

AGAINST ∞ NATURE



A SHOW BY  
HOMOSEXUAL  
MEN

L A C E

Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions

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Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions

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Nayland Blake  
David Bussel  
Peter Christopherson  
of Coil  
Arch Connelly  
Bruno Cuomo  
Vaginal Davis  
of The Afro Sisters  
John de Fazio  
Arnold Fern  
Mike Glass  
John Goss  
John Greyson  
Hudson  
Gary Indiana  
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Marc Paradis  
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Carter Potter  
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Jack Shear  
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Matias Viegener  
Kevin Wolff

# **AGAINST NATURE**

**A Group Show of Work by  
Homosexual Men**

**January 6 through February 12, 1988**

**Curated by Dennis Cooper and  
Richard Hawkins**

**L A C E**  
**Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions**

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## INTRODUCTION/ ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Over the past few years, LACE has presented programs in video, performance, lectures, bookstore exhibitions, and book signings by artists whose work has addressed the topic of AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome). Recognizing that this sporadic activity was not enough, and sensing the need for a much stronger commitment to these growing concerns, I approached Richard Hawkins to curate a show about AIDS. Simultaneously, Dennis Cooper was interested in proposing a show to LACE about sexual promiscuity and its implications today. Initially, we perceived a broad-based exhibition with a variety of components. Richard and Dennis accepted the challenge and after much discourse proposed a very succinct show to the LACE Exhibition Committee. The proposal specifically addressed issues of gay male sexuality and, within that context, a particular approach to art production.

At first we were concerned that this show could possibly be antithetical to our original intent to promote AIDS activism in an all-encompassing context. However, the Exhibition Committee was willing to take a chance based on our confidence and trust in the curators' knowledge of and commitment to both AIDS activism and gay activism.

In light of the AIDS crisis and in spite of the conservative and oppressive atmosphere present today, the premise of this show and the bold work presented here deserves recognition and attention. While AIDS informs the work in this exhibition it leads us to this information through a less direct, albeit powerful and complex, course. The work is confrontational rather than pedantic. The images and content are difficult and may possibly be disturbing to the general public. LACE sees this show as representative of the complexity of the subject of AIDS and only the beginning of an ongoing discourse on issues of sexuality, oppression, and illness that drastically effect all of our lives today. LACE and organizations like LACE must continue to commit to this effort of recognition and activism.

On behalf of the curators and LACE, I would like to thank the following people who have been integral to the production of this show: the staff of LACE for their ongoing dedication and professionalism, particularly Martin Kersels, Building and Office Manager, for his tireless work on the production of this catalog; Susan McWhinney, Bookstore Manager, for her work on the Bookstore Exhibition; Weba Garretson, Performance Coordinator, for the performance component; Anne Bray, Video Coordinator, for her assistance with the video portion; and most importantly, Jinger Heffner, Exhibition Coordinator, who oversaw every aspect of "Against Nature" with diligence

and care; Linda Nishio for the design and production of this catalog; D. B. Finnegan and Benjamin Weissman of Beyond Baroque for their collaborative efforts in presenting the evening of readings; Billy Miller, Chris Cochrane, Tony Greene, John Greyson, Larry Horne, Bill Horrigan, Hudson, Doug Ischar, Jim Isermann, Mike Kelley, Kate Knuth, Patti Podesta, and the Exhibition, Performance and Video Committees of LACE, all of whom gave helpful advice to the curators. Foremost, we would like to thank all of the artists without whom this exhibition would not have been realized. LACE would like to personally thank Dennis Cooper and Richard Hawkins for their insight, thoughtfulness, and bravery in conceiving and actualizing "Against Nature."

Joy Silverman  
*Executive Director*

## ABOUT AGAINST NATURE

We constructed *Against Nature* along personal lines. Who are we? We're gay male artists obsessed with the ways in which sexual desire informs, distances and empowers the recent history of art made by guys like us. We're thinking of, say, Kenneth Anger, Jean Genet, William Burroughs, Marc Almond, Denton Welch... just to start. These artists share at least two concerns—a finely-tuned irreverence for the cultural and moral standards imposed by and for heterosexuals, and a reverence and desire for, mixed with anxiety about the male body, their own, friends', strangers', stars'. It's a limiting esthetic, maybe, but the results speak for themselves. We suspect that the works in this show do too. This catalog is a component of *Against Nature*, and not its tracing.

Dennis Cooper &  
Richard Hawkins  
*Curators*

Dennis Cooper

## DEAR SECRET DIARY,

A guy named Pierre is writing my essay for this catalog for me because I'm too sexually obsessed with him to think about anything else. He asked to write it. He has ideas, big ideas, he tells me. We'll see. When he isn't scribbling he looks into a mirror, for inspiration I guess.

He's about five foot ten or eleven. Tall for a French guy. Great hair, black, curly. Typical skinny guy's back. Bigger arms than you'd think. Pinkish whitish hairless skin. No moles, pimples, scars, weird hairs, tattoos. Typical skinny guy's ass. Bigger legs than you'd think.

My bed is round. It's situated in the exact center of my room, and surrounded by stained wood floors. It's the only thing there. It's like West Berlin. When I'm fucking someone and he accidentally falls off the bed I like to pretend he's about to be shot for trying to defect. Or I did before AIDS ruined death.

Someone I love as much as I can love, died. He was in the hospital wearing a walkman (it wasn't on) when he just stopped making that horrible sound. I'm inferring this since I couldn't face seeing him. I called once. It was like trying to talk to a squeaky door. You're in a room, reading or watching TV, and there's a draft, and you get so fed up with this door being pushed back and forth that you mutter outloud to yourself, like that would stop the noise. I told someone I knew to tell my friend that he couldn't die, but I don't think the message was passed on. People should live, is the point. Even him. Even like that.

I guess if I had my choice I'd have sex with someone who's unconscious and fairly young. In porn, and sometimes in literature, X can drug his nephew, screw the body, and cause irreparable interior damage, which instills pathos in a contrived scene. In real life boys scream. When they come down off your drugs, they tell.

When Kenny something-or-other was found raped and strangled and dumped in a newspaper article, I wrote a satiric monologue in the killer's voice. The death became sexy, disturbing, etcetera. People laughed when I read it aloud. It gave Kenny permanence, meaning. The real Kenny's bones by now. Hardly anyone knew him. What I believed to be weirdly sexy becomes an occasional thought. (yawn) I'd say more if I knew what was happening to me.

Pierre shudders slightly. "That's truly disgusting," he says, still scribbling. Finally. You about ready?

"For what?" he says vacantly.

(unintelligible)

"Very funny, but what if you give me AIDS?"

(unintelligible)

Pierre looking down at his half-hard cock: "You're scaring me."

Pierre returns to his scribbling. By now he has used up both sides of the page and is beginning to blacken the margins. The paper curls up at its edges like a boat, or a large dry leaf. Or a sculpture called "Kenny...." Mmm. It's really captured the kid.

Kenny walks into a bar. "Screwdriver." Since he's eleven years old they won't serve him, but seeing as how he's so cute the bartender says he can stay if he services everyone in the bar. Kenny shrugs and is led to a foul-smelling restroom. He sits down in one of the stalls. The toilet seat is so large he has to splay his legs to keep from toppling into the bowl. All night guys use his mouth for whatever they want. He likes it. It confirms some idea he has of himself. At four they kick him out. He wanders around. A man looks at him funny. Kenny doesn't know what that means but he sucks the guy off in his car. They get along. Kenny moves into the guy's mansion and lies around by the pool. "I think I could love you," he says, "but it will take time." But after a while the man gets bored. His friends think he's nuts not to screw Kenny twenty-four hours a day. "You're welcome to use him," he says, "but I'm telling you, there's nothing there." They do. Kenny starts losing a lot of weight. Some of his fucks think that's hot. They think his sniffing and cough are the result of a coke problem. The "cold" won't go away. Kenny can't get around on his own anymore, so the man's friends pay Kenny's hospital bills. He hates being sick but he never expected to change the world. He's dying. "No kidding." He's on some kind of machine. No one bothers to visit him, not even me, and I made him up. One night Kenny dies in his sleep. Someone thinks I should know, calls. I listen, thank the caller, hang up the phone and think, "Big deal."

Pierre lays down his pen, turns around, arches his eyebrows. "That's it? That's the end of the story? But who was the kid, how'd he die, and why?"

You're missing the point, Pierre.

"Which is?"

What's your guess?

(unintelligible)

(unintelligible)

"Look, it's not that I'm not attracted to you, or anything," he mumbles. "It's just . . . it's not that big a concern to me if you want me, you'll have to, uh, force me in some way. Otherwise, I'll . . . disappoint you. It's not that I'm not, you know, gay. It's not that I'm scared of AIDS. It's just I don't, you know, have sex that high on my list of . . . whatever. I'd rather talk, or listen to you talk. Or . . . wait. (He reaches behind him and grabs the sculpture called "Kenny.") Take this. Read it. Print it. Please."

(It's a description of Pierre in very hackneyed, glowing terms and there's no way I'm going to print it because it doesn't have anything to do with this show, as beautiful as Pierre looks today, even upset. But he's my friend so I'll tell him he's perfect.)

Perfection.



# Notations toward deciphering elements of illness and loss through J.K. Huysman's *Against Nature*

(for Bill Irby & David Heath)

by Richard Hawkins

As an introduction to this show I would like to rustle through some ideas about illness and loss. Without insinuating that homosexuals have a better take on illness (and the obstructing ramifications of a statement like that), I would simply like to wander through some ways of accessing illness (or at least deciphering an awareness, familiarity, or acquaintance with it) in this show of work by homosexual men. Two different concepts of loss and illness are involved: 1) historical (the idea that homos are sick, perverts, miscreants, crimes against nature), and 2) the very present physical one of AIDS, which has played with our identity, the way we see ourselves and others see us.

This is first and most importantly a show of homosexual men; the historical and contemporary motives of illness I find here are ingrained and ultra-present. My primary intent (in this essay as it points toward the show) is to surface and shuffle through what have become (and have been) undeniable elements in constructing and gathering a homosexual identity. Hopefully, a historical label of mental illness can be pestered with and today's presence of physical illness can be acknowledged. With this in mind I present the following:

*"Nature played this trick on me." - Morrissey*

## ARTIFICIALITY

*Against Nature* asserts a reaction that is based on the squabbling complications inherent in Nature (the body/the opposite of "unnatural"). Des Esseintes, in the novel, has been foiled by his body and its relentless propensity for ill-health. He manifests his adversity to the natural (the correlative for his body) in a delight with the artificial (the unnatural). If he is able to construct a landscape (the natural) in his mind from smelling an assortment of perfumes (the artificial) then he will be able to say that he has tricked and defeated his body by thwarting both an imposed view of nature and normality, and received ideas of the nature of his body. It is at once an admission of his body's determinacy in its assertion of ill-health and its denial of health, and an advocacy of a power that usurps or trespasses into the unnatural.

Inherent in artificiality is the confession of a lack of faith or a necessary avoidance of nature, and an attempt to construct a way of working that incorporates that admission.

## MELANCHOLIA

In another chapter des Esseintes maps a heritage of mournful and melancholic characters by reviewing his library. In doing this, he rehearses the appropriative nature of one who identifies with loss. (To bastardize Freud): Mourning is the loss of something outside of oneself; melancholia is a process of identification with loss. Melancholia can look like, serve as, and is a metaphor for mourning.

Des Esseintes exhibits loss of identity the moment he acknowledges that he is without health. The identity of health is lost, and in its place is an identity based on ill-health, lost health. So, melancholia can be the loss of identity and identity's replacement with an identity based on loss. With this decentralization (absence of identity as rupture) emerges a ravenous, promiscuous, appropriative animal in search of a history (search, because of absence; history because that absence has occurred in the area of identification). The new identity (the one based on loss and seeking to identify) is put into practice by forming alliances with the past, particularly with other melancholic figures.

The melancholic presents a varied collection of his chosen self-images. With des Esseintes (Huysmans) it is a library of Baudelaire, Poe, Goncourt, a garden of the most gruesome flowers, or a collection of the most grotesque prints. With Denton Welch it would be an assembly of cast-off cigarette butts, soiled knick-knacks, and broken teacups made of the finest china. These collections are not aestheticizations of ailment; they are manifestations of an appropriative subjectivity that is attempting to construct a self-image out of the past with which it identifies.

## DISTANCE

This is how des Esseintes speaks of Baudelaire: "...thanks to a solid, sinewy style which, more than any other, possessed that remarkable quality, the power to define in curiously healthy terms the most fugitive and ephemeral of the unhealthy conditions of weary spirits and melancholy souls."

Baudelaire sets up this health/unhealth dichotomy himself. His book of poems is entitled "The Flowers of Evil" (the seducer who destroys) and the first chapter is called "Spleen and Ideal", also translated "Bile (shit) and Ideal" (a primary connection between what is dejected and what is perfect).

Like des Esseintes' artificial versions of reality, Baudelaire sets up ideals which equate the natural with abjection. The ideal may be a natural body, but it has to be distanced in some way. It can be distanced by becoming artificial (a statue) and, by that, boiled down into a referent — or it can be a living body, which the poet watches and desires from afar. From a distance he can yearn as it manifests all of its natural tendencies, "Murder, one of your dearest trinkets, throbs on your shameless belly: make it dance!" This visage is ideal — and the melancholic is infatuated by the perfection of the Ideal — only because it is mediated through distance. If the Ideal were in close proximity its horribleness/naturalness would be a personal threat — it would be like any other natural thing.

Memory is a distancing device and thus a constructor of ideals. Nostalgia inscribes a pathetic integrity into the Ideal. Memorials are the ultimate ideals (James Dean's Spider, James Dean's movies, Valentino's crypt) in that they are blank, severe, and incommunicable other than their preservation of the name of the departed — and because they contain and guard the ultimate fear, the corpse.

The Ideal (the crypt) is so supreme because not only is it silent, it holds within it our own loss (thinly veiled by its seductive heroic facade).

### SUBLIME

The sublime (in Edmund Burke) is ironic terror. It is like pleasure but more intense than pleasure because it is based on terror. Des Esseintes' greatest intrepidation is waking up in the morning (and it happens often) to find physical traces of his disease's progress. Some of his greatest pleasures are the flowers he has cultivated: "...tired of artificial flowers aping real ones, he wanted some natural flowers that would look like fakes...The gardeners brought in still more varieties, this time affecting the appearance of a factitious skin covered with a network of counterfeit veins. Most of them, as if ravaged by syphilis or leprosy, displayed livid patches of flesh mottled with roseola, damasked with darts; others had the bright pink colour of a scar that is healing or the brown tint of a scab that is forming; others seemed to have been puffed up by cauteries, blistered by burns; others again revealed hairy surfaces pitted with ulcers and embossed with chancres...."

The presentation of the grosser details of illness in a context other than their own instigates a sense of sublime release among those familiar with loss/illness. (Back to the crypt): the crypt is beautiful because it refuses to present us with the corpse inside, and instead designates a habitation for our memories. It offers a relief which comes from knowing that the threat inherent in its nature (the corpse) has been displaced — not exactly instigating pleasure, but presenting what the abjection is not, while still referring to and containing the abject itself...flipping fear, through distancing, into irony.

### IRONY...

"You said I was ill and you were not wrong." - Morrissey

# PARMA VIOLETS: A VIDEO SCRIPT

by John Greyson, c. 1988

## Scene One

Medium shot of Venice Beach in winter, with a few gulls and fewer bathers. An African green monkey strolls towards the camera. His movements are awkward, since he has been killed, stuffed and then mechanized.

*GREEN MONKEY* (sounding like Alistair Cooke): Good Evening. Tonight on The Wonderful World of Human Nature, we examine the bizarre and often misunderstood habits of 'The Dandy,' or more popularly, the 'White Fag.' This sub-group of the Homosexual species used to proliferate in 19th-century European artistic milieu, but its numbers have sharply decreased in the last few decades with the ascendancy of the more aggressive 'clone.' The Dandy can be identified by its eccentric clothing, its erratic wrist movements, and its predilection for Parma violets in lieu of a cravat.

Camera cuts to medium shot of man in a beach chair.

*GREEN MONKEY* (*sotto voce*): Let us quietly observe the typical behavior of the Dandy in its habitat. Our scientists have learned that this one goes by the name of Gustave Aschenbach.

Aschenbach is dressed from head to toe in a white suit and boating hat, just like Dirk Bogarde in that Visconti film. After adjusting his pillow and pince nez, he petulantly turns the page of his book. Close-up of book: Embrace Nature by Joris Karl Huysmans. Mahler plays mournfully in the background. A flowery script, the color of Parma violets, begins to roll over the screen.

*ROLLING TEXT*: White fags are a special breed of nature lovers, searching for those corners of the urban where the rural erupts. White fags seek out those bridges that traverse polluted rivers, with deep shadows over the water. They embrace the stench of tea-room sewers, casting their pollution into the drains that lead to the sea.

*GREEN MONKEY*: Like many of the Dandy subspecies, he is sick with a peculiar malady, which causes him to imagine things that aren't really there.

Medium shot: Aschenbach looks up and out to sea. Cut to: long shot of an 18th-century cargo vessel in the fog. Its sailors (all naked) are leaping from the decks into the cold grey water.

*ROLLING TEXT*: In 1721, the plague swept across Europe from the east, and reached Marseilles. The Dutch imposed a strict quarantine on all shipping from the east — even burning cargos and making sailors swim ashore naked.

Series of close-ups of mens' bodies, shot from underwater, their thighs and forearms getting tangled with one another as they desperately battle the cold, polluted waters of Santa Monica bay.

## Scene Two

Later in the afternoon on the beach. Medium shot: Aschenbach has set up

a writing table, and is sorting through piles of correspondence. He dips a quill in ink the color of Parma violets and begins to write.

*ASCHENBACH (very faggy and affected):* Dear LACE: I am thrilled to be able to participate in your exquisite exhibit Against Nature, though I really don't know about the title. After all, my doctors specifically recommended the bracing sea air of Venice Beach as a tonic for my many maladies and ailments. Nevertheless, what a divine concept! An entire show devoted to our languid reveries, our elegiacal ennui, our plaintive sighs of capitulation in the face of mortality! We decorative dandies have been marginalized too long by those puerile politicians, those righteous gay libbers, those dykes and feminists who on principle disdain both souffles and sequins! It's time to reclaim our rightful place as the arbiters of aesthetic transcendence! At last, a space of our own, where we may celebrate dillitantism as the penultimate expression of art's true mission! A chance to spill our glorious seed, to let it go forth and multiply, so that we can wallow in our truly bitter harvest! A chance to finally, fully, go camping . . . !

*FX:* Phone ringing. Tight shot of answering machine and phone at his feet in the sand. Reaction shots of Aschenbach listening as people leave messages.

*Voice on Machine:* It's Paul, calling from the hospital . . .

*Beep. Another message:* It's Bill, I'm just on my way to the hospital. . .

*Another:* It's Bev, we're planning the memorial and we hoped . . .

*Another:* Please call Dr. Simian about your test results . . .

Aschenbach reaches for the phone, and then falls back, his listless hand falling to the sand. A delicate tear drops onto the letter, mixing with the wet ink, blurring the word 'reveries . . .'

### Scene Three

Split screen of two maps of Africa, one negative, one positive (one black, one white). The head of the green monkey appears in the middle of each, and simultaneously reads the following texts:

*"If art is to confront AIDS more honestly than the media have done, it must begin in tact, avoid humor and end in anger. Begin in tact, I say, because we must not reduce individuals to their deaths ... Avoid humor, because humor seems grotesquely inappropriate to the occasion. Humor puts the public (indifferent when not uneasy) on cozy terms with what is an unspeakable scandal: death."*

*-Edmund White,  
Artforum, 1987*

*"...Art does have the power to save lives, and it is this very power that must be recognized, fostered, and supported in every way possible. But if we are to do this, we will have to abandon the idealist conception of art. We don't need a cultural renaissance; we need cultural practices actively participating in the struggle against AIDS. We don't need to transcend the epidemic; we need to end it."*

*-Douglas Crimp,  
October, 1988*

The two maps and two monkey heads begin to superimpose, as the **GREEN MONKEYS** speak in unison: These two quotes, taken out of context,

have been transformed by the culture into two opposing polemics, two prescriptions for cultural practice: the art of the Dandy vs. the art of the activist. Each becomes inflexible, didactic, exclusionary, defensive. Artists making work about AIDS are forced to choose an allegiance to one or the other, perpetuating a false opposition.

#### Scene Four

Tracking shot follows the Green Monkey wandering through a toy store, past rows and rows of stuffed animals.

*GREEN MONKEY:* White fags express their relation to nature in peculiar ways. For instance, King Ludwig II of Bavaria created an artificial forest and filled it with mechanical animals that he killed, stuffed and animated with wind-up clockwork mechanisms. That's how I ended up this way (gesturing to his mechanical limbs). Sir Richard Burton, that brilliant Dandy and close friend of Ludwig's, similarly loved African animals and was an infamous adventurer. He translated the unexpurgated Arabian Nights, and developed a theory of sexuality based upon what he identified as the 'sotadic zones.' He claimed that warm tropical climates encouraged the proliferation of homosexuality, while colder temperatures tended to produce heterosexual behavior. However, when he sketched out a map illustrating his theory, it proved to be wildly indifferent to actual equatorial temperatures, conforming instead to the moral and legal geography of the time. His sotadic zones, in fact, consisted of those countries uncolonized by Christianity where homosexual acts were tolerated.

Shot of Sir Richard Burton's sotadic zone map, which is then superimposed over a map illustrating the prevalence of AIDS around the globe. They do not correspond.

#### Scene Five

Long shot of Sir Richard Burton walking along Hollywood Boulevard. He enters a sex shop. Interior: He gives the guy at the cash register a dollar. Camera follows them both as the guy unlocks a door and leads Burton down into the Sex Museum, pausing to switch on an audio cassette tape-loop of passionate groans and clanking chains. Camera surveys various dioramas, lit by spotlights. Each illustrates a category of sexual "perversion", as identified and isolated by scientific study. Pedophilia is a young mannequin boy in shorts on a square of Astroturf. Necrophilia is a blond mannequin woman lying in a coffin wearing a see-through negligee. All the mannequins are from the sixties—the women have flips and beehives, the men have Rock Hudson haircuts, parted on the left side. Burton moves towards a pool of light depicting bestiality. A mannequin man is on his back, pink plastic legs in the air, being mounted by a huge, stuffed toy dog, the sort you win at the fair playing Racetrack with squirtguns.

#### Scene Six

Sir Richard Burton, sitting at a table in the Pioneer Chicken on Hollywood

Boulevard. He is writing a letter with ink the color of Parma violets. Dear LACE: I regret I can't participate in your show Against Nature. Don't get me wrong, I'm not trying to disclaim or disown my dandy comrades or their work. It's more the premise, which runs the danger of being renamed 'Against Responsibility,' which suggests that our artistic response to this health crisis has been nothing more than an ineffectually morbid flap of the wrist. Of course, we white fags may seem to shock or transgress the status quo by flapping our genitals in the face of respectability, but do we really produce anything more than titters (and titillation)? By refusing to make work that engages actual agendas of social change, aren't we ultimately vulnerable to recuperation by the system that we pretend to disrupt? You deliberately exclude work by lesbians, marginalize gays of color, and discourage gay activist artists addressing the politics of AIDS. You provide LACE with an excuse not to do another 'gay' show or another 'AIDS' show, because of course, "We've already done one, it was called Against Nature." White fag privilege becomes enshrined and enfranchised, reinforcing the sexism and racism of the mainstream art world....

FX: Phone rings. Tight shot of Burton answering.

ASCHENBACH: Mary dear, what's this tripe about not being in the show?

BURTON: Trust you to jump on the gossip. Let's meet at the Natural History Museum in New York — we can talk about it there.

### Scene Seven

Long shot of them embracing in the vaulted entrance (discreet European cheek pecks), and wandering up the stairs. Leisure tracking shot follows them as they wander past the dioramas, where herds of mammals and flocks of birds have been frozen for a century. They pause to admire the marsupials, the leopards, the buffalo, the African green monkeys, paying special attention to those species which have become extinct. A crane shot follows their heated argument around and under the giant blue whale.

Just off the blue whale is a hallway filled with pictures and captions. A history of epidemics. From the black plague to AIDS. They try to picture the curator who pulled it off. Someone young, well-meaning, who had read Sander Gilman's Disease and Representation but not really understood it, someone who had probably lost a friend seven months earlier, after protracted bouts with pneumocystis. They proceed through the woodcuts, the engravings, the stigmatas of syphilis, leprosy, bubonic plague. They reach AIDS. It's a rear-projected slide show of photos of PWAs from Miami, Brazil and New Jersey. Men in hospitals, wrapped in IV tubes instead of leather straps, with lesions instead of bruises. The new SM. Real kinky. A grade school class in search of the African dioramas accidentally enters the exhibit. A little boy glances, freezes. In a split second, without the aid of captions, he can 'read' the image. Nine years old and he has mastered the visual semiotics of a purple splotch on a forearm. It takes him two seconds. "AIDS," he screams. The others, the same age, freeze, glance and get it. They too can read. They scream "AIDS." They stampede, their terror cut with giggles, a herd of

unstuffed little animals fleeing from visual contagion, half-convinced the KS lesions could leap from the projected image onto their pre-pubescent bodies. (Perhaps they are not so sophisticated — perhaps they think the slides are front-projected, that they could interrupt the beam of light and cause the image to spill over their faces.)

Cut to: scene from biblical film by Cecil B. DeMille where St. Anne wipes Christ's face on Calvary and the cloth is imprinted with his image.

Cut to: clip from Star Trek episode, where alien woman 'cures' Spock and Kirk by transferring their lesions onto her own arms.

### Scene Eight

Panoramic view of Black Sand beach, a gay nude beach just across the Golden Gate Bridge from San Francisco.

*GREEN MONKEY:* Aschenbach the dandy turned to nature for a cure and was betrayed. Sir Richard Burton the dandy turned to nature for an explanation and was deceived. As representatives of a species facing extinction, they have turned 'against nature.' At the same time, the sea wind sharpens their senses. They are less cynical, more critical. They are beginning to turn 'against culture.'

Long shot of Aschenbach and Burton standing on cliff, looking out to sea. Their POV: the 18th-century cargo vessel reappears in the bay, with the naked sailors leaping from the deck into the water, attempting to escape the plague. Cut to: tight shot of Aschenbach and Burton, transfixed (slipping into a reverie), unconsciously stepping nearer the edge. Mahler. The waves pound below.

*GREEN MONKEY:* That peculiar species, the Dandy, flourished in societies of unquestioned privilege and inflexible stratification. In this moment of turmoil and crisis, the Dandy is threatened with extinction. Like all species, it must adapt or perish.

*ROLLING TEXT:* The ritual plunge, leaping from the cliff into the brine, recurs again and again in diverse cultures. For some, it could cleanse the body and soul. For others, it could appease wrathful gods and fend off earthly demons. Sappho, the most famous of divers, was claimed by Pliny to have been reborn as an androgyne through her leap.

### POSSIBLE CONCLUSIONS:

1. Burton and Aschenbach join hands and leap into the frothy waves. Swimming out past the treacherous rocks, they join the naked sailors in the bay, and commence with some impromptu water ballet. A helicopter shot reveals their complicated formation of intertwined limbs, which spells out: 'Silence Equals Death - AIDS Action Now!'
2. They pause on the cliff, undecided. After much hemming and hawing, they pull out sketchbooks and begin to draw the drowning sailors, with ink the color of Parma violets.
3. Burton leaps while Aschenbach sketches.



4. They debate their options. Aschenbach argues that the leap is a cop-out, romantically embracing the utopian 'image' of collective action while denying their own subjective experiences, of AIDS and of art. Burton concedes that Aschenbach may have a point, but argues that sketching the death throes of anonymous 'victims' is hardly a viable (let alone an aesthetic) alternative. Achieving no satisfactory solution, they appropriate the helicopter (which has been waiting around all day on the off-chance that the Esther Williams shot might happen) and commence with an air rescue of the men. Having nowhere better to go, they fly downtown to the opening of Against Nature. The arrival of two dozen naked sailors causes quite a stir, naturally, and the debate continues at a feverish pace. . . .

# from the performance *Sex Pot, 1986* by Hudson

Ipsa facto.

All homosexuals should carry guns and, with the conscience of acting, not be afraid to use them. A majority of Supreme Court Justices should be burned in effigy - nightly - in front of their homes forever and in as many other places as possible while butt-fuckers and oral copulators go at it on every street corner, in every public building, in front of churches and when the cops come to bust 'em, just blow 'em away. Dynamite their cars. Take no prisoners.

It's going to take too much time too much money and too much effort to right this; and what's right is right, and what's wrong is wrong and we're the one.

Mr. President, we know where you live. We know your every fear. Assassination plots thicken. Strike forces are in place and we're going to get you. We're going to get you and fuck you up the ass with a pecker aids virus bigger than John Holmes. Mr. President, we know where you live. We know your every fear. Assassination plots thicken. Strike forces are in place and we're going to get you. We look like everyone and we are everywhere and like a rat running across the road looking for a hole we're going to find your hole and fuck it up with a pecker aids virus bigger than John Holmes.

after we roll you in thick garbage juice - the kind that sloshes out the backend of trash pick-up trucks when they take corners.

This is an idea whose time has come like so many men have come before. No one knows about the relationship between god and me.

We like flowers, rocks, bunnies, families, dinner parties, nice clothes, the outdoors, cars, tv, shopping, books, movies, records, live concerts, dogs, cats, grandparents, government, pornography, love, sex.

sex is great

it's '86

This is not a symbolic gesture; we are the living sign.

Wet or dry

we're not holding back

and when the shit hits the fan —

muck.

The tables are turned

When you walk without eating

in the cell of your heart

a horrible, horrible dream,

your precious seed a wine factory

pussy foot

deep in debt

cumulative effect

real shock busters

no salt added

plastic surgeon

# THE CODE OF THE SENTIMENTS

## from The Babylonian Empire

by Gary Indiana

. . . . Many small, malignantly cheerful, powerfully smelly boys with shoeshine kits surround him the minute he sits down in Taksim Square. He shows them he's wearing sneakers but the kids plant themselves in front of his bench anyway, squatting on their wooden boxes, jabbering the English words they know. The bench faces the sunken heart of the square, an expanse of uninflected poured cement lined with slatted tubs full of geraniums. The Turks, Jesse thinks, are overly appreciative of cement and its aesthetic uses.

A boy insists on selling him a glass of tea. He drinks it, noticing the glass's been used many times without being washed.

A tall youth in cheap Western clothes approaches, beaming the broad smile of a born hustler. He sits down near Jesse and claps him on the back. He has pale, thick lips, a fleshy nose, scads of curly auburn hair. Jesse eyes him warily. The boy has an eerie resemblance to Tony Bravo, a porn star whose career Jesse has followed in various magazines and videos.

"I am Shamir," the boy announces.

"I am Jesse," Jesse mimics, wasting sarcasm. Shamir's smile lengthens. His teeth are not as bad as the waiter's from the night before, but they are not good.

Shamir has arrived with a friend his own age, who hovers interestedly at a discreet remove. People stroll back and forth in the shade of the elms. Shamir shouts something at a group of men who look at them appraisingly as they pass.

"I don't like these people looking at you," Shamir explains. "I don't like them looking when I talk with you."

"Uh huh."

"All people look at you. Why they look at you?"

"Because I'm a blond," Jesse says.

Shamir emits a snorty laugh.

"I know America," he says, "In America I know San Francisco, Palo Alto. You know Palo Alto?"

"Not really," Jesse says.

"Now work at American Army base. But soon go to Germany. Not from Istanbul. Shamir from Adama. Adama people good people. Not like Istanbul people. Here the people, they lie, they rob. My father worry about Shamir all alone in Istanbul. Thinks, Shamir, maybe he's killed, maybe he's dead."

"Maybe you should give him a call," Jesse suggests, thinking that Shamir is very pretty but also very boring.

"I know, right now, you think: is Shamir a good man? Is he bad man? You don't know. Same for me. I look at you, think, are you good, are you bad? If I go with you, do you hurt me? And you too, thinking, if I go with Shamir, maybe he hurts me."

Shamir has brown saucer eyes that don't miss anything. Jesse feels his gaze

and grows uncomfortably conscious of his own face arranging itself into various expressions. He wills himself to relax. He doesn't want to go through with anything but he wants Shamir to want him.

"I tell you Shamir is a good man. Like you very much. Maybe like you too much. Where is your hotel?"

Jesse tells him. Shamir's eyes sparkle. Jesse knows the look.

"Maybe," Shamir says, "you take me to Pera Palas."

Jesse looks into space. The numb geometry of the cement.

"But," Shamir adds, "maybe is big problem for me. Because I am Turk. Maybe we go in bar, drink, you go to room. I follow, they see, they come, they say, 'leave now, you are Turk.'"

"I think they probably would," Jesse says. He considers that one of the virtues of the Pera Palas is that it has its own hustlers in-house.

"Where I stay," Shamir continues, "not so nice hotel. But man at desk from Adama. His house in Adama, close by my house, I know him, you come there, is no problem. Pay for room, maybe you sleep, maybe I come in your room, maybe you come in my room. No problem. I like you, no problem. Drink, no problem. Friend, no problem. Sex, no problem."

Jesse doesn't understand why people all over the world have such a thing about saying "no problem." He does not think there would be no problem with the scenario Shamir is describing.

Shamir waves away his hovering friend. Jesse walks with him along the wide street where the airline offices are. At a cafe, Shamir drinks a beer and quickly orders another while Jesse sips from a glass of mineral water. In the streaked sunlight flowing through the fringe of the Campari parasol, Shamir's beauty seems almost awesome. His gestures have an overdrawn masculine crudeness that goes with his cheap clothes and discolored teeth. This kid will die young, Jesse thinks. He senses that other people in the cafe have taken note of them. In Istanbul, there could be no reasons besides sex or drugs for two such people to be drinking together. Jesse suddenly feels the pathos of this in a new way.

He doesn't think Shamir will be violent. But he has already calculated the wad of money in Jesse's wallet, and maybe it will be a point of pride for Shamir to get all of it. Jesse feels no particular pride in the matter, but the imprudence of blowing \$200 on a fuck in Turkey seems like the beginning of some fatal indifference to reality.

When they resume walking, Jesse decides to ditch the boy when they get near the Pera Palas. Shamir purposefully turns up a side street. Jesse remains at the corner, waiting for him to disappear. Shamir turns, then comes back for him.

They reach a scungy doorway in a small alley. It's pretty much the way Jesse pictured it. He goes in behind Shamir, wondering if he'll ever come out again.

He sits in a filthy sitting room while Shamir haggles with the desk clerk. They do not give the impression of being old neighbors from Adama. One wall of the room is papered with a peeling photomural of an autumnal forest

in New England. In front of it an ancient black and white television with an elaborately padlocked metal grille clamped over the picture tube stares at nothing. The haggling ceases and Jesse has to give the desk clerk 20,000 lira. Shamir follows him up four flights of twisted stairs, across crackling fluorescent halls that smell of urine and old farts.

The room contains a narrow cot and two sheets and a window that stares into a dark hovel where someone is hanging out laundry. Shamir finds a blanket under the cot and drapes it across the window. He moves to lock the door. Jesse stops him.

"I don't want the door locked."

"No, why, someone can come in."

"Look, I'm going to be nervous if that door is locked."

Shamir gives up on locking the door and unbuttons his shirt. He throws it on the floor, kicks off his shoes, drops his pants. His cock is already hard. He moves again to the door.

"No, I said."

"Please," Shamir turns the lock.

Now, Jesse thinks, out comes the knife.

Shamir keeps his torn athletic socks on. Jesse slips out of his clothes. Shamir's thinner than he imagined. Jesse kisses his balls and licks him up and down, from his asshole to the tip of his penis. Shamir's asshole doesn't smell. After a while Shamir fucks him, with Jesse's legs pressed against his narrow chest. Shamir fucks in long, emphatic strokes. He comes after about five minutes. He kisses Jesse's face and embraces him. They're sweating like pigs. Shamir stands up and snaps his shirt in the air, making a breeze to dry Jesse off.

Jesse pays him 80,000 lira. Shamir asks for 40,000 more and 20,000 additional for the desk clerk. Jesse doesn't know what kind of trouble Shamir would think to cause, though he seems pretty benign at the moment. Jesse gives him the money.

In the street Shamir kisses him and tells him to watch out for strangers on his way back to the Pera Palas. He asks him to meet him in Taksim at 9 p.m. Jesse says he will. Shamir looks at him skeptically. Jesse asks if they can fuck again at Shamir's hotel. Shamir assures him that this is possible. Jesse promises he'll be in Taksim Square between 9 and 9:30. They will never see each other again. In a few minutes Shamir will meet his friend, and together they will plan Jesse's murder. At the hour when he's supposed to be murdered, Jesse will be stroking the balls of the wine steward at the Pera Palas. He will not be thinking of this as a victory for colonialism, but as a pragmatic approach to the code of sentiments and its actual value. The wine steward will come prematurely and take all of Jesse's cigarettes.

# CHERRY

by Kevin Killian

What happened to that man that he became a house? Squashed under the rafters, my feet keep pounding. I think his name's Gil. His cock feels the approximate size and shape of a dart, and he keeps sticking it in, humping his hips like a jackhammer or jackrabbit; and I'm his dartboard, made out of cork. Except cork doesn't ache, or does it, and this little steel dart in and out my ass is killing me. I try to let out a scream. My mouth is stuffed with a red bandanna. Midnight on a slick couch with a Puerto Rican bully. "Well," I think to myself to console myself, "he's such a jackrabbit maybe he'll come soon. I would in his shoes." Then I think maybe he'll burst a blood vessel, my vessel, with that hypodermic needle or dart he calls his bate para jugar baseball and I wonder what I've gotten myself into.

\* \* \* \*

Once I watched as Harry sat opposite in a chair across the room, his pants down, wrapping a long limp rose around his — around his — "Look out for thorns," I said.

"Pretty?"

"Who taught you," I asked, "flower arranging?"

"Taught me all by myself," Harry said, grinning. He tied the rose then lifted his hands above his head and clasped them like a champion fighter. "Look, no hands!" The flower bobbed between his legs; his sparse white blond pubic hair rustled, enthreaded with the greenish-brown of the rose's stem. "Crown of thorns," Harry said with a wink, beginning to whistle a hymn popular on the radio: Everything is Beautiful, in its Own Way. "Feel it, Kevin. Tower of ivory."

I wouldn't.

"Your loss. Now watch." He lowered his hands and pressed them into the encircled rose. "Tighter."

"No, don't, no don't."

"Tighter!"

One drop of blood, and a flood of tears, then he fell on the floor, pretending a deep wound, but laughing and ejaculating at the same time. I went to the window and called out, "He's gone loco this time. He's singing 'Everything is Beautiful' and he knows I hate that song." And presently we did more tricks with flowers and weeds and lay on the rug like Adam and Eve in the first bower of bliss. Occasionally one or the other of us would peel the thick peel off an orange and feed the other its sweet pulp. In the sultry summer heat of Long Island, a junky haze sat upon us. On one wall was pinned a large poster of Raquel Welch in a swimsuit in a blue shower. She smiled at the camera and her silver body sweated hot water. We loved Raquel; who doesn't?

\* \* \* \*

In St. Louis the vast cement arches reminded me I hadn't stopped at a single McDonald's in days.

The guy in the back seat was still sleeping . An unruly lock of red hair dangled over the scar on his forehead. "Like Cain," I thought. One hand nestled his crotch, but the hand was so light it couldn't have weighed more than a pound, and any time I wanted to I could have taken that hand and pinned it to the floor, like Nabokov pinning a butterfly in a glass shadowbox. Motel life wasn't disagreeable to me, no more than to Humbert Humbert and Lolita. So long as I stuck to Howard Johnson's I could take comfort from the jolly sameness of American life — only the faces changed, and sometimes the accents, like this one, in the blue leather back seat — the mouth that opened doorways on several impoverished Southern counties and backwater towns you-all. A few miles later I saw a McDonald's — red and gold as the Queen's embroidery. I wasn't impressed by the Mississippi, smudgy, rolling, futilely dim and wide — unless fright counts as a kind of impression. Crossing bridges always throws me into a panic, and this was one long motherfucking bridge for sure! Good thing I was full from my hearty burger lunch.

\* \* \* \*

Any voice but his, any mouth but his, that  
baby sister of his, when we hung up the phone  
I was gritting my teeth, everyone who  
counted said so, asked me why, why, "Why  
all the tears, why the strain on your  
lovely chin and that big big meat hammer?"

Onomatopoeia gave him his name so  
correctly, it sounds like the noise you  
'make when you can't come, you're too  
drunk or someone has sawn  
off your dick, whereas KEVIN KILLIAN  
believes in itself, there's a ring in it  
rounder than the moon over Upper  
Fifth Avenue, well actually no.

Up top the push of the line began like  
stuffing a baby in my little carpetbag.  
I tried to bear it. A baby grows and grows  
and Hello Big Man —

Trying to creep on my hands and knees  
wobbly as a dish of tea, lemon in it  
to get at his tartness,  
only a victim of his loss of love

When he ate through my ass I felt  
mushrooms grown up giant and monstrous  
into his cheeks, sitting on pizza.

Outside New York and Italy the opera  
Charles VII poured his lurid art  
litany torrent, death death, all the  
tenors laughing, and me creeping, down  
to the ivy that covered his long white  
pendulous body, a thing of brass, of  
him a baby, half sunsuit, half saliva.  
Baby Auden with a thing about Night.

I blinked and over the interesting sky  
nothing but the news sallying forth  
thin as ribbons, curling, squeamish, blue  
and blonde as the boy in town  
saying a few words but not talking:  
"Influence counts for something  
in this sorry old world, it's thin and poor,  
but like the curds and whey of the  
cunt it gives, it gives, it gives."

\*\*\*\*

When we'd met he'd said, "My name's Carey, I want fun with a kid." He smiled sheepishly, as if in on a joke, but not a big smile. Soon it became clear, soon as he dived in, that he did not want fun with a kid, I only wondered if I was that kid. In his car he took off his coat with the portentousness of Jack the Ripper, and had sex with me, but all the time he kept yapping the most outlandish lines I've ever heard, offscreen or on:

Words of love. Words of adventure. But mostly these stories about the ordinary days and nights of his oldest son — Nicky. "I'm me," I thought. "Stop talking about Nicky and pay some attention." In shadow his face was a moving muscle of fat. I couldn't believe a thing he said; his hands pulled at his cock like they wanted to throw it out the window. Finally from out of it came this enormous spurt of come, dappled in moonlight green, yellow, lacy, just when he was telling me about Nicky's hobbies. This I found offputting, but in another corner of my mind I recognized a fellow traveller, another who knew the moves but lacked conviction or intensity. The car door creaked open like a mausoleum, our two bodies slithering to the ground. He swung me around in his huge arms, and threw me onto a patch of weeds. "And so I told him, get a haircut," he said, "but sure enough next day rolled round, no haircut, I dragged his ass over to the Singer machine and chopped his damn hair into the needle." He went down on me, gently, and with my cock in his mouth kept talking, barely decipherable words I think, yes, probably, this was the first time language had ever been used on me quite so



intimately. The sensations varied. Fricatives tended to scrape the straight underside vein; sibilants were sucky, babyish, lisp blowjob; but his long vowels and his aspirants thrilled me. So I got to dislike the word "Nicky" right away, and if his son's name had been "Hugo" who knows? maybe we'd still be together . . . .

\* \* \* \*

I was in New York having an awful kind of sex on the night of the Stonewall riots in 1969. I was seventeen, that part was OK, it was only that I was made to feel so uncomfortable. All night long these muggy fucked-up white fogs rolled up to the window pressing in, looking in, as if to signal that from now on everything was to be first examined, then analyzed. I didn't hear any police sirens or drag queens crying, only the familiar Manhattan rumble of ironwork and street noise. The face on the pillow didn't belong to me, it squirmed and averted its eyes no matter how steady my stare, how intimate or abusive my words. I take this face as the model of the love that resists, yet endures, everything that can be put to it: all trials, sorrows, all caresses. In the morning it rises and in the summer sunlight gets splashed with lukewarm water over a kitchen sink, in front of a mirror. It floats out of the apartment to be confronted by the headlines, black as the dark glasses through which it scans the news. We took a Lexington bus from East End Avenue and 83rd, then hiked over to what we still called "Greenwich" Village. I was really into Italian ice then, I remember: the man I was with for example. We stared at the controversial site amid a big crowd, that grew bigger by the minute. Where had all these faces come from? Out of little bedrooms, down from uptown, off of these perfectly white pillows and into the open air. And all these sunglasses! Like a crowd on the beach — witnesses of some Jaws-type attack.

So if I'd conceived a baby that night it would now be the age I was then, but born and bred under a different condition and I do not know if we'd get along. We would need someone to mediate between generations. If the old only could! If the young only knew! If I shut my eyes to try to call up that face, substituting the blackness of memory for the shades we wore, to call it up as though it were a number, I don't get much of a response. To him I said, "You're old enough to be my father," and that seemed to please, like a token of reification too long denied, a tongue too twisted. "I'm pretty happy," Carey said, admitting to something very like a crime. "Then treat me right," I said. "Let's go back to your apartment. I have to go to summer school tomorrow."

"Not after this," he said, sweeping his hand. "Never, never, never."

But oh yes, I sure did.

# THE BIG CIRCUS

by Boyd McDonald

The David Nelson story is largely unprintable, not because of anything David has done but because of what men would like to do with him. Fortunately, there is no need to tell the story in words; it is pretty much contained in stills and glossies of David. Stills from *The Big Circus* (1959), in which he wore white trapeze tights, are especially articulate; I don't think I have to list the various parts of that body that men would like to "eat," as I believe they call it.

I always depend upon the art director and editor to run photographs that supply graphic evidence for my sermonettes; I especially need them now to tell my story in a glossy, for the exact details of the lust David inspires are best left in the bedroom (or if you prefer, as I do, in the buses, alleys, offices, cars, trucks, theatre balconies, and public terlets). I am not privy to advance knowledge of what glossies run with my articles and I was shocked — but pleasantly — to see in my study of Richard Widmark that the art director and editor had actually added a vital new concept by running a still of Widmark with his thighs spread and his left hand resting on his succulent groin. The photograph revealed an inspiring quality in Widmark's nature that I had not even dared, in my text, to suggest (or in my mind, to hope). A man's hand resting on his bulge is eloquent body language which says that he enjoys his meat and lets others enjoy it too; with that slight but overpoweringly obscene gesture, a man suddenly gives the shocking signal that his meat, up to then merely an impossible dream, is in reality available. (I mean of course men generally, not Widmark specifically.)

Even if he had made no other pictures than *The Big Circus*, David Nelson would still rank as one of Hollywood's premier suck objects. On or off the trapeze, his body composes a variety of images for which the word "historic" would not be an exaggeration, and when, on rare occasions, he turns his butt to the camera, the white fabric clinging ecstatically to his crack can only draw gasps from men who have an aesthetic sense (for it is the kind of butt they like to wallow in like pigs, the dirty things). At gatherings of serious *cineastes*, speculation sooner or later turns to David Nelson's asshole - his "vital centre," in Arthur Schlesinger's phrase. (Schlesinger did do some picture reviews, but he used the phrase to describe centrist political goals rather than David's asshole.) In the absence of any published data — David married twice, but if either of his wives had any special interest in or knowledge of his asshole, she has not written of it — the only thing film scholars can do is extrapolate from information visible on his face, mainly his eyebrow hairs and pink lips. Most would conclude, I think, that his hole, and the hairs which formed its ornamental frame, were among the finest in the film capital. By contrast, the heavy black brows of Brooke Shields and Matt Dillon threaten the possibility that these two newer players are, literally, bushy-tailed.

Simply by giving men the right kind of look with his jewel-like eyes — eyes

of the sort the lyricist probably had in mind when he wrote:

Jeepers, creepers,  
Where'd you get those peepers?  
Jeepers, creepers,  
Where'd you get those eyes?

David could, had he wanted, have spent his life being licked. But such a routine would soon lead to skin irritations on various parts of his body, and instead of thus satisfying mere thousands of men utterly, he chose to satisfy millions of them partially by appearing for over a decade on TV with his parents, Ozzie 'n Harriet, and his brother Eric (commonly known as Ricky), and by making at least five pictures, including *Day of the Outlaw*, which sounds especially worthwhile; *The Remarkable Mr. Pennypacker*, whose star, Clifton Webb, possibly gave his evaluation of David's thighs in correspondence with Noel Coward or someone similar; *30*; and *Peyton Place*, in which, David said in a 1957 interview at Fox while clad in blue jeans, loafers and an "untucked" shirt, he is "red-blooded and all-American" and "the only normal character in the picture."

He "wondered if girls went out with him only because he was famous." He would have no such worry had he "gone out" with boys, who not only would not want publicity but would actually have wanted to keep it secret since, in all likelihood, their sole interest in "going" with him would be to play with his peter, nuts, and, in some cases, his asshole. I don't have to tell you how nasty boys are. David played football at U.S.C., sired two sons, who are in all probability embarrassingly handsome, and indulged in one of the two main California vulgarities, driving a Porsche, but not, so far as is known, in the other one, cocaine. In 1974 Lamparski's *Whatever Became of...?* quoted David as saying that "life really began" for him and his wife "when we accepted Jesus Christ as our Saviour;" the following year he accepted a new wife, according to a cutting from *Variety* in his file at the Lincoln Center Library.

In white tights in *The Big Circus*, seen at 3 p.m., April 14, 1984, on Channel 5, David's body is more starkly erotic than one that is "stark naked." The dazzling white of his costume erases all human imperfections and distractions, such as body hairs, blemishes, scars, pores, and so on, and purifies and idealizes his body while still displaying its exact form. A noticeable percentage of the male population, perhaps around 35 percent, would probably like to examine David's body under any circumstances, including nudity. But even the middle class can regard David's groin and butt, when wrapped tightly in pure white, as being in good taste, and he was, moreover, an authentic athlete, having trained and performed with a couple of trapeze artists who had the fascinating names of Del and Babs. So that he was eligible for the admirations of men who normally cannot permit themselves to worship the male body except under the guise of sports lovers, a phrase which is breathtakingly apt. *In toto*, adding up David's honest sexual fans, the middle class (who dare admire him in white tights), and the sports lovers

(who can pretend, perhaps even believe, that it is his athletic skill they like), perhaps as much as 80 percent of the male population, would be interested in *The Big Circus*. His body thus was potentially one of the most valuable properties in Hollywood, yet it was scarcely used cinematically or, for all I know, sexually. If there were ever an actor ideally suited for such poses as sitting back in his jock strap with one leg over the arm of a chair, it was David Nelson. This is the sort of image men like to crawl and grovel for. But *The Big Circus*, made when he was about 23 years old, is the only picture which displayed his body and even in this picture his body is seen only fleetingly until the climax. Then it is seen in all its glory in a chase sequence as David climbs up the trapeze rigging and walks the tightrope; even his shadow moving against the circus tent is awesome.

Characteristically, the *Times* schedule ignored David's tempting body and did not even include his name in its listing; hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers who have no other source of information than the *Times* were thus unaware of the opportunity to see perhaps the greatest exhibition of a perfect male body in action ever recorded on film. The plot-crazy *Times* TV schedule writer complained that *The Big Circus* has "every big-top cliché invented." Any hack writer can construct a plot, but, to paraphrase the renowned hack poet, Joyce Kilmer, only God can make a butt. A reviewer who is blind to such beauty and complains of "cliches" would ask for franks 'n beans in a Chinese restaurant.

Comprehensive though the images of David's white-clad body may be, they only arouse questions — questions which someone on the crew of *The Big Circus* could answer, and I hope will answer in a Letter to the Editor. Did David have his own private dressing room for this picture? When he changed into his circus tights, where did he leave his street clothes? Did he wear Jockey shorts? Where did he toss his shorts when he pulled them off? Were they ever stolen from his dressing room? Did he bring his own trapeze costumes from his act with the adorable Del and Babs, or did the studio supply them? Did the wardrobe department do fittings and alterations on his tights? Did he wear anything under his tights to, as it were, "catch the drip?" Did he wear anything to hold back his dick and nuts, which did not form a satisfying bulge in his costume, or was he simply, like so many men, not well hung? Where did he toss his tights after a day's shooting? Were they picked up by the studio laundry? Did collectors ever steal, or try to buy, his used tights? If David owned them himself and took them home with him, did he launder them himself? Did he examine them before laundering them? If so, in what sense? Where did he buy them? Where did he try them on? What did he think of his appearance in the mirror? Did he get a hard-on while dressing or undressing? Did his dick leak or drip when he thought of romance? Did anyone in the crew whistle when he walked onto the set in his tights? How, in such a complex costume, did he go about taking a leak, or taking a shit, during the day's shooting? Did anyone from the Fox wardrobe department ever sell his used tights? Laundered or unlaundered? I assume the wardrobe people were hip enough to know that the tights would be worth a goodly sum unlaundered.

# TWILIGHT OF THE GODS

by Matias Viegner

It is a little known fact that Rock Hudson, Roy Cohn and Michel Foucault met and became acquainted in the waiting room of the American Hospital in Paris in 1984. Each of them knew the other was dying, and it was a time for them to settle their scores with each other. They had to answer the big questions. Rock had loved Foucault for many years but he could never get close to him. Since the late fifties, Roy had chased Rock, but to no avail. In the twilight of their lives, they shared the same clinic and came to a profound understanding.

Roy was staying at the Hotel Georges V off the Champs Elysée and Rock had an apartment that he bought early in the sixties in Saint Germain des Pres. No one knew where Foucault lived. While the other two drove up in limousines, no one could tell how Foucault came and went. The nurses said he arrived in battered Renaults and the doctors thought the drivers looked like American graduate students.

At their first meeting, Roy did not know who Foucault was. They were stretched out on leather chairs in the clinic.

"Who are you?" Roy said. "I've seen you before. I've seen your picture."

Foucault was a little dizzy. He had just received a strong antibiotic injection. "I?" he muttered, "I am the archeology of knowledge."

"Hmpf. Do you know who I am? Do you?"

"Y-y-yes," Foucault said slowly.

"You do?"

"My American as-assistants told me."

"What did they say?" Roy said, shaking his arm to keep him from falling asleep. Roy Cohn was an impatient man. "Tell me what they said."

Foucault moaned. "You are power and I am knowledge," he said, shutting his eyes. He was completely bald. He wore a big leather jacket full of metal studs and his head kept rocking as though he were chewing on something. The napkin in his lap fell to the floor; Roy Cohn hesitated, then picked it up and tucked it back into place.

Foucault, Cohn and Hudson were all receiving extensive injections of the potent HPA-23, manufactured from Swiss mountain goats. Being that the injections were expensive and privately developed, the French were distrustful. They wanted everything paid in advance. It seems the hospital had been left many unpaid bills by the last two year's worth of AIDS patients. Only Roy had trouble paying his bills, and the French doctors paced the halls outside his room. Rock had a lot of money, but he worried about Foucault, who had holes in his shoes.

"How do you pay your bills?" Rock asked.

"I don't," said Foucault. "The University of California does. I've been under contract for years."

"They own you," Rock said. "Your intellect."

"No, my body! It's like MGM."

Rock shuddered. There was a rattle at the glass partition to the clinic, where several spectators gathered to look at them. They pressed their faces to the glass and watched Foucault and Rock Hudson, who turned away.

"Oh Michel," Rock said. "Men have tried to own me for years. I understand."

"No, no. I like it. They take care of me. They buy me clothes. They tell me what to read and where to eat. I can devote my life to my work."

Rock got very pensive. A ringlet of dark hair fell on his forehead. "I could take care of you," he said gently. "If only you would let me." Foucault said nothing. The noise of the crowd outside the partition was getting louder. A nurse came in and said, "Monsieur Foucault, it is you they want." Rock looked up. "We so rarely get to be alone," he said. Foucault sighed. He sat in his seat and the nurse looked impatiently at him. "Go to them," Rock said. "The people need you."

The biggest crowds that showed up were always for Rock Hudson or Foucault. Sometimes they couldn't tell their fans apart. The people who lined up to see Foucault were all Americans. The French never knew who Foucault was, but they instantly recognized Rock Hudson. Many of them recognized Rock because they thought he was once the partner of Jerry Lewis, whom they considered the greatest genius of the century.

No one showed up to see Roy Cohn. A messenger came by to give him a notice about his suspension from the New York State Bar. He received telegrams about the lawsuits his former clients were bringing against him and about the taxes the government wanted from him. Roy was a famous man. A camera crew arrived to interview him about the days of the McCarthy trials. "Leftists," the nurses whispered, "radicals!" The reporters heard Cohn was dying and they wanted the last story. Seeing that he couldn't run fast, they cornered him in the halls with their cameras. But they didn't get a word of his on tape. Roy Cohn was used to dodging people. In America, New Yorkers often tried to spit on him from their fire escapes.

Despite all the bad news, Roy was tranquil. He gazed dotingly at Rock from his armchair. Both Roy and Foucault were shrinking. Roy Cohn slouched in his chair with his legs dangling. He gazed at Rock, who gazed at Foucault. Rock was the only one who kept his hair and did not shrink. Roy sat in his chair looking like the balding Picasso.

All of Roy's assets were frozen by the Supreme Court. When the French found out, they tried to lock him out of the clinic. He stood forlorn outside the glass doors, pressed in front of the people who came to watch them that day. Roy mouthed "help me" through the glass. Rock looked at him. "Roy shouldn't wear those tank tops," he thought to himself.

"What's the commotion?" Foucault asked. He couldn't see well that morning because the injections had been particularly strong and he had wandered into a corridor of American students who flashed cameras in his face.

Pressed to the glass by the crowd, Roy began to tilt. Soon he was diagonal

against the glass, in his red tank top.

Rock tried to confer with Foucault, but the philosopher was too preoccupied. The doctors passed by to make sure Roy was still locked out. Finally Rock agreed to cover Roy's bills. The French brought the documents to be signed and Roy came back inside, quivering with gratitude.

"Forget it," Rock said. "Just leave me alone, if you know what I mean." He wanted to be alone with Foucault.

For many years, Rock had studied Ikebana, Japanese flower arranging. He believed it was the purest path to knowledge. Now he was not sure. He felt very insecure about having abandoned German phenomenology, but Foucault reassured him. There was only Nietzsche, Foucault said.

"Of course, Nietzsche!" Rock said. "Tell me about Nietzsche."

Foucault began to talk. Roy listened from across the room but did not intrude. Foucault reviewed The Will to Power, but his attention started drifting. He asked Rock if he was at Elizabeth Taylor's party the night Montgomery Clift had his accident. Rock answered Foucault's questions and tried to prompt him back to Nietzsche. Foucault wanted to know about James Dean. He said he had spent many years thinking about Dean's accident and he was never really satisfied with the findings.

"It was always hard. . . to get answers from Foucault," Rock said in his last journal. "Like all the French, he thought Jerry [Lewis] was a genius. . . destroyed by the Hollywood machine. I labored many hours to convince him otherwise."

It was also hard to get Foucault's attention because there were American graduate students around every corner. They sat on the polished floor of the clinic and wrote down everything he said. Rock began to bribe the students to leave them alone. He gave them word processors. He offered them money to study at Irvine with Derrida. Although Foucault claimed to be indifferent to all the attention, he began to notice the crowds dwindling. "Don't go back to those Structuralists," he cautioned the graduate students. "They'll tell you black is black and white is white. They'll fool you with bargains."

Roy was miserable that Rock wasn't interested in him. He had chased Rock since a party at Peggy Guggenheim's in 1959. Rock was chasing after the middle-aged Sartre, who was more interested in his Algerian houseboy. Rock wore a black turtleneck and kept saying "daddy-o" and "bad faith, man." Tab Hunter wanted Sartre too, but the houseboy's grip on his philosopher was unshakable.

At the clinic, Roy looked at himself in the mirror. He called a nurse. "I look like the aging Sartre," he said, "don't I?" Marie-France had never heard of Sartre. "Yes," she said, "you look like him in all his late movies. Especially when you wear your top hat."

When Marie-France left the room, Roy took a hard look at himself. Roy Cohn realized he was going to die. Until now, he was the only one who had not come to terms with his mortality. He was the only one who still filed lawsuits, insulted nurses and drank cocktails. Now he saw that the students were glued to the glass window to watch him die. He saw the clerks writing

up the bills, the garbage men striking outside, and the cleaning ladies sterilizing the floor.

Recognizing that the power of knowledge was stronger than he was, Roy decided to join Rock at Foucault's feet. He pushed his armchair over to the other two. He was a small man and it took a long time. The other two eyed him suspiciously. Roy stood next to his chair and bowed deeply from the waist.

"OK," Rock said, "but no tank tops."

The world will never know exactly what the three of them talked about. All the graduate students with their notebooks were banished from the room. This was very hard for Foucault; he knew the students would carry his name through the world, but he let them go. "One must learn to care for one's own name," he said. Foucault began to pay more attention to Rock and Roy than he ever had.

For the last weeks, they hardly left the clinic. The nurses said their conversations centered on the meaning of love. It began by Roy's discussion of love, sex and truth in the 1950's, which turned into a love paean to Rock.

"Don't pull that," Rock said. "You treated me like meat. And you too," he said to Foucault, "act as though I'm insensate muscle tissue. Well I'm not. I have feelings, just like Roy. I get no respect. I want to be respected for my mind."

Marie-France came in with their tray of flavored protein shakes. She put them on the table and left without a word.

"What is respect?" Foucault said. "We speak of love without addressing our own needs as subjects. It is in this sense that we are all ill, all of humanity, and all of knowledge is merely an expensive clinic."

Rock was speechless. He bent over to look under his chair. He pulled out his journal. "All of knowledge is an expensive clinic," he wrote.

"Exactly so," Roy Cohn said, "But if we are the illness, what is the cure?"

All of them were struck silent. There was nothing to say. "Who are we, what are we now and what have we been?" Rock asked in his journal. "Our construction as subjects. . . teeters daily on the balance of truth, power and language. Roy's gift is his recognition of the necessity of the 'thing-in-itself,' the language of the body, and of 'sexual' love. Michel? Ah, Michel ma belle. . . Soon I shall be able to call him 'mon philosophe.'"

Roy started to hum "Just One Kiss." Foucault watched him curiously, the fluorescent light shining off his bald head.

"Linda Evans," Foucault said, "is all right?"

"Yes, fine," said Rock.

"I was worried. All the newspapers. . ."

"I know," said Rock, "she's fine. I only kissed her once. Here, she sent me this copy of Rilke."

"Oh," Foucault said. "In German, too."

"I loved Rilke when I was young," Roy said.

"Me too," Rock said. "I wanted to sleep with him. Why have I always been attracted to poets and philosophers? I always hoped I'd meet Rilke at a party."



"He was dead before you were born," Foucault said.

Rock blushed and sank slowly down in his chair. Foucault put his hand on top of the actor's. "I did not mean to embarrass you," Foucault said softly. He began tracing his finger on the skin, connecting the purple dots on Rock's arm. Rock started to tremble. "No one ever touches me anymore," he whispered. Michel traced a star on Rock's forearm. He placed his hand on Rock's hand. "I'm so scared," Rock said. "Oh Rock," Roy said. He put his hand on Foucault's, so there were three hands stacked together.

"I don't want to die," Rock said.

Their eyes met, focused, left each other, slid around the room, and checked their hair. Foucault's gaze settled on the pores of Roy's nose. There were no pores on Rock's nose.

"To want," said Foucault, "to be able to desire, presupposes a self who knows the own limits of his being."

"What?" Roy said. "What are you talking about?"

"I'm afraid to die too," Foucault said. "We all are."

"Our time is so short," Rock said.

"If it is," Roy said, "then why won't you SLEEP WITH ME?"

Rock's answer stuck in his throat. His eyes darted to Roy's orange tank top.

There was a rattle at the glass. It seemed that one of the spectators overheard them; he nodded his head vigorously. From far away, a man moaned out loud. One of the spectators had a printed sign that he was holding up to the glass. It said "Michel, Is God Dead?" Foucault smiled and shook his head. As if on cue, another American put up his sign. It said "What about the Shroud of Turin?"

That night, alone in bed, Rock couldn't sleep. He thought about Roy Cohn and the pathos in his voice. Rock wondered what Foucault would tell him to do. Roy did not inflame his desire. And yet, as Foucault said, we are now less controlled by repression than by stimulation. "Oh," Rock thought, "oh, oh, oh. I can't sleep. Is this what the French mean by a 'White Night?'" Rock began to think about Heidegger. The key moment in Rock's career had been the rejection of his seminal essay on Heidegger in the early fifties. It pitched him into his ridiculous affair with Montgomery Clift. Oh how Monty hated himself!

The evening nurse came in to take Rock's temperature. He pretended to be asleep, and the nurse left quickly. "Yes," Rock thought. "Yes, I will. Yes. I can no longer say no. I will follow the master's words. Yes I will, yes, yes, yes." On the next day, he planned to agree (while throwing a 'significant look' at Foucault), to sleep with Roy Cohn. A bedding that would rewrite history.

The last weeks of Roy, Michel and Rock were blissful. The three of them began to be inseparable. Foucault slept with Rock Hudson and Rock slept with Roy Cohn. Foucault and Roy Cohn felt no need to sleep with each other, but they became special friends. The nurses smiled when they saw them coming and when they saw them coming. People stopped flashing cameras in their faces. To the very end, they sat in adjoining leather armchairs, their faces radiant from the powerful goat injections streaming through their veins.

## VISUAL ARTISTS

### Nayland Blake

Born in New York

Received BFA from Bard College;

MFA from California Institute  
of the Arts

Resides in San Francisco

1. *Untitled (3 Black Boards)*, mixed media, 1988, 24" x 36" each
2. *Burnt Sade*, 1988, sculpture, 36" x 8" x 10"
3. *Don't Waste It*, 1987, engraved cup with chain, 4" x 4" x 4"
4. *After Veronica*, 1987, framed handkerchiefs, approximately 20" x 20"
5. *Untitled (Insulated Pornography)*, 1987, wax-coated books on a shelf, 12" x 14" x 5"

### David Bussel

Born in Plainfield, New Jersey

Received BFA from School of the Art  
Institute of Chicago

Resides in New York

1. *Untitled (Promiscuity)*, 1988, C-Print & Chartpak, 15" x 55"
2. *Untitled (Safe/Risky)*, 1988, Black & white photo and C-Prints, laminated foam core, 17" x 32 1/2"

### Arch Connelly

Born in Chicago

Received BFA from Southern Illinois  
University

Resides in New York

1. *Compass*, 1986, mixed media, 23" x 27"
2. *Formal Garden*, 1986, mixed media, 30" x 70"
3. *Magazine Cover*, 1986, mixed media, 23" x 31"

### Bruno Cuomo

Born in Alhambra, California

Received BFA from University of  
Redlands; MFA from Art Center  
School of Design

Resides in Alhambra

*Sleeping Beauty*, 1988, (5 pieces from the paperweight and jewelry series), resin with HIV+ blood and semen, sizes from 1" x 1" x 1" to 3" x 4" x 5"

### John de Fazio

Born in Reading, Pennsylvania

Received BFA from Philadelphia  
College of Art; MFA from San  
Francisco Art Institute

Resides in New York

1. *Boy Venus*, 1985, painted ceramic, 30" x 18" x 10"
2. *Happy Hookah*, 1988, painted and glazed ceramic with nails and plastic tubes, 40" x 20" x 20"
3. *Shit For Brains*, 1988, painted ceramic and cast urethane on wood and linoleum base with artist's book, 24" x 24" x 36"

### Arnold Fern

Born in Brooklyn, New York

Received BFA from Cornell  
University

Resides in New York

*Desperate Heaven*, 1988, Oil  
Painting, 6' x 18'

### Mike Glass

Born in Los Angeles

Received BFA from California  
Institute of the Arts

Resides in West Hollywood

*Untitled*, 1988, 3 Ektacolor Prints,  
20" x 24"

**Doug Ischar**

Born in Honolulu, Hawaii  
 Received MFA from California  
 Institute of the Arts  
 Resides in San Francisco

*Household Misappropriation: Camouflage So Good One Is Shot At By Other Hunters*, 1988, C-Prints and Color Laser Copies, wall installation approximately 8' x 25'

**Larry Johnson**

Born in Long Beach, California  
 Resides in Los Angeles

1. *Untitled (The friends you keep and the books you read)*, 1988, color photographs, 11" x 14"
2. *Untitled (Fella)*, 1988, color photographs, 11" x 14"
3. *Untitled (5 buck word)*, 1988, color photographs, 11" x 14"

**Johnny Pixchure**

Born in Mobile, Alabama  
 Resides in Chicago

*Abstract Ass*, 1988, Silicone and Plaster Sculpture, 6" x 14" x 6"

**Carter Potter**

Born in Los Angeles  
 Received BFA from University of California at Los Angeles  
 Resides in Los Angeles

*Basic Plumbing*, 1986, installation, 2' x 8' x 8'

**Marc Romano**

Born in Danbury, Connecticut  
 Received BFA from the University of California at Santa Barbara; MFA from Art Center School of Design  
 Resides in Pasadena, California

Stucco work, 1988, Hydrocal, approximately 7" in diameter

**Michael Tidmus**

Born in Toronto, Canada  
 Educated at Kansas City Art Institute; Art Center School of Design; California State University at Long Beach  
 Resides in Los Angeles

*Health and Morality: A Desultory Discourse*, 1988, computer program

**Kevin Wolff**

Born in Rochester, New York  
 Received MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago  
 Resides in Chicago

1. *Hanged Man*, 1986, acrylic on canvas, 72" x 60"
2. *Man on a Stick*, 1987, acrylic on canvas, 72" x 60"

**PERFORMANCE ARTISTS****Hudson**

Born in New Haven, Connecticut  
 Received BA from South Connecticut State College, Philadelphia College of Art; MFA from the University of Cincinnati  
 Resides in New York

*The Back Way*, January 6, 1989, performance at LACE,

**Steve Lafreniere**

Born in New Orleans, Louisiana  
 Resides in Chicago

*The Back Way*, January 6, 1989, performance at LACE,

## VIDEO ARTISTS

### **Peter Christopherson of Coil**

Born and currently resides in London, England

*Tainted Love*, 1985, videotape, 7 minutes

### **Vaginal Davis (a.k.a. Kayle Hilliard) of The Afro Sisters**

Born in Los Angeles, California  
Received BA from California State University at Northridge  
Resides in West Hollywood

*That Fertile Feeling*, 1987, videotape, 7 minutes, © Amoeba Records 1987

### **Isaac Julien**

Born in London, England  
Received BFA from St. Martin's School of Art  
Resides in London, England

*This is NOT an AIDS Advertisement*, 1987, videotape, 10 minutes

### **Tom Kalin**

Born in Chicago, Illinois  
Received BFA from University of Illinois; MFA from School of the Art Institute of Chicago; attended Whitney Program  
Resides in New York

*They Are Lost to Vision Altogether*, 1988, videotape, 10 minutes

### **George Kuchar**

Born in New York  
Educated at the School of Art and Design  
Resides in San Francisco

*Video Album 5: The Thursday People*, 1987, videotape, 60 minutes

### **Stashu Kybartas**

Born in Scranton, Pennsylvania  
Received BFA from Carnegie Mellon University; MFA from School of the Art Institute of Chicago  
Resides in Chicago

*Danny*, 1987, videotape, 20 minutes

### **Marc Paradis**

Born in Montreal, Canada  
Educated at the National Theatre School and Quebec University  
Resides in Montreal, Canada

*Le Voyage de l'Ogre*, 1981, videotape, 24 minutes

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Born in Pasadena, California  
Resides in New York

### **John Greyson**

Born in Nelson, British Columbia  
Resides in Toronto, Canada and Los Angeles

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Born in Mexia, Texas  
Received BFA from University of Texas at Austin; MFA from California Institute of the Arts  
Resides in Los Angeles

### **Hudson**

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Born in Manchester, New Hampshire  
Resides in New York

### **Kevin Killian**

Born in Long Island, New York  
Received BA from Fordham University; MA from New York State University at Stony Brook  
Resides in San Francisco

**Boyd McDonald**  
Born in South Dakota  
Educated at Harvard University  
Resides in New York

**Matias Viegner**  
Born in Buenos Aires, Argentina  
Received BA from Columbia University;  
MA from University  
of California at Los Angeles;  
Ph.D. candidate at UCLA  
Resides in Los Angeles

## **BOOKSTORE EXHIBITION**

**Jack Shear**  
Born in Los Angeles  
Resides in New York  
*Calamus*, 1988, poster and mixed media  
photography

**CRIMES AGAINST NATURE**  
**READING AT BEYOND BAROQUE,**  
**VENICE, CA, JANUARY 20, 1989**

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Born in Landstuhn, Germany  
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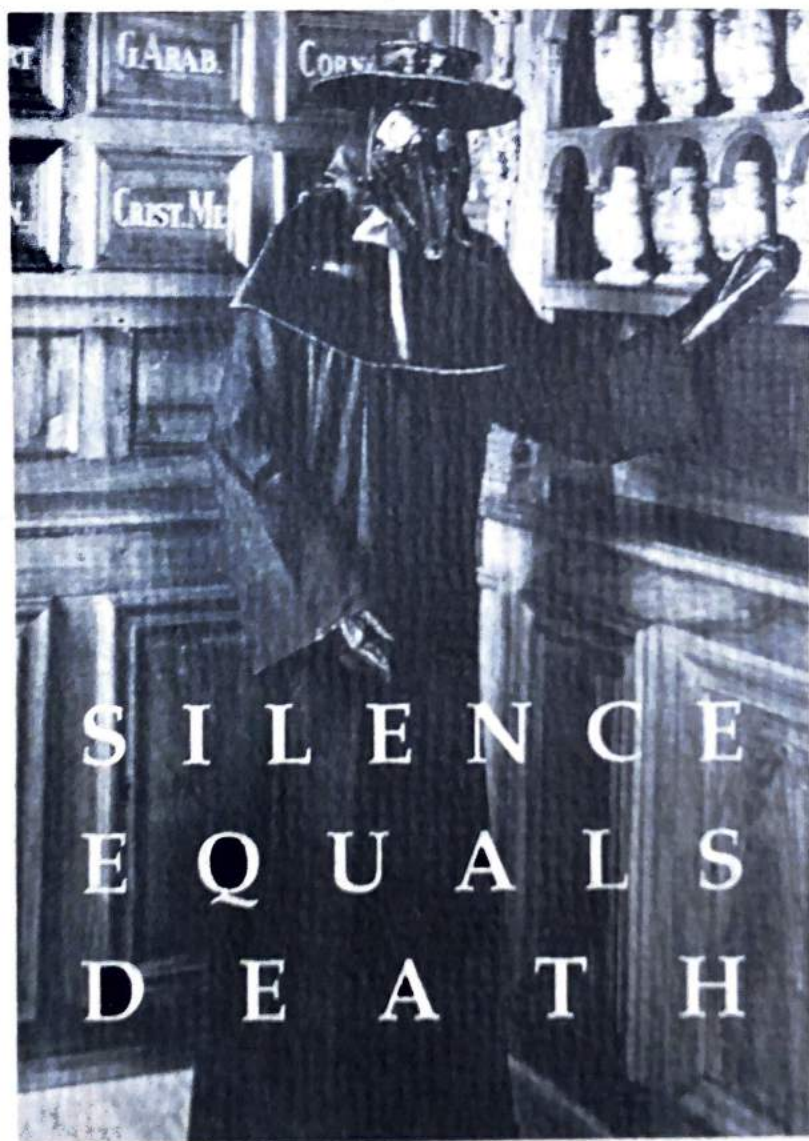
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