

To tolerate life remains, after all, the first duty of all living beings. Illusion becomes valueless if it makes this harder for us.

Sigmund Freud, *Thoughts for the times on War and Death*
(Penguin Freud Library Vol. XII)

Anti-Gay

Edited by Mark Simpson

FREEDOM
EDITIONS

Freedom Editions
an imprint of the Cassell Group
Wellington House
125 Strand
London WC2R 0BB

P0 Box 605
Herndon, VA 20172

© Mark Simpson 1996

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical including photocopying, recording or any information storage or retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publishers.

First published 1996
Reprinted 1997 (twice)

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 0-304-33144-9 (hardback)

Typeset by Ben Cracknell Studios Printed
and bound in Great Britain by Biddies Ltd,
Guildford and King's Lynn

CONTENTS

About the Contributors vii

Acknowledgements ix

Preface xi

1 Gay Dream Believer: Inside the Gay
Underwear Cult *Mark Simpson* 1

2 Is There Life After Sex? *John Weir* 13

3 Going In *John Weir* 26

4 It's Just a Phase: Why Homosexuality Is
Doomed *Peter Tatchell* 35

5 Forbidden Fruit *Lisa Power* 55

6 Indigestion: Diagnosing the Gay Malady *JO Eadie* 66

7 Confessions of a Gay Film Critic, or How I Learned to Stop
Worrying and Love Cruising *Paul Burston* 84

8 Gay Culture: Who Needs It? *Toby Manning* 98

9 Move Over Darling: Beyond the Daddy Dyke *Suzanne
Patterson and Anne-Marie Le Blé* 118

10 A Case for the Closet *Bruce LaBruce and Glenn Belverio
Glennnda Orgasm* 140

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

Glenn or Glenda Belverio is a drag queen terrorist, bitchy journalist and porn model. His show *Glenda Orgasm and Friends* first aired in June 1990 and is to blame for starting the New York drag queen cable TV movement. His film *Glenda and Camille Go Downtown* with Camille Paglia was banned in New York and San Francisco and caused minor riots elsewhere. Or so he'd like to think.

Anne-Marie Le Blé is a photographer and Suzanne Patterson is a practising artist; they both live in North London. Their favourite record is *Sorry I'm a Lady* by Baccara.

Bruce LaBruce is responsible for such movies as *No Skin Off My Ass*, *Super 8½* and *Homocidal*. He was born on the exact day of Judy Garland's death and believes himself to be the reincarnation of the late legend. Even if he is Canadian.

Paul Burston is the author of *What Are You Looking At?* (Cassell, 1995), and gay section editor on *Time Out* magazine. He has been praised by the *Independent* as 'the bright bad boy of gay culture' and castigated by the editor of *Gay Times* as 'making a career out of saying the unsayable'. He isn't sure which is the greater compliment.

Jo Eadie is a writer, community worker and activist, currently wrestling with a PhD (University of Nottingham) on David Cronenberg and William Burroughs. When out of the grasp of bisexual theory he puts his time into being a parent, and worrying about whether to go on Prozac.

Toby Manning is a Manchester-based journalist whose work has appeared in *the Pink Paper*, *Gay Times*, *Attitude*, *New Statesman and Society*, *the Guardian* and *the independent*. He isn't above biting the gay hand that used to feed him.

Lisa Power is the author of *No Bath But Plenty of Bubbles* an oral history of the London GLF 1970-73 (Cassell, 1995) and has been an activist in the gay movement for entirely too long. If she gave you a credit list of organizations you would try to fit them to her article. So let's just say that, like Mae West, she's been things and seen places.

Peter Tatchell is an activist in the queer direct action group OutRage! His recent books include *Safer Sexy - The Guide to Gay Sex Safely* (Freedom Editions, 1994) and *We Don't Want to March Straight—Masculinity, Queers and the Military* (Cassell, 1995). He is happy to work towards his own extinction.

John Weir is a novelist and journalist writing for *Details* magazine. He lives in New York. He isn't gay anymore; he can't afford the gym membership (he spends too much money on phone sex).

ABOUT THE EDITOR

Mark Simpson is the author of *Male Impersonators* (Cassell, 1994) and *it's a Queer World* (Vintage, 1996). He is not a happy homosexual.

PREFACE

Wanting-to be defined by our sexuality may only be symptomatic of our wanting to be defined sexuality is what makes identity both necessary and impossible Because we get lost in it we want to know where we are.

—*Adam Philips'*

What is this thing call 'gay'? And is it any good?

Whatever it is, there is certainly no shortage of it. We now have gay bars, gay priests, gay television, gay football, gay radio, gay plagues, gay brains, gay beer, gay lifestyles, gay serial killers, gay videos, gay counselling, gay Members of Parliament, gay magazines, gay bookshops, gay plumbers, gay pop stars, gay holidays, gay plays, gay youths, gay ads, gay novels, gay clubs, gay condoms, gay studies, gay soldiers, gay professionals, gay districts, gay boutiques, gay flags, gay haircuts, gay cities, gay money, and, of course, a gay press where all these gay things, and many more besides, are enthusiastically profiled, interviewed, promoted and... listed.

Never mind the quality, just feel the length of our lovely lists. In 1995 the most famous British gay publication, *Gay Times*, brought out its celebratory 200th issue, billed as devoting itself to 'an appreciation of the work and achievements of Britain's top two hundred gay men and lesbians'. In the back was the usual 'Gay Guide to Britain': a list of all the gay clubs, pubs and organizations in the United Kingdom. Before that, the regular personal columns – lists of gay people looking for other gay people, along with the regular classified lists of gay escorts, masseurs and electricians looking for gay clients. In effect the triumphant 200th edition of *Gay Times* seemed to acknowledge that the gay press could be replaced by a decent Gay Yellow Pages and that gays, whoever and whatever they are (and let's not go into that), are more obsessed with lists than Seventh Day Adventists.

This gay listing was repeated in the same year on *Gaytime TV*, the BBC's first gay TV series, this time as open farce. In a doomed attempt to introduce some face-saving irony at the start of the show the presenters demonstrated gay-marketed items such as shower curtains and aftershave in a gently mocking fashion - 'Oooh, yes, that's *very* gay'- as if to say, 'How silly! How can you have a gay shower curtain?'. But the joke rebounded on the show itself, and indeed the whole 'gay' world, since the only criterion for, anything being on the show, whether it was Harvey Fierstein or the Gay Ballroom Dancing Group, was because it presented itself as 'gay'. It rapidly became apparent that the 'gayness' of shower curtains and aftershave was as legitimate a reason for attention, interest and applause as the 'gayness' of Harvey Fierstein singing a sentimental song about AIDS out of key. The whole philosophy of the show was summed up in the highly discriminating and critical attitude:

'Here's something gay. And now for something else gay'. This reached bathetic depths in the form of a regular slot called 'Camp Countdown', in which the top ten 'camp' people of that week, such as Shirley Bassey or Joan Collins, were listed in ascending order of campness - i.e., they're not gay *themselves*, but because they're 'camp' we can add them to the list of 'things-that-are-gay' under the sub-heading 'things-for-gays'.

So, it was entirely fitting that it was another BBC TV show, *The Day Today*, a satirical comedy programme which was not gay at all and thus with a better understanding of camp than *Gaytime TV* could ever hope to have, which summed up the whole gay listing impulse in a surreal sketch where a news presenter announced, as if reporting on traffic conditions: 'Gay news now. Today large parts of Norwich will be gay, as will be the whole of the M4 and much of the Channel Islands. There is a slight chance of gayness on the western side of the Pennines'.

But life turned out to be even more surreal than Pythonesque comedy, as gay listing was taken to the molecular level. The real TV news was full of reports of claims by US scientists to have found a 'gay gene'. Gay listers rejoiced: at last, there was something to put under 'G' in the Great Gay List between 'Gay Games' and 'Gay Girls'. Even more welcome was the fact that the gay gene is the first entry which justifies all the others. It is, by definition, a first principle - it doesn't need to explain itself: its existence explains everything else. And since the whole point of the Great Gay List is to avoid serious enquiry into origins or meanings, of sexuality, of language, of value, the 'gay gene, the origin of all gayness, if it didn't/doesn't exist would be necessary to invent.

And yet, and yet, the Great Gay List is, it must be admitted its own answer to the question: What is gay? For all its vacuity, its exhaustive not to say tedious roll call of things-that-are-gay conveys one message loud and clear - that gay is a self-serving project of self-justification. Is it any good? Well, forget that - gay *has* to be good. And this is also why it has to be named so often, not just because it fulfils the imperialist inner logic of gay (thin ideas always need to spread themselves as far and wide as possible in the hope that you won't notice their lack of substance) but also in order that a sceptical world might be convinced of gay's goodness and be forced to accept that gay is as indispensable, ubiquitous and downright lovable as the air we breathe.

This 'celebration' of homosexuality is inextricably bound up with its listy origins as Michel Foucault's famous 'reverse discourse'. In an oft-quoted but little heard passage in the introduction to his *History of Sexuality*, he describes how in the late nineteenth century, after the discovery and categorization of 'perversions' by emergent sexual and psychological sciences, 'homosexuality began to speak on its own behalf, to demand its legitimacy or "naturalness" be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified'. The lists that were used to illuminate and pathologize illegitimate ways of being became, in the hands of homosexuals themselves, an advertisement of legitimacy. Look how real, numerous and immutable we are; look how real, numerous and immutable our desires are.

And how marketable. Nowadays, gay is *goods*. The listing impulse has nicely evolved into the material function of the gay press which is to advertise gay goods, services and performers. Complaints about poor quality of these goods are redundant – the act of discrimination and approval is in the naming of them as gay in the first place. Critical faculties must be suspended once the naming moment is over (except in terms of 'how gay' i.e., how useful to the self-justificatory project of gay). The reverse discourse has gone from political project to marketing strategy. The Great Gay (Shopping) List *is* the 'gay community'.

Well, here's something that *isn't* gay. Something that isn't straight, either, but is – heaven forbid! – *Anti-Gay*.

And perhaps, given the nature of the reverse discourse, raining on gay's parade is the only way to answer the question 'What is this thing called "gay"?', without ending up mouthing the banal and meaningless platitude 'It's good'. So, contributors dwell on problems of the gay identity and lifestyle that don't exactly 'celebrate' it: the stunning vanity and arrogance of the gay world (John Weir); the intensely ambivalent attitude of gays towards bisexuals, wanting to swallow them whole but nearly choking in the process (Jo Eadie); the mindless mediocrity of gay culture (Toby Manning); the way lesbians build their own prison out of buzz-cuts, big boots and a general contempt for femininity (Anne-Marie Le Ble and Suzanne Patterson); the befuddled arguments censorious gay critics employ in dubbing films like *Cruising* 'homophobic' (Paul Burston); and the uncomfortable 'truth' of Camille Paglia's reminder that 'penis fits vagina' and the corresponding benefits of being cured of one's homosexuality (Bruce LaBruce and Glenn Belverio).

However anti-gay the contributors to this volume may or may not be themselves (and Lisa Power and Peter Tatchell, both veterans of the Gay Liberation Front era make here a critical case *for* gay), clearly, they all have problems with the feel-good-or-else politics that is associated with gay. Indeed, sometimes you might be forgiven for thinking that being gay is like being made to wear that electronic helmet designed by tongue-lolling cheery Stimpny for his misanthropic friend Ren which forces the wearer to grin inanely and sing the 'Happy, Happy, Joy, Joy' song.

That many non-heterosexuals were already itching to escape from gay's clingy, cartoony embrace has already been demonstrated with queer. Perhaps the less said about this moment the better. But there was initially at least a strong strain of punkish transgression running through queer which was quite liberating for many. Groups like Homocult, the situationist art collective in Manchester, who specialized in 'negative' images of homosexuality; North American zinesters like *Bimbox* who arguably invented queer; the work of film directors like Bruce LaBruce, Tom Kahn, and Todd Haynes who, as Kahn put it, aimed to put the 'homo' back in 'homicide'; and Queercore, a bad-attitude thrash sound attracting a younger generation of deviants who didn't want or weren't wanted by what they took to be heterosexuality but didn't want to sip cappuccino on Old Compton

Street or Santa Monica Boulevard either.'

And while these cultural manifestations of queer are far from being played out (see Toby Manning's contribution), like the punk that it took its inspiration from it was an avant-gardism that was assimilated by the mainstream almost immediately. But, ironically, the 'straight' mainstream seems to have been changed more by this assimilation than the gay mainstream. The straight mainstream got the New Queer Cinema and Madonna's *Sex*; the gay mainstream got Michelangelo Signorile and 'QUEER AS FUCK' T-shirts.

Gay, in short, did with queer precisely what it always lambasted the 'straight world' for doing: it took what it wanted and disregarded and suppressed the threatening stuff. The gay press preferred to overlook the anti-gay side to queer and dwelled instead on queer's attack on heterosexism and homophobia in the form of the ACT UP style zaps of groups like OutRage! and Queer Nation. Queer's problem was not that it was assimilated by straights so much as it was assimilated by *gays*. It became, as Paul Burston put it, 'Gay with knobs and nipple rings on'. Gay politics, in its queer get-up, *was* badly-behaved and, in that now cringe-making phrase, 'in-yer-face' – but only in the face of heterosexuals.

However, in the academic world – which, after all, at least has to pretend to a critical approach— the advance of what has been called queer theory, with its deconstruction of sexual and gender identities exemplified in the work of Judith Butler and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (heavily influenced by the work of the three French post-structuralist stooges, Derrida, Lacan and Foucault) has already upset gay apple carts and worried some of the gay old timers that used to hawk from them.

According to the (for once with good cause) celebrated gay critic Leo Bersani, 'gay men and lesbians have nearly disappeared into their awareness of how they have been *constructed* as gay men and lesbians... having de-gayed themselves, gays melt into the culture they like to think of themselves as undermining.'

Anyone who has walked through Soho or attended Gay Pride recently might be forgiven for laughing at the idea that gays are disappearing into their own awareness of how they have been constructed. But Bersani is really talking about gay intellectuals. And perhaps he has a point when he writes that 'the power of these systems [that have created the category of the homosexual] is only minimally contested by demonstrations of their "merely" historical character. They don't need to be natural to rule...'. Undoubtedly, a lot of queer theory is little more than linguistic or historical pedantry that is far more irritating than it is 'challenging'.

Surely, however, 'de-gaying' oneself is not something that you embark upon because you think that it will Change the World, but because, as in the course of a feud that you've quite enjoyed up until now, or at least felt self-righteous about, you suddenly discover that you're very bored and don't want to go on playing Tweedle Dum to someone else's Tweedle Dee forever. 'De-gaying' is also the inevitable result of postmodernism finally catching up with gay and fragmenting its pretentious 'grand-narrative'. People are leaving gay because they no longer believe its claims to interpret the world or make it a better place.

As others have pointed out, the gay *v.* straight binary is a *cul de sac* without any turning space; continuing to subscribe to it, even critically in Bersani fashion, is like insisting on pretending that 'left-wing' and 'right-wing' still have a solid meaning post-1980s, when the most radical programmes began to come from right-wing parties. Even Camille Paglia, arch-opponent of post-structuralism and queer theory 'flimflammy' and dubbed 'essentialist' by many of her flimflamming critics, argues for a 'bisexual responsiveness' in all, that human sexuality should be regarded as fluid rather than fixed, and calls for gay studies, along with women's studies, to be abolished and replaced with sex studies. [4]

Bersani and many gays of his generation, just like the older feminists excoriated by Paglia and happy to excoriate her back, appear to want the younger generation to fight over again the battles of their youth, regardless of whether they need fighting again. Just as there is and can be no such thing as 'post-feminism', there is no 'post-gayism' – there is only letting the side down or collaboration. This is apparent in Bersani's circular argument that 'de-gayng gayness can only fortify homophobic oppression; it accomplishes in its own way the principal aim of homophobia: the elimination of gays.'

But if we shouldn't de-gay ourselves because it's what homophobia wants, it follows that it is our duty to be defined by homophobia. This, to my mind, really doesn't read any different to: we have to be gay because homophobia *wants* us to be. And in fact, it is evident from Bersani's own argument that gay needs homophobia just as much as homophobia needs gay. After all, this wouldn't be the first time in history that a system which was supposed to revolutionize human relations ended up being concerned only with its own survival.

To be fair, Bersani is that rare species, a gayist who himself recognizes some of the failings of gay. He confesses that there is 'little self-criticism within the gay and lesbian community'[⁶] and that, 'straight oppression' is not enough of an excuse for this behaviour any more: 'We have enough freedom, even enough power, to stop feeling like traitors if we cease to betray our intelligence for the sake of the cause, and if . . . we admit to have told a few lies about ourselves (and others)'[⁷] But in the context of his broader plea for continuing to rally to the party and for a little more discipline in the 'melting' ranks, his appeal for *glasnost* seems to be a case of too little too late and anyway, only likely to accelerate the break-up of gay. As the Communist Party of the Soviet Union found out, if in the name of a new openness you deprive people of their reassuring myths, what are they left with? Just a lot of barbed wire and shoddy goods.

Chastened by the failure of queer's grandiose ambitions, this collection of malodorous essays by various disgruntled non-heterosexuals does not pretend to offer a new, manifesto or movement that puts the Children of Sodom back on course for the Promised Land. It doesn't even pretend to be much more 'inclusive' than gay (only two contributions by women, only one bisexual and none from people of colour). Actually, it doesn't promise anything other than the merciless operation of critical faculties where gay demands they be suspended,

censored or diverted into 'fighting homophobia'.

And, who knows? By focusing on the shortcomings of gay and refusing to be distracted by how terrible heterosexuality is supposed to be, *Anti-Gay* may even offer the beginnings of a new dialectic, a new conversation with the world, one that is rather more interesting than the current one. Perhaps, just perhaps, the anti-thesis contained within *Anti-Gay* might one day produce a synthesis that will replace the awful gay thesis that we appear to be trapped in right now.

And put an end to those damn lists.

Notes

1. Adam Phillips, *Terrors and Experts* (London: Faber, 1995), p. 90.
2. Caroline Sullivan, 'Queer to the Core', *Guardian*, 17 December 1993.
3. Leo Bersani, *Homos* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 6.
4. Camille Paglia, *Vamps and Tramps* (London: Viking, 1995), p. 121.
5. Bersani, *Homos*, p. 5.
6. Bersani, *Homos*, p. 52.
7. Bersani, *Homos*, p. 55.

Chapter One

GAY DREAM BELIEVER: INSIDE THE GAY UNDERWEAR CULT

Mark Simpson

I hope that now you're Out, life improves for you no end. You've lifted the burden of secrecy and deceit and that might mean that the other problems that have plagued you will simply evaporate.

—*Gay Times* columnist *Terry Sanderson* in an open letter in the *Guardian* to the entertainer Michael Barrymore

I wanna be free, gay and happy! —*The Coming Out Crew*

I am a homosexual in a city full of gays. —*Michel Foucault* in San Francisco

Isn't it just fabby to be gay? Gay is, after all, good, and everyone fortunate enough to be gay is, of course, glad— when they're not too busy feeling proud. Which is perfectly understandable since gays, as we all know, have the best clubs, the best drugs, the best underwear shops and the best time. In fact, gays are so glad and proud that they have a big, sweaty street party every year to show the world just how glad and proud they are and what great underwear they have.

All things considered, it's so fabby being gay, that it's difficult to imagine what it must be like to be straight. Imagine the suffering of those poor souls who are doomed by some accident of genetics or underdevelopment of that brain lobe which regulates aesthetic potential not only to never be able really to appreciate *Ab Fab* or carry off wearing a silver thong but also never to be able to come out. Imagine never being able to experience the joy of discovering your true identity and inheriting all this gladness; imagine being excluded from a world so marvellous, so welcoming, so well-presented, simply because you thought having children and living in the suburbs seemed like the thing to do.

Even worse, imagine what it would be like actually to prefer the same sex but be denied the rewards that this display of good taste so rightly entails and be forced to pass for straight. Difficult as it is to believe, this was once the universal state of affairs. This is because - horrible to relate - once upon a time there were no gays only dreary *homosexuals*.

Naturally, this was before that watershed moment in human history by which everything must be measured - the Stonewall Revolution. Before Stonewall, or *BS*, homosexuals had internalized straight values and were labouring under oppression and a false sense of guilt. They thought themselves ill or sinful or both. So, in dimly-lit, underworld-controlled basement bars, wearing cardigans in muted colours, they cried into their Martinis and looked enviously at the carefree drag queens - so strong, so colourful, so successful with straight trade. As disco had not been invented

yet - there being no gays to sniff poppers and whoop it up in bell-bottoms - the pitiful homosexuals' only solace was singing along to Judy Garland's 'The Man That Got Away' and, of course, 'Over the Rainbow'.

No wonder these poor creatures would often be heard lamenting their lot, expressing shame and wishing out loud that they could be cured of their sad affliction.

However, in 1969 at the Stonewall Inn in Greenwich Village, New York, all this changed. Forever. During another police raid by heartless pigs unconcerned that the homos had buried poor Judy's bones only the day before, something unheard of happened. Inspired to anger by the drag queens' feisty show of resistance, the homos revolted. An ear-ring or beer bottle brutally ripped from some fierce, befrocked lovely resisting arrest, crashed to the floor and the *ancien regime* of homo-shame shattered into a thousand dangerous pieces as the rioting that changed the world began.

Exhilarated by their new-found Gay Power, the rioters had a revelation. It dawned on them that their sense of guilt and shame was just a trick, designed to keep them out of sight and in conservative clothes. There was no longer any need to repress their desires or their undergarments or acquiesce in the New York Police Department's attempt to repress *them*.

Armed with the new-found weapon of Gay Pride they fought back, surprising and vanquishing the entire NYPD whose Irish muscle, used to yielding fag flesh, now found itself impotent against the righteous anger of these empowered pansies. That magical night all the homosexuals in New York became gay and flooded out of their basement bars, darkened piers and parks, onto the streets, peeling off their sweaters, discarding their corduroy trousers and shouting out the message for all the world to hear: Gay is Good!

The cure for their sad affliction had turned out to be not prayer, psychiatry, electro-shock or football, but Gay Pride.

That message resounded around the world. After Stonewall, or AS, homos everywhere began to discover the indisputable truth that gay is as moral, as natural, as healthy, as beautiful as they had been told homosexuality was immoral, unnatural, unhealthy and ugly. The Stonewall Revolution corrected society's misconception about homosexuality not by turning the world upside down but by turning it the right way up: the inverts merely overturned a world that was already standing on its head.

So, in the AS epoch, homosexuality, with its nasty medicinal odour, was now an increasingly redundant term. Instead, 'homophobia', a word with a nasty medicinal odour, was coined to explain the origins of the obviously mentally imbalanced idea that gay wasn't good. While the innocent BS homosexual was the victim of pathologization and prejudice, the guilty AS homophobe was obviously *deserving* of pathologization and prejudice. It soon became apparent that since homophobia was an illness produced by ignorance, secrecy, and an aversion to wearing leather harnesses in public, the underlying cause of homophobia was a shortage of proud gays.

This was underlined by the fact that the homophobe was invariably a

homosexual who wouldn't accept his destiny/duty and become gay. In fact, it was soon recognized that any congruence of same-shaped genitals, or interest in such congruence, however casual or passing, anywhere in the world at any time must eventually be paid for by full membership of the gay community and an account with 'Big Boy Athletic Support Supplies' or else face charges of hypocrisy and living a lie.

Gays quickly discovered another, related, truth. If gay was good - and this was an *a priori* truth - then the gay life was also the good life, in every sense. So not only was being gay a real gas, and as you know, really fabby, but it was the *moral* thing to do. Homosexuals had been encouraged to say 'no' to themselves several times a day (or at least feel guilty about not saying it). Gays, on the other hand, would learn to say 'Yes please!' several times before brunch.

In fact, square, trad old 'no' was not a word that gays had time for anymore. Once the ultimate 'no' had been shouted at Stonewall - 'No!' to a world of shame, 'No!' to straight convention, 'No!' to cotton/polyester mix jockey shorts - there was no need ever to say 'no' again. Moreover, 'to your own self be true' was the Disney-esque existential motto of gays everywhere - and since as a gay your sexuality/pleasure was you, saying 'no' to any form of indulgence was a denial of the truth of who you were. Abstinence was a form of mendacity at best and collaboration at worst - since saying 'yes' to yourself was also the gay way of continuing to say 'no' to straight convention, hedonism was a positive virtue and absolute duty. After Stonewall abolished guilt overnight where centuries of philosophizing had failed, the only thing to feel guilty about now was feeling guilty itself. This is how gays invented the 1970s and made the world safe for designer underwear.

Of course, the thrilling times of Stonewall are a long way behind us now. But their spirit is very much alive today. The life-transforming revelation and truth of Stonewall is repeated every time someone comes out and is baptized into the gay community. The truth shall still set ye free. When one comes out and ceases to be a private homosexual and becomes instead a public gay, the burden of deceit and false consciousness is thrown off, the sex police are vanquished and the out person demonstrates new-found whistle-blowing pride in sexuality instead of shame. It is a confessional narrative of sinner and saved. When a man comes out as gay, he is coming out as what he was meant to be all along - he has found his true self, his existential soul, and rejected the sin/guilt of the previous, inauthentic, closeted self that thought baggy clothes were quite comfortable really.

And now that the scales have fallen down from the new convert's eyes he is born again - not in the silly, lying, sex-negative fundamentalist sense of the word, of course, but in a new meaningful, sex-positive, *gay* sense. And indeed, sense itself is bestowed upon the lucky soul who comes out. His whole hitherto confusing life has been leading up to this moment - a long gestation period spent in the chrysalis of the closet. What seemed without purpose before now takes on meaning. What's more, the other problems that have plagued him will disappear. Coming out is thus a moment of revelation and redemption: I was blind, but now I see; I was

lost, but now I'm found. Just like the homos in the Stonewall Bar that night in Year Zero, from the nasty straight-acting homosexual grub emerges a fabulous gay butterfly with wings of lycra.

Coming out is also a form of death – but a fabulous life-affirming form of death to be sure. To be 'reborn' you have to destroy the wrong person that existed before. So, the out person now recalls that he knew he was gay from the earliest age; before he encountered puberty, before he could walk, before the afterbirth was cold, etc., etc. Early, playground friendships with members of the same sex are now seen for what they were: passionate gay attachments which no one straight could possibly have entertained. On the other hand, any encounters with, interest in or marriage to the opposite sex is now quite rightly seen as nothing but an ill-judged attempt to satisfy one's peers, parents, guilt, false consciousness, or just sisterly feeling. You know the scenario: I thought I loved you, but really, I just envied your make-up skills.

And best of all, the newly emerged out person also discovers that a sense of difference and apartness, feelings of aloneness and hollowness common to most at some time or other and exploited by all nasty religions - especially the anti-gay ones – are in fact a product of being homosexual but unable to become gay. It is surely a great consolation to know that the real reason for your sense of smallness and strangeness in the universe as a child was not because you were human and frail, or separated from God, but because you were meant to dance till dawn in a Spandex all-in-one, surrounded by young men with mobile hips and chemical smiles, and yet were stuck in a Gap-less town in Wales where the only place open after 11 pm was the deathburger van outside the Young Farmers Club.

And it has to be the case, doesn't it? If coming out isn't a coming home, then it would mean that homos were still lost souls who have to face the universe alone. And that would be a bit of a downer, really. That sense of difference is anyway replaced by an enveloping, snugly sense of *sameness* when you come out. In the gay world everything is reassuringly similar, wherever you go. Gays are better at franchising than McDonalds. Just in case you should feel homesick when travelling abroad or just around town, gay bars and clubs around the globe are playing the same music and the patrons are wearing the same jeans, haircuts and even facial expressions. In the backroom the same American porn movie is showing, and men are on their knees performing the same acts they see on the screen and rapping the same rap in the same Strykerese. And wherever you go you can pick up a gay publication which is full of pictures of people just like you and exciting information on just how many other people just like you there are out there and how you can meet them. Once you're out you need never be troubled by pesky old difference ever again.

An inconvenient sense of insignificance and humdrumness is also eradicated when you come out. When you come out you are midwife and mother to your own birth. Nature and heterosexuality have no claim on you anymore as you become a godlike creature of culture. By heroically refusing to allow contact between penis and vagina the gay man refuses

to accept his mortality and the ignominy of driving space-mobiles (even if reproduction occurs, as a result of some drunken accident or some sober design of turkey basters).

Straights, on the other hand, are doomed to be the mere vassals of nature and Pampers shareholders. Their bodies are used in a cruel and mercenary way merely to mix genes together, to pass the new gene line on to the next generation and to pay school fees. Gays, meanwhile, use each other's bodies in a tender and beautiful way to mix together aftershaves and pass on new fashion lines to the next generation.

In this sense, gays, contrary to their perception by many straights as the embodiment of immoral 'animal lust', are actually a brand of holy celibates. Yes, some may be very promiscuous, but only with other men, a choice of partner which – until the appearance of AIDS – was a form of sexual activity with absolutely no consequences (unless you count increased expenditure on Crisco and Kleenex).

But perhaps the-most marvellous thing of all about coming out is that you leave psychoanalysis behind as something for uptight straights. When a man makes the transition from homosexual to gay, he is choosing light over dark, truth over falsehood, reason over superstition, rationality over convention, expression over repression, Calvin Klein over Hanes; he is emerging from the twilight world into the sunlit uplands of life where everyone has a great tan-line. The homosexual who walks out of his stuffy closet and into the open arms of the gay community is in fact conducting a walking cure instead of a talking cure, one which renders all further analysis, or even thought, completely redundant.

Everything is now, by definition, out in the open. The gay man knows who he is, what he is, what he wants and where to find it at a ten per cent discount. There are no longer any conflicts to be told, any mysteries to unravel or any dreams to be interpreted. Nothing needs to be unlocked because this has already been done by opening the closet door – Eros has been liberated, inhibition vanquished. After the gay man's debut on the world stage as a fully formed person with fully formed needs and fully formed pectorals, everything is exactly as it appears to be. The gay man is, in fact, the very embodiment of enlightened common sense, full rationality and great grooming. And there is absolutely no truth in the scurrilous idea put around by anti-gay people and those, like Camille Paglia, who are No Friends of the Gay Community, that this is why homosexuals were more interesting to talk to or, for that matter, read.

When you consider all the advantages of coming out, you can't help but come to the conclusion that it is a pity that it happens only once in your life.

Which is why the Pride Parade was invented. At Pride, everyone can come out year after year. And they can do this *en masse* - just like the original Stonewall rioters. Everyone has the chance to feel like they are changing the world and, even more importantly, to try and draw as much attention to themselves as possible. So, on the June anniversary of Year Zero, gays in big cities parade through town, hold hands, kiss and embrace, and blow whistles, while the fetishists in their ranks display their paraphernalia, drag queens flaunt their stuff, male strippers flex

and pose on floats sponsored by sexual lubricant companies, and young men in their underwear formation dance to Madonna's 'Vogue'. Everyone has the chance to noisily relive and dramatize the excitement and the liberation of their own coming out, vanquishing any counter-revolutionary thoughts they might be entertaining about the muted anti-climax that may have followed this curtain-raiser.

And there are many reasons to feel proud at Pride. You are proud to prefer the same sex, proud to be open about it, proud of your floats and Freedom Flags, proud to be there feeling proud and especially proud of your cycling shorts three sizes too small. It's quite dizzying, really. No wonder many people describe it as a 'near religious experience'. It's a wonder that proud gay hearts don't just burst with pride on such a proud day. The straight world can only look on in bitter frustration, realizing that despite their best efforts they haven't succeeded in making gays hung up about their sexuality.

As a measure of how successful and how popular gay is, every year the parades get bigger, the floats fluffier and the male strippers beefier and oilier. In case we don't notice this, the gay press helpfully points this out - along with the cast-iron prediction that this year the parade will be so big, fluffy and oily that the straights won't be able to ignore it, like they somehow managed to last year (not counting, that is, those couple of photos of drag queens whose lives and choice of heels were obviously being validated because a camera was pointing in their direction).

And knowing that the numbers are growing each year is gratifying news. It tells us that we are on the road to victory, that we must have right on our side, and, best of all, that we are fashionable.

But perhaps the most encouraging thing about the rising attendance figures is that they bring ever closer the realization of the greatest gay dream of all: to turn the whole world into a gay disco! After all, Pride is nothing if it isn't a vast gay day-club; a discotheque after the lights have come on but no one wants to go home.

Understandably, the Coming of the Kingdom of Kylie is something that most gays can hardly wait for. A world of free love and shirtless men with their hands in the air showing you their shaved armpits is something really to look forward to. Just think of the money saved on taxi fares for a start. And what better image could there be of freedom and love than the gay disco? With just a teensy-weensy bit of help from mind-altering substances, the gay disco is the place where you can experience the most intense sense of wellbeing, belonging and happiness, not to mention some really interesting conversations about life, the universe and how difficult it is to get hold of good shit these days and how the tab you took last weekend turned the whites of your eyes yellow.

But this magic is not something that gays want to keep for themselves. Gays are so unselfish, so giving and so concerned about the rest of the world that they devoutly want to extend this dry-ice Nirvana to everyone else, just so long as they're cute and under thirty-five. And

by one of those strange coincidences which makes you realize that Dame Fate is actually a fag hag herself, straights under thirty-five, lured by techno, house and lycra-cotton mix underwear, are exactly the ones who are queuing up outside the gay disco wanting a piece of Utopia plus strobe lights. Everyone cool now wants to dream the gay dream, or at least stay up all night dancing to their records.

So, gays, you see, really have reached the other side of the rainbow that Judy sang about it. Now that we're out of the closet and not living in Kansas or Cleveland anymore we don't need to cry into our Martinis. In fact, such behaviour is not to be tolerated at all, being as it is just a sign that you haven't really 'come to terms' yet or that you are just some terrible self-hating throwback. Any unhappiness is clearly the result of straight oppression, self-oppression or your dealer not having the right contacts.

Besides, we have everything you could ask for, and if, by some strange delusion, you feel you're missing something in your life, thoughtful niche marketeers will think of it for you. The gay press, courtesy of kind telephone sex operators and their lovely sex-positive ads featuring buffed men in some really stunning underwear, is free and never stops telling us how marvellous we and the products aimed at us are. Gay pressure groups tell us we are adorable victims who deserve special protection and sympathy, while market researchers tell us we are adorable consumers who deserve special targeting. Really big stars like Shirley MacLaine and Liza Minnelli love us. Madonna wants to be one of us. The younger generation wants to dance with us. And, God bless their bikini lines, Bob 'n' Rob Jackson Paris and their parakeets are role-modelling for us.

When all is said and done, the only thing to feel sorry about, apart, of course, from the fact that the Olympic Commission hasn't yet accepted the Wet Jockstrap Contest as a sport, is AIDS. But even then, sadness isn't what you should be feeling, except during those touching candlelit vigils. Instead, you should be feeling angry at drug companies/the Government/Western medicine/the CIA/straights for letting it happen and pride at the heroic way gays have responded to it and dismissing as patently homophobic and therefore not worth discussing, the suggestion that AIDS might not have been a gay plague in the West, that gays might not have had to respond to it so heroically without the ghettoism and hedonism of the gay seventies and the gay identity itself.

After having discovered at Stonewall the Truth that gay is always good and having been set free by that discovery, at last seeing and showing things as they really are, gays have indeed changed the world and the shape of men's briefs forever. No wonder we feel so proud of our achievements.

Isn't it fabby to be gay?