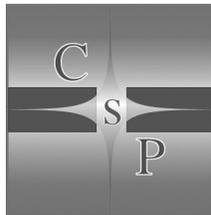


21st-Century Gay Culture

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Edited by

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INTRODUCTION

Not quite a decade into the 21st century, we find ourselves asking new questions and contemplating, again, some of the recurrent issues regarding gay culture, counterculture, inclusion, assimilation, and cofunctionality. Far from being redundant, revisiting important concerns is a sign of growth, the demonstration of a thriving community that continues to define itself as our position in and relationship to mainstream culture changes. As David L. Eng advances in the Introduction to the 2005 special issue of *Social Text*, , “it is crucial to insist yet again on the capacity of queer studies to mobilize a broad social critique of race, gender, class, nationality, and religion, as well as sexuality.”¹ The essays, by authors writing from and about various geographical and cultural locales, including in/out of the academy, gathered in *21st-Century Gay Culture* take a fresh look at some of the important components of gay culture and how we incorporate these elements into our daily, social, political—in short, our cultural lives. Each of the contributors has a history of reflection and publication on queer topics; they bring to bear a diverse range of intellectual experience which converges on several planes, yielding a group of readings at once wide-ranging and coherent. Our hope is to shed some light on the elusive and diverse nature of contemporary gay culture.

The end of the 20th century brought significant changes to the gay or LGBT or queer community in the USA—I use “gay,” “LGBT,” or “queer” not interchangeably but as a kind of shorthand, leaving the arguments for and against “community” for the texts you are about to read—for example Clinton’s founding of the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell (DADT)” policy (arguably momentous at the time) and the thirtieth anniversary of the Stonewall riots. Likewise the opening years of the 21st century have already seen important strides, such as the Lawrence v. Texas (2003) overruling of the Bowers v. Hardwick (1986) decision upholding the Georgia sodomy decision; statements by former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. John Shalikashvili and former Senator and Secretary of Defense William Cohen against DADT. And after the euphoria over the Vermont legislators’ passing of civil unions in 2000, no one forgets the predominant role, for better or for ill, that Same-Sex Marriage (SSM) played in the 2004 presidential campaigns. As such changes occur, so too does the landscape of gay culture. These components of our past and

present culture, along with the adjustments as well as the frustrations that affect our lives in a real and daily way, shape the focus of the essays which follow.

Culture in its various manifestations can be said to mirror daily life. When culture becomes the subject of dialogue, the ambiguity of the term typically opens up discussion. But this debate always introduces just as many variants as clarifications. Over the past fifteen years cultural studies have revealed not only the difficulty of defining “culture” but also the delight on the part of many scholars in the plurality of definitions that have surfaced. Culture has been described as “a set of cultural objects,” which might be physical, mental, metaphoric, symbolic reifications—objects created by the act of symbolization, in the words of the anthropologist Leslie White.² Pierre Bourdieu has called culture “the universal human capacity to classify, codify and communicate experiences symbolically.”³ Bourdieu posits that

[c]ulture is that sort of freely available and all-purpose knowledge that you acquire in general at an age when you don't yet have any questions to ask. You can spend your life increasing it, cultivating it for its own sake. Or else, you can use it as a sort of more or less inexhaustible toolbox.⁴

“Gay” culture in most instances, however, must be considered something rather different from mainstream culture. Gay culture represents a subculture, a set of people with a set of behaviors and beliefs that could be distinct or hidden, which differentiates them from the larger culture which surrounds them. Even considering the very public expression of gay culture that is becoming prevalent in the beginning of the 21st century, there are still important peculiarities that distinguish gay culture from the mainstream culture that Bourdieu addresses.

Separating gay culture from mainstream culture is arguably an obvious step; but what of the many cultures that compose gay life? Do we all share the same cultural experiences? Much like the indistinct and somewhat troubling term “community,” “gay culture” begs clarification as to the problematic assumption of a common identity. The concept of a community, while perhaps useful for the purposes of unified work toward a common goal, collapses into one collective noun the many different types of gay people that make up the so-called gay community. This is, in fact, one of the most conspicuous problems in the rhetoric of presidential candidates who are currently trying to garner the “gay vote”—a frustration we share with other minorities with whom the contenders also try to curry favor.

We can attempt to distinguish gay culture from mainstream culture, as well as from the culture of other groups, by reading Bourdieu's facile definition critically. When he states that, "at an age when you don't yet have any questions to ask," something at once familiar and foreign emerges for us: while we who feel different often do have questions at a young age, we don't always feel we should or even that we can ask them—"can" meaning just as much permission as facility. Our culture and our sensibility stem largely from this very (often self-imposed) interdiction and obstruction. Rather than an imitation of the heterosexual norm, though—to co-opt Judith Butler's objection to claims that homosexuality is a copy of heterosexuality⁵—our mode of questioning revolves around self-doubt, second guessing, and the conflicting tendencies of courageous trial and insecure retreat. Whence originate our difference, our originality, and our culture. Not insignificantly, this is also the source of our seemingly incongruous anxiety and, not disassociated, our camp sensibility.

Another aspect of culture that Bourdieu puts forward, which has particular implications for gay culture, becomes instructive as a way of introducing the specific components of gay culture that we present and consider in these essays:

[A]nachronism is written into the traditional attitude towards culture; the traditionally literate person experiences his or her culture as living, and sees himself or herself as contemporary with all his or her predecessors. Culture and language change because they survive in a changing world; [...] this universe can be called the space of 'co-possibles'. Anachronism detemporalizes the work, tears it out of time [...] at the same time that it temporalizes it by 'reactivating it' ceaselessly, by permanent reinterpretation.⁶

Bourdieu's emphasis on the temporal element of culture has specific and unique consequences for a gay context, and even more consequences for its critics. Our past is peppered with fear and anxiety from a variety of sources both internal and external. Only since the 1950s, and in a more focused way since the end of the 1960s, have we seen significant change. But change is difficult, and it is particularly difficult when community members do not share the same degree of confidence and commitment coupled with a similar degree of security and support. While many of us feel positively about the strides that have been made in the last several decades, others feel we are not changing fast enough. At the same time, we still face stubborn and distressing quandaries concerning religion, marriage (note that I separate these two issues), child-rearing, health

benefits—and the list goes on. Even so, our culture adjusts and adapts to new vistas and hopes. And for many of us, the very prospect of diverse manifestations of our culture offers the most optimistic view of our future.

Judith Butler's sense of performativity, as she discusses it in *Gender Trouble*, offers a useful context in which to discuss gay culture. She explains the reenactment or performance of gender "in ways that work against the heterosexual grain, and subversive performances such as parody and drag reveal ontological inner depths and gender cores as regulatory fictions."⁷ Parody without an original, Butler's "performance" is in fact a parody of an original itself. Thus the notion of the construction of gender, especially significant for LGBT people, clearly displays not only the anxiety of gender performance but the obvious way in which gay culture diverges from heterosexual culture.

Butler's guide provides clear and sometimes uneasy direction for the examination of gay culture. The same is not necessarily true of the exploration of gay identity. From an interview with Butler by Gary A. Olson and Lynn Worsham we read:

This term ["sexual minorities," a notion that Gayle Rubin introduced many years ago] is not identity-based: it isn't that we're struggling for people who are gay or lesbian or transgendered; we're struggling for all kinds of people who for whatever reason are not immediately captured or legitimated by the available norms and who live with the threat of violence or the threat of unemployment or the threat of dispossession of some kind by virtue of their aberrant relation to the norm. What worries me is that many mainstream gay organizations have become very identity-based. [...] [T]here are a lot of folks who aren't going to be able to stand up and say they are *X* or *Y*, or who might even say they are *X* or *Y* and their assertion would be disputed. [...] So, one important question here is: "What happens when identity politics get instituted in the law and becomes a very rigid structure so that the capacity for making a claim or seeking redress becomes effectively dictated by very narrow identity terms?" (347-48)⁸

Applying Butler's words to a consideration of gay culture, then, would beg the question of an identity-based culture—not just the problematic concept of a single culture originating in a narrowly defined community, but the awkward notion of a single culture originating in a group defined by its identity. Can we consider there to be a gay culture or cultures that derive from groups of people with similar cultural expression? Can we conceive of "gay culture" or "queer culture" as an umbrella term that would encompass cultural expressions of various types, from various time periods, embedded in diverse "majority" cultures? Race, class, and ethnicity have begun to claim space in queer theory, but this relatively new

development further complicates the notion of a single gay culture.⁹ This is exactly why the multiplicity of questions and cultural responses to often unspoken uncertainties can be viewed as justifiable and reasonable, not to say legitimate.

The essays in this collection offer insights that address the notion of gay culture. Carolyn Dinshaw delves into the dilemma of our relationship to our past in her exploration of an example of lesbian life in mid-19th-century upstate New York. The links between the past and the present lead her to some startling realizations about the way we think about our position in the 21st century and our concept of “progress” and its function in matters of concern to the queer community. Jonathan D. Katz takes the opportunity of the fiftieth anniversary of *Howl* to reexamine Allen Ginsberg’s statements about homosexuality. By means of another look at this (in)famous piece, Katz challenges Ginsberg’s assertions as well as the standard interpretation of his position in the matter of gay culture. Robert Schwartzwald next takes us to France to consider Daniel Guérin’s often contradictory statements on homosexuality and French notions of universality as expressed in his autobiographical writings. Steven D. Smith delves into Antiquity’s attempts to define queer identity and thus reminds us of the Greek roots of homosexual sensibility and its expression in two texts, the *Symposium* and Achilles Tatius’ prose narrative on Leucippe and Clitophon. Luciano Martínez invites us to take another look at the gay liberation movement of the 1970s in Latin America. Far from the promise of a new society, first the Cuban “solution” and then the political movements of other Latin American regimes had an undeniable impact on efforts to define and confine homosexuality, its nature and its expression.

The collection concludes with four essays that focus more specifically on present-day gay culture. Gema Pérez-Sánchez takes a look at the portrayal of immigrant and gay characters in contemporary Spanish film. In particular she is troubled by the apparently common identity of gays with immigrants in Spain at a historical moment when immigrants, and thus gays, are seen as pariahs. Through the lens of the ideology of the Paris Commune, David A. Gerstner asks us to reexamine our notion of (gay) culture today. He dares contemporary queer theorists to incorporate non-American (con)texts into our studies of gay culture rather than reverting to what Butler called the “intensely bourgeois politics that have taken over the gay movement.” In a similar vein, Tavia Nyong’o takes us to the heart of the race issue in contemporary gay America. He challenges us to contemplate the occulting of terms like “queer” and “black” in contexts where to speak these concepts is not only un-PC but actually confrontational; but not to speak them is, conversely, dishonest and

existentially insincere. Finally, Guillermo G. Caliendo takes a firm look at the same-sex marriage issue in terms of how the rhetoric has taken over the discourse of gay culture and the impact this very discourse risks effecting.

The essays included in *21st-Century Gay Culture* provide a wide array of perspectives from which to reexamine the concept of gay culture, its ontology and its future. What we hope to inspire is an open dialogue on the cultural expression that defines us and that we define. If the semiotic value of culture is, to reference Barthes, an attitude arising from the analysis of the process of meaning by which a group signals its values, these contributions to that inquiry offer considerable material for thought and further scrutiny. In *Publics and Counterpublics*, Michael Warner disputes the notion of an easily-defined public, which, to my way of thinking, is an outgrowth of the problematic concepts of community and culture. In order for there to be a gay culture, there must be a public that buys and consumes that culture. But can the discussion on gay culture be reduced to a simple matter of commodity and exchange? The essays that make up *21st-Century Gay Culture* speak to such a rich variety of manifestations and origins of culture so as to render it impossible to revert to a purely economic explanation. Culture in general, and gay culture in particular, must be allowed the intensity of its diverse expression, equally for primary instances of culture and for their critical examination.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the contributors for their work and their attention to detail. I also thank Dean Bernard J. Firestone and Provost Herman A. Berliner of Hofstra University for their support of the LGBT Studies Program and the symposium that prompted these essays. Finally, I extend my most sincere gratitude to my partner, Thomas R. Pileggi, for his unflinching encouragement in these endeavors.

David A. Powell, New York

¹ David L. Eng, "What's Queer About Queer Studies Now?" *Social Text* 23, 3-4 (fall-winter 2005): 3.

² L. White, *The Science of Culture: A study of man and civilization*. (New York: Farrar and Straus, 1949).

³ P. Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

⁴ P. Bourdieu, *In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology*, trans. Matthew Adamson (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 29.

⁵ "As a young person, I suffered for a long time, and I suspect many people have, from being told, explicitly or implicitly, that what I 'am' is a copy, an imitation, a derivative example, a shadow of the real. Compulsory heterosexuality sets itself up

as the original, the true, the authentic; the norm that determines the real implies that 'being' lesbian is always a kind of miming, a vain effort to participate in the phatasmatic plenitude of naturalized heterosexuality which will always and only fail." J. Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," (1990; *The Judith Butler Reader*, ed. Sara Salih with Judith Butler (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 127.

⁶ Ibid., "Reading, readers, the literate, literature," 104-05.

⁷ J. Butler, "Bodily Inscriptions, Performative Subversions," 1990; *The Judith Butler Reader*, ed. Sara Salih (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 93.

⁸ J. Butler, "Changing the Subject: Judith Butler's Politics of Radical Resignification," 2000; *The Judith Butler Reader*, 325-56.

⁹ See the excellent contributions of Judith Halberstam, "Shame and White Gay Masculinity," and Hiram Pérez, "You Can Have My Brown Body and Eat It Too!" in the special issue of *Social Text* 23, 3-4 (fall-winter 2005): 219-33 and 171-91.

BORN TOO SOON, BORN TOO LATE:
THE FEMALE HUNTER OF LONG EDDY,
CIRCA 1855

CAROLYN DINSHAW

I spent much of my recent sabbatical year in upstate New York, in a house I share with my girlfriend. Our land lies in the remote southwest corner of the Catskill mountain range, home of trout fishermen and deer hunters. In late June of that year I lived through the tragic flooding of the area, an experience that has fundamentally altered my sense of nature's contingencies, the passage of time and my place in the landscape. All this has inevitably seeped into my intellectual work on temporality; the flood has given me a fresh understanding of the concept of "the stream of Time." Anthropologist Johannes Fabian uses that phrase in his critique of evolutionary anthropologists in *Time and the Other*; the metaphor presents time as smoothly progressive, one moment coming after the last in a steady flow.¹ But—as is implicit in Fabian's deployment of the image, and as I am here to witness—streams do not always behave in this way. The stream that forms the border of our property rose, raged, and tore up its banks in the flood. Shifting and withdrawing, it cut new channels and created eddies, pools, and branches. From the small family cemetery upstream a headstone washed up on our banks, a part of the nineteenth century that only now, in the twenty-first century, made its way downstream [see fig. 1]. The rest of that family plot is still upstream. That moving headstone haunts my remarks here, as I meditate on the possibilities of a queer history—a history in which past and present and future mingle; in which there is thus a multitude of times in the Now; in which time moves in non-linear ways; in which ghosts and spirits act up.



Fig. 1: The headstone of David LeValley, 1820–1893
(Photo: Carolyn Dinshaw)

The strange temporalities of the Catskills are indeed legendary. If you believe the story by Washington Irving, first published in 1819 and immediately taken seriously in the region, Rip van Winkle slept for twenty years one night in those hills, enchanted by old Dutch spirits.² Rip’s story reminds us that lives do not always form linear narratives. His life, rather, is ruptured (thus his name), and it is at the same time continuous: Rip slept for twenty years, but he experienced the passage of only one night. As young as he knows himself to be, Rip’s body is creaky and his beard is grizzled: he is, in fact, the very incarnation of what we might call temporal heterogeneity. Rip is a walking anachronism, having slept through the American Revolution while his family and friends are very decidedly post-revolutionary creatures: not only is time *not* a smooth stream, but it is also not the same for everyone, as different people can experience totally different temporalities in the same present moment.

“Rip van Winkle” can thus help us imagine a history that is non-linear and responsive to multiple times in the Now. It also challenges us to take the supernatural seriously. The supernatural—ancient Dutch spirits in their “quaint” dress; ghosts; the divine—can emerge into view at any moment and inform one’s sense of causality, history, and time. The moving headstone I mentioned above images the uneven passage of time, but as my phrasing intends, I want to implicate the supernatural in this as well. Modern historical consciousness, founded on imperatives of rationality,

compels a vision of time inevitably rushing forward, with a present, a Now, that is singular and fleeting. But there are other “attitudes to time,” medievalist Aron Gurevich observes, other ways of “worlding” the earth, as postcolonial theorist Dipesh Chakrabarty puts it, beginning with the quite ordinary *aperçu* that the past inheres in the present.³ Such “disjunctures in the present”—“the noncontemporaneity of the present with itself”—“allow us to be with” ghosts and spirits, as Chakrabarty writes.⁴ And since we cannot master the past or the present, we have a responsibility to ghosts who figure that inability, as both Wendy Brown and Carla Freccero have seen.⁵ Jacques Derrida in *Specters of Marx* asks, “Without this *non-contemporaneity with itself of the living present*, without that which secretly unhinges it, without this responsibility and this respect for justice concerning those who *are not there*, of those who are no longer or who are not yet *present and living*, what sense would there be to ask the question ‘where?’ ‘where tomorrow?’ ‘whither?’” Carla Freccero works with Derrida’s notion of spectrality, maintaining that the “willingness to be haunted is an ethical relation to the world, motivated by a concern not only for the past but also for the future.”⁶ Attention to chronic multiplicity offers queer history a vast and variegated field of ethical resources and opens up a future in which we can address past injustices.

The Catskill mountain range was the home not only of the legendary Rip van Winkle, but also, a century and a half ago, of Lucy Ann Lobdell, known as “The Female Hunter of Long Eddy.” I have become fascinated with the story of this extraordinary person who once lived within a quarter mile of our doorstep up there, and I want to think further about her life and times, by which I mean her being in time, her relationship to her own time and to ours, however these might be defined. That moving headstone on our banks came from the family plot of a close friend of Lucy’s: David LeValley was the husband of Lucy’s friend Hetty.⁷ Lucy roamed those hills, she touched those very trees. How does her history continue to develop, how does her presence persist?

Lucy’s is an astonishing story, causing a sensation in her own day and stirring readers ever since.⁸ Born in 1829, according to her own account, she moved with her family from Albany County to the area bordering Sullivan and Delaware Counties in New York. She spent her early adulthood hunting those densely wooded acres; some say she may have been influenced by stories of the original Female Hunter, Gelerama, one of the last Indian women in those woods [see fig. 2].⁹



Fig. 2: Lucy Ann Lobdell in Indian garb
(Photo: Wayne [PA] County Historical Society)

According to one widely circulated account, Lucy “killed 168 deer, 77 bears, 1 panther, and numberless wild-cats and foxes.”¹⁰ She married—disastrously, as it quickly turned out—and was soon deserted, along with her infant daughter, by her no-good husband, George Washington Slater. Desperate as she looked at a future of domestic drudgery from dawn until midnight as well as low wage labor outside the house, as she explained it in her autobiography, she donned men’s clothes and set out to make a living as a man. Her adventures in the late 1850s—in nearby Pennsylvania as “professor of the dance,” adopting the name Joseph Israel Lobdell, as well as out west in Minnesota doing odd jobs as La-Roi Lobdell—attracted the attention of protective community members and the police, and she eventually ended up in the almshouse back in New York. There—in the late 1860s—she met another destitute abandoned wife, Marie Louisa Wilson, nee Perry, with whom she sparked a close relationship. They left the poorhouse together; according to several later accounts Lucy said she was a Methodist minister and was married to Marie, living as the Reverend Joseph Israel Lobdell (“Joe”). They lived together as man and wife for over a decade, indigent and subsisting on charity (according to some reports) and whatever could be garnered from the land.

But Lucy/Joe seems to have succumbed to the pressures of the life of an outsider, as Jonathan Ned Katz has recently suggested.¹¹ S/he was declared insane—some of the evidence adduced in the depositions of her/his insanity, besides erratic behavior, was wearing men’s clothing—

and s/he was committed to an asylum in 1880 [see fig. 3].¹² The doctor there knew her/him as “Joe,” and his medical journal article on this “case of sexual perversion” was among the earliest to describe lesbianism in American medical annals: it mentions “the quiet monotony of this Lesbian love” between “‘Joe’ and her assumed wife.”¹³ Lucy/Joe died in 1912 after institutionalization for more than three decades, but not before two premature obituaries, one in 1879 and the other in 1885, had been circulated in newspapers.¹⁴ On the death certificate the birth date is wrong, according to Lucy’s own account of her life: it has her born five years too soon.



Fig. 3: Lucy Ann Lobdell
(Photo: Wayne [PA] County Historical Society)

Born too soon: her great-great-great granddaughter, Susan Crawson Shields, in fact would agree with this assessment. Shields wrote approvingly in 1989 of her ancestor’s gender behavior and politics. In a long piece in the newsletter of the local historical society, Shields concludes thus:

The most interesting fact of Lucy Ann’s life, is when one considers where she would stand in today’s [*sic*] world. Her views on “women’s lib,” wearing pants, equal wages, etc., would fit right in. Her exploits with Maria Perry would not even make news items in our era. If anything, the fact that she was “The Female Hunter” would be the most newsworthy item about her. Lucy Ann was merely born “ahead of her time,” 130 years too soon. A “voice crying in the wilderness of things to come?”¹⁵

She would fit right in today, Shields suggests in 1989—and I might add that Lucy/Joe’s contemporaneity is only enhanced as time passes: now in the twenty-first century, there is a vibrant, growing transgender movement in the United States in addition to well-defined national gay and lesbian and feminist political agendas.

Lucy indeed sounds like a “voice crying in the wilderness of things to come” in her own memoir, the *Narrative of Lucy Ann Lobdell, the Female Hunter of Delaware and Sullivan Counties, N.Y.*, “published for the authoress” in New York in 1855. The narrative can be read to confirm Susan Crawson Shields’s claim that Lucy was born too soon: it details her early courtships and the miseries of her short marriage, explains her reasons for adopting men’s attire and setting out to work, and ends with an eloquent plea for women’s rights. For the most part Lucy attempts to set the record straight against her husband’s defamations and accusations that she was a profligate wife who kept a slovenly house. The book also, more briefly but with the promise of another volume, narrates with great relish various hunting exploits in the dense woods; painting a vivid picture of mid-nineteenth-century subsistence farming and timber production, it depicts life in a small community surrounded by wild forest. The narrative ends with the still young Lucy, exhausted by the prospect of the endless work that faces her as a penniless mother, imagining the lot of women in general and advocating passionately for women’s rights:

If she is willing to toil, give her wages equal with that of man. And as in sorrow she bears her own curse, (nay, indeed, she helps to bear a man’s burden also,) secure to her her rights, or permit her to wear the pants, and breathe the pure air of heaven, and you [an implied male reader] stay and be convinced at home with the children how pleasant a task it is to act the part that woman must act.¹⁶

Writing as the American popular “Women’s Rights” movement grew—the Seneca Falls meeting took place in 1848—Lucy here in 1855 was concerned with the number one issue on the petition for “The Just and Equal Rights of Women” circulated in New York State two years earlier: “Why should not Woman’s work be paid for according to the *quality* of the work done, and not the sex of the worker?”¹⁷ It seems possible that Lucy had heard a hint of the reformers’ ideas; she was educated and literate, and she had left her parents’ home in remote Long Eddy, ending up across the river in Pennsylvania. She had seen, that is, a little of the world.¹⁸ Her voice, nonetheless, sounds at the end of her narrative utterly isolated, at that point a highly rhetorical voice crying in the wilderness indeed. Lucy maintains sorrowfully that “I have no home of my own”:

staying in her paternal house would demand her domestic labor plus constant toil outside the house “from morning till night” for pitifully low wages, so in order to make a decent living she had to leave home in disguise—but with every right to “wear the pants”—to live, and write, far away from her loved ones.¹⁹

But “today,” the temporal moment that her great-great-great granddaughter Susan Crawson Shields imagines would be less hostile to Lucy/Joe, is certainly not homogeneous when it comes to views on women’s or gay rights. Wage equality may be an ideal but is very far from a reality, even in non-profit, progressive locations where one would most expect it. Conservative and reactionary ideologies of gender relations, particularly within marriage, are widespread in communities across the country. While images of gays and lesbians flood the TV screen, New York State’s Court of Appeals in 2006 ruled against same-sex marriage; legislation against same-sex couples carried the day in the 2004 elections nationwide; and transgender rights are still utterly marginal in the national imaginary—if one, indeed, can speak of “*the* national imaginary,” given the racial, ethnic, class, and regional diversity in the United States today. Born too soon? Lucy/Joe’s story suggests not only her own temporal estrangement but also the unevenness—ideological, which is also temporal, with political appeals to tradition on the one hand and progress on the other—of our own current moment.

What, then, of the claim that Lucy/Joe was born too late? Her/his second obituary, the one dated July 2, 1885, gives an account of her/his later life as, in fact, an anachronism. Earlier, she roamed the woods of the upper Delaware River “as a hunter,” the article explains:

The woods in those days were full of game and it was not difficult to make a fair living by the sale of furs and venison, but with the clearing up of the country, poor Lucy found her occupation gone and latterly she has had a hard time of it.²⁰

Her/his time seems, according to this account, to be quite over. A tragic timeline is traced in her/his very face, according to other accounts: in jail in Honesdale, Pennsylvania, in 1871, reports a local newspaper, “this singular creature” appeared “about medium size, with short, shaggy hair, and features in the main repulsive, but bearing traces of lost attractiveness.”²¹ “Then she was beautiful,” maintains another paper, speaking of the days of her courtship and marriage, “with more than ordinary intelligence, but now haggard [*sic*] and insane, wandering through the country like a beast.”²² The rhetoric of wildness is applied to her/his present appearance in Honesdale as well as to her/his past

disposition as a hunter: "She was as wild as the deer that then roamed over the hills of Delaware County." Her surroundings when she was a hunter were also called "a primitive wilderness."²³

What, exactly, did people find primitive about Lucy/Joe Lobdell? There seem to have been several elements of her/his putative backwardness. Her/his wilderness way of making a livelihood, in a place that is now tamed: that was primitive in relation to the modernity of cleared forests and farming. Her/his supposedly crazy behavior: that linked her/him with lower life forms, an irrational "beast." And finally, the particular manifestation of her/his insanity, her/his "Lesbian love," as the doctor at Willard Asylum, P. M. Wise, called it in an article about her/him in 1883: her/his masculine appearance and insistence that, as Joseph Lobdell, "she was married and had a wife living."²⁴

The European medical view of "sexual perversions," which Wise cites, developed in relation to racial ideologies of primitivism. Cultural historian Jennifer Terry traces the growing medical fascination in the nineteenth century with the homosexual body that, "like savage bodies, became a text of telltale signs by which to measure moral character and the effects of civilization." Richard von Krafft-Ebing, the German sexologist, considered that "sexual inversion was troubling evidence that homosexuals were arrested at a more primitive stage of evolutionary development than normal (i.e., heterosexual) people," writes Terry. Dr. James G. Kiernan, an American following this general train of thought and writing contemporaneously about Lucy Ann Lobdell, suggested that various perversions, including hermaphroditism (in which Lucy/Joe was implicated by her/his doctor), were atavisms.²⁵

The medical discussion of Lucy/Joe's marriage to Marie follows this discursive timeline. Medical discourse evolved as a means of analyzing and enforcing social organization, Terry argues, keeping races and classes separate and properly subordinated. Sexual perverts tended to threaten such social hierarchy, and Lucy/Joe's story, as told by the doctors, was no exception to this rule, as Terry demonstrates. The class difference between Marie, "a young woman of good education," and Lucy/Joe, who engaged in masculine pursuits and wrote a book but only "in quaint style," is stressed by Dr. Wise; he notes the mutuality of their "attachment" and remarks that "strange as it may seem," it led them to "commence life in the woods in the relation of husband and wife." According to his script of perversion, Marie was clearly vulnerable: she "had been left by her husband in a destitute condition and was receiving charitable aid," and became prey to the Female Hunter, descending on the economic and evolutionary scale into a life lived in alms-houses, jails, and caves.²⁶ The

Female Hunter: seen as primitive in her/his historical moment, born too late in evolutionary time.

The punitive prejudices of this medical discourse of evolutionary tardiness are obvious. But my more general point is that the present moment, any present moment, is replete with all kinds of time, and with people who experience different temporalities. To insist on Lucy/Joe as born *either* too soon *or* too late implies a present that is homogeneous, an evolutionary scale that is evenly progressive, and a human life that is chronologically linear, despite the lessons we learned from the streams of the Catskills and legendary inhabitant Rip van Winkle. But I am increasingly convinced that everyone has his or her own temporality, his or her own particular experience of being in time that is dependent on internal and external factors of enormous complexity. Taking up this idea, we could ask: what would characterize Lucy/Joe's own time, Lucy/Joe's own particular temporality—as distinct from the temporalities foisted upon her/his life history, too soon or too late?

My own time is truncated in this short article and thus I can only speculate briefly on these questions. Many aspects of Lucy/Joe's life remain unaddressed here: her/his religious fervor, for example, which is apparent in the *Narrative* but becomes so pronounced that her/his brother John Lobdell names it in his testimony as a cause of her/his insanity.²⁷ Her/his vagrant life as the Reverend Lobdell with Marie might seem almost apostolic: having “proclaimed himself a prophet,” the Reverend preached—even when in jail—and at one point took to “leading a bear with a rope. He claimed the bear was a sign from the Lord, and that he preached for the gospel of a new dispensation.”²⁸ Clearly, spiritual belief must be taken into account in any reckoning of Lucy/Joe's relationship to time; and if there is something of a millennial quality here, a projected time of fulfillment, her/his wearing of “the pants,” as she had put it, might also participate in a vision of futurity—a vision of an earthly future of equal gender rights.

But there may be another, prior time of loss informing Lucy/Joe's life as well. Lucy/Joe's experience of time might have been tied as well to that putative connection to the Indian woman known as Gelerama, a “lone” native woman in the area and a hunter in her own right. A local story has it that

each fall when the corn silk turned golden brown, Lucy Ann would stop at Hetty LeValley's for a few days, possibly hoping, as Hetty always did, that Gelerama, the Indian woman, the original “Female Hunter” of the Basket, would return with her dark-skinned brothers to the site of their ancient camp-fires. In those days, Lucy Ann wore her dark hair in two long braids

and must have resembled an Indian, tanned from exposure to sun and wind as she roamed over the forested hills and explored dark valleys as yet untouched by the pioneer's axe.²⁹

It is possible that the native woman afforded the young Lucy a model of female independence, strength, hunting skill and survival prowess not readily available in the gendered culture in which she lived, rugged though life in the woods was. Much later, Lucy/Joe's doctor at the asylum reported that when in Minnesota s/he had spent her time "among the Indians," a detail that s/he seems to have mentioned to him, since it does not appear in the published account of her/his exploits out west.³⁰ If Lucy/Joe felt a connection to Gelerama and perhaps other Indians, that sense would (in the Catskills at least) have entailed pastness and loss; it would have been inflected by the coming of settlers and the timber industry, and the eventual agricultural development of the region. Time for Lucy/Joe, in my purely speculative account here, would thus have been inflected by such particular religious, gendered, racial and economic factors.

But I want to move on, since time is short, to the future. Lucy/Joe's story opens up the possibility of alternative futures for the past. This is an idea I derive from literary critics Jonathan Goldberg and, following him, Carla Freccero. In his work on New World sodomites, Goldberg isolates moments in narratives of the past—a colonial encounter between Indian and Spaniard, for example—in which "the question of the future is at stake and the 'history that will be' is suspended, opened up for multiple possibilities," as Freccero recounts it. Goldberg's approach resists the foreclosure of historical possibility by "unwrit[ing]" retrospective accounts of colonial victory that encode a triumphal outcome as an inevitability, and deconstructs "the implicit heteronormativity of historical continuity."³¹ Is there such a resistant "sit[e] of possibility" in the story of Lucy/Joe and Marie?³² Can we resist—unwrite—any retrospective narrative that would encode the trajectories toward their eventual tragic outcomes as inevitable, as triumphs of heteronormativity? A pauper's death for Lucy/Joe after institutionalization as an insane pervert, a pitiful dwindling and eventual disappearance for Marie—when are the trajectories toward these ignominious ends suspended and other futures (at a moment in the past) opened up as possible?

I have the sense that there are numerous potential turning points in Lucy/Joe's narrative. I get the feeling that many times in her/his story there were moments where alternative futures could have emerged. It's crucial that we *not* read the past as uniformly persecutory, as an ineluctable success of heteronormativity, squelching all traces of

dissidence and alternatives, and dictating a single telos for all. Lucy's adoption of masculine hunting attire, for one thing, was indulged and even admired, as an early newspaper report witnesses.³³ I want finally to consider another moment, later in the story of Lucy/Joe and Marie, when a possible future opens up and becomes visible—visible to the historical actors then as well as to us now.

This alternate future is glimpsed in a published newspaper interchange between the editor of the *Wayne County Herald*, W. H. Ham, and Marie Louisa Perry, Lucy/Joe's wife. In 1882, two years after Lucy/Joe had been committed to the insane asylum and had thus disappeared from the area, Marie was spotted where they had once lived, and it made the news:

The "Female Hunter's" wife was in town to-day, selling wintergreen berries. In all the fact or fiction that has come before us we have found nothing more strange than the strange companionship or relationship, as they claim, of these two women. Both educated, the "wife" exceptionally so, asking odds of no one, living by themselves, one in male attire and the other in her proper dress, seeking with earnestness a living in the few avenues left open to them, always consistent, always true to each other in trials and adversity, their strange conduct may well excite more than a passing interest. Old age is creeping upon them yet they resist its ravages as stoutly and as successfully as the most favored. Always gentle, always quiet, defrauding no one, striving in humble yet honest ways to care for and protect themselves they may well be left alone to work out their own "problem of life."³⁴

Marie Louisa wrote a stunning letter in response. She at first notes Mr. Ham's "kindly disposition" but then takes him to task. In clear and assertive prose, she sets the feminist tone: "I am sorry you did not dwell longer upon 'the avenues to employment' not being more 'open' to persons of my sex." She then corrects his label for her: "If, instead of styling me 'The Female Hunter's Wife,' you had said 'his *apparent widow*,' I think the expression would have been more correct." She goes on to defend the nature of their "relationship" in feminine terms, even though she has just used the masculine pronoun "his":

I do not know why the companionship of two women should be termed "strange." The opposite sex [i.e., men] are often seen in close companionship and friendly conversation, and, Mr. Ham, my sex are not inferior to yours. "Not many may know the depth of true sisterly love." Is not this a remark from your own sex?

After a few more comments, she lobs a final feminist salvo:

[T]he abuse and injustice which [woman] often has to endure, and which has such a crushing influence upon her existence, seems [*sic*] to be a wrong on the part of the administrators of the law and the voters who create them. If woman has no voice in the making of the laws of our country, she should as a recompense, be granted sufficient other privileges to preserve her equality of rights. How this is to be done, is the information which many of the stern sex seem to need. Will you find it convenient to inform them? You will thus oblige, a friend and sister. MARIE LOUISA, *The Apparent Widow*.

What if Mr. Ham had taken up that challenge, had become a reformer for women's rights, educating his fellow male citizens and imagining with them how equality and justice could be extended to women? What if he had indeed styled Marie "his *apparent widow*," while granting that women can love each other with a true sisterly bond comparable to other fraternal loves at the time? Mr. Ham, influential leader of the community, would have accepted the illogic of their relationship and would not have tried to explain it in comforting homosocial terms. He would, rather, have publicly acknowledged what would have seemed impossible: a person both masculine and female loving a woman with sisterly love. He would have thus rejected the snide abusiveness of another local newspaper, which sarcastically chronicled Lucy/Joe's release from jail a few years earlier in these terms: "Lucy Ann Lobdell, the would-be gentlemanwoman, has left the Spencer House in company with its wife."³⁵ Mr. Ham would have understood the cruel and destructive effects of such journalism, the effects of class and gender hierarchies in word as well as in deed. A wholly different history of gender activism could open up at that moment.

Our ethical responsibility lies in finding those moments in historical narratives and, in doing so, refusing the inevitable narrative of heteronormativity, the straightness of history, the foreclosure of historical possibility. We must be willing to keep those past moments of possibility alive in the present and bring them forward into the future. We must be willing, that is, to be haunted. It is no mere coincidence that my girlfriend and I bought a country home where Lucy/Joe once roamed: it happened, I think, because *s/he has something to say to us*—to us, as New Yorkers prone to the rat race; as queers pressured to marry and have children in the name of liberal progress; as students and scholars looking ever to be on the vanguard. If spirits persist in the Catskills—the thunder is thought, after Rip van Winkle, to be the sound of Hendrick Hudson's ancient crew playing nine-pins—then Lucy/Joe could well be saying right now: "Find the time, *find your time*."

ALLEN GINSBERG, HERBERT MARCUSE, AND THE POLITICS OF EROS

JONATHAN D. KATZ

In 2006, *Howl*, that epoch-defining poem by Allen Ginsberg, turned fifty. It is one of the queerest works in the American literary canon; but a few lines are sufficient to establish its homoerotic credentials:

Who let themselves be fucked in the ass by saintly
motorcyclists, and screamed with joy,
who blew and were blown by those human seraphim,
the sailors, caresses of Atlantic and Caribbean love,
who balled in the morning in the evenings in rose
gardens and the grass of public parks and
cemeteries scattering their semen to
whomever come who may.¹

Howl offers a veritable laundry list of iconic gay tropes: anal sex, motorcycle trade boys, sailors (the ubiquitous “seafood”), promiscuity, public sex—just add the YMCA and we’d have a brand new Village People song. On the evidence of the above-quoted lines, it seems easy to call this an early and important gay poem. And yet my point will be very much the opposite: that *Howl* is not a gay poem at all, at least not as we use the term today, and that Ginsberg is not really a gay poet—homoerotic to be sure, but not gay. By this I mean to suggest he refutes our modern notion of a gay identity defined in opposition to straightness, as well as the concomitant invocation of in-group practices or customs, and the defining ideal of sexuality as an *ur*-difference.

Howl instead frequently invokes a social margin deliriously unconcerned with sexual differentiation, a ragtag band united by the loosening, not tightening, of gendered and sexual differentiations. Far from modeling increasingly specified, essentialized distinctions as generative of the modern LGBT movement, works like *Howl* are important in part because they allow us to redefine our understanding of sexuality at the very emergence of what would become gay and lesbian liberation. In place of the seemingly historical dichotomy between closeted

and out, *Howl* makes clear a more nuanced, but less politically useful, distinction between essentializing and universalizing visions of sexual difference—both equally “out.” The point is that the historical opposite of gay need not be either straight or closeted—it could in fact be polymorphous perversity, bohemian libertinism or even simply sex—and it’s hardly less radical politically for its refusal to engage a category of identity initially coined, to say the least, without the interests of “gay” people in mind.

Ginsberg annotates his alienation from queers in his first published poem, the 1947 *In Society* (CP 3). It begins,

I walked into the cocktail party
room and found three or four queers
talking together in queertalk.
I tried to be friendly but heard
myself talking to one in hiptalk.

Immediately, Ginsberg takes pains to telegraph his difference from queers, mapping it linguistically; significantly, he sees himself as the passive agent of this difference—“found myself talking.” His hosts seem to pick up on his disdain and respond in kind, for the poem continues, “‘I’m glad to see you,’ he said and looked away. ‘Hmm,’ I mused.” Now, with their mutual hostility more out in the open, Ginsberg next insults his hosts:

The room
was small and had a double-decker
bed in it, and cooking apparatus:
icebox, cabinet, toasters, stove;
the hosts seemed to live with room
enough only for cooking and sleeping.
My remark on this score was under-
stood but not appreciated.

So Ginsberg becomes awkward, self-conscious, even abject as the poem continues.

I was
offered refreshments, which I accepted.
I ate a sandwich of pure meat; an
enormous sandwich of human flesh.
I noticed, while I was chewing on it,
it also included a dirty asshole.

Here ramifying metaphors of self-consumption, as in the clichéd “to eat oneself up”, or “put one’s foot in one’s mouth,” signify shame and self-abnegation, while the dirty asshole ensures that his alienation cannot pass for a normative heterosexual estrangement from all that signifies as queer.

Yet Ginsberg ends the poem having nicely recovered his footing through the time-honored masculinist ruse of performing a dominant masculinity over and against women. In response to a perceived slight from someone he terms a “fluffy female who looked like a princess,” Ginsberg palpably puffs his chest and retorts,

I said, “What!”
in outrage. “Why you shit-faced fool!”
This got everybody’s attention.
“Why you narcissistic bitch! How
can you decide when you don’t even
know me,” I continued in a violent
and messianic voice, inspired at
last, dominating the whole room.

And so the poem ends as it began, a narcissistic invocation of a reified masculinity mapped over and against those who constitute its other—women and queers.

In an interview discussing the gay scene at Columbia when he was a student at exactly the same period in which he wrote *In Society*, Ginsberg said, “Well, there were a lot of gay people around at Columbia. There was one guy who was very much out of the closet... And he was quite a noble and dignified, accepted member of our gang except that he also ran with a gang of gay people or queens or fairies. People who were queer in those days at Columbia... They weren’t big men on campus. They were a group on their own, sort of.”² With his “they” and “their,” his references to queers and fairies, Ginsberg is again marking out gayness as external to his conception of self—and this in 1989, twenty years after the advent of the modern gay liberation movement.

Almost reflexively we assume such refusal of self-identification to be rooted in the closet, to be an aspect of concealment or self-loathing, but clearly this can’t be the case for Ginsberg. He was, after all, the man who concluded his poem *America* with, “America I’m putting my queer shoulder to the wheel” (*CP* 148)—writing that line in 1956, amidst the so-called “Lavender Scare” when same-sex sexuality was illegal and still subject to massive witch hunts and stiff penalties. So if his dismissive refusal of queens or gays or fairies isn’t self-loathing, what is it?

In fact, Ginsberg's refusal of a demarcated sexual identity is hardly idiosyncratic, but part and parcel of a larger cultural discourse gaining strength throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s—though it has largely escaped subsequent critical notice as such, in part because of its vast difference from the common understanding of sexuality, much less same-sex sexuality, today. Few continued this discourse into the post-Stonewall period, but with remarkable consistency, Ginsberg did. As a kind of shorthand, I'll be labeling this historical attitude "Eros," after the usage of the term by perhaps its most famous exponent, Herbert Marcuse, in his groundbreaking book *Eros and Civilization*. Importantly, there is no women's Eros, nor men's Eros in Marcuse's demonstration; it's neither gay nor lesbian nor heterosexual Eros; it's never so specified or made coterminous with an identity—rather it's always simply Eros, and proclaimed a universal human capacity. We tend to understand universals, rightly I think, as inherently oppressive constructs meant to shore the status quo, to keep power in the hands of those who already wield it; but importantly this one understood itself as both dissident and liberating. It's hard to wrap our heads around this vision of Eros because it flies in the face of so much of what we assume to be true: that it is difference and not commonality that constitutes the ground of our identity, that rights are pursued and won on a basis of a minoritizing, not universalizing discourse.

After all, since the publication of *Howl*, the human subject has become increasingly particularized, concentrated into a specific body, the materialized node of multiple social differences in gender, race, sexuality, social class, and now, increasingly, in subsidiary differences such as size, geography, ability, and even religion. Being now accrues meaning largely through difference, and the body's social situatedness condenses our increasingly complex three-dimensional array of divergent social trajectories into what we now understand as our identity. It is identity that constitutes the root of our being, the gravitational pull of our notion of community; it is both the sum of our interiority and the outer membrane that we assume segregates us from all that is non self-identical.

The intellectual and discursive development of an identity rooted in difference has been of inestimable importance towards decentering the presumptively singular, universal subject of old, a universality that, it just so happened, mimicked rather astonishingly well the particular social situatedness of its creators—overwhelmingly white, male, heterosexual, Euro-American, etc. We know all this like a catechism. And it is precisely the power of this catechism to evacuate the Cartesian male subject of any claims to universality, to pinpoint precisely its social and political investments that have made it so useful.