

- The Body Politic

differences between erotica and pornography. I think finally it just doesn't work. It's not what's *causing* the real problems. I think it's a result of the powerless looking at the most accessible thing and trying to change that. But the real structures - relationships between men and women - remain unchanged. I think it's that which contributes to men treating women in a violent way. Pornography and degrading pornography is simply a symptom of that.

I think there's a useful example in the early feminists attacking prostitution and making that a big issue, trying to change that, because they tried to get some laws changed and in some cases I think they succeeded - in England, anyway - and it really didn't change anything. This history would probably be useful in how social movements can be diverted into reactionary goals.

Do you think the gay movement is more organised now that it was in the 1960's and early 70's?

I think in some ways it is more organised, but it has changed a great deal. It was a very small, vanguard group of people in the early 70's who were quite militant in calling for change and demonstrating. It didn't necessarily have a large portion of the gay community behind it at the time. They're much more conscious of this now, and that may be a conservatising influence, but I think it under-

I think the gay movement should proceed on two levels - the political level which frames things in political terms that yes, sexuality is a political issue, and there are political strategies attached to that. Then there's a personal level where people have to deal with their co-workers, with their parents, and the movement has nothing to say to these, no advice to give on the personal level as all political movements are - Marxism says nothing about so many personal things and that's where you have to work things out yourselves.

That support system of parents who've discovered their sons or daughters are gay become many supporters of the movement themselves. I just talked to the mother of a gay activist here who's an extraordinary woman and come a long way in accepting her son and trying to understand gay people. She has reservations, but it's a struggle that she's had to participate in too. It's no longer something disconnected from one's past any more if you can be open with your family. That's the political *after* the personal.

With the gay community coming from all walks of life and the gay liberation movement beginning to reflect this diversity, isn't it going to be more difficult to organize? There are all kinds of different points of view the movement never saw fit to contend with before - like gay Christian groups.

Some people would say the movement is dead-ending - it's becoming so diverse. But it's the development of a community. We never had a community before. So we've developed a diversification of the community. There are organizations which are fairly conservative in their goals. There are a lot of gay Christian organizations and I think the early movement was very opposed to religion and Christianity. I think now it realizes that's a process that probably has to be gone through. We can't just say "forget it".

Business groups have also become more influential. There's a respectability move afoot in the U.S. and southern Canada where people would say, "We're alright. We're affluent, we have money, we have clout. All those crazy radicals and drag queens and bull dykes and so forth that gave us a bad name should be disregarded because they're not really part of us."

That kind of division is a dead end, but I don't think it's controlled the movement. It's just probably a natural evolutionary struggle within the gay community as it becomes more politically diverse. People were more silent - the conservative wing were more silent before and now they're more vocal and that struggle is probably good for us.

The gay movement is also becoming more international all the time. It was a North American phenomenon and most active in

the U.S., Canada, England and Australia - all the English-speaking countries I guess. But it has spread and become very active in the Third World too.

Gay people are involved in other progressive organizations, too, and I think that they've had a lot of troubles there. Left organizations - the sectarian left - have had a lot of trouble dealing with the gay liberation movement and a lot of people have left in disgust because they can't stand not being accepted. On the other hand, I think more and more people are comfortably open there dealing with other issues and perhaps a coalition of progressive gay people and other left groups working for social change is possible. That's where the future would be, I think. We can't do everything on our own - we're still a very small group.

There's an article in the book which I think may be useful - "Out in the Basque Country" by Tim McAskill - and he talks about how the movement there is not an independent movement as it has been here. It's really part of a larger progressive scene. The activists there are more accepted by the leftists than they have been here. I think that we'll see as each country develops a gay liberation movement that it will adapt to the social conditions in that country. The model which is used here will not be applicable. It's that kind of diversity that we'll see in the '80's.

FLAUNTING IT! in style

by Ken Burke

In high school JB suffered from a lot of taunting: sissy, queer, fairy, the usual. One night he was walking home from a friend's house. He was not yet operatively gay. Three men approached on the same side of the street - J felt a familiar unease - they said nothing to him. He awoke the next day in hospital with a broken nose, a badly bruised face, and deep lacerations from his own eyeglasses. The time lost remains a blank to him.

Michael Riordan, excerpt from "The mirror of violence," an article in *Flaunting It!*

When I first picked up *Flaunting It!* with its bold hot-pink and green cover, I thought to myself, "Jeez, I dunno what this's going to be like. It'll be really weird reading this gay stuff." Or somesuch genuine knee-jerk liberal voyeuristic attitude.

Well, *Flaunting It!*, an anthology of a decade of gay journalism from *The Body Politic*, is far from weird. Through its reprinting of articles on wide-ranging topics, I now understand a little more the normality of being gay in Canada.

How normal it is to fear assaults with baseball bats when walking alone at night.

How normal it is to succumb to the fears and persecution of others and masquerade as a "straight," even marrying and having children.

How normal it is to find hostile images of yourself in papers, films, and books everyday, with little or no true or positive images to counter them.

How normal it is to accept that your existence will never be understood or even tolerated by most people.

Not only is *Flaunting It!* not weird, it's also nothing less than a great read. Co-editors Stan Persky and Ed Jackson (see interview) have chosen articles of a quality which, for the most part, any paper in the country would be proud to have in its pages.

Ed Jackson referred to the writing as "the journalism of personal experience," and that's what the book's over 300 pages contain. This isn't "dear diary"-type narratives, or self-indulgent musings on the writer's inner thoughts. It means good, solid feature articles, usually containing the first person. Why? Because *The Body Politic* doesn't write about statistics, it writes of people. And the writers, being quite articulate and often having rela-

tionships and experiences similar to their subjects, have something to say as well.

If they write about themselves, it is never simply "about themselves," but rather about some issue or topic important among gays. These men and women are also more than the average journalist in an "objective" newspaper. They are among the activists and leaders of the gay community through their role in opening up discussion on "closeted" matters.

Jackson and Persky chose their subject matter well. The articles included in the anthology cover a broad spectrum of issues within the gay community - from bathhouse raids and legal rights, to the split between gay men and lesbians, to the images of gays presented in the straight media, to tricky and contentious issues such as S&M or pedophilia (man-boy or woman-girl love). The articles are also about the more supposedly mundane, yet no less important aspects of gay life - their relationships, social life, and work.

Throughout, there is no politically-correct line followed in the choice of articles. In fact, *Flaunting It!* often prints letters, editorials, and other features responding to and criticising initial articles. In this way, I felt I was being exposed to at least several points of view, if not all sides of an issue.

The writing itself at times has the brilliance to touch deeply into the reservoir of commonality between gay and straight. When it made me feel the urgency of a life constantly threatened with brutal violence, the distance between social myth and the real lives of people began to evaporate.

Another poignant article - "No Sorrow, no pity: the gay disabled" by Gerald Hannon - handled its topic with real beauty and compassion for a little-covered subject.

"Richard was a premature baby. Fifty years earlier he might have died at birth. But this was 1953, and little baby Richard was placed lovingly in an incubator of reputable American make. No one would know for many, many months, but some of the machines did not work very well, and babies across North America were quietly breathing an oxygen mixture so rich that their retinal tissue slowly burned away. "I was one of the lucky ones," Richard told me. "Some grew up with really horrible brain damage. I just grew up blind."

The book also includes a mini-history of important events in the movement from 1964 to 1982 entitled "Victories and defeats". Through the articles and history, I would imagine it near-impossible for all but the average narrow-minded bigot not to feel more of a sensitivity towards lesbians and gay men.

For gay people, both in and out of the closet, I think the book would be a vital addi-

tion to their bookshelves - especially for those so deep in the closet they wonder if their experiences are shared by anyone else on the planet. For either straight people or gay, though, this is an important book - one not to be passed up because of embarrassment or fear of "weirdness".

And it's as important for what it makes you say as what it says on the pages. That's an achievement.

Flaunting It!
A decade
of gay journalism
from
The Body Politic
An anthology
edited by Ed Jackson
and Stan Persky

