

gender.network

SKY SYZYG

Artist

ABSTRACT

Gender.network is an artist project, a growing digital archive of flyers, photos, artwork, cartoons, letters, poems, ephemera, and other visual culture from the 1960s-90s, created by trans*, two-spirit, nonbinary, and trans-adjacent activists, organizers, and artists.¹ The curation of this archive has been guided by hundreds of conversations and interviews with trans and queer elders, community members, archivists, and scholars. This essay reflects on the tension between the competing needs of the archive of “things” that this project is identifying and organizing, and the living communities that this project seeks to serve. As an attempt to bridge these two poles, this essay listens to some of the voices and strategies of the history of trans* visual and print culture.

THE IN-BETWEEN ARCHIVE

I am writing this in between cities, on a plane from Boston to New York, on a ferry in the waters between Seattle and Vancouver, on a train between Detroit and Chicago. I find myself in transit a lot these days, traveling from one archive to another, and traveling between the hushed institutional spaces of university archives and the living rooms and Zoom rooms of trans and queer elders. I am traveling to look for traces in the archives of North American twentieth-century visual culture that have not yet been seen for what they are: full of trans*, two-spirit, nonbinary, and trans-adjacent people speaking out, taking care of each other, making worlds for themselves and for all of us. I have been photographing and digitizing these materials and am sharing many of them on the archive website gender.network.

This project is also in between disciplines: I am not trained as an archivist or historian, and yet this project is taking the form of an archive of queer and trans* history. And, despite the archival processes behind this project, I am spending far more time and energy on community organizing than on archival work. To locate and select these materials, I have been winding my way through an existing network² of trans* and queer scholars, archivists, and elders, listening to their stories, and asking them questions such as “Who was influential to you?” and “Who has been left out of previous tellings of this history?”³ Each conversation has added to an exponentially growing list of conversations to have and of additional individuals and events to be researched and included. I have been moved by the stories I have heard recounted of deep and sustained connections and friendships, and of the traces of these relationships in the archives I have visited. What I am finding is an interconnected, international network of gender liberation activists, artists,

publications, and movements that bridge time and space in ways that I wouldn't otherwise have imagined. One example that may come as a surprise, due to its existence alongside contemporaneous trans-exclusive strains of feminism, is that the first issue of Lee Brewster's *Drag Magazine* (published in New York City in 1971) contains an advertisement for *The Ladder*, a lesbian publication by the Daughters of Bilitis, published in San Francisco.⁴ This early, cross-continental, cross-gender, cross-identity expression of solidarity, within a context of conflict, is an ephemeral trace of the sorts of activism that I have been uncovering in archives and conversations with trans* and queer artists and activists.

Through these conversations, I have reconnected old friends who haven't talked for years, shared ephemera and photos that sparked memories, met those who are frustrated with a lack of recognition and those who are burdened by it, and spoke with many who are scarred by decades of fighting for our right to exist. One person recently asked me if I had received any death threats lately because he had just received a rather shocking one; others I have spoken with are at risk of becoming unhoused, are chronically ill, or have related recent traumatic experiences that result from their decades of public advocacy for trans* rights. Many are happy to be contacted and have their work included but are anxious to remain out of the public eye.

THE IN-BETWEEN OF CARE

These conversations ground my ethics for this project. It seems vital to me that we hear from those who have been silenced or who are choosing to remain silent now for fear of attack—and that hearing from them does not put them in jeopardy. I want to honor and respect the vision and self-articulation of the artists and activists who have left us, while not requiring any additional public exposure for those who are still with us. This care involves what often feels like a mission to recover our history—to navigate the open secrets of institutional archives in search of trans* lives, using clues given to me by community members, and then to share what I have found with the communities that the materials originated from.

My own experiences as a trans person have also emphasized the value of these in-between moments, as it has been in collisions between worlds where I have found joy and community. So it does not surprise me that it is in the collisions between my lived experience, queer and trans* communities, and the worlds of archives and the digital public sphere that this kind of community care seems both possible and vitally important.⁵

In thinking along the lines of care, I have begun to call this project, as it shuttles back and forth between the archive and community and between the personal and the social, a genealogy. I am searching in records for lost relatives, yearning to hear them speak, to know what they said and did, what their life was like. In talking to elders about their elders I am building a family tree, and in collecting ephemera from their lives, a family scrapbook. It has been striking to me that some of the most emotionally moving collections I have found in institutional archives are scrapbooks that trace the life of an individual and their chosen family.⁶

This is a family with a radical history. I am seeking our ancestors for us to remember who we have been, how we got here, how our predecessors worked to forge bonds and build a movement over a half-century, and to help us envision what might be next. And at this moment we need all the lessons we can get from our transcestors about how to fight: what worked in the past and what

failed, and about what we are fighting for. (Future reader: The year is 2023 and we are facing a nationwide anti-trans legislative campaign with over 566 anti-trans bills considered in 49 states, 80 of which have already become law.) Each pushback against rights, access to care, and community infrastructure that our predecessors fought against has also been an attempt to deny our history. This project once again shows that we have always been here, that we have taken care of each other when nobody else would, and that our core demands have remained largely the same: the right to dignity and self-determination.

THE IN-BETWEEN IS PRECARIOUS

The care for the archive, the lives it contains, and for our living trans* family is a modest gesture with high stakes. As Johanna Hedva writes in *Sick Woman Theory*, her manifesto for radical feminist and embodied politics:

The most anticapitalist protest is to care for another and to care for yourself. To take on the historically feminized and therefore invisible practice of nursing, nurturing, caring. To take seriously each other's vulnerability and fragility and precarity, and to support it, honor it, empower it. To protect each other, to enact and practice community. A radical kinship, an interdependent sociality, a politics of care.⁷

Hedva's politics of care underscore my experience in doing this research that, while some movements for liberation have been durable and resilient over decades and centuries, the bonds of community and chosen or found family that sustain them are precarious. So, the strength of our movements might not be found in the strength of our identification with each other, but in the care that we must continually offer to our community, its history, and its potential future liberation.

With *gender.network* this precarity exists not only in the vulnerability of each of us in the face of the law, state brutality, and physical and emotional violence, but also in the fragile multivocality of our movement as a whole, if it is even possible to think of it as a single movement. The challenges of the archive seem much like the challenges of movement building: to honor the unique and sometimes contradictory visions and identities of many individual artists and activists, visions and identities that have evolved and changed over the course of their lifetimes. Terms of gender identity have come and gone, and some of the older ones carry harmful or problematic connotations. Each term flattens a wide diversity of cultural, subcultural, and idiosyncratic articulations of gender identity, and has often become the site of border wars over who is welcome, valued, or legitimate members of a given community.

With all of this in mind, I have chosen to avoid using labels or metadata related to gender identity in the structure of *gender.network*. The archive is instead organized along four axes: geographical location, decade, the (chosen) name of individuals and groups, and medium or format (e.g. letter, manuscript, poem, essay). The first two are essential for tracking movements across time and place and for helping to highlight the under-appreciated histories of the geographic south, midwest, and northwest. Using chosen name is vital to honor the agency and identity of the activists and artists whose work is being represented.⁸ Format is a more subjective dimension, and for this project serves mostly to index the diversity of forms that activism and cultural production have taken.

As Harrison Apple points out in “I Can’t Wait for You to Die,” this kind of project, which operates both within communities and in institutional archives, must contend with an essential antagonism between the two; they defend the “refusal to participate” on the part of community members as well as the archivist.⁹ And while they are writing about the individual’s refusal to participate in the archive’s interest in collecting material as an important exercise of individual privacy and agency, I think this refusal may productively apply to terms of identity in the archive as well.¹⁰

THE IN-BETWEEN TAKES FORM

Instead of the more traditional organization that might result from use of gendered terminology,¹¹ I am organizing these materials in a way I believe mirrors the network of trans* and queer artists and activists that I have been speaking with and finding in archives. Each item connects to another based on similarity, allowing a visitor to move through *gender.network* horizontally, from one item to its adjacent neighbors, and so on (Figure 1).¹² For example, we might move from a picture of Stormé DeLarverie speaking to the audience in front of a panel of drag kings, to a photo of Johnny Science, to Tracey Africa Norman’s headshot, to the radical zine *Genderluck*, to Nancy Nangeroni’s tongue-in-cheek *SCHEmail* newsletter, and so on.

This horizontal organization is mirrored in the archive of trans* and queer visual culture through the formats of pasted-up newsletters and newspapers, scrapbooks, and zines. These publications bring together materials with multiple visual identities, authors, and subjects to recirculate them in new ways. For example, many newsletters from the 70s featured cartoons that were copied from the mainstream press, re-captioned with jokes about gender identity. Others featured original cartoons or graphics and explicitly offered this content to other newsletters for re-circulation (see for example Figure 2).

I am sure some aspects of this paste-up community aesthetic have to do with the practical considerations of small underground publishers, but it also suggests radical politics or poetics of cross-pollination, solidarity, and multivocality. One dramatic instance of the relationship between publication and politics is the adoption of the first demand of the Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson’s organization) by several other groups: “We want the right to self-determination over the use of our bodies, the right to be gay anytime, anyplace; the right to free physiological change and modification of sex on demand; the right to free dress and adornment.”¹³ (Figure 3).

This demand from STAR’s manifesto, published in summer 1970, was adopted as points #1-3 at the “Male Homosexual Workshop” of the Black Panthers’ Revolutionary People’s Constitutional Convention in September 1970; as point #2 (Figure 4) of Third World Gay Revolution’s manifesto in 1971; and is very similar to language adopted by Transsexual Action Organization, which subsequently published a list of demands in gay papers across the country.¹⁴ This virality is likely the direct result of Johnson’s and Rivera’s activism, and it is also a sign of how their writing and activism was picked up and circulated by other activists and organizers across the country.

An inspiration for this project is Toni Morrison's *The Black Book*, a curated and collaged collection of documents related to Black history, including newspaper articles, Jim Crow-era laws, advertisements, patents by Black inventors, and art created by enslaved people, published in 1974.¹⁵ As Morrison describes it, *The Black Book* "has no 'order', no chapters, and no major themes. . . It can be read or browsed from the back forwards or from the middle out, either way."¹⁶ The pages are laid out like a newspaper paste-up, with articles next to flyers for performances and texts of Jim Crow laws. *Gender.network* is also inspired by Morrison's process of making *The Black Book*, in which she and several other researchers solicited materials from collections across the country to tell a wide-ranging story of Black self-determination, community care, struggle, activism, and creativity.

In evoking *The Black Book*, I want to acknowledge the role that Black liberation movements have played and continue to play in the strategies and imaginaries of queer and gender liberation. For example, practices gained from experiences in protests and demonstrations during the civil rights era, and the revolutionary language and community-centered organizing of groups like the Black Panthers and the Young Lords were deeply influential in organizing for gender and queer liberation.¹⁷

It also appears that queer and trans* publications shared strategies and styles with the revolutionary Black press of the era, including Morrison's book, and I see this project very much as continuing this legacy. An early example of a gender-focused publication with a pasted-up format is *Clip Sheet* (Figure 5), a collection of materials on gender variance clipped from newspapers and magazines, published in Los Angeles by Virginia Prince during the early 1960s.¹⁸ This clipped and pasted up format and visual style is utilized by many radical queer publications of the time, including the *Detroit Gay Liberator* (1970-71), *Moja = Gay + Black* (1978-1979?), and *Transsexuals in Prison* (1992-1998?) (Figure 2 and Figure 6).¹⁹

THE IN-BETWEEN IS INCOMPLETE

There are other echoes that reverberate across the archive in ways that are far more poetic and harder to narrate: examples of anti-death penalty activism, punk performances and performance art, traveling slideshows of trans* history, cross-gender AIDS activist alliances, and the circulation of stories, jokes, and poetry. Rupert Raj's *Of Souls & Roles, Of Sex & Gender: A Treasury of Transsexual, Transgenderist & Transvestic Verse from 1967 to 1991* is a wide-ranging collection containing writings by nearly two hundred authors and more than a dozen trans* publications of the 1960s-90s.²⁰ It evidences an active, informal network of trans* poetry and poets, with recurring themes like gender dysphoria/euphoria and self-discovery occurring throughout the volume, and also a wide diversity of styles including

confessional verse, romantic lyrics, epics and folk-ballads . . . ribald limericks, Christian and pantheistic devotionals, with themes inspired by Greek myths, medical literature, personal struggles, losses and longings, and celebrations of trans forms of living under the radar and in a time of censure and social erasure.²¹

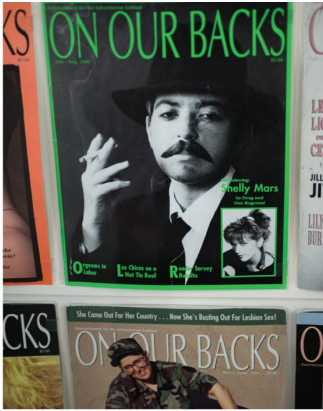
Raj's poetic archive is based in part on his work organizing for trans* rights as an activist, therapist, and the creator of *Metamorphosis*, a newsletter he published for much of the 1980s and one of the first international publications for trans men.²²

Gender.network shares Raj's goal of compiling and honoring a wide diversity of trans* cultural production, and it struggles, as he has, with the challenges of organizing and publishing something so large, unwieldy, and at the same time necessarily incomplete. This incompleteness is in part an effect of the biases of movements of the 20th century and of institutional archives, and so with *gender.network* I am prioritizing ways of representing trans* people of color, two-spirit, trans masculine, and geographic communities that have been under-represented or under-appreciated in the archival record.

On the other hand, this incompleteness is a necessary part of a "refusal to participate," as well as the continual reformulations of individual and group identity. The gaps in the archive are not only absences but also refuges, the places where freedom, if not liberation, can be sought. As Max Wolf Valerio describes in a recent interview, referring to his poems and performances from the 1970s-80s:

If they began to tell a story, I would stop and shift and break that thread. I wanted disjunctive images and ideas to be present in the same space. . . . There are endings, but often the poems end on a twist, a lance of mischief. . . . nothing is settled, it's always moving and fragmentation is continual.²³

This project seeks to stay in this moving, fragmented in-between, to focus attention on both community and archives, people and the things they have left behind, terms of identity and lived experience, solidarity despite/because of conflict, and the vast networks of organizing, art making, and community care, across space and time, that are leading us onward.



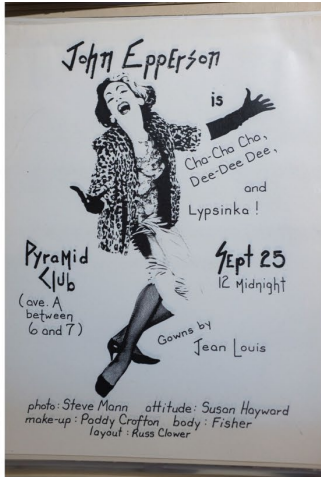
Introducing: Shelly Mars



Protest in Front of FBI Building



Mr. Fashion (Mrs. Fashion) Models



John Epperson is Cha-Cha Cha, Dee-Dee Dee, and Lypsinka!



Female Trouble



Stormé De Larverie with Drag Kings



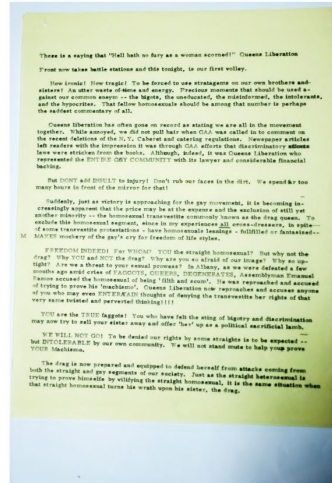
To Be Held in the Magnificent Ballroom of the Drake Hotel



Journey to the Center of Uranus



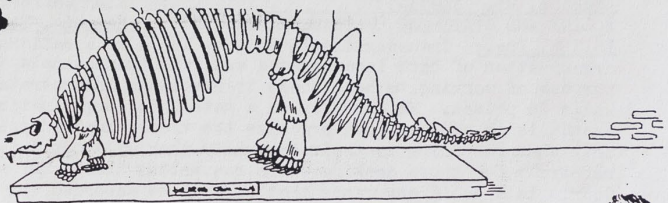
New Love Song



There is a saying that "Hell hath no fury as a woman scorned!"

Figure 1. Sky Syzygy, Screenshot from gender.network, 2023.

" CREDITS FOR THIS ARTISTIC WORK TO YURI KOMYKOV. YOU MAY USE THESE, IN
YOUR NEWS LETTERS BUT PLEASE GIVE YURI THE CREDIT FOR THE WORK.
THANK YOU, Patricia G. Fisher



...those chaps play a very coarsly game."

Figure 2. Yuri Komykov, Cartoons. Transsexuals in Prison 2, no. 14 (September 1992).
<https://gender.network/work/transsexuals-in-prison-14>.



STREET TRANSVESTITES ACTION REVOLUTIONARYS



OF GAY LIBERATION

The oppression against Transvestites of either sex arises from sexist values and this oppression is manifested by heterosexuals and homosexuals of both sexes in the form of exploitation, ridicule, harrassment, beatings, rapes, murders.

Because of this oppression the majority of transvestites are forced into the street and we have formed a strong alliance with our gay sisters and brothers of the street. Who we are a part of and represent we are; a part of the REVOLUTIONARIES armies fighting against the system.

- ✦ 1. We want the right to self-determination over the use of our bodies; the right to be gay, anytime, anyplace; the right to free physiological change and modification of sex on demand; the right to free dress and adornment.
- ✦ 2. The end to all job discrimination against transvestites of both sexes and gay street people because of attire.
- ✦ 3. The immediate end of all police harrassment and arrest of transvestites and gay street people, and the release of transvestites and gay street people from all prisons and all other political prisoners.
- ✦ 4. The end to all exploitive practices of doctors and psychiatrists who work in the field of transvestism.
- ✦ 5. Transvestites who live as members of the opposite gender should be able to obtain identification of the opposite gender.
- ✦ 6. Transvestites and gay street people and all oppressed people should have free education, health care, clothing, food transportation, and housing.
- ✦ 7. Transvestites and gay street people should be granted full and equal rights on all levels of society, and full voice in the struggle for liberation of all oppressed people.
- ✦ 8. An end to exploitation and discrimination against transvestites within the homosexual world.
- ✦ 9. We want a revolutionary peoples' government, where transvestites, street people, women, homosexuals, blacks, puerto ricans, indians, and alloppressed people are free, and not fucked over by this government who treat us like the scum of the earth and kills us off like flies, one by one, and throws us into jail to rot. This government who spends millions of dollars to go to the moon, and lets the poor Americans starve to death.

POWER TO THE PEOPLE

S.T.A.R.



Figure 3. Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries, "Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries," 1970. New York University Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives Printed Ephemera Collection on Organizations, Box 97.

<https://gender.network/work/street-transvestite-action-revolutionarys-1>.

What We Want What We Believe

Our straight sisters and brothers must recognize and support that we, gay women and men, are equal in every way within the revolutionary ranks.

We each organize our people about different issues, but our struggles are the same against oppression, and we will defeat it together — Once we understand these struggles, and gain a love for our sisters and brothers involved in these struggles, we must learn how best to become involved in them.

The struggles of the peoples of the world are our fight as well; their victories are our victories and our victories are theirs. Our freedom will come only with their freedom.

Together, not alone, we must explore how we view ourselves, and analyze the assumptions behind our self-identity — We can then begin to crack the barriers of our varying illnesses, our passivity, sexual chauvinism, in essence, our inability to unabashedly love each other, to live, fight, and if necessary, die for the people of the earth.

As we begin to understand our place in this international revolution, and join with others in this understanding, we must develop the skills necessary to destroy the forces of repression and exploitation, so as to make it possible for a new woman and man to evolve in a society based on communal love.

While we understand that in the United States our main enemy is the socio-economic-political system of capitalism and the people who make profits off our sufferings, fights and divisions, we also recognize that we must struggle against any totalitarian, authoritarian, sex-controlled, repressive, irrational, reactionary, fascist government or government machine.

What We Want:

What We Believe:

1. We want the right of self-determination for all third world and gay people, as well as control of the destinies of our communities.

We believe that third world and gay people cannot be free until we are able to determine our own destinies.

2. We want the right of self-determination over the use of our bodies: The right to be gay, anytime, anywhere. The right to free physiological change and modification of sex on demand; The right to free dress and adornment.

We believe that these are human rights which must be defended with our bodies being put on the line. The system as it now exists denies these basic human rights by implementing forced heterosexuality.

3. We want liberation for all women: We want free and safe birth control information and devices on demand. We want free 24 hour child care centers controlled by those who need and use them. We want a redefinition of education and motivation (especially for third world women) towards broader educational opportunities without limitations because of sex. We want truthful teaching of women's history. We want an end to hiring practices which make women and national minorities:

1. a readily available source of cheap labor
2. confined to mind-roting jobs under the worst conditions.

We believe that the struggles of all oppressed groups under any form of government which does not meet the true needs of its people will eventually result in the overthrow of that government. The struggle for liberation of women is a struggle to be waged by all peoples. We must also struggle within ourselves and within our various movements to end this oldest form of oppression and its foundation — male chauvinism. We cannot develop a truly liberating form of socialism unless we fight these tendencies.

4. We want full protection of the law and social sanction for all human sexual self-expression and pleasure between consenting persons, including youth. We believe that present laws are oppressive to third world people, gay people, and the masses. Such laws expose the inequalities of capitalism, which can only exist in a state where there are oppressed people or groups. This must end.

5. We want the abolition of the institution of the bourgeois nuclear family.

We believe that the bourgeois nuclear family perpetuates the false categories of homosexuality and heterosexuality by creating sex roles, sex definitions and sexual exploitation. The bourgeois nuclear family as the basic unit of capitalism creates oppressive roles of homosexuality and heterosexuality. All oppressions originate within the nuclear family structure. Homosexuality is a threat to this family structure and therefore to capitalism. The mother is an instrument of reproduction and teaches the necessary values of capitalist society, i.e., racism, sexism, etc. from infancy on. The father physically enforces (upon the mother and children) the behavior necessary in a capitalist system, intelligence and competitiveness in young boys and passivity in young girls. Further, it is every child's right to develop in a non-sexist, non-racist, non-possessive atmosphere which is the responsibility of all people, including gays, to create.

6. We want a free non-compulsory education system that teaches us our true identity and history, and presents the entire range of human sexuality without advocating any one form or style; that sex roles and determination of skills according to sex be eliminated from the school system; that language be modified so that no gender takes priority; and that gay people must share the responsibilities of education.

We believe that we have been taught to compete with our sisters and brothers for power, and from that competitive attitude grows sexism, racism, male and national chauvinism and distrust of our sisters and brothers. As we begin to understand these things within ourselves, we attempt to free ourselves of them and are moved toward a revolutionary consciousness.

7. We want guaranteed full equal employment for third world and gay people at all levels of production.

We believe that any system of government is responsible for giving every woman and man a guaranteed income or being interested only in profits, capitalism cannot meet the needs of the people.

8. We want decent and free housing, fit shelter for human beings.

We believe that free shelter is a basic need and right which must not be denied on any grounds. Landlords are capitalists, and, like all capitalists, are motivated only by the accumulation of profits, as opposed to the welfare of the people.

9. We want to abolish the existing judicial system. We want all third world and gay people when brought to trial, to be tried by a people's court with a jury of their peers. A peer is a person from similar social, economic, geographical, racial, historical, environmental, and sexual background. We believe that the function of the judicial system under capitalism is to uphold the ruling class and keep the masses under control.

10. We want the reparation for and release of all third world, gay and all political prisoners from jails and mental institutions.

We believe that these people should be released because they have not received a fair and impartial trial.

11. We want the abolition of capital punishment, all forms of institutional punishment, and the penal system.

We want the establishment of psychiatric institutions for the humane treatment and rehabilitation of criminal persons as decided by the people's court. We want the establishment of a sufficient number of free and non-compulsory clinics for the treatment of sexual disturbances, as defined by the individual.

12. We want an immediate end to the fascist police force.

We believe that the only way this can be accomplished is by putting the defense of the people in the hands of the people.

13. We want all third world and gay men to be exempt from compulsory military service, in the imperialist army. We want an end to military oppression both at home and abroad.

We believe that the only true army for oppressed people is the people's army and third world, gay people, and women should have full participation in the People's Revolutionary Army.

14. We want an end to all institutional religions because they aid in genocide by teaching superstition and hatred of third world people, homosexuals and women. We want a guarantee of freedom to express natural spirituality.

We believe that institutionalized religions are an instrument of capitalism, therefore an enemy of the People.

15. We demand immediate non-discriminatory open admission/membership for radical homosexuals into all left-wing revolutionary groups and organizations and the right to caucus.

We believe that so-called comrades who call themselves "revolutionaries" have failed to deal with their sexist attitudes. Instead they cling to male supremacy and therefore to the conditioned role of oppressors. Men still fight for the privileged position of man-on-top. Women quickly fall in line behind their men. By their counterrevolutionary struggle to maintain and to force heterosexuality and the nuclear family, they perpetuate decadent remains of capitalism. To gain their anti-homosexual stance, they have used the weapons of the oppressor, thereby becoming the agent of the oppressor.

It is up to men to realistically define masculinity, because it is they, who, throughout their lives, have struggled to gain the unrealistic roles of "men." Men have always tried to reach this precarious position by climbing on the backs of women and homosexuals. "Masculinity" has been defined by capitalist society as the amount of possessions (including women) a man collects, and the amount of physical power gained over other men. Third world men have been denied even these false standards of "masculinity." Anti-homosexuality fosters sexual repressions, male-supremacy, weakness in revolutionary drive, and results in an inaccurate non-objective political perspective. Therefore, we believe that all left-wing revolutionary groups and organizations must immediately establish non-discriminatory, open admission/membership policies.

16. We want a new society — a revolutionary socialist society. We want liberation of humanity, free food, free shelter, free clothing, free transportation, free health care, free utilities, free education, free art for all. We want a society where the needs of the people come first. We believe that all people should share the labor and products of society: according to each one's needs and abilities, regardless of race, sex, age, or sexual preferences. We believe the land, technology, and the means of production belong to the people, and must be shared by the people collectively for the liberation of all.

17. Only Lesbians can be liberated women. Only gay males can escape the sexist role of "man."

Written & adopted by the Third World Gay Revolution (NYC), adopted with the addition of Point 17 by GLF-NYC



adopted Feb 1971 as the tentative working platform of GLF-NYC

Figure 4. Third World Gay Revolution, "What We Want / What We Believe", 1971, New York Public Library International Gay Information Center Ephemera Files - Organizations, Box 7. <https://gender.network/work/what-we-want-what-we-believe>.



BIGGEST HOWL enjoyed by the stars who jammed the Beverly Hills Hotel's Crystal Room was provided by an uninhibited Bob Cummings, who showed up at the annual shindig un-dressed as a Petty Girl and spent the evening posing for his wife, Mary, who came as artist Bob portrayed in pic.



QUESTION insofar as this outfit was concerned was not what it was (down on the farm, natch) but who was inside it. Solution, which friends found hard to believe: freckle-faced blonde, giving with the coy looks for someone's benefit, is Robert Cummings.

CLIP sheet NO 1

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Los Angeles 36, Calif

Reno Bans Female Impersonator Shows

RENO Nev. (AP)—The Reno City Council has voted to ban an act in which 25 men impersonate chorus girls—and strip. The review replaced a bare-boom girlie show.
The council in special session Friday voted to draft an ordinance forbidding the review, currently appearing at the Riverside Hotel, and any other female impersonations like it.
"I can't understand these objections from a group that obviously hasn't seen the show," William Quattrini, a hotel spokesman, told the council. "Most people go in expecting to see a freak show, and come out raving."

Feb 26, 1962

Princeton Lads Put Show On The Road



Muscular arms and hairy legs in high heels are half the fun of the Princeton Triangle Show, which makes its annual whistle-stop Dec. 22 in the New Trier Twp. High School auditorium in Winnetka. Undergraduates brush up for their stint in "Tour de Farce."

MAN IN TIGHTS, WIG PLAYS PART OF LADY GODIVA

BEESTON, Eng., Aug. 5. (AP)—A 27-year-old railway clerk, Dennis Harratt, rode through town today on a gelding horse dressed only in a flowing gold wig and tights. He was Lord Godiva in the town pageant.
None of the village girls could get their mothers' permission to play Lady Godiva so the town fathers gave the part to a man.



FOOLED HUGH—Gorgeous George? Nope. It's Movie Clown Hugh Herbert, the "woo-woo" man, who stars in tonight's "Hollywood Premiere Theater" production at 7, KECA-TV (7).

Figure 5. Virginia Prince, Clip Sheet, no. 1, [1962?]. Transgender Collection (MS 1848). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library. <https://gender.network/work/clip-sheet>.

PRISONERS PERSPECTIVES

NOTES FROM THE INSIDE

SEX IN PRISON

by Dee Farmer

With the rising numbers of inmates infected with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), prison administrators are faced with the complexities of how to prevent the transmission of HIV among prisoners. The options are few: stop sex and intravenous drug use, or issue condoms and hypodermic needles. When one option is impossible and the other highly controversial, what do they do?

Sex in prison is real and alive. Prisoners who are vulnerable and hungry for affection often turn to each other for comfort. The pleasure and sense of caring derived during sexual intercourse can become so essential for some inmates that they become promiscuous. Unfortunately they believe that they are at minimal or no risk of contracting HIV; however, the risk is often great. Studies have consistently shown the existence of sex in prison even among inmates who do not engage in homosexual activity when not incarcerated.

Of course, it is prohibited for inmates to engage in sexual intercourse with one another, but that does not stop them. Prison officials are aware that they could never eliminate sex behind bars. It is a known fact that for years prison officials viewed homosexual activity as a comfort to prisoners and in many instances sanctioned homosexual relationships. Homosexual activity was known to occur in housing areas, bathrooms, showers and other non-monitored areas of the institution. When inmates were caught engaging in sexual acts it was not viewed as a major disciplinary infraction and sanctions were minor, if any.

Now, with the AIDS crisis, prison officials have begun to look for ways to curb the transmission of HIV. But, as one major tabloid recently wrote, "sexual activity is occurring in prison and the chances of stamping it out are slim." Not only slim, but unrealistic—there will always be sex and intravenous drug use in prisons, even more so now with the prison system bulging at its seams. Irrespective of the well-documented fact that prisoners continue to engage in sex and drug use, placing them-

selves at risk for HIV infection, the majority of prison administrators will not allow condoms in their institutions. They claim that distributing condoms would be contrary to their rules. An article in the *Washington Post* quotes Mary Campbell, a health educator for Washington, DC, prisons: "Under the District government law, sodomy is considered illegal. If we were to pass out condoms, then we would be going contrary to our own laws." Sadly, their obligation to abide by rules and laws is greater than their ability to save human lives. While New York City, Philadelphia and a couple of institutions in California issue condoms, the majority of prison systems, including the federal government, seem to be saying, we know our inmates engage in sex—but in doing so they break our rules and run the risk of being infected with HIV—so this is what they deserve and we are not going to do anything to help them.



It is noteworthy that prisoners who are caught engaging in risky behavior may be administratively or criminally charged. The federal prison system places HIV positive inmates whom they believe pose a danger to others in controlled housing. Predictably, this determination by prison officials is arbitrary, causing the policy to be researched and hopefully challenged for constitutional infirmities.

What do we do? As prison officials continue to turn their eyes, hearts and minds in the opposite direction and vulnerable prisoners allow passion to lead them into the world of AIDS—*Unite and lift our voices demanding that prisoners be given protection against HIV transmission.*

Dee Farmer is a federal prisoner and trained paralegal. She has been involved in the research and litigation of numerous cases involving prisoners' rights, including HIV-seropositive inmates. Farmer is currently incarcerated at the U.S. Medical Center for Federal Prisoners (Work Cadre) in Springfield MO.

[Ed. Note: Notes From the Inside will continue next month with Carlos Jimenez.]

THE FTM NETWORK

For further information about the network and this newsletter which is free to all F to M's whatever their status, or how they are living - CONTACT Stephen Whittle, 376 Upper Brook St, Victoria Park, Manchester, M13 9RP.

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PWA Coalition Newsline

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Figure 6. Dee Farmer, "Sex in Prison," *Transsexuals in Prison*, 2, no. 2 (September 1993), previously published in *PWA Coalition Newsline* (December 1991), <https://gender.network/work/transsexuals-in-prison-15>.

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ENDNOTES

1. To work against the biases and shifting legibility and uses of these terms, I am using them collectively to refer to the expansive range of ways that people have worked against gender conformity and oppression in their art, activism, and in their daily lives, a range that exceeds any attempt to name it. I am using the un-prefixed “gender” in the title of this project to reflect this expansiveness.
2. This idea of a queer network is not new and shows up as early as the 1970s. See for example, Gay Liberation Front, “Gay Revolution Networker” (Come-Unity Press, 1970s), Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives Printed Ephemera Collection on Organizations, NYU; Rupert Raj, *Gender NetWorker*, 2 issues (Toronto, 1988).
3. You can help build and shape this archive too—please. Please contact me or submit material at mail@gender.network or come to one of our upcoming workshops to help curate, notate, and edit what is here, and help identify what is not.
4. Lee G. Brewster, *Drag I*, no. 1, (San Francisco: Queens Publications, 1971): 36. Digital Transgender Archive, <https://www.digitaltransgenderarchive.net/files/v979v309v>. There is a long history of trans/lesbian solidarity that has been under-recognized. See for example: Emma Heaney, “Women-Identified Women: Trans Women in 1970s Lesbian Feminist Organizing.” *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 3, no. 1–2 (May 1, 2016): 137–45.
5. I received comments on my first draft of this essay that it was sitting somewhere uneasily between a work description, an artist statement, and a manifesto. This felt about right for this project, which itself sits between archival process, community organizing, and a lived sense, also borne out through this research, of the need for a radical archival politics.
6. For example: Miss Gay Black Ohio (Flower Binder), 1960s; 1982-1983. Laura Bailey Collection of Gender and Transgender Materials, General Collection, Box 5, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; Joe H. Hernandez, Scrapbook, 1943-1965 and undated. David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University; Photographs and slides, 1938-1986. Liz Eden Collection, Box 4, LGBT Community Center National History Archive.
7. Johanna Hedva, “Sick Woman Theory.” *Mask Magazine* (March 2, 2016), <https://web.archive.org/web/20160302154617/http://www.maskmagazine.com/not-again/struggle/sick-woman-theory>.
- 8 Some group names do contain words of gender identity, which *gender.network* retains. Adopting a proper name as a label for an item feels like a substantially less speculative or aggressive archival act than assigning a label based on an outside and retrospective understanding of the gender identity or identities of a group or an individual.
9. Harrison Apple, “‘I Can’t Wait for You to Die’: A Community Archives Critique,” *Archivaria* 92 (November 2021): 110–37. See also Xiomara Sebastián Castro Niculescu, “ÁBREME: Performing Trans of Color Critique” (Brown University, 2020) and Be Oakley, *Imperfect Archiving, Archiving as Practice For a Love of Softness* (GenderFail, 2022).
10. The sheer number of collection guides that start with a warning about how they “may include outdated or pejorative terminology” is, I believe, not a sign of how far we have come in developing more appropriate terminology, but a sign that binary systems of organization that are predicated on inclusion or exclusion from a given term are too blunt for this kind of care work.
11. See for example, the Digital Transgender Archive, which utilizes a wide range of gender subject terms to organize its massive and invaluable collection of digitized materials and

collection guides to transgender history, including “Crossdressers,” “Crossdressing,” “Transgender people,” “Transsexual people,” “Female impersonators,” “Gender realignment surgery,” “Drag,” “FtMs,” and “MtFs.”

12. Technically speaking, metadata are used to calculate the distance between each item in *gender.network*, with items that have similar metadata being closer together. Paths to connect related items are assigned using an approximate solution to what is commonly known as the “travelling salesperson problem,” which seeks the shortest possible path that visits each item exactly once. This ensures a completely horizontal and equitable organization, in which no item has a higher priority than any other.

13. Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries. “Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries,” 1970. New York University Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives Printed Ephemera Collection on Organizations, Box 97, Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University Libraries. <https://gender.network/work/street-transvestite-action-revolutionarys-1>.

14. “Male Homosexual Workshop Demands,” 1970. Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives Printed Ephemera Collection on Organizations, PE.036, Black Panther Party I, Box 14, Elmer Holmes Bobst Library, New York University Libraries; Third World Gay Revolution, “What We Want / What We Believe,” 1971. International Gay Information Center ephemera files - Organizations, Box 19, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library; Transsexual Action Organization, “Transvestite and Transsexual Liberation,” [1971?]. Transsexual Action Organization, Box 22, International Gay Information Center ephemera files – Organizations, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

15. M. A. Harris., Morris Levitt, Roger Furman, Ernest Smith, Toni Morrison, and Jack Ribik. eds., *The Black Book*, (New York: Random House, 1974).

16. Toni Morrison, “Behind the Making of The Black Book,” *Black World* 23, no. 4 (February 1974): 86–89.

17 See for example: Emily K. Hobson, *Lavender and Red: Liberation and Solidarity in the Gay and Lesbian Left*, (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2016).

18. Virginia Prince, *Clip Sheet*, no. 1, [1962?]. Transgender Collection (MS 1848). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

19. *Detroit Gay Liberator* 1, no. 8 (January 1, 1971).

<https://jstor.org/stable/community.28035530>; *Moja = Gay & Black*, no 3. (April 3, 1979).

Miscellaneous human sexuality periodicals, #7687. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library; *Transsexuals in Prison* (September–December 1993). Judy Greenspan Papers, Box 11, LGBT Community Center National History Archive; this publication is significant because of its role in advocacy for incarcerated people with AIDS, for publishing Dee Farmer’s essays, and for creating an informal network of trans* groups in prisons.

20. Rupert Raj, ed., *Of Souls & Roles, Of Sex & Gender : A Treasury of Transsexual, Transgenderist & Transvestic Verse from 1967 to 1991*, (Victoria, BC: University of Victoria Transgender Archives, 2017), <https://www.digitaltransgenderarchive.net/files/hm50tr87t>. While the first edition of his anthology was ready for publication in 1991, Raj says he struggled to find a publisher for it, in part due to its length (422 pages in the latest edition). He was determined not to reduce the size of the collection, and so has recently released a digital version as part of his fonds at the University of Victoria with an introduction by Trish Salah. See Rupert Raj.

“RUPERT RAJ, MA, LLD (Hon.), EVAN TAYLOR, RSW, PhD.” March 13, 2023.

<https://vimeo.com/807675406/e2e98c42d8>.

21. Trish Salah, “Foreword,” in *Of Souls & Roles, Of Sex & Gender : A Treasury of Transsexual, Transgenderist & Transvestic Verse from 1967 to 1991*, ed. Rupert Raj (Victoria, BC: University of Victoria Transgender Archives, 2017).

<https://www.digitaltransgenderarchive.net/files/hm50tr87t>.

22. Raj also worked as a counselor for incarcerated trans* people with the organization that published *Transsexuals in Prison*, evidencing another part of the interconnected network of trans* and queer activism and cultural production during the 20th century.

23. Miriam Atkin. “Interview with Max Wolf Valerio.” *Caesura*, (November 2021).

<https://caesuramag.org/posts/miriam-atkin-interview-with-max-wolf-valerio>.

AUTHOR BIO

Sky Syzygy is a white queer trans femme filmmaker and multidisciplinary artist, racial and gender justice facilitator, and data scientist. Her work focuses attention on gestures of resistance, solidarity, and points of contact to acknowledge and celebrate individuals and events that are not usually the subjects of attention. She draws on techniques of printmaking, documentary filmmaking, and movement building for working in collaboration with these individuals and their communities.

Sky received an MFA from The New School, a degree in physics from Harvard, and performed as a dancer in the US and internationally for over a decade. She is a member of A.I.R. Gallery and has been a resident at Women’s Studio Workshop, the Jan Van Eyck Academie, the Art & Law Program, and Mass MoCA, among others. She is a data analyst at the Brooklyn Academy of Music and a racial justice trainer and facilitator with Race Forward. Her videos and installations have been exhibited in group shows and festivals in North America, Europe, and Australia.