

BEING GAY: POLITICS, IDENTITY, PLEASURE

Identity is not a destiny but a choice. But in a culture where homosexual desires, female or male, are still execrated and denied, the adoption of lesbian or gay identities inevitably constitutes a *political* choice. These identities are not expressions of secret essences. They are self-creations, but they are creations on ground not freely chosen but laid out by history. So homosexual identities illustrate the play of constraint and opportunity, necessity and freedom, power and pleasure. Sexual identities seem necessary in the contemporary world as starting points for a politics around sexuality. The form they take, however, is not predetermined. In the end, therefore, they are not so much about who we really are, what our sex dictates. They are about what we want to be and could be.¹

The category 'gay' is not, and never has been, merely a personal label-like category, implying some kind of essence analogous or even synonymous with the term 'homosexual'. On the contrary, the term 'gay' specifically refutes the constitutive opposition hetero/homo sexuality as the central figure of our sexual 'truth'. What the term 'gay' does insist upon is a political and legal *unity of interests* between subjects variously categorised as perverse/sick/mad/queer/contagious and so on, in relation to those institutions and their attendant discursive formations which are able to define sexual difference as an exclusively biological dualism, 'male' - (hetero/sexual) - 'female'.²

Taken from writings by Jeffrey Weeks and Simon Watney, these quotations establish two obvious but crucial points. First, gay male identity - the 'subject' of this article - has always conceived of itself within a *sexual politics*; that is, within a mutually informing transaction between those two words - a sexualization of politics and a politicization of sex. And second, to be 'gay' is not to subscribe to some existential essence. It is instead, as both writers point out, a strategic identification to express demands in a western world that constantly wants to rid itself of homosexual representation by, paradoxically, realizing male same-sex desire in spectacular forms of pathological 'obscenity'. Laws against obscene publications go back to the middle of the nineteenth century, and, like those pertaining to blasphemy, have been invoked against gay men's reading and writing during the past fifteen years. This constantly

restaged spectacle - of our diseased and degraded natures - is attended by a rhetoric of moral retribution that has become extremely loud in this decade of AIDS. The political demands of gay men have, of course, been raised to new levels of cultural consciousness during this crisis. (And the fantasmatic elements involved in popular-journalistic and medical-professional representations of gay people with AIDS have been examined as thoroughly by Watney as anyone else.³)

It would not be necessary to endorse Weeks's and Watney's assertions here were it not for the fact that there has of late been a great deal of interest on the left in the 'politics of identity', particularly in the pages of *Marxism Today* and at a conference organized around 'Changing Identities: Socialism and the Politics of Difference' in London, May 1989. It is significant that the political activism in which both Weeks and Watney have long been involved (such as the work of *Gay Left* in the late 1970s) developed a theoretically engaged identity-based politics at a time when socialism was still largely intimidated by orthodox imperatives to prioritize class. What follows here is an examination of two related issues: the conspicuously belated shift of interest on the left towards politicizing subjectivity; and current debates about the constitutive elements within a politics of gay identity. The last of these points concerns the representational structures informing what it means to 'be gay' within contemporary British culture - in relation to defining forms of gay history and a gay 'life-style' - and how an understanding of those structures may contribute to the future of a socialism that finds itself increasingly obliged to address issues arising from the links between political and sexual identities. One question in particular can help to focus the direction of the present article. If the personal is political, can it also be pleasurable?

POLITICS OF IDENTITY

There is now on the left greater recognition than ever before of the success of campaigns around race, women, and sexuality in the 1960s, and how new assertions of identity outside those of class arose in the course of these struggles. The interconnected genealogies of these recently labelled 'new social movements' made up of 'new social actors' are currently being drawn upon to develop a vision of a viable democratic politics for the present:

In the 1960s . . . democratic analogies and equivalences translated Black pride into Gay Pride; the slogan 'the personal is political' was equivalent in its active interpretation to the statement 'black is beautiful'; expressive forms of collective solidarity signified in terms such as black brotherhood were re-coded with similar empowering connotations by the feminist emphasis on sisterhood. Such connections are always being made - in the late 1970s the soul tune 'We are family' by Sister Sledge was sung as an anthem on Gay Pride Week. What is at stake, and what is at issue, in such cognitive and organisational connections? Whatever happened to the dialogic intersections of the 60s? Was it all, like the idea of a 'rainbow

coalition' today, merely illusory, or are there practical as well as ideological lessons to be learned from an excavation of our recent political past?⁴

Here, Kobena Mercer and Isaac Julien present a scene of interactive 'unity in difference' that sections of the left now seem to be longing for but failed to recognize more than tokenistically during the years of its emergence. At that time, a period that can be roughly marked out between the revolutions of 1968 and the beginning of Thatcher's first term in 1979, marginal groups frequently related to one another in unproductively antagonistic modes (through forms of feminist racism, Black homophobia, and gay male misogyny, to give some notable examples). And similar tensions between minority organizations still, painfully, exist today. Why, then, at this moment should there be an appeal in socialist theory to 'identity'? And how might the partially obscured histories of Black, lesbian, and gay, and women's movements reappear in new political formations?

Stuart Hall stands at the forefront of recent discussions of 'New Times', the Communist Party's initiative to transform its 1970s manifesto, *The British Road to Socialism*. Hall intervenes in these debates about the politics of identity from positions informed by theoretical work developed within cultural studies - a domain of inquiry that he calls a 'field of interruption'. Hall occupies a strategic place within the left; his career charts a course through the New Left of the 1950s via the innovative interdisciplinary analyses of ideology during the following two decades at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham, where new, unorthodox academic practices (such as collective writing) were instituted. Hall has repeatedly made a point of the importance of recognizing the mutual implication of theory and practice: 'I think of Marxism not as a framework for scientific analysis only but also as a way of helping you sleep at night.'⁵ At the moment, he is one of the few non-gay-identified men on the left demanding that an explicitly sexualized politics is now necessary for socialism:

Feminism and the social movements around sexual politics have . . . had an unsettling effect on everything once thought of as 'settled' in the theoretical universe of the Left. And nowhere more dramatically than in its power to decentre the characteristic conversations of the Left by bringing on to the political agenda the question of sexuality. This is more than the Left being 'nice' to women or lesbians and gay men or beginning to address their forms of oppression. It has to do with the revolution in thinking which follows in the wake of the recognition that *all* social practices and forms of domination - including the politics of the Left - are always inscribed in and to some extent secured by sexual identity and positioning. If we don't attend to how gendered identities are formed and transformed and how they are deployed politically, we simply do not have a language of sufficient explanatory power at our command with which to understand the institutionalization of power in our society and the secret sources of our resistances to change.⁶

Rather than advance a popular-frontist coalition of identities under a common

banner of the 'oppressed' (which would be one class-unified strategy for revolutionary change), Hall turns his attention here to questions arising out of theories of subjectivity, and so he is led to address issues of desire, individual choice, and agency. And these are issues not altogether greeted hospitably by Marxism. Several recognizable concerns within contemporary cultural studies underpin Hall's remarks. First of all, he explicitly acknowledges the feminist demand to politicize the personal. But, secondly, and implicitly, he is taking on board a more specific feminist debate with structural psychoanalysis that explores the fading of the subject: its instability, its lack of fixity in a social field of shifting positions. (This is, in some respects, a dialogue with the influential discussions that took place in the pages of the journal *m/f* between 1978 and 1986.) It will be interesting to see how this turn to the subject might negotiate political 'resistance' through and against notions of psychological 'resistance'. By that I mean that any politicized theory of subjectivity is obliged to consider resistances not only to external powers but internal ones as well. In other words, such a politics has to reckon with the convergences and divergences of oppression *and* repression. This may prove to be a conjuncture in which the charged meaning of 'resistance' in its psychoanalytical and social contexts is radically transformed. However, it remains difficult to tell within the scope of Hall's brief essay whether or not the understanding of 'secret sources' of 'resistance' is in some way linked to a residual 1960s libertarian discourse committed to freeing-up the 'repressed' (as in, for example, Marcuse's writings).

Certainly, a newly popularized politics of identity may unhesitatingly make that connection. The subject of such a politics has - whatever its identity - to exist within a democracy, a field, as Weeks calls it, of 'constraint and opportunity'. So how might its desires conflict with the interests of others? Even if this new politics avoids a humanistic individualism based on concepts of uniqueness and freedom of agency, it none the less has to address liberal categories of contract and obligation to guarantee that rights are mutually respected. A new ethical demand is, therefore, placed upon the left to rethink, not only the subject of liberalism, but also the system of differences within which that subject finds its place(s). And that subject will turn out to be different things in different contexts, and, moreover, to have demands and desires that will, at times, appear too intolerably 'different' for comfort. (The repeatedly thwarted efforts of Black sections for representation within the British Labour Party come to mind.) There are a couple of further points to be taken up here, and both of them concern the articulation of this new-found political interest in subjectivity. The first of these is to do with language-use in the strategic voicing of identities. The second relates to the pleasures of acceding to and living an identity.

One well-known point vital to 'minority' struggles has been the assertion of being heard on our own terms, and whole areas of language-use have been redefined by the lexical interventions of Black men and women, feminists, lesbians and gay men, and the less able-bodied (the list of categories is not inclusive, nor meant to be). But there is something more to take note of than just these remarkable changes in vocabulary. A forthright rhetoric of

'empowerment' can now be heard. (This particular lexicon owes much to feminist assertiveness training. Its hegemony has, in many respects, gathered around a broader awareness of feminist ethics.) Gaining the confidence to speak and commanding the right to be heard - and, concomitantly, developing skills at listening - in a much more personal style are clearly altering the style used in expressing political demands. And a concurrent emphasis on discussing our own experiences in small groups, rather than representing our politics exclusively at mass rallies, has informed all types of struggles around collective subjects. Even if Thatcherism seems to dominate the current linguistic terrain of politics, with its repressive statist moralisms invoked in the name of 'freedom', it has to find new strategies to silence voices of permutating resistance speaking out more and more powerfully in terms of differential identities.

Fierce political antagonism in this past decade has, as Homi Bhabha observes, produced spaces of unpredicted 'hybridity' - transformational moments such as the time when women took a key role in reconfiguring what was at stake within the miners' strike of 1983-4. This intersection of feminist and class politics resulted - almost as if by Hegelian sublation - in something that could not be contained as a 'new synthesis', but manifested 'negotiation between them *in medias res*'. Bhabha, via the work of Lyotard, notes this new hybrid formation as an 'agonistic relation' (a relation, that is, that does not abide by a set of predetermined rules but one that forms its own rules in the process of its becoming).⁷ This understanding of such 'negotiations' is worked through at the level of representation. Similar insights appear towards the end of what stands as a touchstone text in radical democratic theory, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's *Hegemony and Social Strategy*, though this is not, it must be stressed, a work engaging with the type of deconstructive model of language that interests Bhabha. Laclau and Mouffe, having traced the development of the concept of hegemony before and after Gramsci, envisage a new 'logics of equivalence' destined to erase the sacrosanct status of the 'social' which derives its positivity from a clear demarcation between public and private:

What has been exploded is the idea and the reality itself of a unique space of constitution of the political. What we are witnessing is a politicization far more radical than any we have known in the past, because it tends to dissolve the distinctions between public and private, not in terms of a proliferation of radically new and different political spaces. We are confronted with the emergence of a *plurality of subjects*, whose forms of constitution and diversity it is only possible to think if we relinquish the category of 'subject' as a unified and unifying essence.⁸

In other words, they argue that we are in the process of witnessing the opening up of new political articulations, ones which have as yet to be theorized, and which cannot be circumscribed by a particular party line. The present discussion, therefore, returns to the point where it began: identities are not essences, nor are the subjects that constitute them. Identifications with collective - rather than private - interests are what are at stake. It is now

possible to see how *people* (rather than 'the people') have been making a re-entry into politics. Stuart Hall and David Held have drawn attention to the internal diversity of that orthodox Marxist predication: 'the people': "'The people" is, after all, also a discursive figure, a rhetorical device, a mode of address. It is open to constant negotiation, contestation and redefinition.⁹ (One might add that 'the people' also designates a *body* - that is, not just an abstract mass - upon and around which not only do meanings and styles circulate but also different sets of sensations and responses compete for its attentions.)

Finally, one question remains to be considered here, and this concerns the processes involved in becoming and living a political identity. What experiences drive us towards politicizing ourselves in this way? The answer is, in one sense, simple enough. The perception of oppression makes us want to become who we are, not who we are made out to be. Yet - to return to the specific 'subject' of this essay - to want to be *gay* accentuates not only a demand for political representation on our own terms but also an identification in search of *pleasure*. ('Gay', in one sense at least, means happy. And it replaces the clinical associations attached to the Victorian category of the homosexual.) Our demands for pleasure could not be more acute during the current health crisis when we are entering a previously unconceptualized space - an agonistic relation, indeed - where an ethical commitment to safer sexual practices opens up an unforeseen erotics. Although state authorities may care to think otherwise, 'sex is not a fatality; it's a possibility for creative life'.¹⁰ The words are Michel Foucault's. Gay politics exists, then, in a sphere not usually associated with the 'alien' realm of the political, as it is commonly perceived. (Using statistics from marketing forecasts, Frank Mort has noted that participating in political meetings is about the least popular leisure activity in Britain.¹¹)

But taking pleasure in our strengthened politicized subjectivities can remain problematic, especially when the left frequently holds to a tradition of asceticism, forever suspicious of seductive (consumer-led) varieties of enjoyment. Leisure-time pleasure is often rejected as a commodified hedonism revelling in the aesthetic superficialities of what is increasingly recognized as a postmodern culture. Moreover, sexual pleasure is uncomfortably bound up for the left with male domination, male violence, and pornography (and the confusions around defining pornography complicate matters further). These widespread and related discontents with different kinds of pleasure need to be briefly looked at in turn.

On the one hand, current theories generated within debates about postmodern consumerism may seem to collude with (one might say, simulate) its sensorial enchantments while in the process of analysing them. Jean Baudrillard, for instance, whose project has been to explode Marxism's most cherished precepts, uses the example of the television screen - upon which 'hot, sexual obscenity' is, anarchically, 'followed by cool communicational obscenity' - and suggests there can apparently be no resistance against the oppressive forms of late capitalism since 'seduction', rather than production, proves to be its 'fundamental role'.¹² On the other hand, a puritanical socialist

orthodoxy will obviously find nothing but contempt for explanations of consumer culture that take pleasure, in all its somatic variables (visual, aural, tactile), and not conscience as their ethical point of departure. Added to these abhorrences at indulgent pleasures, sex can seem just as repugnant for socialists as for anyone else. And hatred for gay men - from many different political positions - has often hardened around the perception of our 'promiscuity' and so-called irresponsible sexual activity, constituting us, in AIDS-speak, as a 'high-risk' group. (This pronounced 'risk' represents sex itself as a dangerous death-wish.) For gay men to be sex-affirmative in this far from inviting climate, we have to confront a mixture of complaints about the degrading and exploitative quality of wanting sex, especially anal sex. The defence of our pleasures has to be made in a context of competing moralisms - right-wing, Marxist, radical feminist. What is more, having a gay 'lifestyle' can be (and often is) construed in terms of narcissistic 'body-fascism' that is profoundly anti-social. The Pink Pound circulates, it may seem, only for gay men to conspire with the machinations of capital. There is an unfavourable urban-centred image of us as predominately white, middle-class, and enjoying a disposable income. And yet, as Mark Finch argues, gay culture is precisely that: 'a discursive system developed out of a metropolitan, white, middle-class and male gay community'. He adds: 'Gay culture speaks from and to this position; it describes a socially-defined audience and an attendant cluster of texts.'¹³ Finch follows these remarks by stressing how such a culture is completely necessary for a politics to take shape. It is impossible to come out as politically gay if there is not to begin with any culture in which we can identify ourselves. This is, problematically, even the case when that culture may not seem to be 'ours' in terms of its class, racial, or regional biases.

Given the left's frequent contempt for sex and consumerism (or, worse, the two together), how might pleasure find a new focus on the political agenda? How might more and more people start enjoying their political identities? Fredric Jameson is one of the few Marxists who has addressed these questions, if in a familiar system of priorities:

The proper political use of pleasure must always be *allegorical* . . . the thematizing of a particular pleasure as a political issue (to fight, for example, on the terrain of the aesthetics of the city; or for certain forms of sexual liberation; or for access to certain kinds of cultural activities; or for an aesthetic transformation of social relations or a politics of the body) must always involve a dual focus, in which the local issue is meaningful and desirable in and of itself, but is also *at one and the same time* taken as the *figure* for Utopia in general, and for the systemic revolutionary transformation of society as a whole. Without these simultaneous dimensions, the political demand becomes reduced to yet another local 'issue' in the micropolitics of this or that limited group or its particular hobby or specialization, and a slogan that once satisfied, leads no further politically.¹⁴

For all the careful nuancing of terms (appeals to literary tropes: allegory and figure), a conventional ('proper') socialist programme is noticeably still in

place. Specific issues, like sexual liberation, remain part of a general project. That is to say, the local must also consciously look towards a Utopian totality. This logic - of lesser parts and greater wholes - subordinates the 'theme' of pleasure to the larger political structure.

If, however, this piece of thinking is turned around so that pleasure itself becomes the structure of political understanding, then an altogether different politics of wants, needs, demands, and choices comes into view, and that is where a politics of identity can begin. The next two sections of this article do not offer an alternative plan of action to Jameson's. Instead, they open up discussion about the interest among gay writers in discovering a history for our desires, and how the wish to situate our contemporary lives within historical contexts can shape, extend, and bring new knowledge to the pleasure of being gay. The particular texts in question - by Neil Bartlett and Alan Hollinghurst - focus on issues central to a politics of identity, even though they are not in any respect explicitly attached to the points raised by Weeks, Watney, and Hall in their joint interest in radical democracy. Neither of the texts discussed below is a work of political theory. Emerging in the late 1980s, the two books - one a piece of historical research, the other a novel - turn their attentions to the use of history to comprehend the coming-into-being of a political identity. But rather than follow a Marxist imperative to learn from the 'lessons of the past', these books are trying to locate what exactly the gay 'past' was - a 'past' whose representation is hard to gain access to, and yet whose identity can be felt (even if problematically constrained by virtue of its social unacceptability) in a cultural arena with more licence than most for gay men: literary writing. And it is through literary culture and literary writing that gay men have found some of the most significant spaces in which to share a knowledge of the identity of our pleasures.

HISTORIES, IDENTITIES, PLEASURES

Oscar Wilde said that the one duty we owe to history is to rewrite it. Since I have no family photo albums, no christenings or weddings, no history lessons, no costume drama, no items about myself on the television news, a sense of history may be hard to come by. Mostly the work of our history will be the filling in of silences.¹⁵

Neil Bartlett's 'present' for Oscar Wilde, *Who Was That Man?* works between different modes - diary, documentary, essay - in an attempt to forge connections between two generations of gay men and their collective labours and so to locate the historical meaning of their sexual identities in their own repressive decades: the 1890s and the 1980s. That is, the concerns of Wilde's circle to investigate a homosexual past (like that found in Shakespeare's sonnets) parallel Bartlett's own fascination with Wilde and his coterie, along with the earlier activities of the notorious female impersonators Ernest Boulton and Frederick Park. Bartlett's experiences as a gay man in London are mapped on to those of Wilde's urban existence. Both men share the same

'sexual geography of the city' (p. xxvi) because both, in their own contexts, have a specific urban comprehension of homosexual signs (code-words, gestures, looks) in a territory where expressions of same-sex desire are officially forbidden. Bartlett wishes to go beyond the late 1960s, Stonewall, and the birth of the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) to see how he might arrive at an explicitly gay history of Victorian Britain's most publicly vilified homosexual. Moving between sections of his own diary, including accounts of periods of research in the British Library, and his analysis of Wilde's biography and oeuvre, he encounters the fundamental difficulty facing anyone undertaking such a project: too much is hidden, silenced, or concealed for him to understand what he wants to know about the gay past. The Wilde trials themselves point up particular suppressions of information: 'If the revelation of hitherto hidden aspects of a famous man's life was such a surprise to the newspaper-reading public of London, then why did Mr Justice Wills comment, in his summing up of the third trial: "I have tried many similar cases". What were those cases? Why were they so conveniently forgotten?' (p. 29).

Confronted by this lack of data, Bartlett is left with his own speculations about Wilde's gay urban experiences. What Bartlett knows of being gay in the 1980s has to be superimposed on Wilde's London a century beforehand, and so, like 'other gay fantasists and historians' from the 1890s (Roden Noel, John Addington Symonds, Walter Pater), he discovers his identity not as a 'unique experience' but within 'the idea that one man's experience may be the repetition of another's' (p. 199). The provisional nature of this 'repetition' is significant. The very fact that both generations found obstacles in their way towards recovering a past for themselves becomes, in itself, the substance of gay historical consciousness. The 1980s and the 1890s can, therefore, only be brought together in a tradition constituted by an imagination witnessing gaps, elisions, and concealments - unrepresentable moments of secrecy. That is, Bartlett and Wilde can only 'know' each other by virtue of reckoning with the impossibility of doing so because of the taboos and prohibitions surrounding them as gay men. The problem facing Bartlett's dialogue with Wilde may, of course, be viewed as one underlying all forms of historical research. The point is, the flexible voice adopted in this multi-discursive text mutually implicates the problem of historical understanding and the question of gay identity. The one cannot be comprehended without the other. Indeed, since this area of sexual history is not inherited (it has to be consciously imagined because of the paucity of documentation), there can be no appeals to whatever might be conceived of as an authentic past, only a projection of what might have been and is: 'I subject the story of my own life as a gay man to constant scrutiny; we all do. We have to, because we're making it up as we go along' (p. 30). And from this desire to re-create - even fictionalize - unrepresented experiences emerges what might be usefully called a kind of extopic lifewriting, whereby the self can manoeuvre into the position of a collective subject. (Extopy is the Bakhtinian principle of 'othering' the self.¹⁶) Here, history-making turns out to be a remarkable fantasizing upon the constitution of a sexual identity. (Bartlett has produced a similar meditation on the life of the gay Jewish

Victorian artist, Simeon Solomon, in what was originally a one-man performance entitled *A Vision of Love Revealed in Sleep*.) By way of a curious circularity, Bartlett's contemporary gay identity has to be the ground from which he can begin to comprehend the historical moment that he hopes will situate the identity upon which his 'present' for Wilde relies.

Bartlett's work can be set within the broader context of recent socialist lifewriting that explores a politics of identity, particularly in relation to gender and class (Liz Heron's edition of writings, *Truth, Dare or Promise* (1985) and Carolyn Steedman's *Landscape for a Good Woman* (1986), both from Virago Press, are notable texts).¹⁷ But Marxist and feminist work attempting to coordinate techniques in things as various as oral history and psychoanalysis are obviously distinct from *Who Was That Man?* because they are not explicitly motivated by a politics based on the right to make sexual contact. Although concerned in many respects with desire, they turn their gaze to other pressing issues: of conscience and of the unconscious. (Steedman's work, for example, demands to be read as a psychoanalytically informed feminist corrective to gender-blind orthodox Marxist accounts of working-class life.) The blurb on the cover of Bartlett's book quotes these approving words from Edmund White: 'Neil Bartlett has grabbed history by the collar and made bitter love to it.' The observation is acute because Bartlett's historical investigation is structured in metaphors of sexual 'cruising', trying to make eye-contact with the past and so to embrace its body. And this is a constantly reiterated exercise to secure identity, since, it seems, identity can only be understood by discovering its 'other': 'All the time, I think, we want to find out about each other, to know if we really belong to each other, belong together' (p. xx). He could be saying this about Wilde or any man he picks up for sex.

Clearly, the need to find others like ourselves has a special urgency for gay men because we are not supposed to be identifiable in public. (Holding hands on the streets of Britain can cause an arrest, even a brutal attack.) Likewise, we are not to be seen for what we 'are' in history books. To discover each other within the crowd, we have developed a system of signs for acknowledging the open secret of being gay:

A sign can be extraordinarily devious; from what does it derive its meaning? Even the most ordinary of contemporary images can assume the fickle potency of extravagant historical costume. Dressed in jeans, leather jacket and a moustache I may walk down a London street feeling entirely confident; at the same time as being a recognizable gay man to those who matter, I also pass as straight. Walking into a bar I look as identifiably gay as if I had made my entrance in a Hartnell gown and tiara. Wearing the same outfit to make a train journey, leaving London for a small town, I simply look like an ordinary man. (p. 63)

Stylizing particular aspects of conventional masculine dress, we can adopt and subvert given identities, appearing like 'real men' and yet being the last thing a 'real man' would want to be mistaken for: gay. (Bartlett's comparison with Hartnell's ball-gowns points out that his masculine attire is a form of drag.)

And this butch style (which is one of many gay styles) is pleasurable because it achieves sexual contact by negotiating a cultural form - hardened masculinity - that is predicated upon homophobia. This type of gay identity, therefore, consciously inhabits a publicly acceptable one which is, in fact, its enemy. It appears that the mocking laughter of parody - the framing and sending-up of given forms - is at work here. But this mockery of masculinity is also driven by a desire for the symbol it derides.

This structure of desire is continuously played out in all areas of gay culture, finding one of its most enjoyable manifestations in camp. Stylish subversion from within is Wilde's key aesthetic principle (his inverted proverbs standing received wisdom on its head), and this camp mode of simultaneously disguising and exposing matters of 'truth' proves to be one of the main connections between Bartlett and the history he is 'making up': 'We still consider inventing a new life to be an ordinary, even inevitable activity. If you can't be authentic (and you can't), if this doesn't feel like real life (and it doesn't), then you can be *camp*' (p. 167). To be gay, then, means to be at a remove from whatever might be construed as being a 'real' person. However, gay pleasure does not exist purely within a space which uses camp to flout those legitimated identities that would all too readily dissociate themselves from homosexuality. Instead, gay pleasure can and does remake itself in a great range of carefully staged scenes of thrilling sex, especially those rehearsed in rituals of sado-masochism. Both of these pleasures need to be examined briefly.

Although camp, first of all, has been extensively analysed, notably by Susan Sontag in a long series of notes dedicated to Wilde, it has usually been understood as an aesthetic rather than a political formation. (Sontag recognizes only too well the problems of analysing the 'essence' of camp. Yet her illuminating discussion views camp solely as a 'sensitivity'.¹⁸) Whatever the historical origins of camp - the late nineteenth-century French derivations of, variously, 'exceptional want of character', or to 'pose' one's subject in painting' (Bartlett, p. 168) - 'camp is the desire of the subject never to let itself be defined as object by others but to reach for a protective transcendence, which, however, exposes more than it protects'.¹⁹ Self-consciously exploiting incongruities of tone between utterance and meaning, camp places a parodic frame around postures, roles, and performances which have become tiringly familiar. It is a critical mode but it may fail to appear as such because it is done in the name of fun; as Christopher Isherwood observed in the 1950s: 'You can't camp about something you don't take seriously. You're not making fun of it; you're making fun out of it.'²⁰ This helpful definition makes it clear that camp can even make fun out of satirical forms designed to make fun of others. For gay men, camp certainly operates as a device to defend ourselves against a dominant culture that regularly holds us up for ridicule. Yet the point here is that camp is not symmetrical with the forms of attack it is responding to. It is the resilience of its critical pleasures - of reflexively interrogating styles, exaggerating words and actions to allow a critique of stereotyping - that can provide a starting-point for the lei to consider how to enjoy the serious issue of establishing a political identity as a

strategic form of empowerment, and yet not lapse into an essentializing rhetoric of authenticity.

The second area of pleasure concerns the erotics of the gay body, and the multiplicity of sexual practices redistributing pleasure across a range of somatic sites away from exclusively genital and penetrative forms of intercourse. (Anal sex, however, is still of central importance for many of us, and need not be a site of renunciation within the frameworks of safer sexual practices.) In an essay written in the early 1980s before AIDS, Richard Dyer summarized the limitations of the Gay Liberation Front's particular commitment to liberating gay male sexuality: 'As long as sexuality meant genital sexuality, it could be quantified and its "needs" met - more opportunities to do it more often . . . Our mistake, which we are only just beginning to see, was in demanding the liberation of sexuality, when we need to be demanding liberation *from* sexuality, in the name of the body.'²¹

The culture of AIDS has enabled an always potentially existent interest among gay men in sado-masochism to be more confidently espoused (rather than being suppressed as a result of fears of guilt and shame) in staging and subverting scenes of erotic domination and submission. Akin, in some respects, to the structure of camp, gay sado-masochism can invert the terms in which power is perceived in the dominant culture: pain becomes pleasure, and so the 'bottom' controls the power of the 'top'. But, as Leo Bersani cautions in an important essay, there are limits to reading sado-masochism as a 'parody of fascism'.²² In his attentive analysis of Watney's remarkable study of pornography, AIDS, and the media, *Policing Desire*, along with the work of other gay theorists, Bersani argues - contra Weeks - that it is dangerous to examine forms of sado-masochistic power-play as a displacement of social inequalities because such an analysis suggests that all sexual practices and behaviours are, in fact, dissociated from a 'real' form of political power. He regards this manoeuvre - to claim that the sexual is not a site of power itself, only its displaced staging - as part of a 'pastoralizing project' aimed at sanitizing sex. Rather than 'redeem' the sexual by celebrating forms of gay sexuality for their 'subversive potential for parodies of machismo', he favours understanding our sexual practices as '*jouissance* as a mode of ascesis', or pleasure in something that is being given up, surrendered, lost. By that, Bersani means that gay men, by virtue of having internalized the phallic male, keep re-presenting that image 'as an infinitely loved object of sacrifice' (p. 222). His argument emphasizes how we achieve pleasure in an image that, if brutal in its cultural meaning, is in the process of being shattered by us. This account, therefore, emphasizes how male homosexuality is, psychically, driven to a continual losing of self - of identifying and dissolving bonds with a symbol of power because we are making love with the man we are not supposed to be, a man whose image stands in judgement against us. In other words, our pleasure is situated metaphorically in our death. (This formulation must not be conflated with a general perception about gay men and AIDS: that our sexual practices have led to our deaths.)

The broader issue that emerges from Bersani's analysis is that gay male sexuality actively submits the self to its own disappearance. This is a point that

has been taken up by Linda R. Williams in her juxtaposition of 'paranoia' and 'ecstasy' within a framework for comprehending pleasure (specifically, feminine masochism in reading). Williams notes the pleasurable need to lose the self while, simultaneously, maintaining the self's boundaries. She closes her discussion with a request for accounts of pleasure in the readings and writings of different sexualities, noting that such accounts may appear 'undignified'.²³ This allusion to a possible loss of dignity suggests that the tone of voice, style of address, and subject-matter these readings choose to adopt may militate against the conventions of what is thought to be acceptable in academic writing. (The 'we' of the present essay, for example, is possibly having the effect of adjusting readers' identifications with the academic context in which it appears.) However, the constitution of the self at stake in the pleasure taken in reading and writing - whether maintained or lost, in paranoia or ecstasy - needs to be situated within a history to obtain a political identity. The next section relocates the questions raised so far about history, pleasure, and identity precisely within the context of reading, and the particular 'lifestyle' that may be examined in relation to gay fiction.

GAY MEN, GAY FICTION

It almost goes without saying that the academic essay is a form of writing that makes contradictory demands on its writer: to be original, on the one hand, and impersonal, on the other. Subjective insights have to be articulated objectively. But this institutional role has been violated time and again by Black and feminist critics, realigning the perspective between subject and subject-matter. Bartlett's *Who Was That Man?* equally contravenes the proprieties of the academic institution. It is, indeed, a scholarly book but it does not, as has been outlined, take the form of an academic monograph. Placed alongside Richard Ellmann's definitive biography of Wilde, published in 1987, the multi-vocal text of *Who Was That Man?* analyses the conditions surrounding Wilde's homosexual identification in a manner not available to the form of conventional biography. Ellmann's fulsome narrative of Wilde's 'life' is replete with an overwhelming amount of empirical detail. Yet Ellmann provides hardly any glimpses of the historical reasons for Wilde's homosexual identity, let alone the particular cultural forms it took.

Since academic literary criticism finds it necessary to suppress the personal in its tone and style, it often finds it difficult to engage with the representation of the many different 'experiences' - sexual, cultural, class-specific - comprising practically every genre it investigates. This problem arises because the orthodox humanism still dominant in English literary studies represents as appropriate the assumption that 'human experience' exists as a readily generalizable category that cannot and should not be challenged. And so it is practically impossible for a major heterosexual biographer of a major homosexual to focus on the problem besetting much of his research: in spite of all the information he has sedulously garnered about Wilde's 'life' here remains another (gay) 'life' that is unseen, unknown, and which can only be guessed at. Increasingly in literary studies there is a call to take responsibility

for the authority of the voices we adopt when writing about our reading; as, for example, in Jane Tompkins's meditation on the critical essay she would prefer to be writing to the one she has been asked to contribute to a journal:

The public-private dichotomy, which is to say, the public-private *hierarchy*, is a founding condition of female oppression. I say to hell with it. . . . I think people are scared to talk about themselves, that they haven't got the guts to do it. I think readers want to know about each other. Sometimes, when a writer introduces some personal bit of story into an essay, I can hardly contain my pleasure. I feel I'm being nourished by them, that I'm being allowed to enter into a personal relationship with them.²⁴

Part of the pleasure here undoubtedly derives from breaking with institutional constraints, of doing what we are not supposed to. Yet such pleasure leaves the personal voice in a double bind that needs careful attention: there is, on the one hand, the already noted danger of retreating into a rhetoric of authenticity and, on the other, a related difficulty of representativeness. Who am 'I' - a construction, a persona - speaking for? And what is the 'we' into which 'I' include myself?

Bersani has asked: 'What is *the* gay life-style? Is there one? Was Foucault's life-style the same as Rock Hudson's?' (p. 220) - the philosopher and film-star, both of whom were people with AIDS. In Britain, it is possible to be gay in specific places and spaces: notably, the club scene and social networks often organized around campaigning organizations (phone-lines; fund-raising; and so on). However, there is no given gay 'community' as such. (We may be 'family' but few of us have been born into a lesbian and gay one.) There are erotic territories - cruising-grounds - for us in larger cities. But the sense of being part of a collective identity is mediated for us as much through a limited national press as anything else. The gay press, if culturally limiting, nevertheless provides a vital service: it is always full of contact ads. Yet, even if gay experience is inevitably different for every man who identifies as gay (since we are other identities as well), there remain, of course, cultural forms that enable us to share a knowledge of who we are. Gay men have clustered around, for instance, icons of strong and suffering femininity. Dyer has examined the cult of gay men that followed Judy Garland during the 1950s and 1960s, making the campy phrase 'a friend of Dorothy's' (from that otherwise innocent childhood fantasy *The Wizard of Oz*) a by-word for male same-sex desire; he cites this letter from a Garland fan: 'She appeals to me as a gay person . . . because she tended to sing songs which seem to echo all the doubts and trials of a gay man within an unaccepting social order.'²⁵ And a much more recent and public identification with the powerful woman - who enjoys a kind of camp excess - can be seen in the work of Julian Clary, the self-defined 'Joan Collins Fan Club', who has shown it is possible to be relatively 'out' on a quiz show scheduled for prime-time family viewing. (*Trick or Treat* was broadcast in the first months of 1989.) Gay men, likewise, have often looked to fiction for representations of the particular pressures placed upon our desires. But 'our' texts are now catching the attention of major publishers, and so 'our'

writing is now being consumed by a non-gay audience.

The moment it was published in early 1988 Alan Hollinghurst's *The Swimming-Pool Library* was lauded by Edmund White as 'the best book about gay life written by an English author'.²⁶ It captures the language, gestures, social context, and, above all, cultural traditions shaping a recognizable type of early 1980s gay 'lifestyle' - a word with a complex of associations about social aspirations, use of leisure time, and taste. The novel reached the bookshops when demonstrations against Clause 28 of the Local Government Act, prohibiting the 'promotions of homosexuality' by local authorities, were gathering strength, and when the clause was rightly creating an upswell of anger within the literary establishment. Clause 28, hurriedly introduced into the bill in December 1987, was successfully passed six months later; it was implemented, in other words, at a time when gay men were becoming more visible - more 'out' - in the mainstream than ever before. Writing in the January of that year, Blake Morrison noted:

The American Edmund White's *The Beautiful Room is Empty* . . . was published by Picador on Friday. Alan Hollinghurst's novel of contemporary - or rather pre-MDS - gay life in London, *The Swimming-Pool Library*, appears from Chatto next month. And on the same day Faber publish Stephen Spender's 'lost' novel of 1929, *The Temple*, based on his own experiences in Weimar Germany, with its cult of nakedness and male friendship. Add to that Richard Ellmann's biography of Oscar Wilde, and a forthcoming major exhibition of Robert Mapplethorpe's photographs, and it looks as if we have something approaching a genre in which 'positive' images of male homosexuality are being promoted.²⁷

The coincidence between this act of law and the new visibility of gay male experience in fiction and photography is hardly accidental. Clause (later Section) 28 was, in a sense, something of a reaction against the perceived toleration of male and female homosexuality on the school curriculum, and also against the presence of lesbian and gay activists voicing discontent about, and consequently taking positive action on, the treatment of people with AIDS. But a cause and effect model is not entirely helpful here since British lesbian and gay politics and culture have developed along lines not purely defined against Thatcherism. Our histories go back well before 1979, and it is to that longer history, on both sides of the Atlantic, that much recent gay fiction looks. The American Edmund White's *The Beautiful Room is Empty* (1988) actually ends with Stonewall; Michael Carson's British novel, *Sucking Sherbet Lemons* (1988) turns to the 1950s. Throughout the 1980s there has been a growing market for gay fiction, along with many other areas of 'minority' writing, and publishers are keen to get hold of potential 'crossover' titles which will reach readers beyond their primary target audience. This question of marketing raises an important point about what has been happening to gay fiction in the past ten to fifteen years; George Stambolian states: 'We wouldn't be asking today if gay fiction can "crossover" and attract a straight audience if

it hadn't already been able to crossover many of the divisions within the gay community itself.²⁸

Hollinghurst's novel is regarded as a 'crossover' novel of this type - it was on the bestseller list for hardback fiction for several weeks. It opens up a first-person retrospect on 'the last summer of its kind that was ever to be' for gay men in London: the pre-MDS summer of 1983.²⁹ Structured around two life stories - the memoirs of an elderly aristocrat, stretching from the 1920s to the recent past, and the autobiographical narrative of a much younger but equally wealthy young man - Hollinghurst's project is in many ways structurally similar to Bartlett's excursion into researching Wilde. But the nature of the research here is far more implied than stated. The novel is strewn with references (many of them heavily ironized) to gay history - the hotel in Bloomsbury which features as a main sexual location is called the Queensberry (Wilde's prosecutor); there is, in passing, a figure called Labouchere (author of the 'gross indecency' clause in the Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1885); and the short campy novels of Ronald Firbank are frequently alluded to (their precious first editions represent a homosexual tradition that Hollinghurst's work is self-consciously extending). Hollinghurst names his hero William Beckwith, after William Beckford, the pre-eminently wealthy, homosexual author of the Gothic novel, *Vathek* (1786). Finally, the older man's memoirs seem based on the partially glimpsed gay histories of E. M. Forster and T. E. Lawrence. The links between the two life histories are explored within a narrative structure of repetition. Beckwith's urban gay life turns out as an uncanny replay of Lord Nantwich's rounds of cottaging. These characters comprise two generations of sons of the rich, with the same school (Winchester) behind them. And they share a similar love for working-class men. The social ethos is white and upper-class: Oxford, gentlemen's clubs, art galleries, mixed in with sexual adventures in a gymnasium and a disco.

Although Morrison places this novel within a corpus of gay 'positive images', the novel appears to be deliberately eschewing any such strategy. Rather than represent a post-Gay Liberation Front identity, one aware of political struggle and the need for the forms of socialism paradigmatically represented by the Greater London Council in the early 1980s, Hollinghurst depicts a counter-image based on a hedonistic gay life-style and pushes it to astonishing extremes. Beckwith is selfish, loathsomely rich (he does not have to work), exploitative, and sexually very active; thus the narrative swiftly forges metonymic links between what are often thought to be negative aspects of gay men's lives. Echoing Wilde's and Firbank's penchants for pieces of working-class 'trade', Beckwith enjoys his most erotic encounters with men who are emphatically stereotyped. (The novel is peopled with character-types familiar from popular culture - a Spanish cook called Pino who comically inflects his broken English; an East End boxing-trainer who has served plenty of time and speaks in the finest Dickensian Cockney.) Characterization is wilfully predictable, constantly pointing to the highly constructed version of the kind of gay ethos it is delineating. (The narrative is, likewise, heavily-plotted, working not only with structures of repetition but also coincidence. Former chance encounters turn out to be fatal attractions.)

The problematic deployment of stereotypes in a work of such 'out' gay fiction raises important questions about how perceptions of gay identity actually operate, both for ourselves and those who do not identify as gay. Are we actually like this? And what is our history? Is our history only available to us through the half-concealed allusions and codings of literary writings? And who can belong to this history? Exclusively those men who comprise gay culture? All the character types frozen in the social reality proffered here? The novel brings these questions to the surface with a level of self-awareness never before found in gay fiction. Although it is tempting to see this work colluding with the 'othering' activity that takes place in stereotyping, it is also exposing these (potentially oppressive, even self-oppressive) images to the scrutiny of history - to consider what life was like in 1983 and whether this portrayal of gay life can be identified with any longer. Writing about the well-known early 1980s movie of the New York leather scene, *Cruising*, Watney focuses on the difficulties involved in thinking about stereotypes:

The major problem with theories of stereotyping is that they concentrate on individual images or motifs to the exclusion of the *active* role of the viewer. For a stereotype is rarely a misrepresentation; it is almost invariably a site of ideological contestation, a site of conflict between incompatible pictures of what it means to be gay, black, an old woman, and so on. To identify a stereotype is to signal one's rejection of a particular image, usually of oneself. It is to refuse an identification to which one has been interpellated. It therefore involves both recognition *and* rejection.³⁰

In *The Swimming-Pool Library*, stereotyping is not disavowed. Rather, it is exaggerated and specifically orientated towards a gay politics that wants to know how this representation of ourselves has been arrived at. What have been the historical and cultural circumstances that have led us to see ourselves in this way? Are these the only images through which our pleasures can be understood? The manipulation of two interleaved first-person narratives continually focalizes each episode from a position *inside* the stereotyped scenarios. And there is a dual focus of interrogation here. The two narrators are both the spectators and the spectated, or, to use allied but different terms, the vehicle and the tenor, of what is seen here. It seems to be the case in this novel that gay male culture is so clearly defined in terms of its territories and practices that the stereotype has to be embraced in order to understand how it has arisen. In other words, this novel is trying to find out how this particular image of gay culture has been produced.

In this narrative, therefore, desire cannot escape from the circuit of cultural traditions and cultural forms it so self-attentively situates itself within. And these forms and traditions include not only Wilde, Furbank, and Forster but also contemporary pornography. Take, for example, this scene:

As we turned into my road he was hobbling and said, 'Will, I'm busting for a piss.' The tight waistband of my trousers squeezed cruelly on his bladder, swollen with a couple of pints of lager. By the time we had entered the

house and climbed the stairs he hardly dared move, and clutched at himself with a babyish moan of need. I unlocked the door and as he slipped in caught him by the arm and made him stand where he was. Then I knelt down and undid his shoes and pulled his socks off: he was jiggling on the spot, gasping 'Man, hurry up!' But instead of letting him go I led him on to the lino of the kitchen, and he stood there, obedient and desperate. I took off his shirt, and undid the top button of his trousers, restoring his porno image - some tough, cocky, bemused little tart. His dick was already half-hard from the desire to piss, and as I kissed him, and bit him, and licked his tits, I whispered to him to let it go. I slipped my hands between his legs and squeezed his balls, and watched his eyes widen as he overcame his inhibition. He looked grateful, almost ecstatic, as the first shy stain blossomed in his lap, his cock jacked up under the thin skin-tight cotton, and then it was all happening, it pumped out, on and on, his left leg darkening and glistening as it drenched down. An abundant, infantile puddle spread on the lino, and when he had finished I went behind him, pushed him to the floor and fucked him in it like a madman. (p. 163)

Since this episode is contrived through a reference to pornography (acknowledging its relation to that form), it makes a double-edged manoeuvre - it appeals to an 'authentic' model of eroticism, and yet, in doing that, points up how staged and how conventional this act of 'water sports' is. There are, then, two pleasures at work here, sexual and textual: one that celebrates the impulses of the body, and another that reflects on the fact that these desires are rehearsed. It might be called an interrogative eroticism. Instead of denying the sexiness of sex, the novel evaluates it in the process of representing it. Sex is both freed and framed. Pleasure not only exists in the scene that is represented but in the consciousness of how that representation operates. And it is at that point that the parodic tendencies of camp and sado-masochism can be composited together with this scene to suggest that these constitutive elements of gay identity can enable a critical assessment of pleasure.

Early on in what still remains as practically the only theoretical work on textual pleasure, Roland Barthes - via a thoughtful choice of words by his translator - fantasizes upon a shared moment of blissful contact (or 'cruising') between writer and reader:

If I read this sentence, this story, or this word with pleasure, it is because they were written in pleasure (such pleasure does not contradict the writer's complaints). But the opposite? Does writing in pleasure guarantee - guarantee me, the writer - my reader's pleasure? Not at all. I must seek out this reader (must 'cruise' him) *without knowing where he is*. A site of bliss is then created. It is not the reader's 'person' that is necessary to me, it is this site: the possibility of a dialectics of desire, of an *unpredictability* of bliss: the bets are not placed, there can still be a game.³¹

A gay context for this extract is obviously informative. Analogous to an urban map of sexual desire, the text can be thought of here as a cruising-zone: a site

where desire charts its spaces for others to share the pleasures of contact: contact between those who are able to identify each other but who have not - as with most cruisers - ever met before. Time and again, we re-present the desire to find out who we 'are' in an unpredictable location where unforeseen *jouissance* may be created. Put crudely, we may know what we want but we can never know in advance who we will enjoy it with. Object-choice is clear but the possibilities of pleasure are still to be discovered. It is hardly insignificant that the major theorist of such pleasure was a gay man, although this particular text of pleasure has only infrequently been associated with a homosexual politics of any kind. But perhaps Barthes's pleasure is generalizable, there for any reader he may cruise, regardless of sexual identity?

Such pleasures, however, are not (even if they should be) available for everyone to cruise, given the anti-sexuality that fuels so much right- and left-wing discourse, and wrecks our current perceptions about democracy. Weeks has opened up the political possibilities of a much more radical democracy that literally embraces sexuality:

'Sexuality' . . . is a phenomenon which is typically understood as being outside the rules of social organisation. We celebrate its unruliness, spontaneity and wilfulness, not its susceptibility to calculation and decision-making. But it is surely a new form of democracy that is called for when we speak of the right to control our bodies, when we claim 'our bodies are our own', (p. 243)

He proceeds to discuss feminist arguments about 'a woman's right to choose' as a central mobilizing force around making the personal political, by putting the body, its desires and demands, at the centre of how we perceive and act upon our worlds. Choice may be one thing and pleasure another but the two have to be worked together, and critically at that - along lines of negotiating consent, comprehending differentials of power, and refining vocabularies for stating what we want and why we want it. Gay politics is about the right to represent our pleasures wherever we are, and so to continue - in Foucault's words - '*becoming* truly gay, rather than persisting in defining ourselves as such'.³² Our struggle for visibility by asserting gay identity has made us acutely aware of the problems facing the representation of pleasure. The styles we have developed are continuously watchful of their mediation, particularly when they have had to find expression in either totally unlicensed or carefully monitored spaces. In our gay '*becoming*' we are, therefore, able to reassess our pleasures. The left could learn much from taking seriously the strategies we have adopted for enjoying ourselves. In a politics of identity, there needs to be the choice to be able to play with the notion of identity itself, to give ourselves the chance of imagining what it is like to be other identities, and, in some cases, creating alliances with them. The opportunity exists for everyone to be camp and to practise sado-masochism. And if those pleasures, for the moment, seem unattractive, then at least there is the choice to comprehend why - historically, culturally, politically - they are there at all.

NOTES

Thanks to Erica Carter for guidance.

- 1 J. Weeks, *Sexuality and its Discontents; Meanings, Myths, and Modern Sexualities* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), 209.
- 2 S. Watney, 'The banality of gender', *Oxford Literary Review*, 8, 1-2 (1986), 18-19.
- 3 See S. Watney, 'The spectacle of AIDS', *October*, 43 (1987), 71-86; *Policing Desire: Pornography, Aids and the Media* (London: Comedia, 1987); and E. Carter and S. Watney (eds), *Taking Liberties: Aids and Cultural Politics* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1989).
- 4 K. Mercer and I. Julien, 'Race, sexual politics and Black masculinity: a dossier', in R. Chapman and J. Rutherford (eds), *Male Order: Unwrapping Masculinity* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1988), 103. See also the essays edited by B. Cant and S. Hemmings, *Radical Records: Thirty Years of Lesbian and Gay History* (London: Routledge, 1988).
- 5 S. Hall, 'The toad in the garden: Thatcherism among the theorists' in C. Nelson and L. Grossberg (eds), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (London: Macmillan, 1988), 72.
- 6 S. Hall, 'Brave new world', *Marxism Today* (October 1988), 29. Hall is referring to L. Segal, *Is the Future Female? Troubled Thoughts on Contemporary Feminism* (London: Virago Press, 1987).
- 7 H. K. Bhabha, 'The commitment to theory', *New Formations*, 5 (1988), 13. See J.-F. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. G. Bennington and B. Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 10-11.
- 8 E. Laclau and C. Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 1985), 181.
- 9 S. Hall and D. Held, 'Left and rights', *Marxism Today* (June 1989), 21.
- 10 M. Foucault, 'Sex, power, and the politics of identity', cited by E. Cohen, 'Foucauldian necrologies: "gay" "politics?" Politically gay?', *Textual Practice*, 2, 1 (1988), 92.
- 11 F. Mort, 'The writing on the wall', *New Statesman and Society* (12 May 1989), 40.
- 12 J. Baudrillard, *The Ecstasy of Communication*, trans. B. and C. Schutze, ed. S. Lotringer (New York: Semiotext(e)/Autonomedia, 1988), 24, 67.
- 13 M. Finch, 'Sex and address in "Dynasty"', *Screen*, 27, 6 (1986), 24.
- 14 F. Jameson, 'Pleasure: a political issue', in *The Ideologies of Theory: Essays 1971-1986*, Volume Two, *Syntax of History* (London: Routledge, 1988), 73.
- 15 N. Bartlett, *Who Was That Man? A Present for Mr Oscar Wilde* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1988), 223.
- 16 This is a limited but useful translation of Bakhtin's work on dialogism. I am following Maggie Humm's deployment of 'extopy' in her account of lifewriting practice in feminist teaching: "'Extopy" is active understanding and watchful listening and knowledge taking the form of a dialogue where a "thou" is equal to an "I" yet different from it': 'Women's Studies: pedagogy and dialogic, experts in experience', unpublished paper delivered at Higher Education of Teachers of English conference, Birkbeck College, April 1989, ms 22; my thanks to her for a copy of this paper.
- 17 On the problem of autobiographical 'authenticity' in these and related texts, see L. Marcus, "'Enough about you, let's talk about me": recent autobiographical writing', *New Formations*, 1 (1987), 77-94.
- 18 S. Sontag, 'Notes on "camp"' (1964), in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*

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- (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1966), 275-92.
- 19 H. Beaver, 'Homosexual signs (in memory of Roland Barthes)', *Critical Inquiry*, 8 (1981), 106. Finch points out that 'arguments for camp's subversiveness, specifically in questioning culturally-constituted gender roles, are themselves questionable' and cites Andrew Britton's comments on how camp 'reinforces existing social definitions' of masculinity and femininity; against this view Finch argues that 'camp becomes important when it speaks to [gay] historical experience'. I would wish to emphasize that to 'be gay' it is necessary to comprehend the historical significance of the pleasure camp has given gay men in coping with a world that prohibits gay representation. Bartlett's and Hollinghurst's books are part of a political project to discover the historical bearings of camp. (Britton's comments strike me as offering a fated theory of the inevitable: categories, he seems to be arguing, no matter how much you camp them up, remain steadfastly in their place. Such a view makes camp appear non-strategic, fun for fun's sake, rather than fun and a concomitant critique of fun. Reading Wilde as closely as Bartlett and Sontag do serves as a helpful reminder of the contestatory aspects of camp.) See M. Finch, *op. cit.*, 36-7 and A. Britton, 'For interpretation: notes against camp', *Gay Left*, 7 (1978), 11-14.
- 20 Cited by Beaver, *ibid.*
- 21 R. Dyer, 'Getting over the rainbow: identity and pleasure in gay culture and politics', in R. Brunt and G. Bridges (eds), *Silver Linings: Some Strategies for the Eighties* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1981), 65. For a critique of GLF, see S. Watney, 'The ideology of GLF' in Gay Left Collective (eds), *Homosexuality: Power and Politics* (London: Allison & Busby, 1980), 64-76.
- 22 L. Bersani, 'Is the rectum a grave?', *October*, 47 (1987), 220.
- 23 L. R. Williams, 'Submission and reading: feminine masochism and feminist criticism', *New Formations*, 7 (1989), 32. Williams is referring to a 'personal' account of reading poetry by I. Armstrong, 'Christina Rossetti: diary of a feminist reading', in S. Roe (ed.), *Women Reading Women's Writing* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1987), 117-37; see also in the same volume D. Collecott, 'A double matrix: re-reading H.D.', 139-75.
- 24 J. Tompkins, 'Me and my shadow', in L. Kauffman (ed.), *Gender and Theory: Dialogues on Feminist Criticism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 123.
- 25 R. Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society* (London: BFI/Macmillan, 1987), 153.
- 26 E. White, 'The shimmer of romance, the sulphur of confession', *Sunday Times* (21 February 1988), G4.
- 27 B. Morrison, 'An even bigger splash', *Observer* (24 January 1988).
- 28 G. Stambolian, 'Entering the mainstream', *European Gay Review*, 4 (1989), 105.
- 29 A. Hollinghurst, *The Swimming-Pool Library* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1988), 3.
- 30 S. Watney, 'Hollywood's homosexual world', *Screen*, 23, 3-4 (1982), 108. In one of the most significant essays to date on stereotyping, Tessa Perkins remarks that it is probable that 'gays will be more conscious of stereotypes as stereotypes - whether or not they accept them as accurate'; gay culture often finds itself undoing the stereotypes ascribed to us. See 'Rethinking stereotypes' in M. Barrett, P. Corrigan, A. Kuhn, and J. Wolff (eds), *Ideology and Cultural Production* (London: Croom Helm, 1979), 152-3.
- 31 R. Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill & Wang, 1975), 4.
- 32 M. Foucault, 'Friendship as a lifestyle', in *La Gai Pied* (April 1981) cited by Cohen, *op. cit.*, 95.

Steve Bannon thinks identity politics are great for President Donald Trump. That's what the president's adviser told Robert Kuttner over at the American Prospect. Modern liberal identity politics is in large part a reaction to this US history and attitudes surrounding race. After centuries of what many people justifiably see as oppression, they think it's time the country has an open conversation about what has been going wrong all this time and how the country can move forward to be more tolerant and accepting of a diverse population. He added, "You can do nothing to protect black motorists [pulled over by police] and gay couples walking hand-in-hand down the street if you don't control Congress and, most importantly, if you don't have a voice in state legislatures." Scott Olson/Getty Images. It's my impression that many straight people believe that there are two types of gay men in this world: those who like to give, and those who like to receive. No, I'm not referring to the relative generosity or gift-giving habits of homosexuals. Not exactly, anyway. Rather, the distinction concerns gay men's sexual role preferences when it comes to the act of anal intercourse. But like most aspects of human sexuality, it's not quite that simple. I'm very much aware that some readers may think that this type of article does not belong on this website. But the great thing about good science is And the gay rights movement relied on a growing gay identity, which, in circular fashion, had been created in part by the military's persecution of gay service members. Just last May, Army Secretary Eric Fanning became the first openly gay leader of a U.S. military branch. As openly gay people were being targeted and excluded from service during the World Wars, the military unintentionally helped create supportive gay communities, made many gay people aware of their orientation and ultimately contributed to the creation of a gay identity in America. And after World War II, policies excluding gay people continued to carry on for more than sixty years, until DADT was repealed just half a decade ago. Posted in: Politics Features. Are We Thinking About Climate Migration All Wrong?