I hope you can see why I would not even begin to think of suggesting that anyone else gamble in the same way. Until many more tests are done—including especially a rigorously monitored test that starts out with *only* HIV-negative men who engage only in *oral* sex—the results are simply not conclusive.

I enjoy a certain kind of pleasure. I gamble on getting it.

So far, over six or seven thousand receptive condomless oral encounters since c. 1982, I've been lucky. No AIDS. No Chlamydia. And *possibly* one case of oral gonorrhea (the only time the doctor's office was out of swabs), though I note that in the two weeks I had the sore throat, neither a genital discharge nor urethral soreness

gran corazón, le ha estado ayudando a atender el negocio durante treinta años), al lado de los estantes de vidrio con vitaminas y medicinas holísticas y pulseras de cobre y correas con magneto (los cuales, dice él, todos son, a excepción de las vitaminas, cosas que dan vergüenza, pero que él debe vender porque la gente las pide), cogí la enorme píldora roja y la enorme píldora blanca, y me las tragué en mi camino a casa.

Unos días después, la prueba había regresado.

Era negativa para estrepito de la garganta.

Era negativa para clamidia.

No se hicieron pruebas para gonorrea.

Era negativo para las pruebas de anticuerpos del VIH.

El dolor de garganta había desaparecido en 48 horas, o por lo menos se había reducido a la tos débil, lo cual es un efecto secundario común para algunas personas como yo del inhibidor Ace.

17) Espero que puedas ver porqué yo considero que mi vida sexual es una apuesta. Espero que puedas ver porqué yo nunca empezaría a pensar en sugerir que alguien apueste de la misma manera. Hasta que se hagan más pruebas, incluyendo especialmente una prueba monitoreada rigurosamente y que empiece solamente con hombres VIH negativos que sólo practican sexo oral, los resultados simplemente son inconclusos.

developed—which is simply not characteristic of gonorrhea, whether initially contracted orally *or* genitally. (Usually such symptoms develop within three or four days.) Thus, there's a high possibility it was some other bacterial infection that happened to respond to the Cipro and/or Zithromax—though *what* it was for sure, we will never know.

One thing that is part of what I am gambling on, however, is the scientific evidence that exists: and, yes, I am ignoring all hearsay, including accounts such as B.J.'s. I do not think he is dishonest. I believe, rather, that when people think that you can get AIDS orally, a certain number *will* also believe that that's how they got it. It doesn't make it any less a gamble—and possibly makes it more so.

In the past, often science has been like that.

—*New York, August 2004*

Yo disfruto cierto tipo de placer. Yo apuesto en conseguirlo.

Hasta ahora, con más de seis o siete mil encuentros de sexo oral receptivo sin condón desde 1982, he tenido suerte. Sin SIDA. Sin clamidia. Y, posiblemente, un caso de gonorrea oral (la única vez en la que la oficina del doctor no tenía torundas), aunque noté que durante las dos semanas en las que tuve el dolor de garganta, no se desarrolló ninguna secreción genital ni dolor en la uretra, lo cual simplemente no es característico de la gonorrea, ya sea que se contraiga oral o genitualmente. (Por lo general, dichos síntomas se desarrollan dentro de los tres o cuatro días). Además, existe una gran posibilidad de que fuera otra infección bacteriana que respondió al Cipro y/o Zithromax, aunque nunca sabremos con seguridad *qué* fue.

Una de las cosas que es parte de lo que apuesto, sin embargo, es la evidencia científica que existe: Y, sí, yo estoy ignorando todos los rumores, incluyendo las historias de B.J. Yo no pienso que él sea deshonesto. Yo creo, sin embargo, que cuando la gente piensa que tú puedes contraer el SIDA oralmente, también cierto número creerá que así es como ellos lo contrajeron. No lo hace menos que una apuesta y posiblemente lo hace más.

En el pasado, a menudo la ciencia ha sido así.

—*Nueva York, Agosto de 2004*

GhettoRainbows

Tim m T. West

(for leslie and mark)

5.20.05

1.

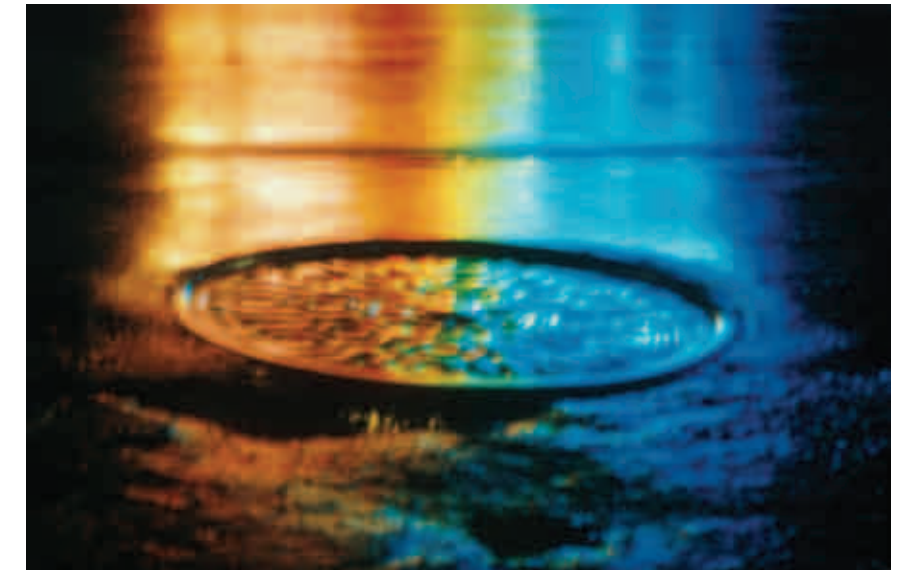
to call them friends
 would be misnomer
 they are more
 something filling space
 already felt
 still I wonder
 if they get the way I imagine space
 between us
 my pen
 my cupid arrow
 stuck in traffic
 like my heart
 so not pumping
 but just enough
 and so the space between
 one beat and the next
 is like breath
 sometimes
 the very personification of
 in-hell
 waiting to be
 let back out

2.

I want to tell the one
 that I share memories too
 not unlike the ones
 he has the heart and wind

to share and scribble
 I envy his pen
 brilliant like nigga-gold
 it refuels on the juice of Big Apples
 while I pencil at Bay
 editing myself
 waiting for clouds to break
 my life unsharpened,
 desiring more edge
 like memories
 being around him
 reminding him to love his self
 and get loved
 only
 as well, unconditionally,
 and enduring
 as I give it.

he in NYC
 the subways screech and slide
 145 to Lower East Side
 to flow
 underground magic.
 being miles away
 my passion, searching for stability
 is missing
 the bud that gets me high.
 wanting two competing wants
 means I won't
 or may not get
 either
 they circle in my head like crows
 waiting for the streets to clear
 and traffic to die
 to get grounded.



3.
 I want to tell the other
 that I have not really danced
 since I left NYC
 the feet get stuck
 end up
 remembering
 March 2004
 Star Treks down Christopher St.
 burstin
 over house and break beatz
 even big macho man like he
 loves it
 hugs me all bravado-like
 in public
 I have always forgiven the guise
 holds me better with his eyes

He
 atypically Chelsea
 Chic before those streets got sweet
 with gentrification
 he Zulu Nation.
 cuz life's a dance
 and he the synergy
 moving rhythmically about me.
 he Markin' the heartbeat
 pretending not to feel
 things felt since 93
 and I've got his back
 though he'd say never "like that"
 it's platonic
 though many have questioned that fact

4.
 and space
 not something I've figured out
 except through them
 so I figure
 it's perhaps the patience and strength
 to stay up
 when all is down
 and remind myself even
 when I'm not down
 with being down
 that I, too, am being watched
 a ghettorainbow spanning
 project skies
 between East and West
 coasting
 above
 the colorful silence above traffic
 and unfortunately
 we sometime forget to look up
 to see.

through them
 I remember
 the projection of sun
 hiding behind
 concrete jungles
 still shines.

Reclaiming the Future: Over 50 with HIV

Jody Benjamin

A hot, humid dusk settles on New York as Robert Lee Chew, looking relaxed and healthy as if rested after a nap or a visit to the beach, steps into a coffee shop on Ninth Avenue. Tall and thin with grey-green eyes, Chew, 55, is dressed casually in a pair of khaki capri-length shorts, a pair of flip-flops, and a sleeveless white T-shirt. A day-old growth of salt-and-pepper beard covers his narrow, animated face. He has lived with HIV for 17 years.

Just a day earlier, the announced threat of another terrorist attack in Manhattan had lent a certain gloominess to the back-to-work Monday routine. But with reports that the threats were based on old information, and may even have been politically motivated, many a New Yorker felt safe enough, once again, to quickly tune out the entire mess. So too with Chew. Yet the topic seeped into his conversation about his years of experience living through the epidemic.

“You know what everyone is going through right now with this terrorism stuff is like what we went through in the early days with AIDS,” he says. “We didn’t know what it was, when, or if, it was going to hit us or where it was going to hit us. So much was not known about HIV at that time. It was disorienting and debilitating. Just like now.”

He fingers a tall paper cup with a frothy coffee drink as he speaks. The only adornment on his hands: a thick gold ring from New York University School of Social Work. In the years after he almost lost his life to AIDS, Chew earned a Master’s Degree in Social Work. He now runs two support groups: one for transgendered seniors, the other for gay seniors who are not HIV positive.

Chew himself is part of a growing segment—between 11 and 13 percent—of people living with AIDS over age 50 in the United States. Between 1991 and 1996, AIDS cases among this group grew twice as fast as those among younger adults, according to the National Association on HIV over 50. Medical studies have repeatedly found “surprising” evidence that seniors engage in risky sexual, drug and alcohol abuse behaviors. But they also note that doctors—and even seniors themselves—do not frequently perceive seniors as a risk group. Health care providers may inadvertently dismiss certain HIV-related symptoms—amnesia, fatigue—as simply part of getting older.

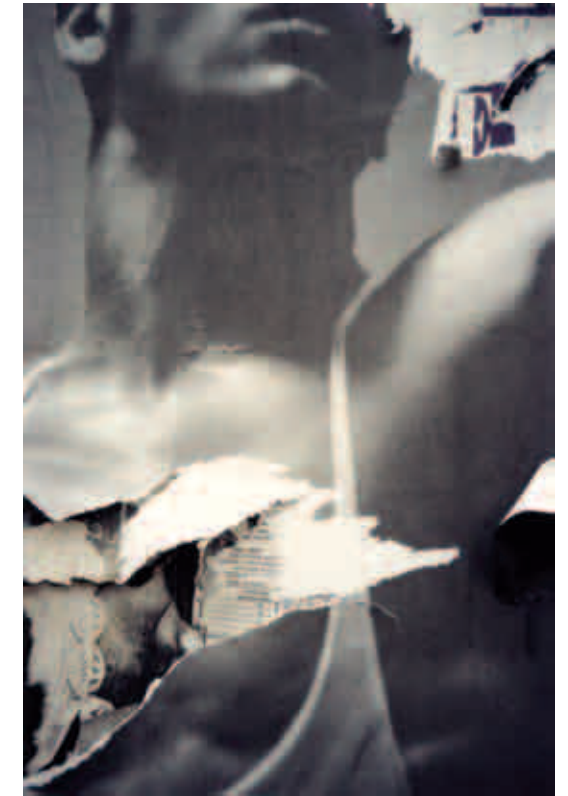
“People who work with people with AIDS are going to have to know more about aging and about how the aging process interacts with HIV,” says John Ganke, a social worker with Seniors Active in a Gay Environment. Ganke runs a bi-monthly support group of twelve men with HIV. “Some of the medications are pretty toxic and have never been tested on older people,” said Ganke.

Those who do know they are infected face common emotional hurdles: isolation stemming from a loss of peers, depression and even anger rooted in a negative attitude about getting older. If anything, the number of cases of older people with AIDS is expected to increase as individuals survive longer because of triple combination drug therapy and other treatment advances. A group of Michigan researchers said that the heavy marketing and commercialization of virility-enhancing drugs is expected to lead to an increase in the number of cases, as more people remain sexually active longer.

Chew was 38 years old when learned he was HIV positive. An actor, he was performing that summer with Lauren Bacall in a production of “Sweet Bird of View” at the Almsen Center in Los Angeles. Two years before, when he learned that his costume designer boyfriend was positive, Chew had tested negative for antibodies to the virus. But having ended the relationship, he decided to be tested again. He was positive.

He says he went the same afternoon to a support group. Despite any reassurance he received from group discussions, Chew said that in his own mind he felt there was little hope that any medical approach would save him. He figured he’d be dead before reaching 50. “I remember being very concerned with time in those days. I remember thinking, ‘okay, what time frame am I working with?’” said Chew. “I figured that if I was lucky, I could squeeze out about ten years. And, you know, my plane came in right on schedule.”

Chew got sick with pneumonia about ten years later. But the story didn’t end the way Chew then thought it would.



In the meantime, while still in his 30s, Chew said he began living the supposed fantasy lifestyle of a retiree with a mountain of savings. Chew didn't have a mountain but he rapidly began to burn through the savings he did have in the belief there was no point in keeping it for the future. He cashed his stocks and CDs and traveled in Europe, mostly in France.

"It felt good," he remembers. "I was having a good time but I was living like a person who was dying in Florida. Most of the money I had went out the window."

He did not think to prepare a will, he said.

He lost interest in pursuing a career. Where before he had aggressively pursued roles that would bring him ever-increased exposure and income, he now went without work for months at a time. He says he lost the self-esteem needed to really promote himself as an actor. It was during this time that he began a new relationship with a man who was 17 years younger than he and who was HIV negative, a move he says he wouldn't make today.

"We were mismatched from the beginning," he now says of the relationship. "But in that mindset you just grab on to whoever's in front of you. There may not *be* anyone else for all you know. And so even though it was somewhat of a mismatch, it was like 'hey, why don't we move in together?'"

Was he taking any useful advice from friends or family?

"I wasn't getting any advice from people and I'm not sure I was looking for any," said Chew. "I told a friend that I didn't want to spend any more money on psychotherapy. I just wanted to *live*. It's like your feelings just shut down. It's hideous."

It is here that Chew's experience as a person with AIDS intersects with another growing field of interest for social workers and activists: that of gay men reaching middle

age. Gay men have few role models on which to base life decisions as they get older, argues psychotherapist Harold Kooden, Ph.D. in "On Golden Men: the Power of Gay Mid-Life." This fact can aggravate an already difficult process for a person living with AIDS, he said.

"The vast majority of gay activists, artists and public figures who grew up in the gay community, and who might otherwise serve as role models, are dead," said Kooden in an interview. "Many of us feel that we go straight from adolescence to middle age, with nothing in between."

A pervasive ageism among gay men—seniors are rarely if ever featured in glossy lifestyle magazines, popular media, or even in HIV prevention campaigns—renders the population virtually invisible.

"There were men I met who said that they were more afraid of getting old than they were of dying of AIDS," said Kooden. "We reach our emotional maturity relatively late."

A range of gay senior-oriented support groups have inevitably sprung up—Chew himself leads one in New York for a group of transgendered seniors—but the groups' availability, reach and effectiveness can be limited. Many people who might benefit from them don't know the groups exist. In talks with gay seniors, Kooden stresses the importance of confronting one's own negative perception of aging and asks why more men don't, for example, learn to find men their own age sexually attractive?

"Ageism is bad for one's health because it makes you fearful of a natural process," said Kooden. "It must be confronted. After all, it's the gay men who took charge of their health and not simply went along with whatever was told to them about AIDS who survived. They had a sense of the future. Men who have no sense of the future are not likely to have a positive feeling about aging."

Chew certainly knew of support groups for people with AIDS but he now admits that internally he had shut himself off to their message. He noticed when men would come to meetings weighing much less than they did the week before; and when they didn't come back to meetings at all. To him, talking out issues of aging generally with men his age hardly seemed relevant. Among close contacts of Chew's to die were his talent agent, fellow actors and even his doctor. In 1996, he learned that his former boyfriend, the costume designer, was dead.

"It's a strange thing to be in your 40s and to know more than two hundred people who have died," he said.



By the spring of 1997, Chew had already been battling pneumonia and other infections for several months. He began to experience paralysis in his feet that got progressively worse until, in May, he was confined to a wheelchair. He left New York to be with a sister then living in Madison, Wisconsin. There his family rallied round him while he was in hospice care.

Chew found that his family rejected his boyfriend as immature and selfish. He felt torn between his family and his boyfriend. But during this period of being bedridden, he also began to get some of the therapy he had been avoiding.

“One woman used to come to see me once a week. She afforded me the opportunity to talk,” said Chew. “She was a little too New Age-y for my tastes. But she was not afraid of the fact that I was dying. She helped me to understand my feelings.”

Just as Chew began to reach emotional clarity, another unexpected development occurred. An experimental three-drug combination of protease inhibitors was introduced that was having dramatic results. Chew began the treatment. He said it felt as though the flood waters of paralysis that had slowly been rising from his feet up his legs, into his thighs and hips, suddenly began to drain out, receding again to the bottoms of his feet.

With the passing weeks, he regained strength. It was in this unexpected manner that he soon found himself back in his apartment in New York, trying to figure out what to do next. He had not been out of a hospital bed for a year. He was down to his last \$2,500.

“Here I was back from the dead but I almost didn’t recognize my life anymore,” said Chew.

“I don’t know if I’ll ever understand what I went through,” he said. “AIDS is incomprehensible. It’s senseless. It’s a little speck of protein that has no purpose whatsoever. Suddenly that little speck is the king of the jungle. What could possibly ever explain that?”

Explanation or no, Chew began to rebuild his life. He feared his acting career had gone unattended too long; besides, at that point in his life, he longed for work he felt had a more direct impact on people. So instead of acting, he enrolled in the social work program from which he graduated two years later with a Master’s Degree and a special citation for his clinical work.

He now works primarily with gay and transgendered people who are trying to navigate—around the sandtraps of isolation and fixed incomes—through old age. Among his clients is a man in his 70s who is blind and another in his 80s who recently lost his partner of 45 years.

“I’m trying to make sure he doesn’t drink himself into a coma,” said Chew. “Mostly what they want is for someone to talk to who is not afraid of death. They want someone to take them outside of their own worlds for a moment.”

“I believe that mental health is the ability to work and to love,” he continued. “Even work in the smallest way means a lot. A blind person can answer phones, for example. I see my job as helping them to discover how they can feel useful in some way and how they can resume their lives.”

“It would be very ungrateful of me to moan and groan, to whine, really about getting older,” he said. “I never dreamed that at this point I’d still be among the living. My attitude is ‘okay, you made it.’ You’d be grateful too.”



All images by Eduardo Aparicio, from the series *Cuerpo Público*, 1993-97, prints from color negative, dimensions variable

Flatware

Aldo Alvarez

I came home with red ink still wet on my fingers. That cheap pen exploded on me as I graded tests from my freshman literature course. Must have been anger, feeding through my fingertips into the pen. I felt like the Mrs. in the Scottish play, and felt even worse that it was such an inelegant and obvious metaphor for the interior life I purport to have.

I'd taken over the course from a retiring professor. It was my opportunity to prove myself and place my stamp on the syllabus while still fulfilling the expectations of the department. But I had to accept their "suggestion" that I keep "Death In Venice" on the reading list—after all, I'm only an assistant professor. It's one step up from adjunct, so I shouldn't be complaining.

But I hate that story with a fuckin' passion: I hate the prose, I hate the voice, it's so-called ironic quality (irony my *foot*), I hate what the story says about human beings, and about queers in particular. And I have to use the sucky translation.

I mean, enough with stories about love and death. Scratch that, enough with stupid, superficial and grandiose stories about love and death, especially with queers. It's a NAMBLA fantasy with Nazi overtones, and the day it goes out of print, it'll be a great day for faggots everywhere. Pardon my French.

So I was grading the test on the train home, trying to contain my loathing for that story and be fair to my students, who'd had to put up with perhaps the lamest lecture I've ever presented. It was only one-fourth of the test grade, anyway. To keep my interest, I positioned it with "The Dead," "Aura" and "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius." I asked a whole heck of a lot more interesting questions about those three stories. And—in the event that I had so crippled their insight and appreciation for that abomination of a tale that they were now unable to even answer my perfunctory questions about it—I came up with an extra credit essay question that neatly goes into the *gestalt* of the selections:

"Vladimir Nabokov said that art is beauty plus pity. Please choose one of the stories featured in this exam and discuss it in the context of this statement."

This question was especially neat because it dovetailed right into their next assigned reading, *Pale Fire*. I took pride in how I designed the course. It should all flow together, have a sensibility about it, rather than merely exist as a canonical list of books that 1 Should Read 2 B Edjicated.

In any event, Charlie didn't notice the ink on my fingers when he practically jumped out of bed with good news. He held me close to him. When he let go of me, my fingerprints were all over his silk kimono. Charlie said, "Oops, there's a spot."

I felt, when he held me, the little slot in the crook of his arm where an IV clips into him like a phone jack. I smelled the rubbing alcohol floating off his skin, the handiwork of Camilla and Sue, the couple who take care of him during the day when I'm away. I felt against me the reassuring layer of fat which was slowly returning to his body.

"Did you hear the news?" Charlie said.

"Calm down, sweetie," I said. "There's nothing to be that excited about."

"They've come up with a vaccine!" Charlie said.

"No shit?"

"Yeah!" Charlie said, aswoon. "News just broke on the nets. Now you can go get your shots, like a good puppy."

I couldn't articulate my surprise. That an AIDS vaccine finally had been developed. That Charlie would want me to get it. That Charlie wasn't bitter that it was not a cure for AIDS. That he'd still die, anyway, and that he'd still want me to live. That I am so in love with Charlie.

"Aren't you glad?" Charlie asked, slowly undoing my tie. "Isn't it fabulous?"

"It's unbelievable," I said, and I let him spoon me.

Spooning hadn't frightened me like that in years. I have no fear of flatware of this kind. But this was scaring the be-jesus out of me.

I lost interest in spooning. 'Cause I couldn't understand what he was so happy about.

"So how was work...?" I said.

That came off just a tad too condescending. I was sorry the moment I finished saying it.

“What, you don’t believe me?” Charlie said, gathering his kimono around him.

“Well, sweetie,” I said, digging my own grave, “it’s not like this is the first time you’ve jumped for joy for cyber-gossip. Is this *absolutely* true?”

Charlie flashed a blank, accusatory stare, and sped off to his computer room. I trudged behind him, as if cutting through a forest of thorns. I stopped at the study’s open door; within, my sleeping beauty’s outline glowed with the light of the outsized graphic-designer monitor. Panels shone onscreen with his design work and open text-files (electronic mail, news wires, whatever).

“Is *Reuter’s* trustworthy?” he said, swiveling on the desk chair.

“Not like the *New York Times*,” I said.

“You don’t really trust me, then,” he said.

“I’m sorry?” I said, surprised.

•••

After I got my shot, I imagined little robots coursing through my veins, zapping malignancies. I always cutify the frightening, if I don’t outright avoid it. I chose to stay away from the crowds and the mania of the big city and got my shot after the frenzy died down. I made an appointment with my doctor on



All images are by Nodeth Vang. Untitled, from the *Magnum Cum Laude* series, 1997, silver gelatin prints, 16 x 20

campus. She takes my trimonthly tests—invariably negative—with a tact and expediency that have earned my trust. And Carla—Dr. Todd to you—doesn’t buy my bullshit.

“Relax,” Carla said as I began to unbutton my shirt when she walked into the cubicle. “You’re getting undressed and I haven’t briefed you on the risks yet.”

I stopped at the third shirt button. “I just want to get this over with,” I said.

“Want to talk?” she said. She gave me one of those looks that told me she knew there was more at stake for me than I pretended there was.

“Charlie wants me to take the shot,” I said, “so let’s do it.”

I mean, I’ve been with Charlie for ten years now, nursing him through good periods and bad, even making love when we’re both up to it, and I’ve remained negative. It wasn’t difficult: I’ve only known safe sex, and Charlie was honest with me about his status when we met. When it comes to flatware (our code-word for sex), it’s more spooning than forking, so the shot is purely a formality. I don’t really need it. I might as well take the vaccine to please my husband. Charlie’s in remission right now, with a little help from some gastrointestinal technothingsies. He can keep his food down, and soon he’ll be graduating to eating ten-course meals, God willing. So, why do I resent getting a shot?

“Let me explain how it works first,” Carla said. “This doesn’t prevent AIDS as much as tame it. I’m sure you’ve read this in the newspaper.”

“Charlie told me about it,” I said.

“If you ever contract it, you’ll only have a very mild case, like bouts with bronchitis or fever. But that can be medicated easily and cheaply. You’re at high risk, with a sick spouse, so I heavily recommend you take it.”

Charlie told me this, too. He’s told me everything, everything, as if I were the one who needed to have all the facts spelled out, who needed to be encouraged and supported with my health-care choices. I decide to humor her with my attention.

“Any side effects?” I ask.

“You’re a healthy guy, so it can only police your already existing immune system. Think of it as insurance,” she said. “It only takes two weeks for the inoculation to yield protection. So play it safe till then. Though a lot of people go into the breach as soon as they run out of the office, I wouldn’t recommend it.”

Funny. It used to take two weeks for an HIV test to get graded.

“I’m in no rush,” I said. “I know it’s coming someday, and, well . . . I’m not that important. I don’t really need it.”

She put her hand on my forearm. “Don’t be so morbid.”

“I’m not morbid,” I said. “I’m realistic.”

“Would you like some Prozac with this?” Carla said.

“No,” I said, sighing, letting go of my anger with a breath. “Just a little tea and sympathy.”

“How’s Charlie doing?”

“He’s like taking care of me, now.”

Charlie and I can’t afford to refit him with a new immune system. It’s incredibly expensive, and the technothings take a long time to rebuild what Nature hath wrought and make him fully-fuctional. So we don’t have the time either.

It’s not that we’ve stopped struggling against his condition. I couldn’t earn enough for both of us, so Charlie sold his insurance with the help of a broker friend when debt got out of hand. That makes Charlie an investment that yields when it goes bust. But Charlie can enjoy his life insurance now, when he’s alive. Death Futures investors don’t know that we’re cheating death a little bit. We used the money for some “amenities” (as Charlie calls them), like the technothings in his stomach lining. They’ve kept him well enough to absorb his tubloads of medicine and eat well. And the transfusions of blood don’t have to carry all the burden of his survival.

The night after I got my shot, I found enough fat in his belly for me to grasp and fondle. Oh, God, it was magic.

Carla put down her yellow legal pad. “Oh, please, Serge.”

“I’m not kidding!” I said. “He’s talked so much about the whole fuckin’ thing, it’s as if it’s going to make him better!”

Carla sighed, stood up, and picked up this elongated staple gun from the side of a slick-wheeled console. I felt as if she were going to pump me full of gas.

“If you don’t know what’s going on, I’m not going to be the one to tell you,” she said. “Take off your shirt.”

I had never been so terrified of being naked.

•••

“I’m *only* going to last you so long,” Charlie said. “If you get the vaccine, maybe you can look for someone else after I go.”

“Jesus!” I said. “Let’s just drop it.”

Charlie sliced vegetables into pleasant shapes and I perspired over stew and noodles. The ink-stains on his robe were quite flattering, really

“Nothing, Serge,” he said. “I just want you to think about yourself, for a change.”

“Look, I’ve sown my wild oats. What if I want to spend the rest of my life as a widow?”

“That’s so sweet. Get me a barf bag,” he said.

Charlie’s strange in that he looks like Ernest Hemingway, thinks like Oscar Wilde, and seamlessly goes from butch to swish, sometimes within the same sentence.

“I don’t know, Charlie. I just feel you’re pushing me into this decision.”

“So, I want you to live.”

“Not if you fuckin’ can’t.”

“Gee, I’ve lasted ten years, sky’s the limit, now. Why do you have to spend your days worried if you’re going the same way, too?”

“I’ve handled it till now.”



“You won’t have to anymore.”

“Oh, is it that you want to have plain old unsafe sex, is that it?”

Charlie pointed at me with the cutting knife. Oh shit. “It really hurts to hear that that’s what you think this is all about. Though it’s nice to see you putting up a fight.”

“Why?”

“Do you know what it is to be married to a martyr?”

“So, tie me to a tree and pierce me dead with a bow and arrow.”

“Why do you make this so difficult?” he asked.

I don’t know.

The vegetables were not quite so elegantly cut at this point of the conversation. He dropped the knife. He stood up with a steadiness and determination that almost had me cry miracle, or call for help. I dropped the cooking spoon inside the stewpot. Can the ill kill?

No. They come over to you slowly, and sidle up to you, and take you and kiss you gently.

And you drop your arms, and your defenses, and you cry.

And they let you mourn them while they’re still alive.

“Will you do this for me?” he said.

“Yes,” I said. “Yes, I will, yes.”

“I will *never* understand why it takes you so long to take my word for anything,” he said.

There once was a time when it seemed that time would just stretch into infinity, and that I could love someone so strongly, so powerfully, that the world would bend to my love, and nothing would ever hurt him, because I said so.

That time is gone.

“I’m sorry, I’m just so wiped out,” I said. I couldn’t make myself tell him I got the shot; I felt like I’d betrayed him.

•••

I received my very first Concerned Parent letter—through e-mail, even! The one annotation is mine, the rest is hers.

To: ProfRuiz@wordsworth.edu

From: DebFoyle@dyne.com

Subject: Morbid Articles

Dear Professor Ruiz:

Hello. Let me introduce myself: my son Walter is taking your literature course. It’s been hard to see him off to school as a freshman. He is very intelligent, and, well, he is the first one in our family to go to college. Paying for his education takes some sacrifice on our part. I feel a little out of my depth writing to you about this, since I know college is different, but I’m sincere and honest and I trust I can write to you. Walter has a chance at something his parents didn’t have and I’m really worried it might go wrong. I was a member of the PTA and accustomed to being personally involved in his education. So I took it upon myself to read the books assigned for the course. I already feel educated myself by reading them (some I only looked through, to be honest) but what I read frightened me.

First I am sorry to see that you have demanded of the students that they buy books on paper and not on computer. Wasting good paper like that when they could just the same read them on-screen. The money we have spent on his equipment makes it all the more upsetting. Could you consider using electronic books in the future? His other classes use them. But that is not the reason I am writing to you.

I am afraid that the morbid nature of the books moves me to give you my opinion. The course seems to be almost obsessive on death. If there isn't somebody dying, somebody's already dead! It is almost funny, but I can't laugh. You understand, Walter is young and sensitive, he gets that from me. I am afraid they might influence him. I feel Walter is a very sensitive child and we must protect him from unnecessary concern. The world is a hard place, and I do not want him to face it under such worries. Life has been hard on me, I don't apologize for it, but it has. I do not know you, I don't know how your life has been, and why you would choose these books. But I am really frightened by the thought that something might happen to Walter, who has a real chance of not having to make do month in month out. I want the best for him. Wouldn't you? I'm sorry, maybe I am just going crazy over here. I really miss him. Please be good to my child.

I was particularly frightened by the homosexual themes in some of the articles [Mrs. Foyle is referring to "Death In Venice," dammit...and *Pale Fire*, alas.-SR]. They are obviously presented in a way that makes them futile and sad. I don't know how homosexual's lives are, even though we respect their right to be as they are Americans too, but are they so unhappy? They can marry now. My sister is a nurse and she tells me about how really nice they are. It's sad enough to hear them die. And I stayed up awake one whole night, frightened, thinking what if Walter was homosexual? And I would not want that life for him, especially if it is as sad as those books say. That's why I want everything mean and ugly and painful out of his life. I want things to be simple and clean and good and easy to understand. And this is getting too complicated for me. I am only his mother, and I guess I can't do everything.

I keep thinking the morbid nature of the books might be wrong for him. Maybe had I gone to college and read those books I wouldn't have made the mistakes I have made . . . My son sent me a copy of a recent test of his. I am glad he had a B+ so he must not be ignoring his studies. The question in the test about art equals beauty plus pity, I don't understand, especially in the face of all this death.

Thanks for your time. Please ignore this letter if you think I am wasting your time.

Question: Books have happy endings, too, don't they?

So do faggots, ma'am. With God as my witness, so do faggots too!

To: DebFoyle@dyne.com
From: ProfRuiz@wordsworth.edu
Re: Morbid Articles

Dear Mrs. Foyle:

No, you are not wasting my time. It's nice to hear someone care for their children. Thank you for your concerned note.

Walter is quite definitely an intelligent young man. I certainly do not want to drive him to suicide, if that's what you're wondering about. He's doing fine. If he showed up drunk, stoned or unprepared, I would have noticed—though, as far as I am concerned, it's up to the student to take the course seriously or not. I just flunk them if they don't. What I have noticed about Walter is that he's becoming more vocal in class discussions. He shows real character as a reader. His attention to the work being discussed is becoming keener, and the semester is only starting. I can forecast an improvement on his test grades given his growth in class. You should feel no worry, at least regarding what is within my purview as his professor.

It's a real pleasure to watch someone bloom in front of you. That's why I teach.

On the point of using books on paper, I'll tell you right off the bat that I'll continue to demand paper books until the university's administration licenses an e-book reader that makes it possible to make annotations like "Oh, that's just like me!" or "Right on!" or "ha, ha" or "Metaphor" or "Irony" on the margins of the screen. Scribbles make for easy browsing when one looks for a scene or sentence that's particularly intriguing. My books are full of such jottings.

Unfortunately, the powers that be signed a contract with the corporation who offered them the best deal but not the best product. The e-book reader that the students get for free has a strange habit of automatically misreading/mistranscribing my scribbles—they come out as "Arena", "Sinead ducky", and "This book is so guy!"—and you can't do a keyword search that includes your annotations. It's really annoying and, I'm sorry, that's just not acceptable. I could ask my students (and you, the parents) to spend money on a less institutionalized, higher quality electronic bookpad, but I'd have to go through an outside distributor for it. The institution here doesn't have a structure to order and sell other hardware (I suspect that's part of the agreement that gives us access to the "free" reader), but they do have a structure to order and sell books (I imagine the contractor doesn't see it as "competing technology"). So the choice has been made for me.

Sorry if I come off as kind of reactionary and insensitive. I am not afraid of technology. If I were, I'd be terrified of a lot of things I need to do to get along with people.

On morbidity and beauty:

Art is beauty plus pity because beauty never lasts. Because things are always changing, the world is always ending, beauty's always dying. What makes it so precious is what makes it so unstable and provisional. So the beautiful makes us feel sad. And if we really care about life, sadness is never too far behind. And so is joy, because, somewhere on the horizon, there is some new beauty waiting to be discovered, some strange mutation that will never be duplicated or equalled.

And if you can live with that every day, and still feel the swoon of beauty in the face of all that dying, boy, I'd say you are some kind of grown-up.

I am working on this, and so are most of the students I hope to encourage on this path.

Ask Walter what he thinks of the class. I would think he does—

The phone rang. My husband.

“Sweetie,” he said, “you doing anything tonight?”

“Nothing,” I said, “just going over lecture notes.”

“When are you coming home?”

“You can set a clock to my comings and goings, Charlie.”

“I know. I was wondering if you were up for flatware tonight.”

Two weeks since my shot, and, well, Charlie doesn't wait too long for a Booty Call.

“Dirty thoughts, eh?” I said.

“Yeah,” he said. “Don't shoot your wad, eh?”



Charlie and I can be very Canadian about sex.

As I hung up, I thought: do I love him because he's going to die? Do I hate myself because I cannot? Am I being just a tad grandiose?

I didn't finish the letter, but I saved it to finish later.

...

The two weeks during which the C3PO immuno-expressant corps began to take over my body went pretty much without incident. Other than Charlie being particularly cuddly and patient with me. It was infuriating. The first signs of dementia settling in. I don't know, maybe the feeling that he had something to support me about made him feel that much closer to me, made him feel useful. And of course I make show of trusting him right and left.

The other day, I let him take me out to dinner and the movies. He got the popcorn. I held our seats, frightened that he would faint or something while standing in line. I was so grateful when he came back, even if he forgot the Good & Plenty. But I'm not supposed to be courted, I'm not supposed to have problems, he's the one who's sick. He was not very mopey to begin with, but now he's positively bursting into song at the onset of some emotion—or a bowel movement.



Other than that, my health is more or less the same. I would hope to mutate into some monster, something more frightening, like a dung beetle. At least I'd have an excuse to leave him. All that's changed is that I'm sleeping better. And I wake up with this furry guy curled up against me, this guy who's growing chubbier all the time.

Charlie's too good for me. I'm going to have to leave him. After all we've gone through, he's still too good for me, and I don't deserve him. Living with him is such excruciating torture nowadays, knowing he's going to kick the bucket, and him having nothing but sweetness for me. Me, who's probably going to get tenure. I just feel so . . . I feel so *wrong*.

So I'm going to have some unprotected sex with him just to please him, and then I'll find some way of moving near campus in a jiff. That's my parting gift: the contamination of my precious bodily fluids. Then: exile.

I can't stand this anymore. I'm burning my candle at both ends, and I forget how the rest of this quote goes.

I hope Charlie will understand.

I get home to find Charlie pouring white sauce over cannelloni stuffed with some high-cholesterol paté and ground beef. His only greeting is a lifted eyebrow and a stroke of his goatee. I drop my briefcase on a kitchen table chair.

"How are you feeling?" I ask.

"Abominable," he says.

There are candles on the table, flowers in a vase as if they were arranged by Robert Mapplethorpe, and, displayed where I cannot help but notice it, a can of Crisco.

"I've been slaving over the stove all day," he says. "Dinner will be ready in half an hour."

It's so weird to have Charlie take care of me. It's so wrong. He's the one who has to be taken care of, not me.

"This takes my breath away," I say, "and quite possibly my appetite, too. You can't be spending your energy like this. What a spread you've put out for me."

“In a manner of speaking,” he says, cocking his butt.

Let me change the subject. “No, I’m serious. You shouldn’t be overextending yourself.”

“Oh, Camilla and Sue helped out. And I paced myself. I’ve been working on this all week, really. No need for you to feel guilty.”

“It’s a sin.”

“Well, ain’t it just!” Charlie licks a speck of sauce off his wrist. “Help me toss the salad? Or shall I toss myself—that is, shall I toss the salad?”

“Let me overcompensate on the salad,” I groaned.

So out comes the cutting board and the cucumber. The cuke I slice so thin the slices should melt in his mouth. After hubby puts the pan of pasta in the oven, he sits down to watch me slice.

I am so nervous I slice my middle finger.

“F-f-fuck!”

“Let me have a look,” Charlie says.

“Oh all right,” I say, and give him the bird.

And then, he takes my cut finger in his hand.

And he ever so slowly kisses it, and pops it in his mouth, and sucks it.

Dinner burns in the oven. Spoons, forks and knives remain untouched on the table, all in their correct order and placement.

The amazing thing is one can love something that can die. The irrational thing. That is the enchantment. That one could love a losing proposition, that one can love the transitory, and still remain in the moment, in the moment before that beauty passes away.

And if this is turning into a world where mystery and pain are eliminated to make for a—

Let me not overinterpret this.

I would hope that my bionic ImmunoHelpers have traveled into him through the spit in my kisses, and through other methods of injection—methods that I will not reveal in order to remain within the bounds of good taste. And if my attempts at sharing my love and my health fail to extend his life, or make mine uncomfortable . . . well, fuck it.

At least I gave it a shot.



Contributors

Aldo Alvarez is the author of *Interesting Monsters: Fictions* (Graywolf Press), featured as one of the best short story collections of the Fall 2001 book season by *The Washington Post Book World*. Aldo has an M.F.A. in Creative Writing from Columbia University in the City of New York and a Ph.D. in English from Binghamton University (SUNY). In 1997, he founded *Blithe House Quarterly: queer fiction lives here* (<http://www.blithe.com/>), the premier literary magazine for LGBT short fiction; he currently serves as its Executive Editor and Publisher. He teaches writing and literature at Wilbur Wright College in Chicago.

Eduardo Aparicio, born in Cuba, is a photographer and writer currently living in Austin, Texas.

Jody Benjamin is an award-winning journalist and writer whose work has appeared in *The Seattle Times*, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, *South Florida Sun Sentinel*, *The Village Voice*, and *The Source*. He is now at work on a memoir/history of New York's black Hebrew community.



Ken Slater

Samuel R. Delany is a novelist and critic who lives in New York City and teaches at Temple University in Philadelphia. His most recent fiction is the short novel *Phallos* (Bamberger Books, 2004). His non-fiction includes *Times Square Red*, *Times Square Blue* (NYU Press, 1999).

J. Diaz is a poet and photographer who lives and works in New York. He takes inspiration from Estefano and Mark Anthony who say, “Valió la pena lo que era necesario estar contigo amor. Tú eres una bendición. Las horas y la vida de tu lado estan para vivirlas pero a tu manera.”

Robert Diaz is student at the CUNY Graduate Center Ph.D. Program in English. He currently teaches undergrads at Queen's College, CUNY. While pursuing his doctoral interests, Robert also worked for the Asian and Pacific Islander Coalition on HIV/AIDS, a non-profit organization dedicated to providing free HIV/AIDS prevention and counseling services to API's in New York City. As a queer Filipino immigrant, Robert also advocates for policies that would alleviate the current problems immigrants face around protection and basic human services. Before being a New York transplant, he lived in California, graduating from the University of California Riverside with a degree in English.

Laurie Toby Edison lives in San Francisco. She has published *Women En Large: Images of Fat Nudes* (edited and text by Debbie Notkin) and *Familiar Men: A Book of Nudes* (edited by Debbie Notkin, text by Debbie Notkin and Richard F. Dutcher). Edison's photographs have been exhibited in many cities, including New York, Tokyo, Kyoto, Toronto, Boston, London, Shanghai and San Francisco. Her solo exhibition “Meditations on the Body” at the National Museum of Art in Osaka featured 100 photographs. She is completing *Women of Japan*, clothed portraits of women from many cultures and backgrounds, and has begun work on *En Large*, life-sized nude portraits. (www.laurietobyedison.com)

Patrick Pato Hebert is an artist-educator based in Los Angeles. His art has been featured at Galería de la Raza in San Francisco, Voz Alta in San Diego and the Japanese American National Museum in LA. His work has received support from The Rockefeller Foundation, the California Arts Council, the Creative Work Fund and the Durfee Foundation. He serves as the Associate Director of Education, Prevention at APLA.

John Keene, an assistant professor of English and African-American Studies at Northwestern University, is the author of *ANNOTATIONS* and, with artist Christopher Stackhouse, of *SEISMOSIS*. He recently received a fellowship in poetry from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts.

Viet Le is an interdisciplinary artist, creative and critical writer, and curator. He has recently received fellowships from the Banff Centre (Canada), the Fine Arts Work Center (MA), and PEN Center USA (CA). Le obtained his MFA from UC Irvine, where he has also taught, and is currently pursuing his doctoral studies at USC.

Debbie Notkin is an editor and nonfiction writer. She works closely with Laurie Edison, writing and editing text to accompany Laurie's photographs. She is chair of the Motherboard of the James Tiptree Jr. Award, recognizing fiction and fantasy that explores and expands gender. She edited the award's first anthology, "Flying Cups & Saucers," and is a co-editor of the current annual series of anthologies from Tachyon Publications. She has written and spoken extensively on body image and on science fiction, all over the United States and in Japan.

Osuna is an artist who will use anything to express himself. He works with cameras, crayons, chalk and paints, and writes poetry and short stories. He likes to say he has ADD in arts because he's always starting creative projects. He is a 2003 graduate of Manual Arts High School in South Central Los Angeles. He is a peer health educator and member of APLA's Mpowerment project, an HIV prevention program for youth.

Khary Polk writes fiction and cultural criticism in New York University's doctoral program in American Studies. He has been published in the *Journal of Negro History*, *Think Again*, and Nerve.com. He lives in Brooklyn.

Robert F. Reid-Pharr is professor of English at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York and author of *Conjugal Union: The Body, the House and the Black American* (1999) as well as *Black Gay Man: Essays* (2001). He lives in Brooklyn.

Darieck Scott is the author of *Traitor to the Race* (1995), and the editor of *Best Black Gay Erotica* (2004). His fiction has appeared in the anthologies *Black Like Us*, *Shade*, *Giant Steps*, *Flesh and the Word 4*, and *Ancestral House*. He is assistant professor of English at the University of California at Santa Barbara, where he teaches African-American literature and creative writing.

Morisane Shiroma (Sunny) was diagnosed with HIV in 1990. Soon after, she became a client and a member of the Asian and Pacific Islander Coalition on HIV/AIDS (APICHA). True to her activist roots, Sunny also serves as APICHA's Infoline Counselor, utilizing her various matrixes of identification—Asian, queer, transgender, woman, bilingual immigrant, and advocate (to name a few)—in order to connect with individuals who need APICHA's services. Before joining APICHA, Sunny was a famous designer, contracted by stores such as Macy's, Bergdorf Goodman, and Bloomingdales. She is thrilled when she sees her clothes being sold at thrift shops around New York City. Sunny currently lives in the West Village with her partner.

Nodeth Vang was born in Bordeaux, raised in Orange County, and is a visual artist currently living and working in New York. He is inspired and seduced by magazine culture, in one foot, and revisiting Hmong culture filtered through colonizing forces and his family's immigration to France and the United States.

Tim m West is a poet, activist, emcee, and scholar who in 1999 co-founded the notorious black queer hip hop ensemble Deep Dickollective. He has been a strong voice for multidisciplinary artists at the intersections of black and queer politics, culture, and diasporas. In 2003 he self-published his first book, a poetic memoir in 6 breaths, entitled *Red Dirt Revival*. In July of 2004 he released a musical complement to his book with *Songs from Red Dirt* (Cellular Records). Former Dept. Chair of Literary Arts and English at Oakland School for the Arts, Tim'm now lives in D.C. where he continues to follow his he-art, mediating HIV/AIDS Outreach efforts and producing an arts monthly called "The Front Porch" that has become a popular black SGL-friendly spot for poetry, hip hop, and soul music. More of Tim'm's writings, music, and critical review is available at www.reddirt.biz.

Ronaldo V. Wilson is a doctoral candidate and a President's MAGNET dissertation year fellow at the CUNY Graduate Center, where he is writing his dissertation: *Black Bodies Black Field(s): 20th Century and Contemporary Poetics of the Black Body in African American Poetry and Visual Culture*. He was a 1999-2000 winter poetry fellow at the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown and is also co-founder of the Black Took Collective. His poetry and prose appear most recently in *Blithe House Quarterly*, *Callaloo*, *Fence*, *Harvard Review*, *Interim*, and *Nocturnes (re)view of the Literary Arts*.

Allen Wright was born on the Westside, raised on the Southside, lived on the Northside, only side left was East but that was the lake. Allen left Chicago for New York when he fell in love with a man from Harlem. He is again restless in Chicago. Allen's work has appeared in the Lambda Book Award-winning anthologies *The Road Before Us* (Galiens Press) and *Sojourner: Black Gay Voices in the Age of AIDS*, a publication of Other Countries: Black Gay Men Writing (later Black Gay Expression). A member of Other Countries during those years in New York, Allen served on its Board, coordinated writing workshops and toured in a number of its stage productions. With Other Countries, and as part of the performance group, Brother Tongue, he appeared at The Nuyorican Poets Café, Artist's Space, The Studio Museum in Harlem, Harvard, Brown, Yale and New York Universities. He is also proud of his "small but significant" role in *Tongues Untied*, Marlon Riggs' award winning and Jesse Helms-condemned documentary. More recently, Allen co-wrote *Kevin's Room Part 2: Trust*, which debuted at the 26th Annual International Lesbian and Gay Film Festival and aired on WCIU-TV in Chicago and the tri-state area. And he worked with producer Craig Loftis on *Above Ground: SGL 012*, a CD compilation of music and spoken word artists.

