

# BOUND To STRUGGLE

Where Kink and  
Radical Politics Meet

VOLUME 2

Hey everyone, thanks for reading. This zine project sets out to bring together the words and art of practitioners of kink and radical politics. Volume One was completed in 2004 while I was living at Ida, a queer arts community in rural Tennessee. After settling back in my hometown of Chicago, I rediscovered my desire for community gatherings that actualize our passions, even when we cannot be together, when we cannot be face to face, our bodies filling spaces with love.

These pages hope to help in the creation of those spaces.  
Please copy them over and over and pass it all around.

Yours in struggle,  
simon strikeback

*for additional copies and to submit to Volume 3*  
1433 W. Lunt #1N  
Chicago, IL 60626  
s.strikeback@gmail.com

Thank you to Jeannette for layout and printmaking help.  
Thank you to all who submitted their work.  
Thank you to Mollie for copies.  
Thank you to Lee and Early to Bed for encouragement and initial distribution.

Thank you to my families, assigned and chosen.

why i hate california .....	madsen minax
Out Against the War .....	Challes Deadprince
Rough Trade for Trannyfags .....	Margo Miller
Delusion .....	Rina M. Rothmann
Appearing Act .....	appleseed
Dying and Knot .....	Minax
Corresponding Confessions .....	emmylou
conversation .....	s.kelley shipwreck + emmett starr
Learning to be Queer -Excerpt .....	Gina de Vries
Armed Desire .....	Challes Deadprince
Knock Three Times: A Letter to Samuel Delany about Larry Craig .....	Sam Worley
What I Learned from the Faggots .....	simon strikeback
Untitled .....	Jesa Rae

## why i hate california

California is one of those magical places... eternal summers, notions of "acceptance." When I think about all of the things I've experienced in this foreign state far from my own, I wonder why I have not yet packed up shop and fled west.

They say we go to a place between worlds. A place between life and death, space and time. It's true. For a few afternoon hours, the time stops. People become pieces of nature, chunks of neatly arranged molecules, silhouettes, forces of intention. And I become electricity. I put my hands flush an inch away from each other and feel the soft pressure that sits between them. Each time I do this, the child I am is thunderstruck with the newness of life.

My mother would touch my head as I fell asleep. My dad would rub my hand during the car ride at 6am.

That day I became a bird. No, maybe a Chiropteran.

When she put her hand inside me, it felt like it belonged there. Does the universe make mistakes?

California is a place where people are fashionably late for momentous engagements and loudly proclaim upon entry (pearlies intact) that mercury was in retrograde. People in California say they'd love to see you this week. You see them six months later at a bar, and they say they'd love to see you this week. California is for freaks, perverts, and rich people.

And I think to myself, you will see me grow up.

But I am grown up.

Though I run through the woods, naked with my friend. We reinvent our childhoods. One where he was not beaten, and I was not diseased. The sun beats on our backs as we transform from boys to beasts. Our hips drop low as we sprout fur and acquire speed. And our time stands still.

C. To establish connection, you must first make eye contact.

I have fingers that one may equate to small sausage links, yet my hands are graceful. They move with the calm yet penetrative touch of an older, more confident being. When I grazed her chest with my youthful fingertips, one thick salty tear rolled down, curved around arched cheekbones, and dropped onto my hand. "When you touch me like that."

When you touch me, my body is perfect. When your eyes opened wide to let me in my knees shook. I swear I could see right into your core. Nothing ever tasted sweeter than an eyelash.

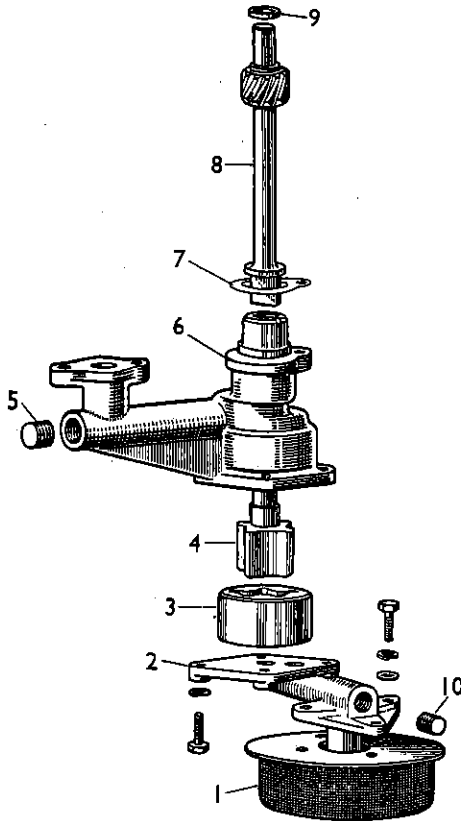
In the Midwest people don't look each other in the eyes. They might see something.

In the Midwest, folks tell you that they don't like you, and then they prove it.

When your hooks pierce my chest and my insides flow outside, I am reminded of that which I refuse.

I refuse to practice the missionary position. I can fuck from behind, with my legs wrapped around my lovers' throat, standing while she hangs upside down. I can fuck in the street, in a bathroom, in a library, on a rooftop, in a church, on dirt, cement, grass, with a home, without a home.

Grief is a funny thing. It reminds you of how you felt between birth and 18. Or how you felt when you were finally understood, then fled.

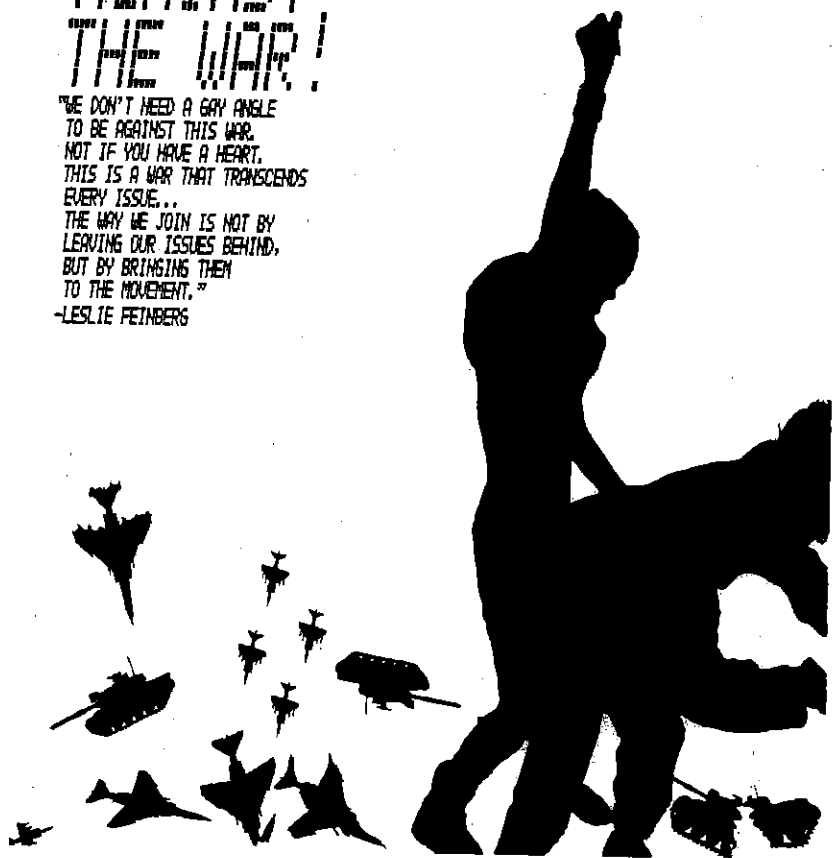


# OUT AGAINST THE WAR!

"WE DON'T NEED A GAY ANGLE  
TO BE AGAINST THIS WAR.  
NOT IF YOU HAVE A HEART.  
THIS IS A WAR THAT TRANSCENDS  
EVERY ISSUE..."

"THE WAY WE JOIN IS NOT BY  
LEAVING OUR ISSUES BEHIND,  
BUT BY BRINGING THEM  
TO THE MOVEMENT."

-LESLIE FETINBERG



C. Deadprince

## Rough Trade for Tranny Fags

I picked up a guy at a bar the other day and brought him home. He talked about how he often thought men were attractive--and he couldn't stop saying how attractive he found me. He had a serious crush on a gay friend and had been blown by a couple of other guys while in prison, he told me, but he began to get uneasy as he started to understand that this was exactly the kind of thing I wanted to hear. We talked more, and he insisted that he didn't like cock. We tried to figure out what we could do together, but since I had said early on in our conversation that I wouldn't blow a guy who wouldn't blow me, he refused even the compromises I suggested, most of which he seemed to find quite enticing. If he let me at his ass, I'd let him at mine. What if he met me somewhere tomorrow or the next day--after he'd had some time to think about fucking me like a guy--at the basketball courts up in the hills where no one but me ever played--and I'd blow him after he felt my cock through my jeans or athletic shorts of choice? Whether he was a lightning-quick convert to whatever queer ethics I had been spouting off about, simply respectful of the personal boundary I had stated on the fly, or just, as he said, too overwhelmed with the erotic and political configuration he found himself in to continue, I couldn't tell. Our discussion awakened him most of all to sexism he hadn't recognized in his previous hook-ups and relationships, which was fascinating to hear about, but also a real turn-off. So it goes. He seemed concerned that he might convince me--because he surely believed this--that he didn't like cock, when it was clear to him that this wasn't something I wanted to and maybe wasn't capable of



believing...just as he couldn't blow me, although as time went on and his consciousness raised, he, increasingly disturbed, more and more seemed to be considering it. I asked him what difference it made if I got off watching him sucking my strapped-on cock or if I imagined him sucking my cock while he licked my clit. To this he had no answer and I drove him home. He said he had a gay friend who liked to go to bars and pick up straight guys. "Is that what you're into?" he asked. Yep.

Where did my rough trade fetish come from? Was it my love of gay liberation and its manifestations in Joe Gage films and the *Straight to Hell* anthologies I've picked up at rummage sales and thrift shops? Is it the logical extension of my compulsion to cruise anyone at all? The realization of my would-be boyhood crushes on coaches? (Hi Mr.'s Heunink, Larson, Endicott, Kreuger, and Eastman!) The fact of having been raised, at times, to approximate a girl and finding myself wanting men but hating sexism? Or is it the product of my academic interest in gender, public space, queer-straight antagonism, and gay sex? Other transmen have written compellingly of the time when they begin to pick up bio-men at clubs, video bars, and public cruising spots. From some accounts of dyke to fag transitions, the process of picking up men, like the acquisition of masculine traits, male privilege, and a gay sex repertoire is an intense and potentially devastating experience, traumatic like everything related to gender and sexism usually is (and what isn't?). I've found that if you have a sick sense of humor—if, for example, you're already nihilistic as fuck or operate with an everyday death wish—it can be quite amusing, if not downright fulfilling. In

other words, the DtF transition can be playful, as well as fraught. Both erotic modes hinge on the power that operates—and cuts, burns, sears, slaps, foils and fucks us—through the ambiguity between queer and straight identification, queer and straight sex, and queer and straight cultural codes in contemporary culture, mostly as these ideas constitute our relationships to commodities and to each other.

Sometimes people use the phrase “rough trade” to refer specifically to male prostitutes who are risky to take home. (This is how the Oxford English Dictionary defines it, for example.) What this definition fails to recognize is that it is always just as dangerous for johns to take tricks as it is for the tricks paying for sex; either can easily be robbed or murdered in the encounter, and the life of one is not worth more than the other. To limit “rough trade” to rough johns is misleading because all sex is dangerous. Indeed, sex work, public sex, rendezvous arranged online, one night stands, and so-called anonymous sex can be especially risky. But it is never easy to distinguish sex that is supposedly outside of various other kinds of economic exchange from prostitution, or safe and dangerous sexual situations (the “safer” quality of sex prevention for STDs and HIV infection is only the most obvious example). In this context, anyone who turns you on because there’s something you don’t know about them—you don’t know if you trust them or not, you can’t tell what they’re thinking, you don’t know if they consider themselves gay or straight, or if they’re the kind of person who might all of the sudden harm you—is rough trade. These questions pertain to all sex partners, not only the undercover police officers and tabloid informers among them, and also occur in

the everyday politics of emotional betrayals and failed promises as they play out in certain particularly loaded social contexts (see James Baldwin's *Another Country* or Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* to experience the stakes of this level of combat). Rough trade is risky precisely because its danger comes from the fact that in a single moment it exists apart from questions of sexual identity as they are usually understood and intensifies the power relationships that the structural effects of these questions dictate in our everyday lives. When taken up by the culture industries—radical queer ones, dominant industrial complex ones, and all of those that cut across both—this set-up allows people to produce many different sexual and aesthetic formations around trade. All of this cultural production creates lots of possibilities for play, as the many forms of masculinity ripe for fetishization are matched with all kinds of risky sex and countless specific sex acts, creating new visual constellations, political critique, and erotic experience. In all cases, the danger—emotional, financial, political, and physical—is heightened by the politics of sexual identity, but it's hot because it represents the destruction and impossibility of this question of homo- or heterosexuality (which is, unfortunately, the primary way we've been taught to ask questions of sex and self). It's a fantasy of its nonexistence—a way to solicit the future while playing with the oppressions of the present and this queer subjection that may one day come to pass. Now that's sex. It offers recognition that the question of whether someone is gay or straight is a stupid question to ask, a question that can't be answered, and yet a question that determines the distribution of power in our culture, and does so unfairly.

My favorite definition of rough trade is from early international gay travel guides. Some bars were listed with the disclaimer mark of "A.Y.O.R." This acronym stood for "At Your Own Risk." As the editor of one explained the code, "you might like the people there, but it is highly questionable that they will like you." Is this a reason to go? For those into the "highly questionable" aspects of life, love, and sex, it certainly is.

People say that one of the exciting aspects of sex in bathhouses is that you don't care to know and don't have to know anything about the guy you're fucking. Me, I can't help but imagine the guy screwing my ass sitting around in a boardroom when he's not on vacation, working all day to make my life outside the club miserable. What does it mean to take it up the ass from someone who, unlike you, may never—not even ten or twenty years from now, even in this day and age, as they say—be cool with being queer, like you are, and as you want others to be. (This question is not unrelated to the question of how women sleep with men who are fucking them over, in what can include the specific and broader senses of this figure of speech.) Rough trade intrudes on the politics of pride and respectability. Who would dare find "closet-cases" sexy? (Straight marriage-minded women can be quite good at this.) Does it make a difference if one does so out of self-loathing, curiosity, or antagonism?

Rough trade is often thought regressive, but it happens to further eroticize a political commitment evident in a lot of queer pop culture practice, such as our everyday experiences in conversation, flirtation, cruising, gossip, humor, camp, and fashion, an investment in critical consumption and cultural production, which is—no doubt as

result of the danger it poses to straight dominance—also derided. (Although cruising and public sex have been taken up as academic topics, the rough trade scenario, despite sharing many fundamental themes with queer theory on the whole, hasn't been discussed as much.) These different kinds of cultural work—work we don't always realize we're doing—promote the fact that it's impossible to know who is gay and who isn't. Unlike outing, which must enforce the distinction between gay and straight, rough trade takes pleasure in pointing out with flair that the question of sexual identity is the wrong question to be asking in the first place. The right questions: Who and what do I like and who and how can I fuck? Rough trade insists it knows better than dominant culture what's queer and what's not. It keeps insisting and yet it's self-interested; all it really cares about is sex—specific kinds of sex, in specific settings, according to specific scripts, in order to disturb them.

For transmen, genderqueers, and bio-gay men, the rough trade scenario and the power dynamics it plays off of are simulated and rehearsed in significant ways through consumption. The rough trade framework assembles straight men who will have gay or gayish sex into an identifiable category even as it questions the basis of the distinction between gay and straight men and masculinity (despite others' belief that it reinforces this separation) and then fragments it through even more particular fetishes—truck drivers, sailors, businessmen, daddy-son, teacher-student, amateur stars of gay porn, and more. If you can't tell if the stereotypically masculine tough in a tearoom or a rest stop or on the street is gay or straight, or can't take his word for it—you can't!—what does it matter? In this way, rough trade is a

look or style as well as a reality of our sex practices, and thus a way of citing, ridiculing, and erotically appropriating all the everyday pop culture spectacle and selling of straight men to the women who find some way to love and live with them.

Rough trade is shorthand for queer-straight contact, conflict, combat, and conversion. The structures of power it eroticizes play out in relationships apart from sex, as well. Through it all, the closet remains a powerful metaphor. Rough trade sex can potentially exploit, degrade, assist, or save — besides get off and get off on — guys who will live straight dominating lives, as well as those on their way out of the closet, however slowly. The essence of rough trade is deciding for a moment not to give a fuck, and to fuck. In all kinds of sex, anonymous or not, we confirm that it hardly matters what we do. Artists have often tried to evoke this feeling. It isn't an easy thing to do with politics, but still: rough trade can make it sublime.

It's a bleak and brutal world, and being queer makes it even bleaker and more brutal. If straight people don't know just how bad it can be (and I don't think they do, at least not the cushioned, compliant, powerful, and pathetic ones), how can we bear to fuck them? But how can you tell who they are? It's all "highly questionable." Cruise A.Y.O.R. You might change someone's mind...if not, alas, their sexual habits.

## l/elusion

If you're looking for the poetry, it ain't here.

I'll invite you in, let you see for yourself  
since you came all this way.

Let you peek in my corners,  
sift through my shadows,  
stroke me with your shy, sly smile

if you want to.  
I'll sit back and watch you work.

You can come close and ask questions,  
tease a slow smile,  
offer me your sweetest kisses.  
I'll take them  
I'll twist them  
and I'll tell you

Baby, this isn't what you think you need.

Try to coax my insides out.  
Lick up what you like.

You won't be able to stand  
                                  in the darkness  
                          off the deep end.

So look around, girl.

Now,

turn around.

Raise your arms.

Let me look at you.

I'll say this only once.  
You'd better go.



13

appleseed



## Dying and Knot

Flowers for the ailing...

Energy sucking can be explained by esoterics, but who will  
save my heart?

It screams and cries with anguish and desire,  
irreparable yet indestructible.

You say I hold the key and perhaps I do.

I hang people for a living.

I listen to their stories of misfortune and demise.

I cleanse their darkest psyches and make them feel whole  
again.

I help them orgasm too.

I struggle to know what I already know

and die a little death every day.

## Corresponding Confessions

Dear you,

Thanks for opening up to me. it really means a lot, I think, when we can risk feeling vulnerable and share pieces of ourselves with others that usually aren't held up to the light to be examined and explored. I want you to feel safe sharing with me. Personal, schmerstonal. Too few people know who we really are these days.

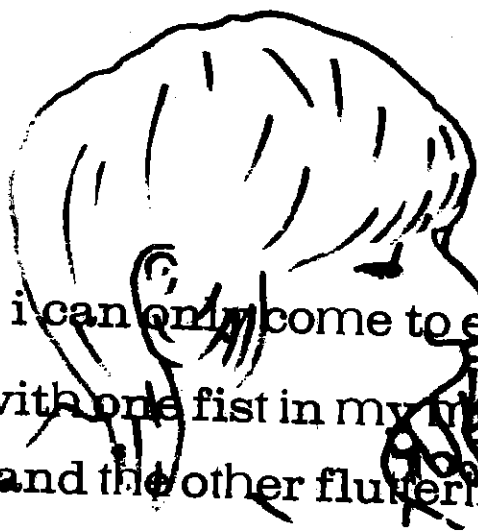
I don't remember when I started peripherally thinking about bdsm either.

Perhaps some of my desire was partially engendered by unconsensual experiences of my own, whether it was the rape attempt this past summer (before which I had clearly stated I didn't want to have penetration sex and he started pushing his penis inside me anyway) or a childhood friend groping me as I drunkenly stumbled my way home when I was thirteen. But I don't completely believe that my interest in bdsm was solely established in reaction to these unconsensual sexual experiences. I feel like that argument could be used to destabilize and delegitimize the sexual desires of survivors that, like you wrote in your letter, are already hard to own because they fall outside both mainstream and (mainstream) feminist sexual values. I think any act of a survivor articulating her sexual desire is an anti-patriarchal, defiant act despite how complex or terrifying those desires may be.

Sometime around the age of fifteen I wanted to shut myself off sexually from male bodied people completely, feeling righteously pissed off and militantly queer. I kind of bought into the radical lesbian feminist strain of thought that all hetero sex was inherently rape or at least inherently oppressive and problematic. I started hooking up with self-identified women but discovered some uneasiness or boredom with some of the interactions, perhaps subconsciously realizing my past eroticization of power differences during previous heterosexual encounters. I felt like my female bodied lovers expected me to assume a more butch or dominant role than they, which didn't turn me on as much as being submissive did. I wasn't able to clearly articulate why I felt this way, but while I was reading a book of bisexual women's erotica I stumbled across a story that mirrored my wish to feel submissive in sexual situations which validated and gave name to my own desires.

I felt ambivalent and distrustful of my freshly acknowledged preferences and felt like I was a rotten feminist. I mean, what would andrea dworkin say? I felt like my innermost fantasies were threatening to betray my commitment to anarcha feminism. I attempted to rationalize and contain my desires by writing them off as results of my internalized sexism, a mere eroticization of male power and control. I felt embarrassed to own these desires and talk to my partners about them. Needless to say, my subsequent sexual encounters could be best described as unquestioningly vanilla.

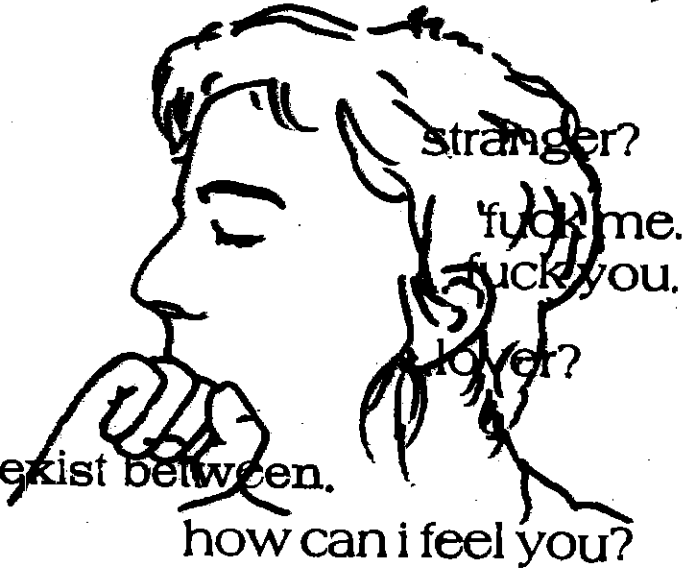
it seems to me that it is between  
this fist, my mouth, this con



i can only come to explain it  
with one fist in my mouth  
and the other fluttering ideas about space

n us,  
conversation.

daddy?



how can i push you?

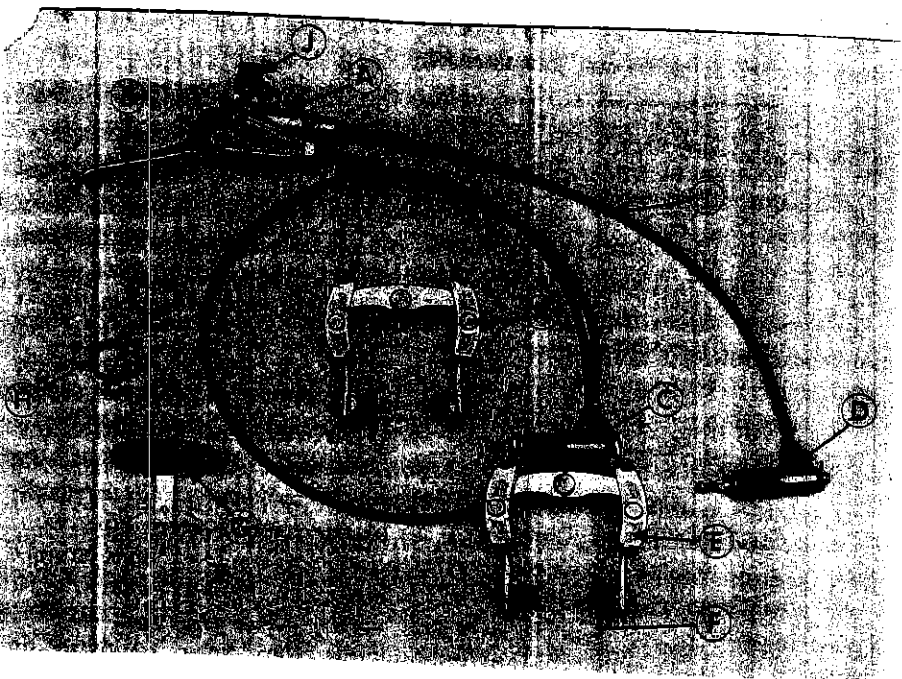
And then last year I started dating one of my most recent partners. Over time we became comfortable enough with each other to share secrets and shame about our sexual fantasies, which led me to tell him that I liked being dominated in bed. This honesty allowed us to dabble in bdsm themes while having sex. He held me down, tied me up, called me a slut, bit and scratched me, and I came. Hard. I think it's worthwhile to mention that during this time in my life I was experiencing a gradual mental meltdown and had issues with self injury, thoughts of suicide, and drug abuse. Fucking like that was cathartic for me, allowed me to surrender and give up control. For my overly analytical and academia oriented mind, it was a release to feel something that real and tangibly painful.

Since our recent breakup my "aberrant" fantasies have lain mostly dormant, feeling uncomfortable exposing them to partners who I presume do not share these feelings nor have had any experience or interest in acting them out. I also feel residual shame for having them in the first place. I still, like you, find pain arousing. I still relish bruises made while having sex (whether they were intentionally given or not) and fetishize whips and spanking. I'm afraid of scaring lovers away by divulging these wishes that could be perceived as too intense or oppressive. I still struggle with what these desires mean for my political convictions and wonder whether they're coming from a place of agency or mere reaction and internalization of misogyny.

I've realized while writing this letter that I haven't talked to anyone other than the above-mentioned lover about this, like

this. I've found it to be really relieving to put my shit out for you to see, so thank you. I feel like our conversation will continue to help me strengthen and validate myself when I'm struggling with these complicated, sometimes confusing desires that haunt me in my dreams and hang over my sexual experiences like an unnamed yet persistent shadow.

yours,  
emmylou



## Learning to Be Queer – Excerpt

### Lesson #2: Female Socialization Does Not Make You Any Less of an Asshat

Lou is a guy I'm no longer in touch with; but I still wonder about him and sometimes—for a moment—I still care. Lou, butch and hot and perpetually fourteen years old—even though when we fooled around I was twenty-one and he was twenty. One of way too many FTMs in my life who's gone the "female-to-macho-teenage-asshole" route. The first time we met, he told me my body type was "totally his fetish." He said that he liked round high femme girls, and apparently, I fit his specifications perfectly. I was a little grossed out that he'd called me his fetish—but another part of me was happy, because I'd just been put through the ringer by an entire community of transguys who hated fat femmes. It felt nice to be told I was pretty, even in a questionable way. Lou told me he was surprised that I was bottom because I was so confident, because I held my head up high when I walked and looked people in the eye when spoke to them.

Lou was friends with my housemates too, so he started coming over alot. He grabbed Edwin's ass when Edwin was cutting someone's hair, and again when Edwin took a boiling pot of pasta off the stove. Edwin yelled, Dude, CUT IT OUT both times, pissed as hell, and Lou smiled this impish bratty grin, laughed as if that somehow made groping people when they were holding things that could cut or scald you safer. I leered at Georgia, conspicuously stared at her when she walked around the house naked, made fun of her for being



particular about how we kept the kitchen. Our kitchen. He was a guest at our house. He called Georgia's girlfriend Liz her "girltoy," even though Liz asked once, twice, five times to please not call her that, it really bothered her.

I watched it all unfold and tried my best to let it slide, to really believe that Lou was growing up and becoming a better person. I wanted to believe that I'd had good taste in friends, had the right instincts and opened my house up to someone nice and respectful, not snotty and entitled. "It's important to give people the benefit of the doubt.

He's learning how to be a guy in this world. He just needs time," I said to myself, over and over. Never again.

When we started sleeping together, Lou knew that I didn't want to get fucked at that point in my life. He knew that that particular kind of sex was hard for me at that point in time; I'd been raped less than a year before, I just wasn't ready to let people into my body like that.

At first, he made it sound like it was okay with him. We could just do other things. But the second time we had sex, it was different. We wrestled all over my house before we ended up in my bedroom. With the door shut and my clothes rumpled, his hand wrapped in my hair and his knife close to my skin, I asked him to go down on me. He responded, an almost annoyed look on his face: "Well, this is going to turn into me fucking you, because that's what you want!"

"Um... No." My voice was much meeker than I wanted it to be. I remember that I had a very hard time looking him in the eye. "You penetrating me is actually not what I want. If I do want it, I'll tell you, but that's not what I asked for."

I look back on that night and I have so many fantasies about kicking Lou to the curb, but he stayed. Because I

wanted to come, because he was there and he was hot, even though, for a moment, I truly hated him. Lou didn't go down on me, and he didn't fuck me. He held me while I jerked off, because that was the safest thing I could think of, the thing that wouldn't involve him touching me and potentially doing something I didn't want. He whispered a dirty story in my ear, held me close to him and kissed me while I made myself come, and I was thankful he didn't fuck up, didn't say anything else unbelievably stupid.

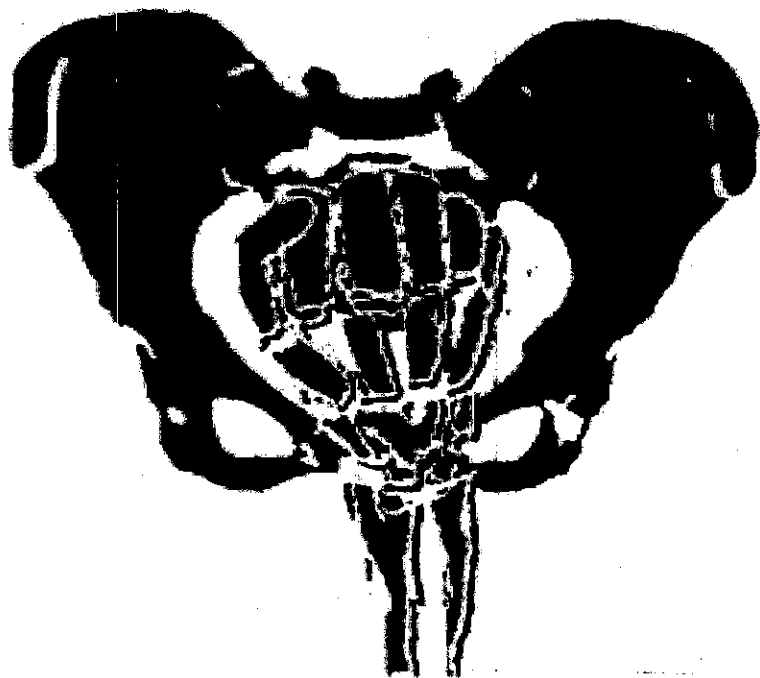
Afterwards, I said to him, "You know... It really bothered me when you said that." "Yeah, I realized that wasn't a good thing to say to you right after I said it." Then why didn't you apologize? I thought, but didn't ask. I literally bit my tongue. What was my problem, not being able to stand up to this silly little boy, this teenager who thought he was entitled to my body on his terms?

"You just have a lot of boundaries, I'm not used to having sex with people like you," he said. You're fucking stone, where the hell do you get off telling me I have too many boundaries? I wanted to scream at him. What, just because I'm a girl I don't get to have boundaries, but you get to have all the boundaries in the world because you're a boy?

"Also, every other time I've gone down on a girl I've fucked her," he said. He looked at me, hopefully. I bit my tongue, again. I couldn't look at him. I felt a cross between disgust and disbelief and a weird kind of shame, still, because he made fun of me enough to make me feel like my limits didn't make any sense. "But, uh, I'm sorry if it wasn't the right thing to say!" He added it quickly, as an afterthought. I'd like to think that I've changed since then. That I've learned not to let boys—or girls, for that matter—be

assholes because that's just the way it's always been. That I know how to "establish boundaries," "state my needs" — whatever therapisty jargon people use to mean being healthy and whole and present in your relationships. But I still see transguys treating women like shit. I still see women letting them get away with it because we're not taught to stand up to men — or, maybe worse, because we don't want to believe it's happening.

It's not about not considering transmen men, exactly. It's suffering from the notion that transmen are somehow safer, or better, or less misogynistic, than non-trans men. This guy is supposed to be different. Like me. Understanding.



C. Deadprince

## Knock Three Times: A Letter to Samuel Delany about Larry Craig

Dear Professor Delany,

I don't know the protocol for introducing a "fan" letter but I hope the contents herein will give you some idea of how much your work has meant to me. I hope this letter finds you well. My name is Sam. I live in Chicago: I am a twenty-four year old white queer man and I work as a baker.

I recently re-read the section in *The Motion of Light in Water* about your first visit to the St. Mark's Baths. I read it often, actually: at the risk of sounding sycophantic, that along with the story of Bob and the passage about "the place where language stalled" are a part of my own cobbled-together book of queer foundational myths, things occasionally of which I find it important to remind myself. The passage has seemed relevant lately in light of the scandal around Idaho senator Larry Craig, a story that unnerved me with its many implicit proscriptions for how gay lives should be lived: there was the quick labeling of Craig as a "pervert" or "predator" for his sexual behavior; the insistence on the part of straight (i.e. not explicitly gay) media institutions on outing him, even prior to the bathroom incident; the 1950s-eque tones of the questions posed to Craig, and of his own denials ("I am not gay. I never have been gay").

My own aversion to public sex is one of shyness, but I'm comforted that it exists: bathhouses and parks and theaters seem some of the last arenas in which gay men can express

radical sexual difference that other members of the “community” are busy trying to pretend out of existence. And as you pointed out in *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*, there is enormous value in cross-class, cross-race public venues that foment “contact” relationships outside the usual spheres of work and consumer culture. A friend of mine used the term “down low” in relation to Larry Craig – and to this area of gay life in general. While I’m not sure that the term, which I understand to have originated specifically in black communities, is applicable, I wonder if this doesn’t bring up a gap in the language. Is there any other phrase or concept that allows people having non-hetero sex any space to not be “gay”? Can one avoid altogether a relationship with the “closet” – or must one necessarily be “in” or “out”?

Because one of the things you learn when you “come out” for the first time is that the act is never singular, of course: having some commitment to being “out” in a heterosexist world means that you’re actually having to be coming out *all the time*. And if being “out” implies a constant clear articulation of one’s self to one’s peers, I suppose that very few of us actually are – in a way that’s both satisfying to us and understandable to our interlocutors. Rather, being queer entails a constant process of negotiation – *how much* will I share of *what* information about myself, and with *whom*. In terms of empowerment, then, maybe the point is not to be perpetually “out and proud”; instead, maybe the point is to control your own life to the extent that you can consciously choose what information remains private, and what is shared publicly.

The extent to which this is at odds with the “coming out” narrative was demonstrated pretty handily by the Larry Craig incident – GLAAD, for instance, issued a startlingly homophobic set of media guidelines on the story which included the “expert” statement, “[C]ruising is practiced mainly by deeply closeted men...There is a lot of self-hatred and shame, and they can't allow themselves to come to terms with their sexuality.” To this end, as to the various assumptions people made about Larry Craig – for instance that there was some conflict between having sex with men and denying being “gay”; that some sort of pathology was indicated by the ways and places that he had sex; that having sex with men and being “anti-marriage” was especially “hypocritical” – are these assumptions a type of heterosexist violence? Are most people who analyze the story, gay and straight alike, simply trying to make Craig politically intelligible according to a measure to which he has no relation?

What the situation reminded me of was that 1960s moment in your book when homosexuality stopped being, for you, a “solitary perversion” – and started to suggest a mass movement. That movement now is all but asexual, if not anti-sexual (is there a more anti-sexual institution than marriage?), and in that context everything about the Larry Craig story had the whiff of a “solitary perversion.” I eventually felt that no matter his politics – no matter who he was, period – what Larry Craig did in a broader sense was to act as a badly-needed disruption in the assimilationist narrative that effectively forbids public sex: the narrative whereby one “comes out,” one is allegedly “proud” of oneself, one leads a

superficially sexless public life – and if one is a member of Congress, is regularly held up as a symbol of How Far We've Come. Would it be in some political sense better if Craig had been elected, without scandal, as an openly gay Republican senator? I don't know. But I don't think so.

On the other hand – and this is where I'm having the most trouble – Larry Craig *is still* a public figure, and heterosexism *is still* an enormous, violent problem. I don't know the extent to which I'm blithely defending "the closet" from the extremely privileged position of someone whose own process of "coming out" couldn't, frankly, have been easier: most of my personal relationships are unchanged for it, and some have been bettered. To what extent, and in what ways, should queer people feel accountable to other queer people? Does that accountability always need to be actualized in being "out" – is there any other way?

I'd love to hear your thoughts, but in any event I hope that this letter reflects the enormous respect that I have for you and your work. Take care, and thank you.

Sincerely,

Sam Worley

## What I Learned From the Faggots

“We do a little better when we sexualize our own manner of having sex – learn to find our own way of having sex sexy.”

- Samuel Delany in Times Square Red Times Square Blue

What is about what we do that turns us on? Talking with you the other day at the beach about play spaces and hot costume themed parties at Idapalooza, I was doing that to entice you into a friendship. I hoped that what turned you on, what spaces were sacred, which relationships you cherished were like mine. I hoped you could be wooed with the possibility of parties that were sexy because of the way we played with power.

Example A: [at the speakeasy the shoeshine boys all had mamas who were dancing girls. The poor accordion player had a secret relationship with the owner, a single woman with a mysterious past; she was also my cousin whom I protected from rival mob hits.]

At the registration table, making sure new arrivals signed up for work shifts, moved their cars to long-term parking, registered and picked a mailbox number for future rendezvous with other similarly-numbered participants, R. asked me what is it about all this we need? “All this” officially refers to the Ida Fruit Jam, an annual queer music festival in the woods in rural Tennessee. But it also refers to

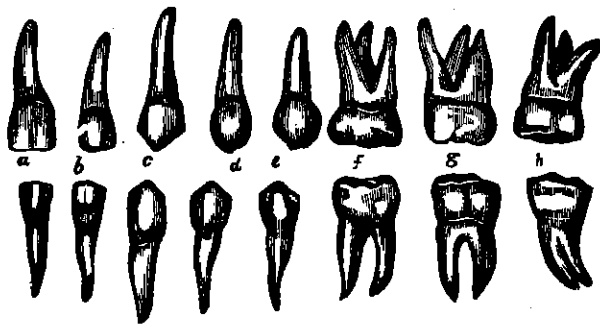


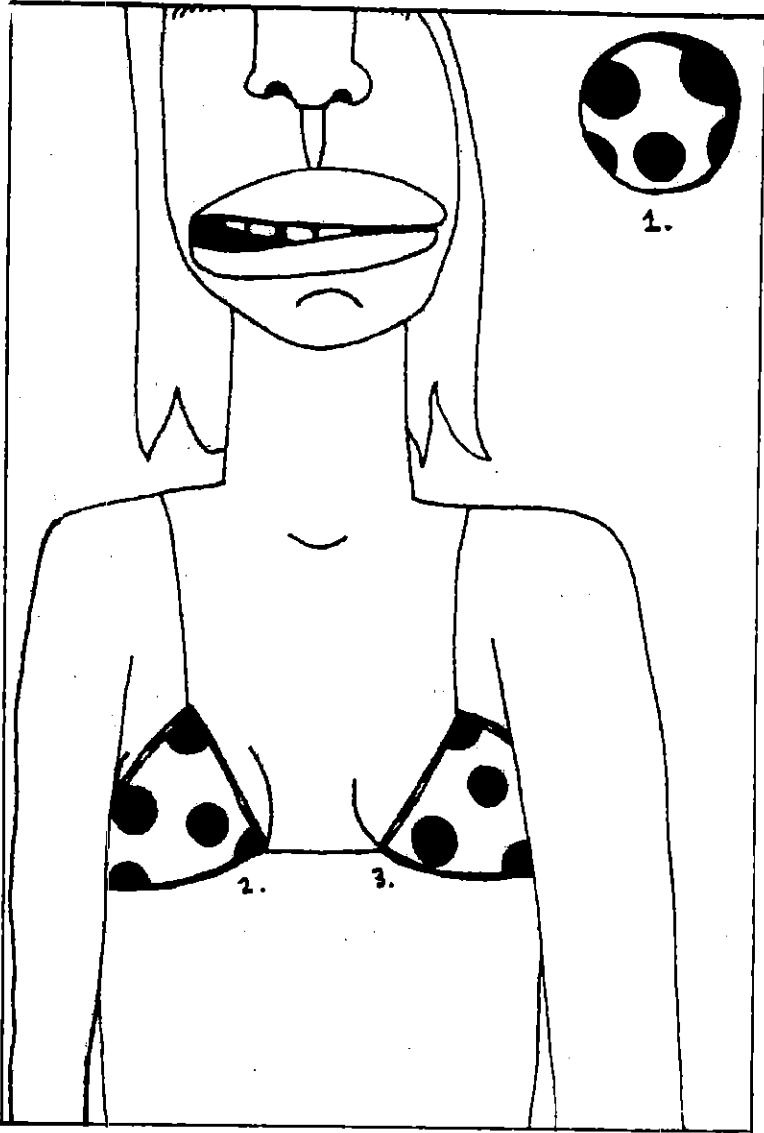
the enclosed space of the land, rife with misbehaving queers and genderfucking rabble-rousers, many of whom lead lives intensely full of political action, fucking the system and each other, hard and in it for the long run. "All this" is the sex party in the creek bed on ancient slabs blanketed with tarps and moldy blankets with appropriate sharps containers, alcohol prep pads, neoprene gloves in different sizes and condoms that glow in the dark. "All this" is the variety show with spoon players from New Orleans and dragfags from Australia acrobat-ing to "...oh those beautiful boys, kings and queens and criminal queers". "All this" refers to the femmes and their spiked heels in the dry dirt, ferocious chest tattoos, dusty lipstick readily available for a quick touch-up only to, if in the mood, leave most of it on the cheek of someone most deserving. "All this" is learning to be all of the above. All at once. All together now.

I told R. that there's certainly something - I can't put my finger on it, wrap my tongue around it, can't tell what it is by staring at it's chest or crotch, choosing either/or by a weighted silhouette. Its about our bodies, the way that we wear the stares of the everyday world heavy on our torsos, how that mantle pushes us away from fucking, from loving our rascal frames and flesh, from pressing our hands into each others hearts and sticking there. The way we swallow the insipid power games of every piece of hatred around us, internalize them until, just like everything else we are taught to hate about ourselves, we are configuring new ways to love. We are taking this shit of life and holding it so tightly, crushing it with our brutal hands worn down with survival, our knuckles pestle and palms mortar, grinding the surfaces of these games down revealing the shimmering golden origin

of power that can be beautiful when understood, breathtaking when taken with consent, and magical when freely given away.

And "all this" is most definitively art. The pieces demanded to live only in a romanticized childhood free from a world straining at its chain to tear us apart, sometimes held at bay, most often getting us anyway. The creative bits of us dismissed for being unmitigated yet unintelligible in the real world, too unreal. We are too unreal. We are, too, unreal. Is it strange that our art reflects us, the way we queerly reconfigure scraps into sweeping gestures of grandiosity? "All this" is our gorgeousness that is somehow mistaken for grotesqueness and gives us very little room to call each other beautiful. "All this" is all the room we need to call across long distances and shout screams of the pleasures we derive from each other's disobedient company.





jr

**appleseed** is a queer picture-maker from Albuquerque, NM. she lives in Chicago, where she can be found spitting out the seeds and looking for art in uncanny places. she wants you in front of her lens.

**emmylou** is a reclusive student majoring in women's and gender studies and social justice at the university of Missouri. when not teasing apart the intricacies of her sexuality, emmylou enjoys collecting antique lamps, telling and writing ghost stories, and honing her crisis intervention skills. she may be reached by writing to [emmylou@riseup.net](mailto:emmylou@riseup.net).

**Challes Deadprince** was a founding member of Montreal's Anticapitalist Aspirates, and was heavily involved in that group's production of propaganda. Still in Montreal, taking a break from organizing, watching the reasonable accommodation debate" expose the racism and fear of difference that lurks even on the antiauthoritarian left.

**Gina de Vries** is a queer writer and activist from San Francisco. Her work has appeared or will soon appear in some of the following places: *On Our Backs* magazine, *That's Revolting!: Queer Resistances to Assimilation*, *Baby Remember My Name: An Anthology of New Queer Girl Writing*, *Sodom & Me: Queers on Fundamentalism*, *GenderQuery*, and *TransForming Communities*. She likes boys with good manners and dirty minds, girls who like like girls, and sharp shiny things.

**madsen minax** is a musician and filmmaker living in Chicago. he has no idea what he is doing with his life.

**Margo Miller** grew up in TeeVeeland, lives in Chicago, and

believes David Berman when he says that for a little love you pay for all your life. Miller's writing has appeared in *Framework*, *Jump Cut*, and *The New Queer Aesthetic on Television*.

Minax is a cultural interloper, bdsm trainer and educator, funny bunny and all around kinky kook. You may find out more about her at <http://www.mistressminax.com>.

Rina M. Rothmann had trouble writing her own 3 sentence bio, so she asked her partners and sister to contribute. In their words, you should know that she is: a passionate/opinionated/openminded queer/poly/bi advocate/fighter/lover that finds joy in nature/exchanging ideas with others/and trying to leave the world a bit better than she found it. She is a domestic violence crisis worker and adores her work.

Sam Worley writes "When Idaho Senator Larry Craig was arrested for trying to solicit a blowjob in an airport bathroom, accidentally sparking a number of sort-of dialogues about public sex, I wondered what Samuel R. Delany thought about it (Delany must have a PhD in public sex theory AND practice, or something; in this regard two of my favorite books of his are The Motion of Light in Water, and Times Square Red, Times Square Blue). So, I wrote him a letter. I haven't heard back yet."

s.k. shipwreck and emmett starr have an ongoing collaboration. s.k. is incredible with type space and roller cleaning. emmett keeps things moving by saying go go go (and cranking the wheel). they both enjoy putting away the letters and pulling the squeegee across the screen.

Simon Strikeback is about to celebrate his 29<sup>th</sup> birthday, back in his hometown of Chicago. He is a devout practitioner of kink, radical politics, polyamoury, vegetarianism and long walks on the beach. He is entering graduate school this winter at University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee focusing on History and Gender and Sexuality Studies. He is a white, Jewish, queer no-ho trans guy eagerly awaiting a chest tattoo of the Great Lakes, Mississippi River and the Upper Midwest.

He thanks you again and again for reading, writing, discussing and actualizing these passions of ours.

---

“... build your life and those of the people around you into a plateau of intensity that would leave afterimages of its dynamism that could be reinjected into still other lives, creating a fabric of heightened states between which any number, the greatest number, of connecting routes would exist. Some might call that promiscuous. [They] call it revolution.”

- Brian Massumi, on Deleuze and Guattari

