

**HISTORY'S FUTURE:
REFLECTIONS ON LESBIAN AND GAY HISTORY IN THE
COMMUNITY**

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ABSTRACT

From its beginnings in the nineteenth century, the lesbian and gay political movement has been linked to a search for lesbian and gay history. In the post-Stonewall period, community-based historians have been fostering interest in the lesbian and gay past and developing distinctive forms for disseminating their research--in particular, the lesbian/gay archive, the slide-lecture presentation, and the community-based audience. Analyzing the content of these forms reveals how the fascination of the artifact, the image, and the Other fosters the construction of both knowledge and identity. It is these forms of knowledge, rather than their content as such, that are in danger of being forgotten as lesbian and gay studies becomes academically institutionalized.

Our history can change the future. When it shows that our presence is not quite so singular; when it reveals fuller images of what it means to be lesbian or gay . . . our history can change the future. And by recovering the past, we make history. Lesbian and gay history is lesbian and gay politics.

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From the beginning, the construction of an identity based on sexual preference has been accompanied by a simultaneous reach into the past, a hasty swaddling of the newborn subject in the cloak of an organic origin. Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, after introducing the subject he called the "Uranian" in his 1864 broadside, The Vindicator, proceeded to publish no less than eleven additional treatises that repeatedly dipped into history and anthropology to show, in effect, that his construction was really a discovery. The Uranian was always-already there, in the past of time, in the layers of culture. Edward Carpenter made a similar detour through the archives on behalf of his invention, the "intermediate type." His ethnohistorical treatises, The Intermediate Sex (1908) and Intermediate Types Among Primitive Folk (1914), have lost none of their charm or originality, and only in recent years has the ethnographic research been improved. In the 1930s, Ruth Benedict, struggling to create her own lesbian lifestyle, succinctly stated the central premise of all these efforts when she wrote, "We have only to turn to other cultures . . . to realize that homosexuals have by no means been uniformly inadequate to the social situation."¹

At the time, the stakes were enormous. The merest scraps of evidence concerning gay presence in the past or in other cultures could relativize Western values and undermine the argument against homosexuality from nature. Furthermore, given the prevailing mindset of Western epistemology--the conceit that "true" knowledge mirrors nature thanks to the transparency of language--these early activist-scholars could have proceeded no other way. To count as knowledge under Western rules of discourse, knowledge production must erase its tracks.

From the beginning, gay liberation has attracted bookworms, collectors, history buffs, and amateur antiquarians who doubled as activists. In the 1950s and 1960s this included Harry Hay, Dorr Legg, Don Slater, Jim Kepner, Jeannette Foster, Barbara Grier, and Barbara Giddings among others. Lesbian and gay studies were among the first of the "institutionalizations" of the homophile movement--along with the Mattachine discussion group (a

vehicle of consciousness-raising) and ONE Magazine (a vehicle of education and networking). I find it remarkable that at a time when the rights of homosexuals to free speech and public assemblage had yet to be established, the ONE Midwinter Institute and the One Institute Quarterly were founded to provide a forum for such topics as "Berdache and Theories of Sexual Inversion" (Dorr Legg) and "The Moral Climate of Canaan in the Time of Judges" (Harry Hay). It was Hay himself who pinpointed the hold of history on the gay imagination when he referred to this urgent will to knowledge as "the homosexual in search of historical contiguity."

Since Stonewall, the tradition of the activist-scholar has been continued by Arthur Evans, Jonathan Katz, Esther Newton, Vito Russo, John Lauritsen, David Thorstad, Judy Grahn, Allen Bérubé, Joan Nestle, Judith Schwartz, Deborah Edel, Karla Jay, Charlie Shively, Paula Gunn Allen, Audre Lorde, Gayle Rubin, Roberta Yusba, Eric Garber, Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherrié Moraga, Joseph Beam, Amber Hollibaugh, Jeffrey Escoffier, and many others. In the 1970s, banners bearing the names of historical gay men and lesbians became a visual cliché in marches and parades, while organizations devoted to gay history formed in many cities. It became possible to speak of a lesbian and gay history movement. «²»

The Buffalo Women's Oral History Project founded in 1978 was among the first of the post-Stonewall history collectives. Its goals are typical: "(1) to produce a comprehensive, written history of the lesbian community in Buffalo . . . ; (2) to create and index an archive of oral history tapes, written interviews, and relevant supplementary materials; and (3) to give this history back to the community from which it derives." «³» This model quickly spread throughout North America. «⁴» The San Francisco Lesbian and Gay History Project, founded in 1979, has been among the most long-lived of these groups. Members of the project were the first to make use of the "slide-lecture" for presenting historical research, beginning with "She Even Chewed Tobacco" (originally "Lesbian Masquerade"), dealing with nineteenth century women who passed as men, and Allen Bérubé's "Marching to a Different Drummer: Lesbian and Gay Americans During World War II."

These presentations were instant successes. In late 1979 and early 1980, Bérubé toured the East Coast with "She Even Chewed Tobacco," and soon grassroots historians and history projects throughout the country were developing slide documentaries on a variety of subjects. «⁵» Today, the slide-lecture is the hallmark of community-based lesbian and gay history. Taking advantage of a time-honored "low-tech" medium (the "magic lantern,"

precursor of the slide projector, was invented in the eighteenth century), the typical presentation combines a running narrative with the programmed use of slides. Recorded music and other enhancements are easily added. The results can approximate the dramatic and visual values of filmed documentary. Indeed, the use of images in this way enacts a core metaphor of gay liberation--the shattering of invisibility.

Slide-lectures and the lesbian and gay historians who have traveled throughout the country presenting them deserve much of the credit for developing the "gay market" that so many book publishers are now eager to infiltrate. The independent scholar, an endangered species in American society at large, has enjoyed a renaissance in the lesbian and gay community. In the past ten years, unaffiliated lesbian and gay scholars and authors have produced an impressive number of books, articles, films, and videos without institutional support--or its corollary, institutional supervision. Their work has evolved out of close and ongoing interaction with community-based audiences, part of what Lisa Duggan has termed a "democratic historical practice."

Another important manifestation of community-based history is the many lesbian and gay archives and libraries that have been established in North America--over thirty according to a recent count.⁶ In many cases, these archives began as private collections of books, periodicals, memorabilia or other artifacts. The holdings of the International Lesbian and Gay Archives in West Hollywood, for example, grew out of collections started by its founder, Jim Kepner, as early as 1942. When the collection could no longer be kept in a private residence--or when two or more collections were merged (as when two collectors became lovers or one organization bequeathed its materials to another)--the next step was to "go public." Several of these lesbian and gay archives began as labors of love on the part of one or two collectors and have remained closely identified with them (which accounts for both their organizational stability and their occasional idiosyncrasies).

Today's lesbian and gay archives provide a variety of innovative services. When I visited the Quatrafoil Library in Minneapolis on a rainy Saturday morning in June 1990, I found a small but efficiently organized space staffed by two volunteers and buzzing with a dozen patrons checking out books and videos, conducting research for school papers and other projects, photocopying, and browsing through an international selection of periodicals. David Irwin, co-founder of the library and a self-described "gay bookworm," proudly showed me his latest

acquisitions: a collection of rare homoerotic photographs from the 1930s and 1940s and an entire women's lending library donated by a local bookstore.

Similar scenes might be found in San Francisco, Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, Toronto, and many other cities. The International Gay and Lesbian Archives has over 22,000 books, 3,000 periodical titles, and thousands of posters, photographs, artworks, T-shirts, buttons, and memorabilia. The library of ONE, Inc. in Los Angeles, established in the 1950s, has 9,000 volumes and extensive historical files. The Lesbian Herstory Archives in New York, founded in 1974, maintains hundreds of biographical and subject files, several thousand books, over 2,000 slides, and thousands of hours of audio tapes. In San Francisco, the Gay and Lesbian Historical Society of Northern California (formerly the San Francisco Bay Area Gay and Lesbian Historical Society) represents yet another manifestation of the gay history movement. Founded in 1985 as a membership organization "to foster the recovery, preservation, and understanding of the history of lesbians and gay men," the Society sponsors public programs, publishes a newsletter, maintains an office and archives, and regularly interacts with local institutions and libraries.

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In the history of the lesbian and gay movement, it seems that the declaration "Gay Is Good" is always followed by a dash to the library. This dual gesture to future and past is linked to distinctly grassroots politics. Time and again, from the early German emancipation movement to Mattachine and then the Stonewall era, we find activists pursuing history and history being recovered and told in political settings. In North America, the idea of gay and lesbian history and the emergence of a gay and lesbian political movement are so closely linked as to seem inseparable. What characterizes these efforts is not a specific political agenda but the practice of mixing politics and intellectual inquiry in a discourse accessible to a general community.

A merely "historical" account of the gay history movement, however, would miss what may be its most important contribution. This is not the content of the works it has produced but the forms it has fashioned for disseminating them. These forms--what I refer to as "the artifact," "the archetype," and "the audience"--have been steadily refined since the 1950s. Now, as lesbian and gay studies stand poised for a final assault upon the academy, their future is uncertain. What they represent, the "content of the form" in historian Hayden White's terms, and what

is at stake in their preservation is the subject of this paper. To analyze these forms, I will be drawing, somewhat freely, from contemporary cultural theory.

Artifacts and Objects

In Western civilization, libraries, archives, and museums are key sites for the production of historical knowledge. They are the source of the "raw material"--artifacts and texts gathered from a distance, organized, and made accessible--that historians "process" into historical narratives.⁷ It is not surprising that lesbian and gay archives, albeit modest imitations of the great collections of governments and institutions, have been the earliest and most frequent manifestation of the lesbian and gay history movement.

As a cultural form, the archive is above all a collection of objects. Aside from any inscriptions these objects might bear, they are meaningful because they are selected and presented in certain ways. Indeed, in collections the meaning of the relationships between objects often supercedes the individual meaning of the objects themselves. Through exclusion as well as inclusion, by arrangement and organization, collections create a world of values, revealing both personal and cultural ideals of taxonomy, ethics, gender, aesthetics, and so on.

The meaning of the collection and collecting as cultural forms has been the subject of several recent studies. Historian James Clifford writes that "some form of 'gathering' around the self and the group--the assemblage of a material 'world,' the marking off of a subjective domain which is not 'other'--probably is universal." Collecting produces "rule-governed territories of the self"; it is an exercise in making the world one's own, a mechanism of identity formation.⁸ In a similar vein, Susan Stewart writes that "the collection marks the space of nexus for all narratives, the place where history is transformed into space, into property."

What the collection narrates is the self of the collector. As a metaphor of completion, the collection tells the story of the longing for return and reunion with a lost point of origin. For Stewart, this is the mother-infant relationship, and she traces the desire for a "pure object" that "will remain complete at a distance" to the primal disruption of this relationship. Collecting provides a means of objectifying the desire for a nostalgic past, for unity and containment.⁹ As Walter Benjamin, an avid book collector, observed, "For the collector--and I mean the real

collector, a collector as he ought to be--ownership is the most intimate relationship that one can have to objects. Not that they come alive in him; it is he who lives in them."«¹⁰»

The archives of the Gay and Lesbian Historical Society in San Francisco provide a good illustration of how subject and object, desire and history converge in the practice of collecting. According to Bill Walker, long-time steward of the archives, the Society's holdings are characterized by three of its key acquisitions. The first was Walker's own collection of periodicals and publications begun in the early 1970s when he was living in Montana. Collecting gay publications was a way to make political connections through the mail and overcome isolation. A second, key acquisition was the collection of Greg Pennington, a long-time San Francisco resident, who had accumulated clippings, ephemera, and newspapers concerning local history and current events with more of a cultural than a political focus. A third major acquisition was an extensive collection of erotic materials, mostly gay male-oriented, that dated back to the early 1950s. When the collector died, his lover donated the material to the Harvey Milk Archives to prevent it from falling into the hands of nongay relatives; it was subsequently transferred to the Historical Society.

This last acquisition provides an obvious example of how desire and identity are interwoven in collecting practices. Even before the founding of ONE Magazine and the Ladder in the 1950s, gay men and lesbians were perusing muscle magazines and lesbian pulp novels.«¹¹» This material was not merely viewed and read; it was, out of necessity as well as desire, hoarded. It became a secret collection. Gay archives, to the extent that their holdings often include such material, quite literally have come "out of the closet." As part of a collection, however, even erotic objects acquire the meta-meanings and metaphors of the form of the collection described above. The collection articulates and organizes the nuances of sexual and emotional preference into a kind of erotic personality map; out of this a narrative of the emerging self can be read.

In this regard, sexual preference plays a much more direct and formative role in identity formation than labelling theory--that prop of social constructionism--allows. It is the objects that desire invests, as much as the labels that society applies, which serve to unleash the flows of signs and meanings, the discursive play, that constitutes and inscribes our subjectivity. As Clifford and Stewart argue, these same processes are at work in all

instances of collecting, whether the objects are desired for sexual pleasure or simply to satisfy the collector's compulsion for inclusion and completion. The collection offsets social construction with self-construction.

We might ask at this point to what extent lesbian and gay collecting reflects the phenomenon Freud termed fetishism. For Freud, the fetish is an object that functions as a substitute for the absent phallus; it sutures the void of castration. In Stewart's terms, the fetish is a "metonymic object" in that it substitutes a signifying object for a part of the body (or a part of the body for the whole). "The boundary between collection and fetishism," she concludes, "is mediated by classification and display in tension with accumulation and secrecy."«¹²»

This is a tenuous boundary, but I believe it is both possible and desirable to distinguish fetishism and collecting. While physique magazines and pulp novels, as erotic supplements, can obviously function as fetishes, when they become part of a collection something quite different results. They are no longer merely metonymic objects displacing a transcendental lack (of the phallus, of the maternal relationship). By their placement within a community of objects, they begin to function metaphorically and discursively. The collection produces something: it objectifies subjectivity and constructs identity. This is an infinitely more creative function than that of the fetish-object trapped as it is within the closed economy of desire-as-lack. The appropriate metaphor for this capacity, I would argue, is not castration but birth. In other words, what is represented in lesbian and gay collections is not the missing part, but the immanent whole and the process of bringing this into being, which is nothing less than an act of self-birth. Stewart's observation is suggestive. Collecting, she notes, has been "socially placed within the domains of anti- and nonauthority: the feminine, the childish, the mad, and the senile."«¹³» Might we not add to this list the category of "the queer"?

I hope this discussion suggests how lesbian and gay collections, including collections of fantasy material, can be a rich source of insights into our history, sociology, and psychology. Two examples will illustrate what I mean. In her study of the lesbian pulp novels of the 1950s, Roberta Yusba has shown how a literature intended for the titillation of heterosexual males was subversively written and read by lesbians and how it provided many women, especially in remote areas, a way to begin to articulate their desire.«¹⁴» Equally interesting is the psychological reading of gay male erotica by Jungian psychotherapist Robert Hopcke. Hopcke considers erotic narratives a form of folk literature that draws from stock motifs and collective psychological themes. His study

reveals that the predominant theme in gay men's erotic literature is that of masculine initiation, enacted between the poles of active/receptive and older/younger (but not masculine/feminine).¹⁵» The narrativization of homosexuality, whether in soft-core lesbian novels or hard-core gay male erotica, interjects a transcendent theme: the production of pleasure becomes a rite of passage.

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Lesbian and gay collecting has played a key role in the history of lesbian and gay identities, communities, and politics. Now, placed in archives, these "objects of identity" are losing their private and purely erotic character. As collective objects, they are being taught to speak and tell stories.¹⁶» But whether private or public, collecting is an indigenous gay practice, continued today by community-based lesbian and gay archives.

Archetypes and Images

In 1986, I began presenting my research on the subject of the berdache role among the Zuni Indians in the form of a slide documentary.¹⁷» Several months and many presentations passed, however, before I really understood the dynamics of this mode of presentation. This happened when I accepted an invitation to speak to an organization of lesbian and gay business people and professionals in Fresno, California. In San Francisco and Los Angeles, my story of the six-foot tall Zuni Indian We'wha who wore a dress and shook hands with President Cleveland had been enthusiastically received. But how would an audience of lesbian and gay professionals in the middle America setting of Fresno respond to the Zuni "man-woman"--as an episode of "gay history"?

In fact, they reacted just as audiences have everywhere--with attention, good humor, and a genuine appreciation of the accomplishments and character of We'wha. A lesbian high school teacher wished her students could see the program for both its Native American content as well as its handling of sex and gender issues. No one complained that I was presenting a stereotype--a dress-wearing man--as a role model.¹⁸»

The next morning, as my lover and I were driving home through the dense winter tule fog of the Central Valley, we marveled over this reception. How was it that diverse audiences responded so well to We'wha's story? At that moment, as the fog literally lifted, I saw the answer. Gay audiences identified with We'wha because they had already identified with his "type" before, in the form of an archetypal figure with innumerable articulations in popular

gay culture--the triumphant queen who, being female or identified with the feminine, is powerless in social and economic terms but overcomes all obstacles on the basis of strength of character alone. For my Fresno hosts, a pharmacist and a florist who played us tapes of their favorite show tunes as they drove us home that night, this archetype was no doubt personified by Judy Garland. But its strength and popularity is a function of its adaptability; it can be found not only in the many female figures idolized by gay men, but in the personas of Quentin Crisp, Harvey Fierstein, and Molina in Kiss of the Spiderwoman. Whatever form it takes, this figure always tells a "core narrative" of personal redemption through adversity. Thus, in the case of We'wha, no rationalization is needed to convince audiences to take him seriously. In the images of him that I present, his dress juxtaposed to his inherent dignity and self-assurance automatically places him in this category.

But aside from the archetypal content of images, there is the pure fascination and pleasure of viewing them, and this, I believe, accounts for the popularity of slide-lectures in general. Images, like collections, clearly have a role in the crystallization of identity. To understand this we need a theoretical orientation that can explain the fascination of the image and its subjective effects, one that I believe Laura Mulvey provides in her article, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema."¹⁹ Although Mulvey is concerned with the "fascination of film" and how this is "reinforced by preexisting patterns of fascination," I believe the viewing milieu of the slide-lecture--an audience sitting in a darkened room watching larger-than-life images--is similar enough to warrant the use of her analysis.²⁰

To explain the appeal of images, Mulvey draws on the theory of French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan concerning the "mirror stage." This point in infant development occurs when the child first apprehends its own image in a mirror or reflective surface, usually before the age of two. At this stage, the infant still lacks basic motor control--but the image in the mirror appears as an integrated totality, and this gives it irresistible appeal. In Lacan's theory, this primal experience of apprehending one's body-as-an-image is crucial for the constitution of the ego; it is the basis for all subsequent experiences of seeing--and seeking--oneself in others, what Lacan refers to as the "identificatory relations" of the "imaginary," or pre-discursive realm of images.

Mulvey goes on to explore the two forms that pleasure in viewing can take: scopophilia, or pleasure in looking at another person as an object, and narcissism, the pleasure of seeing oneself in an image, an experience that allows a "temporary loss of ego while simultaneously reinforcing the ego."²¹ For Mulvey, the majority of films

offer both pleasures in terms of a heroic male figure to identify with and exotic female figures to look at. But for us this raises an interesting question. Which of these pleasures is operative in the case of the gay audience viewing an image it sees as "gay"--say a picture of We'wha, facing the camera, wearing traditional women's clothing but with one arm bare, revealing a pronounced male musculature? Is this scopophilia: seeing the imaged Other as an object of desire and wondering, perhaps, what other physical attributes are beneath that dress? Or is this narcissism: identification with the imaged Other as one's authentic self? It seems to me that in homosexual desire--which is desire for a double rather than an/other--it is impossible to separate scopophilia and narcissism. Lesbians and gay men are able to identify with and objectify images, alternately or simultaneously.

But what is the status of these objects-that-are-subjects? Do they provide us with "knowledge" about ourselves or the meaning of the images they appear in? Or are they purely subjective and random? A colleague in gay studies once confessed that he was suspicious of all the slide-lectures because the form itself encouraged anachronistic identifications on the part of the audience. The implication was that such reactions were not only without value, they were counterproductive. And this brings us, fairly abruptly, to the larger question of what counts as knowledge and the debate that opposes positivism to relativism.

Some years ago, R. G. Collingwood, a philosopher of history, proposed a solution to this problem in terms that I think are useful for our purposes. How is it, he asked, if knowledge and thought are strictly context-dependent (the relativist position), we are able to follow the reasoning in the writings of Plato, since his context is lost to us? Collingwood's answer was that thought is more than feeling or sensation, and for this reason it can exist in more than one context without losing its identity, "although without some appropriate context it could never exist." He concludes, "The peculiarity of thought is that, in addition to occurring here and now in this context, it can sustain itself through a change of context and revive in a different one. This power to sustain and revive itself is what makes an act of thought more than a mere 'event' or 'situation.'"«²²» To study ideas from the past, therefore, the historian must re-enact them in his or her thought.

The "berdache," following this line of reasoning, is not lost to present-day comprehension, although its original context has lapsed. As an idea--or we might say today a sign or symbol--it can be re-thought by contemporary lesbians and gay men. Such an act is not independent of external factors, however. "The object [of

thought] must be of such a kind that it can revive itself in the historian's mind; the historian's mind must be such as to offer a home for that revival."²³» By "home," Collingwood means the context-dependent values, beliefs, experiences, and knowledge of the historian. In other words, neither relativism nor the capacity for cultural comprehension are absolute; but between these two poles a limited domain for critical historical knowledge exists.

An argument like this enables us to see more in the response of lesbians and gay men to historical images than the subjective fantasies of a naive audience. If lesbians and gay men are able to "rethink" the idea of the berdache to the extent of meaningfully responding to it, then there must be an objective basis for this comprehension, some relationship between contexts, experiences, or thought-systems that makes the identification possible. Without this objective basis, identification could not occur--the image would remain alien, incomprehensible. The lecturer might as well be showing slides of Rambo! In other words, it seems to me that the very ability to imagine ourselves in another world and to build conceptual bridges between worlds amounts to a hypothesis of continuity. It is the historian's job to translate such subjective clues into more "objective" knowledge through the use of evidence and criticism.

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The identification of lesbian and gay audiences with historical images and narratives is hypothetical, temporary, and recreational. In the liminal space of the slide-lecture, identities and desires can be tried on. When the program is over, the audience leaves enriched, not converted or programmed. And with the right critical tools, historians can draw valuable insights from these responses into both past and present forms of homosexuality.

Audiences and Others

An interesting sideline to the history of slide-lectures is the fact that the first of these presentations, on the subject of nineteenth century women, was originally researched by a gay man, Allen Bérubé. Bérubé worked with Estelle Freedman and Liz Stevens to produce the slide-lecture, "She Even Chewed Tobacco," but he delivered the initial presentation himself before a largely lesbian audience at San Francisco's Women's Building in 1979. Bérubé still recalls the trepidation he felt that night, knowing that not only might his research be found wanting, but that

his position as a man studying lesbian subjects might be cause for suspicion and resentment. In fact, he received an overwhelmingly enthusiastic response on that occasion and many that followed.

Bérubé's experience is not unique. Eric Garber and myself, both white gay men, have researched African-American and American Indian subjects, respectively. Such cross-cultural investigations by members of a dominant social group have become increasingly problematic in both community and academic settings. To do this kind of research and present it publicly would only seem to invite criticism. But the projects of Bérubé, Garber, and myself have proven feasible for this very reason--their vulnerability to criticism. We have all presented our research directly to the communities affected and were able to complete our projects only because of the cooperation of members of those communities.«²⁴» Consistent and adamant objections, on the other hand, would have brought our efforts quickly to a stop.

The audience has a critical role in shaping the production of history, and this is the third "form" of lesbian and gay history that I want to discuss. Setting aside the economic aspect of having an audience (few independent or academic scholars actually earn their living directly from an audience anyway), there are two ways that audiences can influence the production of history. On the one hand, actual (or imagined) experience with audiences can affect the historian's choice and definition of the subject and mode of presentation, essentially a constraining role. On the other hand, audiences can confirm results, verify evidence, and propose interpretations, which is more of an enabling role. This applies to the production of knowledge in academic settings as well. Academic audiences, whether students, supervisors, funding sources, or peers, enable and constrain research in various ways, according to prevailing values of that world. Scholars, at least those who have been influenced by postmodern critiques of culture and knowledge, would be the first to agree that the difference between knowledge produced in the academy and in the community cannot be characterized in terms of objective or subjective but only by the different rules under which it is produced.

One feature of community audiences, however, has no academic counterpart. In only exceptional instances is the academic setting likely to provide a predominantly and overtly lesbian and gay audience (indeed, academic audiences in general are rarely inclusive of the populations that academics study). The difference this makes is not in terms of the expertise and interest of a gay audience--for academics have access to interested experts, as well--but in

the dynamics that occur when same-sex desire is introjected into historical imagination to produce both knowledge and selves. This is a unique dynamic that can occur only with a lesbian and gay audience.

As we have seen, both objects and images provide access to the imaginary, that primal, pre-discursive domain of images and identifications where the sense of self first develops. The artifact, the archetypal image, and the audience of peers can help create spaces where the imaginary and the real, subjectivity and objectivity, interact. By using these forms, the community historian engages the lesbian and gay imaginary, the wellspring of all identifications, and the source of our desire for "historical contiguity."

This need not be an uncontrolled influence on the production of history. Identification with images in a slide documentary is not purely subjective (or merely objectifying) if the images talk back in the person of the historian and a critical dialogue can unfold. The historian bridges the transition between the imaginary and the real. And while the historian serves as a "reality-check" for audience reactions, the audience can equally check the historian's projections, assumptions, and identifications. This would seem to achieve what Mulvey calls for in regards to narrative film: "to free the look of the camera into its materiality in time and space and the look of the audience into dialectics, passionate detachment."²⁵

Conclusions: History = Life

This inquiry into the forms of the gay and lesbian history movement has led us to humble and unexpected points of origin--magazines hidden beneath mattresses, treasured collections of books and objects, lesbians and gay men peering at slides in darkened rooms--objects and images that not only convey information but shape consciousness and construct identities. In Joan Nestle's words, "Answering the challenge of exclusion is the work of a lifetime."²⁶ Given all that has been said here, we might give her remark a double reading: Answering the challenge of exclusion is not only work that takes a lifetime, it is work that builds lives and identities, that provides both knowledge of the world and knowledge of the self. It is work that makes lesbian and gay living possible.

In a recent article, Jeffrey Escoffier bemoans the growing hegemony of academic lesbian and gay studies and asks "whether as an academic discipline it should, or can, exist without structural ties to lesbian and gay political struggles."²⁷ But there is no point in denying that today's out-of-the-closet lesbian and gay academics can

improve upon the work of their activist predecessors. This is no comment on the skills of the earlier generation but simply a function of superior resources. Nor is it likely, for the time being, that gay and lesbian scholarship will lose its potential for disrupting the status quo simply because its primary site of production shifts to the campus.

But while the content and the subject of gay and lesbian studies are likely to remain stable, academic rules of discourse make the future of the forms of community-based gay history uncertain. Will the mainstream libraries and institutions now willing to establish lesbian and gay-related collections be as willing to accept erotic or idiosyncratic materials as the community-based archive?«²⁸» Will academically-accountable scholars feel as free to experiment at the borders of objective and subjective knowledge as independent scholars? Will they be as willing or able to engage the imaginary of lesbian and gay audiences?

Escoffier fears that an "unbridgeable gap between gay academics and the community" may result from the institutionalization of gay and lesbian studies. But the potential for disjuncture between scholars and communities always exists, even in the case of the community-based historian. What has bridged this potential gap until now has been the forms of community-based knowledge production that I have described here--the collection, the image, and the audience. This is what the lesbian and gay history movement bequeaths to its academic successor--a way to maintain a vital link to community.

The lesbian and gay political movement also has a stake in these knowledge-forms. I agree with Escoffier's concern that gay and lesbian history in the future may be produced in forms inaccessible to broad audiences and for audiences other than lesbians and gay men. This bodes ill for the lesbian and gay movement, which, for very practical reasons, needs to have its history constantly retold to avoid having to reinvent its wheels in every generation. While the academic scholar committed to socially responsible professional practice can turn to community-based history for lessons on audience and voice, the activist can gain insights on the power of identity and genealogy to bond and to mobilize.

If the lesbian and gay community-based history movement were to adopt a slogan, it might be simply "History = Life." In the words of the Lesbian Herstory Archives in New York City:

The Archives doesn't just preserve papers and artifacts. It has honestly preserved Lesbian life and lives, in a hundred small and large ways. The very existence of the Lesbian Herstory Archives, as well as the knowledge contained in those countless files and images, have kept more women going than any of us will ever know. . . . The Archives is where we will be remembered, our writings and images cherished and preserved, our history connected to the future, and our people supported.«²⁹»

NOTES

¹. Ruth Benedict, Patterns of Culture (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1959), 262.

². See Lisa Duggan "History's Gay Ghetto: The Contradictions of Growth in Lesbian and Gay History," in Presenting the Past: Essays on History and the Public, ed. Susan P. Benson, Stephen Brier, and Roy Rosenzweig (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 281-90; "Introduction," in Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past, ed. Martin B. Duberman, Martha Vicinus, and George Chauncey, Jr. (New York: New American Library, 1989), 1-13.

³. Madeline Davis and Elizabeth L. Kennedy, "Oral History and the Study of Sexuality in the Lesbian Community: Buffalo, New York, 1940-1960," Feminist Studies 12(1) (1986): 7-26.

⁴. These include the New York Lesbian and Gay Historical Society and Lesbian History Project, and the Boston Lesbian and Gay History Project (Duggan, 283-85). While Duggan mentions some activist groups of lesbians and gay men of color with an historical focus, the first minority gay history project that I am aware of is the Gay American Indians History Project founded in 1984 (see Will Roscoe, "Bibliography of Berdache and Alternative Gender Roles Among North American Indians," Journal of Homosexuality 14[3/4] [1987]: 81-172; Living the Spirit: A Gay American Indian Anthology [New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988]).

⁵. Other slide-lectures include: Roberta Yusba, "Twilight Tales: Lesbian Paperbacks 1950-65"; Joan Nestle, "Lesbian Courage Pre-1970"; Lesbian Herstory Archives, "Preserving Our Heritage: Issues and Challenges of Doing Lesbian History Research"; Eric Garber, "Tain't Nobody's Bizness: Lesbian and Gay Life in Jazz Age Harlem"; Frances Doughty, "Gilt on Cardboard: Djuna Barnes--Her Life and Visual Art"; Judith Schwarz, "The Radical Feminists of Heterodoxy"; and the Boston Lesbian and Gay History Project, "Our Boston Heritage."

⁶. The Gay and Lesbian Historical Society of Northern California maintains a current list of these organizations. See also Stuart Timmons, "The Future of the Past: Who Controls Gay History?" The Advocate, May 27, 1986: 30-33.

⁷. This model of "knowledge production" is based on Bruno Latour, Science in Action (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987).

⁸. James Clifford, "Objects and Selves--An Afterword," in Objects and Others: Essays on Museums and Material Culture, ed. George W. Stocking, Jr. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 238, 239.

⁹. Susan Stewart, On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), xii, 125.

¹⁰. Walter Benjamin, Illuminations (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 67.

¹¹. The genealogy of this material dates back at least to the 1920s, with the appearance of the first physique magazines and the prototypical lesbian pulp novel, The Well of Loneliness. See Roberta Yusba, "Twilight Tales: Lesbian Pulps, 1950-1960," On Our Backs, summer 1985: 30-31, 43; "Those Wonderful Lesbian Pulps: A Roundtable Discussion," San Francisco Bay Area Gay & Lesbian Historical Society Newsletter 4(4) (summer 1989): 1,4; 5(1) (fall 1989): 7-8; Eric Garber, "'Physique Pictorials': Vintage Beefcake," San Francisco Bay Area Gay & Lesbian Historical Society Newsletter 4(2) (winter 1988): 1,7; Michael Bronski, "Art and Evidence," Gay Community News (October 21-26, 1990).

¹². Stewart, 163.

¹³. Stewart, xiii.

¹⁴. Yusba, "Twilight Tales."

¹⁵. Robert Hopcke, Jung, Jungians, and Homosexuality (Boston: Shambala, 1989).

¹⁶. See Philip Fisher, "The Future's Past," New Literary History 6(3) (1975): 587-606.

¹⁷. See Will Roscoe, The Zuni Man-Woman (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1991).

¹⁸. I have not encountered the resistance from conservative or "image-conscious" gays that Duggan describes ("History's Gay Ghetto," 288-89), perhaps because audiences are more willing to suspend judgments when it comes to American Indians--a romanticization that I critique in the course of my lecture.

¹⁹. Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Screen 16(3) (autumn 1975): 198-209.

- ²⁰. Mulvey, 198.
- ²¹. Mulvey, 202.
- ²². R. G. Collingwood, The Idea of History (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), 298-99, 301, 297.
- ²³. Collingwood, 304.
- ²⁴. For an account of my experience lecturing at the Pueblo of Zuni, see Will Roscoe, "The Zuni Man-Woman," Out/Look 1(2) (summer 1988): 56-67. For a discussion of Garber's work, see Duggan, "History's Gay Ghetto," 287.
- ²⁵. Mulvey, 209.
- ²⁶. Joan Nestle, A Restricted Country (Ithica, NY: Firebrand Books, 1987).
- ²⁷. Jeffrey Escoffier, "Inside the Ivory Closet: The Challenges Facing Lesbian & Gay Studies," Out/Look 3(2) (fall 1990): 40.
- ²⁸. See Bill Walker, "Evaluating the Current Status of Lesbian and Gay Archival Collections," unpub. ms., 1989; Timmons, "The Future of the Past."
- ²⁹. Lesbian Herstory Archives Newsletter #11 (January 1990), [insert].