



Homocore Rules

Gay Zine Makers Bust a Move

By Dennis Cooper

Punk has always had a contingent of lesbian and gay bands, critics, fans, and general scenemakers. Out of fear of skinheads and the like, they remained a relatively silent subminority until the rise of Reaganism, then AIDS, and the gradual realization that silence under the circumstances meant, well, death. Bolstered by the popularity of bands like the Smiths and Bronski Beat, as well as by the support of cool, straight upstarts like Jello Biafra, Lydia Lunch, and Henry Rollins, these punks began to think out loud, meet, organize. Trouble was, the gay community at large, giddied and a little spooked by its growing political power, seemed to meet calls for anarchy with a collective finger to the lips. To punks' horror, many gays in the early '80s had gotten as lazy as the heterosexual mainstream who sought to oppress them. "Problem children" (punks, activists, women in general) were marginalized via an unspoken but entrenched class structure that effectively alienated all but the most "privileged."

Homocore is pretty much a direct result of that schism. The term was coined a few years back by Bruce LaBruce and G. B. Jones, editors of Toronto's seminal lesbian/gay punk minimagazine (or "zine"), *J.D.'s*, and later adopted by the San Francisco zine *Homocore*. There are about 20 Xeroxed and/or cheaply offset-printed publications like them across North America, constituting a network of subdespot alternatives to established, large-circulation periodicals like *The Advocate* and *Outlook*. Mutually supportive for the most part, but individualistic in outlook and de-

sign, these zines share a hatred for political correctness, yuppification, and all things bourgeois, especially within gay culture. In fact, for many of these young editors, the enemy is less heterosexuals than, in the words of Johnny Noxema of *Bimbox*, "crypto-fascist clones and dykes... telling us how and what to think." Or as Tom Jennings describes his zine, *Homocore*, "One thing everyone in here has in common is that we're all social mutants; we've outgrown or never were part of any of the 'socially acceptable' categories. You don't have to be gay... any personal decision that makes you an outcast is enough."

HOMOCORE (c/o World Power Systems, P.O. Box 77731, San Francisco, California 94107; \$1, cash only) is the most generous and info-packed of the zines. Produced on the kind of cheap newsprint that seems to yellow before your eyes, it consists of letters from readers, reports on anarchist goings-on, pics of partying local scenesters, and lots of opinions from Tom Jennings and assistant Deke Nililson. Though he'd probably deny it, Jennings's motor-mouthed editorializing makes him the unofficial conscience of the movement, and his pronouncements, even when couched in who-the-fuck-am-I-to-say-ism, give this zine the hypercreamst tone of classic punk periodicals like *Flipside* and *Maximum Rock'n'Roll*. In a recent issue he seems to speak for all when he bemoans the scarcity of lesbian-edited zines, and declares himself pro-drugs (or certain drugs anyway—LSD, mushrooms, cocaine). But occasionally he distinguishes *Homocore* from the pack by taking a rather old-school liberation-

ist stance, as in his recent dismissal of one of the more self-consciously abject gay zines, *Carnifex Network*, whose provocatively unopinionated debate on the pros and cons of intentionally spreading sexual diseases brought out the traditionalist beneath the mohawk. "If you hate yourself," he responded, "and wanna indulge that, fine, but I am not gonna support it. The world-at-

large does enough of this for us, thank you, without 'us' doing it to ourselves."

Also out of San Francisco is the tiny and stylish **MILQUETOAST** (c/o Kennedy, 1491 17th Street, San Francisco, California 94110; send SASE). Editor Jeffery Kennedy is a pioneer in the field, having given the world the legendary (in these quarters), defunct *Boysville U.S.A.*, sometimes called the thinking person's *Tiger Beat*. If there were a church for sensitive, easily love-struck gay punks, *Milquetoast* is what they'd consult instead of the Bible. One sheet of pink paper folded like a girl's party napkin, its surface is a pristine collage of cute boys, beauty tips,

and found items with a homosexual subtext. The zine's considerable charm can be traced to the tensions between Kennedy's transcendent goals and the realities of low-tech publishing. Even one more smidgen of professionalism and the project would be something much blander and less sweetly pitiful.

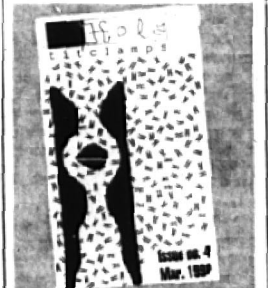
Traditions are exploded in the utterly amazing **FERTILE LA TOYAH JACKSON MAGAZINE** (7850 Sunset Boulevard, Penthouse Suite 110, Los Angeles, California 90046; \$4, cash or checks payable to C. D. Sanders). Jackson, an L.A. drag-queen-about-town, is the namesake, guru, and perennial cover girl of this lawsuit-defying zine, edited by writer "Blactress" Vaginal Creme Davis. Davis and staff spend most of each issue fantasizing about the sexual preferences of the famous with an abandon that makes *OutWeek's* Michelangelo Signorile seem like a heterosexual apologist. Here are some flights of fancy from recent issues: "Oh I went to one of THOSE parties... Beautiful Billy Idol was harking back to his Generation X sissy days by slobbering all over model ex-Wasted Youther Jeff Dahlgren... Mickey Rourke seemed to have an even better time as he was nimming and fudgepacking Head of the Classes' Michael DeLorenzo... Later I personally... watched [Jason Bateman] fudgepack cute Jewishy teen heartthrob Rob Stone from ABC's sitcom *Mr. Belvedere*." *FLTJAM's* genius lies less in such details than in the stylish violence with which Davis gives white-bread celebrities the lifestyles we demand of true Stars, at least since *Hollywood Babylon* came out. Wish it

were all the absolute truth, though some divulgences (Tom Cruise getting fistfucked in John Schlesinger's dungeon, for instance) would strain the gallibility of the mentally challenged.

Toronto's **BIMBOX** (282 Parliament Street, #68, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5A 3A4; "free to

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those who deserve it") is a relative newcomer. According to coeditors Rex Boy and Johnny Noxema, their project is a "forum to reach a secret network of lesbians and gay men across the globe who can barely ride a bus without vomiting out of disgust and contempt for the walking heterosexual abortion sitting across the aisle." *Bimbox's* wild layout pits typewritten rants/fiction against a quilty Xeroxed collage of imagery both found and invented, as well as plenty of those zine regulars, comics and porn. Highlights of the first issue include TaBorah's account of fistfucking well-known lesbian writer Pat Califia, a complete Nancy Sinatra discography, and the column Clone Watch by Jo-Jo Price-Morgan, which all but suggests that the moustachioed among us be targeted for assassination. Throughout, *Bimbox* reworks images originally created to titillate heterosexual libidos into fiercely gay graphics, as if attempting to hallucinate the enemy away. Most unusual is the undifferentiated array of male and female voices, a rare occurrence even in this determinedly non-sexist scene.



Gentler in spirit but no less incendiary, Laurence Roberts's **HOLY FITCLAMPS** (Bozholder, P.O. Box 3054, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55403; \$1, cash only) is a quarterly zine made up of whatever readers' mail in. In the latest issue, Roberts answers complaints that *HT* "lacks focus and vision" by accepting the blame. To him, a hands-off policy is the natural end product of anarchism. In fact, one of the zine's lures is a slight overall haziness, magnified by a lackadaisical if neat layout, where anything photocopiable, whatever the intent or degree of sophistication, fits snugly. Number 4 gathers romantic poetry, a B-52s review, comics, letters, and Roberts's smart, poetic daydream of a gay punk utopia. *HT* is also inordinately literary, with regular dollops of writing by and/or reviews of faves like Sarah Schulman, Robert Glück, and Kathy Acker. Astute, as well as relatively ego-free, Roberts is one of the gay anarchist movement's clearest thinkers. His practical twist on the Andy Warhol chestnut—"In

the future we'll all be famous to fifteen people"—could easily become the motto at large.

Robert Ford, Trent Adkins, and Lawrence Warren's **THING** (1516 North Sedgwick, Chicago, Illinois 60610; \$1, cash or checks payable to Robert Ford) is the first zine directed primarily, though not exclusively, at black lesbians and gay men, to whom the more extreme Acid House is punk. Ford's gorgeous layout is complicated and multiplicitous without seeming either overfed (à la *Spy*) or overcompensating (à la *Egg*). Recent features have ranged from an interview with DJ/producer Riley Evans to a Monopoly-like game board, "House Hayride (just add dice and spin)," to profiles on artists Keith Haring, Louis Walker, and David Wojnarowicz. (*Thing*'s been known to appropriate material—I was surprised to find a piece of mine from an old art catalogue here.) Each issue has four or five separate gossip columns, most only a shade less wittily libelous than *FLJTM*'s. Plus there's an up-to-the-second taste-making chart called "Thing/No Thing." In the most recent issue Pat Stevens, Bobby Short, "Fuck Me," and *One Nation Under a Groove* are among those rated as "Thing," while Pat Buckley, Harry Connick Jr., "Fuck You," and *Rhythm Nation* are deemed "No Thing." If there was ever a zine that begged for the backing of a gutsy billionaire, it's *Thing*, though it looks plenty resplendent in simple Xerox.

Chicago is also "house" to perhaps the most underground zine, **GENTLEWOMEN OF CALIFORNIA** (the address is a well-kept secret). Editor Steve Lafreniere is one of the city's best-known entrepreneurs (for lack of a better word), and his occasional Xeroxed publication is founded on the principle that "everybody owns everything." Therefore it's a highly discriminating repository of images, fiction, quotes, and essays swiped from other places. Lafreniere crops, enlarges, defaces, prints them on various colored and textured papers to create what might be considered an (ugh) Artist's Book, if he wasn't such a terrorist. "Say No to Democracy" and "Homosexual Men Arm Yourselves" read two of the messages masked into the zine's fopsy-turvy design. The latest issue involves texts by Jacques Attali, Gary Indiana (on Mapplethorpe), Angela Carter, Paul Bowles, and New Narrative writers David Sedaris and Kevin Killian, plus doctored erotica galore, including an actual page ripped from some porn magazine and scratched with the slogan, "Where's your mind now?"

J.D.s (P.O. Box 1110, Adelaide Street Station, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5C 2K5; \$4, cash only) is pretty much everybody's favorite, the zine whose style of combustible romanticism triggered the onslaught. Bruce LaBruce and G. B. Jones are roommates (and a fag and dyke respectively; they hate the terms gay and lesbian). They manage what's quickly becoming a J.D.s empire. In addition to the zine, they produce compilation cassettes of "Queercore" (music by gay punk musicians, including their own band, Fifth Column), direct and star in videos, host a popular film series at a Toronto nightclub, and head a clique of anarchists called the New Lavender Panthers. *J.D.s* the

zine organizes news, porn, whimsy, transgressive diatribes, letters, and drawings into an intricate supermesh of a "look" so fresh I wouldn't be surprised if it affected magazine design the way Neville Brody's *The Face* did in the early '80s. The current issue's subheading could be the "Nazi Skinhead Special," since a slew of pages is devoted to the pros (and a few cons) of punks "worshipping the oppressor." LaBruce offers an autobiographical-sounding sex story, as well as some teasers for his just-released video, *No Skin off My Ass*, "the tender love story of a punk ex-hairdresser obsessed with a young, silent, baby-faced skinhead." Jones contributes a

smoky photospread of Jena von Brucker, "Human Ashtray," and some Vermeerque sketches of tight-jeaned dyke punks. Fleshing out the subject are LaBruce's awe-struck interview with porn icon Peter Berlin, a picture of Sid Vicious in bed with a boyfriend, and Vaginal Davis's history of closeted homosexuals in the Los Angeles rock scene. Significantly, and this could apply to the other zines too, *J.D.s* is free of the simplistic anti-Helmsesque rhetoric that suffocates much gay product these days. In classic anarchist fashion, they just invent a world for themselves in and around the givens of the big fucked-up one, and say, "Join or leave it alone." ■

Brief Encounters

Prole Reversal

Who Built America?: Working People and the Nation's Economy, Politics, Culture, and Society
Volume One: From Conquest and Colonization through Reconstruction and the Great Uprising of 1877
By the American Social History Project under the direction of Herbert G. Gutman
Pantheon, \$19.95

As it gets taught in high school, U.S. history has a measure of Hegel's *Philosophy of History* blended into it. The mixture is watery, but the flavor's there. The spirit of America moves inexorably from East to West, from the colonies across the frontier, like Reason



following the course of the sun in Hegel's lectures. The nation-state creates and overcomes its limits one by one, moving from crisis to perfect realization of its democratic, pluralistic essence. And the best path toward comprehension of U.S. history is through careful study of the deeds of our Great Figures.

This emphasis on leadership sits well with the phys-ed instructors who, for some reason, often teach history in public schools. History has its winners and its losers, and the U.S. has been a winner. The Great Figures of U.S. history merit study because they were pragmatic idealists who had a good feel for strategy. Study of their example makes for good citizenship and a competitive football team.

But this mixture of dialectical

and Rotarian philosophy has a pronounced side effect. By their senior year, if they get that far, most students have indeed reached "the end of history"—they are inoculated against curiosity about the past for the rest of their lives.

So a work like *Who Built America?*, a popularized condensation of recent studies of U.S. history as lived "from the ground up," faces two obstacles. The first, and the easiest to get around, is the myth of history as a tale of great men doing great deeds. Over the course of the New Left's painful climb to tenure, an enormous amount of research has been done on the daily lives of slaves, women, workers, and Native Americans, research that *Who Built America?* synthesizes into a textbook format designed for accessibility. And that is where it faces a second, greater problem: breaking past the sullen conviction that "history is bunk," making the past not simply "relevant" but vivid enough to capture the imagination of the cynical.

As one of the dubious, I am surprised to report that *Who Built America?* largely succeeds on this last point. It's a good read, as few textbooks ever manage to be. According to the preface, the material gathered here was originally taught in a series of seminars for labor activists organized by the late Herbert Gutman. The seminars met with "extraordinary excitement... among these working adults." The larger part of their excitement probably came from the sheer novelty of learning what laboring people did and thought about at different moments in U.S. history. There is also the startling experience of hearing about the American past in terms not too different from those of the evening news. In the section on Reconstruction, for instance, the Ku Klux Klan is called "in essence the paramilitary arm of the southern Democratic Party."

This is the underside of history's smooth, dull surface: a story not of the ordained progress of institutions (much less of the nation-state), but of the combined and uneven development of an American landscape and psyche periodically ripped apart by drastic changes. Two sets of emphases, two long strands of storytelling, weave together the periods covered here. One is economic: the continent's subordination to capitalism, from its mercantile origins in Europe through the consolida-

tion of huge industrial monopolies in the 19th century.

The other defining perspective comes from looking at the efforts of various groups to find and hold a place in the society they thought they were building. There develops among workers (free and enslaved) a precarious mixture of individualism and community values of egalitarianism and republican ideology. Women, slaves, and industrial workers take seriously the promises of democratic rights, organize themselves to make good on the promise, and are regularly knocked down for their efforts. And, often enough, one oppressed group takes comfort at the sight of another's miserable condition.

Who Built America? generally does a good job of accounting for the diversity of experiences throughout working-class history. Occasionally, though, the egalitarian perspective is laid on like a trowel-full of cement. At the end of one section on the Northern colonies we are told: "These ordinary folk wanted to stand together in communities and to stand individually on land of their own, not to run as fast as they could in an endless race for wealth."

The authors of *Who Built America?* do run the danger of reducing history to economics. They try hard to avoid this, in part by providing numerous sidebars portraying working-class culture from contemporary materials: songs, letters, magazine illustrations, newspaper stories, etc. These are, by turns, documentary and propagandistic, moralizing and sarcastic; there are appeals to egalitarian feelings and to racism, sometimes in the same cartoon.

Unfortunately, only mass culture is treated as being really historical. Such an omission is no slight thing. Midway through the book, Shakespeare's cross-class popularity in the 19th century is mentioned. On the same page is an account of the crowds at the Bowery Theater, taken from an essay by Walt Whitman. It is the first and the last time Whitman is mentioned. No writer has so thoroughly embodied the values and the imperfections of American culture: the egalitarianism and the racism, the longing for collective unity and the self-centeredness. Surely even a poet might have a place in teaching the lesson that history is not a spectator sport? —Scott McLemore

Self-Service

Walter Winchell
By Michael Herr
Knopf, \$18.95

Walter Winchell: in which the author, Michael Herr, having outlasted the celebrity of one book (*Dispatches*), the screenplay for one film (*Apocalypse Now*), coauthorship of another film (*Full Metal Jacket*), and the text of a book of drawings concerning Las Vegas (*The Big Room*), finds a subject that is, surprisingly enough, less than the sum of Michael Herr's parts—Walter Winchell.

Winchell—"brassy, ambitious, arrogant, sentimental," reads the book's jacket copy—is subject matter over which Herr would, one assumes, shine. Is not the second-rate biographer (see anything by Albert Goldman, any cleft by Jackie Collins) the mean-spirited watchman in us all who desires nothing more than to step on the toes, private parts, and pickled brains of subject matter less than—surprisingly enough—the gifted, less famous author/ess? Funny, that—the literate person's desire to transcend (an old Hollywood press-agent word—or dream) the "concept" at hand attests to a theory observed time and again: the bookish read and/or write to have more words to be mean with.

As in the numerous anti-Semitic remarks about Winchell—the man, the journalist, the pushy Jew—put into the mouths of other characters. For authenticity's sake, one assumes. "Can't you control that crazy little kike?" demands Eleanor "Cissie" Patterson of William Randolph Hearst (for whom Winchell worked) at the time Winchell begins his virulent anti-Nazi broadcasts. But such attempts at snap character analysis issue not just from the mouths of liquor-ridden babes, but from Herr himself, who describes "Walter and Walter Jr., an infant. Walter, like almost any Jewish father, picks the baby up and plants

a fervent kiss on the tush."

Actually, the only ass Herr believes worth licking here is his own: he has rescued Walter Winchell, the most famous and highly paid gossip columnist of his era—from the early '30s through the late '50s, a builder and destroyer of careers ("Bette Davis has cancer!" began one not so blind item) and creator of a look (the fedora as tough-guy lid)—from the relative obscurity that has grown, like moss, over his memory. Herr has transformed him into a subject with a capital S. Unfortunately, Herr betrays himself: the person he would like to elevate from the sniffy pedestrian world of Journalism is not Walter Winchell but Michael Herr, as in Herr, Writer, who writes:

"A good reporter is the noblest work of God," Hemingway says. "Why, thank you, Ernest," Walter says....
"Ever read my stuff?" Hemingway asks.
"Every book. Every word. I love it. Short sentences. Like my stuff," Walter says.

In the old Freudian game, I believe the above would be referred to as countertransference in triplicate: Herr Writer writes a scene in which the subject (Winchell) identifies with the writer (Hemingway), who would like the greater public praise of a very public journalist (Winchell) that, as a serious writer (Hemingway), is denied him, given popular taste.

But this curiosity of form and function (Herr's) is best explained by the author in his introduction, wherein his intention—to write a screenplay in the form of "prose fiction"—trashes our prior knowledge of what an extraordinarily good writer he can be, and on more than one occasion. Walter Winchell holds no interest for Herr, as creeps of this proportion rarely ever do even for other creeps like writers, so there is no ostensible reason for his resurrection. —Hilton Aih