ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: BETWEEN F* WORDS: RURAL & GAY LIBERATIONIST REFRAINS IN THE SOUTHEAST, 1970-1981

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Dissertation directed by: Professor Christina Hanhardt, American Studies

Between F Words* is an affective history of how gay liberationism persisted through its intersections with back-to-the-land movements in the 1970s Southeast. In telling an affective history, I show how liberationism is best understood as more than a reasoned political choice; rather, it crucially involves specific ways of viewing and feeling in an increasingly globalized world. Specifically, its politics complemented critiques of a divisive system with lateral strategies for staying connected. By tracing gay liberationist networks from rural Ozark and Appalachian sites to cities like New Orleans and Atlanta, I prioritize a regional analytic which, unlike models predicated on the urban "gay ghetto," hinges on rural-urban connection. This project, then, sets gay liberation both within everyday life and in unexpected places as a way to imagine expanded LGBT political cultural maps. Employing analysis of oral history interviews, newly available

archival materials, and the print culture of *RFD* (a rural gay serial published in the Southeast from 1978-2009), *Between F* Words* is a description of the subject formations of Southeastern gay liberationist collectives who felt the word *gay* no longer represented their political cultures.

Using Felix Guattari's concept of the refrain, I read the words and images of those in the culture to characterize the orientational, emotional, psychic, and corporeal dimensions of improvised subjectivities like the faggot, sissie, gentle man, and Radical Faerie. At the same time, I show how these regional refrains emerged in contrast to similar West Coast ones. Their Southeastern networks were acutely aware of their proximity to the fomenting Moral Majority which would become a conservative cornerstone of the Reagan-era national political economy. Galvanized by the racism, sexism, and homophobia at the heart of the conservative political culture which they saw taking root in the Jim Crow geography around them, these gay liberationist subjectivities were shaped by regional forces. *Between F* Words* draws upon this history not only to propose the regional as a crucial scale for any radical analysis responsive to economic development schemes but also to imagine radical LGBTQ political subjectivities to be affectively formed within the daily experience of such divisive regional development.

BETWEEN F* WORDS: RURAL & GAY LIBERATIONIST REFRAINS IN THE SOUTHEAST, 1970-1981

by

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Preface

This is the first cover of *RFD* that I remember: text in stark red, white, and blue bands, with *RFD* and *WAR* in harsh red. It was the first issue following the September 11th attacks on the World Trade Center. The sight of the cover has stayed with me. The boldness of its graphic belies its tensions. Is it flag or newspaper column? Is it patriotism or protest, celebration or critique? Such questions are part of its surface. I was concerned with them before I had even really begun reading. But my seeing didn't end at the pages' edge. *Where* I first saw this *RFD* fixes its impression even more. I saw it on the porch of a farmhouse on Tennessee's Short Mountain, at the eastern edge of the Highland Rim. It was an hour's drive from the farm where I grew up. This first brush with *RFD* was at a Radical Faerie gathering. And, even though I didn't know it at the time, production for the magazine was based out of a little shed just steps from the farmhouse. Everything was so much closer than I knew.

Still, even though I was close to "home," I also felt elsewhere, as underground music blared from the kitchen and as bearded drag queens in muddy boots tromped past me on the porch. But the layers of elsewhere multiplied as I recognized the names of places that I had never been on the magazine's cover: Afghanistan, Castro Street. Further, the politics of the issue – as critical of a San Francisco gay Pride scene as it was of U.S. imperialism – seemed out of place in a wider Southern U.S. rural geography assumed to be anything but radical or gay. I had grown up here; it was menacingly entrenched in its conservative Christianity. This entrenchment became even more dogged after 9/11. Then again, years before, a couple of hours' east, I had attended a Gulf War protest in Knoxville where queer students played Ani DiFranco while older

mountain counterculturalists sang "We Shall Overcome". My experience of this protest was one of confusingly layered generations and geographies, creating political and aesthetic mash-ups. But the sight of this cover of *RFD* began orienting me to such disorientation. I was discovering my own capacity to feel odd politics in queer places.

At the heart of my project has been an attempt to rewind time, to return to the first sight of the red-letter "RFD War" issue, to understand how all of us –the queer attendees *and* this bold cover -- came to be on that creaky porch. When I began research, I felt confident I could trace how the magazine's production came to Short Mountain in the late 1980s and how the local Radical Faerie culture has evolved around it since. I would complement the traditionally historical approaches of archival research and oral history interviews with the more literary close readings of *RFD* and an ethnographic participant observation at current Radical Faerie events. My strategy was designed to get me as close as possible to this living, rural queer culture's use of texts as an extension of their everyday political lives.

The close readings of the magazine have remained a priority. I first visited Short Mountain in early 2000 when a poet friend recommended it to me. I went for a long weekend retreat to complete the last edits on my own poetry manuscript. A main concern of that collection, which I titled *mere jonathans*, was how I could use the writing of poems to animate some dynamic sense of a queer self and community out of my own rural background and out of my own disaffection with urban gay life as I knew it. I was trying to improvise a language for relating other than through the masculine-defined models of spouse/parent, worker, church-goer, and citizen within an increasingly urban U.S. that struck me, and those I loved, as patently heartless. While at Short Mountain

that January, I barely looked at my drafts. I was too excited by the prospect that I might have found a sympathetic queer political culture – one that took it that life could be fundamentally creative. So, it was clear to me that looking at what Radical Faeries make is a crucial component to understanding how they would live. This is central to my method.

The project also involved talking to people. As a participant-observer at various events, I quickly realized that people recycled conflicting stories about how the Radical Faerie culture took root in the Southeast. I speculated why that might be. Some people I spoke to at events, no matter their age, had only been active in the small subculture fewer than ten years. Only a hand-full had been active longer. Many had died under the institutional racism, sexism, homophobia, classism, and ableism of the 80s and 90s. Those who did survive understandably guarded their stories. Some I did manage to speak to implied that, in such a small and relatively short-lived community, the archive was minimal and carefully guarded. Cultural veterans might receive historical inquiries as a question of who was still contributing most. For those who were both survivors and active leaders in the culture, a longer historical view was often too painful or too distracting. In so many ways, the personal and the cultural histories were at odds with each other.

Oral history interviews and newly available primary documents gave me reason to significantly re-shape my project, though. For example, after discovering that, of those who had attended the 1978 Running Water Farm gathering which brought *RFD* to the Southeast, only a very few still participated in Radical Faerie culture, and even then, minimally. In my interviews with them, I found that most felt that, at some point, the

Radical Faerie culture that they helped to create shifted away from their primary needs and/or values. I realized that these earlier stories wouldn't be legible through participant-observation. They had largely left the culture centered around *RFD* and the Southeastern rural sites which originally hosted it. Those cultural elders still active in the culture anchored at Short Mountain represent a slightly later phase, one characterized, I suspect, by urgent responses to the devastating crises of the 80s and 90s. They took the fledgling infrastructure of print and rural event culture established by others in the late 1970s and put it to a different kind of Radical Faerie work.

Because the oral history interviewees were so generous, not only in giving time to talk, but in making primary sources available, I was taken with their slightly earlier story. As a result, my project shifted; it was no longer about the changing development of a uniquely Radical Faerie culture in the Southeast. I started over with a more firmly historical study of the 1970s regional networking which helped to create the Radical Faerie culture in the area. What this also meant was that, in terms of political cultures, the project now attends to a network whose contributions to Radical Faerie culture were sparked by their experiences of gay liberation. *RFD* was started in Iowa in 1974, in a year when many believed the gay liberation fired by Stonewall had fizzled. In the last issue of 1979, the magazine would announce itself a Radical Faerie publication, eclipsing its gay liberationist commitments. Then, in the first years of the 80s, the Short Mountain farm would form as a Radical Faerie "sanctuary". But this shift followed on several years of attempts to re-animate and re-direct gay liberation, both through the print culture of *RFD* and in the back-to-the-land projects of the counterculture. So, the story I tell is

now one of a gay liberationist persistence which gave birth to the Radical Faeries in the Southeast.

To convey the very lived experience of the political culture which is its subject, the project now strategically employs a method of close reading which refuses to translate texts into what the authors *thought* but rather insists on describing what the authors *felt* and *faced*. Said in another way, I treat the poems, images, and prose of these later-day gay liberationists as politically emotional, relational, and sensory responses within their lives, rather than as rational reflections conducted at some remove from that life. The distinction is important for description of a culture for which the political *was* personal. While most of these responsive texts are in *RFD*, in some cases, other texts demanding such reading might be found in the oral histories or archival materials themselves. Conversely, while I mostly depend on the oral histories and archival materials to provide evidence of what exactly provoked these textual responses, that context is sometimes provided within the pages of *RFD* itself. Where I find text and context is less important than the way of reading them. To distill the approach I take for historically depicting such a political culture of the everyday, I narrow the scope of my reading so that I am describing stimulus and reaction more than longer range cause and effect. I am reading more for nervous responses than rational choices.

Still, if the project is more historical than I first intended, more concerned with regional gay liberationism than with Radical Faeries, I argue that this formation is crucial to understanding the latter culture. Interestingly, the Winter 2001 *RFD* cover – appearing twenty years later than the period I here consider -- strikes me now as thoroughly liberationist. Where gay liberationism spiked in the context of an imperialist war with

Vietnam, this cover responds to a war in Afghanistan. Where gay liberation would critique urban gay male clone culture's isolationist tendencies as a feature of gay complicity with U.S. imperialism, this cover points a similar finger at the San Francisco Castro "Pride" scene. And, where gay liberationists would convey these messages by creative, visceral means, so would the Tennessee-based production team with the "RFD War" issue.

These texts were designed to stick with you. This one has stuck with me for going on twenty years.

Acknowledgements

This history is rooted in stories. For that reason, I would first and foremost like to thank the regional gay liberationists who shared their stories with me in the form of oral histories: Franklin Abbott, Clear Englebert, Dimid Hayes, Cathy Hope, Michael Oglesby, Milo Pyne, David Speakman, and Mikel Wilson. Your generosity with your personal time and memories was profound, and your nimble, joyful spirits of liberation were, one and all, a wonder. I also appreciate all the photos you shared to bring the late 1970s gay liberationist Southeast alive for me. To Mikel and Douglas, Dimid and Michael, thank you for hosting me, for providing such warm places in your homes for me and for all my questions. And, Dimid, thank you so much for the trust you invested in me by sharing the incredibly important sissie archive, which you have cared for so well. I look forward to sharing future adventures with all of you.

I want to thank the Georgia State University Special Collections and Archives. You became a home away from home for me as I read endless *RFD* issues and Gay Spirit Visions records. I want to especially thank Morna Gerrard, archivist for the Women and Gender collections, for sharing your own boundless curiosity as you connected me to text and person alike. Thank you, in particular, for introducing me to Franklin Abbott and facilitating my first interview with him. I am so grateful, Franklin, for your being such a gracious first interviewee, for your generosity in sharing your materials with Georgia State, and for your introducing me to others in the now far-flung Southeast Network.

I also want to thank Duke University's Sallie Bingham Center for Women's History and Culture. Director Laura Micham and librarian Kelly Wooten expertly expanded my excitements over their James T. Sears and Atlanta Lesbian Feminist

Alliance collections. Thanks to their generous Mary Lilly travel grant, I was not only able to indulge my happy archive fevers; I was also able to present my early work to fellow researchers and to meet Milo Pyne at the same time I read his Short Mountain papers. All of this was an immeasurable honor and thrill.

The American Studies department at the University of Maryland was also an amazing source of support and inspiration. Grants supporting my attending the 2016 Appalachian Studies Association conference and my pursuing exploratory participant observation helped to clarify my project. The American Studies program itself is unique, I think, in that the professors and my peers form a culture equally committed to experiment and support, diversity and collaboration. I have been continually inspired by its community. Thank you, A. Anthony, for all the marvelously queer postcards; even when I have been states away from College Park, you made me feel energized and engaged with your own brand of correspondence poetics. Thanks to my wonderful dissertation committee: Scott Herring, Oliver Gaycken, Laurie Frederik, Jan Padios, and Psyche Williams-Forson. Your comments usefully cast my work in new lights and offered it different tracks. You guys showed me just how creative the review process can be. And, I especially thank my advisor, Christina Hanhardt, for modeling a scholarly spirit which I myself aspire to. You so well demonstrate the joy, energy, and care possible in this sort of work.

Thank you to Seth Stewart for first introducing me to Short Mountain and the Faeries. You naturally cast it in a poetic light, and I haven't seen the place and people in any other way since. Thank you to the Memphis River Spirits, and by extension, to the folks around Elsewhere: Louis, Ribbon, Joe, Dapper, Jake, and Gary. For so many years,

your creative place-making has helped me to find the forest in the city and the queer in the forest and a place off the path. And, thank you to Beth, who introduced me to Seth, and who has, for so many years, talked to me best about the poetics in every single day. I never tire of sharing curiosities with you.

And thank you, Duane. Since our own first January trip to an Appalachian cabin, you have always made home its own sweet adventure. Thank you for writing that story, and so many more, with me.

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Introduction| Toward an Affective Regional History of Gay Liberation

In a letter written on July 14, 1979, New Orleans gay activist Alan Robinson shared his two-part critique of the gay collective, Louisiana Sissies in Struggle (LaSiS).[1] First, he commented on how odd it was to see a group of gay men act like lesbians: "I have never seen collectives, common in the Lesbian/Feminist community, work in the gay male setting before." Second, he argued that "My objection to them is that politically they are a disaster … They brought with them a confrontation style politics that is not really applicable to the delicate internal and external politics of the New Orleans gay community." Robinson was a gay rights activist born in the suburbs of Chicago and transplanted to New Orleans in 1975 by way of Fort Lauderdale. He would later be owner of the Crescent City's Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Faubourg Marigny Books. His critique was primarily concerned with community respectability, legal reform, and delicacy. His is a sensibility offended not only by the "disaster" of confrontation but also by the mixing of lesbian and gay cultural forms. You can nearly feel him turn in disapproval from LaSiS on these grounds.

I contend there is another less evident but essential element to his objection. By saying LaSiS "brought with them" these political cultural qualities, he implied they belonged elsewhere. Since we know that a confrontational style and New Left alliances were more typical of gay liberation, we might expect the collective brought them from New York's Stonewall, or from San Francisco's Tenderloin, both hotbeds of gay liberationist activity. The truth is, though, that LaSiS members had moved to New

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[1] Quoted in James T. Sears, *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones: Queering Space in the Stonewall South* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University, 2001), n393. This is a letter written from Alan Robinson to David Williams, July 14, 1979.

Orleans from Fayetteville, Arkansas, in 1977 and 1978. By the close of the 1970s, many assumed that gay liberation had faded, and gay rights had seized the foreground. I argue that Robinson's letter conveys a double distaste: for a political culture he found passé and for a geography he found at least foreign, if not backward. How dare LaSiS bring an old vanguard from the backwaters?

Robinson's letter shrinks from the very phenomenon that this history seeks to make more familiar -- namely, the persistence of gay liberation in the unexpected urban *and* rural Southeast. Such a history is important for several reasons. First, significant LGBTQ scholarship of the past twenty years has focused on critiques of "homonormativity" for gay complicity with the oppressive neoliberal state.[2] Although scholars point to a number of different factors in the rise of homonormativity, the historical displacement of gay liberation by gay rights is certainly an early part of this story. Understanding how gay liberation survived might complement critiques of homonormativity with durable models of liberation. Second, traditional LGBTQ histories of U.S. liberationism which only look for it in cities known to be gay (New York, San Francisco, and Los Angeles) often imply that other places (the rural, the small-town, the interior, the international) are inherently un-gay, un-modern, and un-radical. Such approaches too often ignore other forms of gay liberation elsewhere; they can also

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[2] Some important examples of this scholarship are Lisa Duggan's "The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism," in *Materializing Democracy: Toward a Revitalized Cultural Politics*, Russ Castronovo and Dana D. Nelson, eds., (Durham, NC: Duke University, 2002), 175-194 and *The Twilight of Equlaity?: Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004); Michael Warner's *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life* (New York City: Free Press, 1999); and Jasbir Puar's *Queer Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham, NC: Duke University, 2007). In "The New Homonormativity," Dugan defines the term as "a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions — such as marriage, and its call for monogamy and reproduction — but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption."

become tools to isolate and erase those other movements, rendering them impossible, and contribute to dominant politics of geographic division as represented, for example, by blue state-red state maps.[3] I propose that histories of gay liberation in regions popularly understood to be rural and conservative (like the U.S. Southeast) not only recognize unique political cultural forms but could also be tools for future movements to craft themselves in such places.

Between F Words* is such a history of gay liberation's survival in an unexpected place – the Southeast region. It traces groups like LaSiS back to places like Arkansas, back to androgynous practices like gay men practicing lesbian feminist collectivism, and describes how regional situation shaped particular forms of gay liberationism. And it does so with the purposes listed above: to offer tools for contemporary alternatives to homonormativity and, in so doing, to expand the map of gay liberation to include sites of rich liberationist potential. I am invested in a history that looks elsewhere to discover possibilities. Clearly, I am emphasizing other than the usual geographies. But, I am also stressing unusual definitions of the political.

Robinson's letter does not simply lodge an intellectual difference with LaSiS; it registers an offended sensibility, a shame. His response was part of a wider New Orleans gay disapproval of the collective which included how editors of the gay paper *Impact* regularly censored LaSiS articles for radically politicized language. Robinson's letter similarly positions himself, as a gay rights activist, at a distance from the liberationist sissies, and fuels that separation with a very somatic embarrassment. I do not believe this is overstatement. I expect that, after sending this letter, he would have taken steps to

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[3] For more on LGBTQ readings of blue state-red state maps, see Karen Tongson, "Hot Red and Blue: Queers and the Electoral Imaginary," *Social Text* 23, no. 3-4 (Fall-Winter 2005): 193-217.

avoid LaSiS. I expect that, should he have crossed paths with them in public, the color would have already begun to rise in his face, and nervousness would have ticked his movements. This would have been even truer if the recipient of the letter were present. The letter serves as a kind of pact for a certain kind of reaction. The point is that politics are only minimally rational, and as I will show, gay liberation uniquely capitalized on this fact. Therefore, its history deserves a different attention than politics as usual.

Literature scholar Henry Abelove has recently written that "Gay lib's whole mental world -- its ideas, values, attitudes, confusions, aspirations -- has in effect been lost in the Stonewall story."[4] Despite his describing the liberationist world as "mental," Abelove's list of examples also includes terms which are orientational (confusion, aspirations) and emotional (attitudes). The implication is that whole ways of *feeling* liberationist have been lost. It is a core contention of *Between F* Words* that, until some sense of the daily feeling of gay liberationism has been historically recovered, no intellectual espousal will stick. The world of gay liberation will stay lost in time. This is why I pose the project as an affective history focusing on the political orientations, emotions, and rhythms of the gay liberationism practiced in the Southeast of the 1970s. Liberationists embraced the feminist claim that the personal was political. This history takes this commitment seriously.

Therefore, in *Between F* Words,* I use oral histories and new archives to trace a 1970s gay liberation found in Southeastern rural and urban geographies – the Ozarks and Appalachia, New Orleans and Atlanta. But, in doing so, I pay particular attention to cultural production to describe the everyday somatic, emotional, and performative aspects

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[4] Abelove, "How Stonewall Obscures the Real History of Gay Liberation," *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 61, no. 40 (July 10, 2015): B4-B6.

of liberationism as a political way of life. To build that sense of the everyday, I assemble my archive from a variety of very personal documents: journals, letters, drawings, poems, mini-autobiographies. Even in cases where such documents were published in *RFD*, they remained personal in that that magazine written by its very small network of readers to each other. Such documents capture affect best – the ways in which the political shapes the everyday. By this method, I more fully characterize the main subjective figures – sissies and gentle men – which the region improvises in the years between the ascendency of the liberationist faggot and faerie. This history is a document of politics as more than an intellectual position; it chronicles gay liberation as a way of facing and feeling, touching and moving. To do so, it often foregrounds cultural analysis as an important facet of any historical and social movement analysis which addresses a political culture so focused on the personal.

In the remainder of this introduction, I situate the project in key relevant literatures related to U.S. LGBT history, critical regional/rural studies, and affect studies. I then describe my method of reading for affect before offering two formative examples of these readings: one of Carl Wittman's "A Gay Manifesto" (1970) and another of James Broughton's films *The Bed* (1968) and *Dreamwood* (1972). These readings not only demonstrate the key interpretive approach I take; they also describe foundational expressions of the political spirit of the Southeastern cultures I will discuss in more detail. Finally, I offer an overview of the project's course, chapter by chapter.

Looking for Liberation, Beyond the City Line

Abelove argues that the spectacle of Stonewall – he refers to it as an obscuring myth – willfully links two stories: gay fighting and gay citizenship. What this mythical

history offers, then, is a narrative of an LGBT struggle for rights which would fully include its fighters in the nation. Abelove underscores the acute ironies of such a view, given that the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) chapters which formed after the Stonewall riots named themselves after the Vietnamese National Liberation Front, a declared enemy of the U.S. at the time. His article calls for the work of history in the wake of such spectacular erasure.

Traditional U.S. LGBT history marks the social movement's development into three periods: homophile movements, gay liberation, and the gay rights movement.[5] In this traditional history, the first was characterized by groups exhibiting a kind of respectable image to the wider American public, by maintaining that gays and lesbians were no different than the rest of society except for the minor factor of their sexuality. Gay liberation, inspired by other movements like the Black Panthers and women's liberation, dispensed with respectability, adopting a more confrontational style and, instead of seeking inclusion in the wider system, they critiqued that system as the source of social problems. As Abelove points out, most date the origins of gay liberation to the June 1969 Stonewall Riots, which quickly inspired the formation of Gay Liberation Front (GLF) chapters, committed to such confrontational politics, all over the United States. Also inspired by international revolutions like those in China and Cuba, gay liberationists had to re-assess their models when they discovered the rampant homophobia within those countries' revolutions, especially Cuba's. Many historians have commented on the brief life of gay liberation, dating it from 1969 to 1973, the year by which most GLFs had

[5] For overviews and slight variations on such histories, see Lillian Faderman, *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle* (New York City: Simon & Schuster, 2015) and Marc Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement* (New York City: Routledge, 2012.)

dissolved. Gay rights movements succeeded gay liberation, often combining homophile concerns of inclusion in the state as equal citizens with "pride parades" which generally moved away from respectable appearances in favor of being "out" and "proud". As Abelove points out, many now mistakenly assume that this latter political style is the liberation for which gay liberationists fought.

Abelove names several LGBT historians who have helpfully placed the origins of U.S. gay liberation before Stonewall. In particular, he cites John D'Emilio, whose accounts of mid-century homophile groups make plain that such networking was a critical foundation for Stonewall militancy. He also credits the work of Marc Stein and Susan Stryker who, by describing instances of LGBT confrontational politics well before Stonewall, show that the movement's militancy wasn't born in 1969 New York. The work of these three historians, then, not only pushes the timeline of U.S. gay liberation back; they also re-distribute its location from New York to places like Philadelphia, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. Abelove declares, though, that "Gay lib as a movement then disappeared in the mid-1970s".[6] I argue, though, that the quick death of gay liberation is also part of the larger myth he describes; it is possible to trace the ways it survived.

I place *Between F* Words* within an emerging LGBT historical literature describing a longer gay liberation. Such scholarship usually contends, like Abelove, that the ways we frame and define gay liberation shape how we measure its fate and impact. Examples of recent such scholarship is found in the work of Emily Hobson and Jim

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[6] Abelove, ibid. D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); Stein, *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves: Lesbian and Gay Philadelphia, 1945-72* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Stryker, *Transgender History* (Berkeley, CA: Perseus Books, 2008).

Downs.[7] Hobson has shown how Bay Area gay liberationism persisted past the 1970s by remaining committed to international coalitions, especially in Central America. Her work, while using gay San Francisco as an anchor, pushes the scale of liberation to a geographic elsewhere beyond city and nation. Downs critiques how mainline LGBT history has associated gay liberation exclusively with sex and protest; his history focuses on cultural work like establishing gay churches and bookstores. His work pushes our understandings of gay liberation beyond narrow definitions of sexual politics. My project resembles Hobson's and Down's in that I am describing other liberationist geographies and different liberationist politics, but it's unique in that it stresses the rural/regional and the affective.

As different as their work is, they both anchor their histories in U.S. cities known as sites of gay culture; Hobson focuses on the West Coast Bay area and Downs mostly on New York, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, and New Orleans. While expanding the external and internal boundaries of U.S. gay liberation, they do so by often reproducing the dominant geographic lens of that liberation: the major U.S. coastal cities. In that my project represents a geographic shift from these sites, it joins other such histories of U.S. gay elsewheres. LGBT regional histories of the national interior often yield helpfully different political perspectives with their geographic ones. In not being about major cosmopolitan coastal centers, they also help theorize what politics can be when it is not geographically on the "cutting edge". For example, there has been much interesting recent work on the Midwest, like Timothy Stewart-Winterson's *Queer Clout: Chicago*

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[7] Hobson, *Lavender and Red: Liberation and Solidarity in the Gay and Lesbian Left* (Oakland, CA: U of California P, 2016) and Downs, *Stand By Me: The Forgotten History of Gay Liberation* (New York City: Basic Books, 2016).

and the Rise of Gay Politics and *Queering the Middle: Race, Region, and a Queer Midwest*.[8]

Since my history focuses on the Southeast, it builds on LGBT histories of that region which have become canonical. John Howard's *Men Like That: A Southern Queer History* (1999) shifted the urban focus of U.S. LGBT history with a post-WWII study of Mississippi which also helpfully indicated how Southeastern LGBT histories also belong to regional Civil Rights histories. James T. Sears' *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones: Queer Space in the Stonewall South* (2001) cast a wider regional net and characterized a post-Stonewall era with dizzying details of many Southeastern local LGBT organizations. E. Patrick Johnson's *Sweet Tea: Black Gay Men of the South* (2008) conducted life histories to show how traditional institutions distrusted in many urban LGBT cultures were sites of vitality for Southern black gay men.[9] These three scholars have not only made it possible to imagine a Southeastern LGBT history which was both political and everyday, but they highlight the importance of understanding the very different roles of similar institutions in different geographies.

Because of his focus on the region's post-Stonewall liberationist period, I have particularly engaged Sears' archive. Many of the Southeastern LGBT figures I discuss, though, only appear as footnotes or passing references in his book. For that reason, I

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[8] Stewart-Winterson, *Queer Clout: Chicago and the Rise of Gay Politics* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2016) historicizes the overlap of activism and electoral politics in gay Chicago; queerly rethinks the Midwest as a region associated with a national norm. Manalansan, Martin, Chantal Nadeau, Richard T. Rodriguez, and Siobhan Somerville, eds., "Queering the Middle: Race, Region, and a Queer Midwest," special issue, *Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 20, no. 1-2 (2014).

[9] Howard, *Men Like That* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1999); Sears, *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2001); and Johnson, *Sweet Tea* (Chapel Hill, NC: U of North Carolina P, 2008). At the 2017 Organization of American Historians (OAH) conference in New Orleans, sessions on Southeastern LGBT history made regular reference to these three writers. This observation is what led me to think of them as an emergent canon.

have also turned to more local histories within the region like Allyn Lord and Anna M. Zajicek's *The History of the Contemporary Grassroots Women's Movement in Northwest Arkansas, 1970-2000* (2000), Brock Thompson's *The Un-Natural State: Arkansas and the Queer South* (2010), Alecia Long's "'Death Delights to Serve the Living': Reconsidering the Life and Legacy of Clay L. Shaw" (2016) and Saralyn Chesnut and Amanda Gable's "'Women Ran It': Charis Books and More and Atlanta's Lesbian-Feminist Community, 1971-1981" (1997).[10] That said, very few of the figures, events, or sites I discuss have received much analytical attention. The above histories, then, help me to provide regional historical context for my primary historical methods: oral history interviews and archival research.

Setting gay liberation so firmly within the context of urban politics has obscured the degree to which it was shaped by the counterculture, especially on the West Coast. Around the same time U.S. liberation movements formed, American back-to-the-land movements surged as the U.S. city seemed to fail on its economic promise. With the rise of global capitalism, industrial production sites were transferred overseas, leaving many urban factory wastelands. Poverty spiked in the cities, and that poverty was increasingly racialized and criminalized. Exurban white flight and inner-city ghettoization left cities

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[10] Lord and Zajicek, *The History of the Contemporary Grassroots Women's Movement in Northwest Arkansas, 1970-2000* (Fayetteville, AR: U of Arkansas P, 2000); Thompson, *The Un-Natural State: Arkansas and the Queer South* (Fayetteville, AR: U of Arkansas P, 2010); Long, "'Death Delights to Serve the Living': Reconsidering the Life and Legacy of Clay L. Shaw," *Louisiana Historical Association*, 57, no. 4 (2016): 389-402; and Chesnut and Gable, "'Women Ran It': Charis Books and More and Atlanta's Lesbian-Feminist Community, 1971-1981," *Carryin' On in the Lesbian and Gay South*, John Howard, ed. (New York: NYU Press, 1997), 241-284.

feeling like concentric bull's-eyes, especially for those – predominately people of color – remaining near their emptying centers.[11]

On the heels of sharply critical and popular publications like Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1964), environmentalist and anti-consumerist movements catalyzed around portraits of the city as the nexus in a system of rampant consumerism, economic dependency, natural exploitation, and uncontrollable waste production. Back-to-the-landers looked to the rural for solutions. They left the city, aimed themselves far past the impoverished dependency in the urban wastelands, past the conspicuous consumption of the suburbs, unplugging as much as possible from these capitalist nexuses in order to practice self-sufficiency in the country. It should be added that many were sympathetic with these domestic migrations but were unable to join. For many, the price of flight was too high. Still, there was a call to the country, which some answered quite literally while others answered with sporadic or imaginative trips to the hills. Some gay liberationists drawn by androgynous hippie styles and free-love sexualities joined these movements.

Inasmuch as gay liberation took to the country, *Between F* Words* expands the analytical scale to include the rural. As a result, I engage the critical rural literatures around the concepts of urbanormativity and metronormativity. The sociologists who authored *Critical Rural Theory: Structure, Space, Culture* (2011) and *Studies in Urbanormativity: Rural Community in Urban Society* (2014) see the former phenomenon to have arisen partly in their own discipline, with the rise of sociology as a set of methods

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[11] A major scholar on industrial restructuring and the rise of the global city is Saskia Sassen. See her "Economic Restructuring and the American City," *Annual Review of Sociology* 16 (1990): 465-490 and *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo* 2nd Ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton, 2001); See also Roger Waldinger, *Still the Promised City?:African Americans and New Immigrants in Postindustrial New York* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1996) and John R. Logan and Todd Swanstrom, eds., *Beyond the City Limits: Urban Policy and Economic Restructuring in Comparative Perspective* (Philadelphia: Temple University, 1990).

particularly poised to analyze – and potentially solve -- the large-scale problems associated with the dense populations of the industrial city.[12] In fact, sociologists of urbanormativity point out that, in the wake of the Great Depression, in 1937, the few then practicing rural sociologists broke away from the American Sociological Society, frustrated that sociological methods and theories, like concentric zone theory, which were "modeled on the continual expansion of a city into an apparent geographical void," not only dominated the discipline but also monopolized policy-makers' attention.[13] Strategically, though, this break wasn't altogether a wise move because it marginalized rural sociology even more from the comparative successes and resources enjoyed by urban sociologists. In many ways, sociologists became the scientists of public policy, and the city defined their laboratory.

As a corrective to such views, recently, critical rural sociologists, have called for, first, a departure from theories and methods which take up an exclusive focus on either the urban or the rural. Instead, they call for critical attention to the urban-rural divides which are understood as being necessary to the operations of economic systems of power. They propose that rural and urban spaces are always coordinated within the political economy and attention to that coordination is politically important. Second, they specifically argue that, being so fundamental to economic power, those urban-rural divides must be both produced and obscured by cultural processes which continue to frame the urban as the site of what is real and important while alternately mythologizing the rural, somewhat positively, as a simple place of escape from the urban, or, negatively,

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[12] Alexander R. Thomas, Brian Lowe, Greg Fulkerson, and Polly Smith, *Critical Rural Theory: Structure, Space, Culture* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011); Gregory M. Fulkerson and Alexander R. Thomas, eds., *Studies in Urbanormativity: Rural Community in Urban Society* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014.)
[13] Thomas, et al, *Critical Rural Theory*, ibid., 2.

as a place of backwardness.[14] These cultural processes produce what they call "urbanormativity," the kind of monopoly of attention on the urban described above.

Third, they urge critical urban studies to complement sociological quantitative studies with *cultural* approaches within and beyond sociology which would be helpful to address the complexities of how urbanormativity is produced.[15] Fourth, critical rural theorists insist that countering urbanormativity is important because it helps to expose how the same imperialist divisions of space which create racially uneven urban development also produce under-scrutinized rural space in the shadow of the city. For critical urban scholars, describing how that urban-rural divide functions as a system with specific biopolitical effects on both sides of its lines is important.

In writing a history of gay liberation which persists in rural as well as urban areas, I want to avoid characterizing the rural as a space somehow outside of or irrelevant to the systemic power which liberationists critiqued. I argue that, instead, liberationists variously came to recognize urban-rural divides as another form of global capitalism's imperialist isolation which had to be overcome by a reconnection with the rural. In moments of such reconnection, they improvised a kind of implicitly critical rural practice. Recognizing this, my project aims to look at their crossings of urban-rural divides as moments in which the role of urbanormativity is exposed as part of similar processes of isolation like racialization, gendering, and sexualization. Also, by looking at how liberationists imagined themselves and their socialities as rural, we are able to see the

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[14] Ibid. Also see Fulkerson and Thomas, *Studies in Urbanormativity*, ibid, 7.

[15] I think it's important to add here that advocates of a queer rural sociology, like Julie Keller, outline ways that quantitative sociological approaches can complement the cultural work of queer rural studies: Keller, "Rural Queer Theory," in *Feminisms and Ruralities*, ed. Barbara Pini, Berit Brabdth, and Jo Little (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015), 155-166.

ways they sought to defy urbanormativity. In that it analyzes moments of urbanormativity, my history can also be understood as a cultural form of critical rural studies.

As a cultural historian of a significantly rural queer movement, I also depend on studies of gay metronormativity. The term was proposed by Judith Halberstam in *In a Queer Time & Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (2005) to refer not only to how queer subjects become legible almost exclusively through an urban frame but also to how urban LGBT visibility turns on an association of the rural with the backwardness of the closet.[16] Whereas Halberstam devotes critical attention to how metronormative representation functions, in *Another Country: Queer Anti-Urbanism* (2010), cultural studies scholar Scott Herring interprets rurally oriented queer cultural production for how it speaks back to metronormative urban LGBT cultures.[17] I consider Herring's work substantially, especially in Chapter One, as it is one of the few sustained cultural analyses of my primary text: the gay liberationist, back-to-the-land magazine *RFD*. Founded in Iowa in 1974, the magazine moved to Oregon 1976-1978 before relocating production into the Southeast in 1978, where it remained for over thirty years. I treat *RFD* as an important record of the cultural work and political perspective of the Southeastern rurally oriented gay liberationists who wrote for and edited it. The anti-metronormative print stylistics which Herring so carefully describes as a form of "critical rusticity" in early *RFD* become a key rubric for how I read the cultural work in later, Southeastern *RFD*.

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[16] Halberstam, *In A Queer Time & Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lies* (New York City: NYU Press, 2005).
[17] Herring, *Another Country: Queer Anti-Urbanism* (New York City: New York UP, 2010).

Both *urbanormativity* and *metronormativity* rely on an understanding of the rural as, in part, culturally produced. *Between F* Words* does so as well. I contend that, for example, by writing for *RFD* and hosting rural gay gatherings, Southeastern gay liberationists composed and performed a regional gay subjectivity which – in that it was both rural and urban – defied the metronormativity which was gaining traction during this period. Herring particularly names six analytical categories critical to following the cultural assumptions of metronormativity: narratological, racial, socioeconomic, temporal, epistemological, and aesthetic.[18] I will address several of these categories myself, adding the religious and emotional as part of this rubric by which the urban and the rural are culturally produced as different from one another. Following critical rural sociologists, I define rural-urban divides as systemically produced as a component of systemic political economic power. *Between F*Words* traces the ways regional gay liberationists wrote and performed in defiance of this dominant production of the rural.

Herring frames early *RFD* as an alternative to the portrait of a mostly "bicoastal" LGBT city life put forth by urban gay magazines like *The Advocate*. As a Southeastern cultural history of a longer gay liberation, my own project proposes a setting for gay liberation which is, unlike Hobson's or Downs', also decidedly not urban or bicoastal. Like their histories, though, I am invested in placing gay liberation elsewhere. Like Hobson, I am interested in how liberationism maintains its international perspective within a period of intense globalization, but I am curious about whether that perspective must be anchored within a global city or if a transnational rural gay liberationist point of view could emerge within cultures like those I examine here. Like Downs, I am

[18] Ibid., 15.

primarily interested in culture, but I don't want to reproduce the divisions between culture, politics, and sex which I think his history does in trying to propose a liberationism which is somehow "more than" fucking and marching. On the contrary, I hope that my study demonstrates how gay liberation is predicated on a highly connective political culture. In fact, I propose that these are exactly the "ideas, values, attitudes, confusions, aspirations" which Abelove believes that Stonewall has eclipsed. For that reason, I next explain what I mean when I cast *Between F* Words* as an affective history.

The Feeling of Liberation: Affect in the Political Refrain

Politics are saturated with feelings. They motivate actors, mobilize movements, color actions, and flood audiences. In the case of gay liberation, Abelove seems to argue that, not only has the movement disappeared, but that a whole way of responding to and regarding the world has gone with it. Beyond gesturing towards the feelings of gay liberation, this observation also suggests that feelings are historical rather than universal. In other words, there are different ways of feeling readily available to me today than there would be at some other historical moment because we are shaped to feel in certain ways. Historians of emotions have grappled with the challenge of re-constructing past repertoires of feeling. Two major figures in this field are William Reddy, whose *The Navigation of Feeling* (2001) draws upon psychological and anthropological theories to characterize the emotional climate of the French Revolution, and Barbara Rosenwein, whose *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (2007), accounts for the overlap of quite different medieval emotional communities.[19]

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[19] Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2001); Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2007); for an interview with these historians (and Peter Stearn) on the methods of a history of emotions, see Jan

Work on more contemporary subjects, particularly by those in queer studies, focuses on the express political dimensions of emotions. For example, Ann Cvetkovich has stressed the political importance of responding to sexual trauma by referencing not archives of crisis but of the ordinary.[20] Lauren Berlant has similarly written about how, in a period where crisis is everyday rather than exemplary, a culture of wanting what will not sustain you becomes normalized.[21] Deborah Gould has written on the emotional registers of ACT-UP activism.[22] As a study of the emotions of an LGBT movement, Gould's work is of particular interest to me. As a sociologist, she has written on the value of writing about political emotions as *affect*; drawing mostly on the work of philosopher Brian Massumi, Gould argues that affect – a bodily, sensory intensity – allows her to explore the political potential in emotions which are not fully formed, feelings which can't be classed as rational choice.[23]

I frame my project as an affective history, rather than a history of emotions, for different but related reasons. While *Between F* Words* does treat emotions related to gay liberation – loneliness, exhaustion, terror, and caring, for example – it is ultimately more concerned with how such emotions facilitate and inhibit connections. I see this attention to bodily connection as critical to the study of liberationism, a political perspective so concerned with the ways the system works through institutions to divide and control populations. While liberation certainly centers the act of breaking free, and gay

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Plamper, "The History of Emotions: An Interview with William Reddy, Barbara Rosenwein, and Peter Stearn," *History and Theory* 49, no. 2 (2010): 237-265.

[20] Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2003).

[21] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2011).

[22] Gould, *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP's Fight against AIDS* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2009).

[23] Gould, "On Affect and Protest," in *Political Emotions, eds.* Janet Staiger, Ann Cvetkovich, and Ann Reynolds (New York City: Routledge, 2010), 18-44.

liberation foregrounds the metaphor of the thrown-open closet, that freedom was both *from* systemic control as well as *into* the relationships which that control would prohibit.

The liberationist spirit of many late-1960s social movements, inspired both by various post-World War II anti-colonial nationalist politics and anti-establishment social currents, recognized the sequestering of bodies as a fundamental imperialist strategy. National borders, prison bars, factory walls, school doors, and hospital curtains were all taken as instruments of a global systemic control mechanism which owed much of its success to the fact that its divide-and-conquer maneuvers didn't really have to be conspicuously enacted: They were sewn into the landscape, the infrastructure. As a result, whole groups were split along lines of nationality, race, class, language, and relative health, in ways that seemed to be as natural as the way fields are divided by tree lines.

Recognizing this situation, liberationism critiqued the isolation of populations and individuals and saw their re-connection as a vital step towards overthrowing imperialist domination. Re-connection was understood in libidinal terms, and sexual repression was declared an ideological tool of empire which served to sap revolutionary forces of their drive to connect. As such, early liberationist political philosophy, while often hinging on a willful revolutionary subjectivity, typically did so with less focus on any isolate individual, instead investing its imagination more consistently on connection, alliance, and relation. Inward-turned identity was commonly only a way-station for processes of

recognizing the ideological nature of individualism so that a more externally aimed and connective subjectivity could be developed.[24]

For example, Hobson points out that Bay Area gay liberation was inspired by two fellow forms of liberationist connection: 1) Black Panthers' cross-movement affiliations both within and outside the U.S. and 2) lesbian feminists' politically oriented collective households.[25] Gay liberationist author Allen Young, in the movement-defining collection *Out of the Closets: Voices of Gay Liberation* (1972), volunteered that he thought gay liberation might uniquely offer to the revolution a way of "dealing with the politics of personal relations, and as such [be] the path of personal fulfillment and joy".[26] Because affect speaks more directly to the corporeal aspects of emotions and because liberationism hinges so much on forms of connection, I cast my history as an affective one. Specifically, I am interested in tracing the forms of connection which gay liberationists performed.

Fundamental to such a history is the belief that liberationist connections deserve better descriptions than "A+B=Coalition". Relationships, political or otherwise, have emotional tenors, special occasions, crossroads, rhythms, plots, divorces, and audiences. They operationalize nuanced definitions of self, other, and union. It may be a truism to say that no two relationships are alike, but *Between F* Words* starts with that assumption

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[24] I want to recognize, though, a range of emphases in liberationist practices, from sustained personal self-analysis to social collectivization to militant alliances. Recognizing such different complex combinations allows us to differentiate forms of liberationism.

[25] Hobson, ibid.

[26] Young, "The Cuban Revolution and Gay Liberation," in *Out of the Closets: Voices of Gay Liberation* Eds. Karla Jay and Allen Young (New York City: NYU Press, 1992, 20th anniversary edition), 207. Various liberationist movements offered their own political relational models. For an account of the erotic dimensions of Black Panthers' forms of affiliation and its influence on French gay radical Jean Genet, see Amy Abugo Ongiri, "Prisoner of Love: Affiliation, Sexuality, and the Black Panther Party," *The Journal of African American History* 94, no. 1 (2009): 69-86.

and responds with efforts toward finer descriptions of liberationist connection. To do so, my main method is to read the cultural production – in *RFD* and in personal texts -- of these Southeastern, rurally oriented gay liberationists for characterizations of their political relationships. I derive how I read this work from a couple of theories of affect which are themselves rooted in queer and liberationist politics: assemblage/refrain theory and queer orientation.

Assemblage theory was formulated in response to a liberationist event. In France, in the wake of the events of May 1968, during which students and industrial workers united to take the Gaullist French government to task for its bureaucratic control of both labor conditions and sexual expression, philosopher Gilles Deleuze and psychoanalyst Felix Guattari began their collaboration on their two-volume theoretical work, *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. In the first volume, *Anti-Oedipus* (1972), Deleuze and Guattari provide a theory to explain – just as the insurrectionists of May 1968 demonstrated – a connection between capitalist control both of political-economic institutions *and* of the apparently personal sphere of everyday life.[27] Their explanation depends on describing how, broadly speaking, under capitalism, productive desire is routed into labor and contained within the form of the bourgeois family, which functions to manufacture a sense of the personal, private, and domestic as barriers to the broader politicized connections which would be a threat to large-scale capitalist production. Their political vision includes a call to amplify desire beyond the walls of home and family.

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[27] Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (New York: Viking, 1977, French 1972).

In their second volume, *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), Deleuze and Guattari develop the concept of the *assemblage*.[28] The term refers to how, in periods of large-scale capitalist change, when familiar modes of production shift, capitalism mobilizes or *territorializes* certain diverse phenomena to create the controllable conditions for its new modes of production. For example, women can be yoked to the home to do compulsory domestic work, and people of color can be conceived as less-than-human to justify their use as slave labor in large plantation economies. Uneven contrasts emerge: Man is privileged over woman and white is valued above black. These are examples of what Deleuze and Guattari call *territorializing assemblage*, the capitalist marshaling of various bodies to its own purposes. The twentieth-century Western bourgeois family is an example of a territorialized assemblage. Diverse phenomena such as private gardens, automobiles, sexual guilt, television, psychoanalysis, confessional novels, debutante parties, etc., developed in order to articulate, reinforce, and maintain the bourgeois family structure and its members as increasingly privatized individuals who are mobilized to administer the labor of the working-class whom they are exercised to avoid when otherwise possible.

Deleuze and Guattari note, though, that the composition of an assemblage is not a purely rational process.[29] It is inadequate to imagine either that those in positions of relative power organize a perfectly logical structure of control or that those held within power consciously accede to the dominant ideological rhetoric. While logic, structure,

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[28] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota, 1987, French 1980.)

[29] In Italy, Autonomist theorists like Antonio Negri, in dialogue with Deleuze, developed a parallel theory of affect very similar to assemblage, which they referred to as "composition," in the sense of class composition.

control, consciousness, compliance, ideology, and rhetoric are certainly common *parts* of any assemblage, there are also necessarily emotional, material, and rhythmic elements because an *assemblage* also involves the necessary affects, bodies, and timing to coalesce into a compelling and new capitalist force. Best understood as internally coherent and dynamic processes, assemblages develop their own relations, patterns and rhythms, producing new elements that fit the overall sense that moves them.

For example, assemblages might produce emotional conditions like hysteria or temporalized spaces like the slave auction-block which support a cohesive lived sense, an apparently common "logic," with which to naturalize oppressive contexts as inevitable, "just how things are," and therefore as self-perpetuating. Ultimately, the assemblage must yield a new labor subjectivity by giving *everyday* shape to a populace who will work in the emergent modes of production. So, in a later capitalist shift, the rise of global capitalism which moves industrial labor from "first-world" cities, like those in the US, to developing countries, requires very material *territorializing assemblages* in the form of new labor subjectivities like the Mexican *maquiladora* worker, the cosmopolitan financial trader, and the Filipina/o displaced nurse.[30]

Assemblage is never a perfect process, though; there are always pieces which fail to fit the larger composition. As a result, there are also *deterritorialized assemblages*: elements that begin to cohere in ways that don't contribute to the new capitalist form and may even be in opposition to it. A *deterritorialized assemblage* often produces subjectivities characterized by experiences of chaos: Unable to see themselves within the

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[30]See Rosemary Hennessy, *Fire on the Border: The Passionate Politics of Labor Organizing on the Mexican Frontera* (Minneapolis: University of Minnessota, 2013); Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, *Border as Method, or, the Multiplication of Labor* (Durham, NC: Duke University, 2013); and Catherine Ceniza Choy, *Empire of Care: Nursing and Migration in Filipino American History* (Durham, NC: Duke University, 2003).

larger emergent capitalist logic, some may find themselves without clear function, brought into confusing intimacy with apparently tangential materials, emotions, customs, institutions, practices, bodies, etc. – many of which may or may not make sense with each other. In such confusing phases, Guattari would later recommend an "ethico-aesthetic paradigm" for experimenting with these apparently disparate elements, following developing desires and watching how they produce social patterns, discovering which elements might fall into their own counter-rhythms, their own counter-sense, and counter-practices – enough to become a politically charged and unique subjectivity whose form is not fit so well for capitalist labor as it is for politics *against* the reigning capitalist form. As this improvisational *assemblage* develops a cultural sociality of its own, discovering its own politics, it becomes what Guattari later calls a *refrain.*[31] In short, the refrain refers to the emergence of a new socio-cultural and politicized anti-capitalist subjectivity in the wake of a major and disorienting capitalist shift.

Assemblage, then, refers to the processes by which social, embodied subjectivities are shaped, routed, and habituated. It is a useful tool for liberationist critique because it allows for complex descriptions of how subjects are socially constructed even in moments that seem everyday, natural, and/or private. In queer studies, Jasbir Puar has demonstrated the utility of this descriptive method, tracing how, in the U.S., the figure of the terrorist has been assembled as, among other things, a sexually conservative foreign body, which, in turn, makes possible a normative gay U.S. citizen willing to support violent foreign and domestic policies against those racialized as terrorists.[32] In many ways, Puar employs an intersectional approach, paying careful attention to overlapping

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[31] Guattari, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1995).
[32] Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2007).

factors like race, gender, sexuality, nationality, and class, but the assemblage aspect of her method is evident in her careful description of the affective, somatic dimensions of subject formation. For example, she discusses how meaning is attached to turbans and weaponry as apparent extensions of terrorist bodies; how accelerated rhythms in media depictions trigger associations of apocalypse and zealotry; and how the daily experience of new surveillance technology generates a sense of hyper-intimacy. What Puar recommends is a combination of intersectional and assemblage methods to offer nuanced descriptions of how subjectivization works on the ground.[33]

In reading the cultural production of gay liberationists, I want to perform a similar descriptive balance of intersectional and assemblage elements. I specifically want to pay attention to when and how they feel themselves compelled towards more liberal than liberationist subjectivities and to how those moments route them into or away from cross-movement relationships inflected by categories like race, gender, sexuality, and class. At the same time, I want to remain attentive to the roles of emotion, body culture, temporality, media, etc., in these processes of subjectivization. All of these concerns will structure the ways I read gay liberationist cultural production.

Puar's method is primarily one of critique. I am most interested in refrains – improvisational moments in which these gay liberationists not only sense how they are being shaped but then experiment with new relational forms which defy that shaping. So, while Puar's archive is drawn from the dominant media, my own is taken more often from the subcultural gay liberationist media, particularly *RFD* magazine, and personal documents like letters and journals. While I still apply the above intersectional-

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[33] Puar, "'I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess': Becoming-Intersectional in Assemblage Theory," *philoSOPHIA* 2, no. 1 (2012): 49-66.

assemblage reading methods to these refrains as forms of resistant assemblages, I have found a complementary hermeneutic in Sara Ahmed's work on *queer orientation*.

In Ahmed's earlier work on the cultural politics of emotions, she took as her primary analytical subject politically salient emotions which, when circulated in media, condition and shape our bodies.[34] As an example, she cites how U.K. political rhetoric encourages (white) British citizens to not be "soft" in accepting immigrants (of color) into their homeland. As a result, white British citizens brace themselves instinctively against persons perceived, by skin color and other corporeal cues, to be foreigners. Normatively white nationalist bodies are conditioned to literally tighten and withdraw. Ironically, Ahmed has been critiqued by vanguards of affect theory for treating affect narrowly as emotion and not engaging it enough as biological materiality.[35] I think, as the above example shows, her main entry point for analysis has been political emotions but that, ultimately, she uses that analysis to arrive at descriptions of material bodies.

Particularly, with *Queer Phenomenology* (2010), she turns to *orientation* to show how corporeal relations, described by bodies' relative position and direction, can reveal to us what those bodies are composed to do. For example, bodies sitting around a holiday table, facing each other, are typically composed in such a setting to mirror a traditional familial structure which is understood as shared in a way similar to the way the food is shared. The work at this table is to collaboratively reinforce the middle-class family structure. But, that orientation is disturbed if, for example, an organization of alternating genders representing heterosexual couplings is disrupted by a repeated gender or a

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[34] Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Oxford: Routledge, 2014, 1st edition 2004).
[35] For an overview of Ahmed's response to critiques of "biophobia" and a clarification of "new materialist" views, see Noela Davis, "New Materialism and Feminism's Anti-Biologism: A Response to Sara Ahmed," *European Journal of Women's Studies* 16, no. 1 (2009): 67-80.

differing skin color, which may signal a same-sex or mixed-race couple who also may not do their "job," which is to reproduce and perpetuate the family form. Ahmed defines such an everyday disruption as queer: "... queer pleasures in the enjoyment of forbidden or barred contact engender the possibility of different kinds of impressions. When bodies touch and give pleasure to bodies that have been barred from contact, then those bodies are reshaped."[36]

I understand such configurations as the family holiday table as part of the bourgeois family assemblage Deleuze and Guattari reference in *Anti-Oedipus* and see Ahmed's queer orientation as an example of refrain, an affective relation that forms across dominant schematics. As such, I think that adapting a reading for queer orientation as a method for describing refrains would involve my first paying careful attention to how figures are situated, faced, and purposed in relation to each other; noting instances of forbidden contact; taking stock of the new shapes, impressions, which that contact produces; and characterizing the inevitably politicized emotions on which such relational forms depend. Basically, I understand my method as similar to that of Ahmed's *Cultural Politics of Emotions* (2004), only in reverse: Instead of plumbing politically valent emotions to see how they shape bodies, I am here looking closely at the fabular bodies proposed by these gay liberationists to see what politicized relations and emotions produced them.

The back-to-the-land gay liberationists I look at called themselves many names: faggots, fruits, fuzzies, sissies, and fairies. I understand names like these to signal improvised subjectivities, refrains, queer orientations. They emerged when gay liberation

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[36] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2010), 5.

was waning, when the story of the rights-holding gay citizen ascended. Experiencing the parallel capitalist shifts towards global capitalism and U.S. nationalism as absurd to their liberationist vision, some of those liberationists who were affectively no-longer-"gay" used print media and rural events to improvise new subjectivities and make sense of social chaos. In that these subjectivities were not rationally defined or logically espoused, they less resemble firm identities than they do the subjective experiments which I am calling refrains. My main method is to begin with some of these emergent figures and to read the cultural production around their formation to describe the kinds of connections – orientations and assemblages – which shape them.

To further distinguish this interpretive approach, I describe it as a form of nervous reading.[37] By this, I mean that, instead of reading texts for what they rationally mean, I read them for what they *do*: how they forge a connection, establish a rhythm, or circulate an emotion. To get to the scale of everyday life, I don't read for long-range cause and effect or mid-range puzzle and logical solution; to characterize the more immediate, I read for stimulus and response. I treat these texts as tools within the everyday lives of gay liberationists, not as leisurely reflection somewhere outside those lives. I see them as products of the skin, designed for touch – not of the withdrawn mind. When such a nervous reading method is applied to refrains, however, its purpose is to discover improvisational efforts to feel differently, to re-condition responses to everyday stimuli.

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[37] There are certainly parallels with other theoretical forms of "nervous" critique. See Michael Taussig's *The Nervous System* (New York City: Routledge, 1992) and Denis Byrne's "Nervous Landscapes: Race and Space in Australia" in *Making Settler Colonial Space: Reflections on Race, Place, and Identity,* Tracey Banivanua Mar and Penelope Edmonds, eds. (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 103-128. Because I more often read for somatic responses of connection, of alliance-building, though, rather than responses addressed to power, there are significant differences, too.

Between F Words* adapts a range of affective theories. In terms of application, I pay particular attention to four different categories of affect to describe the refrains of certain gay liberationists of the 1970s Southeast. First, I attend to affect as *emotion*. For example, in Chapter One, I discuss a particular form of gay liberationist loneliness, and in Chapter Four, I describe a period of gay liberationist terror. Second, I consider affect as *orientation*, how these gay liberationists formed in relationship to other groups, defining themselves, for example, *with* or *against*, other subjectivities of the time. Often my analysis of orientation focuses on the intersections of social categories like gender, race, class, age, and sexuality. Of particular importance here is the complex but critical relationship of these Southeastern gay liberationists with radical lesbian feminists. Third, I often talk of affect in terms of *psyche*. Chapter One demonstrates how gay liberationists who widely critiqued institutional psychology as a tool of repression and homophobia improvised their own models of the psyche and mental health. I describe how these liberationists employed these models in their everyday but very political lives. Fourth, I also discuss affect as *corporeality*. For example, I discuss performing genderfuck drag, occupying domestic space, and experiencing accelerated and timeless temporalities. I pay attention to how these gay liberationists tried to re-shape and re-pace their bodies. By describing the everyday experiences of these gay liberationists in terms of these four types of affect, I offer a multi-layered portrait of the refrains which sustained not only the politics, but also the feeling, of liberation. To demonstrate this method, I next provide a reading of Carl Wittman's "A Gay Manifesto" (1970), followed by readings of James Broughton's films *The Bed* (1968) and *Dreamwood* (1972), as key countercultural

liberationist foundations. Analyses in the chapters of *Between F* Words* will regularly refer back to liberationist aspects I find in these readings.

Setting Liberationist Scenes: The Orientation of the Gay Ghetto in Wittman's Manifesto

Carl Wittman published "Refugees from Amerika: A Gay Manifesto" (1970), in San Francisco, and many see it as setting the early terms of gay liberation. Wittman had been born to Communist parents, been a member of Students for a Democratic Society, participated in Southern civil rights work, and co-authored the article "An Interracial Movement of the Poor" (1963). In the gay manifesto, citing widespread Marxist and Communist homophobia, Wittman famously wrote, "We haven't figured out what kind of political/economic system is good for us as gays. … But we know that we are radical, in that we know the system that we're under now is a direct source of oppression, and it's not a question of our getting our share of the pie. The pie is rotten."[38] As part of the coalitional gay liberation politics which Wittman urged, he called for gay men to work on the chauvinistic practices they perpetuated towards the women within the movement even as they also committed to women's liberation: "We have largely opted out of a system which oppresses women daily - our egos are not built on putting women down and having them build us up. Also, living in a mostly male world we have become used to playing different roles, doing our own shit-work. And finally, we have a common enemy: the big male chauvinists are also the big anti-gays."[39]

In "Refugees from Amerika" we can see several recognizable liberationist elements. Wittman's past theorization of an interracial political movement and his call

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[38] Carl Wittman, "Refugees from Amerika: A Gay Manifesto," *History is a Weapon*, accessed 27 November 2015, http://www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/wittmanmanifesto.html.
[39] Ibid.

for a commitment to women's liberation index his sense of gay liberation as part of a wider network of liberation movements. Alliance is crucial. He further focuses primary critique on the state. As such, his claim that the "pie is rotten" expresses his distaste with the larger system and does so vividly, in a gustatory register, evoking domestic and nationalistic belonging ("apple pie") with a sweetness which then turns the stomach, using revulsion to set liberationism affectively against the system, as a matter of the gut. I want to contrast this position, though, with Ahmed's description of feminist wonder in order to mark Wittman's liberationism as a departure from the androgyne refrain I will describe below in Broughton's films.

Ahmed recognizes that feminist bodies are often productively shaped by their political anger, but she also says, " … feminism cannot be reduced to that which it is against, even if what it is against is irreducible. Feminism is also 'for' something other, a 'for-ness' that does not simply take the shape of what it is against."[40] Ahmed names this "for-ness" as feminist "wonder" and defines it as recognizing the extraordinary in the ordinary, as if seeing the everyday for the very first time, as a made thing rather than natural one—as a way of seeing which "opens up rather than suspends historicity".[41] She further writes, "The capacity for wonder is the space of opening up to the surprise of each combination; each body, which turns this way or that, impresses on others, affecting what they can do."[42]

If according to Ahmed, politicized wonder is an emotion which shapes bodies by what they are for, then Wittman's vision of gay liberation here seems more characterized

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[40] Ahmed 2015, 178.
[41] Ibid, 179.
[42] Ibid, 183.

by deploying an affective bond of what "gays" were against. It hinges on strategies of revulsion. This becomes particularly important when we look more closely at how he sounds the tenor of his coalition with women's liberation. The connection is proven by gay men's having "opted out" of sexist systems of oppression, by refusing to build their egos in typical patriarchal relations to women, by "doing our own shit work," and by finding a common enemy in chauvinists. Along with a politics of shared anger against a common enemy, the other mentioned forms of coalition are actually characterized by vectors of disengagement from systems of oppression but they don't actually include explicit motions *towards* women.

If I adopt Ahmed's model of queer orientation to imagine which way Wittman's model of gay liberation would position gays in relation to women, I do not imagine them facing each other, as we will see the black man and white woman do with Broughton's androgyne figure, locked in a kiss. Instead, I see them, in some cases, facing away from women, in those moments when they "do their own shit work". Here, we can imagine them back-to-back, surely aware of each other's sharing a similar space, but not exactly working together. At most, when they face their common enemy (chauvinism), we can imagine them shoulder to shoulder, possibly holding hands, but their attentions are still primarily directed out and away, shaped by the shared x-ray focus of their critique of the oppressive system. This is a very specific form of alliance. It *may* still be a kind of queer orientation in that women and gay men's recognizing their parallel situation within the imperialist system and joining forces does defy the divisive system. But, this refrain is *not* one of bodies mutually shaped in eroticized wonder; instead it is shaped by

withdrawal from complicity with the system and by shared revulsion in the face of systemic shit and rot.

Still, Wittman described these radical women as "our closest ally" and urged gay liberationists to "get together with them" and "be sensitive … and respect" their developing identities at the same time they join forces with a lesbian caucus "to attack gay guys' male chauvinism".[43] Here, gay liberationists were encouraged to turn inward to uproot their own internalized sexism and increase their proximity to the women's movement, demonstrating affects of sensitivity and respect. I read that combination of emotions as an expression of a "good fences make good neighbors" form of connection. Gays and women stand together, touching, but not crossing boundaries. In this sense, they are separate *and* together, close, but in no way interpenetrating. I call this orientation a "radical adjacency," a togetherness characterized by respect but not by erotics or wonder.

Furthermore, while calling for cross-identity liberationist coalitions and underscoring the multiracial composition of gay culture, "Refugees from Amerika" tellingly described any possible coalition with Black and Chicano liberation as "tenuous," citing many of these movements' male members' "uptightness" and extreme masculinity as the core problem.[44] While Wittman went on to assert that those problems were surmountable, there is a clear difference between how he described necessary relations with women's liberation and how he described those with liberationist groups of color. With Black and Chicano liberationist groups, Wittman does urge gay liberationists to

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[43] Wittman, ibid.
[44] Wittman, "Refugees from Amerika." Wittman also references "the traditional pattern of Mexicans beating up 'queers'".

"overcome mutual animosity and fear," but there is no parallel call to name these affects as stemming from an internal foundational racism which should likewise be attacked, and there is curiously no call to demonstrate sensitivity and respect; instead, gay liberationists are encouraged to "show them that we mean business," to see these other liberationists' "uptightness and supermasculinity" as "understandable," and focus on "common enemies" like "police, city hall, capitalism."[45]

Here, strategies of knowing, rather than more intimate affective approaches, are advocated, and by way of the phrase "meaning business," a capitalist and vaguely violent proving ground is ironically imagined as the default meeting space for these movements. And, the emphasis on common enemies, while retaining the liberationist mode of systemic critique, seems to abandon the paired liberationist mode of wonder, of "for-ness," and of connection, opting instead for a politics of simply turning "mutual animosity" outwards toward the oppressive system. LGBT movement historian Christina Hanhardt observes how, in Wittman's discussion of homophobic violence, "[The] slippage from police violence to street violence is telling. The ideas that anti-gay violence is disproportionately committed by people of color and that it is expressive of other forms of inequality are early hints of what would emerge as a key aspect of the new gay rights activism."[46] As Hanhardt shows, even in early gay liberationist discourse, we can see in its isolationist tendencies a certain gravitational pull towards a concern with white safety.

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[45] Ibid.

[46] Hanhardt, *Safe Space: Gay Neighborhood History and the Politics of Violence* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), 87-88.

The above nervous reading of Wittman's manifesto reflects its geographic location in the urban "gay ghetto". As Hobson has shown, it models itself on Black Power and women's –especially lesbian – liberation, but it doesn't orient itself to those movements with open arms. With women, it establishes a respectful adjacency, and with liberationists of color, it sets a competitive tone. Neither relationship is inflected with the kind of wonder Ahmed describes, with a kind of "for"-ness. This orientation is critical to remember because, as we will see, Wittman will be a founding editor of *RFD* magazine in 1974.

We find a different tone, though, if we both re-wind and broaden the setting of West Coast gay liberation, to set it in the promises of the counterculture. The "Summer of Love" spirit which immediately preceded Stonewall accommodated gender and sexual "deviance" with its hippie androgyny and free-love. As we will see, many gay liberationists moved in these countercultural circles and even took part in its back-to-the-land experiments. In order to contrast the kind of gay liberation promised by this counterculture with that of Wittman's urban ghetto, we can provide a parallel nervous reading of two James Broughton West Coast films which bracket Stonewall: 1968's *The Bed* and 1972's *Dreamwood.* Not only do these readings help us to imagine a gay liberationist orientation within the counterculture and its often rural settings, but they also describe the unique vision of someone who will later be a leading figure in rurally oriented gay liberationist culture. Film-maker Broughton would eventually be touted as the culture's "bard". I take some time with this interpretation, then, in order to establish a set of reading practices and themes which will be central to many of the arguments posed by *Between F* Words.*

To Bed & Into the Woods: Broughton's Countercultural Liberationist Orientation

The Bed is a short lyric film set in a field, starring Bay Area bohemian artists and counterculturalists who improvise a dizzying array of acts to perform on and around a four-poster bed. Because the film includes same-sex sexuality and androgyny in its joyous proliferation of bodies, libidinously connecting and reconnecting on its titular four-poster, I see the film as an articulation of a broadly liberationist ethos which helps to set the stage for a specifically gay liberation which would form shortly after. Because it is set, not on the San Francisco streets and park grounds which had been the setting of the Summer of Love the year before, but in a pastoral field outside the city, I argue that Broughton gently shifts the geography of the liberationist imaginary to the rural in a way that necessitates his more directly engaging a back-to-the-land philosophy, which he overtly does four years later in the equally timely *Dreamwood* (1972).

The Bed is animated by a Summer of Love spirit. It is full of bodies: dancing bodies, sleeping bodies, touching bodies, leaping bodies, ministering bodies, running bodies – so many *naked* bodies. There are old bodies, young bodies, white bodies and black bodies, women's bodies and men's bodies – but there is a hippie androgyny resulting from featuring men's longish hair and women's unshaven skin. A sense of spirituality is joined to a liberating playfulness, and a "free love" ethos pervades the scenes, most of which are peopled by Haight-Ashbury artists and bohemians. While bringing relentless full-frontal nudity to the US screen, the comic little twenty-minute film is anything but pornographic. All the same, its nudity forced Broughton to print it with "an illegal pornography outfit, which printed much frontal nudity between midnight

and dawn in the rear of a building on a back street in East Palo Alto".[47] Despite such supposedly seedy origins, though, the director later found out that the film was mild enough to be used to train health professionals who required a "relaxing" exposure to the bare human body.[48] Its lyric treatment of a shocking subject proved unexpectedly useful.

There are more germane reasons not to let *The Bed*'s mildness or apparently familiar "hippie" cultural milieu -- or playfulness or spirituality or brevity -- lead us to read it shallowly. The film distills a unique and important, if fleeting, moment before the advent of gay liberation proper. The emphasis on the body marked by androgyny and free love which the film captures signals a period when the counterculture attempted to re-work gender and sexuality in ways that anticipate the political perspectives of the 1969 Stonewall Riots in the East Coast bohemian neighborhood of New York's Greenwich Village. This countercultural spirit can be understood as one condition for the emergence of gay liberation.

Broughton himself had had relationships with both women and men, including Mattachine founder Harry Hay, who had been one of his lovers during their college days at Stanford in the early 1930s. Both men lived through the early Cold War years, though, when homosexuals were cast as paradigmatic traitors – to the country, as communists, and among communists themselves as probable informants.[49] Homosexuals were then considered a liability to the (straight) traditional citizenry and to radicals alike. Additionally, homosexuals who tried to meet in public spaces like parks or in commercial

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[47] James Broughton, *All: A James Broughton Reader,* Jack Foley, ed. (Brooklyn, NY: White Crane Books, 2006), 144.
[48] Broughton, *Coming Unbuttoned* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1993), 31.
[49] See Margot Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011).

spaces like bars were regularly arrested, if not attacked. As a result, homosexuals – especially politically radical ones – lived in an atmosphere of pervasive surveillance. Elaborate systems of code and actorly repertories were developed so that they could network sexually, socially, and politically. Being able to read or play a situation – the flash of a red sock or recognition of an undercover cop – became essential to getting by. Gay life in these times were essentially baroque: lived differently in the open light of day and under cover of night; in cramped spaces, scared and/or hopeful of what might lie just around the corner; and with heightened skills of artifice. It was in these years that homophile organizations -- like the Mattachine Society – appeared, basing their politics on stressing homosexuals' respectability and important social roles as reasons they should be accepted into the larger society as minorities.

When the counter-culture began to emerge in the mid-1960s, though, with its emphasis on free love and androgyny, with its emphasis, in style, on what historian of transgender politics Susan Stryker has called "'hippie/fairy' chic," homosexuals were newly able to lead public lives within a broader culture that was politically committed to exploring its sexual and gender boundaries.[50] Conventional respectability was less necessary. Appearing in the juncture between homophile and gay liberation movements, Broughton's *The Bed* is a poetic document of the exuberance performed around variant gender and sexuality just after the years of Cold War constriction and just before the emergence of more public and culturally specific gay political identities. It was a generative interstice.

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[50] Stryker, *Transgender History.*

Another related reason to value *The Bed*, beyond its being a representation of an important moment in gay liberation history, is how its aesthetic form articulates the nuances of that cultural moment. *The Bed* marked Broughton's return to film. His previous film, *The Pleasure Garden* (1953), a pastoral allegory set in a park, was awarded the Cannes 1954 Prix de Fantasie Poétique award from judge Jean Cocteau. In the intervening fifteen filmless years, Broughton published four books of poetry. He insisted, though, that his film *was* poetry: "Just because one is a poet one does not have to verbalize. What I seek in cinema is a poetry of expressive image conveyed in metrical 'vehicle for meanings,' which hopefully may take us all into some vision of ecstasy."[51] For Broughton, then, poetry creates a sense of rhythm ("metrical"), whether verbal or imagistic, which results in ecstasy, some bodily joy. The imagistic and the verbal enjoy a kind of synergy in Broughton's work because he recognizes how verbal poetry, especially the lyric, hinges on images to produce an affective state, and how what is moving in motion pictures is often shaped by the words – whether spoken or textual – that surround the bodies filmed.

As poems, his films follow an associational logic more than a narrative one. Critic Bruce Elder describes the compositional strategy of *The Bed* in the following way:

> He [Broughton] begins with a premise -- … for example, he asks what we all do on a bed. He then follows this inspiration to wherever it carries him, but always remaining true to the initial premise, allowing one image to suggest the next. You think of mounting (an action performed in bed) – if you can mount someone in a bed, then you can mount something from a bed; let's say a motorcycle. … So you have a motorcyclist: you can rhyme the motorcycle (visually) with a horse; so a horse and rider get into the work.[52]

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[51] Broughton, *All*, 157.

[52] Bruce R. Elder, *A Body of Vision: Representations of the Body in Recent Film and Poetry* (Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1997), 76.

Using association, Broughton sets *The Bed* to imaginatively proliferate bodily phenotypes and relations. As the Cold War era of the McCarthy hearings receded, its policing -- its vigilant defining -- of proper gender roles and faithful sexual relations eased, too. Into that ebb, Broughton wanted to loose as many genders and sexualities as he could imagine. *The Bed* becomes not only a gallery of the resultant forms, but also an aesthetic primer in the means of producing them in just such moments of opportunity.

The film begins, as I have mentioned, with a white frame bed rolling jauntily downhill and into a field, comically the star of her own movie. The first human figures to appear are an Adam and Eve, rightly nude. Broughton quickly sets to re-writing Eden. First, Broughton frames the story, not only with a mythical pairing, but by reminding us that a third, the tempting snake, was in Eden from the beginning. Differences in species thus become a way to classify and multiply bodies, as much as gender. Broughton, though, wants to generate as many possibilities as he can. If pairing is -- even briefly -- important, then a pair should be paired with other pairs: Another man and woman appear. Other combinations become possible: man with man, woman with woman, triads and solitaries, groups of four, and so on. Broughton puts all these combinations in the bed, as demonstrations of possibilities.

This trope of numeric reproduction begs the question of sex. The convention of the implied missionary position is turned on its head as bodies orient themselves other than face to face, instead trying face to foot, allowing a foot fetish sexuality to introduce itself. Species is brought back in as animal role-play appears, one person riding another on all fours. On the other hand, reproductive sex introduces the concept of generations as infant and elderly figures appear. As purportedly sexual and familial scenes blur with the

movement of nude bodies, it becomes difficult to tell sexual attentions from bodily care for others. Ranges of intimacies look very similar. Rites of passage are performed: baptisms, marriages, funerals. These mark familiar stages of the body, but they are also opportunities for new forms of care for bodies to emerge. Traditional hierarchies based on such bodily categories as gender and race are reversed, as when a black woman, posed in the nude opulence of Matisse's odalisque paintings, is reverently washed by a kneeling, suited, middle-aged white man, apparently a corporate figure.

The logic of opposition is also used to turn the Christian origin story on its head as apparently Catholic figures appear only to admit a more catholic spirituality in the form of a pagan Pan figure playing flute, crouched on the frame at the head of the bed. Eden becomes heathen as a human-animal hybrid (goat-man), instead of an angel, watches over the scene. Global nears and fars, highs and lows, sacred and profane, are scrambled in the context of *The Bed*'s upbeat relational promiscuity.

Demonstrating a kind of relentlessly imagistic deconstruction, Broughton not only shows how the moralistic logic of opposites (man/woman, black/white, straight/gay, old/young, holy/profane) can be happily turned on its head, but how the very logic of oppositional pairing itself is limiting. In *The Bed*, Broughton offers joyful inversions of pairs so that, ultimately, he can make larger clusters of more intimate bodies. This is a visual-poetic illustration of what Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari call *deterritorialized assemblage.*[53] An apparent chaos begins to discover itself as potential.

Towards the end of *The Bed*, Broughton's playful corporeal proliferation reaches a climax when the bed appears weighted with uncountable bodies.

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[53] Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus.*

Fig. 1. Still from video, James Broughton, *The Bed*, in *The Films of James Broughton*, DVD, (1968; Chicago: Facets, 2006).

The number of bodies in the bed, estimated by the pile of dirty feet, boggles the mind. Judging from the angle, some bodies appear to be spilling off the bed. Because of the film's preceding focus on nudity and rites of passage, this image uncomfortably sutures orgy to mass grave. The dirtiness of the feet gesture towards an at least "pedestrian," if not working-class, group. Their facelessness makes them "unreadable," makes their intentions unknowable, but also ambient. Because of Broughton's comic buoyance, viewers feel part of this group, conspirators within the group whose threat comes from their multiplicity, their unpredictability, their generative desire, and their intimacy with the earth, death, and work. Again, this image registers the chaos of Deleuze and Guattari's deterritorialized assemblage. Antonio Negri, building on both Deleuze and Guattari, as well as Spinoza, would describe such a phenomenon as referencing the politically valent *multitude*.[54] Each of these terms aptly describe Broughton's crowded bed in that they refer to a collectivity in foment, gathering itself in threat to the larger

[54] Antonio Negri, *The Savage Anomaly: The Power of Spinoza's Metaphysics and Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

system. Because no specific subjectivity has yet presented itself, though, we don't yet have an example of Guattari's refrain. The unique combination of elements which might result in an identifiable figure or subjectivity, one which might serve as an icon for a newly politicized culture, has not yet emerged.

But Broughton does present us with such a figure in *The Bed*. Central to his filmic practice is enacting a kind of liberatory deconstruction which, in order to effect tangible change, must occur on the level of the body, not just of words. Already, as we have seen, the poet-filmmaker likes to play in an associative way with the logic of phenotypes, arriving at different bodily combinations. Species, gender, race, age, sexuality, and class are all phenotypical categories usually used to divide bodies into different classes. Broughton's film imagines, instead, seeing those phenotypes as opportunities for connection, rather than separation. Following that logic, Broughton presents us with the androgyne as a figure that indexes such connection. Whereas the androgyne is typically thought of as a fusion of male and female in a single body, in *The Bed*, Broughton's understanding of the androgyne is not simply a joining of two genders.

Towards the end of the film, we encounter this body:

Fig. 2. James Broughton, *The Bed*, in *The Films of James Broughton*, DVD (1968; Chicago: Facets, 2006), Video.

Broughton represents the androgyne as the joining of what are socially considered bodily opposites – here race *and* gender -- in a concerted figure. The fact that Broughton represents this androgyne without camera tricks is purposeful: The viewer is not supposed to bow to the illusion that either of these bodies is *subsumed* into a larger whole body. The point of the androgyne for Broughton is to recognize the individual body as not individual at all but as, in fact, multiple, and that that multiplicity only coheres due to the increased intimacy which results from exploring new practices and forms of bodily care. Broughton's is an ethic of such radical joyful closeness that its practice necessarily changes one on the very bodily level. You multiply but somehow cohere. And the androgyne is the prime figure of that ethics.

Elder writes of viewing Broughton's film that "… we must open ourselves to the world that Broughton presents and receive its beauty quietly and without judgment. Only this state, close to what Heidegger calls '*Gelassenheit*,' affords the nudes of Broughton's film – a catholic collection of shapes, sizes, and ages – their autonomy. It is what justice demands, for justice consists in giving beings their due, and nothing less than complete autonomy is due to any sacred object."[55] Elder also points out that this justice involves a dual practice: one of what he describes as Oz-like enchantment with what is always possible and another he sees as Zen-like acceptance of what is really present. As such, Broughton's androgyne is aspirational and realistic at once.

As the joined body of a white woman and a black man, kissing, this androgyne registers white U.S. society's sexist and racist sexualization of any relationship between white women and black men. As such, we cannot simply see this androgyne refrain as

[55] Elder, 83.

the product of Broughton's inspired creative labor; it is very much a recognition of the real, but often obscured, ways by which global capitalism yokes black and white, female and male, in its project of using race and gender to assemble apparently natural labor subjectivities: forced domestic and manual workers. In the eyes of the U.S. dominant culture, the coupling of black and white is not, at base, a sexual deviance; it is an exposure of this ongoing history of forced labor along racial and gender lines. Broughton's androgyne, then, fits Guattari's definition of an ethico-aesthetic practice: It recognizes the dominant assemblage at play and improvisationally composes a hybrid figure, an alternate subjectivity, by joining those the system would separate and subject. As such, it is also an example of Ahmed's queer orientation: These are bodies touching despite being forbidden to do so, and then, being re-shaped by that touching.

To realize the impact of Broughton's androgyne, we must remember that *The Bed* was released in 1968, just one year after the Supreme Court's *Loving v. Virginia* ruling declared laws against inter-racial marriage unconstitutional. This decision nullified anti-miscegenation laws active in sixteen Southern states at the time of the ruling. Like 1967's *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?*, *The Bed* helps to naturalize the spirit of the new law within U.S. culture by visually celebrating the union of black and white, on the big screen, shortly after the court's decree. While Broughton's androgyne surely evoked *Loving v. Virginia* for the film's audiences, it just as surely amplified the implications of the case by not depicting the process of a wedding but rather focusing on the irrevocably unified body of those *already* married. As he does elsewhere in *The Bed*, Broughton here joyfully takes advantage of a literal reading of the Bible, in this case Mark 10:8's description of marriage: "And they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more

twain, but one flesh". Having a single pair of arms and legs, one of each black and the other white, and wearing a single gown, Broughton's figure should be understood as one body. Black and white are already indivisible. This androgyne makes the tacit condition overt. In the wake of the Civil Rights movement and the *Loving v. Virginia* case (1967), Broughton's refrain imagines the bodies that might emerge from intimacies forged between those forcibly divided. But, as a body which is also female and male simultaneously, it also refuses easy and divisive classification into either of two genders at all.

I propose that Broughton's androgyne is an early example of the kind of bodily reshaping Ahmed describes in that it presents a body formed in an ongoing cross-racial intimate contact which results in a body necessarily understood as mixed-race and mixed-gender. And, it does so not because of the allowances of *Loving v. Virginia*, but in the face of all the structural racism that preceded and followed it. To attend to this androgyne figure's queer positioning in terms of race, gender, sexuality, and class describes it intersectionally. To complement that description with an assemblage description, as Puar demonstrates it in *Terrorist Assemblages*, requires looking at the other material, energetic, and spatiotemporal elements which comprise the conditions of the androgyne's composition, their union.

What the static images from the film cannot convey is the pace of Broughton's assemblage and refrain. The rhythm of the film moves from languid, relaxing scenes to those in which the film is slightly sped up, as in comic keystone-cop sequences. This technique evokes earlier film periods, especially those that pre-date classic Hollywood's fixation on symmetry and causal narratives. Because of this, *The Bed* can be understood

by what film theorist Tom Gunning has called "cinema of attractions".[56] (This connection is particularly appropriate, given Broughton's filmic fascination with pre-Hollywood amusements like carnivals, living statuary, and the *tableaux vivant*, which had their influence on early film as well.) Cinema of attractions indulges in a kind of bodily excess, an exhibitionism, which demands the viewer's attention to the filmed figures themselves rather than any larger story. They are a kind of spectacle, often capitalizing on the novelty of innovative film equipment and technique, and they often feature a kind of satirized "rube" figure – a rural character whose role is to express naïve wonder which the audience briefly shares before quickly elevating themselves to expressions of urbane knowing. For this reason, the cinema of attractions is often taken up by avant-garde auteurs whose spectacles and techniques are recognized as modern and urban.

The Bed is a different kind of attraction. Broughton stresses technical novelty very little. He writes, "*The Bed* has no special style, there isn't a trick in it, it is all straight cuts. I wanted to show as directly as possible my vision of the flowing river of existence."[57] Film scholar Scott Bukatman has described how attractions typically exhibit a "temporality of irruption," often leading to a defamiliarizing effect, but, as we have seen, Broughton's film flows and is "relaxing".[58] The film's form of seduction is hypnotic rather than flashy. Yet, with its ubiquitous nudity, its lyric resistance of narrative, and its reference to earlier film conventions, it has an exhibitionism which links it to the cinema of attractions. The point of Broughton's exhibitionism is not to interrupt

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[56] Tom Gunning, "The Cinema of Attraction[s]: Early Film, Its Spectator, and the Avante-Garde," *Wide Angle* 8, nos. 3 &4 (1986): 63-70.
[57] Broughton, *All*, 144.
[58] Scott Bukatman, "Spectacle, Attractions, and Visual Pleasure," in *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded*, ed. Wanda Strauven (Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 80.

the flow of reality but to expose its inherent strangeness, to lace the everyday with wonder. As such, it echoes other art forms of the countercultural period which sought to dissolve the borders between art and audience, performance and the everyday -- such as happenings and street theater. It also sustains the position of the rural rube within the cinema of attractions, refusing to displace the bumpkin's wide-eyed wonder with urban knowing.

Understanding Broughton's androgyne refrain as a variation on the attraction draws out its kinship to Ahmed's description of feminist wonder. We can now see how neatly her description of this wonder describes Broughton's film: "The capacity for wonder is the space of opening up to the surprise of each combination; each body, which turns this way or that, impresses on others, affecting what they can do."[59] Broughton's androgyne body recognizes and does not repress the history of labor forced, along racial and gender lines, into their performances by global capitalism. But, it also attempts to open that history up by performing a bodily connection across race and gender divides, by cultivating a sense of wonder around that connection, by asking us to imagine what might result from such a reunited body's efforts to work for its own liberation rather than in the interest of global capital. Remembering the various sexual practices and gender deviations which "share the bed" with this filmic androgyne, *The Bed* would construe "gay" liberation as vitally joined to many other liberation movements, most especially black and women's liberation, all of which seek to free themselves from their conscripted roles within the overarching structure of global capitalism. What affectively drives the liberationist project is an alchemical cycle of transmuting an anger at being trapped

[59] Ibid, 183.

within this divisive structure into a wonder at what alternative structures might be made by building intimacies across those divides.

As a refrain, Broughton's androgyne defies expected radical affects. Instead of a temporality of irruption, in which the present is pierced by some modernizing futurity, *The Bed* has a fluid composition which opens the past as something still being made *as* the present. It transmutes anger to explore the uses of wonder as a political emotion. Joyful and erotic connection characterize its tone, making it more comic than dramatic. Like so many of Shakespeare's comedies, it builds to an unexpected, even audacious, marriage. That marriage is clearly extra-Christian, foot-noting Christian Eden only to paganize it. And, if the turban and bomb become the bodily extensions of Puar's terrorist assemblage, then the bed itself – from birth to death – is the indispensable extensive skin of Broughton's androgyne. In fact, it's possible to see Broughton's bed as precursor to John Lennon and Yoko Ono's 1969 Bed-Ins for Peace, which themselves were inspired by Civil Rights-era sit-ins and looked to love and peace as political alternatives to the military violence on display in the Vietnam War. To the degree that broad erotics and androgyny were central to Broughton's liberationist refrain, gay liberation was already embedded in it.

Broughton's 1972 film *Dreamwood* explicitly addresses the urban-rural divide that was merely implicit in *The Bed*'s pastoral setting. If *The Bed* foregrounds a complex cross-racial and cross-gender pan-liberationism inherent in the ideals of the counterculture, it does so while simplifying the geography of the counterculture and setting it in an under-theorized Eden. By doing this, it becomes complicit with the kind of urbanormativity critical rural scholars describe. In *Dreamwood*, Broughton attempts

to correct this, as he depicts the challenging journey of the androgyne from the city to the forest. Stryker, among others, has shown how the more gender-varied "hippie/ fairy chic" of the early days of gay liberation was supplanted in just a few years by the hyper-masculine, militaristic style of the gay male "clone". *Dreamwood*, then, can be read to answer where the androgyne goes when the city is no longer hospitable.

Fig. 3. James Broughton, *Dreamwood*, in *The Films of James Broughton*, DVD (1972; Chicago: Facets, 2006), Video.

Basing the film on his book, *The Androgyne Journal*, originally drafted in 1960, Broughton starts his 1972 film with a man waking in the city. That city is obviously depicted as a place of isolation, where industry has abandoned individuals and left them trapped in the architectural shells of an economy that has moved on without them. The man looks faintly clone-like in work clothes and a mustache. With binoculars, he scans the urban wasteland to see in the network of exhaust stacks a full-frontal female nude among trees. Here, Broughton uses the simple photographic technique of superimposition in order to represent his androgyne. Here, the androgyne is not fe/male-black/white but city-female-forest. This super-imposed, highly intimate image conveys a

spatial sense of elsewhere as always here and a temporal sense of the supposedly lost past as always now. "Somewhere there is what there has always been," says the film's opening poetic invocation, reflecting the spatial opening of historicity which Ahmed references as an essential component of wonder.

The hero has to leave the city for the forest, but when he finds it, he fails the mythic tests he must pass in order to enter. His violent rejection of his own androgyny and his obsessions with being a masculine patriarch become very real barriers to his entering the feminine forest: Literally every time he approaches the tree-line after demonstration of such masculine investments, Broughton rewinds the film to position him back in the field, outside the forest. The field is the space of what Broughton refers to in his film notes as the "masculine mysteries".[60] What those mysteries are is made clear by a visual pun delivered by the quick succession of scenes in which the hero passes two differently occupied men.

In the first shot, visually, the hero appears, literally, to be "walking into a punch" as he approaches a man shadowboxing. In the second, he passes a lone figure pushing a box uphill. Here, thematics of the "masculine mysteries" are linked by the visual pun of the "box," which indicates enclosure, even in the supposed open-ness of the field. Both scenes are saturated with a sense of futility as the notion of walking into a punch is immediately followed by a visual reference to Sisyphus, who is cursed to push a stone up a hill for eternity. The source of such futility is linked to masculinity – whether it be associated with a form of leisure rooted in aggressive competition, or with the world of endless labor which yields no fruit (remember the wasteland of the city's industry).

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[60] Broughton, *All*, 159.

Figs. 4-5. James Broughton, *Dreamwood*, in *The Films of James Broughton*, DVD (1972; Chicago: Facets, 2006), Video.

Obviously, the forest path of the androgyne involves leaving the masculine world with its values of patriarchal family, temporal succession, competitive leisure, and alienating labor. In fact, the rural forest can only be reached by leaving these values behind. And the hero does eventually achieve the forest. By overcoming all manner of socially conditioned revulsions and by inviting intimacies outside patriarchal and heterosexist propriety, he cultivates such closenesses that join his bodies to others, rendering "him" fundamentally connected, an androgyne. And, as we see from *Dreamwood*'s opening version of the androgyne, urban and rural are recognized as joined, as part of the same body.

In fact, in the original script of the film, Broughton describes *Dreamwood* as ending this way: "This image of union and unity achieved is seen, with behind it in a sequence of running back of the landscapes through which he has come, back to the city, and ultimately to the ocean – taking the resolution back into the world from which he

came."[61] But, in the actual film, that return to the city never occurs. The film closes with the hero still in the forest. But, given that the film opens with the man waking, the audience must also wonder whether the trip to the forest ever really occurred, if it had only been a dream. As a result, *Dreamwood*'s setting is possibly both rural and urban at once, rendering any distinction untenable. Ultimately, the important act is the crossing of urban-rural *divides* so that the actual *connection* necessary to achieving androgyne status is revealed. In *Dreamwood*, Broughton attempts to extend the scope of the androgyne to include not just intimacy between individual human bodies but between whole reunited urban-rural regions. Implicitly, by the logic of the cinema of attractions, rube-ish wonder and urbane knowing are also linked. *Dreamwood* stands, then, as a kind of inspiration to liberationists -- especially gay ones taken with the figure of the androgyne – to no longer see themselves confined to urban wastelands filled with hyper-masculine clones but to instead re-vision the city as part of a larger landscape which includes a rural geography where work which is not patriarchal might be discovered.

It should not be overlooked, though, that, as the androgyne refrain's erotics expand to include urban-rural divides and to imagine a politicized rural which accords with a critical rural perspective, a mixed-gender erotic hinging on an embrace of the mythical feminine becomes central. Cross-racial erotics, on the other hand, don't seem to figure in this revision of the androgyne. It must be asked whether the racial tenuousness of Wittman's gay liberationism had become a condition of the androgyne's going back to the land. There are also many possible troubling socio-political implications to an androgyne subjectivity whose femininity and erotics are drawn from a Divine Feminine

[61] Ibid., 161.

associated with a pre-modern nature. The role of race and gender in back-to-the-land gay liberationism is a central question of my project.

Chapter Overview

Hopefully, the preceding analyses of Broughton's androgyne achieves a couple of things. First, it illustrates my method of describing refrains. Second, *The Bed* and *Dreamwood* together prove reflective of the shift in spirit from an early erotic liberationism to a gay liberation whose connections are strained by the movement's isolationist patterns. Third, the films set many of the affective terms that will inflect the rural gay liberationism which is the subject of this project: connectivity, subjective multiplicity, wonder, anti-Christianity, gendered labor, and so on. Fourth, these two films also represent a move to more fully theorize an early pastoral vision by way of a more critical rural perspective. Basically, *Dreamwood* leads us to the threshold of a gay back-to-the-land movement which struggles to remain liberationist. The shifting affective elements of this newly combined movement are the subject of my regional history.

In Chapter One, I introduce *RFD* magazine as an important textual staging ground for back-to-the-land gay liberationism. Looking at its first four years, I contrast the editorial concerns of its Iowan (1974-1976) and Oregonian (1976-1978) tenures to highlight the tensions which will inflect the magazine and its culture as it moves into the Southeast. In the first part, I engage Herring's concept of critical rusticity as central to Iowan *RFD*'s view of rurally oriented gay liberationism before contextualizing it as paired with what I call erotic rusticity. I argue that this erotic mode depends on an emergent liberationist psychological model to address a specific historical form of

loneliness. In the second half, I interpret Oregonian *RFD*'s faggot refrain as an application of Bay Area political spiritualties to address the exhaustion of gay liberation. I also read textual documentation of the 1976 rural Faggots and Class Struggle conference for how its masculine investments in a militant femme figure and its assumptions about the scale of liberation result in important connective failures. I close, though, by showing how, ironically, such failures prompted a specifically gay liberationist concept of the rural.

In Chapter Two, I describe a contemporaneous (1973-1977) Southeastern back-to-the-land gay liberationism: Fayetteville, Arkansas' Mulberry House collective. I rely on letters, journals, and oral histories to characterize the formation of the group's sissie refrain through a dual orientation of 1) contrast to West Coast faggot culture and 2) identification within a regional lesbian socialist feminist network. I read sissie Michael Oglesby's *RFD* critique of the 1976 Oregon conference discussed in Chapter One as a socialist feminist take on rural liberationist event design, and I use Dennis Williams' journal to build a narrative of the collective's daily life in order to describe it as a specifically sissie means of denaturalizing "housework" and as an everyday form of struggle which ultimately led to the House's fissure along class lines. I end the chapter, though, with a reading of an Arkansas Sissies' *RFD* letter for how it articulated a Southeastern gay liberationism through its critique of the whiteness of urban West Coast faggot culture.

Chapter Three begins with the specifically Appalachian context of several gay liberationists' back-to-land and activist rural experiences (1973-1978) by providing oral histories as background for three letters written to *RFD*. I also position these writers as

key liberationist actors within the history of a Southeastern gay political network which formed around the quick dissolution of the Georgia Gay Liberation Front (GLF). Importantly, I describe their participation in the 1978 Southeastern Conference for Lesbians and Gay Men in Atlanta, which culminated in a lesbian feminist critique of gay men within the regional network and in gay male liberationists' decision to host a rural event to build a culture around addressing that critique. I couch this June 1978 Running Water Farm "gathering" as a rural event contrasted to the 1976 Oregon faggot conference and an event patterned on Rainbow gatherings. By oral histories with attendees and by analysis of a poem written about the gathering, I end the chapter with an affective description of the event and its vision of rural-urban connection.

Chapter Four describes the Louisiana Sissies in Struggle (LaSiS), the New Orleans collective which many of my interviewees credit as the radical spirit of the rurally oriented Southeastern gay liberationist network. Formed by middle-class members from the Ozark Mulberry House, the collective sought to translate its earlier sissie practice to the Crescent City's streets. I begin with narration from Dennis Williams' personal journal -- begun in Arkansas and continued in New Orleans -- to provide a lived sense of his revised sissie practice. I then read three key LaSiS texts. First, I look at Dimid Hayes' "Letter to Action" for how it envisioned sissie collectivization to work with the gentle refrain of the Running Water Farm gathering. Second, I look at the *RFD* playlet, "Solidarity Forever" for its portrayal of LaSiS' performance of cross-movement connection and of regional relevance to national politics around education. Third, I look at the *RFD* sissie "man"ifestoes as examples of a gendered terror/ism. I close the chapter with LaSiS' liberationist and poetic responses to

the accelerated crisis of gay liberalism bracketed by the 1978 assassination of Harvey Milk and the 1979 March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights.

Finally, Chapter Five contrasts elements of the 1979 Spiritual Conference for Radical Faeries in Arizona with the similar back-to-the-land gay liberationism in the Southeast. I outline Southeastern ambivalence towards, critique of, and departure from key Radical Faerie tenets even as those in the network adopt the "Radical Faerie" as an umbrella term for the broader culture and for the purpose of *RFD.* I show how Atlanta cast itself as a "Faerie" urban hub which networked the Appalachian sites of Running Water and Short Mountain even as important differences within the regional refrain emerged. Finally, I show how the Southeastern Network answered the West Coast Radical Faerie call for "sanctuary" -- rural gay liberationist land trusts – by growing Running Water and Short Mountain as two very different models of sanctuary which reflected differences within the regional refrain. I contend that, in the process of forming rural sanctuaries, these liberationists perform an implicitly critical rural understanding of ways by which the rural and the urban are coordinated in systemic processes or development. *Between F* Words*, then, describes how Southeastern rural gay liberationists experimented with their own relational refrains in the transition from "faggot" to "faerie," and in the process, improvised a critical rural experience of rural-urban divides.

1 | "Country Faggots Everywhere": RFD, Erotic Rusticity & Liberationist Scale, 1974-1978

For a little fledgling Iowan magazine to dedicate itself to "country faggots everywhere" in the spring of 1975 demonstrated a certain audacity.[1] By 1975, many considered gay liberation in serious crisis, if not already dead. Most urban Gay Liberation Front (GLF) chapters had closed their doors several years before. It was a movement whose spark seemed to lead to quick exhaustion in the cities where it started. When *RFD* magazine used the word *faggots* in its Spring 1975 tagline, it evoked the confrontational political tenor of gay liberation in a season when most felt its fire had fizzled. And, if it was unexpected that the editors raised that spirit in Iowa, it must have seemed odder for them to do so in the name of *rural* faggots who had apparently defied confinement in backwaters to be absolutely *everywhere*. The magazine suggested that rurality and gay liberation were, together, more widely pervasive than the city orientation which seemed to define them.

Such a suggestion was less strange then than it sounds now. Any isolationist associations of the rural with some national interior, with a domestic "heartland," were surely shattered as Middle American families had watched the wartime devastation of Vietnamese villages on their home TVs. The partially documented revolutions of Mao and Castro suggested peasant – rather than industrial – models of radicalism to U.S. leftists so that, in the early 1970s, the rural was neither necessarily insular nor conservative. Likewise, gay liberation wasn't exclusively American or urban. Several Western European gay liberationist movements followed roughly similar timelines as

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[1] Cover, RFD #3, Spring 1975, Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta. For an image of the cover, see http://www.rfdmag.org/cover-detail.php?img=images/pages/ro_003.jpg&iss=3.

those in the U.S. The landmark anthology *Out of the Closets: Voices of Gay Liberation* (1972), edited by Karla Jay and Allen Young, included a manifesto for Third World Gay Revolution and an entire section on Cuba led by Young's essay "The Cuban Revolution and Gay Liberation".[2] If urban Stonewall was a spark for the U.S. movement, its city geography wasn't taken as an indispensable element of its template. *RFD* posed a rural elsewhere for a persistent gay liberation.

Knowing the magazine's position within the print culture landscape of the time also helps to map its political orientation. In 1974, Stewart Scofield proposed *RFD* at the Iowa City Midwest Gay Pride conference because the countercultural, back-to-the-land *Mother Earth News* refused to publish his notice seeking others interested in a rural gay collective.[3] That his magazine proposal was warmly received by other Pride attendees registered a growing gay liberationist disaffection with a rural counterculture whose interests in "free love" and androgynous attire didn't quite amount to a rejection of homophobia. As cultural studies scholar Scott Herring has shown, though, *RFD* qualified its pushback against *Mother Earth News* and the broader back-to-the-land movement by a more specific adaptation of the design aesthetic of rural lesbian publications like *Country Women* and by a rejection of the production style of urban gay male magazines like *The Advocate*.[4] The gay liberationist orientation, then, of early *RFD* turned away from the homophobia of the back-to-the-land counterculture and the rights-based politics of gay male urban cultures to learn from the strategies of rural lesbian feminists.

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[2] Jay and Young, *Out of the Closets,* 363-367 and 206-250. I discuss gay liberationists and Cuba more in Chapter 3. Although the "Third World" here refers to U.S. people of color, the term still frames their experience in longer, global histories of colonialism.
[3] Sears, ibid., 146.
[4] Herring, ibid.

To get a better sense of the affective, relational dynamics of this second, rural wave of gay liberation, a closer look at the early issues of *RFD* is important. Only a few scholars have offered a sustained analysis of the magazine. Herring reads the early editors' design choices to provide a nuanced portrait of the above political orientation in terms of what he calls "critical rusticity". He argues, though, that by the close of the twentieth century, the publication had abandoned this crucial anti-urban aesthetic. Historian James T. Sears documents how, in its first four years, the magazine's main editorial collectives – the one in Iowa and the other in Oregon – disagreed over *RFD*'s rural and political content.[5] Indicating that a more historical analysis of the magazine must take into account who edited it, and where, Sears follows *RFD*'s own retrospective approach of couching the serial's growth by its various locations: In three successive issues in 1983, *RFD* editors would describe the shifting spirit of the magazine in Iowa, Oregon, and then North Carolina.[6] This chapter brings together and builds on these approaches to describe the first politico-aesthetic shift in *RFD* as it moved from Iowa to Oregon. This description is crucial to contextualize the regional gay liberation produced around *RFD*'s move into the Southeast.

I first look at *RFD* content during its Iowan tenure (1974-1976) to place its critical rusticity within the context of a particularly liberationist form of gay rural loneliness. I argue that the magazine's writers employed an erotic rusticity, as well as a critical one, in answer to this loneliness. I then consider the content in Oregonian *RFD* (1976-1978) to show how the editors' renewed commitment to a gay liberationism associated with the

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[5] Sears, ibid., 145-149.

[6] History of *RFD, RFD* #34, Spring 1983, 9-13; #35, Summer 1983, 11-12; #36, Fall 1983, 9-11. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.

San Francisco Bay Area led them to embrace a regionally specific faggot subjectivity. By then reading *RFD*'s documentation of the 1976 Faggots & Class Struggle conference, I show how the geographic dimensions of faggot analysis limited its connective reach, a realization which I argue led to important re-conceptualizations of the role of the rural within this form of gay liberation. I treat early *RFD* as a document of the affective responses the culture improvised in answer to the emotional loneliness and exhaustion it experienced in the years gay liberation was said to disappear.

Liberationist Loneliness and Country Love Letters: Iowan RFD (1974-1976)

Scofield, raised in the small town of Hobart, Indiana, not far from Chicago, had come to Iowa to study psychology at Grinnell College. After graduating in 1970, he took work at his alma mater and helped to establish a gay liberationist base in Iowa. When he voiced the need for a magazine like *RFD* at the 1974 Pride conference, Iowan farm natives Donald Engstrom and Rick Graf, then living as part of an Iowa City collective, embraced the project. So did Carl Wittman, author of "Refugees from Amerika: A Gay Manifesto" (1970), along with his partner Allan Troxler, both of whom were in transit from North Carolina to Wolf Creek, Oregon. The group partnered with the Iowa City Women's Press to print *RFD*, and production responsibilities alternated between the Iowan and Oregonian collectives.[7] They mailed copies of early issues to as many friends and gay student groups as they could find. Their early readership was small but voracious.[8]

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[7] For more on the Iowa City Women's Press, see Julie Enszer and Agatha Beins, "'We Couldn't Get Them Printed,' So We Learned to Print: Ain't I a Woman? And the Iowa City Women's Press," *Frontiers* 34, no. 2 (2013): 186-221.

[8] This early history of *RFD* comes from Sears' *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones*.

RFD took its name from the acronym for "rural free delivery," the turn-of-the-twentieth-century government program which expanded U.S. postal delivery to remote rural areas. The name evokes the quaintness of distant agrarian places and supposedly simpler times. The historical postal program belongs, though, to the same general period covered by Colin Johnson's itinerant hobo cultures and Kevin Mumford's urban vice districts, a period of increased urban-rural intimacy.[9] The program itself was an example of a systemic effort to incorporate the rural into the nation's communication network at the same time the industrial city would absorb laborers, many of whom were women and/or people of color who were pulled into industry from rural areas, domestic spaces, and foreign countries alike. This demographic shift, as critical rural sociologists have pointed out, focused the attention of sociologists, policy-makers, and activists on the city as an object of rational problem-solving.[10] By giving their magazine the name *RFD*, gay back-to-the-land collectives tied the serial to a formative instance of historical urbanormativity, implicitly framing urban-rural divides as historically constructed.

Herring describes this position as a form of queer anti-urbanism, emphasizing how *RFD* formed in contrast to the emergent urban gay norms found in men's clone culture and in magazines like *The Advocate*. More specifically, Herring shows how the early *RFD* editors adapted the print stylistics of rural lesbian publications like *Country Women* in order to perform a "critical rusticity" which involved the magazine's "failing to properly clone itself".[11] In contrast to the aesthetic and economic aims of slick, urban

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[9] Colin R. Johnson, *Just Queer Folks: Gender and Sexuality in Rural America* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2013); Kevin Mumford, *Interzones: Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New York in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York City: Columbia University Press, 1997.)
[10] Gregory M. Fulkerson and Alexander R. Thomas, *Studies in Urbanormativity*.
[11] Herring, 93.

"clone"-oriented publications like *The Advocate*, the wide sales of which depended on the magazine's reproducibility – both in terms of the publication itself and the bodily form of its audience – *RFD* consciously employed design practices which, as Herring shows, defy uniformity, completion, and reproducibility. To illustrate his point, Herring points to the first issue's statement of purpose and its layout and typography.

Citing the obvious mis-spellings, nonstandard capitalization, apparently random punctuation, unfinished and re-started sentences, wavering margins and text lines, circling and strike-throughs, irregular spacing, and odd word-fusions, Herring argues, "The statement is a typographic nightmare. It is also a textualized version of the stylistic anarchy represented in *Country Women*'s aesthetic layout. … the quarterly becomes the antithesis of a clean-cut *Advocate* reader, as well as the antithesis of a clean-cut *Advocate* grayscale."[12] *RFD*'s rural text and readers are crude, unfinished, divergent works-in-progress; they are not uniform or clean-cut, like the *Advocate* or its urban clone cultures. In fact, Herring argues that *RFD*'s critical rusticity is a stylistic critique of the increasingly narrow racial, gender, and class identities found in homogenizing urban gay male cultures. Citing the work of LGBT geographers David Bell and Gill Valentine, Herring further suggests that lesbian separatists and gay men like those in the *RFD* collective who followed such women's leads understood the rural as a space that facilitated their political work.[13] Given, as we will later see, that urban lesbian and gay collectives in this period were often under FBI surveillance, many may have thought of the country as a place to evade political scrutiny. Critical rusticity, with its confusing

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[12] Herring, 92.
[13] Ibid., 81. Bell and Valentine, "Queer Country: Rural Lesbian and Gay Lives," *Journal of Rural Studies* 11, no. 2 (1995): 118.

typography and anarchic expression, would have also frustrated the quick read necessary for efficient print surveillance.

Far from an isolated instance, this critical rusticity with its rural refusal of cloning was a pervasive aspect of the culture early Iowan *RFD* built. Editors and readers applied this practice in at least three other ways. First, the name of the magazine itself shifted from issue to issue. Even though the acronym RFD ("rural free delivery") was chosen to reflect the publication's rural ties, the founding collective purposely confused the "issue" by subtitling the first *RFD* "Rustic Fairy Dreams". Embracing this purposeful confusion as tradition, editors changed the subtitles of the subsequent four issues: "Reckless Fruit Delight," "Really Feeling Divine," "Rabbits, Faggots and Dragonflies," and "Raving Flamer's Diary".[14] Quite literally, publishers put out a different "RFD" with each issue.

Second, as these titles indicate, reader-writers embraced so many "F words" to refer to themselves: *fairy*, *fruit*, *faggot*, and *flamer*. This list from the first five issues of the magazine represents common epithets (mostly with etymological roots in rural settings, as Colin Johnson has shown) which were being reclaimed by the *RFD* contributors in order to improvise some productive and playful culture by playing with the words. These terms were not interchangeable, though, and did not always derive from slurs, or even have lasting lives in gay slang. For example, in issue #2, the word "fuzzy" was proposed for its potential to evoke, at once, hairiness, half-logic, and inscrutability, and for its productive contrast with "faggot," which differently conveyed a definiteness, a political certitude, as we will see later.[15] Far from embracing a single,

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[14] This convention continues today. For example, issue #169 (Spring 2017) is subtitled "Redcliffe Fountain Dahlia".

[15] *RFD* #2, Winter 1974, 12. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.

clearly common identity, this culture seemed to foster an endless production of conditional subjectivities, improvised on the fly for their usefulness in a given context. This practice is seen in a third way, when individuals, like Donald Engstrom, would adopt other names ("Don-tevel") which might be used for a season or a certain context, and then replaced with another. (This self-naming practice became even more common with the advent of Radical Faerie culture.)

These practices of consciously proliferating names are an example of the critical rusticity, the failing to clone, which Herring so well describes. They also play with a conflation of text, identity, and body. No effete exercise, this playfulness defied systemic practices which sought to control bodies, within print media contexts, by recording and fixing names which were then linked to identifying photos, which made tracking of suspect persons possible. In that context, dropping given names and changing personal images became skills important for flying under the system's radar. These practices cannot be seen as absolutely new; surely, they were already associated with homosexuals in a U.S. Cold War context which feared the homosexual as exceptionally traitorous and deceptive to country, spouse, and comrade. But, here, those in the *RFD* network reclaimed these practices to increase skill in crafting serial, makeshift subjectivities out of the identities forced on them. As such, these practices are also skill-building exercises in refraining, as Guattari defines it. In that a refrain resists being reproduced within a territorializing assemblage, the improvisational refrain is clearly itself also an exercise in the failure to be cloned.

But, it is the rural inflection which *RFD* gives to this refrain-ing which makes "critical rusticity" a much more specific description. The contrast is made on rural

grounds towards an urban clone and towards an urban, bicoastal *Advocate*. It resists the kinds of reproducible identity which the political economic system sets as the condition of gaining the rights which it grants. Increasingly, these are the rights which the urban *Advocate* advocates. "Critical" rusticity is, however, only part of *RFD*'s rustic practice. While I think it is unquestionable that *RFD* reader-writers performed a critique of urban gay male culture and offered an anarchistic rustic alternative to its rights-based clone practices, this characterization alone leaves us with a conventional understanding of liberationism as rooted in critique and escape. This critical rusticity must be contextualized within the broader affective dimensions of liberationism, of its eroticized sense of political connection. If this dimension is forgotten, then the focus on urban-rural connection seen in Broughton's *Dreamwood* is reduced to just a polarizing *anti*-urbanism which runs the risk that sociologist Christopher J. Stapel points out – that of scholars' neglecting to queer the urban-rural divide itself.[16]

Herring recognizes the connective aspect of early *RFD* when he cites issue #2's hand-drawn map of its dispersed rural subscription base, including its caption ("RFD COUNTRY: each dot is a known reader").[17] His descriptions of the map, though, emphasize a particular politico-affective mode: "as tiny DIY *pinpricks* in the nationalizing U.S. imaginary that was the *Advocate*'s visual and print culture"; "a form of paper *cut* politics *nagging* the urbanized queer nation"; and "a small-scale intervention that reintroduces the regional, the ruralized, and the non-metropolitan to *blast* open the

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[16] Stapel, "'Fagging' the Countryside?(De)'Queering' Rural Queer Studies," *Studies in Urbanormativity: Rural Community in Urban Society,* eds. Gregory M. Fulkerson and Alexander R. Thomas (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014), 151-162.
[17] Qtd. in Herring, 95.

bicoastal ideals of normalizing U.S. gay print culture".[18] The actions Herring ascribes to *RFD* are incisive, erosive, and explosive. Charting an agonistic politics of anti-urbanism, Herring lends the hinterlands a cultural political "edginess" usually only associated with the centrality of the city. This orientation "against" was an essential part of the Iowan *RFD* refrain. At the same time, these reader-writers clearly saw a relationship "against" not simply as a matter of division but also as one of intimate connection. Because of this, they also responded in seductive registers, saving their combative modes for the larger system which thrived on the myth of urban-rural divides. I refer to this mode as an "erotic rusticity" which we should next couch in the affective terms of rural gay liberationist loneliness, of an emergent liberationist psychological model, and of a print-based correspondence poetics. This description conveys erotic rusticity as affective in emotional, psychic, and corporeal terms.

To draw a full picture of this connective mode, it's important first to understand the specific form of loneliness the early *RFD* editors and contributors felt. It was not the abstract loneliness experienced by any modern self, realizing its distance from all others. We see from their naming practices that these liberationists didn't invest in that discrete sense of self at all. Many of these gay liberationist back-to-the-landers had gone into the country with the intention of entering vibrant countercultural enclaves rooted in free love and gender experimentation. The "fairy/chic" lifestyles of late-60s hippies, as Susan Stryker has shown, promised such.[19] They had certainly not left the city to be hermits. Paralleling their textual banning from *Mother Earth News*, gay counterculturalists also found themselves cold-shouldered in their new rural Edens. In such circumstances, it

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[18] Italics added. Ibid., 95.
[19] Stryker, *Transgender History.*

was hard not to feel isolated *from* the cities. Whether they had left the cities or never pilgrimaged to them, there was a strong sense that the gay liberation sparked in the city had failed on its promise. Still, so many gay social establishments were urban: community centers, bars, social groups. As a result, many gay back-to-the-landers grappled with an emotional schism they felt between themselves and all their peers and hopes, many still in the great gay cities.

In the first issue of *RFD*, Allan Troxler bitterly addressed the men whom he encountered in countercultural collectives:

> You may start out a "commie hippie faggot", but by the time they've watched you drive through the village with your pickup full of neatly stacked firewood, sold your livestock, seen you wheel out of the local garage greasy and triumphant on your tractor, and (the clincher) met your old lady and four kids; you have won something. Which I never did win.[20]

Far from desolate, the rural places these hippie collectives settled in were already populated with farmers and townspeople who, by Troxler's description, became a kind of audience for countercultural performances of survivalism, environmentalism, and folkways. Straight men, once upbraided for their apparent hippie politics, lifestyle, and sexuality, often seized center stage and conspicuously performed rural manual labor and nuclear-family sexualities to win some insider status with their new neighbors. Within such dynamics, gays were regularly marginalized within the collectives, and as a result, they increasingly stood out like sore thumbs in the broader rural community. In the countercultural country, hippie "fairy chic" cachet turned into a liability which was quickly dropped – by those who could.

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[20] Troxler, *RFD* #1, Fall 1974, 15. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.

Realizing he couldn't "win" in the coupled performance of manual labor and straight sex, Troxler searched for a unique form of labor by which he might become of integral value to the collective. He desperately searched himself but was only able to come up with "a sense of design," which was taken by the others in the community as "unnoticed bustle".[21] Aesthetic work was trivialized. Gays in straight country stood out all the more painfully for having nothing apparently valuable to do.

This rejection must have felt like a sucker punch to many. Mid-century gay radicals, like Mattachine founder Harry Hay, had already been turned out of straight, masculinist leftist circles – in Hay's case, the Communist Party, USA – for their sexuality. As already mentioned, this severance could, in part, be explained by the fact that U.S. Cold War discourses cast the homosexual as an inveterate turncoat whose habit for infidelity would lead to snitching on radical comrades in ways parallel to how s/he had deceived and abandoned spouse and country. Another factor, though, was how many Marxists hung their revolutionary hopes on the figure of the industrial worker who was also a white family man.[22] Gays were an irritant to this very vision of revolution. To be rejected in the countercultural country just as they had been in radical urban circles, on very similar terms, must have carried a double sting.

Within women's liberation, though, there were already very vocal critiques of radicals' so exclusively embracing this rigidly male industrial body and his work. The international Wages for Housework campaign, begun by a feminist collective in Italy in

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[21] Ibid, 16.

[22] I would argue that it's important, in understanding liberationist discourses, that the revolutionary "worker" is taken as a foundational refrain, but that how radicals historically and imaginatively describe this figure makes all the political difference. Liberationists, therefore, often re-write the white, straight, male industrial worker in some other corporeal form whose particular assemblage underwrites the who, where, when, and how of liberation.

1972, formed multiple U.S. chapters in 1973, with West Coast offices then appearing in San Francisco and Los Angeles.[23] Radical feminists like Mariarosa Dalla Costa, Selma James, Nicole Cox, and Silvia Federici argued that a more fundamentally revolutionary hope lay with the *un*waged reproductive work performed by women within the home.[24] In fact, they claimed, instead of being *outside* the capitalist economy, reproductive labor – which they defined to include physical reproduction but also physical, emotional, and sexual care work – is *foundational* to capitalism since it continually reproduces and nourishes the waged labor force which powers the modes of capitalist production. Capitalism actively seeks to obscure the fact that housework is central to its operations so that it can benefit from keeping it unpaid but also so that it won't expose the system's true Achilles heel. The Wages for Housework campaign audaciously demanded that the capitalist state recognize housework (i.e., reproductive labor) as work deserving of a wage.

But, like Wittman, these radical feminists didn't call for the wage to get their "piece of the pie"; instead, if ever given the wage, their stated aim was to refuse to do that now publicly valued work as a way of exposing how thoroughly the capitalist "pie" was "rotten". The Wages for Housework feminists were also searching for their own autonomous political economy. Like other liberationists who understood imperialist global capitalism to have clear roots in colonialism, Federici and Cox connected the

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[23] Many of these feminists emerged from the same Italian Workerist and Autonomist radical movements which political philosopher Antonio Negri, theorist of the multitude, had also been part of.

[24] The following books document the core philosophies of the Wages for Housework campaign: Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James, *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community* (Bristol, UK: Falling Wall Press, 1975) and Nicole Cox and Silvia Federici, *Counter-Planning from the Kitchen: Wages for Housework : A Perspective on Capital and the Left* (New York: New York Wages for Housework Committee, 1975).

unwaged labor of women to the unwaged and racialized labor of slavery, which typically forces colonized people of color to perform, not so much machine-assisted and waged industrial labor, but extractive (agricultural, mining) or reproductive (housework, child- and eldercare) labor.[25]

At a time when gay people were routinely physically attacked, arrested, or fired, liberationists like early *RFD* contributors Wittman and Troxler were surely attuned from their coalitions with women's movements to see when and how their value and work could be trivialized within the context of the masculine-centric and heterosexual nuclear family. They surely felt this was no less true within the rural countercultural collective. If a countercultural "fairy chic" androgyny allowed them a superficial place within these rural collectives, performing rural manual labor only bought so much belonging if it wasn't yoked to the traditional reproductive gendered roles and sexualities of the nuclear family. Those who couldn't enact these roles found themselves marginalized in, and even ostracized from, the tiny rural society of the collective. Other forms of work, related to aesthetics or intimacy, for example, would be ignored, if not actively trivialized. The result was an isolation that must have felt like forcible erasure, especially so soon after the promise and visibility won in urban countercultural contexts like the San Francisco Summer of Love.

Rusticity should be understood as more than a rationally chosen mode of resistance. It was also a means to cope with the above forms of loneliness. Further, I see it as an extension of a liberationist psychological model which reflected both increasingly

[25] Federici and Cox, ibid.

globalized experiences of space and liberationist values of defiant connection.[26] As I alluded to earlier, the historical moment which produced liberationist movements, was also a period in which swift globalization had introduced disorienting experiences of fluxing geographic scale. The wartime horrors in the Vietnamese countryside were televised in farmhouse living rooms where TV sets had become more common fixtures. As a result, foreign rural geographies felt suddenly and oddly intimate. As moving images, such remote scenes animated domestic spaces and vividly looped in viewers' memories.[27] The personal, local, regional, national, and global all seemed immediate, making experiences of different scales feel interchangeable. This was not only a televisual phenomenon; advances in air transportation made inter-state and international travel matters of hours rather than days and weeks. By plane, most "fly-over" geography was somatically reduced to a cloudy blur. It may be helpful to remember that, by 1970, Delta Air Lines' passenger fleet was exclusively composed of jets and that Federal Express was founded in 1971.[28] This was a "boom time" for broadcast and transportation industries, often bodily experienced as a vertigo of scale.

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[26] Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* Richard Philcox, trans. (New York City: Grove Press, 2008) heavily influenced liberationism. Widely translated into English in the late 1960s, it described the conflicted psyche produced by black experiences of colonialism. Michael E. Staub's *Madness Is Civilization: When the Diagnosis Was Social* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2011). discusses how anti-war movements often understood psychiatry as a gatekeeper in charge of deciding who was fit to go to Vietnam or not and how liberationists of all stripes critiqued the mental institution as a tool of political isolation.

[27] For more on the increased media coverage of the War in Vietnam and for interpretations on how it was handled, see William M. Hammond, *Reporting Vietnam: Media and Military at War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998) and Daniel C. Hallin, *The Uncensored War: The Media and Vietnam* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986.) David Culbert's "Television's Visual Impact on Decision-Making in the USA, 1968: The Tet Offensive and Chicago's Democratic National Convention," *Journal of Contemporary History* 33, no. 3 (July 1998): 419-449, mentions how Vietnam was referred to as "the living-room war" and how recently color sets had become the norm.

[28] "Timeline of Airline," *Delta,* Accessed July 26, 2017, http://news.delta.com/timeline-airline; "Time Flies: The FedEx Timeline," *About Fedex,* Accessed July 26, 2017, http://about.van.fedex.com/our-story/history-timeline/timeline/.

During the time of this widely shared somatic experience, psychologies overly premised on singular interiority lost traction.[29] Philosopher of science Ian Hacking has noted, "Around 1970, there arose a few paradigm cases of strange behaviour similar to phenomena discussed a century earlier and largely forgotten. A few psychiatrists began to diagnose multiple personality."[30] Between the 1957 movie *The Three Faces of Eve* and the 1973 book *Sybil* (made into a TV movie in 1976), multiple personality diagnoses snuck back into the U.S. popular – and medical – imagination. Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* (1972), which would spark the concept of assemblage, offered not only a specifically liberationist philosophy, prompted as it was by the May 1968 uprisings in France, but it also—by its subtitle, *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* -- offered a decentralized, material, and desirous model of the psyche different from any psychoanalytic one that stressed the interiorized, domestic, and familial normalization so essential to capitalist control.[31] I propose a link between the somatic experience of early 1970s globalization --the intimate vertigo of scale I describe above – and the parallel spike of U.S. interest in multiple personalities. Fewer people experienced their mental states as discrete, interior, or rational. And liberationists like Deleuze and Guattari

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[29] Philip Cushman's *Constructing the Self, Constructing America: A Cultural History of Psychotherapy* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1995) argues that U.S. "self-contained individualism" eroded after World War II and led, by end of the century to an "empty self". My argument is that between these two, in the liberationist period, there emerged a hyper-full, or multiple, self.

[30] Hacking, "Making Up People," *London Review of Books* 28, no. 6 (August 17, 2006), https://www.lrb.co.uk/v28/n16/ian-hacking/making-up-people.

[31] Deleuze and Guattari use the term "schizophrenia" to indicate this shift in dominant psychological models but distinguish it from the mental condition and the suffering many experience with it. They make this distinction to foment a conceptual shift but not at the expense of those who have been diagnosed as such. Scholar of affect Lisa Blackman has written substantially on the history of psychology to show evidence of more material, multiple, and decentralized psychological models both before and parallel to the dominant models which Deleuze and Guattari critique. See Blackman, *Immaterial Bodies: Affect, Embodiment, Mediation* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishing, 2012) and *Hearing Voices: Embodiment and Experience* (London, New York: Free Association Books, 2001.)

associated an alternative porous, erotic, material psychology as crucial to any liberation from the isolating containment of capitalist control.

Referring to those with multiple personality diagnoses as "splits," Hacking made an interesting connection: "In 1986, I wrote that there could never be 'split' bars, analogous to gay bars. In 1991 I went to my first split bar."[32] Hacking is interested in a phenomenon he calls "making up people" by which groups – like "splits" and homosexuals – are first formed by being pathologized, which then creates a class that socializes and forms shared ways of being, a culture. Like historical materialists, he sees this process from pathological to cultural formation as historical, producing unique subjective classes. In 1986, he cited the gay bar because the de-pathologization of homosexuals was recent.

Gay liberationists had pressured the psychological establishment into this. After years of campaigning the American Psychiatric Association to remove homosexuality from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM), gay liberationists finally succeeded. In 1974, homosexuality did not appear as a pathological condition in the new edition. Historian of gay liberation and anti-psychiatry, Abram J. Lewis, has demonstrated, though, that many activists didn't look to the psychiatric profession to pronounce them sane. He describes how, in true liberationist fashion, they defied institutional definitions of sanity and seized upon madness as the proper orientation to take in relation to systemic control, often identifying with the multiple perspectives of schizophrenia and turning to magical practices.[33] Interestingly, *RFD*

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[32] Hacking, ibid.

[33] Lewis, "'We Are Certain of Our Own Insanity': Antipsychiatry and the Gay Liberation Movement, 1968-1980," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 25, no. 1 (January, 2016): 83-113.

published their first issue during the fall of the same year. It wouldn't be surprising for gay people during the early 1970s to improvise alternative ways of understanding their own psychologies; it also wouldn't be surprising that gay liberationists' tentative psychological models would reject metaphors of isolated interiority for more open models similar to what Deleuze and Guattari proposed. In fact, we can frame critically rustic practices like proliferative naming strategies and refusals to clone or normalize one's self as consonant with the liberationist psychological models outlined above.

A couple of examples from *RFD* support this reading. Much of the writing demonstrated a refusal of any easy understanding of the "I" as discrete or individual. Several embraced androgyny, a gender subjectivity which often produced an understanding of a self that housed more than one psychic body. A writer named "Peter" wrote in the first issue:

I have a friend
we talk silently
we do things silently
there are no words
we are always fucking
me always pregnant
always in labor.

the other thing
unborn
escapes me.
maybe it too is another
silent poem.[34]

The "friend" at the beginning of the poem calls to mind an imaginary friend, born out of the self to provide company, but no less real for being "made up". The "I" of the first line shifts quickly to the "we" of the second line. This new "we" communicates

[34] "Peter," [poem], *RFD* #1, Fall 1974, 7. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.

physically, by constant fucking, but the silence leaves the narrator feeling lonely. After the word "fucking," the "we" switches back to "me," a solitary object. The sexual relationship described in the poem is not a mutual one but rather an instrumental one characteristic of a sexist, straight male. That the narrator himself is feminized is obvious in that, by line's end, he reveals himself as a "Peter" who is pregnant.

Echoing Wages for Housework feminism, the author defines being a mother – both in reproductive and in the care-providing senses – as "labor," but that which is given birth in Peter's poem is complex. It is "unborn" but it "escapes," as if going on to exist in a way different than we are able to recognize as life. The poem creates a sense of endless imaginative reproduction which stems from seeing each erotic, caring connection as giving birth to a new self. That new self may or may not conventionally materialize as an embodied baby, but it is nevertheless produced in moments of erotically charged care. The poem expresses a liberationist perspective that, while the dominant system tirelessly works to shape us into capitalist labor roles, each moment of mutual care produces a different self. And since no ham-fisted system could ever keep up with this constant proliferation, some self always escapes. This poem not only places new value on the work of creating intimacy, but it also reflects a liberationist sense of self which, far from isolate, is multiple and complexly coherent, connective, and – therefore – deeply social. It therefore reflects both critical *and* erotic rusticity, and it resonates with the images of bodies proliferating on Broughton's *Bed*.

In *RFD* #5 (Fall 1975), a young contributor from the very small New Bloomfield, Missouri, published a piece which employs a clear rusticity, directly references

schizophrenia, and describes his own vertigo of scale.[35] The title, "This is YOUR life, LYLE FINLEY," inconsistently uses capital letters and shifts from typeset text to handwriting. Doodled drawings and other handwriting interrupt the body of his essay. Paragraphs jump topics without signal transitions, and some lines taper off and re-start, as with "Where is the beauty of it all? I love // I love you." His tone doubles back constantly: At times outright caustic, using gay slurs – often out of anger against gay sexual objectification – he is also often sarcastic, sentimental, and upbeat by quick turn. He sometimes mocks other gay people, but his uneven application of quotation marks makes it unclear whether he is speaking in his own or another's voice. As these voices sprawl across two pages, the single authorial voice associated with the name "Lyle Finley" is tonally, physically, and spatially stretched, flirting with collage. I suggest this strategy offers a psychic map which mirrors the geographic confusion of scale produced by recent forms of globalization.

The use of handwriting reminds the readers that a body wrote this. And Finley pushes this point even further by massing emotion words which he links to bodily functions: "disillusionment," "confusion," and "regret" are followed by "puke," a spastic circular scrawl, "(green)," and "shit". On the next page, though, the tone shifts to "beauty" and "love," and the words continue, generally positive, until the last handwritten word before "The End" is "schizophrenia". This schizophrenia is expressed in terms of intersecting "little worlds": "We all live in our own little worlds. Yes [hand-written]. // And when we let these worlds intermingle, it's beautiful. // But these little

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[35] Finley, "This is YOUR life, LYLE FINLEY," *RFD* #5, Fall 1975, 43-44. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta. The following quotes come from Finley's writing on these two pages.

worlds are mobile, so they float around until one world sees another and says, 'You're a beautiful world. Let's exchange some of our souls. And we'll float among the worlds together.'"

The personal is equated to the global here, using the familiar metaphor of the "world," demonstrating how global spatial concepts were mapped onto the psyche. At the same time, each personal world is populated with multiple souls. Just as on the previous page of Finley's piece, negative feelings manifest as bodily discharges, here on the page populated by more positive feelings of connection, those feelings also manifest as physical extensions of the body:

> Possession of mobile worlds is love. It's not real possession of things.
>
> It's possession of an invisible telegraph wire transmitting beautiful messages back and forth.
>
> COMMUNICATION [hand-written]
>
> Because we've gotten away from seeing the sole aspect of material things as sexy nude bodies.
>
> And we see additions. A new aspect which is unlimited. It is called
>
> FEELING [hand-written]
>
> also, but this time it doesn't mean burning your finger or fucking someone. It means the
>
> RESULT. [hand-written]
>
> It's like everything has an AURA. And you can feel the thing. But you can feel the aura, too. If you only recognize its existence.

This is a very complex passage, but I read it to assert that communications produce feelings between bodies ("mobile worlds" with multiple souls) which then produce tangible auras extended past the skin. In other words, selves are porous, material, and

productive. They accrete, adding palpable auras formed of the feelings exchanged with other bodies. They are layered inward and outward, like nesting dolls of differing material densities. In that emotional exchanges produce new selves, Finley echoes Peter's poem. It also resonates in that bodies are understood to house multiple selves. Following on the above excerpt, though, Finley writes the word "schizophrenia," which I take as a word that helps him characterize this multiple, emotionally productive layered sense of self. And, not only does it happen to echo a liberationist multiple model of the psyche, but it also helps to explain *RFD*'s seemingly endless proliferation of "F" words. This fledgling rural gay liberationist culture was improvising an understanding of the subject as produced anew with each contact. Its affective work sought not only to produce different emotions but different psyches as well. As might be expected, such affective models were reflected in how the culture understood corporeality and orientation.

During *RFD*'s Iowan tenure, its writers thought of the magazine's pages as extensions of their own bodies. In doing so, they discovered a way to mediate their rural loneliness. One of the main purposes of *RFD*, then, was to answer the machine of isolation with new practices of intimacy. In the first issue, the editorial comment openly states,

> We hope to break down the feeling of isolation from things gay that many of us experience in rural settings, to build some sense of community among rural gay people, and to provide the means of sharing with each other our thoughts, feelings and ideas about our unique experience as gay country people. // R.F.D. is a reader-participatory venture. <u>You</u> write, sing, dance and are R.F.D. We need your contributions of material, energy and love to survive.[36]

[36] Editorial comment, *RFD* #1, Fall 1974. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.

While the need for this intimacy was acute, a matter of survival, as with Broughton, *RFD* reader-writers transmuted its pursuit into a practice of wonder, of curiosity about "unique experience" across lines of isolation. As a "reader-participatory venture," the magazine was conceived more as a group correspondence than as a centrally authored publication with an abject, faceless audience. Further, to create a sense of intimacy, the magazine could not be imagined as a purely rational, linguistic, or textual practice; instead, the pages were understood as singing and dancing -- material, bodily presence. *RFD* was a print mode of touch, of connection.

As an ethico-aesthetic practice which drew upon the intimacy of the personal letter, *RFD* participated in a form of correspondence art already active in urban gay avant-gardes. For example, in the 1950s and 60s, New York City poet Frank O'Hara had crafted his poems with the express intention of lending them the casual intimacy of a note or phone call between close friends.[37] Similarly, in 1960s New York, Ray Johnson had circulated small text-image collages – many representing apparently meaningless gatherings which he called "Nothings," as opposed to "Happenings" – through the mail, asking recipients to augment the pieces they received and forward on.[38] Johnson came to think of these art correspondences as poems. This multimedia yoking of word and image also echoed Broughton's thinking of his lyric films as poems.

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[37] In his "Personism: A Manifesto" (1959), O'Hara wrote, "I went back to work and wrote a poem for this person. While I was writing it I was realizing that if I wanted to I could use the telephone instead of writing the poem, and so Personism was born. It's a very exciting movement which will undoubtedly have lots of adherents. It puts the poem squarely between the poet and the person, Lucky Pierre style, and the poem is correspondingly gratified. The poem is at last between two persons instead of two pages." O'Hara, in *Frank O'Hara: Selected Poems*, Mark Ford, ed. (New York City: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), 248.
[38] "Ray Johnson: Biography," Ray Johnson Estate, Accessed July 26, 2017, http://www.rayjohnsonestate.com/biography/.

What these correspondence poetics have in common is an effort to use the existing media to address large and dispersed audiences, not as *masses*, as undifferentiated and abstract populations, but as not-yet-known particular persons. It's important, too, to recognize that even as experimental art, these historical practices were not elitist or rare. Literature scholar Mike Chasar has demonstrated how what we now conceive of as "high art" poetic practices were actually popularly engaged in the twentieth-century United States, as evidenced by such widespread phenomena as poetry scrapbooks, jingle competitions, and radio poetry shows.[39] Furthermore, lest we think of this correspondence art as somehow desexualized, chaste love letters, we should remember that following on 1969's *Stanley vs. Georgia* case, private possession of pornography came to be seen as protectable by law, so that the U.S. postal service no longer felt authorized to seize obscene materials in the mail.[40] The early 1970s print culture within which *RFD* arose was also one in which pornographic magazines and films proliferated, many circulated through the U.S. postal service. The intimacy which the new gay back-to-the-land magazine produced, then, also enjoyed increasing erotic potential.

RFD's erotic correspondence poetics, instead of being rarefied or voluntaristic practices, were presented as simple, inevitable aspects of a curious "everyday". The unfinished lines and repetitions in the statement of purpose or in Finley's "This is Your Life …" were given as examples of everyday kinds of writing which naturally tend towards poetic forms. They are found poems – offered as common genres like the

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[39] Chasar, *Everyday Reading: Poetry and Popular Culture in America* (New York City: Columbia UP, 2012.)
[40] Stanley vs. Georgia, *FindLaw,* Accessed July 26, 2017, http://caselaw.findlaw.com/us-supreme-court/394/557.html

statement or letter but overtly given some of the formal features of poetry. And, unsurprising for a correspondence poetics, it was letters and poems that were most often confused. Peter, likely the author of the above poem, characterized himself as a "hermit" and wrote in what looks like a letter to the editor, "Some folks like, some folks don't. Once I was told it was not a poem. Well, I don't much care."[41] Finley refers to his submission as a letter, addressed to the *RFD* editors, but the prose is laced with drawings and enjambed lines, and the letter closes with a poem. This defiant confusion of letter and poem stayed committed to the intimacy of correspondence as well as to the material and emotive immediacy of the poem, refusing to allow genre classification to compartmentalize the work the writing was intended to do – create a space for writers to touch each other.

This makes plain the erotic dimension of Iowan *RFD*'s rusticity. One final example, though, clearly shows that this erotic rusticity extended to writers' understanding of rural-urban relations. In *RFD* #7, Spring 1976, the last issue to be produced in Iowa, editors published a poem called "to country soul from city soul".[42] Written as a letter, collapsing generic distinctions between correspondence and poetry like we have seen, this piece imagines the city as wooing the country. An image of embracing men above the title conveys tender care. At least one of the men in the illustration has the longer hair and feminized carriage redolent of "fairy chic". So, while the facial hair and clothing may index the masculinity of the urban clone, the obvious

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[41] Letter to the editor. *RFD* #1, Fall 1974, 6. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.
[42] Author unknown, "to country soul from city soul," *RFD* #7, Spring 1976, 7. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.

same-sex tenderness and androgyny simultaneously redefine it. In the third stanza, by characterizing the urban-rural border as an "agrarian belt" which is "gazed over," the author not only evokes oral sex by bringing the eye to waist-level, s/he also, through the lens of sex, imagines that that belt can be taken off, that the border can be removed. Body *is* geography and, therefore, sex is spatial politics.

Further, instead of nostalgia for a time lost, the poem performs a longing for a future union. In that future, the rural farmer realizes a new labor for himself. While city and country soul are apart, country soul's work is confined to the "tool" of plow and hoe. If we see "tool" as sexual slang for a cock, then the problem with the country's current work is that it – using plow and hoe – is exclusively insertive, traditionally masculine. The masculine rural work that Troxler witnessed in his back-to-the-land experience is gently critiqued here as being limited. With the guidance of city soul, the country soul realizes that "to know, to feel, to keep" should be recognized as work worthy of perfecting. This work is affective and relational (kin) labor, which is so often, as we have seen, conceived as feminine. City soul, the poet, can offer him a new tool for that work: poetry as a method of seduction, instead of seizure or insertive access. The hand that plows can just as easily be the hand that caresses or writes.

The poet, though, is constrained by clear urbanormativity. Literally imprisoned in "perpetual city walls" and "smog alarms," the geography of industrial capitalism blocks his passage and obscures his vision. To underscore this point, the poet says "his only escape" has been the fantasy of rural union found in browsing the L.L. Bean Catalog. This catalog functions in the poem as a reminder of the false intimacy generated when print culture becomes wholly commercial. The catalog only teases with its images of

rural men, with its sales jingles instead of love poems, and it mystifies the rural by offering it as empty clothing commodity rather than an actual working body. But, the poet claims he is able to write his wooing poem because of those urbanormative failures which he realizes by reading the catalog anyway.[43]

In the end,

… Country Man has freed City Man
from captivity in blocks of concrete
Country hand takes City hand
and walks with him thru stalks of waving wheat
Loving Soul finds Loving Soul
and at last
both of their separate lives are made complete.

Love,
City Soul.

In this stanza's pairings, first, "Man" disappears, becoming "hand"s. Masculinity fades so that focus is shifted from the genitals of reproduction to the organ of work, the hand. The work of the hand here, though, is put to an affective labor – of uniting, of creating intimacy, of hand-holding. Still, if this work is not fully reproductive, if it does not clone itself by giving birth to children, it instead creates lateral "kin," an intimate network. In the next line, there is an echo of lovers' hands seen in the "waving" wheat. The former men are now recognized as peers in the field, greeted by handless plants who, nevertheless, are seen to do a similar work here, of recognizing kinship across difference. This field economy stands in stark contrast to the urban industrial economy, characterized by isolation and uniform mass production. Following this logic of pairing, next, the newly united couple each become a "Loving Soul," similarly identifiable by their shared

[43] This jibes with Mike Chasar's reading of earlier U.S. popular poetics, which participate in and play off of, and sometimes against, the word-play operative in commercial, mass culture.

work of loving, but remaining two distinct souls connected by that work. As if in recognition of this uniqueness, they refuse to fuse, following the example of Broughton's urban-rural androgyne: Their "separate lives are made complete," and the poem's closing lines are indented to make a letter's salutation. In the end, it is a correspondence sent like a hand searching for a comrade's through the pages of *RFD*.

As such, it deploys a register of rural sweetness and simplicity – not just critical rusticity – so that it moves past *anti*-urbanism to perform the kind of broader integrative regionalism (rural *and* urban) which *Dreamwood* recommends. Inasmuch that the field economy ultimately eclipses the urban industrial economy, though, the poem insists on a rural orientation as necessary to dissolve the current normativity of the urban. By combining the reproductive skill of shaping and growing bodies (whether animal or plant) to the care work of connecting bodies, the composite labor of performing *intimate* and *connective* rustic refrains becomes possible. By imagining its writers' bodies as extended through print media to cross rural-urban divides, *RFD*'s gay liberationist sense of affect re-wrote traditional models of corporeality, allowing intimate orientations to emerge across intense isolation.

On the whole, I propose that *RFD*, during its Iowan tenure, did the work of putting Broughton's androgyne vision into action in a rural setting. Working in print culture, it drew upon traditions of urban gay correspondence poetics, radical feminist theories of reproductive labor, and separatist women's critically rustic publishing design to find value in the production of intimacy *and* simultaneously to find value in refusing to clone itself. I contend that this latter refusal was an extension of a nascent liberationist psychological model which stressed the material, decentralized, ever-changing, and open

nature of subjectivity as a reflection of the somatic experiences of heightened globalization of the time. Despite *RFD*'s critique of urban gay male culture's normalizing tendencies, it extended its connection-making practices across urban-rural divides to imagine regional rural-urban unions operating within radical new visions of intimate work. Five years later, "to country soul from city soul" seemed like a print companion piece to Broughton's film-poem *Dreamwood*.

At the same time it borrowed from the culture and theory of women's liberation, *RFD* seemed to inherit a radical adjacency to the women's movement similar to that which I find in Carl Wittman's 1970 gay manifesto. The first issue's editorial stated, "No women have contributed material for this first issue but we hope it is not so male-oriented/dominated to prevent Lesbians from using this magazine for communication with each other. And perhaps, with the Earth as our common ground, we can begin a much needed dialogue between gay women and men."[44] In that these women's and men's projects perform a parallel work, of cultivating a new rurality by intimate same-sex networking through print circulation, they rub elbows. But they don't embrace.

Instead of actively inviting women into *RFD*, at this point, they "hope" not "to prevent" their voluntary entry for the purpose of talking -- *not* to the male reader-participants -- but only to each other as Lesbians (with a capital L). This orientation to the women's movement takes the form of an open-door policy. It's difficult to tell whether this is simple passivity or negligence in the work of including women, or whether there's a sense that an invitation to women would be too forward or presumptive, that it would cross certain lines of respectful propriety between the groups.

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[44] Editorial comment, *RFD* #1, Fall 1974. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.

RFD's orientation to women's liberationist culture had inherited a deferential formalism, a radical adjacency, which saw their work as parallel but not connected. In this case, *RFD* tried to create a textual space imbued with women's liberationist political philosophy and stylistics that would be hospitable to lesbians; that hospitality, though, was circumscribed by a formality evidenced by an infrequent, blanket invitation rather than an active and personalized one. The above editorial may be taken as a passive hope or an open call to women's liberationists; either way, aside from the collaboration with the local women's press for printing, specific women's voices were peripheral to the magazine during its two-year Iowa tenure.

Remember, too, that, in the transition from *The Bed* to *Dreamwood*, Broughton's liberationist films seemed less concerned with race. Wittman, who had claimed only "tenuous" alliances with the liberation movements of people of color, was also an active participant in *RFD* at this time, being a member of the Oregon collective which shared production responsibility with the Iowans. Herring qualifies the racial dynamics of the early *RFD* culture, though, by writing "I emphasize that these queer anti-urbanisms [like *Country Women* and *RFD*] do not fall under the rubric of a conventional and racist 'white flight' from the city since they are literally 'flights' from racially normative metropolitan gay culture."[45] Echoing the motivations of lesbian projects like *Country Women*, *RFD* founders surely saw cities as sites of concentrated patriarchal and capitalist domination in which the work of liberation was easily policed and undermined; the rural was seen at the time as a space that could enable liberationist work. Herring argues that early *RFD*, unlike urban gay publications like *The Advocate*, maintained their connections with

[45] Herring, 88.

lesbian cultural political practices particularly and critiqued the growing uniformity – racial and otherwise -- in urban gay male culture.

Still, in moving from the increasingly racialized cities, gay back-to-the-landers, intentionally or not, may have created a purely theoretical connection to liberationist movements of color, one which geographic distance wouldn't allow them to further materialize. Moreover, in a period when the city was increasingly depicted as black and the country as white, it's telling that a poem like "to country soul from city soul" would visually represent its allegorical relationship as between two *white* men. Race dropped from the urban-rural intersectional imagination to focus instead on class, geography, gender, and sexuality. This poetic choice was complicit with the historically operative urbanormativity, in that it failed to recognize the system's crucial and divisive use of race in producing urban-rural divides. It further demonstrated a very partial understanding of actual rural geographies.

RFD culture was mostly dominated by an *urban* gay liberationism which was *back*-to-the-land, not *still*-on-the-land. Even though the magazine's home was in Iowa, it had been conceived at a Gay Pride conference and had been first realized by GLF members. Both of these were gay urban phenomena transplanted to rural regions. But, the magazine had circulated fairly quickly and reached many who had long lived in rural locations. Some of those specific regional rural spaces were very different than the abstract "Country" which some in the *RFD* network imagined. For example, in issue #2, a teacher described moving to rural Somerville, Tennessee, and found himself working with a student body which was 90% black.[46] Such experiences stood in defiance of

[46] Letter to the editors, *RFD* #2, Winter 1974, 4. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.

national discourses which would cast the urban as black and the rural as white. They also gave lie to the notion that *all* African Americans participated in the Great Migration, leaving the country for urban opportunity. They also stood in contrast to stories of gay rural arrivals only happening by way of countercultural enclaves which would be marginally independent of surrounding rural economies. The Somerville teacher was embedded in the local, rural economy directly. That early *RFD* provided a textual space for such stories but didn't yet know how to contend with the socioeconomic and racial details of the diverse rural places that emerged seems clear. The rural country they shared and loved was still relatively unknown.

In fact, regional differences in rural cultures partly explain why *RFD* moved from Iowa to Oregon. Historian James T. Sears explains that collaboration on production, across such a great distance and during a time when communication was limited to "snail mail" and land-line telephones, was almost always frustratingly lopsided.[47] Tension between the two collectives mounted. A more fundamental difference was also clear, though. The Iowan version of *RFD* leaned more heavily on the back-to-the-land content -- on how-to articles or on poems and essays about coping with rural isolation. The Oregonian *RFD* had a sharper political vision whose liberationism was as fiery as it was gay. That many of those in the Oregon collective had strong ties to the San Francisco Bay area, and all the political cultures that thrived there, certainly contributed to this regional difference. It was in this context that the *RFD* culture would attempt to deal more directly with the differences among those already in its participant-readership and

[47] Sears, 145-149.

among those in its Northwestern liberationist network. An overt faggot refrain would be the vehicle for this attempt.

In Lavender Country: Oregonian RFD and the Faggot Refrain (1976-1978)

In 1973, a country band called Lavender Country released its self-titled record, the first known openly gay country music album. The lead singer-songwriter, Patrick Haggerty, had grown up on a Port Angeles, Washington dairy farm, the son of a father who, upon recognizing his son's habit of cross-dressing, encouraged young Haggerty not to "sneak".[48] A founding member of the Seattle GLF, Haggerty, with his band, secured the backing of the Gay Community Social Services of Seattle to make and release *Lavender Country*. Faygele Ben Miriam, a fellow founder of that organization, produced the album. A natural provocateur, Ben Miriam was not new to pressing social norms in the Pacific Northwest. In 1971, he, with Paul Barwick, unsuccessfully applied to a county office in Seattle for a marriage license. In 1972, he was fired from his job as an Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) clerical worker for his unabashed homosexuality and feminine dress.[49] In response, Ben Miriam filed a lawsuit, and in 1974, he won. His little gay record made waves, too. In 1974, when Seattle KRAB DJ and lesbian Shan Ottey dared to air the track "Cryin' These Cocksuckin' Tears," the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) stripped her of her license and issued a

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[48] Julie Zammarchi, "The Saint of Dry Creek," StoryCorps. Animated video, 2015, https://storycorps.org/animation/the-saint-of-dry-creek/

[49] Carole Beers, "Faygele ben Miriam Crusaded for Rights," *The Seattle Times* (Seattle, WA), June 7, 2000. http://community.seattletimes.nwsource.com/archive/?date=20000607&slug=4025290. Born John Singer, he had his name legally changed in 1973. "Faygele" was a slur for a homosexual, derived from the Yiddish "Vogele," meaning "little bird," and "Ben-Miriam" Yiddish for "son of Miriam." By this naming practice, Ben-Miriam was able to claim a matrilineal Jewish descent.

fine, resulting in Ottey's losing her job.[50] *Lavender Country* emerged as a sonic rural space born of intense contest over gender and sexual conformity.

In the remainder of this chapter, I show how *RFD*'s tenure in Lavender Country contended less with rustic isolation and more with proximity to West Coast, particularly Bay Area, liberationist political cultures. The differences between rural Iowa and rural Oregon are important. As a result, the magazine's cultural work became less about establishing urban-rural connection and more about finding a renewed place in the West Coast regional liberationist network. To show this, I first read Lavender Country's song "Back in the Closet Again" for its critically elegiac stance towards the fragmentation of the region's liberationist *corpus* to show both the connective joints and stress points of West Coast liberationism. Second, I describe the faggot subjectivity which the Oregon editors espoused as influenced by Bay Area eco-feminist witchcraft cultures. Third, I analyze *Morning Due*'s and *RFD*'s representation of the 1976 Faggots and Class Struggle conference to see the event as an uneven effort to use the faggot refrain to rekindle West Coast gay liberationist connections. Finally, I argue that, despite *RFD*'s apparent prioritization of a faggot-based liberationism over a back-to-the-land ethos, a more uniquely gay liberationist sense of urban-rural connection emerged from this shift. Essentially, the operative affective dimensions of Oregon *RFD* were focused on addressing emotional exhaustion and sustaining orientations to urban West Coast liberationist cultures.

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[50] Dave Lake, "40 Years Later, Patrick Haggerty's Gay Country Album Gets a Proper Release," *Seattle Weekly News* (Seattle, WA), March 18, 2014. http://www.seattleweekly.com/home/951664-129/40-years-later-patrick-haggertys-gay.

By 1973, with the rise of urban clone culture and *The Advocate*, many felt the liberationist revolution had been lost. The *Lavender Country* song "Back in the Closet Again" directly expresses this feeling. The central verse looks back to the powerful and connective outset of the liberationist revolution:

> The Revolution started outright
> Black Panthers were leading the fight
> The Lords were in the left flank
> The women drove a Sherman tank
> And the workers were a hunk of dynamite
> A battalion of Gay men brought up the rear
> Packing two grenades in each brassiere
> Every purse was filled with mace
> Carbine rifles trimmed with lace
> Them campy Gay guerillas knew no fear ... [51]

Note how the collection of these movements forms a larger military body, a corps. In the song, as the acknowledged leaders, the Black Panthers are the first to challenge U.S. imperial power, both historically and in the march's front lines. The Puerto Rican Young Lords are on the left, evoking both a position on the political spectrum but also, at the "flank," protecting the side of this revolutionary body. The driving women with a phallic tank seem to occupy the middle of the body and spur forward momentum while the workers' movement, equated with a "hunk of dynamite," also seems to occupy a phallic centrality. Then there are the gay men, characterized less by their same-sex sexuality than by their cross-dressed weaponry, bringing up the "rear".

It's important not to see *Lavender Country*'s description of the liberationist revolution as universal. Instead, it reflects the specific connective aspects of the

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[51] *Lavender Country* liner notes, *Paradise of Bachelors,* Accessed July 26, 2017, http://www.paradiseofbachelors.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/PoB-12-Lavender-Country-back-cover.jpg

liberationism that was active in the San Francisco Bay area, and broader West Coast, of the 1960s and 1970s. Historian Donna Jean Murch has written that "Perhaps more than any other metropolitan region, the San Francisco Bay Area experienced the contradiction that underlay Johnson's waning War on Poverty and the military escalation in Vietnam … . As hundreds of thousands of soldiers passed through the Oakland Army Base and Airport, the vast expenditures on defense became a visible part of daily life."[52] Huey Newton and Bobby Seale had founded the Black Panthers in Oakland in 1966. LGBT movement historian Emily K. Hobson has shown that Bay Area gay liberationists were inspired by Black Panthers' theorization of US ghettoes as instances of internal colonialism and by their successful alliances with non-black and international liberationist movements.[53] Especially after Newton's 1970 address, many of the area liberationists supported the Panthers' initiatives and adapted its vision for their own liberationism.[54] As Hobson further points out, "… the San Francisco GLF represented gay masculinity and sexual autonomy as threatened by establishment authority yet recuperated through alignment with the black freedom struggle."[55] Part of that recuperated masculinity surely included the military affect of the early Panthers' armed patrols but may have also included the peasant look that, according to historians Robin D. G. Kelley and Betsy Esch, many Panthers later embraced in their adapting Maoism and distributing Mao's *Little Red Book* on Bay Area streets.[56]

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[52] Murch, *Living for the City: Migration, Education, and the Rise of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California* (Chapel Hill, NC: U of North Carolina Press, 2010), 121-122.
[53] Hobson, ibid.
[54] Newton, "The Women's Liberation and Gay Liberation Movements," *History is a Weapon*, Accessed July 26, 2017, http://www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/newtonq.html.
[55] Hobson, 26.
[56] Kelley and Esch, "Black Like Mao: Red China and Black Revolution," *Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture, and Society* 1:4, (1999): 6-41..

At the same time, these male gay liberationists were also inspired by San Francisco's lesbian feminist movements. Hobson points out that the Gay Women's Liberation organization, started by Judy Grahn and others, kept its alliances with the Black Panthers and "embedded these politics into its approaches to collective living and its creation of new community institutions."[57] These households and institutions were critical, Hobson further explains, to maintain liberationist connections to the radical underground and to fend off the heightened harassment by FBI officers who increasingly associated lesbianism with women's armed resistance in the era of the Symbionese Liberation Army and the Lexington 6. The heavily circulated image of Patty Hearst contributed to a wider national iconography rooted in fear of the radical woman with a gun. While area gay liberationists adopted the care work of consciousness raising and collective living from Bay Area lesbian feminists, they also surely noted the mobility of a militant masculinity taken up first by Black Panthers and then by radical women.

The San Francisco Bay Area of the 1960s and early 1970s was home to a variety of liberationist movements which, as Hobson underscores, fundamentally valued "solidarity". Black Panthers supplied most of the political model: cross-liberationist alliances; theories of internal colonialism; and practical adaptations of international revolutionary theories, especially Maoism.[58] Lesbian feminists worked these political models into what Hobson calls "collective defense": a collectivism built on consciousness-raising, collective households, and alternative institutions which were

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[57] Hobson, 44.

[58] For a description of such1970s radical gay and lesbian adaptations of Maoism, as context for reading the film *Born in Flames*, see Christina Hanhardt's "LAUREL and Harvey: Screening Militant Gay Liberalism and Lesbian Feminist Radicalism circa 1980," *Women and Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 23, no. 1 (2013): 17-37.

linked to Panthers' cross-movement commitments, post-colonial theories, and armed militant stances. Far from being a discrete development, Bay Area gay liberation was shaped as part of this local political network. Despite the richness of these various political programs, national media coverage associated them all with a revolutionary figure who was armed and masculinized. The role of the femme androgyne figure within an apparently masculine solidarity was unclear to area gay liberationists eager to join the revolution.

This regional political culture informed *Lavender Country*'s "Back in the Closet Again," and the song documents the regional gay liberationist orientation to the Bay Area. Returning to the lyrics above, the rear position of gay men in the martial body is purposely ambiguous. In some ways, this position may be temporal: Of those listed, gays were the last to join liberationist movements. They were slower to organize. There is also the possibility that, among liberationists, gay men felt themselves to be the "butt" of a political joke. Their gender-bending campiness could have just as easily been seen as a lack of seriousness, necessitating their shameful place behind the others. As if in response, Haggerty took pains to link the effeminate with military threat: grenades, mace, and rifles outfitted as fashion accessories. Because, in the song, the Lords and Black Panthers propel and occupy the vanguard and because the working class simply *is* the explosive dynamite, their status as revolutionary soldiers, as *men*, need not be named. The gender of women and effeminate men *is* indicated, and they must be outfitted with weaponry in order to gain an equivalent revolutionary status to the obviously masculine men. This recalls the "business" which Wittman felt gay liberationists needed to show the Black and Chicano movements. Those who were woman-like needed to prove their

mettle. Gay liberationists with their subjectivities rooted in androgyne figures had to find ways to reconcile their femininity with the dominant radical figure of the culture. Haggerty's response was to draw the striking figure of the cross-dressed gay male militant, in bra, purse, and lace, with grenades and mace, too.

The revolution was thwarted, though, as we see in a later verse:

But the liberation forces got uptight
They screamed, "You fags ain't got no human rights
We think you guys are sick
Cause all you want's a prick"
And while we scrapped, pigs stole the whole damn fight
That was the end of the revolution, my friend
'Cause all of us are going to the pen,
They're rounding up the Blacks
Then they're after Gay folks next
So I'm back in the Closet again.

Lavender Country traces the fragmentation of the revolutionary liberationist body to an affective cause: getting "uptight". This is the adjective Wittman used. In the gay manifesto, the word seemed to refer to an "understandable" bodily tension and anxiety associated with black liberationists' experiences of racialized violence. In the Lavender Country song, other liberationists' getting "uptight" seems to refer to a moralism, a recoiling from sickness, and a revulsion felt towards sexual deviance, all at once. In hippie slang, the word did carry a double meaning of anxiety and moral rigidity -- the opposite of being "laid back," or easy-going. Certainly, with homosexuality's being removed from the *DSM* concurrent with *Lavender Country*'s release, any reference to sickness (moral, mental, and bodily) would have pushed buttons.

The sexual accusation – "all you want's a prick" – here is interesting, though, because the song's primary markers for gay men thus far have been androgyny, not same-sex sexual practices. Perhaps, gay liberationists felt that "hyper-masculine" liberationists

couldn't move past their bodily and moral revulsions around male-male sexuality in the necessarily intimate space of liberationist politics. Perhaps, this hyper-sexuality was a kind of affront to the chaster public image of solidarity.

But, if we look back to Huey Newton's 1970 address, we see that he delivered these two sentences together: "… we know that homosexuality is a fact that exists, and we must understand it in its purest form: that is, a person should have the freedom to use his body in whatever way he wants. // That is not endorsing things in homosexuality that we wouldn't view as revolutionary."[59] Perhaps, supposed revolutionary uptightness with gay liberation stemmed, not so much from a moralism about deviant sexuality *per se*, but from questions about whether gay liberation's revolutionary analysis matched its sexual commitments, or about whether its concerns with masculinity (sexually and politically) were too narrow for a liberationism which required more expansive connections. On the other hand, perhaps gay liberationists, "campy guerrillas," found such questions around appropriate political comportment themselves to be a reflection of an overly narrow (and hyper-masculinist) definition of politics. If so, that might explain the song's efforts to fill in the image of the unthinkable: the cross-dressed soldier.

Likely, liberationist stress-points emerged along several of these lines, among all its factions. The song does not ultimately blame other liberationists for the movement's demise; instead it implies that the divisiveness was engineered by the system, which sent police forces to arrest blacks, then gays, followed by all the rest. Interestingly, Lavender Country also doesn't blame the rise of urban clone culture and gay rights movements for abandoning the liberationists' more radical vision. Instead, we are led to infer that the

[59] Newton, ibid.

increased policing and surveillance physically separated the movement body and affectively exhausted it by sewing internal suspicions. In other words, being "uptight" was an emotional, corporeal, and orientational affect produced by the system for the purpose of exhausting liberationist forces.

As a reflection of this sort of liberationist analysis, the end of the song re-writes our contemporary understanding of the closet, which so often casts "in" or "out" as a matter of choice. In "Back in the Closet," the carceral system which divides and isolates the liberationist body does so by containing some (mostly blacks and gays) within prisons ("pens") and forcing others into a lowered visibility ("closets"), which in the context of *Lavender Country*, is associated with the rurality of its country music. Pen and closet, prison and countryside, become paired tools for the carceral state's division and isolation of liberationist forces. Haggerty's singing performs this nuanced analysis along with a mourning for the lost liberationist revolution. The use of the word "again," though, implies that revolution is a cycle and that energies must be re-collected to revive its militant fire. Gay liberationists saw the latter as the work of a new corporeal subjectivity identified with the "faggot".

The Wolf Creek *RFD* editors printed an "RFD Collective Statement" in which they claimed, "Most of us call ourselves faggots."[60] This one "F* word" began to take cultural precedence over any previous ones. The Wolf Creek collective defined "faggot" etymologically as the kindling used to fuel a fire and then claimed that, as a derogatory term, it derived from a historical phenomenon of throwing homosexuals into the wood-

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[60] "RFD Collective Statement," *RFD* #10, Winter 1976, 4. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.

fires used to burn witches. Witches, they explained, were usually strong, assertive women who were also knowledgeable, rural herbalists, and "often lesbians".[61] They added that "Witches and faggots were enemies of the church because we were often country dwellers, lovers of the natural world and the communal good, rather than private greed. We were an obstacle to the development of merchantilism [sic], which became capitalism." The *RFD* collective explained that they took up the mantle of "faggot" with pride – proud of their historical alliances with women, with lesbians; proud, even when not noticeably effeminate themselves, of their own feminine natures and the "sissie men" among them; and proud of their political commitments to nature, the rural, and the collective as much as of their political resistance to capitalist and Christian oppression.

This emphatic entrance of the faggot onto the *RFD* stage stemmed from a few interrelated cultural phenomena with strong West Coast countercultural roots. The overlap of feminist and environmental concerns in the 1970s led to nascent eco-feminist political perspectives recognizing just how thoroughly women had been associated with nature. Violence against nature and violence against women were seen to erupt from the same source: patriarchy. For many, the rise of patriarchy was mappable to the rise of capitalism in that, in order to centralize the means of production in cities, capitalists needed to control the reproduction of the labor force by controlling women within male-dominated families, and they also needed to take ownership of the countryside as a natural resource for production. By this capitalist logic, both women and earth were natural resources: Women were a source of future laboring bodies, and the earth was the source of raw materials. As such, both were the "stuff" of capitalism. A socialist eco-

[61] Ibid.

feminism developed around the political goal of liberating women and the earth from capitalist patriarchy. And, for those coming from the liberationist perspectives we have already described, such women's liberation, as a critique of global capitalism, should also be linked to the liberation of the racialized people and lands which capitalism, in all its colonial modes, had enslaved, exploited, disenfranchised, and oppressed.

Eco-feminist perspectives often had a spiritual component. To many eco-feminists, Christianity, as the religious arm of the rising capitalist city-state, was a major means of capitalist population control. Male Christian clergy, reflecting the word of God the Father, articulated divine laws restricting sexual partners, sexual activities, birth control, and abortion. These laws made it more possible to streamline, track, and regulate the birth of populations which might become labor or military forces. Refusing to follow these laws was both crime and heresy, and women, of course, as potential mothers, were the most violently held to these laws, often labeled as witches. Property laws were also yoked to these strictures, making ownership a matter of heredity, heredity a matter of legal documentation, and land something the capitalist state parceled. Women and earth were thus placed under centralized capitalist control. Christianity was the efficient ideological funnel, producing belief – usually by force -- in the values which fueled capitalist state control of all natural bodies. Eco-feminists turned away from Christianity. They began to recover, imagine and practice religions which venerated women more than men, mothers instead of a single dominant Father.

One of the most influential of these eco-feminist spiritualities on the reader-writers of *RFD* was Reclaiming Witchcraft.[62] Although the formal organization would

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[62] *RFD* issue #137, Spring 2009 ("Reclaiming Faerie Dynamics"), was a theme issue focused on the long influence of the Reclaiming Witchcraft spirituality on the Radical Faeries.

not actually be founded until 1979, its leadership was already active in the San Francisco Bay Area in the mid-1970s. By 1975, there were enough different traditions of neopagan witchcraft active in the Bay Area that the Covenant of the Goddess could be formed as an official church, bringing practitioners of these different traditions under one legal umbrella.[63] Neopagan witchcraft in the United States originated primarily with the development of Wicca in mid-century England by Gerald Gardner and Doreen Valiente before its being brought to North America in the 1960s. It claimed its basis in the nature-focused religious practices of those historically and politically labeled by the Church as witches and treated as heretics and Satanists. Historian Ronald Hutton has also noted that, influenced by folk practices, ceremonial magickal orders (like the Golden Dawn), and craft/trade guilds, Wicca has had, of necessity and tradition, a secretive and dispersed organization.[64] Practitioners, if not solitary, have often belonged to small covens. This clandestine and decentralized organizational form would resonate with the collectivist households and underground networking of local liberationists, especially lesbian feminists. In the 1970s Bay Area, the Reclaiming Witchcraft Movement would combine such elements of Wicca with emergent eco-feminist politics so that proudly reclaiming the title of "witch" also meant committing to political activism – especially anarchist approaches to feminism, environmentalism, gay liberation, and peace.[65]

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[63] Jone Salomonsen, *Enchanted Feminism: Gender and Divinity Among the Reclaiming Witches of San Francisco* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002) and Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Goddess: 20th Anniversary Edition* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1999).
[64] Ronald Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft* (Oxford, UK: Oxford, UP, 1999).
[65] The act of "reclaiming" epithets as a function of "pride" deserves its own affective history – one which would address Pagan Pride alongside "Queer Shame".

Most of the Reclaiming leadership, including co-founder Starhawk, were also previously trained in the early 1970s in an American form of witchcraft called the Feri Tradition.[66] This tradition was founded by Victor and Cora Anderson and was unique in seeing itself as an ecstatic tradition rather than a fertility tradition, focusing on sensuality rather than reproduction, and therefore ultimately being more welcoming to initiates who weren't heterosexual or gender-normative. Stressing a repudiation of all bodily shame and an embrace of personal sensuality, creativity, and power, the Anderson tradition also, echoing its huna influences, described the soul as having a triple, not a single and discrete form.[67] This ecstatic and porous, multiple sense of the self would have resonated with those who experimented with the forms of liberationist psychological models featured in Iowan *RFD*.

Importantly, Starhawk described the magic of Reclaiming witchcraft as a ritual approach to shaping the affective energy necessary to sustain long-term political projects.[68] If *Lavender Country* had expressed an exhaustion in the wake of a failed revolution while implying a need to reignite its extinguished fires, such affective magic would prove useful. Starhawk framed magic as a ritual form of concrete poetry, a way to play with affect (energy, emotions, associations, rhythms, roles) in ritual settings designed to mobilize and charge ecofeminist political subjectivities. As such, witchcraft is a historically specific method of refraining. As faggots, the Oregonian *RFD* collective

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[66] Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance.*
[67] Cora Anderson, *Fifty Years in the Feri Tradition* (Portland, OR: Harpy Books, 2010, 1994), pp.16-19. Thanks to Feri and Reclaiming witch T. Thorne Coyle for directing me to Anderson's book and thanks to witch Ivo Dominguez, Jr. for explaining the concept of the tripartite soul in several esoteric spiritual traditions. *Huna is* a New Age spirituality claiming roots in indigenous Hawaiian practices.
[68] Starhawk, ibid.

linked themselves to ecofeminists and Reclaiming witches, sharing their political values and magical practices. They set about the work of realizing faggot bodies.

Taking seriously eco-feminists and neopagan calls for re-imagined relations to nature, many of the new Oregonian *RFD* androgyne figures featured human-nature hybrids, mostly echoing pre-Christian classical sources. An image of a creature is half-man, half-tree not only re-figures the classically feminine dryad as a man but also attempts to take literally the figure of the faggot by imaging him as the tree which would become firewood used for witches' executions.[69] Drawn as part tree, he seems trapped inasmuch as he takes on the appearance of a sacrificial Christ figure, the hair on his torso forming a cross on his skin and the sharp lines of his hair evoking the crown of thorns. For Christian audiences, the image would evoke sympathy for the faggot as a Christ-like victim of an imperial system not altogether unlike Rome's. Neo-pagan audiences, on the other hand, might see in this figure the soul of Merlin contained in a tree until the time for his triumphant return. Playing, like Broughton's *The Bed*, on the tensions between Christian and pagan imagery, this specifically faggot androgyne strikes, though, not the joyous and liberating union of Broughton's film but focuses on the constraining (prison/closet) elements of union by which the faggot is turned into a victim from his being caught in the Christian imperial system.

Articulating a political spirituality was not easy in a West Coast context which also gave birth to the New Age movement. *RFD* reader-writers were eager to differentiate their own faggot spirituality. As a Berkeley *RFD* contributor calling himself

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[69] Image, Jeff Venero, *RFD* #16, Summer 1978, 6. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.

Howie Zowie, a Jewish transplant to the area from New York City, noted in a piece called "Politics and Faggot Spirituality,"

> I am angry at the New Age Growth Movement such as EST, Polarity Therapy, Arica, etc. because it only recognizes problems as personal and internal. They blame the individual for not being spiritual, skilled or mature enough. By emphasizing individual solutions they don't recognize societal caused problems. My personal growth as a gay person cannot be separated from my liberation from heterosexist oppression. Besides the high price tag connected with their knowledge, these groups show their classism by ignoring the financial and psychological oppression of the working class and the special problems of racial minorities.[70]

Where New Age spiritualities were focused on the discrete individual, gay liberationist spirituality was deeply social and, as such, expressed its connections to the concerns of other liberationist movements.

In a similar vein, it was Arthur Evans' *Witchcraft and the Gay Counterculture* that crystalized faggot identity. An activist and historian, Arthur Evans had relocated, like Faygele Ben Miriam, to Washington from New York City in the early 1970s. Evans and two other gay men formed a group they called the Weird Sisters Partnership and, during summers, slept in tents on a forty-acre plot, which they named New Sodom, in a mountainous area in remote northeastern Washington State.[71] In winters, they would stay in Seattle, where Evans continued research on a countercultural history he had begun in New York. In 1974, Evans relocated to San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury but would publish photos and short reports from his New Sodom experience in the Spring 1975 *RFD*.

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[70] Howie Zowie, "Politics and Faggot Spirituality," *RFD* #12, Summer 1977, 20. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.
[71] Arthur Evans, "Arthur Evans," 2010, http://paganpressbooks.com/jpl/EVANS-OB.HTM.

Even though his book wouldn't be published until 1978, Evans had begun hosting a group called the "Faery Circle" in his Haight-Ashbury apartment in 1975. This circle "combined neo-pagan consciousness, gay sensibility, and ritual play."[72] In New Sodom and in Haight-Ashbury, Evans had been researching and writing *Witchcraft and the Gay Counterculture*, its ideas surely circulated in the Bay Area through this "Faery Circle". In that book, he described "fairies" as the people who continued to practice old matriarchal religions throughout history, even though that practice was criminalized.[73] He recounted how women and gay men were labeled witches and heretics for practicing these nature-based matriarchal religions, and as a result, how they were arrested, tortured, and executed for it. And, he cited the very same etymology of "faggot" as the Wolf Creek *RFD* collective, saying the word was ascribed to gay men who were burned alongside witches. Throughout the book, he names industrial capitalism as the rising force that drove this violence.[74]

At the end of the book, Evans dismissed both liberalism and industrial socialism as politically inadequate to address the violence industrial capitalism still waged against women, gays, the poor, the indigenous, and people of color across the world. What he advocated was a new kind of revolutionary socialism, which would call all these people together, to act in collectives designed to withdraw their work from the alienating and

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[72] "Arthur Evans," *The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Religious Archives Network,* September 2011, http://www.lgbtran.org/Profile.aspx?ID=301 (NOTE: A parenthetical note at the bottom of this webpage says that most of the biographical information was written by Evans himself for the publication of his book, *Critique of Patriarchal Reason*.)

[73] Evans, *Witchcraft and the Gay Counterculture* (Boston, Fag Rag Books, 1978), 27-28.

[74] Here, it is important to note that both the theory of an early worldwide matriarchal religion that informed the witches' practices and the etymology of "faggot" to refer to executed homosexuals during the Burning Times have been seriously questioned on scholarly grounds. Both Starhawk and Evans acknowledged those critiques, pointed out the inherent biases of the academy as a capitalist and patriarchal institution, and argued for the value of "mythical" histories which may not be provable but which open up historical possibilities and collective subjectivities for oppressed groups.

enforced labor of capitalism and apply it towards their own networking and mutual survival. He wrote, "The most favorable spot for such collective work is the countryside," unplugging from the industrial capitalist city but still networking with those urban collectives unable to leave the confines of the city.[75] He urged these collectives to use "magic," as a means of recovering spiritual communication with nature and with each other, as a means of uniting and empowering each other as networked collectives. The magic Evans advocated depended on the practice of "group song, dance, sex, and ecstacy" and would enable collectives to "hold themselves together and function in perfect order without prisons, mental hospitals, universities, or the institution of the state."[76] Finally, he urged that these collectives be prepared to kill, to return violence when they were served it – not as an ideal or exclusive political response but as one that must be held as a real and necessary option in violent times.

Evans' theory of gay witchcraft, of faggot spirituality, matched up with the militant liberationism of many of his Bay Area contemporaries. Wolf Creek and *RFD* would be central to what would prove an only partially successful effort to realize the faggot refrain through a rural event. Over Labor Day weekend, 1976, Wolf Creek hosted the Faggots and Class Struggle conference. The organization and planning of the conference itself was the work of a collective of faggots, mostly from Lavender Country: Eugene, Portland, and Seattle. The express purpose of the conference was "to discuss class struggle as it specifically applies to our own oppression. The purpose of the conference is to share information, experiences, and ideas, and to provide a format to begin to clarify the relationship between gay men's oppression and class struggle.

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[75] Evans, 148.
[76] Ibid., 149.

Further, we want to work toward an analysis to develop strategies in a systematic way."[77] If, as we have hypothesized from the affective dimensions in Lavender Country's "Back in the Closet Again," there was a broader liberationist sense that gay liberation needed to fine-tune its revolutionary analysis, this rural conference was meant to do that work.

The conference was built on a shared sense of liberationist perspective: "It is critical for us … to participate in the development of a theory and a practice which gets to the root of faggot oppression and which takes into account that the oppression of faggots and women and third world peoples has been integral to the consolidation of power of the ruling order."[78] At the same time, the conference was designed to create its energy from a certain affective tension. Ideological difference was invited: Marxist-Leninists, socialist feminists, and anarchists attended. The "struggle" of the title referred, of course, to class-based agitation against the ruling order, but it also referred to the struggle with one's own possibly false consciousness, and to the struggle with revolutionary peers who might have different perspectives. If "faggots and class *struggle*" was the topic of the conference, its stated theme was "unity," charging people to struggle *with*, not *against*, each other across difference, in very specific ways. Organizers felt that, on the whole, the attendees achieved that goal:

> People came away feeling a higher sense of cooperation among political faggots on the West Coast. We were mostly nurturing, responsible and straightforward with each other. Criticism was offered in a dialectical, materialist way: offering both sides and seeing our actions in a historical perspective. Self-criticism was used by many. We used the conference as a place for serious investigation of our political practice and theory, and really created an atmosphere of unity-struggle-unity. … A key factor in the cooperation of conference participants was the way we dealt with class background. People from working class backgrounds by and large were not trashy [in the sense of not "trashing" or being dismissive] but took risks to

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[77] "Statement of Purpose," in "A Conference Report: Faggots and Class Struggle," special issue *Morning Due: A Journal of Men Against Sexism* 2, no. 6 (Nov.-Dec. 1976): 11.
[78] Ibid.

> expose feelings and offer constructive criticisms. People from Petit-bourgeois backgrounds showed not defensiveness, but a willingness to be self-critical and seek avenues for change.[79]

Taking cues from feminist consciousness-raising circles, encounter groups, and witchcraft rituals, faggot event design took much care with the cultivation of liberationist affect. Corporeal attitudes of separation (trashiness) and self-enclosure (defensiveness) were discouraged and emotional attitudes of open-ness and connection (risk, exposure, constructiveness, change) were cultivated under the aegis of "unity-struggle-unity". A sense of bodily wonder of the kind Ahmed describes was fostered by an understanding of personal actions as part of larger materialist and historical processes, rather than as rational individual choices.

In the spirit of self-criticism, the organizers acknowledged that, despite all their attention to the affective design of ideological discussion, their relative lack of attention to the larger format and the planning process led to fairly serious repercussions in terms of gender and race. As a *conference*, the event was assumed to be a mostly intellectual enterprise, with a tendency towards experts speaking to learners. The organization of the conference into five presentations ("Class and Bourgeois Ideology," "The History of Imperialism: Faggots and Imperialism," "The History of the Father-Dominated Family," "Socialist Feminism," and "Practice") made clear that the main body of the conference's faggot work was the masculinized labor of revolutionary analysis and critique. Cultural, spiritual, and interpersonally intimate sessions *were* included, but they were scheduled like an after-thought, during the evenings, and they were made the responsibility of faggots who almost exclusively also identified as effeminate "sissies". Prioritized

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[79] Ibid., 4.

intellectual presentations almost always ran long, pushing meal times back, leaving these later evening sessions unevenly attended.

Organizers' self-critique stated: "They [sissies] did the shit work of setting up the performances, they did a lot of the performing, they initiated the orgy and the moon ritual. Sissies were responsible for organizing childcare and kitchen duties."[80] Sissies formed a caucus and spoke out against this as a "sexual division of labor … between sissies and 'straight-identified faggots' (STIFs as the sissie caucus labeled the non-sissies …)." Processing this critique, faggot organizers recognized that "songs, poetry, dancing, role-plays, theater, group writing, graphics-sharing, and film should happen throughout the day and evening, and be given the respect of thoughtful criticism. … [That criticism] helps us understand [cultural work's] relevance to building the revolutionary spirit and learning." They made a special point that spiritual rituals, orgies, massage, and group drug use be included as cultural events. They further offered their slowness to realize that learning importantly comes from "experiences and emotions" and that "the togetherness and power we feel through culture is learning, revolutionary learning."

Sissie aesthetic/spiritual/intimacy workers were present but marginalized at the Faggots and Class Struggle conference. Very few gay liberationists of color attended: There were five men of color among the 140 participants. The organizers admitted that racism was reflected in their planning processes and in the "lack of practical discussion around anti-racist and national liberation issues at the conference".[81] The organizers faulted themselves for quickly shifting the geographical focus of the event, from a Northwest to a more general West Coast conference, and asking for last-minute

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[80] Ibid., 8. All the quotes in the paragraph come from this page.
[81] Ibid.,5.

participation from the San Franciscan Gay Latino Alliance, the Gay American Indians, and the Black Gay Caucus. Representatives from all three groups declined to attend, commenting that, having not been part of conference planning, the event "didn't suit their needs".[82] Leadership from these three groups also objected to the exclusion of women, whom they saw as integral to their own liberation groups; the use of "faggot" in the title, which they saw as registering an over-emphasis on white European experiences of colonialism; and the conflation of colonialism and racism in a way that marginalized the importance of both.[83]

Organizers agreed with all these critiques, except the first, about the sexist exclusion of women, stating "In our white communities, lesbians have made it clear that now is not the historical moment for gay women and gay men to work together in any large, organizational way."[84] Given the critiques from the sissie caucus, though, faggot investments in masculine forms of organizing and communicating might have largely contributed to this connective impasse. Further, the fact that organizers responded from the perspective of "our white communities" only underscores how thoroughly the subject of the conference was understood to be white. The critiques from Bay Area gay liberationists of color did not so much highlight faggot organizers' flawed analysis as they did their failure to connect. Since the conference did not engage them in any way, by definition, it couldn't *do* anything for them.

In the winter of 1976, *RFD* documented its Wolf Creek conference. The production collective, as we have already seen, announced that "Most of us call ourselves

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[82] Ibid.,6.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid.

faggots." Given the above critique that faggot subjectivity depended almost exclusively on white European experiences of colonialism, and given the sissie critique that faggot identity depended on a "stiff" masculinity, the statement seems unlikely as a cry to readers to rally around the identity. Instead, it seems to follow the conference's affective directive to situate one's self historically and materially, which the collective does later in its editorial statement: "We are all young (if those of us in our thirties can be considered young), white, man. Almost all of us grew up outside of the large cities. But all of us have been nurtured by the cultural/political gay male circles in the large cities. Though some of us come from the working class, most of us come from the middle class."[85] Following the affective design of the conference, the collective made plain their faggot subjectivity, naming key ways their historically conditioned perspectives might be blinkered and privileged at once. Still, in claiming a name so predicated on white masculinity, the group's gay liberationist position would be qualified by the forms of relationships they cultivated with liberationists of color and sissies. The tenor of those relationships can be found in how *RFD* depicted the event.

RFD's main documentation of the conference took the form of a poetic-photographic text.[86] The text is dedicated to the sissies and, therefore, rightly takes a creative, poetic form. When looking at this page, our eye is shunted between photo and poem, accruing information, almost as if trying to animate text and image into a filmic capture of the event: shirtless men, their hands joined, their mouths open as if mid-song,

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[85] "RFD Collective Statement," *RFD* #10, Winter 1976, 4. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.

[86] jai d. elliot,"bread & roses revisited (for the sissies)," *RFD* #10, Winter 1976, 17. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.

their white and black skins united in the circle. Since the men face the text of the poem, it looks like they are singing the poem onto the page. We see the title of the poem, "bread & roses revisited," noting that there is a return to something past. The phrase "bread & roses" would have been familiar to those in 1970s Lavender Country. In 1974, Mimi Farina, younger sister of Joan Baez, had released a version of a song with that title and also founded a San Francisco-area organization with the same name, dedicated to bringing live music to those suffering acute isolation in institutions like prisons, hospitals, and nursing homes. Reducing the distance between artist and audience, Bread & Roses sought to restore those connections, and even connect diverse folk music communities. As we have seen, such isolation had been increasingly associated with rural and gay experience by *RFD.*

Furthermore, the song itself articulates a women's political perspective. Originally attributed to feminist and labor activist Rose Schneiderman, the phrase "bread & roses" was associated with the 1912 Lawrence, Massachusetts textile industry strike which united many women textile workers from various immigrant backgrounds. The song is sung in the voice of women who not only unite across their own racial and ethnic differences but also unite with men, too: "As we go marching, marching we battle too for men / For they are women's children and we mother them again."[87] Men have a place in this politics as *sons*, by their connection to their mothers. *RFD* reader-writers, having increasingly stressed the value of feminized creative and care labor, identifying with working-class women, would have sympathized with the lyric: "For the rising of the women means the rising of us all". In fact, the song's title succinctly values not only

[87] "Bread and Roses, song lyrics," *Protest Song Lyrics*, Accessed Nov. 4 2017, http://www.protestsonglyrics.net/Inspirational_Songs/Bread-and-Roses.phtml.

physical care, stressing that the women were indeed fighting for bread to eat, but also affective and aesthetic connection, in that the women fought for beautiful roses, too: "small art and love and beauty."

In the *RFD* poem "bread & roses revisited," credited to "jai d.-elliott," "flaming comrades" are addressed and described as designing a ritual articulating the relationship of "faggots & the mother" and merging "ceremony with solidarity". Here, we see evidence of the faggot subjectivity which draws off of the Wiccan worship of the mother Goddess and the Reclaiming use of ritual to energetically forge political alliances ("solidarity"). The participants later stand round a fire, watching wood burn and thereby recognizing themselves as "faggots" used in the burning of radical women, of witches, and commit themselves, too, as "faggots joining the struggle / faggots claiming the female aspect / as well as the male / faggots working to be whole again." Referencing the Jungian theory that all men have a feminine aspect to their personality called the "anima," faggot ritual participants were encouraged to find the feminine parts of their psyche as a means to a more whole androgyne psychology which should then enable their spiritual and political commitment to a struggle which would not only fight against the oppression of women but also against the oppression of themselves as feminized men. In consonance with the song "Bread & Roses," these faggots were trying to realize their political place by stressing their roles as sons of mothers and as fellow sufferers of patriarchy. The ritual, in the Reclaiming Witchcraft tradition, functioned to forge their political commitments to each other and to women through affective means. They visualized their own and women's bodies burning in the fire to stoke collective emotions of pain and outrage, and these emotions substantiated a fiery political orientation

sustained even further by finding the feminine aspects of their daily selves. It was this ritual generation of collective affect which fueled the vision of "comrades in dresses / & with guns" (echoing Hagerty's crossdresser-soldier) which the faggot would like to realize.

But, according to elliott's poem, there were very probably actual comrades in dresses present at the "Faggots and Class Struggle" conference. Describing the last day, when a line-up of workshops was being read, the litany was "interrupted for sissie statement / 'stiff' men gasp for denial / goats eat garbage / dresses blow in the wind." I read this as the kind of self-critique which organizers fostered among participants. In this case, the "sissies" at the event issued a critique of the masculine-centric aspect of the gathering, to which the more masculine and un-emotive ("stiff"/ "straight-identified faggot") men respond with awkward and unconvincing denial. Faggot militancy's reliance on masculinity was challenged by the flapping of the sissies' dresses in the wind. The goats, the trash, the dresses, and the wind all function as literally mute but corporeal rebuttals to any masculine denial of its political stiffness. The Wolf Creek collective statement claimed that "Though all of us are not sissie men, we will no longer be ashamed of woman-identified men or the woman-identified man in all of us." That shame, then, was surely palpable at the conference. The collective effort to celebrate the sissie was clearly uneven as sissie-shaming and sissie-marginalization clearly did circulate at the event, provoking sissies to interrupt it with critique.

Elliott would make these sissies central to the event by dedicating "bread & roses revisited" to them. From a magical perspective, this makes sense. Whereas many of the faggots would pay lip-service to the Mother Goddess by invoking her, and visualize

burning witches and comrades in dresses, at an event described as a meeting of "brothers," with no women apparently present, only the sissies were able to materialize the feminine beyond its linguistic and interior psychological forms. Their bodily androgyny made the poetry of the ritual concrete, as Starhawk would describe it. And while Elliott's poem commits the sissies to a physical text, dedicating their androgynous presence to ink and paper in a way that allows the ritual's memory to be sustained as a *body* memory which can surface viscerally later (as happens in the parenthetical final stanza of the poem), it is important to note that sissie bodies are not represented in photo or illustration in *RFD* #10. In fact, the issue is designed in such a way to keep the sissies linguistically documented but not visually represented. While there might be many reasons for this, the result is that in *RFD* #10's documentation of the "Faggots and Class Struggle" conference, the feminine body was rumored but not seen. It's difficult not to wonder whether – just as the sissies gained conditional admittance to the conference, shunted to late-night after-thought events – *RFD* #10 similarly must *invoke* them to make good on the faggot-witch connection crucial to its refrain, but the magazine must also stop short of *visually materializing* the sissie, ultimately unconvinced by any femme capacity for implicitly masculine revolution.

By contrast, gay liberationists of color are not linguistically invoked at all. Despite the thoughtful critiques delivered by the San Francisco Gay Latino Alliance, Gay American Indians, and the Black Gay Caucus, there is no poetic dedication to them, or mention of their concerns in all the self-critique cited in the poem itself. Perhaps, this is because attendance by gay liberationists of color was so minimal as to make their presence or critique un-documentable. Yet, in the photograph to the right of the poem,

the foremost figure is that of a black person, appearing the most engaged by whatever is occurring at the heart of the circle. If five of 140 participants were people of color, in this photograph, the fraction is visually increased to one in three. The same participant, identified simply as "david" in the table of contents, appears in another photograph on page 32 of the same issue -- without his glasses, crouching underneath a small waterfall. If david's image is used to visually foreground and multiply black participation at the Faggots and Class Struggle conference, it's peculiar that that participation isn't documented other than photographically. The aesthetic of *RFD*'s documentation of the event renders sissies speakable but not visible and conversely renders gay liberationists of color visible but unheard. These two forms of erasure also can't be said to be equal: Sissie participation was recognized as substantial in the poem while the attendance of liberationists of color was effectively minimized and then muted, without comment. What's more, nothing in either the organizers' or *RFD*'s accounts admits the possibility that participants might have been both – sissies of color. The *RFD* account, like the song "Back in the Closet Again," seems more bent on invoking the figure of the violent femme than on admitting the sissie of color.

All of the above point to real limits to the liberationist vision of the faggot refrain. Taking seriously the conference organizers' self-critique along these lines and the *RFD* collective's (uneven) efforts to document more inclusive participation, I am not arguing that these are matters of strategic design. Intellectually and theoretically, the widest possible inclusion was important to the faggot organizers and *RFD* collective, as liberationists. It's the affective dimensions of the faggot refrain as an assemblage, I contend, which are at the heart of this issue. First, legacies of de-eroticized affiliation on

the part of regional gay liberationists towards liberationist movements by women and people of color hardened into purely formal relationships which risked being forgotten, deferred, or short-shrifted. Second, this formality manifested in organizational and event design which, temporally, relegated non-masculine and non-white liberationists to after-thoughts and, spatially, positioned them further and further away from the planning table. Third, documentation of these uneven liberationist relationships manifests in lopsided and telling orientational patterns belying connections that appear to be "all talk" or "just for appearances". These are barometers of formalized alliances which suffer from affective, not purely logical, inattention. Finally, because faggots in mid 1970s Lavender Country improvised a refrain which depended so much on the association of the liberationist with the masculinized militant revolutionary, they had real difficulty reconciling their recent traditions of androgyny and feminized labor forms to their new politics.

That these struggles over political affect took place as part of the new production climate for *RFD* means that the culture's understanding of the rural was also inflected in the process. Tellingly, the Faggots and Class Struggle conference organizers faulted the shift in regional focus – from Northwest to West Coast orientation – for their failure to incorporate San Francisco liberation movements of color into their program earlier. They owned that an event designed for and by one regional culture can't just be mapped onto another one. They themselves had made a similar argument when they had expressed anger over U.S. Marxists' trying to transfer other countries' – like China's and Cuba's – revolutions, whole-cloth, onto the American context. Maoist thought – so influential in Bay Area liberationist circles – had taught just that: revolutions had to reflect the specific

historical *and* regional material conditions from which they would break free. For that reason, a true West Coast gay liberationism would have to address the inter-relations of both metropolitan regions like Seattle and the Bay Area as well as the rural Lavender Country which connected them, and doing so would mean attending to the racial, gender, and class complexities of these places.

The faggot refrain of *RFD*'s Oregon years represented an effort to invoke a revolutionary militant femme figure who might help gay liberationists articulate a place in wider liberationist networks and re-fuel a waning liberationist spirit. To craft their refrain, area liberationists employed a politicized witchcraft spirituality which used poetics and ritual to mobilize affects of fiery militancy and universal motherly connection. The faggot refrain enjoyed very limited and uneven success because it failed to adequately engage people of color, women, and sissies who were also gay liberationists. In some ways, though, this connective failure exposed the necessary ways by which gay liberationism would need to enrich its connections in order to continue. As Hobson has importantly shown, most popular LGBT histories represent gay liberationism as a flash which receded to make way for gay rights movements; instead, her work demonstrates how gay liberationist politics survived in the New Left and even in later queer politics. Even in 1973, when Haggerty pauses a little after singing the chorus of "Back in the Closet" only to add an emphatic "again," we get the sense that revolution requires ongoing and iterative care as much as it does a martial flash.

In fact, the liner notes to the album say as much: "We'd like to tell you about Lavender Country. For many, it means a land of fear, confusion, and loneliness; for the rest of us, it means a life of struggling towards liberation and an affirmation of

Gayness."[88] In this sentence, the rural as a space of danger, chaos, and isolation becomes a temporal trajectory ("a life"), a "struggle" in the direction of "liberation". It's telling that Lavender Country expressed its liberationist politics in the very traditional musical form of country music which had grown popular in the 1950s and 1960s through a kind of inter-rural aesthetic funneled through Nashville-centered radio. It's also telling that Haggerty was most inspired by new female singers (Patsy Cline, Loretta Lynn, and Tammy Wynette) which he listened to in his childhood, telling their stories of connection and survival over the airwaves.

It would be a mistake to think of such linking of iterative liberation and the rural as a purely white or even rural phenomenon. As Donna Jean Murch has so carefully pointed out, Black Panther cultural formation often relied on the rural-urban connections of the African American Great Migrations. Founders Bobby Seale (Liberty, TX) and Huey Newton (Monroe, LA) were both born in the rural South and moved as children, with their parents, to the Oakland area during the second Great Migration. Seale, in particular, according to Murch, "proudly embraced [Southern rural] vernacular speech and dress" in ways that appealed to working-class blacks newly migrated from the South to the Bay Area.[89] Murch also stresses that the black panther itself was borrowed from the black candidate ballot symbol in Lowndes County, Alabama, a rural area mostly populated by poor blacks who defied a violent white supremacist bloc in efforts to secure elected seats for African Americans. Such details add nuance to historians Kelley and Esch's observation that Black Panthers, inspired by Mao and selling his *Little Red Book*

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[88] *Lavender Country* liner notes, ibid.
[89] Murch, 207.

on Bay Area streets, often adopted a peasant style of dress while working in the streets. Black rural stylistics in the urban Bay Area also clearly inflected black liberationism.

Most U.S. liberationists cite the influence of Maoism for its call to revolutionize consciousness by difficult dialectical self-questioning processes like those practiced at the Faggots and Class Struggle conference. Few mention the fact that Maoism valorized the rural peasant as the central revolutionary subject, rather than the urban industrial worker favored by most European forms of Marxism. Mao, likely influenced by his own rural origins, was so insistent on the importance of the rural peasant class that he forced waves of educated urban youth to migrate into rural areas and humbly integrate themselves into rural work and life.[90] Kelley and Esch outline the many U.S. Black revolutionary movements which, after exposure to Maoism, also agitated for the occupation of rural Black Belt lands. So, in several ways, U.S. liberationism reflected a Maoist association of the rural and the revolutionary.

The *RFD* poem "bread & roses revisited" mentions a Eugene, Oregon "Mao House" under the author's name. The fact that the conference was hosted in rural Wolf Creek, between Pacific Northwest and Bay Area urban hubs, is significant enough to raise the question about whether a Maoist concept of a rural revolutionary was operative in the culture. As liberationists, the Wolf Creek collective and the conference organizers would certainly have distinguished themselves from a rural gay nationalist project like the Alpine County movement, which (ultimately unrealized and partly a publicity stunt) aimed to move (mostly white male) Bay Area gay residents to a rural town in Alpine

[90] In interviews conducted for later chapters, Southeastern gay liberationists said that few outside China knew the horrifying actual implications of Mao's policies at this time. They described Maoist information coming into the U.S. in "trickles".

County, California, displacing Native Americans there and creating an all-gay village.[91] Hobson points out that the stated overt colonial nationalism of this movement galvanized many gay liberationists to distinguish themselves from such politics.

RFD and Wolf Creek seemed more to model their concept of the rural on the conviction, like that of lesbian feminists associated with *Country Women* and that of Arthur Evans, that the rural was a place better suited to resist the systemic control and surveillance concentrated in the city. Similar to Evans, they clearly didn't advocate a separation from the city but imagined instead an urban-rural network of liberationist households. As I have shown by an analysis of representation of the Faggots & Class Struggle conference, this vision of an urban-rural network often suffered from an uneven networking of rural and urban areas *and* of feminized and non-white gay liberationists. Further, as anthropologist Scott Lauria Morgensen has shown, similar shortsightedness amongst the *RFD* network, in terms of its politics, spirituality, and rural homesteading, risked perpetuating settler colonialism of a uniquely gay sort.[92]

Both Morgensen and Hobson, though, represent these gay liberationists as being part of the conversations in which such historical critiques arose, partly because of their commitments to cross-movement affiliation, as first modeled in the Bay Area by Black Panthers, and to the dialectical consciousness-raising practiced by area socialist feminists and Maoists. Both these aspects of regional liberationist culture would have cultivated a sense on the part of gay liberationists that they should internalize and grow from such critique. Given this, it is possible that an understanding, as similarly expressed by

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[91] Hobson, 34-39.
[92] Morgensen, *Spaces Between Us: Queer Settler Colonialism and Indigenous Decolonization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

Lavender Country, of the revolutionary urban-rural network as an iterative process survived the faggot refrain.

For evidence of that possibility, I to return to *RFD*. In jai elliott's poem, there remains the apparently insignificant figure of the goats. Remember that, in response to faggots' masculinist denial of sexism, "goats eat garbage / dresses blow in the wind". We can rightly link the goat to the Wiccan Horned God or to *RFD*'s satyr images.[93] But, I think it's important to also think of the goats as a metonym for the rural farm, as actual residents and hosts of the event. The fact that they are depicted as eating garbage points to a certain inconsistency in the faggot attendees' eco-feminist values since the garbage could only be produced by the urban attendees. The goats stand beside the sissies in critique of such behavior: The masculine devaluation of the feminine goes hand in hand with the masculine devaluation of nature. Thus, another point of critique conference organizers mention is participants' "city chauvinism," a kind of arrogance in thinking that urban culture and values can and should operate unchanged in a rural environment.[94] Not only were organizers critiqued for a faggot chauvinism which failed to engage Bay Area gay liberationists of color; they were also critiqued by the rural residents, including the farm goats, for a city chauvinism which imagined urban cultures easily transplanted, even for a weekend, to an agrarian space.

Likely, this form of chauvinism occurred because the main motivation for hosting the conference at Wolf Creek, aside from broad geographic convenience, was the escape from the regular surveillance and infiltration which, according to Hobson, liberationists

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[93] See the image on the inside back cover of *RFD* #12, Summer 1977: three chubby, smiling, nude satyrs joined at the beards. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.
[94] *Morning Due*, 10.

in the Bay Area increasingly experienced in this period. This primary concern was reflected in the organizers' policy of vigilantly maintained security at the conference and of scrupulous admittance only for those who had pre-registered. At a conference whose militant faggot refrain included open discussion of the possibility of armed "terrorist" acts, the fear of undercover officers and "plants" was very real. This heightened fear, though, resulted in an over-determined sense of the rural as somehow naturally more private, more securable. Actual experience at the rural conference raised the question: Whose security? Performed by whom? In whose space?

The implication is that urban and rural countercultural liberationists were poorly prepared to meet each other in this space which also included other life like goats, crops, and trees, whose safety might have been less planned. As historian Christina Hanhardt has pointed out about gay neighborhoods in San Francisco and New York City, it is under the rubric of "gay safety" which important questions about inclusion – and I would argue, by extension, connection – get raised.[95] Once, as critical rural studies scholars have argued, the myth that the rural is a blank space appended to urban hubs is dispelled, a simple escape to the country is no longer tenable. If there is no Edenic safe place "out there" for all, then conversations around urban-rural connections (and divides) become critical.

Returning to Lavender Country's "Back in the Closet," we remember now how Haggerty's lyrics conceive of the rural and the prison as two sides of the imperial system's strategy of division and isolation. The prison isolates by containment, and the country isolates in the form of exile. What Lavender Country's song pushes us to is a

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[95] Hanhardt, *Safe Space.*

recognition of the implicitly urbanormative nature of that coordination of the fears around being "locked in the pen" or "lost in the country". The song, the whole album, and early *RFD* all re-write our understanding of the isolating country by coloring it lavender. They also ask us to see the rural and the prison as connected, as spaces which non-conformists circularly travel in their continuous efforts to escape the jail cell *and* the lonely country.

As if in recognition of this, #10 was also the first *RFD* issue to feature the regular "Brothers Behind Bars" column, re-printing letters by inmates who often corresponded with *RFD* reader-participants and who often organized other gay inmates.[96] The editors commented that it was often in liminal spaces like highway rest-stops where rural men, countercultural travelers, and urban exiles, seeking same-sex intimacy, would be targeted for arrest. Further, the column editors directly connected the isolation of gay country life to the isolation of gay prison life, advocating the use of correspondence to alleviate that isolation, to share political values and organizational strategies, and to network rural collectives to which former convicts could go after release.[97]

The "Brothers Behind Bars" column gracefully stitched Iowan and Oregonian gay liberationist cultural politics. By expanding its understanding of systemic isolation to include that experienced in the confinement of urban ghettoes and prison walls as well as that in the apparent desolation of wastelands and de-populated rural areas, the *RFD* network could turn its Iowan correspondence practices and intimate care work more strategically to address specific forms of isolation experienced on either side of specific urban-rural divides. Since so many urban militant liberationists in this period

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[96] "Brothers Behind Bars," *RFD* #10, Winter 1976, 26-31. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.

[97] See Chapter Two, about Koch's Farm and Mulberry House for examples.

experienced their "front lines" as the faces of police, cell bars, and bureaucratic red tape, such connections directly addressed the militant concerns of the Oregonian faggots.

By focusing on the connections on either side of actual urban-rural divides, the *RFD* network stood an improved chance of making the cross-racial and cross-gender connections it had failed to make before. As Latino/a cultural scholar Mary Pat Brady has recently argued in relation to the scholarly queer "rural turn," we too often neglect to understand that "categories (race, gender) are actually *processes* and that these processes are made real, in part, through their spatialization" which requires that we "shift the focus to networks of relationships and the obstructions and flows between people and events and the sites of their coming together … ."[98] The *RFD* faggot collective had earlier adopted a rationalized and abstract understanding of race, class, and gender which leads, in Brady's view, to an "adjacency that orders into sequences and iterations what we hope to understand simultaneously and in a temporally variegated fashion."[99] By taking seriously the lived spatial dynamic of urban-rural divides, *RFD* reader-writers attempted to engage race, gender, class, and sexuality, not as static possessed identities, but as lived processes of subjectivization which happen differently in specific spaces, whether that be part of rural mid-century China or a rural county in Jim Crow-era Alabama. After the advent of the "Brothers Behind Bars" column, *RFD* showed more politically conscious attention to spatially specific social instances of urbanormativity and urban-rural divides from a liberationist perspective.

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[98] Brady, "The Waiting Arms of Gold Street: Manuel Munoz's *Faith Healer of Olive Avenue* and the Problem of the Scaffold Imaginary," in *Queering the Countryside,* Mary L. Gray, Colin R. Johnson, and Brian J. Gilley, eds. (New York: NYU Press, 2016), 114-115.
[99] Ibid, 111.

Ironically, just as *RFD* seemed poised to realize an androgynous suture of its Iowan and Oregonian -- its back-to-the-land and liberationist -- *corpuses*, they began to run out of steam. In Issue #15, the editors wrote, "In looking back on our work with RFD we have become aware of the contradiction of calling ourselves a Country Journal by Gay Men, while not always relating to it in that way. During its stay in Wolf Creek, RFD has tended more to be a personal, cultural, and political journal by faggots."[100] They changed the tagline of the magazine to read "A Journal of Gay Culture and Liberation" and announced their intentions to move publication operations elsewhere. That elsewhere was, perhaps unsurprisingly, San Francisco. Issue #16, like the previous two issues, didn't follow the playful riffing on the RFD acronym. It was subtitled the "Women's Issue" and featured the magazine's first extensive work by and about women – but, as one female reader from Atlanta would note, the issue was dominated by the editors' work, the editorial tone seemed more tokenistic than radical, and the entire issue suffered from a lack of cross-movement context between gay and women's liberation.[101] Something in the tone of *RFD*'s move to the city, of the admission of a lost rural orientation, and of the fairly passive efforts to re-connect with women's political cultures sounded a note of revolutionary exhaustion. It was almost as if the faggot refrain burned itself out. But its lessons and magazine survived.

Issue #17 would come from somewhere else altogether: rural North Carolina. The next chapter describes the development of a uniquely Southern convergence of gay

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[100] Editorial comment, *RFD* #15, Spring 1978, 7. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.
[101] Cathy Gross, letter to the editors, *RFD* #17, Fall 1978, 10. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.

liberation and back-to-the-land movements which paralleled, and intersected with, the cultures found in *RFD*'s Iowan and Oregonian tenures. Articulating these specifically Southern affective refrains is necessary to next understand how the little rural gay magazine would come to land in the South, and stay there, for the next thirty years.

2| Sissie Voices, Sissie Rooms: Mulberry House & Ozark Socialist Feminism, 1973-1977

Describing the specific regional development of Bay Area liberationism, Emily K. Hobson writes, "Although the concept of the gay ghetto still resonated with many, it seemed less tenable as a description of San Francisco's geography because queer life was increasingly widespread. In addition, black liberation and Third World radicalism began to inspire activists to use the concept of the gay ghetto to analyze sexual identity at scales beyond the urban neighborhood."[1] As we have seen, the Wolf Creek Faggots & Class Struggle conference came up against this confusion of scale when organizers attempted, too late, and with too little connection, to expand the scope of its conference from a Pacific Northwest event to one that might include the Bay Area and its very diverse gay liberationist network. Organizers acknowledged that this misstep exposed their own lapse in Marxist analysis of specific material conditions, their limited connections to gay liberationists of color, and their operative assumptions about the commonality of gay experience. Although it was less discussed, they also underestimated the reach of the *RFD* rural network.

The 1976 security for the Faggots & Class Struggle conference was unprepared for the late-night arrival, in a retired postal delivery truck, of a group of sissies from Fayetteville, Arkansas. There is a kind of poetic irony in the fact that, at a time when *RFD* was turning away from its rural orientation and embracing a West Coast faggot liberationism, a small entourage from that earlier far-flung "RFD Country" would travel cross-country in a *mail truck* – an amusing, improvisational riff on the magazine's

[1] Hobson, 21.

tradition of correspondence art.[2] The group got out of the truck, likely with a purse or two, maybe a flashy shoplifted earring here and there, and announced themselves as the members of "Mulberry House". Security blinked. They couldn't find any registration for the clearly tight-knit group. Standing in headlights, conference security must have seen infiltrators, smelled possible plants. Rules were raised, safety was invoked, and admittance stalled. It was Seattle's Faygele Ben Miriam who appealed to the sense and sensitivity of conference security: These sissies had driven *days* to attend the conference, and they should be allowed in.[3] So, they were.

In this chapter, I describe an Arkansas gay liberationist collective which not only coalesced at the same time as early *RFD* but also published responses in that magazine, distinguishing their own developing sissie refrain from that of the Wolf Creek faggots. To describe this collective and its cultural political orientation, I draw from a few existing regional histories, private archival records, oral history interviews, and *RFD* writings in order to couch its work in a regional context. This approach is necessary not only because few gay liberationist histories of cultures outside of the bicoastal urban hubs exist but also because such details are critical to any effort to resist posing an apparently universal (or national) portrait of (faggot) gay liberation like that implicitly put forth by the Wolf Creek *RFD* editors. To that end, this chapter will look in some detail at the Mulberry House collective as an important Ozark distinction from West Coast faggot

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[2] The fact that a critically rustic print culture stylistic had by this point been pushed beyond simple paper textuality to the very infrastructure of print circulation itself is further supported by Mulberry House member Dimid Hayes' having painted his Harrison, AR, mailbox lavender with the word "MALE" appearing on its side. Dimid Hayes, interview by author, August 3-4, 2016.

[3] Ibid. Hayes comments that Ben Miriam was politically more anarchistic than the majority of the conference organizers who were more hidebound socialists. For Hayes, this explains Ben Miriam's willingness to bend the security rules.

refrains. I tell the story of key members' coming to form Mulberry House as a node in a regional lesbian socialist feminist network. I then analyze one member's response to the 1976 Wolf Creek conference as a rural gay liberationist event and make use of another's 1977 journal to re-construct a sense of daily life in the collective in order both to describe what distinguished them from West Coast faggots and what class-based differences ultimately led to the collective's split. Finally, I contextualize a 1977 Arkansas Sissies *RFD* letter as part of a wider rural critique of West Coast faggot political cultures and as evidence of a developing Southeastern rural gay liberationist perspective. In affective terms, I describe Mulberry House by its orientation to regional lesbian feminists more than West Coast faggots, by its emotional class struggle, and its different corporeal performance of domestic space.

Becoming Mulberry, Not Mayberry: Gay Socialist Feminist Struggle in the Ozarks of Northwest Arkansas

The Mulberry House residents who drove their old mail delivery truck to Wolf Creek were no strangers to class struggle. In many ways, that particular struggle -- within a gay liberationist context – was the glue and the tension that held them together as a house, as a family. Former Mulberry House resident Dimid Hayes recalls that other attendees of the Wolf Creek conference were struck by the cultural cohesion of their house. That cultural consistency had come at some considerable interpersonal cost even as it reflected the dominant lesbian and socialist feminist practices of the greater northwest Arkansas women's culture of the 1970s. The story of the formation and dissolution of Mulberry House shows how members refined sissie practices by

experiences in different networks. Specifically, their sissie refrain oriented *in contrast* to West Coast faggots and *within* Ozark socialist feminist cultures.

The physical house had its advantages. Hayes describes Mulberry House as resting "on a couple of acres really close to the center of town, very wooded, and basically a little wooden shack that was kind of sliding down the hillside – *was* Mulberry House."[4] He remembers its bower-like position as a major benefit, making it a kind of refuge where little gardens could be grown, where visitors could be naked and no one beyond would know -- "honeysuckle everywhere … a lush Southern environment." Former member Michael Oglesby remembers that Dennis Williams rented the place for $50 a month and that Hayes "built a greenhouse which we called Lavender Thumb."[5] Speaking of Williams, whose name would have been the sole one on the lease, Hayes notes, "Dennis definitely was the anchor, always was the anchor – both for the men who came through and for the women who came through."[6]

Walter Dennis Williams was born in 1933, a Capricorn, in Dallas, Texas. Having worked in New York City as a Broadway costume designer in the 1960s, he set off in March 1970 with other hippies, from Ann Arbor, Michigan, on a cross-country trip for San Francisco. He arrived at his West Coast destination in April. Williams, an artful journal- and letter-writer, recorded the regular hassles he and his fellow countercultural travelers suffered as they drove across the country.[7] Their "longhair" looks marked them for police scrutiny and they passed at least one night in a jail cell, with no explanation, and were stopped or followed many more times.

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[4] Ibid. This and the following quote are taken from the same interview with Hayes.
[5] Michael Oglesby, email response to questions by the author, November 22, 2016.
[6] Hayes, ibid.
[7] Dennis Williams, Unpublished Personal Journal, 1970. Private collection of Dimid Hayes.

It's important to stress that globalization depended on its own forms of connection – namely, improved transportation and communication lines which could then better network urban hubs and provide swift passage for raw materials from rural areas. Although it's now typical to think of communications in terms of the internet and transportation in terms of airways, earlier and more local forms of networking involved expanded postal (i.e., rural free delivery) and interstate highway systems. The counterculture took to these opened roads for its own purposes. The 1969 film *Easy Rider* – itself a West Coast-to-Southeast journey –testifies to this fact, its countercultural protagonists suffering some of the same imprisonment and rural threat that Williams did on his journey west.

Communications scholar Jeremy Packer has shown how the late 60s through the mid-70s was the last gasp of a countercultural hitchhiking culture which was associated with youth "hitching their way as far from home as possible – into the mountains and forests, across the Great Plains, toward every urban or rural hippie Mecca rumored to exist."[8] Examining popular guides and creative works, Packer shows how crossing these urban-rural divides led to various forms of vilification; for example, hitchhikers, associated with roaming hobos, represented a scary extremism to home- and car-owners who distrusted travelers' minimal need of things; also, rural dwellers, associated with arch-conservatism, represented an angry mass to many mobile counterculturalists. Packer further shows how the road, as a hippie youth venue, was not only politically volatile but also sexually charged.

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[8] Packer, *Mobility Without Mayhem: Safety, Cars, and Citizenship* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 89.

As we have already seen, Wolf Creek *RFD* writers framed the interstate highway, with its lonely rest stops, as an urban-rural liminal space where same-sex sexuality was heavily policed. Film and media scholar Ryan Powell has provided a rich example of such sexualization of the interstate in the 1970s by examining how John Gage's *Working Man Trilogy*, "a series of hardcore porno-romances", in its second film, *El Paso Wrecking Corp.*(1977), extends "a vision of the interstate highway system as a space that fosters nonmetropolitan forms of desire between men, and ones that may even be inclusive of women".[9] These films depicted the road as a space of unexpected encounters, always potentially sexual. Powell indicates how the "crossover" film, as a genre, in this case allowed for the realization of a more mutable geographic or sexual orientation than simply being urban or rural, straight or gay. Due to its liminal urban-rural location and its refusal to reproduce binary sexual norms, the sexuality which Powell finds in Gage's films represents what I have called erotic rusticity. *RFD*'s claim that such erotic rusticity was assiduously policed is testified to by historian Brock Thompson, who documents the sting operations and ultimate closure of Arkansas' Morgan rest stop along Interstate 40, surveilled for its same-sex sexual traffic.[10]

On his journey west, Williams encountered elements of all these road-culture phenomena. As we have already said, he and his countercultural friends were badgered, threatened, and arrested. He wrestled with the same-sex sexual energies which manifested between himself and straight-identified "longhairs" within the context of a

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[9] Powell, "Queer Interstates: Cultural Geography and Social Contact in *Kansas City Trucking Co.* (1976) and *El Paso Wrecking Corp*. (1977)," in *Queering the Countryside: New Frontiers in Rural Queer Studies*, Eds. Mary L. Gray, Colin R. Johnson and Brian J. Gilley. (New York City: NYU Press, 2016), 183-184.
[10] Thompson, *The Un-Natural State.* Lest we consider this policing purely a phenomenon of the 1970s, it's important to note that Thompson's account takes place in the early 1990s.

free-love sexual economy which, at least according to some, centered women and femininity. Such sexuality had to be curtailed since open androgyny and sexual ambiguity could draw more suspicion as they moved through the country's rural heartland. Having seen the country in this way, once he did finally reach San Francisco, Williams decided to leave the country. He embarked by boat to India, spending May through September there, on a journey that he sometimes saw as spiritual and sometimes saw as an escape from Nixon's America.

The truth is that it was a sobering attempt at both. Reflecting countercultural interests in Eastern religion, particularly Tibetan Buddhism, Williams traveled to holy cities like Allahabad and Benares. On his journeys, he found extreme poverty alongside rampant commercialization. He regularly crossed paths with other Westerners traveling the country. Come face to face with globalization, Williams was too worldly to have fully expected a spiritual arrival in a geography outside the reaches of U.S. capitalism. At the same time, he wasn't completely jaded. He held a guarded trust that some spiritual growth was possible from accumulated daily life lived in the interstices of capitalism's global reach. He stayed open.[11]

By July 1971, Williams was back in the US and back in the South, living on Koch's Farm near Boles, Arkansas – just two hours west of the cruisey Morgan rest stop Thompson describes, during the very year when the stop was built. Hayes speculates that Williams arrived in the Southern state through leftist artistic circles he'd known in New York. For example, he had met Diana Rivers in those networks, so it's possible she had helped Williams find his way to the state.[12] Rivers -- later an award-winning author of

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[11] Dennis Williams, Unpublished Personal Journal, 1970. Private collection of Dimid Hayes.
[12] Hayes, ibid.

lesbian speculative fiction – had founded her own intentional community, Sassafras, in rural Arkansas around this time. Koch's Farm, 113 acres of mostly wooded land not far from Hot Springs, was headed by a couple, Leo and Mary Koch. In a July 20th letter to a curious party, Williams announced himself the "Minister of Information" for the farm, saying that the job of formal correspondence fell to him once he had proven he (an "over-educated city type") knew nothing about farming. Of the farming collective's spirituality, he wrote, "Religiously we run the gamut from militant atheist to backsliding Buddhist, but spiritually our rallying cry is Freedom. If Prince Kropotkin were alive I think he would call us a functioning anarchy, even though I'm sure he would disapprove of our voting on whether to watch *Bonanza* or turn the TV off."[13]

Williams' experiences at Koch's Farm generally echo those of early *RFD*'s Troxler. The others saw his writing ability as urban and trivial and used it to emphasize his inabilities with farming. Williams had already come to see himself as primarily attracted to men, but on the farm, while his peers didn't insist he abandon the occasional same-sex experience, they encouraged him to remain open to finding the girl who would surprise him by their mutual connection. In a September 5th letter, he mentioned finding that "mythical person" in a much younger Gloria.[14] In 1971, and into 1972, Williams also maintained correspondences with inmates interested in the farm as a place supportive of leftist prisoners' political views and as a possible residence after release. Some of these inmates were gay, and with at least one of these correspondents, Williams discussed the temptations of suicide.[15]

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[13] Williams, Personal Letter, July 20, 1971. Dimid Hayes' Personal Collection.
[14] Williams, Personal Letter, September 5, 1971. Dimid Hayes' Personal Collection.
[15] Williams, Personal Letters, 1971-1972. Dimid Hayes' Personal Collection.

By the summer of 1972, Williams was writing many letters looking desperately for a midwife for Gloria who had been pregnant since late spring. He and Gloria had grown increasingly frustrated with the parental postures of Leo and Mary and started looking for somewhere else to live with their own growing family. In an October 9th letter, though, he wrote that he and Gloria were breaking up.[16] Hayes, who would meet Williams a couple of years later, remembers that there might have been a devastating miscarriage. Whatever the case, by July 20th, 1973, Williams was living alone as he wrote to a "Sam" from a new home. That home was Mulberry House in Fayetteville.[17]

Hayes first heard of Williams via a letter the latter had written in *RFD*. Curious about its author, in the Fall of 1975, Hayes hitchhiked from Harrison, Arkansas, to meet Williams. They quickly became intimates. Of this first meeting, Hayes recalls, that the older Williams, then 42, was "captivating, and very charismatic, very intelligent, very well spoken, a passionate speaker, had an incredible cackle of a laugh, and … not like anything I had met before." Hayes, just 22, also a Capricorn, had grown up in Minnesota farming country, the fourth child of a grocery manager and a seamstress. Hayes, despite having been raised in a "permissive Lutheran" environment, always considered himself more a "nature spirit," often seeking time alone from his family of six brothers and sisters by taking walks into nature and losing himself in books. After studying landscape architecture and then landscape design at the University of Minnesota, he dropped out of school, frustrated with the lack of structure and guidance in early versions of self-designed degree programs. He moved to Harrison, Arkansas, where a cousin was working with VISTA, an anti-poverty program which was a sort of domestic version of

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[16] Ibid, October 9, 1972.
[17] Ibid., July 20, 1973.

the Peace Corps. He soon got a job in landscaping with a local nursery. In contrast with his experiences in rural Minnesota, Hayes noted both the racial diversity and friction in the area, finding out quickly that Harrison had an active Ku Klux Klan presence. At a local flea market, it was a rural lesbian couple who gently introduced him to *RFD*, where he happened on Williams' letter. Having worked a couple of landscaping seasons in Harrison, Hayes moved to Mulberry House, and the relatively more liberal university town of Fayetteville, by the end of 1975.[18]

In a November letter to Hayes, Williams revealed the spiritual basis of his politics: "The goddesses have beaten my head bloody showing me the path I must follow … . In moments of weakness & doubt I beg them sometimes to send me some one or group of ones to walk beside me. And occasionally they test my resolve by sending me a collective or a beautiful, gentle, blond gardener from Harrison. But to date their message clearly seems to be that I must walk alone."[19] In the same letter he intimated a shared understanding with Hayes of rural work as integral to kinship-building: "I sense the same response toward our Mother Earth that sends me to the embroidery hoop & quilting frame & you digging into the soil. And I sense that we share some of the same, practical ideas about combining our love for growing things with our dreams of community – i.e., a greenhouse."[20] Williams, consonant with *RFD*'s "to country soul from city soul," considered quilting and planting skills applicable to making connections and growing community.

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[18] Hayes, ibid.
[19] Williams, Personal Letter, November 17, 1975. Dimid Hayes' Personal Collection.
[20] Williams, ibid.

Hayes remembers Williams living in the house alone. But he says there were always people going through, whether it was local straight or closeted men looking for sex or gay women and men traveling liberationist networks.[21] Not long after Hayes moved in, a couple, Michael Oglesby and Charlie Thornton, having returned to Fayetteville from their own trip to San Francisco, joined Mulberry House. Oglesby and Thornton had grown up in the Monroe, Louisiana area -- the same town where an older Huey Newton had been born before his family relocated to Oakland. The couple had met in the Louisiana town in 1972. Oglesby, then 17, had been living as a street kid, and moved in with Thornton, 22, who had an apartment paid for by his gas station job. Their apartment became a kind of safe place for street kids to gather, most of whom were lesbians and gay men. Oglesby grew up poor, his mother on welfare after his father, an alcoholic and a carpenter, left the family for Dallas. His mother was an avid and wide reader, and Oglesby appreciated that her eccentric reading tastes meant that both John Howard Griffin's *Black Like Me* and John Rechy's *City of Night* found their way into his hands. Because his family had lived on the fringes of a middle-class suburb, Oglesby remembers being one of a few poor kids in a school where he – and a young girl he identified as Hispanic – would be told to stand, identified as "needy" to their classmates, who were encouraged to bring cast-off clothes for them. He and Thornton grew up with racism as a regular part of the Jim Crow landscape, fearfully seeing the Klan burn crosses on multiple occasions. When, in early 1973, a pair of their friends – a lesbian couple, one white and the other black – had one of those crosses burned on their car, Oglesby and Thornton decided to give up their apartment and move to New Orleans.[22]

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[21] Hayes, ibid.
[22] Oglesby, ibid.

Thornton had read of gay liberation and he spoke about it to those who visited their Monroe apartment. In 1973 New Orleans, they hoped to plug into liberationist culture. Although Oglesby and Thornton enjoyed the vibrant New Orleans bar culture and the city's hippies and drag queens, they remember being frisked daily by city police, targeted for dealing drugs because of their long hair.[23] Not long after the couple arrived in the Crescent City, on June 24, 1973, a second-floor French Quarter gay bar, the UpStairs Lounge, was set fire, following an evening Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) service. Thirty-two people, mostly gay, were killed by the arson. Their proximity to this horrifying event surely shaped their sense of gay liberation.[24]

According to most accounts, congregants had gathered at the Lounge and sang along to the Brotherhood of Man's "United We Stand," a song which stresses the importance of sticking together despite hard times. When the downstairs buzzer rang, someone opened the door and a burst of fire filled the room, fed further by the many bar decorations which covered the walls. Even though bartender Buddy Rasmussen was able to lead a number of patrons through a back exit to the roof, more were trapped inside the second-floor bar with barred windows. Many died huddled together in the interior while others clawed to get through the windows, looking down on horrified onlookers. MCC Reverend Bill Larson was one of those who burned while struggling to get through the barred windows, and his charred body remained pinned there for some time after, a horrific reminder facing onto the French Quarter street.[25]

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[23] Oglesby, ibid.

[24] In his correspondence with me, Oglesby paired the UpStairs Lounge fire with the 2016 Orlando Pulse shootings: the two worst mass murders of gay people in the U.S. to date, geographically positioned at different sides of the U.S. Gulf Coast states.

[25] I synthesized accounts of the UpStairs Lounge Massacre from *The Upstairs Lounge Fire,* directed by Royd Anderson (2013), DVD; Downs, *Stand By Me,* "The Largest Massacre of Gay People in American

Oglesby and Thornton must have witnessed how poorly New Orleans responded. The arsonist was never identified and convicted. Most believed that a hustler named Rodger Nunez, who had left the bar angry after a skirmish a bit earlier in the evening, had done it. Several reported that Nunez later confessed to the arson, but he committed suicide in 1974 and the story has never been proven. MCC minister Robert E. Goss lays the real blame at others' feet: "I place the guilt in the hands of the police and government, the churches, the media, and gay businessmen in the French Quarter. Homophobic violence and silencing contributed to the mass murder, and in the aftermath they were far more lethal."[26] His evidence is testimony to how powerfully gays were neglected or despised by the institutions of the place and day. Goss's account shows how police only half-heartedly sought to identify bodies or find a culprit. The city declared no official mourning. The media circulated opinions about the fire's being God's will and also printed public responses which scoffed about the flames burning away the men's dresses. WVUE Channel 8 "irresponsibly aired a fictitious story about an anonymous caller who claimed a vigilante group called 'Black Momma, White Momma' had fire bombed the bar" as a gesture of war against gays who were known to sexually attack their members.[27] A cruel joke rounded the streets of New Orleans that year: "What will we bury the ashes of queers in? Answer – fruit jars."[28] Even gay business owners resented any negative attention and called visiting activist and MCC Reverend Troy Perry a "fairy

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History," ibid., 17-40; Robert E. Goss, "Silencing Queers at the Upstairs Lounge: The Stonewall of New Orleans," *Southern Communication Journal* 74:3 (2009): 269-277; and Johnny Townsend, *Let the Faggots Burn: The Upstairs Lounge Fire* (Bangor, ME: BookLocker.com, 2011).

[26] Goss, ibid.

[27] Ibid., 273.

[28] Qtd in Ibid, 271.

carpetbagger".[29] When it came time to hold memorial and funeral services, most area churches turned their backs.

Both Goss and Downs credit the liberationist bonds of the MCC itself as the only glimmer of hope in the horrible series of events. Perry himself referred to the massacre as the "Stonewall of New Orleans".[30] However, no vocal activist group formed in its wake. Odds were, the climate was just far too violent, and the hold of the gay businessmen just too firm. The foundations of a later gay gentrification, documented by geographer Lawrence Knopp, were already being laid.[31] In a landscape of regular police harassment and violent fires, Oglesby and Thornton scrounged to buy a copy of Karla Jay and Allen Young's *Out of the Closets: Voices of Gay Liberation* (1972), which they found in a New Orleans bookstore. Oglesby remembers being inspired by "stories about gay people going to Cuba to cut sugar cane for the revolution" and that he "could relate much more to that than the bars."[32] For Oglesby and Thornton, the class-based socialist revolution would have resonated. Since sugarcane had long been a part of south Louisiana's economic geography, too, the specific rural form of that revolution did not look particularly foreign.

As Allen Young wrote of his own early position on the Cuban revolution, "Cuba, 90 miles from home, provided the first and the clearest example of a people fighting with considerable unity against U.S. imperialism."[33] For many liberationists, Cuba felt closer

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[29] Qtd in Ibid, 273.
[30] Goss, ibid.
[31] Knopp, "Exploiting the Rent-Gap: The Theoretical Significance of Using Illegal Appraisal Schemes to Encourage Gentrification in New Orleans," *Urban Geography* 11, no. 1 (1990): 48-64 and "Some Theoretical Implications of Gay Involvement in an Urban Land Market," *Political Geography Quarterly* 9, no. 4 (1990): 337-352.
[32] Oglesby, ibid.
[33] Young, "The Cuban Revolution and Gay Liberation," in *Out of the Closets*, 207.

to them, not just ideologically, but even geographically, than did major U.S. bicoastal urban centers. And Young felt that, after witnessing the homophobia among Cuban revolutionaries and even between fellow U.S. liberationists in Cuba, one unique contribution gay liberation offered to revolution was in its "dealing with the politics of personal relations, and as such [being] the path of personal fulfillment and joy, which proletarian revolution and Third World revolution cannot promise by themselves."[34] Not long after splurging on *Out of the Closets*, Oglesby and Thornton began to hear stories of rural communes in northwest Arkansas. In 1974, the two re-located to Fayetteville and started working as orderlies in a nursing home, looking for just such a rural counterculture which would allow them to live a local reflection of some of those gay liberationist values of which they had read in Jay and Young's book.

It wasn't long before the two met Dennis Williams at a party. Oglesby says he remembers Williams enjoying a kind of "guru" status among the straight hippies of the area "because he had been to Tibet and had spiritual leanings".[35] Williams was finished with what he had experienced at Koch's Farm and was focused on a gay commune by this time, though. Oglesby and Thornton posted a notice in a local student paper and started a gay consciousness-raising group. Their interest in a gay collective grew from these conversations. Shortly after, they moved into Mulberry House with Hayes and Williams, and by early 1976, the collective was born.

We see a few continuities with the broader *RFD* network: Williams' experiences on the straight commune, coming to hone his writing abilities as connective care labor, already networking by letter with inmates; Williams' politicized goddess spirituality;

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[34] Ibid, 208.
[35] Oglesby, ibid.

Hayes and Williams' sense of connection between rural labor and kinship work (echoing the *RFD* poem "to country soul from city soul"); and Oglesby's and Thornton's inspiration drawn from international revolutionary movements, like Cuba's. The immediate context of these continuities was surely different in ways that mattered, though. For example, residents of Mulberry House knew the nearby mountain South as a target of national anti-poverty programs like VISTA. Also, the Klan violence of the Jim Crow South, which Black Panther founders Long and Seale's families had fled, was part of the very ground upon which Mulberry House sat. Those burning crosses pervaded all forms of bigotry with a racist flashpoint.

An important difference from the 1976 Wolf Creek refrain was the relationship to women's culture. In the same November 1975 letter Williams wrote to Hayes, he stressed that "I respond so strongly to radical lesbians" and "our conversations always turn political when we're together" and "the only people I espy among the crags & boulders surrounding us are radical dykes – the irony of which I would find delicious if it weren't so painful & sexually frustrating."[36] Speaking of some of the most radical lesbians in the area, Oglesby recalls, "Even though they were separatist, we had much in common and we all kind of fell in love with each other."[37] Even though both the Wolf Creek faggot and Mulberry House sissie refrains held relationships to women's movements as primary in the mid-1970s, the differences are important. The former's faggot refrain was an assemblage which, as we have seen, depended on affects like familial solidarity, ceremony, pride, and parallel but separate work. The concurrent sissie refrain of Mulberry House hinged on affects which related specifically to radical dykes

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[36] Williams, Personal Letter, November 17, 1975. Dimid Hayes' Personal Collection.
[37] Oglesby, ibid.

(more explicitly than to mothers and sisters) and which generated strong responses: often of painful proximity, delicious ironies, sexual frustration, commonality, and love *across* separatism. One depended on an apparently formal and stable border between women and gay men; the other understood its gendered border as a site of often frictional but intimate contact between radical lesbians and gay men.

Sociologist Anna M. Zajicek and historian Allyn Lord (2000) have written about the distinctive women's movement in northwest Arkansas.[38] Lord and Zajicek report that around half of the (mostly white) women they interviewed from the local movement had previous activist experience and that around a third of that number had participated in the Civil Rights movement. Mostly college-educated and middle-class, nearly half of their interviewees, unasked, volunteered that they were lesbian, bisexual, or transgender. A little fewer than a quarter were locals. Lord and Zajicek point out that, unlike other women's movements which often coalesced around women's sexist treatment within Civil Rights circles, the northwest Arkansas culture, largely lesbian, felt catalyzed by positive experiences and attitudes towards the Civil Rights movement. Perhaps, as historian John Howard has argued about 1960s Mississippi, Southern associations of perversity (same-sex and inter-racial relationships) with interloping Civil Rights beatniks fomented a 1970s gay and lesbian movement which saw itself as an extension of Civil Rights politics within a Jim Crow geography.[39] Another regional distinction was temporal: Lord and Zajicek point out that while in the mid-70s many urban radical women's movements were flagging, the northwest Arkansas one was gaining momentum.

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[38] Lord and Zajicek, *The History of the Contemporary Grassroots Women's Movement in Northwest Arkansas*; Thompson, *The Un-Natural State*.
[39] Howard, *Men Like That.*

The formation of the University of Arkansas Women's Center in 1972 gave the dispersed movement an important hub. Lord and Zajicek specifically mention the following collectives as associated with the center: Problem Pregnancy and the Women's Health Collective (1973-1982), the Feminist Growth Collective (1973-1979), the Art Collective (1974-1976), the Feminist Press Collective (1975-1979), and the controversial Razordykes (1976-1980).[40] It's not accurate to characterize the culture as a student movement exclusively, though. Consciousness-raising groups had existed among community women since the late 1960s, and women leaders of area environmentalist back-to-the-land movements had been vocal since the early 1970s. In the mid-1970s, according to Lord and Zajicek, an explosion of women's – many lesbian –collectives used the university Women's Center as a hub, which was itself dependent on the pre-existing network of locals' consciousness-raising groups and many back-to-the-land enclaves.

Mulberry House had especially close ties to women's rural intentional communities. Williams knew Diana Rivers, who had founded Sassafras outside nearby Jasper, Arkansas, in 1972. Begun as a mixed-gender community, Sassafras soon became a women-only space as the women became feminist- and lesbian-identified. A lead figure among these women, Rivers remained at Sassafras and started writing lesbian fiction in her cabin there. Trella Laughlin and Patricia Jackson actually lived at Mulberry House briefly during the early years of forming Yellowhammer (1974-1980), a women's intentional community named after the Yellowhammer woodpecker that was widely

[40] Lord and Zajicek, ibid.

spotted on the rural eighty acres in neighboring Madison County.[41] Mulberry House served as a safe way station for lesbians traveling to the area women's rural communities, especially Yellowhammer. Hayes says, "We were doing it out of a sense of justice and service for women, people of color, women of color. There were several … women of color that were part of the groups that would come through. I think they mostly … tolerated us. A few of the women came to love and trust us – and to get the sense these are special men and this is a special place."[42] In the mid-1970s, though, while there were some women of color in the movement, the leadership of the women's rural collectives was white.[43]

Laughlin and Jackson had left Austin, Texas -- where in 1970 they had played in an all-girl band -- to join an Arkansas mixed-gender collective referred to as the "Doobie Plantation," but when the women's agitating about the local spraying of 2,4,5-T (an Agent Orange derivative) became heated, the male residents asked the women to leave.[44] Living in different regional communities after this, many of these and other women traveled the area by horseback, speaking to church, civic, and government groups alike about the dangers of using the herbicide. The women faced threats of violence, which materialized at least once when their tents were burned. Holding true to their radical dyke liberationism, Laughlin and Jackson, according to Oglesby, "were too radical for

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[41] Lord and Zajicek, ibid. The authors provide a background sketch of these two rural women's collectives.
[42] Hayes, ibid.
[43] In 1979, a working-class women of color rural community, Arco Iris, would be formed from parts of the dissolved Sassafras community. Arco Iris continues to exist today, even though it is no longer a women-only community. See both Thompson and Lord & Zajicek for more on Arco Iris.
[44] Lord and Zajicek, ibid. The use of the word "plantation" as part of the name of this collective reflects the regional associations between farming and slave-based plantation economies. Although the racial politics of this association are, at this point, unclear, the name underscores the need for close racial analysis in histories of Southeastern back-to-the-land ventures.

the other women in town … and they asked if they could park their van in the [Mulberry House] driveway."[45] The specific radical perspective which Laughlin and Jackson, with their local notoriety, brought to the house animated the back-to-the-land liberationism that the house was reading of in the pages of *RFD.* Oglesby goes on to describe the spirit of Mulberry House during this period:

> Slowly Trella and Patricia moved into the house with us. By then we were wearing skirts and discovering the Goddess. Trella and Patricia had been hard core radicals associated with the Weather Underground and they began to raise our consciousness in many areas namely toward socialist feminism. We began to internalize the concept of the "personal is political". These women really helped Charlie and I get in touch with our class anger.[46]

The degree to which Mulberry House *internalized* "the personal is political" -- a concept and phrase distinctive to 1970's feminism, and particularly, to many early women of color feminists – by uncomfortably re-shaping their daily lives according to raw, classed emotions which they saw reflected in the larger Arkansas women's movement became the tuner for the household's specific sissie refrain.

Lord and Zajicek's interviewees describe the climate of the several networked all-lesbian households in the area. Women came and went. Everything was shared – clothes, food, bills. Butch looks and typically masculine jobs (later, there would be a collective of women truckers) became a kind of in-culture norm. But, most pervasive was the relentlessness of the internal critique: "Classism, racism, patriarchal language, and definitions of woman's place faced similar challenges as members of the movement confronted both outsiders' and each other's language and ways of relating to women".[47] An interviewee going by "Teresa" mentioned an atmosphere of hypersensitivity and fear

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[45] Oglesby, ibid.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Lord and Zajicek, 12.

around a shared understanding of "language as a tool and a weapon"; a "Vera" recalled "painful self-examination and examination of each other"; a "Wendy" discusses the many crisscrossing vectors of anger and "fierce hostility"; and a "Robin" stressed "I think a lot of the ways that we hurt each other, loved each other, and hated each other were really important to understand."[48] It's important not to underestimate the complex, lived dimensions of Robin's observation: The loving bonds these women built were premised on a willingness and skill to risk that love by collectively seeking to dismantle all the ways that the system had raised them to see their uneven differences as natural. It was accepted that that process would hurt. Being up to that painful, collective work was a component of their bond, not a political tangent. The personal *was* practiced as deeply political. Mulberry House shared this dynamic.

Just as the women took on butch looks and masculine forms of work, the residents of Mulberry House wore skirts and feminine accessories like purses and earrings. (Williams wrote in his journals and letters about his regular practice of shoplifting for these items.) Oglesby and Thornton gave up their work as orderlies and Hayes quit landscaping. The group worked for a local food co-op, often growing produce for it in the Lavender Thumb greenhouse which Hayes built. They took on food justice causes through the co-op, making food bundles for poor households, for example. A primary source of income came from Williams' work as a book indexer, a freelance gig he had picked up while at Koch's Farm by networking with New York City friends in editorial circles. Understanding indexing as middle-class work stemming from middle-class education and middle-class networks, the socialist Mulberry House insisted on

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[48] Ibid.

collectivizing the jobs. The group would sit around the kitchen table with academic book manuscripts, counting word incidences and marking them on index cards. Tensions rose, though, whenever Williams showed a tendency to assume leadership over the process.[49]

Hayes also remembers that, when he moved in to Mulberry House, the rooms were tightly packed with Williams' stuff: Williams had a large room to himself, for sleeping, privacy, and art work.[50] Oglesby points out that "I had never in my life had a bedroom of my own or any personal space at all and most of the other [middle-class] men … were not used to making themselves smaller or immediately cleaning up after themselves so that others could use the same space."[51] In what they understood as a socialist feminist and Maoist spirit, the working-class residents confronted Williams' monopoly of space as "counter revolutionary" in what would lead to many "criticism/self-criticism sessions". Such constant struggle became a way of life. Because their house was "a stop on the underground for many people," they learned their bruise-y mode of living was likely extreme but at least similar in kind to other collectives.[52] At the same time, like the lesbian houses in the region, this painful process was also a crucial bond: They were ever concerned about visiting outsiders whose thoughtlessness and disorientation might upset the fragile balance Mulberry House learned to gingerly maintain. In their primary orientation towards Ozark lesbian feminists, the Fayetteville gay liberationist collective practiced a highly emotional form of struggle which was at once a source of friction and a bond.

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[49] Synthesized from Hayes and Oglesby.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Oglesby, ibid.
[52] Oglesby, ibid.

A House Divided: Conference Critique & the Arrival of Melba'son on Watson

Fig. 6. Thornton, Hayes, Williams, Oglesby, & Jack Kindrick. (Photo courtesy of Michael Oglesby).

It was this cohesive, operative sense of class struggle that the group carried with them, in a mail truck, to the 1976 Wolf Creek conference. Having visited the Iowa *RFD* collective previously, Mulberry House was no stranger to the magazine's network. Still, Wolf Creek was surprised to receive an Arkansas contingent of sissies. Afterwards, the Wolf Creek faggot editors specifically asked Oglesby to write a working-class critique of the conference. In the following, I first analyze Oglesby's article to tease out how the Oregon rural event solidified the Mulberry House sissie subjectivity in gendered and classed contrast to the Northwest faggot refrain. Second, I use extensive quotes from Dennis Williams' 1977 journal to build a very personal and everyday narrative of life at Mulberry House. I do so because, in 1976 and 1977, aside from a few published pieces, the Ozark sissie refrain belonged less to the *RFD* record than to the performance of daily life which Williams' journal captures. So, this section dedicates ample space to narrating this regionally lived life in Williams' own voice before analyzing it as evidence of a

class-conflicted Southeastern refrain which emerged alongside the Iowan and Oregonian collectives.

In his critique, Oglesby found the Wolf Creek conference only superficially socialist or feminist. The weekend had started with small-group discussions which were then followed by "presentations with their endless analysis, rhetoric, and abstract theories."[53] He didn't believe that this structure fully reflected the values of attendees. He remarked that discussion groups were formed of members from the same class background, and his own working-class group was assigned childcare and gate duties so that their discussions were constantly interrupted. Essentially, conference design itself perpetuated class division. And this structure was very different from the *cross*-class struggle he was accustomed to in Mulberry House and northwest Arkansas.

Oglesby further described the presentations as a "'buffet' of ideology" which was "cooked and served" to the listeners without their involvement – to which he responded, "… I don't like being waited on."[54] Respecting theory and analysis as important work similar to food preparation, Oglesby resented the *division* of this labor as well as its implicit framing as masculine. Reporting feelings of intimidation and anxiety, he recommended instead not only a more collaborative but a more "nurturing" means of performing this work. In drawing analogies to cooking and by calling for collaboration and nurture, Oglesby recommended the intellectual work of class analysis be understood as a feminized form of production in the mode of feminist reproductive labor and Troxler's androgyne "sense of design" -- not the singular, masculinized forms of

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[53] Oglesby, "A Critique of the Conference," *RFD* #10, Winter 1976, 18. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.
[54] Ibid, 19.

intellectual labor he saw built in to the faggot conference. In fact, Oglesby's critique suggested a more careful socialist feminist design. Possibly from un-analytically reproducing the institutional "conference" format, the Wolf Creek event produced minimal cross-class union only by over-defining the working-class role in that union. Aware of the gendering sewn into the event, Oglesby implied that the "conference" would be better designed if it were to recognize its work as fundamentally creative care labor, as a traditionally "feminine" work like cooking, in this case characterized by collaboration and nurture.

Oglesby saw the event as coming closer to achieving this latter design status towards its close. An open mic segment gave him the chance to share his critique, for which he felt "supported" despite the words' being "scary to say." Characterizing the open mic as a temporal space for "real struggling and learning," Oglesby both felt supported enough to take a central place within the event's collectivity and to voice analysis of differences within that body. I argue that this is an example of the "auto-critique" which Herring describes as central to critical rusticity and to radical women's culture in general.

Oglesby seemed to appreciate the affective, spiritual element the most: "When we came together in the fairy circle, I felt very protected, 'whole'. I could also see how powerful our magic is and how good it feels. And what a strong sense of déjà vu! It really was like Remembering Forgotten Dreams … ."[55] Echoing Evans' Haight-Ashbury "fairy circles," this ritual emphasized wholeness instead of division and stressed a

[55] Ibid. Even though the conference was documented in *RFD* #10, the issue immediately following the conference was Fall 1976, #9, "Remembering Forgotten Dreams". This demonstrates just how much the event experience was tied to the experience of reading *RFD*.

generalized eroticism ("how good it feels") within a larger context of struggle. That eroticized wholeness was also represented as accessible in the form of an affective return to a mythical past – "déjà vu" and "remembering forgotten dreams" – in a similar way to how Broughton's androgyne is designed as a touchstone image connecting us to a time before our social division. For Oglesby, then, the successes of the Faggots & Class Struggle conference were to be found in the feminized creative care labor designed to combine both a faggot struggle to recognize difference and a fairy eroticism for remembering wholeness. Oglesby's review of the conference not only offered a sissie critique; it also sketched a possible sissie model for event design. And that highly affective sissie mode, reflecting its own sense of struggle and unity, emerged from the experiences of Mulberry House, and its place within the 1970s northwest Arkansas lesbian feminist culture.

After the conference, back in Arkansas, the endless struggle work eventually began to outstrip Mulberry House's resources for unity. Williams' journal was a document of these tensions. Critique of self and housemate was often brutal, leading to fractures that were increasingly hard to mend. In a May 26, 1977 journal entry, Williams wrote, "The last week has been one of chaos & upheaval. The middle-class (Bob, Dean, me) was asked by the working-class (Charlie, Duane, Michael) to move out of Mulberry House because we cannot get our shit together to stop oppressing them."[56] The divided house mirrored divided psyches. Williams started his summer journal following a suicidal period which he documented in the same May 26th entry announcing the collective's split: "I am now 44 … & a week and 2 days ago I came w/in 30 mins of

[56] Williams, Unpublished Personal Journal, 1977-1978. Private collection of Dimid Hayes.

committing suicide. If the Goddess had not sent Dean (& Bob) along the route I was walking, I'd be dead. And now, 9 days later, what do I think about all that?"[57] Hayes had found him in a city park, depressed to the point of despondence, and after much effort and many tears, they convinced him to return home.[58] They went about the work of minding their connection while respecting their differences.

The middle-class contingent found a place on Watson Street but hoped to maintain a two-household unity with the working-class still living on Mulberry. Much of that unity work fell to Hayes, who – partly due to aspects of his personality and partly due to his farming background – came to function as a "bridge person" between the two groups. Williams wrote frequently of the strain he saw Hayes suffer at the time, aware that Hayes had been lumped with the middle-class mostly because of his connection to Williams.[59]

In his journal, Williams vacillated between punishing himself for his socialist shortcomings and exploring more anarchist views. In a May 28, 1977 entry, he described himself negatively as a rock – one whose very nature is an obstruction to others' flow but who will hopefully, over time, be changed by those others' revolutionary courses. Working against inertia, he offered, "As I see it, the only change possible right now, since I seem incapable of getting out of myself & becoming the nurturing sissie I know is buried somewhere inside me, is for me to give what I can – resources, skills, money -- & hope that in time the Goddess will vouchsafe to me the grace & vision I need to become a

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[57] Ibid. Williams used an idiosyncratic shorthand in his journal, which I here leave as is – as an example of his "voice" and of a personal practice of critical rusticity.
[58] Hayes, ibid.
[59] Williams, Unpublished Personal Journal, 1977-1978. Private collection of Dimid Hayes. Hereafter, I will mostly use in-text citation of the journal since it is the main source I use in this section.

part of revolution." The day before he had written, "Face it, Dennis, you're a Prufrock, not a Hamlet. But that's nothing to be ashamed of. Where would any movement be w/o its spear carriers?" Williams saw himself as painfully becoming a revolutionary realized in the figure of a nurturing sissie, but he felt his entrenched middle-class conditioning held him – and others – back. He struggled, with uneven results, to turn what he saw as his sometimes obstructionist behavior into a truly effective, if modest, support role. The bitterness with which he often critiqued himself could also be turned upon the working-class members, though. On May 29th, he confessed to his own "resentment of their anti-intellectual, anti-visionary, anti-beauty (all bread & no roses!) political stance". Reading Emma Goldman, he sought a more anarchist politics which would allow him some pleasure in the revolutionary process.

Pleasure didn't come naturally. Undoubtedly, Williams' relative age was a complicating factor. Acutely aware of his distance from the sexual circuits of the many younger liberationists he surrounded himself with, from the beginning he had argued against "couple-ism," noting how those in couples tended to horde affective resources and prioritize each other's material well-being within the collective. This critique was also voiced in the women's rural collectives. Brock Thompson has pointed out how, around 1976, the separatist Arkansas Women on the Land group complained that "'coupling' of lesbians led to factionalism on the farm and pitted women against each other as loyalties lay with sexual and romantic partners".[60] For Williams and the other sissies, affection and intimacy should be collectivized just as thoroughly as other resources.

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[60] Thompson, 145.

Politically, he supported a culture of wide sexual and emotional connection, even as he suffered from the others' – aside from Hayes' – perceived lack of effort to connect across differences of age, of generation. He supported the idea of a "fairy farm" despite his conviction that "there will not be a place for me there or for any other older faggot, born of a different era & shaped by forces they resolutely refuse to understand." Within their highly political culture, he accepted that "I represent an Old Consciousness that, as Emma Goldman so rightly pointed out, must die before the revolutionary New Consciousness can be born." His own Cold War experiences of homosexuality were inaccessible to the younger sissies. While he didn't embrace his earlier experience as a model, he sometimes wondered whether the others' understanding it could sharpen social analysis and strengthen intergenerational connection. As a result, his journals and letters document cycles of abjection and resentfulness, exhaustion and renewed fire, self-critique and spiritual-political vision.

A useful record of his inner life, the journal also documents the daily activity of the sissie collective. In a faint echo of T.S. Eliot's Prufrock, Williams observed on July 16, 1977, "We measure out our lives in food stamp appointments." We see in the journals a daily rhythm – some of which involved dealings with bureaucratic red tape in the form of government offices, banks, and police. Their mundane lives consisted mostly, though, of endless group meetings (with the respective houses or the Ozark Food Co-op) punctuated by physical or communicative tasks completed alone or in small groups. Every minute of this daily ebb and tide was understood to be political. The summer of 1977 – despite the May split into a working-class Mulberry House and a middle-class Watson Street – was a time of intense collective political activity.

Williams' July 2nd entry provides an overview: "In the meantime, while living apart & trying to keep it together, the collective is buying land (40 'unimproved' acres), fighting vicious homophobia (losing our jobs & getting kicked out of the food co-op), becoming involved in a prison project (job & housing for a gay prisoner), working on an index (960 pgs of patriarchal history), and continuing to struggle w each other."

The gay prisoner was named Kelly. On June 1st, Williams provided an account of how they had prepared for a visit from a parole officer who was sent to determine how fit their home was as a future residence for the inmate. The sissies "straightened" their house in a flurry, "secreting our beads, skirts, rhinestones, & earrings". Although they apparently managed to pass this inspection, complications arose when, later in the summer, the sissies were asked to pay a sizable sum to secure Kelly's release – a sum which they collectively determined they couldn't pay. Phone calls and letters to Kelly and prison officials continued until, around the beginning of August, Mulberry House received a 3 a.m. call from the police: Kelly had escaped. Williams wrote, "Within minutes the same pig was knocking on this door & wanting to search Watson St, I said no & he went away" (8/3/77). At a later "dyke-faggot" meeting, Williams said he was critiqued for his sharp response to the police.

The sissies experienced their most aggressive conflicts with the Ozark Food Co-op. Its countercultural majority were sometimes homophobic, sexist, and racist. On July 2nd, Williams was working on an angry letter to Sassafras and his old friend Diana Rivers, confronting them on their treatment of a black resident named Roger who was being taken to task over his disruptive behavior and that of his "rowdy friends". Roger soon took a job at the co-op, working – along with two black women who were also soon

hired – on the same day-shift assigned to the sissies. This occurred at the same time there was a perceived acceleration of homophobia on the regional, local, and co-op levels. In a July 5th entry, Williams wrote,

> It's coming down, kids. Anita [Bryant] has made queer-baiting the In sport among the self-righteous of all ages. Two years ago a young lawyer in the Co-Op said he had every right to discriminate against gay people. A year ago an elderly co-op member resigned from the board, calling us "moral problems". Two weeks ago the current president of the Board said he hated queers & thought homosexuality was 'fucked' (his verb). And today a teenage stranger, as far as I know, threatened to rape me. It's coming down.

When, in that very year, singer and Florida Citrus spokesperson Anita Bryant led the Save Our Children campaign to overturn a Dade County, Florida, gay antidiscrimination ordinance, she catalyzed a "moral majority" homophobic sentiment with national reaches but with a regional (Southeastern) association.[61] In northwestern Arkansas, homophobia seemed to quickly intensify from moral disapproval to hatred and then threats of violence. As liberationists, the sissies understood this intensification as intimately linked to regional sexism and racism.

This perspective wasn't merely local. Although most remember the Save Our Children (SOC) campaign as a conservative anti-gay movement, historian of religious conservatism Gillian Frank has clearly shown how the homophobic success of the SOC vitally depended on a rhetoric of (white) child protectionism rooted in previous successful South Florida anti-desegregation initiatives and anti-ERA campaigns. In fact,

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[61] Although the organization, televangelist Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority, would not be formed until the summer of 1979, its formation drew directly from the Save Our Children campaign's successful rhetoric. In addition to the work of Frank and Graves, whom I cite later, see Amy L. Stone, "From Anita Bryant to California Proposition 8: The Religious Right's Attack on LGBT Rights," in *Gay Rights at the Ballot Box* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 1-40; Patrick McCreery, "Miami Vice: Anita Bryant, Gay Rights, and Child Protectionism" (PhD diss, New York University, 2010); and Carol Mason, "Anita Bryant: Oklahoma Roots and National Fruits," in *Oklahomo: Lessons in Unqueering America* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2015), 47-80.

Frank shows how prominent leadership of the SOC had also led other Miami-area racist and sexist conservative movements.[62] Furthermore, Florida black community leaders drew attention to the phrase "Save Our Children" as echoing Dixie racist slogans to "Save Our Children from the Black Plague!"[63] Having so recently experienced their own conflicts with the white countercultural leadership of the Ozark Food Co-op as a complex mix of racism and hetero/sexism, the sissies would have surely followed this regional story closely. What was clear was that, in the name of youthful white purity, homosexuals were being cast as predators. Immediately following, threats against the Sissies – and African Americans and feminist women – spiked.

The co-op developed an increasingly violent atmosphere as hate messages began to appear on its bulletin board, bearing an official license because they were left there for all to see. In a July 14th entry labeled "Bastille Day," Williams reported,

> An incredibly homophobic flyer showed up in the co-op yesterday. It accuses us of 'acting like storm troopers,' which is like saying to a Jew 'You act like Hitler'. And the three hets on the staff quit this week – the last today: a liberal Quaker woman who is scared of strong women. So now the Board next Monday will have 'virtuous' excuse to fire the dykes & faggots ('See! Nobody can work w <u>you people</u>!') as well as the black woman & black man (Roger) hired this week. A purge of all undesirables: women, queers, and blacks.

Throughout Williams' summer entries, he conveyed that the sissies saw racism as part of their own systemic programming which they had to arduously analyze, critique, and work

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[62] Frank, "'The Civil Rights of Parents': Race and Conservative Politics in Anita Bryant's Campaign against Gay Rights in 1970s Florida," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 22, no. 1 (2013): 126-160.

[63] Ibid, 151-152. Frank also mentions that the DCCHR campaign minimized gay sexuality and stabilized gay identity as biological as an apparent bid for respectability. Another anti-SOC campaign, Robert Kunst's Miami Victory Campaign (MVC), Frank describes as more "liberationist," stressing the 'what is positive and joyful in the same-sex experience' and the innate bisexual nature of all people (150-151). Kunst's campaign was seen as a liability since SOC supporters latched onto it to feed fears about the vulnerability of children to such gay "recruiting".

on (7/6, 7/24, 7/27). They held Mulberry-Watson Street meetings to discuss their racism, worked with their black shift-mates to form coalitional support, and proposed long-term plans to re-direct the escalating situation into a politically productive one. The July 25th entry conveys their plan to petition the co-op to fund another store to be set up in the poor part of town and allow the dyke, faggot, and black staff to run the new location in collaboration with the neighborhood's working-class and black community until the latter could take over operations completely. The hurdle to this plan, as Williams mentions in the same entry, was that the "reactionary racist hets" who formed the majority of the co-op membership had also begun to boycott the store.

The hippie leadership of the co-op found that both food stamps and blank checks had been stolen. Rumors flew around the co-op that Roger was the culprit. Among the stories was that Betty, one of the black staff members, had investigated on her own and tracked down the food stamps, finding that Roger had indeed taken them to trade for dope (7/27). "We are all on edge bec we are being pressured by the hets, the liberals, & the capitalist storeowners in the green warehouse to call the police. And we refuse to do so" (7/27). Police were widely considered to be the local enforcers of systemic control, using arrests to physically divide potentially liberationist forces; by liberationist strategy, calling them in to solve any problem was counter-intuitive. Trying his best to put out fires, Williams spent a lot of time talking to the co-op's angry leadership factions, convincing them not to report the theft as a crime. He feared, though, that even that work represented his own racist failures because he devoted all of his energies to smoothing white racist feathers rather than relating directly to Roger and his black co-workers

(7/27). The August 3rd entry blankly states that they eventually had to confront Roger about the food stamps and ask him to leave the co-op, which the latter did.

The homophobia escalated. In his August 16th entry, Williams recounted the events of the previous evening's co-op meeting at which a member named "Crazy John threatened to murder the 'dicksuckers' & lesbians". He also mentioned that, at an earlier mediation meeting, his "'old friend' Diana turned first on the women & then on me". Both events "brought home to me the fact that our very lives are in danger & there is no one we can count on for support but ourselves." In the August 19th entry, he documented that Crazy John again directly threatened Dennis and fellow middle-class sissie David. A week later, "a mock ad was tacked up on the co-op bulletin board. It showed a T-shirt bearing the legend SAVE COAL – BURN A FAGGOT & implied that the shirts could be ordered from the Mulberry House collective c/o the Ozark Food Co-Op" (8/26).

In the same entry, Williams mentioned that the sissies had begun carrying a teargas canister with them for protection; wanting to join Oglesby and Duane at a local disco, Williams was afraid to leave the house alone at night since the other two sissies had already taken the teargas ahead with them. On September 3rd, he announced the culmination of the co-op friction, saying that they were effectively "kicked out" of the co-op. During a health department-mandated shut-down and clean-up, "the hets massed … & refused to work unless the queers left the Coop. So we did. The locks were changed immediately & a vilification campaign is in full swing. So far, the two black women are hanging on & we're giving them all the support we can by sharing information. But it's only a matter of time."

As evidenced by the emergence of broader terms like "queer" and "dyke-faggot," these ordeals brought the lesbians and sissies closer together. They honed their politics: a shared socialist feminist revolutionary stance which they increasingly contrasted to reformist liberalism. For example, referring to the ever problematic "Bob," a middle-class Watson Street resident who often socialized with the hippie "hets," Williams noted,

> All this is what's freaking Bob out. His liberalism is being put on the line. He thinks we're getting in 'too deep' w Kelly and Roger, & that we're headed for 'danger'. I argue that we are already in danger – political faggots in a state where homosexuality is against the law -- & that the only way of getting 'out' of our involvement w Kelly and Roger is to drop them into the tender laps of capitalist law & racist hippies. (7/3)

Williams, as a middle-class sissie himself, did his best to sympathize with Bob's transition from reformist to revolutionary, but he was frustrated by his housemate's apparent obliviousness to an air of increased racist, sexist, and homophobic violence which the sissies and lesbians understood to be built into the system itself. Quite literally, they were already "outlaws," so their political position had to reflect that.

As their work with the co-op grew even more tenuous, they made "dyke-faggot" plans to transition into a broader collectivization of the indexing work. Several women had moved into Mulberry House, and at Watson Street, Williams started to train a "Marianne" in the requisite skills (8/1) so that more women would take on indexing jobs, too. In many ways part of a sensible plan, the very intellectual and clerical nature of the work nevertheless continued to be problematic. Some socialist feminist and working-class queers either dis-identified with or denigrated it as middle-class work, and Williams felt that he was critiqued for not trying to collectivize the processes when, to him, so many refused to take any responsibility for it. Williams felt the latter disavowal of responsibility was intricately related to ageist aspects of the sissie culture which relegated

him to the affective sidelines (10/1). Still, they all put a lot of faith in the indexing project as a means of uniting the regional queer socialist feminist culture: "If more work comes from our advertising, it will mean that the dyke & faggot collectives will become even more closely connected" (8/26).

With this heightened connection came greater local visibility. Socially and politically, they had to be prepared for more homophobic violence. In his August 1st entry, Williams ventured,

> … I have a feeling this house [Watson St.] shd not be left too long unattended. We are coming farther & farther out across the street, & too many hets over there know we live here. Also, the Women are using Watson St more & more to caucus, rest, & now, with Marianne beginning to learn indexing, to work. The Women bear the brunt of the queer-baiting, plus the typical rape energy that comes from macho straightmen toward lesbians.

The dykes and faggots worked together on responsive political projects. On the 22nd of August, Williams mentioned two new committees: the first to protect against a rapist known to live in the same neighborhood as one of David's female friends and the second to explore sissie child-rearing of lesbians' male children. They participated in regional protest movements, too. For example, on August 31st, Williams recorded that "four dykes & two sissies will be on the highways of America on Labor Day weekend," travelling to Atlanta to participate in a rally for Dessie Woods, a Georgia black woman convicted to twenty-two years in prison for killing her white rapist with his own gun.[64] In his September 24th entry, he mentioned "The dyke & faggot collectives are in Joplin, MO today protesting an appearance there by Anita Bryant."

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[64] "Dessie Woods," *The Freedom Archives,* accessed Nov. 4, 2017, http://search.freedomarchives.org/search.php?view_collection=139

For a time, this spirit of connection also improved relations between the working- and middle-class sissies. In fact, they even planned to merge again into a single Mulberry House, thinking of themselves as co-habitating caucuses in the same sissie collective (7/24). But, for Williams, tensions over the collectivization of the indexing, over his relationship with Hayes, and over relentless critique (internal and external) of his middle-class orientation began to make his connections seem like borders which left him feeling virtually alone in his difference from the other sissies. He commonly attributed that isolating border to ageism, being in his forties amongst sissies almost exclusively in their twenties. While being a vivid record of Mulberry House social political struggle, his journal was also very much an affective record of his efforts to mitigate his class and generational circumstances within the Arkansas dyke-faggot culture, of his struggle to become a sissie revolutionary. Its pages convey the detail of the collective's orientation to the regional lesbian feminist culture and of the very emotional class struggle as an everyday experience.

There was a very particular style to Williams' use of his journal – one which reflected the deep print culture engagement found in *RFD*. His entries also document efforts to translate his political and print experiments into a more conscious performance of his daily life. In the following, I describe how his aesthetic print practice shaped his everyday acts, his psychic and corporeal habits.

As a means of understanding just how thoroughly liberationist this process was, it's helpful to recognize how its major tool, the journal, was no private affair. On July 1st, Williams wrote, "Even this journal is political in its own peculiar way. You know that someday it will be read by eyes other than your own. … . Records like these are always

political records, no matter what the outcome. This is the record of a faggot consciousness, & as such will be of value to all faggots. The personal is political." Periodically, he mentioned how other sissies would casually read his journal, implying it was an open-access document considered an extension of the collective's discussions. Sissies would refer to its entries in meetings. He would sometimes tear pages to leave in the house as messages or to send as letters.

One recipient of these mailed journal pages was Faygele Ben Miriam. Having, since their trip to Oregon, received several letters from Ben Miriam, Williams wrote in a July 2nd entry – one likely unsent – that "You [Faygele] refused to let the ties we made last fall wither away. A m-c [middle-class] part of me wants to be grateful to you, but the revolutionary in me says we should expect it of each other." Referring just as intimately to "future faggots" (7/31), he saw building inter-generational ties as being just as crucial to revolution as maintaining cross-geographic ones. As with the correspondence art of early *RFD*, Williams re-worked a traditionally private genre in order to lend a personal timbre to wide-ranging connection. The journal became, for him, an important tool in revolutionary sissie assemblage. Further, the continuity of print work into everyday performance, of archive into repertoire, had become a natural way of living; as he observed in his July 31st entry, "Friday was a three-volume novel & Saturday was a five-act drama."

This assemblage was also inflected by the other print culture work of indexing books. Basically, the dyke-faggot collectives anatomized scholarship, letter by letter. Ironically, their labor was to facilitate access to dense works of history and economics against which they defined their political selves. On July 5th, Williams recorded, "I

began indexing the next chapter (what happened in the non-European world from the 17th to the 20th century in 38 pages!), but gave up when I hit Africa." Outsourced indexers, their job was not to serve as critics; compelled to work in detail with the smallest units of scholarly books, though, they couldn't help but *feel* the academic marginalization – the shrunken consideration – of the colonized world to which, as liberationists, they felt themselves connected. Such highly affective print experiences honed their critique.

Those experiences also lent shape and rhythm to their daily lives, blurring letter and spirit. On August 10th, Williams wrote, "I have spent seven hours, w interruptions, on the letter A, & I am pooped, disheartened, discouraged, dismayed, & disgruntled." As inherently alliterative work, indexing trained them in repeating sounds. Understood poetically, the frequency of the repetition – for example, the recurring initial "dis" sounds in the entry above – created an accelerated pace, one of returning over and over to the same place again, a quickened return which erodes and exhausts. That rhythm could also be seen in the accelerated regional homophobia, racism, and sexism they were experiencing, or in the relentless critique of self and other which shaped their sociality.

This instance of Williams' alliterative observation wasn't an isolated case. On August 14th, he wrote, "I'd spent the entire day working on the letter C (capitalism, China, Christianity, communism)": four sharp sounds for four concepts which more than occupied the thoughts of the socialist feminist collective. That this accelerated alliterative affect reached beyond the indexing practice, beyond their ideological bonds, and into the social and spiritual is evidenced by Williams' August 28th entry in which he vouched, "It is no small symbolic irony to me that there will be four D's living in Mulberry House: Duane, David, Dean, & Dennis. I'm not sure what that means yet, but

it is too perfect to be mere coincidence." Paying attention to aural changes, rhythmic shifts, new social confluences, broken patterns, and energetic knotting – a witch-like attendance to affect – preceded any hasty logical judgment as to meaning. Liberationist attention to the *form* of the connection was crucial.

As socialist feminists, these Arkansas sissies associated rational language with class oppression and patriarchy. They would have seen its capacity to parse concepts, for example, as analogous to patriarchal global capitalism's capacity to divide and conquer populations. This was the spirit with which Oglesby launched his critique of the lecture format of the Faggots & Class Struggle conference. Its form of intellectualism divided attendees, especially faggots from sissies. Similar collective conversations led Williams to understand private texts (i.e., the journal or letter) as collective; this informed his increasing understanding of language as primarily material, social, and affective, rather than simply rational. We see the latter developing out of his very material engagement with academic texts via the labor of indexing, which in turn led to a sort of alliterative form of living with a rhythm of harsh acceleration.

We can also see this spirit in Williams' efforts to conduct socio-political analysis by non-verbal means. For example, throughout the summer of 1977, he was working on an *RFD* article on ageism. Mulling over how to tackle the issue, in his July 1st entry he struggled with how different classes, socialized with different literacies, are herded into communicative impasses by the system: "Bec you were programmed w words, you say, it prevents free-flowing communication from happening btw you & faggots programed [sic] w images." Such an observation seems relevant to gay liberationist aesthetics if we were to consider why Broughton thought of his imagistic films as poems. Here, we see

Williams struggling towards his own form of communication which might, by reconciling word and image, also facilitate cross-class connection.

He mused that real communication occurred somewhere in the moments which precede our capturing experience in language or image. Such speculation led him to focus more and more on the spatial interactions of bodies. Towards the end of the above entry, he wrote, "It's spatial, I think. … It has something to do w the way we view space. Not physical space, but inner space. Can you write about that in words of no more than three syllables? I'm not sure I can write about it at all. I'm not sure I even understand it!" Frustrated, he added, "Probably also has something to do w biorhythms, but that's about as abstract as saying it's spatial. It's probably both -- & other things as well – but how can we get a handle on them?" His tentative answers were affective, somatic; he sensed a solution to cross-class communicative impasses lay in how bodies occupy space together and in how they generate rhythms between each other. (Such observations resonate with Lyle Finley's thoughts on bodies extending by emotional auras.) Even his claim not to understand should be read as a commitment to *feeling* his way, with others, toward an answer, rather than rationally puzzling it out alone.

These ruminations were deeply political. In historian Stephen Vider's work on gay male communes, he describes such collectives' politics as *prefigurative*, rather than *strategic*, building on New Left historian Wini Breines' classification of the former as an effort to *live* the future society which one envisions.[65] The word *prefigurative* is interesting here, suggesting an attempt to form a figure, a body, not yet realized. Williams' intensely affective steps to understand the politically generative potential in

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[65] Vider, "'The Ultimate Extension of Gay Community': Communal Living and Gay Liberation in the 1970s," *Gender & History* 27, no. 3 (2015): 865-881.

how bodies relate within spaces must be understood as a lived theory of prefigurative politics. Where Vider briefly and rightly cites Mulberry House as an example of class friction within gay male communes, I argue further that the group is notable for how hard it worked at the affects which were essential to any such politics set on improvising its future body. Consciously orientational, emotional, psychic, and corporeal labor formed the heart of political Mulberry House.

Williams became even more pre-occupied with space and feeling over the summer. On July 3rd, he reflected, "As long as I can stay out of a concentration camp, prison, or mental hospital, a necessary part of my physical survival involves a corner somewhere & a good light. If I can read or write or sew w/o disturbing anyone, I think I can make it. I'd like to make my nest as moveable as possible. … The size of the nest is immaterial. It's the light I cannot live w/o. I could never make them understand that at Mulberry House." In a phase where he was sensitive about his middle-class habit of taking up space, he emphasized his growing ability to reduce and peripheralize his person while also firmly orienting himself to the others. This is an apt description of the comportment of a "spear carrier" – ready to move nimbly through the melee, keeping one's place at the side of the warriors. Whereas his housemates often saw his reading, writing, and sewing as non-collective self-indulgences, he seemed to argue here that they were necessary to maintain the individual who contributes, in whatever way, to the whole. Such conversations reflected anarchist-socialist tensions within the collective, expressed in spatial terms. Williams held that tending to the self was necessary in order to bring feelings to share with others. Later in the same entry, Williams wrote, "It may be true, scientifically speaking, that John Donne was wrong when he said that 'no man is

an island'. But it's also true that when Krakatoa blew up the impact was experienced around the world. What you are feeling affects everyone around you."

He further explored the material impact of feelings. On July 6th, he reflected, "I did a lot of things today, but that's not why I'm wiped out. I'm tired bec I felt a lot of things." On the 13th, he contended that "Sometimes, as in prison, one has to fight for psychic survival." On the 31st, he stressed the anarchist history of such realizations -- "'If you cannot feel a thing, then you cannot understand the meaning of it,' quoth Emma Goldman" – before sounding a quintessentially liberationist caution: "Through hardness & selfishness the heart grows rigid, & this rigidity leads to separation from all others." On August 3rd, in another echo of Broughton, he considered what sex might spiritually offer a politics which so deeply relies on connecting across class and movement and also relies on both anarchistic and socialist convictions: "It [interest in the power of non-verbal connection] is what led me, a few years back, into Tantric Buddhism, where the act of sex is seen as the central symbol of the Mystery – what Jung & the alchemists call the mysterium conjunctium, the holy union."

Williams' journals emphasized the particularity of sissie sex. Expressing sissie subjectivity as intimately familiar with the spatial processes of assemblage, he ventured a cosmic, spiritual description:

> The essence of Sissiehood … I feel, is not in becoming the Still Point in a moving world, but in becoming a Moving Point in a moving world. Nothing is lost in one's Pointedness, as 'twere – one's Individuality – but instead one gains by being a part of everyone around you. It is tat tvam asi – Thou art That – raised to a political level. If I care about everyone's psychic space as I do for my own, then somehow space will be found for everyone. (7/13)

This philosophical perspective had deep sexual implications: "Male sexuality seeks to dominate while Sissie sexuality seeks to communicate" (7/21). Not meaning this as

platitude, Williams relentlessly interrogated his and Hayes' sexual relations, characterizing the dogged pursuit of orgasm ("the big O") as a patriarchal form of relation. The two struggled to find forms of bodily (including genital) contact which would fittingly communicate their larger mutual needs within a political collective situation flooded with – possibly exhausted by -- words.

His contrast of male and sissie sexuality reveals the degree to which sissiehood assumed the status of an alternative gender for Williams. On July 13th, he recounted a painful teenage school experience: "Once she [his favorite English teacher] banished me from her class bec I turned in a report on a book she thought was beneath my intelligence. It was one of the [Elsie] Dinsmore books written for young m-c [middle-class] Southern girls. I identified! Miss Hornbeak's rejection of my Sissie was a blow I never recovered from. I got back in her good graces by turning in a book report on Les Miserables." The anecdote is interesting for a number of reasons. First, the intersectional tensions along class and gender lines are complex. That he was banished by a beloved female authority figure for identifying with a popular middle-class girls' book which was beneath a competing middle-class female sense of taste and intelligence, only to win back favor by turning his attentions to a canonical work about wretched class conditions and revolution, demonstrates just how complicated navigating mid-century U.S. gender and class conventions could be. Second, it was this very complexity which necessitated the emergence of the sissie as another gender which was shaped by a boy's situation of navigating that terrain by crossing its many borders: Dinsmore to Cosette, popular to classic, American to European, moralistic to intellectual.

If Williams' sissie was a classed gender, it was also a raced one. Although, as we have seen, the sissies used the word *faggot* almost interchangeably with *sissie*, they recognized, from the Bay Area gay liberationists of color's critique of the 1976 Wolf Creek conference, that *faggot* was a racially exclusive term derived primarily from white European working-class experiences of capitalist expansion. In a July 11th entry, Williams struggled with Thornton's critique of his use of the word *faggot* in his ageism article: "the word faggot is a white word & many blacks & Third World gays do not identify with it. 'Gayman' is the only alternative we could come up w, & neither of us like it. Too liberal." Here, we see how the word *gay* had become so thoroughly associated with urban, reformist, gay (white male) rights-based politics that it was impossible for radicals to use it. Later in the same entry, Williams considered the term *fairy* but reluctantly dismissed it for the same genealogy as *faggot*. In the end he wrote, "Sissie is my favorite word." *Sissie*, then, was a term intended – in this case, by the white sissies of Mulberry House -- to be racially capacious due to its lack of association with etymologies of white Europe. Similar to how early *RFD* attempted to create a print space welcoming to separatist lesbians by its shared critically rustic design aesthetics, white Arkansas sissies espoused a terminological space which they hoped would be welcoming to "gay" liberationists of color. The welcome of sissies' language would have to be proven by their anti-racism work.

Returning to Williams' teenage classroom story, it's interesting to note that while he "<u>identified</u>", he did not claim to *be* a girl, or even a sissie. I propose that this is because "sissie" was also not an identity, conventionally understood, as something we *are*. On the contrary, Williams explained the sissie as something he *had*, referring to his

teacher's "rejection of my Sissie". If we look to his other journal entries, we remember that he spoke of the revolutionary sissie as something he might become, a kind of *pre*-figure; until then – as a means of hopefully making that transition – he thought of that sissie potential as *part* of him, as someone he had within him. During the summer of 1977, he began to call his potential radical sissie self by the name "Melba'son," re-claiming a matriarchal lineage through his mother Melba just as Faygela had similarly done by taking the name "Ben Miriam". This practice with a multiple self mirrored the psychic aspects of affect found in Broughton's androgyne subjectivity, early Iowan liberationist psychologies, and the Bay Area Feri and Reclaiming witchcraft work with a triple soul.

Part of Williams' journal practice was to make a space to relate to Melba'son, to enact an intra-self dialog intended to affectively amplify a sissie subjectivity. That subjectivity coached Williams on relating, not out of need, but out of a communicative and mutual sissie sexuality. On July 3rd, Williams wrote, "But I, Melba'son, am your Self, & I don't need that protection any longer. I'm getting stronger, thanks to you and Dean. I want to join you – a menage a trois, as 'twere. Perhaps, if Dean's Sissie learns to trust us, we can make it a quatre." The proliferative potential of Broughton's *The Bed* haunts Williams' journal here. From a July 16th entry, we can see that this practice was quite literally a somatic one: "I felt you very strongly today, Melba'son. And it sure felt good! It was as tho you wld slip in & out from under my skin occasionally, so gently that I didn't even know you were there until I opened my mouth & out wld come your voice." As affective communication predicated on the sense of an open and proliferating self, this sissie sexuality manifested as a rushing circuit of feeling: "Melba'son was outraged at the

way Dean was treating us, while at the same time feeling deeply his pain & unhappiness."

Williams' practice with Melba'son is best understood through the lens of Lewis' account of how many gay liberationists embraced non-secular and non-rational modes in defiance of psychiatric oppression. Given Williams' exposure to Tibetan Buddhism and Bay Area witchcraft, it makes the most sense to describe this as a form of liberationist spiritual practice. Remembering that Reclaiming Witchcraft founder Starhawk understood magic as a kind affective management of political energies through ritual, we can imagine that, by investing Melba'son with a personhood – a visage, a temperament, a character, a carriage, etc. – he created a "word-symbol" of the radical sissie, one which carried the force of conviction when he himself could not. When called upon, Melba'son fired him with that necessary conviction while sidestepping all the doubt-filled scaffolding of rational argument. The point, in spiritualities like that of West Coast witchcraft, was that practiced belief – whether "true" or not – changed things affectively. Williams trusted that he could only fully stand inside his revolutionary political position, leaving his middle-class liberal one behind, by experimenting with highly connective emotional, sexual, and spiritual means. He hoped his sissie self, Melba'sson, was the vehicle for that change.

But his sense of isolation spiked as summer began to give to fall – despite the fact the group had joined into a single house again. In his October 1st entry, Williams bitterly commented, "Well, well, well … today marks the anniversary not only of the founding of the People's Republic of China, but also of our re-entry into Mulberry House a month ago. The symbolic ironies are too pat to be accidental. Red China crushes its queers &

so do the Red Faggots – for that's what I am: a queer among the faggots." Feeling that radical collectivity had become a bond of political righteousness rather than one of care, of intimacy, Williams observed in the same entry that "All of us are caught in the bind of our revolutionary rhetoric, & none of us can feel beyond our slogans." Leaning more and more towards anarchism as an alternative, Williams felt isolated by his age, his bookishness, his middle-class leanings, and – now – his politics.

He was briefly hopeful about a new relationship which promised understanding around the issue of ageism – a local thirteen-year-old working-class sissie who commiserated with Williams about not being taken seriously due to his marginal age. The child appealed to Williams' sympathies, complaining of feeling trapped in an oppressive home, but his mother eavesdropped on their phone-call and forbade the two to ever speak again. Williams blamed Mulberry House. He had asked for their help in assisting the child, but they had – he felt – responded passively, too slowly, ending in the boy's being trapped in an even more dangerous home and in Williams' possibly being reported to the police. Their age-based marginality left them endangered in their respective houses. To Williams, it felt like a last straw: "I've had it. I want to go away. The King Tut show has opened in New Orleans & I cld stay for a while w Nick & Terry. Perhaps I cld get a job washing dishes in the café where Nick works. Perhaps I cld just jump in the Mississippi & get it over with."

Feeling just how acutely their intersecting differences had become walls rather than connections, Williams described the impasse in his October 4th entry: "I have nowhere to turn but inward & no one to turn to but myself. I cannot turn to the w-c bec I am from the m-c. I cannot turn to the m-c bec I am twenty years older than they are. I

am scared & no one can hear my fear bec no one can feel what it is like to be forty-four. No blame, my brothers. I cannot feel what it is like to be from the w-c. And that is what has been the problem all along: none of us can feel the others' pain." He attributed this barrier of feeling as a product of their "male conditioning". That observation became the backbone of a nascent political perspective – that, for radicals raised as men, gender analysis had to precede class analysis so that the necessary affective tools could be developed to keep socialist politics from simply reproducing the agonistic division central to systemic control. That was not to dispense with critique, but to practice it with feeling, with connective goals held firmly in mind. Williams "prayed," "If we could only come to terms w that, with our maleness, perhaps we cld break thru the class barriers that separate us. Dear Goddess! if only we could all be Sissies! [double-underline on last word]".

Before the end of that entry, though, any individual hope turned to resignation. He wrote, "I am tired unto death." Ever alert to the evocative potential of print culture, he noted, "We are coming to the end of this journal; one more page remains in the notebook. … This journal began with a question … perhaps it is symbolically right that it end w one – the last page left blank." He then wrote a personal note to each of the sissies -- Michael, Duane, David, Dean, then Charlie – before saying his last goodbye – "Melba'son, farewell!" He signed the journal with "Dennis," looping the tail of the final S to curl above the dot in the I, making a little question mark above his name. He left the entry in Mulberry House, for the others to find.

Reflecting on that previous May when Mulberry House had first split and when Williams had considered suicide, Hayes says, "There was a great deal of love for

everyone, each one of us. And yet we didn't recover from that to the point that it was a few months later that Dennis again left with a note saying he was leaving to commit suicide."[66] Williams' summer 1977 journal was bracketed by suicide, set first against the story of the collective's split and, then, against their not altogether happy re-joining. After leaving Mulberry House that October, Williams found a big tree and set out forty-four lye pills – one for each year of his age – to swallow. As he prepared himself to undo his age one pill at a time, he had a vision. He saw the death mask of Tutankhamun. While in India, he had wanted to go to Egypt to see the ruins of the pharaohs' ancient civilization but had been fearful, feeling vulnerable due to his being small of stature and fairly effeminate. He suddenly remembered that the King Tut exhibit was then in New Orleans and he took the vision as a sign that, instead of killing himself, he should go to the Crescent City. Resolved, he hitchhiked his way there – first with a black truck driver who "talked of revolution" (10/7/1977) and then offering a blowjob as fare to another trucker who took him to New Orleans.[67] He eventually found a place to stay with a working-class male couple – Terry and Nick, old friends of Thornton's who lived Uptown, and who had visited the Arkansas collective over the summer.

He took a couple of weeks to notify the others at Mulberry House that he was alive. They were worried sick. While acknowledging how difficult things had become for Williams and everyone else, Oglesby remembers that "Dennis faked his death".[68] Hayes holds that Williams was "self-examining to the point of bleeding on the pages" but he was also "always one for drama," a trait surely honed in his days of costuming for

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[66] Hayes, ibid.
[67] Williams, ibid.
[68] Oglesby, email response to questions by the author, November 22, 2016.

Broadway.[69] In his own journals from New Orleans, Williams admitted to fleeting moments of fantasizing about Mulberry House's missing him – a note of unflattering honesty – but he also asserted that he owed it to them to figure out what it was he was doing, if not killing himself as he had so brutally promised in his letter.[70] He owed them evidence of some positive new growth to come from the worry he had caused them. He eventually got in touch, telling them he had decided to stay in New Orleans. Mulberry House's original anchor was gone. Sounding much like Lord and Zajicek's interviewees, Oglesby says, "We made many mistakes, we were in the vanguard of the faggot revolution pre-radical faerie and we hurt each other. We forgot that we were family and it became more important to be correct. We all had to change but we forgot what we were changing for."[71]

The summer of 1977, narrated in Williams' voice, provides us with a daily, affective sense of sissie life. For a refrain so focused on the politics of the everyday, this sense is vital. Embedded in that day-to-day story, though, are important shifts in orientation which it is important to now summarize. I have already discussed how the Arkansas sissie orientation *within* lesbian socialist feminist circles distinguished it, as a refrain, from West Coast faggot ones. Much of their sense of struggle was forged *with* the lesbian and socialist feminist cultures of northwestern Arkansas. Instead of a radical adjacency, Mulberry House existed as a hand-full of radical gay men who operated *within* a much larger radical women's feminist culture. Close to women, even sharing a house for a short time, Mulberry House didn't adopt the formality and parallelism of the

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[69] Hayes, ibid.
[70] Williams, ibid.
[71] Oglesby, ibid.

Oregonian faggot refrain as part of its repertoire. Instead, they struggled with women and each other as part of the very affective work necessary to be part of their regional radical community.

Intensely conscious of the classed and gendered roots of individualism and labor, they worked to perform a domesticity based on the feminine accessorizing of apparently male bodies, on the cross-class collectivization of intellectual labor (book indexing), on a class-conscious use of spaces in the home, on a negotiated resistance to "coupling," on various collaborations with women -- (from working in the food co-op to being a way station for rural lesbian separatists), and – especially – by practicing a very difficult but binding feminist self/criticism. And Mulberry House, as seen through Oglesby's critique in *RFD*, had trouble adapting to the faggot conference's radical practice as masculine intellectual analysis; instead, their experiences in Arkansas conditioned them to understand radical practice as a kind of feminist affective work, an interpersonal and everyday struggle to connect across and through classed gender. I argue that the performance of this "house work" was what Mulberry House circulated as its sissie refrain. Vider has written of gay liberationist communes that "male sex roles, rooted in a heterosexist, capitalist patriarchy, were directly to blame for one of the primary problems facing gay men: loneliness – a sense of isolation and alienation from each other. Communes offered a means of resisting this psychological oppression, by encouraging and modeling new forms of connection, rooted in emotional authenticity, sexual openness and shared practices of home-making."[72] Mulberry House, as a sissie collective, was an affectively and regionally specific form this gay liberationist radical house work. As

[72] Vider, 466.

such, sticking to the (pre)figure of the sissie was central, though. By embracing the singular figure of the sissie, and less emphasizing serial proliferation of subjectivities like early *RFD* did, a certain speculative identity was stabilized in order to do the work of denaturalizing the home.

Williams' journal, as a tale of a house divided, documents a diverging politics which deserves more description. Simply calling Mulberry House working- and Watson House middle-class risks obscuring those politics behind a limited concept of class as an identity marker only. At the same time, those politics surely stemmed from individuals' unique, classed experiences. United as liberationists, both houses maintained their focus on systemic sources of various oppressions as well as their focus on critique of "gay" liberalism and countercultural white, male, straight privilege. For working-class sissies, processing "class anger," thoroughly interrogating the bourgeois aspects of individualism, collectivizing projects and space, and building cross-racial and -gender connections on the basis of class was important. In many ways, it makes sense that their sissie feminism remained more socialist within a political culture which offered opportunities for growth along such lines. For the middle-class and older Williams, who generally shared these values, anarchistic alternatives began to appeal more – alternatives to complete collectivization, alternatives to anger as a dominant political affect, and alternatives to class struggle as *the* model of political relations. Williams grew convinced that only a sissie-feminist grappling with their differently classed masculine modes of relating would allow them to move past affective impasses. Despite their exposed nerves, Mulberry House saw these as differences of *method* within a shared liberationist vision.

Differences in praxis often required separate spaces which were outfitted for different work. Separation was not the same as a divorce; separation was understood as a potentially temporary state and understood to imply ongoing maintenance of the relationship across spaces. Historian of lesbian print cultures Julie Enszer has similarly argued that separatism be understood less as a form of alienation or border-erection than as a complex feminist political process.[73] Certainly, Mulberry and Watson House adopted such an understanding when they considered themselves different caucuses in the same sissie collective and began discussing reuniting even as they split. The methodological differences had concrete implications, though. At Watson House, middle-class socialist feminist women soon started meeting to skill-share; Marianne became a regular as she set herself to learning to index from Williams. While this middle-class propensity for academic work allowed for some expansion of sissie-dyke connection, Williams acknowledged that middle-class sissies had much work to do on their own racism. The working-class sissies led discussions on race and enjoyed easier connections with black workers in the region. As already noted, Williams regretted that his middle-class tendencies led him to respond to racism by running interference with white institutions rather than interacting directly with the black people themselves. As a liberationist, Williams counted this as a connective failure.

Likewise, Williams struggled to improvise more socialist forms of intellectual and creative labor.[74] As a parallel to *RFD* correspondence poetics, he practiced ways to make

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[73] Enszer, "'How to Stop Choking to Death': Rethinking Lesbian Separatism as a Vibrant Political Theory and Feminist Practice," *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 20, no. 2 (2016): 180-196.

[74] I would argue that, in hindsight, it makes sense to classify Williams' nascent politics as a "materialist feminism," which Rosemary Hennessy and Chrys Ingraham place in the liberationist period and characterize as joining historical materialist, radical feminism, and postmodern theories of subjectivity. *Materialist Feminism: A Reader in Class, Difference, and Women's Lives* (New York City: Routledge, 1997),

the personal journal more collective, leaving it out and available to the house as material for meetings. Shaped by the deeply alliterative practice of book indexing, he developed more material, affective concepts of language. He came to think of this as particularly important as a response to working-class sissies who claimed linguistic literacy as a sometime barrier to connecting with blue-collar sissies more accultured to image-based communication. As a result, Williams began playing with the materiality of language – its status as sound or visual letter – to discover its potential for cross-class connection. He started to think of intellectual work as always in process and necessarily collective – not a product finished privately.

As someone with a theater background, he wondered about the communicative potential of bodies in shared space. For example, aware of his middle-class tendency to take up space, he began to practice ways to shrink and de-center his body. Of course, bodies were often larger due to supposedly immaterial qualities like emotions, rhythms, movement, gesture, and volume – which he came to see as having a material impact. His everyday sissie socialist feminism called on him to practice contracting, opening, and moving – in constant flux with other bodies in shared spaces. He also improvised sexual and spiritual methods which recognized the mutuality and multiplicity in self and others. Such practices engaged a liberationist psychological model with a theatrical sensibility towards the everyday.

While these political and aesthetic realizations were registered in Williams' journal, they should in no way be considered his alone. Hayes is careful to note the catalyzing force of Williams' personality, the power he had with word and gesture. At

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7. By their terms, it is not "cultural feminism" in that its cultural interests are still firmly committed to anti-capitalist revolution and critique of the class system.

the same time, he makes clear that it would be inaccurate to reduce the Mulberry House refrain to Williams and his vision. Oglesby and Thornton shaped the group by emphasizing a working-class perspective of struggle *and* unity, without which Hayes contends the group would never have been called upon to understand how saturating an influence class, gender, race, and sexuality could be. [75] Oglesby credits Trella Laughlin and Patricia Jackson specifically, but also the broader northwest Arkansas lesbian and socialist feminist network, with building that consciousness into the relatively rural landscape where they lived.[76] Hayes also argues that those women lent Mulberry House their politics while *RFD* contributed a sense of spiritual collectivity.[77] Regional women's politics were radicalized, according to Hayes, by the urban women who came to the area, but as Lord and Zajicek argue, there were also local traditions of feminist consciousness-raising and the experience of Civil Rights work which shaped those women's politics in the Arkansas which they came to call home.

Hayes himself -- careful to cite all these influences and less so to name his own work – contributed his own willingness to recognize various and often conflicting notes in the refrain and to sit with their tensions, to serve as a "bridge person". This is an example of the sissie work which Oglesby recommended in his critique of the Faggots and Class Struggle conference. As if in recognition of this work, Hayes underwent a personal shift and changed his name from "Dean" to "Dimid". There was a tradition for name-changing within the culture.[78] That choice can be understood in the context of a

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[75] Hayes, ibid.
[76] Oglesby, ibid.
[77] Hayes, ibid.
[78] For example, Donald Engstrom went by "Don-Tevel" and John Singer changed his name to "Faygele Ben Miriam".

broader cultural critical rusticity by which rural gay liberationists regularly remade themselves in their naming practices, for their magazine and for themselves. Within witchcraft circles, using a "magickal name" was considered important to maintain privacy and safety as well as to commit to a spiritual path.[79] Performance names for drag queens were common, too, of course. And, Hayes says that he remembers that "Hippies tend to get fun nicknames."[80] We can see Hayes' transformation from Dean to Dimid as informed by all these traditions, to some degree.

It was certainly a process. Hayes remembers that, early on at Mulberry House, he felt the need to take stock of the sea change he had experienced – from Minnesota to Arkansas, from landscaper to radical sissie. He went to the little chicken coop in back of the house which had been converted to a meditation space which they called "the Tea Room". He smoked a bit of pot and began to reflect. The word "timidity" floated to the surface, with its traditional connotations of being "shy, a wallflower … not empowered," but none of Hayes' associations were traditional anymore. He says he then experienced a "complete reversal, kind of a gestalt moment: Well, timidity is maybe something that should be cultivated." Envisioning the way many men walk into a room and instinctively "take up space," Hayes felt, for a breath-taking and inspiring moment, what it might be like for a man to enter a room differently: "becoming open, not taking up the space but being receptive to the space, and allowing it to come to oneself." The men and women of Mulberry House were reading about matriarchal religions at this time, discussing, for example, Robert Graves' *The White Goddess* and the works of archaeologist Marija

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[79] Donald Michael Kraig, "The Magickal Name," *Llewellyn.com* (August 18, 2010). https://www.llewellyn.com/blog/2010/08/the-magickal-name/. Retrieved February 27, 2017.
[80] Hayes, ibid.

Gimbutas. In a matriarchal homage to his grandmothers, he tried on the name "Timidity Nanna Rose"; the others thought it sounded like a singularly awful drag name. But, Hayes was already intrigued by its very sound, the power of its "lilt".[81]

Much later, in Minnesota, while listening to a former lover argue with his new wife in the adjoining kitchen, Hayes improvised an automatic writing exercise in which that lilt insinuated itself on page. While hypnotically writing "timidity" over and over, the suffix dropped away, along with the initial "t" sound, which itself rounded to form the "d" which began his own given name, as well as that of his father and all his brothers. The name "Dimid" emerged. He liked that it was a palindrome, which lent it a kind of integrity, a "holistic" feel. And he liked how "it encapsulates all this personal mythology."[82]

The story of the gradual generation of Hayes' name captures the personalization of the sissie refrain. It describes a politics that was never simply rational; instead, it was a politics which demanded daily, sensory, connective experience. Being a politics committed to utterly changing the domestic as the foundation for a radically different society, its iconic scene was of course something as everyday as entering a room. Instead of articulating rules to be followed to the letter, the more critical aim was to learn to enter a room differently – with a lilt, with receptivity, in no way like men do. Still, crossing that threshold involved not only passing through connected rooms but also demonstrating connected genders, ones which internalized the lineage of grandmothers and the echo of brothers. This was important, especially since the rooms Dimid knew best at this time were those inhabited by both lesbians and sissies, all acutely aware of class. Instead of

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[81] Ibid.
[82] Ibid.

analytically picking and choosing the best of the *RFD*, witchcraft, drag, and hippie cultures he was exposed to, he improvised with self-naming to arrive at a uniquely sissie subjectivity. In that it was ever open to change, depending on circumstances ("Timidity" whimsically changed to "Dimid"), it was less an essentialist identity than an importantly temporal posture predicated on the very somatic way a sissie comes through a door, feels the press of space on his skin, and then listens for the others in the room. As a refrain, it possessed a politics with its own erotics.

Williams made a similar name change. Possibly inspired by Faygela Ben Miriam, he took on the name he had given his sissie higher self, a last name which stressed his matriarchal lineage: Melba'son. He allowed the "Williams" side of himself to die in order to take a decidedly feminine path, one which made room for a son's belonging with his mother. Eventually Dimid joined Melba'son in New Orleans, understanding themselves, according to Oglesby, as "middle-class exiles," but ultimately giving their new collective its own name: the "Louisiana Sissies in Struggle".[83]

Oglesby and Thornton remained in Arkansas. Hayes says Melba'sson left them and the women the indexing work. He would merely continue as the contact with the publishers while the others did the work and received the pay. Oglesby and Thornton ultimately took up residence on the sissie farm, on land bordering the women's rural community, living a kind of geographically realized androgyne existence with the radical

[83] Oglesby didn't like their use of the word "exile". Surely, this was due to the word's imputing to the working-class sissies a sense of separatism which they never held. They, like Enszer, had already demonstrated an understanding of separatism as feminist process rather than a permanent break. Middle-class sissies, aware of this, likely used the word to express the hurt they felt over a separation they interpreted as stemming from prioritizing sissie socialism over sissie feminism.

lesbians they had been so formatively bonded to. Located in the Southeast, the sissie refrains still shared qualities formed in contrast with West Coast *RFD.*

Letters from the Sticks: The Arkansas Sissies & Rural Writing Back to the San Francisco "Scene"

While the above characteristics might have been somewhat shared with the cultures of household collectives elsewhere, Mulberry House knew their culture as regionally specific, even beyond the lesbian feminist culture of northwest Arkansas. As referenced earlier, their politics were also influenced by their geographic position in the racially violent Jim Crow South. And, they used this position as a point of contrast with West Coast faggot culture. In response to *RFD* #14, Winter 1977 -- the issue coinciding with Melba'son's suicide attempt and move to New Orleans -- the "Arkansas sissies" complained that *RFD* editors had "dumped our feelings, our struggle and our growth," questioning whether the Oregon collective had abandoned the revolution.[84] Their first point of critique was that the previous photography issue featured only white faggots and "no photos of 3rd world gays or 3rd world situations." They added critiques concerning what they saw as racist parody of indigenous culture, as sexist and violent drag depictions of women, and as the under-analysis of the class privilege inherent in doing photography at all. Applying a critique rooted in analyses of race, sex, and class, the Arkansas Sissies emoted concern that they and their shared revolution had been abandoned. They were first worried, though, about what they saw as a mounting whiteness within the faggot

[84] Arkansas Sissies, letter to the editors, *RFD* #15, Spring 1978, 4. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.

refrain, which – as we remember -- Bay Area gay liberationists of color had characterized as overly dependent, by its very name, on European experiences of colonialism.

It seems, though, that the Arkansas Sissies saw the whiteness of the faggot refrain as stemming, at least in part, from regional exclusivity. They closed their letter by asserting their place in "RFD Country": "We are living in an area of the U$A where the KKK is very entrenched and has alot of support for its evils – the enslavement and or genocide of 3rd world people. The KKK is now attacking lesbians and gays verbally and physically. In Oklahoma City, the KKK is invading gay bars and beating people with baseball bats. The right wing forces are tightening the nooses around oppressed people's necks more each day … ." The Arkansas Sissies invoked a sense of an expanding range of systemically enabled, vigilante violence which moved along dual trajectories. First, similar to Lavender Country, they saw racist violence against black people as expanding temporally to next target lesbians and gays. Second, they saw the geographic origins of that racist violence as situated in the Jim Crow (mostly) rural South, but quickly moving like a field fire towards the urban West Coast, too. As relatively rural sissies in the South, they considered themselves front-row witnesses to both forms of rapid expansion, which urban West Coast faggots seemed, by contrast, unaware of.

The Arkansas Sissies saw no evidence in the photography issue of *RFD* that faggots witnessed the expanding violence sparked by the Florida Save Our Children campaign. To them, it was a sign that West Coast faggots suffered a critical blindness and a regional disconnect. The image of the lynchman's tightening noose was meant to jar West Coast faggots by a very frightening and visceral evocation of Southern Jim Crow violence. Questioning *RFD* faggot editors for visually implying that "there are no

3rd world gays living in the country," the image of the noose was also meant to insert a horrific "3rd world situation" into the pages of the magazine and thereby waken broader sight. The sissies raged, here, at the ironies of such short-sightedness, especially in an issue on photography.

However, the shuffling of Jim Crow racism and homophobia risked obscuring the important differences between the experiences of each. While the SOC figure of the vulnerable, pure white child summoned conservative, protective anger against people of color, feminists, and homosexuals alike, the ways that the anger manifested in violence were very different. In this context, the noose references long, regional, racist lynching practices which are painfully unique to African Americans, especially those in the Southeast. At the same time, Frank argues that it is important to analyze the confusing ways historical conservative movements have linked their racism, sexism, and heterosexism, and mixed strategies.[85] The sissies' metaphor of the noose over-reaches and erases the specificity of black experiences of Jim Crow lynching in its attempts to provoke West Coast faggot whiteness into an awareness of the ways racism and homophobia were being linked in the Southeast and Midwest.

We have seen other such linking already. For example, was the cross burned on Oglesby and Thornton's friends' car because they were lesbians or because they were a mixed-race couple, or both? Why was the homophobic vigilante group in the fraudulent WVUE story about the UpStairs Lounge called "Black Momma, White Momma"? What were the implications when, as John Howard has shown, regional racist government leaders and media bodies characterized Civil Rights activists as perverts with homosexual

[85] Frank, 160.

tendencies? Gay liberationists in the Southeast would have felt how homophobia was a tool of racism, how sexuality functioned in the assemblage of regional white supremacy.

The Arkansas Sissies closed their *RFD* letter with a call to faggot editors to take a different vantage, sung by "a strong black woman, Bernice Reagan [sic]," who was a Georgia-born Civil Rights activist, Freedom Singer, and founder of Sweet Honey in the Rock: "There's a new world cummin---Where you gonna be standing when it comes?????"[86] The implication was that the West Coast faggots should have been standing somewhere closer to the "ground zero" of the struggle: in the rapidly expanding, largely rural, Jim Crow South which was already being re-branded as the home of the "Moral Majority". If early *RFD* and *Country Women*, as Herring suggests, saw the rural as a better location for liberationist work, possibly because it was outside the nexus of urban surveillance and entrapment, the Arkansas Sissies instead saw the rural Jim Crow Southeast as closer to where imperialist racist, sexist, and homophobic violence was being cultivated. They, and others, saw a disturbingly complementary form of whiteness produced by trendy West Coast urban gay insularity.

The Arkansas Sissies were not alone in their rural critique of West Coast *RFD*, and that other critique also took issue with faggot whiteness. In the same issue, on the facing page, a reader using the name "Arnold J. Cornbelt," hailing from "Sticks," Minnesota, re-deployed Iowan *RFD*'s visual satire of a *Mother Earth News* cover in order to lambast what he saw the magazine had become in the hands of its new editors.[87] A

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[86] The actual spelling of the artist and activist's last name is "Reagon". Frank points out how the DCCHR also responded to their defeat at the hands of the SOC by singling African American Civil Rights songs. Arkansas Sissies may have been following suit.

[87] Cornbelt, letter to the editors, *RFD* #15, Spring 1978, 5. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.

West Coast native who had come to identify with the rural Midwest, Cornbelt attributed urban white trendiness and classed commercialization to the new West Coast editors. By labeling the drawing of a mailbox with "NO MIDWESTERS" and depicting an animal-like figure called the "San Francisco Scene" begging the farmers to "Feed me!", he exposed the ironies of an apparent San Francisco gay exclusivity which simultaneously denied its dependence on U.S. rural regions, not just for the food they produced and exported to cities, but also for their gay populations, many of whom came to gay "meccas" from these rural areas.

Replacing "RFD" with "WHITE WEST-COAST GARABAGE," Cornbelt – like the Arkansas Sissies – characterized this emergent phenomenon as a form of regional gay whiteness. His tools were definitely critically rustic ones, as the bold mis-spelling of *garbage*, the crude and often unreadable lines, and overt anti-urbanism (note the sarcastic "cities are ok too") attest. Cornbelt's illustration is clear support of Herring's argument that, within the rural gay liberationist circles inspired by early *RFD*, urban gay culture was seen as alarmingly white.

In the same issue, a reader-writer from Minneapolis groused because their submission to the magazine wasn't published. The writer angrily wondered whether it wasn't "'artsie fartsie' enough," or whether "it was because if faggots don't live on the 'coast' they must not be real."[88] Referring to how, apart from letters, most of the content came from a California "where money flows a little easier," the angry writer closed with "All this WOIKIN CLASS BACKGROUND, you people seem as much from that class

[88] Kim Brettingen, letter to the editors, *RFD* #15, Spring 1978, 3. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.

as Mr. and Mrs. Fud from Dorkdale, California." Accusing the faggot editors of a middle-class perspective which, because of that, looked practically straight, the Minnesota writer sounded a note of regional betrayal, disaffection. On these two pages, Midwestern and Southeastern readership sounded off to the magazine's Bay Area faggot editorial collective in a rural voice which took exception on racial, class, and sexual grounds.

In 1977, those who lived elsewhere in the rural reaches of the *RFD* network than on the West Coast struggled by letter, image, and radically affective housework to articulate a different gay liberationism than the white ruralism ironically backed by a San Francisco-identified *RFD* editorship. As Mulberry House split into Arkansas and Louisiana sissie collectives, they looked regionally to find others in the Southeast who sought their own counterpoints to the West Coast faggot refrain. After all, the same increasingly eroticized roads which extended to bring *RFD* directly into rural mailboxes, and which took the Arkansas sissies all the way out to the West Coast, had also made intra-regional travel more doable. For all their affective labor, the sissies knew that other orientations were possible. In fact, not long after he relocated from Fayetteville to New Orleans, Dimid Hayes would be on the road again – to Atlanta – to talk about sissies and effeminists. The next chapter sketches the networking which drew him there.

3| "gentleness refined, aligned and dangerous": Appalachia in the Gathering of the Southeast Network, 1973-1978

If the Ozarks were one Mountain South locale where a rural gay liberationism took root, Appalachia was another. Although more dispersed, gay and lesbian locals, counterculturalists, and activists in Appalachia not only contributed to *RFD* from its very beginnings; they also participated in burgeoning regional lesbian and gay movements which stitched isolated liberationist enclaves to more urban hubs like Chapel Hill and Atlanta.[1] In this chapter, I describe the complex role of Appalachia in national political cultures of the time before using oral history to offer regional context for those area liberationists who read and wrote to *RFD*. I then provide an account of the 1978 Southeastern Conference of Lesbians and Gay Men in Atlanta, which brought key *RFD*-networked liberationists together and served as a precursor to the region's first rural gay liberationist event: the June 1978 Running Water Farm gathering. I describe a few features of this and subsequent Running Water gatherings to convey a sense of the purpose they served. I argue, finally, that this "gathering" offered a needed alternative rural event format to the "conference". The events which led to the gathering -- the development of the regional sissie identity discussed in the last chapter, Appalachian gay liberationist activists and collectivists, and gender-based movement tensions anchored in the Atlanta area -- aided in the early assemblage of a particularly Southeastern gay liberationist refrain. In fact, the Appalachian gathering became the rurally oriented practice of assembling that refrain.

[1] Remember that Carl Wittman and Allan Troxler were returning from North Carolina when *RFD* was born.

In essence, this chapter collects the aspects of 1970s Appalachia which *poised* it to produce rurally oriented gay liberationism rather than situating it as a mere historical geographic coincidence. So, I turn first to how Appalachia was made before devoting the rest of the chapter to the ways by which Appalachia made a form of gay liberationism which has, to date, been under-documented.

Appalachian Creature: How City and State Imagined a Rural Region into Place

Reflecting a sort of assemblage perspective, a conviction that "all consciousness is poetic," anthropologist Allen Batteau has boldly asserted, "Appalachia is a creature of the urban imagination."[2] Foremost, it has been scored as a geography of poverty. Formed as a federal agency in 1965, the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) was inspired when, during his 1960 Presidential campaign in West Virginia, John F. Kennedy was moved by the poverty he saw there. Lyndon B. Johnson later turned Kennedy's initial legislation into a formal federal agency dedicated to alleviating the region's economic distress and isolation, a move consonant with his own War on Poverty.[3] Defying clear differences in geography and culture, the commission named individual counties as part of the region based on their impoverished conditions, including locales as different as counties in Mississippi and West Virginia. The ARC definition of Appalachia was a cobbled assemblage of poor counties covering wide territory. Hinging on the moving images of poor rural mountain people, ARC ultimately reached few of the remote rural populations on its map because much of its efforts went to improving infrastructural elements like interstate highway systems, which brought traffic to towns

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[2] Batteau, *The Invention of Appalachia* (Tucson: Arizona University Press, 1990), 8,1.

[3] VISTA, the domestic anti-poverty version of the Peace Corps which had brought Dimid Hayes' cousin to Harrison, Arkansas, was also part of Johnson's War on Poverty.

where small numbers of thriving middle-class Appalachian businesses reaped the lion's share of benefits.[4]

The mountain poor who were photographed to attract national sympathies were emphatically white. Racially, these whites were cast as deviated or less evolved versions of the accomplished whiteness which was assumed to be behind the nation's global ascendancy. Such a racialization capitalized on generations of "hillbilly" stereotypes, which allowed for a national, urban derision of the region's backward folk even as the War on Poverty mobilized sentiments to bring these sadly stuck white "ancestors" forward into modernity. This affective dynamic relentlessly painted rural poverty as white, and therefore (often) sad, while it just as continuously characterized urban poverty as black, and criminal. During this period, urban-rural divides were buttressed by a racial binary which prioritized some (rural white) people's poverty as sympathetic and deprioritized others' (urban black) poverty as an individual failing.[5]

Some of this racialization of Appalachia as white had to do with myths of the place as a geography naturally without people of color. That simply was not the case, natural or no. The forcible removal of Southeastern indigenous nations, including many Appalachian Cherokees, in the early nineteenth-century "Trail of Tears" supported a sense of the region as already emptied of a Native population. Many clung to this sense

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[4] For overviews and impacts of ARC and 1960s and 1970s Appalachian development, see Michael Bradshaw, *The Appalachian Regional Commission: Twenty-Five Years of Government Policy* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky, 2014, reprint ed.); Richard B. Drake, *A History of Appalachia* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky, 2003, reprint ed.); Ronald D. Eller, *Uneven Ground: Appalachia Since 1945* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky, 2013); David E. Whisnant, *Modernizing the Mountaineer* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee, 1994, revised ed.); John Alexander Williams, *Appalachia: A History* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 2002); and James P. Ziliak, *Appalachian Legacy: Economic Opportunity after the War on Poverty* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2012).

[5] Of course, it wasn't always so black and white. Caudill (below) sometimes cast blame on poor white Appalachian's for their poverty, but on the whole, after Kennedy's and Johnson's programs, greater national sympathies were extended to regional whites than to urban people of color.

despite the small but continuous presence of the Eastern Band of the Cherokee in Western North Carolina, who have been variously embraced or neglected as *part* of the region in very different scenarios.[6] Popular narratives which contrast mountain yeomen farming economies to Deep South plantation economies support a sense that blacks haven't been a significant population in Appalachia since they have naturally concentrated in former slave-centgric geographies. In 1985, William Turner and Edward Cabbell dispelled that myth with the landmark anthology *Blacks in Appalachia*, and since, many scholars such as historians Wilma Dunaway and John C. Inscoe have tried to correct racial assumptions with historical descriptions of Appalachian slavery and Jim Crow racism.[7] Poet Frank X. Walker even coined the term "Affrilachia" as the title of a 2000 collection of poetry which led to the formation of the Affrilachian Poets and a broader cultural movement which recognizes both the long and expanding cultural history of Appalachians of color.[8] So, while Appalachians themselves likely never experienced the region as exclusively white, its national depiction as such served to support racially scored urban-rural divides, which in turn unevenly mobilized the poverty politics of the era.

Additionally, the region has been understood by its exploitation at the hands of extractive (mainly mining) industries, which contributed not only to poverty but to environmental devastation. In 1963, lawyer and historian Harry Monroe Caudill

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[6] Historian Tiya Miles tells a much more racially complex north Georgian history of a Cherokee-owned plantation in her *Ties That Bind: The Story of an Afro-Cherokee Family in Slavery and Freedom,* (Berkeley, CA: U of California P, 2005).
[7] Turner and Cabbell, *Blacks in Appalachia* (Lexington, KY: UP of Kentucky, 1985); Dunaway, *Slavery in the American Mountain South* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2003); Inscoe, *Appalachians and Race: From Slavery to Segregation in the Mountain South* (Lexington, KY: UP of Kentucky, 2000).
[8] Walker, *Affrilachia: Poems* (Lexington, KY: Old Cove Press, 2000).

published *Night Comes to the Cumberlands.*[9] The book has been credited with sparking Kennedy's concern for the region's poverty. Ironically, even though Caudill was a Kentucky native, he alternated between blaming the poverty on the failings of Appalachians themselves and on the failings of the government who did nothing to rescue the region wasted by predatory industry. That interpretive combination appealed to the mostly white urban liberal imagination of the time. Another part of the book's popularity among liberals, though, was its characterization of the Appalachian landscape as once beautiful and pristine and now deeply wasted, like its people. Published on the heels of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), the book also fed the fires of a nascent environmentalist movement, whose sights were set on Appalachia as a major area of concern. For many, Appalachia was a fallen Eden ready for rescue.

If this was the Appalachian creature of the 1960s – a wide rural space mythologized as one of white impoverishment and environmental wasting – 1970s Appalachia became a magnet for activist sympathies. The region had grown its own activist roots before then, of course. The Highlander Folk School, founded in 1932 in Grundy County, Tennessee, had been an important site of Civil Rights activist networking and training in the 1950s. Closed by the state in 1961, regularly questioned for "communist" activity, the school then relocated deeper into Appalachia, in New Market, Tennessee.[10] Historian John Alexander Williams says that, in the 1970s, the

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[9] Caudill, *Night Comes to the Cumberlands: A Biography of a Depressed Area*, reprint edition (Ashland, KY: Jesse Stuart Foundation, 2001).

[10] For a history of the Highlander Folk School, see John M. Glen, *Highlander: No Ordinary School, 1932-1962* (Lexington, KY: U of Kentucky P, 1988).

region drew many "anti-poverty warriors," many of them – like some of the women in northwest Arkansas – veterans of the Civil Rights movement.[11]

The strong presence of Appalachian women in regional activism must have caught the attention of the exploding women's movement, too. Barbara Koppel's 1976 award-winning documentary *Harlan County, USA* dramatically illustrated local women's activism when it captured Kentuckian Lois Scott pulling a gun from her bra in support of miners striking in 1973. This image of Scott circulated in a time, as Hobson has shown, when images of the gun-toting radical woman saturated national media. Widely distributed images of rural poverty combined with recently acknowledged traditions of regional activism to draw outsider activists to Appalachia by the 1970s. Additionally, as Williams also notes, counterculturalists espousing similar politics and attracted by cheap land and local agrarian and craft cultures also flocked to the area.[12] Given the intersections of gay liberation with the counterculture, back-to-the-land movements, and broader activist networks, it should now come as no surprise that gay liberationists were embedded in this fomenting Appalachian culture.

In the following section, I provide oral histories of regional *RFD* reader-writers who lived in such Appalachian countercultural and activist networks in order to read compatibilities between their gay liberationist print activity and their Appalachian lived experience.[13] The stories illustrate key components of Appalachian experience which would inform a regional gay liberationism to come: Pyne's translation of previous

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[11] John Alexander Williams, ibid.
[12] Ibid.
[13] A few of the central oral histories (Milo Pyne, Merrill Mushroom, and John Harris/Gabby Haze) were conducted by Sears for his book. I conducted another interview with Pyne, and the additional histories I conducted for this project.

activism into countercultural contexts, Englebert's print method of defying myths of isolation, Wilson's experiences of regional cultural amalgamation, and Gross's familiarity with specifically Appalachian activism. These particular Appalachian lives demonstrate a regional readiness for a sustained gay liberation which only waited to be oriented to, networked with, each other as much as they had been to urban coastal hubs of gay culture.

Deeper Souths: Appalachian RFD Letter-Writers & the Inklings of a Transnational Revolutionary Rural

One area of particular countercultural concentration was the far western edge of Appalachia in middle Tennessee. In 1971, Stephen Gaskin and 320 hippies from San Francisco had founded The Farm not far from Summertown, Tennessee. Five years later and a bit further east, a writer named "Milo" would publish a letter in *RFD* #10, the same issue which documented the Faggots & Class Struggle conference: "Flying South for the Winter? Solitary faggot needs winter guests. The other (non-gay) members of our group have left me with the goats and cow, on a beautiful middle-Tennessee mountain. Come and visit if you're passin' thru."[14] Even though he apparently expected reader-guests from the North, Milo received responses from further south and further east. A native of North Carolina, Milo had been in Appalachia, on Short Mountain, since 1973, but he'd arrived with a different name.

Born George Clinton Pyne, Jr., in Durham, in April 1950, the boy had grown up middle-class, with an architect father, but also with strong female political role models, as his maternal grandmother had been a North Carolina judge and his paternal grandmother

[14] Pine, Contact letter, *RFD* #10, Winter 1976, 44. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.

a feminist engaged with the work of Margaret Sanger.[15] He remembers his family's being generally liberal -- surely not without their own nuanced forms of racism but consistently vocal in their support of the Civil Rights movement. In college, he went by Clint, and according to Sears, he was soon "organizing student support of the mostly black female food workers, chairing meetings of the Chapel Hill Revolutionary Movement, and writing for *The Protean Radish*, a statewide alternative paper founded by a chapter of the Southern Student Organizing Committee (SSOC)".[16]

He decided to drop out of college, though, and join the August 1970 third Venceremos Brigade to Cuba. There had been gay participants in the brigades since the first one, which Allen Young had been part of, just the year before, but visibility had increased in stride with the expansion of gay liberation so that, on Pyne's brigade, there were five open GLF members on board.[17] Although Pyne considered himself an "ally" at this point, he was excited about the presence of a gay caucus, having heard about gay liberation already from David Bland back in North Carolina. As both Sears and historian Ian Keith Lekus have documented, even though the Gay Liberationist caucus at first considered themselves an unproblematic addition to the other liberationist caucuses on the brigades, they were regularly treated with vehement suspicion and distaste by these other radicals.[18] The brigades were mostly organized by the Communist Party, USA, and

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[15] In an interesting connection, Pyne's mother was given DES when pregnant with him. In my interview with Pyne, he cited fledgling research concerning how DES impacts sexual development of children, wondering whether his own experiences of gender and sexuality related in some way to this chemical influence. Milo Pyne, interview with author, July 1, 2016.
[16] Sears, 86.
[17] Pagan journalist Margot Adler had also gone on the second brigade. Adler mentions this experience in her autobiography *Heretic's Heart: A Journey Through Spirit and Revolution* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998).
[18] Lekus, "Queer Harvests: Homosexuality, the U.S. New Left, and the Venceremos Brigades to Cuba," *Radical History Review* 89 (Spring 2004): 57-91.

Pyne says other liberationists' responses reflected the dominant Marxist view at the time, which was that homosexuality was considered "decadent" and "not progressive".[19] Increasingly aware of Cuba's own harsh treatment of homosexuals, gay radicals were further politicized by their experiences in the Venceremos Brigades.

U.S. *brigadistas* openly defied the national ban on travel to Cuba, received first-hand experience of a nearby socialist country and cause, and contributed by everyday labor to the Cuban revolution. Pyne's brigade went to pick lemons. Lekus draws parallels between *brigadistas'* experiences and that of the Civil Rights Freedom Summer of 1964. Admitting political cultures had clearly shifted in those five years, he still observes, "Once more, young Americans – spanning racial divides but this time united by their shared national identity – traveled to an even deeper south seeking a more just way of living and of organizing society. The *norteamericanos* looked to learn from Cuba's experiences building *el Hombre Nuevo*, the New Man, over the past decade."[20] The U.S. establishment feared what the young radicals would learn there. As Lekus indicates, it is perhaps no surprise, then, that Mississippi Senator and ardent segregation-supporter James Eastland linked Freedom Riders and Venceremos *brigadistas* as communists training to destroy America, a link bolstered by the U.S. "image of Cuba as a land where racism had supposedly vanished".[21] Anti-racism was vehemently linked to communism, especially in the Southeast, where local capitalist economies still depended on a violent and racial division of labor. As a part of this transnational "even deeper south" which had been shaped by long experiences of Atlantic plantation economies built on racist

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[19] Pyne, interview with author.
[20] Lekus, 61.
[21] Lekus, 65, 62.

slavery, Cuba emerged as having possible revolutionary solutions for the persistently colonial Jim Crow South.

In a reflection about his own *brigadista* experiences which he prepared for Sears, Pyne focused on the importance of "people who have grown up in an urban environment to become aware of the possibilities for socialist transformation in rural areas" and, instead of thinking of rural life as a "retreat from the struggle," to understand it as an effort to "find our roots and lose the colonial settler mentality".[22] Such a response lends context to Mulberry House's Oglesby being inspired by Young's accounts of gay people cutting "sugar cane for the [Cuban] revolution," which itself reflected Castro's politicization of *zafra* (harvest) as the quintessential revolutionary work of the New Man. Coinciding with partial portraits of Maoist Chinese peasant revolutionaries, a liberationist sense of rural space and work as an everyday revolutionary labor began to emerge. And, again, for those radicals with experience of the 1960s Jim Crow South, Cuba held particular appeal for its reputed success with anti-racist revolution. Gay liberationist *brigadistas* like Young were *both* disillusioned by Cuba's harsh heterosexism and inspired by its revolutionary relevance.

In this way, the components of a transnational rural revolutionary imaginary became available to 1970s liberationists. Pyne volunteers that "a lot of stuff was kind of political fantasies" but that there was also this effort to "try to connect with other people … not necessarily in terms of organizing them, but … connecting with rural people or connecting with working-class people in the country, but also with developing these skills – about how to grow food or fix machines … ."[23] Connecting such rural

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[22] Sears, 93-94.
[23] Pyne, interview with author.

perspectives to Cuba, Lekus concludes that "The communes sprouting up all across the land came closest to replicating the personal and political intimacy of the [Venceremos] Brigades, but they differed in their small household size and in their highly decentralized nature".[24] The latter certainly characterized the experiences of Oglesby and Thornton in Arkansas and that of gay liberationists' experiences In Appalachia.

When Pyne returned from Cuba, he traveled towards New England moving from one radical enclave to another. In New York he met with Allen Young, who would later give him a place to stay in Boston, where he became involved with the White Panther Party, a far-left anti-racist organization formed in response to Huey Newton's recommendation that white activists do anti-racist work with their own parallel party. He then met another "Allan," gay activist-historian Allan Berube. He explored his own attractions to men, remembering that he kissed a bearded man "just to have that experience of being physically intimate with a man." In Vermont, he witnessed a combination of radical communal farming and journalism through radicals doing film work related to the Liberation News Service. Pyne says that this was where he "first saw radical people living in the country".[25]

Cuba and these subsequent experiences helped to determine his next steps. Upon returning to North Carolina in 1971, Pyne joined the rural Tick Creek collective in Chatham County, not far from Pittsboro. He says they served as a kind of "way station" for radicals traveling between Atlanta and DC.[26] While there, he further explored relationships with women and men, including, according to Sears, with a local black

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[24] Lekus, 82.
[25] Pyne, interview with the author.
[26] Ibid.

beekeeper named Loomis, and eventually a man named Peter, who also lived at Tick Creek. When the collective's house burned down in early 1973, Pyne, Peter, and a few others looked for new land.[27]

They found it on the other side of Appalachia, at Short Mountain, in rural Cannon County, Tennessee. In June, they moved to an abandoned farm there which they had gotten cheap. Pyne says they estimated no one had lived there for about ten years, since the most recent newspapers scattered in the buildings were from 1962 and 1963. It was possible that tobacco had been grown on the land a few years prior, but there had been no residents for about a decade. Pyne says, "We immediately fell in with some of the local people because we needed their help with tractors and getting stuff done on the land." A little more remote than Tick Creek, Short Mountain made for challenging collective life. Pyne says, "It was hard to make a living, number one, and people got burned out on all the interpersonal conflicts and the lack of resources and there really wasn't any work. Now, the road [to Short Mountain] is really good. Back then, you would lose a muffler trying to get to town. … It was hard living."[28] Nerves were frayed and resources were tight. When two people would fight, they would often both leave.

Sears relays how Pyne, as an organizer for the People's Party, attended the 1974 Midwest Gay Pride event where Scofield would propose *RFD*. So, as Sears tells it, when another gay counterculturalist approached Pyne, after a middle Tennessee co-op meeting, to ask if he'd heard about *RFD*, the latter was able to enthusiastically fill in some details.[29] Pyne's lover, Peter, had shown him a copy of the very first issue of the

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[27] Sears, 94-95; Pyne, ibid. Sears doesn't mention Peter and his moving with Pyne to Tennessee. Pyne shared this in the interview with me.
[28] Pyne, ibid.
[29] Sears, 144-145.

magazine at Short Mountain. Feeling a kinship with the rural liberationist perspective of Iowan *RFD*, Pyne would later meet up with Allan Troxler, who was back in North Carolina, to help out with the layout of one of the early issues -- probably #5 from the fall of 1975, in which a photo of a branch and bulb is credited to "Milo".[30] So, Pyne was clearly involved with *RFD* in its earliest years of critical and erotic rusticity.

As Pyne's immediate collective diminished, his connections to gay liberationists and counterculturalists intensified. And these connections were not exclusively print ones. In fact, the curious man at the co-op was John Harris (later Gabby Haze), who belonged to a very queer Tennessee collective of his own in nearby Dry Creek, where he lived with his wife, lesbian Merril Mushroom. Sears tells how Harris and Mushroom had originally met as students in Miami during the late 1950s and early 1960s. They both ended up in New York City in the late 60s, when Mushroom introduced Harris to LSD. Very involved with the anti-war movement, they missed the Stonewall Rebellion altogether, and after Harris proposed to her with a valentine outlined with LSD, Mushroom divorced her then-husband, Jack, who was also gay, to marry John. Sears opens his Southeastern LGBT history with the Mushroom-Harris marriage and makes the relationship very clear: "Merril's marriage to John was one neither of convenience nor necessity. Each cared for the other, and they shared a homestead dream of raising a tribe of 'hard to place' children."[31] In 1970, they adopted their first child in New York State and began searching for a more rural place to live.

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[30] Pyne, ibid. Pyne credited Peter with showing him *RFD* #1 and spoke of working with Troxler in our interview.
[31] Sears, 11.

In 1973, after living for a stint on a hog farm in New Mexico, Mushroom and Harris relocated to Knoxville, Tennessee. Mushroom's longtime lesbian friend from Miami, Julia Stanley (later Julia Penelope), then teaching at the University of Georgia in Athens, had recommended Knoxville for its radical lesbian community, some of whom she had met at regional conferences. They indeed found a "diverse but not divided" lesbian community composed of "southern ladies," "dyke" daughters to Oak Ridge scientists, "working-class women, students, and professors," and "softball lesbians".[32] Not long after, though, they found land in rural middle Tennessee: Dry Creek. Harris continued to work for a short time in Knoxville, spending only weekends at their new collective, while Mushroom – with their (now) two adopted children, a dog, and (occasionally) Mushroom's cousin Billy -- set about daily living at Dry Creek. In 1974, Stanley – by that time a dedicated separatist frustrated with academic institutions -- moved there, too, with her lover, a poet named Sylvia. Harris (then going by the name Gabby Haze) remarked of countercultural middle Tennessee, "Some of it was gay, most of it was straight – all of it was drug related at some level. We wondered, Is it going on everywhere? Is there madness happening in every little nook and cranny or are we sort of this special place?"[33] To answer Haze's question, I contend that 1970s *was* a special place, having drawn a critical mass of counterculturalists and activists, some of whom were also gay liberationists.

Even though Pyne recalls no real suspicion or backlash from the locals about all the countercultural activity in the area, the federal government definitely took note. In fact, as Sears so carefully documents, Pyne had been on the FBI watch list since returning

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[32] Ibid., 117.
[33] Ibid., 144.

from Cuba. At Short Mountain, Pyne had begun going by the name of Milo Guthrie, chosen partly in homage to the activist-folksinger of the same last name. An FBI memorandum from late October 1974 records this name change and that a local had reported to an agent that Short Mountain was comprised of around twenty-five to thirty residents who were doing no farming whatsoever.[34] Upon agents' later closer inspection, they could find no evidence of subversive activity, instead seeing that the supposed radicals were "only raising flowers and various herbs".[35] From their Memphis offices, the FBI officially closed Pyne's case in January 1975.

Historian Douglas M. Charles has observed that, in the early 1970s, towards the end of J. Edgar Hoover's term as director of the FBI, successive federal scandals had curtailed the agency's more intrusive technological methods of surveillance so that they had to rely more and more on informants. He also comments that gay liberation, having formed in this period, was also so anarchistic and decentralized that FBI officials had a much more difficult time infiltrating its ranks than they did more traditionally organized homophile movements. Charles mentions how the FBI collected gay liberationist publications to monitor the movement's political leanings and activity, but the titles they followed were mostly in big urban centers like New York City. He does not list *RFD.* [36] Dispersed organization, rural meetings, constant mobility, and ever-changing names were features of the culture which frustrated agents' surveillance efforts.

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[34] FBI memorandum on Pyne, (10/25/1974), James T. Sears Papers, Research Files Box 137, Folder 15, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.
[35] Quoted in Sears, 348.
[36] Charles, *Hoover's War on Gays: Exposing the FBI's "Sex Daviates" Program* (Lawrence, KS: UP of Kansas, 2015), 302-342.

FBI informants were often an effective tool for sewing dissent within liberationist circles wherever they were found, though. Lekus notes that many *brigadistas* believed that tensions on the Venceremos Brigades, especially against gay liberationists, were stirred up by FBI plants.[37] Sociologist David Cunningham confirms that the FBI at least agitated homophobic feelings within the Brigades by circulating fake information indicating that the Venceremos Brigades were inextricably associated with gay liberation.[38] Cunningham shows how this was part of a larger FBI strategy of associating New Left ideologues' attraction to un-American politics with the equally un-American homosexuality. As the government framed it, radical politics and gay sexuality both involved "perverse" attractions.

RFD gay liberationists weren't the only ones practicing correspondence poetics or dabbling in fairy tales. Cunningham relays how, in 1968, the FBI fed info about leftist peace activist Dave Dellinger – who had been arrested in 1949 for a same-sex exchange in a bathroom – to the *New York Daily News*, referring to Dellinger as "the Pied Piper for Protestors of Peace" and to his history of "perversion".[39] Using a fairy tale about a colorfully dressed musician who lures a village's children away to describe a gay peace activist was just one example of federal strategies to spread fear about the monstrous and seductive powers of gays and radicals. Among both of the latter groups, there was a widely held sense that FBI informants and their perversity charges had a long reach. We see this in the *brigadistas*' belief that they had been infiltrated in Cuba, and we also see it in the need which Wolf Creek organizers felt to beef up rural security for their

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[37] Lekus, ibid.
[38] Cunningham, *There's Something Happening Here: The New Left, The Klan, and FBI Counterintelligence* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004), 118-122.
[39] Ibid, 120.

conference. Still, there is a kind of comic satisfaction in imagining the challenges FBI informants must have faced in tracking Pyne/Guthrie to a very remote Appalachian locale, and even in their struggling to recognize what subversion might look like on a farm as opposed to in a city. It begs the question of just who had been lured out of the town and into the forest.

Cunningham gives an account of a kind of triangulated counterintelligence, though, with sinister implications for the Jim Crow Southeast specifically. He tells of how in the 1960s the FBI played a permissive role with the racist practices of the elite White Citizens Councils in the region while attempting to discredit the leadership of the theoretically inclined American Nazi Party with rumors of internal homosexuality and gender non-conformity. This differential treatment of U.S. racist organizations also informed the FBI's treatment of the KKK. Cunningham points out how, on the one hand, the FBI deemed the KKK's violence as state-subversive, so they distributed counterintelligence designed to route Klansmen into the more "acceptable" politically and economically systemic racist organizations like the Citizens Councils. In drafting counterintelligence for Klansmen who were overtly characterized as "poor" and "rural," the FBI, as Cunningham shows, mimicked uneducated writing with quotas of spelling, grammar, and usage mistakes.[40] Infiltrating the Klan necessitated the agency's learning to play stupid and illiterate in order to be convincing.

But keeping the Klan less ideological was also a federal goal. To keep the apparently unintelligent KKK separate from the more ideological U.S. Nazis, counterintelligence about Nazi homosexuality was expected to keep a wedge between the

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[40] Ibid, 122-127.

two forms of domestic racism: Klansmen already held their own brands of homophobia and predictably applied it to the American Nazi Party after the FBI leaked its rumors of perversion about the ANP.[41] We can now infer a composite rhetorical situation in which FBI counterintelligence amplified Southeastern KKK homophobia at the same time it schooled ignorant Klan racism into more powerful systemic forms. In this specific sense, the Arkansas Sissies were right: Southeastern racism against African Americans was systemic and involved a "rider" homophobia. Arms of the federal government actively cultivated institutional racism which worked *through* the political economic system at the same time it planted class-based homophobia to divide white supremacist organizations. In that the KKK and Citizens Councils were highly concentrated in the Southeast, FBI counterintelligence of the late 1960s and early 1970s produced a uniquely regional assemblage of white supremacism, homophobia, and classism. I contend that, while these counter-intelligence practices wouldn't have been known at the time, regional liberationists *felt* the assemblage – such as the racial, gendered, and sexual composition of the Save Our Children campaign – and would have suspected state systemic designs.[42]

As we have seen, though, as the FBI closed its books on Pyne, and as he worked with *RFD* to network with other rural gay liberationists, he found himself physically more isolated as the others in his collective abandoned the Short Mountain farm. Winters were especially hard. Pyne recalls, "Two winters, I was the only person there. My mission was to hold up that tent pole" so that others could return in fairer weather. But eventually none did. It was then, Pyne says, he realized that he had to bring new

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[41] Ibid, *n*311.

[42] I would add that, while there is no evidence to confirm it as such, the unsubstantiated New Orleans WVUE "Black Momma, White Momma" story about the UpStairs Lounge fire matches the form and content of such counter-intelligence.

direction and life to the place.[43] In Winter 1976, he placed the ad in *RFD*, determined not to spend another lonely winter there, casting Short Mountain as a dot within the wider gay "RFD Country". Pyne's first three years in Appalachia had demonstrated the area's gay liberationist potential in a number of ways. First, it was a prime opportunity to experiment with the emergent radical rural imaginary born of gay Venceremos experiences in Cuba. Second, the rural location served as a frustration to FBI surveillance tactics, and radical gay residents could defy the government's regional racist-homophobic assemblage. Third, not only had Appalachia attracted a sizable enough counterculture to enable networking; it was fairly evident that those circles included lesbians and gay men. Slowly, they started making the connections.

Further south, Clarence Englebert heard Milo's call in *RFD*. An alternative bookstore owner in Huntsville, Alabama, at the far southern reaches of the Appalachia defined by the ARC, Englebert had kept *RFD* on the shelves of Books as Seeds since 1975.[44] He had seen Issue #2 in a Castro bookstore on a trip to Northern California's Buddhist Shasta Abbey and immediately wrote to Stewart Scofield to request copies for his shop back in Huntsville. Englebert confesses, "*No* one bought it," but *RFD* enjoyed a certain visibility in a shop which had substantial gay traffic due to its being situated not far from the city square, a popular cruising spot. Books as Seeds also stocked a lot of radical black literature for its regular black clientele and positioned a flagrantly displayed Hindu section at the entrance, which, according to Englebert, practically faced a Baptist Church. The owner said that the store was designed so that visitors "had to adjust [to its

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[43] Pyne, ibid.

[44] Clear Englebert, interview with the author, February 28, 2016. Englebert's background on the following pages – including quotes -- is taken from this interview.

alternative bent] or realize you were in the wrong place." He says they carried a lot of underground publications, including comics and newspapers – not only national ones but important regional ones like Atlanta's *The Great Speckled Bird*.

Born in 1951, Englebert had been raised from the age of two to eighth grade in nearby, very rural Colbert County, "one mile from Mississippi and thirty miles from Tennessee." He remembers that "You could walk for miles and miles and miles and only see woods." Growing up, his family had electricity but no running water; instead, they had a well to draw water and an outhouse in back. Although rural, and by ARC classifications Appalachian, 1950s and 1960s Colbert County was not a white place. Englebert says his main playmate was a slightly older black boy named Johnny who lived across the road, and that this hadn't seemed strange to him, given that his own grandmother and grandfather, who lived nearby and were called "colorblind" by neighbors, had adopted an orphaned black child for several years. As he matured, though, Englebert saw how fraught such relationships in the Jim Crow South actually were, as he found that his grandparents felt compelled to send their son to the care of an African American family once the young man became increasingly disturbed by the fact he couldn't follow his white parents into many businesses and facilities in violently segregated Alabama.

Englebert's parents were teachers. His father had been valedictorian of his high school class but had refused to go to the graduation ceremony because he saw it as a "racket," engineered to get families to buy robes, yearbooks, and rings. His mother refused to wear make-up and often took her children on long walks in the woods. She later told her son that she first suspected he was gay when, before pre-school age, he had

requested a doll as a gift. The boy was relatively safe, though, in that his family cultivated a different perspective than many of their neighbors.

At some point, his mother and father had decided to "shop" for a religion, considering everything, including Buddhism, before settling on Catholicism – a maverick choice in a doggedly fundamentalist Protestant region. Calling his parents "heavy-duty Catholic converts," Englbert says that he and his two older brothers weren't allowed to wear shorts because they were "immodest" and that they all said prayers over their rosaries daily, usually in the car on the way to school. The nearest Catholic church was thirty miles away and the family attended religiously. There were "holy water fountains in the house – four of them! – and we'd cross ourselves going from room to room." Despite this deep religiosity, he says his parents were the kind of people who "would not go along if it really didn't seem right," and they passed this lesson on to him.

When he was a teenager, the family moved to Huntsville to be close to an ailing relative, and Englebert went to high school there. He had a girlfriend who would eventually come out as a lesbian. He says he was so happy she didn't sexually pressure him and vice versa. She was Catholic, too, and they would lie, saying they were going to church meetings together, but would instead park at a golf course near the church and just talk. They were very close and she was the first person he did LSD with. Like his father, when Englebert graduated high school, he didn't attend the ceremony and felt relieved to be finished with the horrible institution of formal education. His parents supported that decision.

He recalls an active gay sexual culture in Huntsville. There was a bar, The Escape Lounge, which he never frequented because he didn't like alcohol. There was an

active bathroom near Murphy's Variety Store, near where he worked at a newsstand. And there was the "beep-line": a phone number -- mostly used by straight people but also by some gay men – which you would call and receive a busy signal over which you could trade personal phone numbers for sexual hook-ups by speaking, syllable by syllable, between the beeps.

Instead of going to college, Englebert's dream was to start an "alternative bookstore to get information out to the people". Securing a loan, he and his brother, both budding hippies, opened their first store – "A Good Book Store, four words!" – in June 1971, when Englebert was 19. Later becoming somewhat disillusioned by his experiences of the bookstore as a business predicated on debt, he and his brother left their alternative store in the hands of friends and drove to Belize, to dive into the raw foods movement. Englebert would stay for six months. Around 1973 or 1974, A Good Book Store burned to the ground under circumstances which he calls "questionable". (Like Pyne, Oglesby and Thornton, fellow native Southerners, Englebert was unfortunately familiar with fires, recalling that his own "longhair" brother and his wife had moved south of Huntsville only to have the Klan welcome them with a cross burned on their yard.) After returning to Huntsville from Belize, Englebert felt newly determined. He knew he was the only one who could provide an alternative bookstore for the city. He went about the slow work of starting Books as Seeds – and putting *RFD,* visibly, on its shelves.

Not long after, Englebert would read Milo's contact letter in the 1976 Issue #10. Despite being even further south than Milo, Englebert saw that this faggot-identified man was located only about one hundred miles north and promptly wrote to him, arranging to

meet.[45] He risked car and muffler on the dangerous winter roads to Short Mountain, making a gay liberationist connection in Appalachia. It was Milo who would introduce Englebert to another gay liberationist, a Zen practitioner in Eureka Springs, Arkansas, who would eventually become Englebert's partner.

A couple of years later, Englebert would write his own letter to *RFD* -- Issue #15 (Spring 1978), the issue following the one in which the Arkansas Sissies critiqued the West Coast faggot editors. In that letter, he wrote, "I just have one request – please put the word 'country' back in the subtitle of the magazine – I really appreciate your honest reasons for leaving it out – but it sure felt good to see that one special word. // I love you folks and I sure appreciate your dedication."[46] Avoiding overt critique, his letter nevertheless follows on the wave of rural critique in the previous issue. He compliments the editors on their honesty about their urban faggot perspective but directly appeals more to the value of making others feel good by a simple act, one which sees no conflict between a gay liberationist and a rural perspective elsewhere than the West Coast. For Englebert, simple acts of design – the placement of an odd word, a strange magazine, an alternative storefront – do the prefigurative political work of prompting others to re-orient themselves. And not long after meeting Pyne, Englebert would further re-orient himself. He would, by 1980, cross the Alabama state line to live only a little closer to Short

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[45] Remember that Milo's announcement had addressed northern "snowbirds," headed with the question "Flying South for the Winter?"

[46] Englebert, letter to the editors, *RFD* #15, Spring 1978, 3. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.

Mountain, in a small rural collective in Hot Rock, Tennessee, and to legally change his name from Clarence to "Clear," for $5 at the Lincoln County courthouse.[47]

Clear's sense of design dealt most prominently in print culture, and the ways that his alternative bookstore circulated various radical and spiritual literatures, from the region and beyond, defies any sense of 1970s Appalachia as isolated. Rather, for a rural area, it was newly but uniquely "plugged in". He wasn't the only Southeasterner to respond to Milo's letter. On the other side of the Smokey Mountains, Mikel Wilson saw the ad for visitors and made plans to visit Short Mountain on his move from North Carolina to San Francisco.[48] Wilson had been born, the youngest of four, in "mid-twentieth-century" Miami. When he was thirteen, his father, who had worked for the Miami Medical Surgery Company, died, leaving young Mikel alone with his mother, the older children having already left home. They spent summers at a family place in Little Switzerland, North Carolina, and they moved for his junior-high years to Athens, Georgia, to live with his sister's family. They later returned to Coral Gables where Wilson would finish high school and grow to love music in the Presbyterian church he attended there, sharing this love of spiritual music with a childhood friend, David Green, who himself attended an Episcopal church.

After graduating high school in 1970, Wilson accompanied a female cousin on a summer trip to Europe, and he returned to begin college at Florida State in Tallahassee. At the end of the first semester, he had immersed himself more in the booming hippie drug culture of the time than in his course work and dropped out with "straight Fs". He

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[47] Englebert, interview with author, ibid. For an *RFD* interview with Englebert about his homesteading in Tennessee, see *RFD* #28 (Fall 1981), 50-52, and *RFD* #29 (Winter 1981), 52.
[48] Mikel Wilson, interview with author, February 22, 2016. Wilson's background – including quotes – on the next few pages is taken from this interview.

moved to Atlanta and worked as a busboy at the Howard Johnson's on 10th Street until his friend David Green visited and talked Wilson into joining him at Guilford College, a small Quaker-founded liberal arts school in Greensboro, North Carolina.

Wilson stayed two years at Guilford. He remembers developing a different spiritual perspective as he studied Eastern esoteric religions and took a course in comparative arts. He fell in with older hippie students who graduated ahead of him. At the end of his second year there, in 1973, he turned 21 and inherited a small trust fund that had been left him by a grandmother who had died when he was a child. Wilson dropped out of school, took the money to a rural real estate agent, and bought the first place he was shown: fifteen acres at an altitude of about 3500 feet on the side of Roan Mountain in Mitchell County, North Carolina. Wilson moved in within the week. Of his new home, Wilson remembers, "It had a chestnut cabin on it that had been built in the 30s. It had been abandoned, probably for decades, and it had twenty or thirty really nice old mountain-variety apple trees and … a garden that was almost like an acre … . It was just a *lovely* space, almost impossible to get to because it had been abandoned for so long." Like Short Mountain, it was another abandoned Appalachian farm, difficult to reach. Unlike Short Mountain, it was small (15 acres as opposed to Short Mountain's couple hundred), pitched on steeper terrain, and at a higher elevation.

A couple of Guilford hippies, Phil and Terry, moved in with him, but Wilson mostly only spent warm-weather months there. In winters, he stresses, you were easily trapped on the side of the mountain. For a while, Wilson worked as a short-order cook at a local rural diner to make money while living on the farm. He says, "The old mountain guy next door, Stokes Ledford, was just delightful and would teach me things about how-

to-do-it." He often consulted the Appalachian *Foxfire* books, the *Whole Earth Catalog*, and *Mother Earth News*. Wilson comically named the place "Running Water Farm," because he had taken a black plastic pipe and run it from one of the mountain springs uphill straight into his kitchen sink, so that – without a faucet – the water ran constantly.

As was the case in middle Tennessee, there was a countercultural network, with a food co-op in nearby Loafer's Glory and regular "potlucks and gatherings of the local hippies". As in Arkansas, there were women's consciousness-raising groups. He joined one such group down the road; it was hosted by a radical woman named Carol, her husband Grant (who ran the local Volkswagen repair place), and another radical woman who lived with the couple. In short time, both women came out as lesbian and Mikel came out as gay. Unlike most "coming out" stories, Wilson did not come out in the metropolitan area he had lived in before; rather, he came out into a small radical enclave in countercultural Appalachia. Wilson reports that, not long after, "Those women packed up and left Grant up there and took the two girls and moved to Asheville. I packed up my Volkswagen square-back and moved to San Francisco."

This was February 1977.[49] Pyne/Guthrie had just published his call for visitors. Wilson planned to stop by Short Mountain on his way west. He made his way to Smithville, Tennessee, when it started to snow. He soon "slid off the road and into a telephone pole, which miraculously centered itself on the front of the Volkswagen." Since the engine was in the back, Wilson simply backed up and continued to the town of Liberty, going as far as he could safely travel by car towards Short Mountain. By then, it was dark. Determined, he decided to walk and, without a flashlight and slipping on the

[49] In my interview, Wilson recalls his moving to San Francisco in February 1976, but since Milo didn't post his ad until late in 1976, I propose it must have been 1977.

frozen mountain springs that crossed the road, he eventually found his way to the Short Mountain farm when he spotted a dim light through the dark and snow: "Milo was there and there by himself. All the hippies had left. A lot of goats and Milo. No electricity." He remembers that Pyne was fretting over how to revive the collective. Wilson calculates, "I was out [of the closet] so we were talking about a *gay* community." Wilson stayed a week while Pyne located a different colored hood for the Volkswagen, and then he set out for San Francisco, which at the time, was "like heaven" – "everybody was going there".

Wilson only stayed about six to nine months in San Francisco. But, he stayed at the corner of Haight and Ashbury, in a rent-controlled Victorian, during a rent strike. He got a job as a dishwasher at the Elephant Walk and made his way home nights through Buena Vista Park. He remembers going to parties, and despite the fact they weren't organized until 1979, he recalls seeing soon-to-be Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence in drag at some of these house parties. He fell in love with a hippie traveler named Soma. As the rent strike ended, he and Soma drove the coastal highway before heading back to North Carolina. Wilson says they made it in three days. Laughing, he recounts how the accelerator cable in the Volkswagen had gone out so they just ran the cable from the back over the passenger-seat shoulders to the front, holding the accelerator in a full-speed position. Once back in North Carolina, they stayed briefly at Running Water until Soma decided to travel further on his own and Wilson started classes in weaving at a technical college in small-town Waynesville, just west of Asheville. Whereas Pyne remembers no run-ins with locals, Wilson's experience recalls a 1970s Roan Mountain area in which locals, counterculturalists, and radicals worked together. Perhaps Wilson enjoyed a

certain access from working in the local economy or from having spent some of his childhood in nearby Little Switzerland. Either way, his story testifies to an Appalachian culture which had largely settled into a happy amalgamation of activist, hippie, and local cultures.

Wilson, as we have seen, came out in an Appalachian countercultural feminist consciousness-raising group and immediately headed to the city. Cathy Gross, on the other hand, stayed put.[50] Gross came to Appalachia as a student who, like Mulberry House's Hayes, was in a self-designed program of study. Based in anthropology, she took up everyday activism and pottery as her education when she arrived in Big Stone Gap, Virginia in 1971. Born in inner-city Cleveland, Ohio, just after World War II, Gross grew up "WASP, middle class" but she remembers, "I was a little baby butch *way back*" as documented in a photo she recalls of her raking leaves at the age of three. Her family moved when she was a child to York, Pennsylvania, in the northern reaches of Appalachia, where she became deeply involved in the Girl Scouts, an organization which accommodated her love of nature, where "learning camping wasn't seen as not being a young woman." She says she refused to grow out of her younger butch looks and ways, carrying them into her high school years, when she spent a lot of time in the library. Although her suburban York school only had one black student, she joined an inter-school committee which allowed her to socialize with the black students concentrated in the York city schools, and she did her junior English research paper on James Baldwin

[50] Cathy Hope, interview with the author, October 18-19, 2016. Gross would eventually change her last name to "Hope" in a self-naming practice which was common in several of the overlapping alternative cultures of the time, as described in the last chapter. Gross/Hope's background – including quotes – over the next few pages is taken from this interview.

and her senior one on Oscar Wilde. She became passionate about environmental issues. When she graduated, she was determined to "get out of Dodge".

She was an early-acceptance student at the New College of Hofstra on Long Island in New York. On the day of her arrival in September 1969, she experienced instant culture shock: "Half my freshman class was tripping," fresh from Woodstock. Most of her student peers were Jewish, and many were African American. The campus was fully accessible in 1969. Gross says, "Something like 5% was WASP … I went from a place where everybody was like me to one where *no* one was like me." But despite the Stonewall Riots having happened just that summer before in the city, there was little lesbian and gay awareness on campus. In her junior year, she elected to go to Big Stone Gap, Virginia, to work with FOCIS House.

FOCIS (the Federation of Communities in Service) had been founded by forty-four former Glenmary nuns in 1967.[51] The Glenmary Sisters were founded as an order in 1941 by William Howard Bishop, who envisioned the group entering and ministering poor rural areas where Catholic presence was minimal. An early recruitment poster for the Sisters bore a photograph of a nun riding a tractor. Many of the nuns who signed on ended up in Appalachia. Following the early 1960s Second Vatican Council and the foment of the women's movement in the U.S., many Glenmary Sisters felt spiritually called to radically loosen the value of the cloister and more fully enter their rural communities *as* modern women. That meant living, dressing, and relating as the rural women around them, shedding their divisive habits, in dress and act, including sexual

[51] For the history of FOCIS and the Glenmary Sisters, I rely upon Helen M. Lewis and Monica Appleby, *Mountain Sisters: From Convent to Community in Appalachia* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 2003).

behavior. The Church thought this went too far. Seventy Glenmary Sisters left the Church, and the fourty-four who formed FOCIS saw their new service organization as the body by which they would embrace a secular mission in the Appalachian communities they had been serving.

The FOCIS House in Big Stone Gap, Virginia, attracted many young student-activists: "From 1969-1972 the FOCIS Center in Big Stone Gap, Virginia, served as an Appalachian field center for the Union for Experimenting Colleges and Universities. The field center developed programs for students from Hofstra, Stephens, Antioch, and other colleges."[52] Among their countercultural numbers were also several lesbian and gay liberationists. When Gross arrived in Virginia in 1971, it didn't take her long to realize that the expectations of her Hofstra anthropology professors were out of step with those of the ex-Sisters and those of the local Appalachians. She recalls thinking, "You have got to be kidding me … . These people do *not* want to be studied."[53]

In her work with FOCIS, Gross participated in black lung-related activism, worked with the staff of a "not super-conservative" newspaper, and taught pottery in area schools. The latter school-based cultural work organized by FOCIS collaborated with the Appalachian Studies program at nearby Clinch Valley College.[54] That program had been put together by sociologist Helen Matthews Lewis -- future director of the Highlander Research Center – who had recently, in 1970, begun to analyze Appalachia as an internal colony within a larger structure of global capitalism and to advocate community-based activist-scholarship in the region. In this way, Lewis paralleled West Coast black

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[52] Lewis and Appleby, 164.
[53] Hope, ibid.
[54] Lewis and Appleby, 171.

liberationists, both casting specific regions – one the black urban ghetto and the other rural Appalachia – as internal colonies, and, for her theories of colonialism, she drew, in part, on the writings of Frantz Fanon.[55] Gross came to Virginia when it was an important center for the development of a radical Appalachian Studies, and she eventually took a degree in the fledgling discipline, from Antioch College, based on her immersive community service. In this service, she worked alongside ex-nuns, some of whom had same-sex partners, and she eventually found a partner herself.[56]

These same-sex relationships, she stresses, though, were fiercely guarded secrets. Gross reminds us that this was a time when prison and violence followed quickly upon the epithet of "queer". She initially told no one about her relationship. About six months after arriving in Virginia, though, she was talking to a conscientious objector, five years older than she. They were both stoned at a party, "under a table, on the floor, … whispering in a corner," when Gross first confided her sexuality to him – and he likewise confided his being gay to her. She says, "That began our seventeen years of friendship." The young man, Russ Cravens, would introduce her to another lesbian couple he knew – a local rural Appalachian and a Mennonite.

Gross lived and worked in Big Stone Gap, Virginia until 1977. A committed activist and cultural worker in Appalachia, her class and gender politics thrived even as her sexual politics around lesbianism had to be fiercely guarded. For example, she eventually joined a women's consciousness-raising group guided by reading a radical feminist paper published in Philadelphia. The three lesbian members took a vow that

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[55] Lewis, *Helen Matthews Lewis: Living Social Justice in Appalachia.* Patricia D. Beaver and Judith Jennings, eds. (Lexington, KY: U of Kentucky P, 2014). The preceding information about Lewis was also taken from this source.
[56] Hope, ibid.

they would talk openly about anything with the straight women in the group, risking the requisite vulnerability for earnest consciousness-raising, but they would *never* mention their lesbianism. Not enjoying a prominent lesbian feminist culture like that anchored by the Women's Center at the University of Arkansas, Gross and her peers practiced a similar feminist self/critique but were forced to withhold deep analysis of sexuality from the consciousness-raising table and also forced to form very covert lesbian networks in the Appalachian activist culture. Gross had left New York -- like Mushroom and Haze, entrenched primarily in other activisms than gay liberationist ones, little influenced by Stonewall -- to "come out" within rural Appalachian activist and countercultural circles. Her own regional experience underscored how a specifically Appalachian activism featured a very visible women's role, a compatible liberationist sense of internal colonialism, and an appreciation of cultural work.

But, after years there, in 1977, when Gross' romantic relationship dissolved, she and Cravens, after a brief stay in Denver, relocated to Atlanta together, where she threw herself into a lesbian and gay community that was by then in full swing. She remembers going to men's drag bars with Cravens and other gay men, just as much as she immersed herself in the rich women's culture of the city. It would be from Atlanta, in Fall 1978, that Gross would write to the West Coast *RFD* editors about Issue #16, the Women's Issue.

In that letter, she openly admired the high graphic quality and the stated purpose (the "examination of the oppression of our sisters and our responsibility in it") of the Women's Issue but she took the high concentration of work by three faggot editors, the inclusion of photos of female celebrities -- like Marilyn Monroe – and drag queens, and

the lack of much political editorial context as a failure to achieve that purpose. In fact, she saw the issue as a "token peek into women's/lesbian culture" more than an analysis of sexist oppression or of the need for gay men in particular to understand the dynamics of sexism. She particularly mentioned the missed opportunity of putting rural lesbians in conversation with the magazine's rural gay male readership. She closed her letter with "I care about my gay brothers and hope the points I've brought up will serve to further communication between faggots and lesbians."[57] Surely, her politically radical concern with relationships between lesbians and gay men, especially in rural areas, were the result of her having left Long Island to come out to a closely bonded gay male friend in rural Appalachian Virginia.

What all these rural, regional experiences point to is an Appalachia poised for gay liberation. The relatively happy 1970s amalgamation of activist, countercultural, and local cultures meant that means of combatting supposed isolation were already in place. It also meant that a social base had been laid for gay liberationists familiar with radical and hippie movements and, therefore, as collectives connected, lesbians and gay men began to recognize each other already in these circles. For this reason, gay liberationist isolation may have been less intense here than in other rural areas. Furthermore, the region provided ample opportunity for radical work – whether that was experimenting with a local liberationist rural imaginary born in places like Cuba or China or combatting rural internal colonialism which included FBI surveillance and racist, homophobic counterintelligence. In many ways, these gay liberationists began to recognize each other

[57] Gross, letter to the editors, *RFD* #17, Fall 1978, 10. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.

at just the right time, in the right rural environments, to build a gay and lesbian network which reflected the place.

The stories of the Ozark Mulberry House, held alongside these sites of rural Appalachian gay liberationism, reveal motifs which will inform the development of a Southeastern refrain. First, as the recurrence of burning crosses, burning businesses, and burning residences show, the KKK loomed large as a figure of violence given some federal license in the region. Situated at the southern extremes of mountain ranges, along the seams of the nation's "deeper souths," lived experiences in the Ozark and Southern Appalachian collectives (especially Englebert's) defied the national imaginary of the time, one which racially contrasted urban black poverty with rural white mountain poverty. The hotly contested line between poor Appalachia and a Jim Crow "deep South" was already confused when the ARC drew the borders of Appalachia with telling dips into Mississippi and Alabama, crucial sites of Civil Rights confrontations with Jim Crow. Donna Jean Murch so convincingly shows how the black liberationism of the Bay Area Black Panther Party depended heavily on long political memories of migration from the rural Jim Crow South. And, Emily Hobson has shown how Bay Area gay liberationism drew heavily from black liberationist concepts of internal colonialism and cross-movement alliances. These Southeastern gay liberationists, then, seem to face the Jim Crow South as a kind of geographic originary of U.S. internal colonialism. For these reasons, and in the above ways, they began to orient their liberationism to their immediate region more than to coastal cities like San Francisco or New York. This was important – that their politicized affects were rooted in the immediate geography of their everyday.

As we have seen with the Arkansas Sissies' 1977 collective letter to *RFD*, there was also an implication that a wave of this regional internal colonial violence would spread from Southeastern rural geographies to West Coast urban ones. They seemed eager to remind the faggot editors that, far from being outposts outside the urban nexuses of global capitalist control, rural areas like the Jim Crow Southeast were instead regions of direct colonial bodily violence which could ultimately take over urban areas like San Francisco. Formed in a very different gay liberationist political geography than those -- like Carl Wittman's -- which had hinged on the gay ghetto, the Arkansas Sissies considered the Jim Crow South with its KKK fires a crucial site for stopping the spread of domestic colonial violence.

As such, Southern Civil Rights political culture was also, to different degrees, heavily influential. As we have seen, a significant number of the lesbian and socialist feminists of northwest Arkansas had previous, positive experiences in Civil Rights work to draw upon. Clarence Englebert made sure he visibly represented black Civil Rights and liberationist news and literature in his Huntsville bookstore. Clint Pyne/Milo Guthrie had grown up in a North Carolina family approving of Civil Rights politics, which might be seen to lay the basis for his early involvement with the anti-racist White Panthers. Race, then, was held, at least theoretically, as a cornerstone of many of their forms of gay liberationism because, as was the case with both the Arkansas Sissies and Lavender Country, there was an assumed temporal progression by which violence against blacks was understood to directly precede violence against gays and lesbians.

Ironically, it was within the context of this very serial understanding of social categories like race and sexuality that the Arkansas Sissies called for increased visibility

at the supposed borders between the two – namely, increased visibility for "3rd world gays and situations". Latino/a cultural scholar Mary Pat Brady argues that, with the "rural turn" in queer studies, serial understandings of intersectionality are transformed, by the addition of region, into abandoning an "adjacency that orders into sequences and iterations what we hope to understand simultaneously and in a temporally variegated fashion."[58] She argues that, instead, it allows us to move away from models of static identity grids towards models of process and to "shift the focus to networks of relationships and the obstructions and flows between people and events and the sites of their coming together … ." I hold that the Arkansas Sissies' Southeastern rural orientation led them to an emergent attention to the obstructions in their networks between white gays and people of color, an obstruction which was buttressed by national urban-rural divides rooted in racialized depictions of poverty. Similarly, Appalachian gay liberationists' experiences with their neighbors – mountain locals alongside transplanted activists and counterculturalists – also brought needed attention to unexpected forms of connection across these groups.

Further, Hobson has shown the very temporary utility, in the Bay Area, of the gay ghetto as a standard geographic unit for gay liberation. Black Panthers' international political perspective necessitated liberationist discussions beyond city and nation. In the rural areas often understood to be the most intensely domestic spaces within national borders, Southeastern liberationists were also tuned in to Maoist China and Castro's Cuba as possible revolutionary models. As Lekus has illustrated, Cold War ideologies pitted the U.S. against Cuba in ways that resonated with Southern segregationists who could

[58] Brady, "The Waiting Arms of Gold Street", 111.

lump communist anti-Americanism with Cuba's perceived successful record of anti-racism. Literature scholar Caroline Levander has traced how such a Cold War binarism has long been used to mask and buttress the fundamentally racist dimension of U.S. imperialism, as concentrated in the South – since the nineteenth century, in fact.[59] On the other hand, such a Cold War assemblage offered to Southeastern liberationists the possibility of geographically identifying particularly with Cuba as a revolutionary part of a transnational "deeper South" whose anti-racism could inspire and inform Southern radical struggles against persistent Jim Crow racist and homophobic practices buttressed by earlier FBI counterintelligence practices.

Of course, a primary aspect of Lekus's narrative is how *gay* liberationists in particular, following their harsh treatment on the Venceremos Brigades and their exposure to Cuba's policies against homosexuality, had to develop more qualified politics. For Southern-born liberationists like Oglesby and Pyne part of this qualification involved how they embraced the concept of agricultural work as a form of everyday, continuous revolution (in contrast to the sharp overturn of a military coup). Lekus points out how, in Cuba, that agricultural labor – cane-cutting – was often represented as both revolutionary and quintessentially manly, to the degree that U.S. women *brigadistas* were told they couldn't cut cane. For U.S. gay liberationist back-to-the-landers who had, as Herring shows, formed their identity in relation to *Country Women*, such assumptions must have seemed so preposterous as to clearly necessitate a different possible

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[59] Levander, "Confederate Cuba," *Imagining Our Americas: Toward a Transnational Frame*, Sandhya Shukla and Hedie Tinsman, eds. (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2007), 88-110. Lavender's essay seems to reflect a larger phenomenon in American literature scholarship, "new Southern studies," which seeks to place literature of the U.S. South in outside national frames. For an overview, see Kathryn McKee and Annette Trefzer, "The U.S. South in Global Contexts: A Collection of Position Statements," *American Literature* 78, no. 4 (2006): 691-692.

revolutionary direction, one predicated on a re-gendering of both revolution and rural labor at once.

Culture played a central role in such politics. As we can see with the Arkansas Sissies' quoting of Bernice Reagon, traditions of African-American music within Civil Rights political cultures were clearly inspiring. With Mulberry House, the textual basis of early *RFD*'s critical rusticity switched to a focus on material riffs on the postal infrastructure (re-purposed mail trucks and pink-painted "maleboxes") and on struggle as a way of performing a liberationist domesticity. We also see these regional liberationists practicing print culture outside the work of writing and publishing *RFD.* Mulberry House collectively indexed academic books. Gross worked on an Appalachian political newspaper staff. Englebert ran an alternative bookstore. And, of course, they all wrote back to West Coast *RFD*. Also, rural -- often Appalachian or Ozark -- craft (Melba'son's and Wilson's weaving and Gross's pottery) were practiced as natural fits within these liberationist political cultures. And, as we have seen, Oglesby's critique of the Wolf Creek Faggots & Class Struggle conference laid out some ways in which the liberationist rural event might be reconceived along differently gendered lines.

And, if we are looking for an androgyne here, I think it's impossible to ignore the thread of close lesbian-gay relationships within this emergent Southeastern network. We can look to the Arkansas relationships between Mulberry House and Yellowhammer -- to the love shared between lesbian feminist and sissie. Or, we could look to Gross's Appalachian coming out to Cravens -- a moment leading, almost mythically, to a seventeen-year friendship and to a letter calling for gay men and lesbians to build better bridges between each other. Or, we could reference Wilson's similar coming-out story,

alongside two lesbians in an Appalachian consciousness-raising group. We could turn to Englebert and his high school girlfriend, sharing LSD, pretending to be at church but instead bonding as they overlooked an empty golf course. Or, maybe we could use the LSD marriage of Mushroom and Haze as a kind of index of the primary orientation of Southeastern gay liberationists of this period, calling it, as Sears describes it, a marriage "neither of convenience nor necessity".

Sears describes that relationship indirectly, though – by what it is not; the work of the previous examples is to give that historical, regional connection body. This regional gay liberationist orientation was also one of lesbian-gay connection. But, as the Mulberry House experience made plain, such lesbian-gay "marriages" were also not always easy ones. Next, I re-position Sears' account of the 1978 Southeastern Conference for Lesbians and Gay Men as a pivotal moment in the formation of a regional network of rurally oriented gay liberationists, leading to the first gathering at Wilson's Running Water Farm. As a nearby urban hub, Atlanta coordinated regional gay activists in very close proximity to Appalachia. This proximity allowed for easy crossover between the rural liberationists discussed above and broader regional circuits. At the same time, the catalyst for the Running Water gathering was a larger faultline between Southeastern radical lesbian feminists and more reformist, liberal gay men.

Conferring Gathering: From Atlanta to Falling Water, Spring to Summer, 1978

Like the dots in "RFD Country," these small pockets of back-to-the-land gay liberationism in the Southeast were at this point, mostly unconnected. An awareness of each other had surfaced through slow-moving print culture like *RFD* but only a few writer-readers had actually met. Parallel efforts towards regional gay organizing would

soon change that, leading to several of these liberationists' coming together at the 1978 Southeastern Conference of Lesbians and Gay Men in Atlanta. In the following, I provide a radical and liberationist history for that conference.

Georgia had its own Gay Liberation Front. The group was founded in 1971 and was based on the New York City GLF, but like other such GLF chapters, it was marked by rifts from the beginning and was destined for a short duration. In its statement of purpose, published in a March issue of *Gay Good Times*, founders voiced their own frustrations with the expected organizing frame of the gay ghetto, but they came up with different answers than did the Bay Area gay liberationists Hobson describes: For the Georgia GLF, "the term ['gay ghetto'] applies to gay people in a psychological rather than a physical sense". [60] Maybe because of this abstract framing, lesser attention was devoted to different and uneven material conditions. For whatever reasons, though, the dominant white male leadership of the Georgia GLF noted that, soon after forming, previous strong participation by lesbian and black members dropped dramatically, likely as a result of white gay male attitudes.[61]

According to Saralyn Chesnut and Amanda Gable, by the next year these attitudes persisted throughout the organizational process of the 1972 Atlanta Gay Pride Parade, and as a result, radical lesbians -- several key members' having themselves participated in either the Venceremos Brigades or the leftist paper *The Great Speckled Bird* – formed

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[60] William Cutler, "Statement of Purpose of the Georgia GLF," *Good Gay Times* clipping, 3/8/71. Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance Papers, Box 15, Gay Liberation Front, Folder 36. David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University. Although I am clearly arguing that the regional scale of gay liberation grapples with both physical and psychological forms of containment and isolation, the focus on the psychological would suggest the importance of alternate psychological models than that of the APA, including but not limited to the improvised liberationist psychology my project describes.
[61] Ibid.

a splinter group: The Atlanta Lesbian-Feminist Alliance (ALFA).[62] Lesbians and gay men continued to collaborate, but commitments to anti-sexist work were an on-going issue, as evidenced by the formation of a small "Radical Effeminists" group of leftist gay men wishing to distinguish their own politics from many of the other reformist men in the regional GLF.[63] Likely also based on a New York model, these radical effeminists surely advocated the position and aims of Steven Dansky, John Knoebel, and Kenneth Pitchford, as ultimately published in the 1973 "Effeminist Manifesto". Viewing intellectualization, violence, and domination as hallmarks of specifically male culture, these effeminists urged all men – but especially "faggots and all effeminate men … oppressed by the patriarchy's systematic enforcement of masculinist standards" -- to "become traitors to the class of men" and to shape themselves as "anti-masculinists" in league with feminist women's leadership, which could only really be realized by effeminists' taking on their share of daily care work, especially for children.[64] The dominance of the mostly liberal white male leadership of the Georgia GLF sparked such splinter groups almost from its inception, but the effeminists represented a liberationist faction.

Sears recounts how, months later, in November 1972, a southeastern regional "convention of gay militants" was held in Athens at the University of Georgia. The university had previously refused to host a gay dance, citing a conflict of values and a lack of educational purpose, so the Committee on Gay Education took the university to

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[62] Chesnut and Gable, "'Women Ran It'."
[63] "Gay Meetings," *Good Gay Times*, clipping 8/10/72. Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance Papers, Box 15, Gay Liberation Front, Folder 36. David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.
[64] Dansky, Knoebel, and Pitchford, "The Effeminist Manifesto" in *We Are Everywhere: A Historical Sourcebook for Gay and Lesbian Politics*, Mark Blasius and Shane Phelan, eds. (New York: Routledge, 1997), 435-438.

court and received a restraining order so that student organizers would be able to hold the 1972 convention on campus.[65] The organizers enlisted the help of the Georgia GLF and ALFA and, according to *Great Speckled Bird* writer and ALFA member Lorraine Fontana, they also attracted attendees from a wide swath of the Southeast region, including Miami, D.C., Memphis, Jackson, Knoxville, Charlotte, Lexington, Atlanta, and Athens.[66] Even though the convention led to the establishment of a "Southeast Gay Coalition" -- Merril Mushroom's old friend Julia Stanley, then a professor at the University of Georgia, would serve on the coordinating committee -- the convention itself was very divisive.

Fontana observed that white gay male leadership of the convention -- using Roberts Rules of Order -- rushed the proceedings, appeared to block divergent opinions, and even ushered through committee reports that seemed suspiciously prepared in advance. This bustle occurred before reaching a group consensus on their collective reason for being there. Attendees differed over whether their strategy should be to build alliances with all liberationists – women and people of color – or to build a coalition of just gays and lesbians, across a wide range of political ideologies. Disagreement over whether analysis of sexist or class oppression should take precedence entrenched different camps against one another. Strident Marxists were criticized for not recognizing the horrible treatment of homosexuals at the hands of revolutionary Cuba and China. Fontana said the meeting was particularly galvanized when an Atlantan Marxist man proposed that all "pro-capitalist ideology" be excluded from the coalition. Middle-

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[65] Sears, 107-108.

[66] Lorraine Fontana, "Gay Convention," *Great Speckled Bird,* 11/20/72. Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance Papers Box 16, Southeast Gay Coalition, Folder 3. David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

class gay men thundered back, shutting the Marxist proposal down. Many radical Atlantans then walked out, and the coalition was quickly structured with many "special-interest groups – Marxist, reformist, feminist, and independent, as well as students, workers, welfare recipients, unemployed, etc." Fontana expressed her own disappointment with such decisions in her article.[67]

In the December 1972 issue of *The Great Speckled Bird*, a member of the Committee on Gay Education (CGE) critiqued Fontana for what he saw as her presumptive and dismissive reading of certain white, gay middle-class males -- like the chairperson with his book of Robert's Rules -- and for her apparent lack of evidence.[68] In the same issue, some of *The Bird*'s staff formed a gay caucus, defending Fontana's reporting and making plain their commitments to a revolutionary liberationist coalition, not a "Gay version of NOW".[69] The political differences within the Southeastern lesbian and gay network thereafter substantially widened. The *Bird*'s staff vocally held the liberationist line.

By the next year, on July 14th, 1973, the Georgia GLF dissolved. In an article titled, "Gay is Gone," Bill Smith contrasted the organization's first meeting of over 100 people to the final meeting, which was attended by only two, both of whom easily agreed that the state's GLF was over.[70] Smith drew parallels to the dissolution of the New York

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[67] Fontana, ibid. The summary and quotes in this paragraph are taken from Fontana's article.
[68] Jodie O'Connell, "Gay Convention Letter," *Great Speckled Bird*, 12/11/1972. Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance Papers Box 16, Southeast Gay Coalition, Folder 3. David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.
[69] Gay Caucus of *The Bird*, "… and response," *Great Speckled Bird*, 12/11/1972. Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance Papers Box 16, Southeast Gay Coalition, Folder 3. David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.
[70] Smith, "Gay is Gone" article clipping without periodical title, 7/23/73. Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance Papers Box 15, Gay Liberation Front, Folder 36. David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

City GLF and their resultant formation of new groups like the gay rights-focused Gay Activist Alliance. In Atlanta, he named ALFA as the front-running new organization but also mentioned the growth of the Metropolitan Community Church as well as gay caucuses in the Young Socialist Alliance, International Socialist, and the Socialist Workers Party. According to Smith, though, most agreed on one thing: that the divisive 1972 Athens convention was the beginning of the end for the Georgia GLF.

Chesnut and Gable describe this as a period of remarkable lesbian political organizing and cultural growth in Atlanta, especially in the Little Five Points area. As in Fayetteville, Arkansas, Atlanta's lesbian feminist community enjoyed a growth spurt in the mid-1970s. In Little Five Points, Charis Books and More opened with an "emphasis on theology, women's fiction, and a large selection of nonsexist and nonracist children's books".[71] The store became a lesbian feminist hub. By mid-decade, around twelve lesbian collective households, many of whom were ALFA members, were established in the neighborhood. ALFA sponsored monthly meetings, a newsletter, potlucks, various cultural events, and softball teams. In part the result of efforts by members like librarian Elizabeth Knowlton, ALFA also meticulously archived its own and regional liberationist materials, even running its own library. As in the lesbian San Franciscan community which Hobson describes, lesbian households were often sites of intense government surveillance in this period. Chesnut and Gable relay an account of an ALFA fundraiser to aid a lesbian Weather Underground member whom the FBI arrested in one of these Little Five Points collectives. On the whole, this largely young, white, middle-class lesbian culture was radical and close-knit, with an extensive political and cultural infrastructure.

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[71] Chesnut and Gable, 242. The overview of the Little Five Points lesbian feminist culture is summarized from Chesnut and Gable as well.

This was the Atlanta which Cathy Gross and Russ Cravens would settle into in 1978 after leaving Big Stone Gap, Virginia.

The Southeast Gay Coalition would continue its work, though, in the form of a regional lesbian and gay conference. The first two (1976 and 1977) were held in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. These conferences seemed to follow the 1972 Athens meeting's ultimate design precedent: to focus on gay issues across an ideological spectrum, with a strong showing of lesbian content. Chapel Hill meetings featured a range of speakers, including Charlotte Bunch, Barbara Gittings, June Jordan, and Karla Jay and Allen Young. Faygele Ben-Miriam presented in 1977 -- a session titled "Classism, Racism, and Sexism and the Gay Movement".[72] In 1978, organizers decided to hold the conference in Atlanta. Wasting no time getting involved, Cathy Gross joined the organizing committee, which also included Franklin Abbott.[73]

Abbott was born in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1950.[74] He recalls his mother's stories of growing up near a steel mill and therefore having to sweep coal dust from her family porch daily. He spent part of his childhood in Birmingham and then part in Buffalo, New York, before going to high school in Nashville, Tennessee. Nashville was painful for him, as a boy who was interested in "art, music, theater," because sports were the measure of boyhood in his Tennessee high school. Still, he threw himself into language classes (Latin and German) and the junior masonic Order of DeMolay, the latter of which he credits with teaching him a lot about organizing. In addition to being very

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[72] Conference pamphlets. Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance Papers Box 16, Southeast Gay Coalition, Folder 3. David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.
[73] Hope, ibid.
[74] Franklin Abbott. Interviewed by Wesley Chesnault, September 30, 2011. Georgia State University Library, Special Collections & Archives, Social Change Collection. Abbott's background – including quotes – on the following pages is taken from this interview.

gender-restrictive, his high school was very white. When he went to school at Mercer University in Macon, Georgia, he was introduced to a whole new racial climate than that with which he grew up. In contrast to his childhood in Birmingham, from which he remembers the "n word" being a kind of common expression of white kinship, Mercer had strongly recruited black students and there was a strong Black Power contingent on campus. In what Abbott says to him felt like a few years, his world went from an almost exclusively white one to one with an immediate powerful black presence.

He came out in his sophomore year, took Black Studies courses, and eventually got a major in sociology. Macon itself had a large African-American population, and Abbott remembers that "it had more unpaved roads than any major city, or city its size, in the United States": "Once I started making friends with black people who lived in the community and we'd go visit them, I would be astounded that we would leave the pavement and you would go for miles into these communities, down these dirt roads, into really another world altogether." He remembers stories that a Nigerian man, Sam Omi, had been the first black student recruited to attend Mercer, by white missionaries, but that, ironically, Omi was barred from the main white Baptist church near campus -- for being black. Abbott himself, possibly due to his black friendships, was later entreated by a local minister to not lead an integration march, which Abbott hadn't yet even considered. When he graduated, he got work directing a south Georgia day center for the mentally ill, and his clients were, by and large, extremely impoverished rural black people. This was in a society which he felt had treated black people like a contagion, with different water faucets and bathrooms. So, after directly experiencing his own and the state's inadequacies to address the complex rural intersections of race, health, and

economic issues, he decided to pursue a graduate degree in social work. He came to Atlanta in 1978 to do his internship.

Abbott was assigned to work both at the Buckhead Mental Health Center and with lesbian therapist Jane Gavin to set up a gay center and helpline called Tempo. Outside of the vibrant lesbian culture, the gay male culture of Atlanta was mostly centered on bars or religious groups like the Catholic Dignity, the Episcopalian Integrity, and Lutherans Concerned. Having attended the 1977 Chapel Hill lesbian and gay conference, Abbott discovered a more liberationist spirit. Then in Spring 1978, he published a poem in *RFD* #15, the same issue which included Englebert's letter from Huntsville. He met activists Cathy Gross and Russ Cravens, eventually sharing an apartment with them. From his Chapel Hill connections, Abbott became interested in putting his organizational efforts into putting together the third regional lesbian and gay conference, and bringing it to Atlanta.

The commitment to the Atlanta site was controversial. Georgia had not ratified the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), and many lesbians and feminists opposed rewarding the state with the local expenditures such a conference would involve. Thus, concerns around complicity with sexism were foregrounded from the start. To make that matter worse, in the organizing process, some from more reformist men's groups like Dignity objected to the planning of women-only sessions, even those devoted to women's sexuality. Abbott and one other man voted with the women organizers in favor of these few "separatist" sessions, upsetting the gender split in the vote in favor of the lesbians.

Abbott remembers that the more reformist men who hosted the planning meeting, recognizing they were on the losing side of the vote, angrily told the others to leave.[75]

Organizers moved ahead, clearly stating in their conference brochure that "We understand the need for minority groups (Lesbians, Blacks, Latins, Asians, Native Americans, handicapped gays, etc.) to discuss and organize among them/our/selves without outside participation."[76] Articulating the need for a particular regional focus, they also claimed to be "faced with the problems of urban depersonalization and rural isolation of gay people due to the geographic and economic factors characteristic of the Southeast" and expressed as an overt goal of the conference to "aid in the building of new skills applicable to gay people's daily living situations".[77] Here endorsing a kind of session-based separatism, conference organizers surely saw this approach as critical to a uniquely regional political process.

As Sears has noted, since 1972, the coalition had cast a wide regional net. ALFA had done similarly successful networking. Thompson mentions how, in 1976, the rural lesbian separatist Arkansas Women on the Land (AWOL) had written to ALFA to ask for support.[78] Even the very rural gay liberationist reaches of the Southeast could claim an active place in the regional coalition. They not only attended the 1978 conference; they also delivered substantial content. Ben Miriam presented on "Armed Struggle and Violence;" Dimid Hayes offered a session called "Sissie/Queer/Effeminist/Boy Love: The Cutting Edge of the Gay Male Movement;" Mikel Wilson co-presented a talk called

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[75] Abbott, ibid. This summary of conference organizing comes from Abbott's interview.
[76] Conference pamphlet, Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance Papers Box 16, Southeast Gay Coalition, Folder 3. David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Thompson, ibid.

"Rural Gays;" and Franklin Abbott contributed "Gay & Angry / Gay & Sad: The Psychological Realities of Oppression".[79] Many of the Southeastern *RFD* letter-writers and rural gay liberationists not only brought their unique perspectives to this conference, but they also met each other face-to-face in 1978 Atlanta. Crossing urban-rural divides, these liberationists consummated their print intimacies.

But the divisive ghosts of the 1972 Athens convention shook their chains at the conference. Women witnessed again and again how gay men hogged table spaces and microphone time. In the boom period of its Little Five Points community, ALFA and the broader Southeastern lesbian network felt even less compelled than before to stand for sexist gay male reformism. On Sunday, April 2nd, a closing feedback session was held at the Georgia Terrace site of the conference. During the session, the women provided critique of men's behavior, charged them with the job of working on their own sexist issues, and promptly exited the room *en masse*.[80]

Abbott remembers a hush falling on the knot of men remaining in the room.[81] Most who stayed considered themselves radicals and feminists, if not "effeminists". They -- like those in the rural gay liberationist pockets I have described -- considered their own subjectivities to be shaped by lesbian-feminist perspectives and relationships. Acculturated to consciousness-raising groups and struggle, they didn't take the women's departure as a divorce; instead they took it as it was meant: as a charge to do their own radical anti-sexist work. Their models for that work would be the lesbian-feminist political cultures they had come out into. As Abbott remarks, thinking back to the

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[79] Conference pamphlets, ibid.
[80] This story is consistent in Sears, and with most interviewees – Hayes, Pyne, Wilson, Hope, and Abbott.
[81] Abbott, ibid. This paragraph draws its summary from Abbott's interview.

vibrancy of the Little Five Points culture, not only was it impossible for him to imagine a gay liberation which didn't root itself in fighting patriarchy; neither could he imagine a more engaging culture to carry and fire that politics than what he saw in Atlanta's lesbian feminist community – bookstores, printing presses, poetry, theater, music, collectives, and potlucks. For him, and for many of the others present, urban gay male culture, by contrast, had only really offered the bar for its culture and socialization. Without any of the women's infrastructure, though, the men at Georgia Terrace, on the day after April Fool's 1978, weren't sure what step to take next, or where to go.

It was just then that Mikel Wilson stood. Abbott refers to him as "one of the wild creatures who had come down to the conference": "Mikel was a weaver. He wove all his own clothes. He had a long beard. He wore a tunic that he had woven out of rough wool and carried a staff, and looked like an Old Testament prophet."[82] He offered Running Water Farm for a summer solstice gathering, as an Appalachian event for the male gay liberationists to begin their own gender work.

In June 1978, most of these men who had really only known contact through the pages of *RFD* would get together at Wilson's Running Water Farm. Even in my interviews, years after the event, attendees gently corrected me if I accidently referred to the event as a *conference*. As a *gathering*, it importantly differed not only from the 1978 Atlanta conference, but also from the 1976 Faggots & Class Struggle conference. In many ways, it would be an opportunity to realize a rural event of the kind Oglesby gestured towards in his critique of the Wolf Creek conference. As such, it would also be an opportunity to respond to lesbian separatism, not abstractly and abjectly as outcasts,

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[82] Abbott, ibid.

but, in the ways we have seen Enszer to rethink lesbian separatism – as a very complex political *process*.

And, in fact, these gay-lesbian liberationist relationships were in no way severed. These Southeastern gay liberationists took their own rural "separation" as a temporary retreat to hone the feminist skills necessary to continue their established connections with the radical lesbians who had so thoroughly formed them. In other words, they sought to take their charge from lesbian feminists as a gesture of intimacy, and as such, return it with the seriousness such a connection deserved. In some ways, the gathering would be a regional response to Gross's letter to West Coast faggots in *RFD*.
Furthermore, it was conducted as an extension of the regional gay radicalism that had been embattled against the gay male liberalism which had quickly dominated the Georgia GLF.

As such, it carried on its effeminist politics, the broadly networked gay militancy of the 1972 Athens conference, and the mostly socialist radical spirit of *The Great Speckled Bird*. But, the example of the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance surely loomed large. Not a conference intended to confer "pre-cooked" knowledge, the 1978 Running Water gatherings would be events for collaborative poetic experiments in vision, affective connection, skill-sharing, and infrastructural planning – ones which echoed lesbian political cultures like those in northwest Arkansas and Atlanta's Little Five Points. They would also combine a more anarchistic Lavender Country faggot refrain via Faygela Ben Miriam, the sissie struggle learned in Arkansas, and the scattered gay liberationist Appalachian experiences discussed earlier. As rural events, they began to define the rural as a space suited for such experiment, but also a space which necessitated

the regular crossing of urban-rural divides. I close this chapter with a description of the Running Water gatherings as culled from *RFD* reports, oral history interviews, and poetic documentation about the event.

Gathering as Verb: Running Water as Poetic Workshop for Care Labor

In some ways, the fact that the gay liberationist men's gathering following the 1978 Atlanta conference would be set in Appalachia was a matter of chance. Since returning from San Francisco the previous fall and parting ways with Soma, Wilson surely struggled with the concept of Running Water Farm as a traditional residence, faced with yet another of its uninhabitable winters. Spring must have sparked thoughts of how the space might serve other purposes. The past year's conversations with Milo and the feminist gay men's need for a space independent of lesbian cultural infrastructures must have clicked into place in Wilson's mind as he rose to offer Running Water to his fellow gay liberationists at the Georgia Terrace on that Sunday morning of the conference. He was planning a birthday celebration around the summer solstice anyway.

But, if Abbott remembers Wilson looking like a prophet, it's also true that the choice of an Appalachian gathering site seemed at this time like something of a self-fulfilling prophecy. As we have seen, a few key figures – several of whom had spent significant parts of their younger lives in or near Appalachia – had some understanding of it as a liberationist region from their countercultural and activist experiences there. But, these kinds of associations were not limited to those who actually lived in the Southeast. As Herring points out, by 1976 some in the *RFD* network had gone beyond reclaiming epithets like *faggot* and *sissie* to also try on *hillbilly*, using Appalachian stylistics to contrast their own identities to the normative urban gayness increasingly associated with

the West Coast.[83] The Southeastern mountains seemed more and more suited to accommodate, if not gays, then faggots, fruits, and sissies who increasingly reclaimed variations on a hillbilly look and lifestyle.

If, in trying to visualize the Running Water gathering as an event, we think back to Broughton's Northern Californian *Dreamwood*, we see a similarity in that both are self-conscious attempts to *enter* the forest, to cross urban-rural divides. These *RFD* reader-writers were very much aware, not only of the developing urban nature of gay identity, but also of the fact that the Southeastern lesbian and gay conferences had all thus far occurred in cities and college towns. So, instead of being a simple and accessible place, the Appalachian forest had to be somehow achieved. In *Dreamwood*, though, achieving the forest was primarily an individual vision quest; Running Water, on the other hand, was a collective work. Harkening back to what Oglesby most appreciated about the 1976 Wolf Creek gathering -- the fairy circle which facilitated "remembering forgotten dreams" – the June solstice event at Running Water may have evoked a thoroughly constructed pastoral like the one in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

In fact, as with earlier refrains we have discussed, the event was understood poetically. *RFD* #17 ("Ramblings from Dixie"), which documented the first Running Water Farm gathering, took on the theme of everyday life in the rural gay liberationist enclaves of the Southeast and led with an excerpt from the William Stafford poem "A Ritual to Read to Each Other". Originally from Kansas, Stafford was a pacifist and conscientious objector during World War II. As a result, he was assigned to rural work in Arkansas, Illinois, and California -- appointments with Civilian Public Service Camps.

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[83] Herring, 90. Herring suggests that, in many cases, this act was surely appropriative.

"A Ritual to Read to Each Other" was published, interestingly, in a 1960 collection called *West of Your City*, a book further divided into sections titled, in order, "Midwest," "Far West," and "Outside". In that the book's organization seems to chart a liberationist extra-urbanism dependent on a trajectory further and further West, it echoes the popular association of the counterculture with the West Coast. But, as such, it also ran counter to the direction of *RFD*, which had traveled from the Midwest to the Far West to the Southeast. Having come with Ben Miriam to "Dixie," *RFD* practiced a kind of critical rusticity by cutting Stafford's poem up and using the parts which suited it best. (We can think of this practice as akin to the poetry scrapbooks Chasar discusses.) Editors printed the cautionary theme of the poem's opening and closing stanzas while excising the illustrations of the central ones – lines which metaphorically situate the ethics of the poem with a circus approaching a park. Leaving the more urbane setting of the poem on the cutting-room floor, *RFD* editors affixed the remainder to an issue about thoroughly rural Southeastern milieus.

What's left is a poem that, by its title, resonates with the previous print and spiritual cultures of *RFD*: a ritual to read each other. It underscores the intimate interpersonal nature of reading and ritual and frames both as foundational to a liberationist political perspective.

If you don't know the kind of person I am
and I don't know the kind of person you are
a pattern that others made may prevail in the world
and following the wrong god home we may miss our star.[84]

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[84] William Stafford, excerpt from "A Ritual to Read to Each Other," qtd. In *RFD* #17, Fall 1978, 1. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.

The passage echoes the affective impasses Melba'son experienced in the last days of Mulberry House. Without the difficult everyday interpersonal work of self-analysis, struggle, and affective connection which was widely practiced in feminist consciousness-raising groups and by sissies like those at early Mulberry House, the system ("a pattern that others made") may very trap us into supporting it while we neglect ourselves and our peers. This delusion is framed, not as a logical oversight, but as a theological mis-orientation.

The closing couplet, which immediately follows the ellipsis in the *RFD* issue, recommends a triangular relational clarity between the two interlocutors and their deified star: "the signals we give – yes or no, or maybe -- // should be clear: the darkness around us is deep." In fact, the "we" of the poem – in that they give off signals – themselves become stars, or gods, by maintaining their connection and resisting the dominant ideology. Such conviction of the divinity of all individuals was also common in the West Coast Reclaiming Witchcraft traditions adapted to the faggot refrain. A religion rooted in the connection of and care for our spectral selves was understood to be naturally liberationist in that it cultivated the abandonment of the false gods of the global colonial system. Affectively, Stafford's poem urged a lateral orientation to each other, in the here and now, in the everyday, rather than a vertical orientation to the remote heavens; emotionally, it was no less spiritual or reverential for its groundedness.

The "gathering," then, was understood as an event designed to practice everyday consciousness-raising – to clarify personal direction, to practice making lateral connections, and to cultivate vision and habits beyond the prevailing ideology. The term "gathering" itself, while evoking a folksy tone which we might easily associate with

Appalachia, was likely primarily rooted in the cultures of the back-to-the-land Rainbow Gatherings.[85] The first Rainbow Gathering was held in July 1972, on Strawberry Lake near Granby, Colorado. Instead of advocating a permanent residence in a rural area, Rainbow Gatherings promoted annual temporary residency in national parks to practice the creation of rural communities founded on principles of peace.

One of the key points was to re-think dwelling as a *practice* (as opposed to a place) which could be progressively unhinged from its dependence on private property. This was why public property (national parks) were the preferred sites of the Rainbow Gatherings and why many insiders to the culture would become "travelers" who lived from gathering to gathering rather than in any privately owned or rented space. According to communications scholar and ethnographer Michael I. Niman, more than twenty thousand showed up for the first 1972 Colorado Rainbow Gathering, and after Governor John Love barred them from the site -- arresting hundreds -- a group of four thousand marched on police roadblocks, forcing the governor to back down and to allow the gathering to take place.[86] This showdown demonstrated the 1970s political stakes of crossing urban-rural and public-private divides. After 1972, Rainbow Gatherings became annual events held in different national parks.

Although I can make no direct connection between Rainbow Gatherings and the 1978 Running Water Farm gatherings, a number of overlaps demonstrate a shared geographic and cultural provenance. For example, various Rainbow insiders' websites maintain that, although West Coast countercultural youth groups organized the first

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[85] Niman, *People of the Rainbow: A Nomadic Utopia* (Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 1997). The following background of the Rainbow Gatherings is taken from Niman.
[86] Ibid., 32.

event, a surprising 2600 Southeasterners attended that Colorado Gathering and were integral to its support.[87] I venture that those numbers are part of a larger countercultural Southeastern-West Coast migration pattern in the 1970s, within which we could also place not only Charles Wittman and Allan Troxler's 1974 move from North Carolina to Wolf Creek but also, for example, Steve Gaskin's 1971 relocation of over three hundred San Francisco hippies to rural Tennessee. As we have seen, both the West Coast *and* Appalachia were important cultural geographic nodes in countercultural and activist migration patterns after the 1960s.

Further, the first Southeastern Rainbow Gathering was held in the Ozarks in 1975, closely coinciding with the formation of Mulberry House but also with the heyday of northwest Arkansas' many women's rural intentional communities. Niman's 1997 ethnography documents the word *faerie* as an established cultural in-word to refer to "a homosexual male Rainbow" and that the phrase "Welcome home," also later common in gay liberationist Radical Faerie gathering parlance, was also part of Rainbow Gathering tradition.[88] Further, Milo Pyne and several Short Mountain archival records indicate that a number of the Southeastern gay liberationists attended regional Rainbow Gatherings in the 1980s, setting up "faerie camps"; it's just not clear when this overlap began.[89] Either

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[87] For example, see "Rainbow Gatherings," *Improve Your Knowledge, Blogspot,* December 19, 2015, accessed Nov. 8, 2017, https://doyouknow00.blogspot.com/2015/12/rainbow-gatherings.html and "Rainbow Gathering Festival," *American Festivals,* June 21, 2017, http://www.americafestivals.com/2017/06/rainbow-gathering-festival.html. I could not confirm this information, but it is widely circulated on such sites.

[88] Niman, 240 and 247. For an analysis of Radical Faerie usage of the phrase "Welcome Home" for its settler colonial dimensions, see Scott Lauria Morgensen, "Arrival at Home: Radical Faerie Configurations of Sexuality and Place," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 15, no. 1 (2009): 67-96. Morgensen doesn't consider the Rainbow lineage of the phrase in his article; I doubt its addition would impact his argument much, though, other than to place the Radical Faerie gathering culture in a longer history of countercultural land relations which reproduced settler colonial frames.

[89] Pyne, ibid; *Short Mountain Goatzette* (Summer 1985), 4. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University,

way, both forms of *gatherings* saw the rural as a space to practice an everyday which depended on other relations and economies than urban ones, cities being understood as thoroughly conditioned by capitalist features like competition, violence, and private property. In fact, although Running Water was privately owned, by Wilson, after the 1978 gatherings, the culture of those gatherings would lead to better efforts to collectivize the rural space.

In *RFD* #17, in a section headed by the phrase "Southern Celebrations," Michael Glover of Norfolk, Virginia, wrote of arriving at Running Water late for the June 16-18 weekend gathering. He remembered the drive "seemed like a several-hour trip into nowhere": "Around us the blue darkness itself seemed asleep, as though in turning off that interstate we had moved into another kind of world. The quiet calm land began its healing work without our noticing, simply by being with us, surrounding us in its silent beauty."[90] He recorded how uneasy he felt, knowing this was a gathering for "sissies" and "faggots," words he had felt as stinging epithets or simply unimaginable to him as a gay man. As he and his friend set up their tent in the dark, on the angled grounds, and eventually lay down to search for sleep, they seemed to perform their own version of "A Ritual to Read to Each Other": "my friend and I holding each other as we lay on the side of the hill, looking at the stars and listening to the quiet."

But, by the end of the weekend, Glover began to explore the possible sissie and/or faggot within himself. The men at Running Water were both familiar and unique sorts:

Atlanta. This issue mentions several Short Mountain Faeries setting up "faerie camps" at the 1985 Rainbow Gathering in Mark Twain National Forest in Missouri.

[90] Glover, in "Southern Celebrations," *RFD* #17, Fall 1978, centerfold. . Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta. The descriptions and summaries in this and the next paragraph are taken from Glover's account.

about 30 "gentle men, long-haired, short-haired," "from Louisiana, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Maine, New Mexico, Georgia" but also "from not so far away, long-haired mountain folks, men who knew what they saw when they walked through the woods, discovering a rare lily or something good to eat." The gentleness the men shared seemed to cross geographies or countercultural status. They did ordinary and playful things – chopped wood, cooked, roamed the woods, showered in the sun, spat seeds at each other, laughed, and sang. But, sharing these activities as "gentle men," as men who dared to air their attractions to each other, as men who worked on themselves in response to regional lesbians' charge, as men who experimented with open caring – that felt new.

As Englebert remembers it, the Running Water gathering built on the print connections *RFD* had enabled but strengthened and electrified them: These were "people living very far apart and [who] needed to have the support and acknowledgement for who they were as brilliant and earth-centered people *where they were* [italics mine]."[91] He elaborates on the experience of this connection, insisting, "THAT was where the real networking happened, because you're standing in a circle and here are these incredible beings and NObody is ordinary, they are ALL extraordinary … and you wanted to connect with every one of them." The gathering emphasized magical difference between the attendees as they occupied everyday reality. Englebert sums up the event's affective tenor as one of "wonderment," remembering thinking, after seeing many of the men flossing in the kitchen late at night, "These were people who cared for their bodies, and that was the kind of people I wanted to be around – not careLESS people."

[91] Englebert, ibid. The quotes and descriptions in this paragraph come from this interview.

Taking the risks to show that care to each other was a central part of the event. Glover wrote of seeing "two men in pain working on trouble within their friendship – other men gently holding them and talking quietly, me a little scared and overwhelmed at what they were trying to do, what they were doing. I'd never heard men talk to each other that way before: healing, nurturing, softly holding on to each other: strong womantraits, and here men were doing it, too."[92] Hayes remembers the final "goodbye" circle on Sunday and how one man fell, "sobbing," and how Dimid broke the circle to simply hold him, despite the fact that he himself "was not a particularly demonstrative person."[93] Finding ways to perform simple affective, hands-on care for each other was experimental and experiential for them. Short Mountain's Gabby Haze would attend the second gathering and bring his children, incidentally giving many men the opportunity to perform direct childcare for the first time. Hayes says that the rural location facilitated such experiments: "The remoteness of its being in a non-urban environment was disarming in a good way" because everyone was "open" and "approachable" and they didn't have to "play the dance of cruising" as they would in an urban gay bar. Looking back, he frames the event as men "taking the charge from the women, men stepping into an unknown with each other … and being blown away by what we found with each other."

Despite the examples of lesbian-feminist culture, of countercultural communes and Rainbow Gatherings, of New Left coalition work, Wilson says the gay liberationist men themselves "didn't have a model": "There were no elders. We were all twenty-somethings. We just got together, sat in a circle, and created all that stuff that we now

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[92] Glover, ibid.
[93] Hayes, ibid. This and the other quotes in this paragraph come from Hayes' interview.

take advantage of today, like heart circles."[94] Wilson, Hayes, and Englebert all remember the 1978 Running Water Gatherings as the start of "Faerie" culture. Wilson says that "The New Orleans Sissies were there … well, the Radical Faerie thing we invented separately here from what Harry Hay and the Radical Faeries on the West Coast did. We were very separate at that point. We were unaware of each other." Englebert recalls that attendees were uniquely experienced in the "organization of 'alternativeness' and putting it into practice."[95] Part of that organization was the circles. He says there were "heart circles" in which everyone would introduce themselves and speak vulnerably and caringly, but there were also circles on political and spiritual topics, and even circles just for singing – a practice which seemed to physically expand the chest, heart, and throat with vocalized feeling. The highly affective gatherings were as corporeal as they were emotional, improvising the kinds of non-masculinist modes of relating which Melba'son had newly come in his journal to describe as *sissie*.

Wilson concedes, though, that, while the Southeastern gay liberationist network was mostly separate from Harry Hay and the others who would form the West Coast Radical Faeries, they were remarkably similar culturally. Likely, this was at least partly because of attendees from Lavender Country, from the Pacific Northwest. One such attendee was Charlie Murphy -- newly relocated to Philadelphia -- a gay liberationist musician who would just a few years later record "Burning Times," a song which would politically catalyze the feminist witchcraft movement. Glover remembers Murphy playing on the Running Water farmhouse porch, and a "Nelson" playing piano.[96]

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[94] Wilson, ibid. This and the next quote are from Wilson's interview.
[95] Englebert, ibid.
[96] Glover, ibid.

Englebert said Murphy's presence and music infused the gathering with a sense of "ritual, goddess, earth-worship energy," but also that that spiritual perspective wasn't the only one by far.[97] Englebert himself had already embraced Zen Buddhism and enjoyed how it depended so little on ceremony, the latter of which was so typical of his boyhood Catholicism and of the emerging US witchcraft rituals. In fact, he remembers that he wouldn't attend gathering rituals afterwards because he couldn't help snickering at them, a humor he would later share with his friend Perlie. Wilson also remembers Eastern esoteric spiritualities – including yoga and meditation practices – being common and that Russ Cravens (later known as "Raven Wolfdancer") explored his own Native American background, sharing what he knew of some of those traditions at the gatherings.[98]

Faygele Ben Miriam was also there. Around the time of the 1977 Chapel Hill Conference for Lesbians and Gay Men, Faygele had relocated to Efland, North Carolina, with his mother Miriam. Wilson recalls attending that conference and sleeping on Miriam's floor alongside about thirty other gay men.[99] Before moving from the West Coast, Faygele had secured funding from a Seattle arts organization to sustain the flagging *RFD* and brought the magazine with him to the Southeast. At the Running Water gathering, the attendees decided that their network could give *RFD* a home. Hayes, having met Ben Miriam at the Wolf Creek conference, already knew him for his generous and anarchistic spirit. Sharing his politics with his Jewish mother, Faygele was understood by everyone to be a "red diaper baby". Hayes offers a nuanced description: Ben-Miriam was "drawn to these newer definitions [of politics]" and "he wasn't wed to

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[97] Englebert, ibid.
[98] Wilson, ibid.
[99] Ibid.

hard politics but felt empowered and impassioned about being a political person, about being a political animal."[100] As he had in Chapel Hill and Atlanta, he used the circles to challenge those at Running Water to work through their privileges as white men, to analyze the dynamics of gender and race.

But, such positions hardly capture all that the political Faygele was. Hayes says that he was also fond of baking loaves of bread for gatherings, that he was "a big presence, very outlandish, wore skirts a lot … [or] he'd always be naked."[101] Hayes, Wilson, and Englebert associate him with "push" – "pushy," a "pusher," as "always pushing, an instigator".[102] Englebert comments that "he was famous for not being compromising about being sexual."[103] He remembers one ritual, a variation on the Reclaiming "spiral dance" in which the men, holding hands, spiraled into a knot and then reversed the spiral, each man kissing the next until the spiral was opened. In that ritual he remembers Faygele shoving his tongue down Englebert's throat, an act which the latter found incredibly pushy but also inflected by Ben-Miriam's coming from "a fabulous place" of sincere open-ness, an honest wish for everyone to be free. Faygele and Murphy clearly imbued the Southeastern gay liberationist network with a West Coast faggot flavor that would persist in both regions' future cultures. But, in the space of the Appalachian gatherings, faggot culture would mix with a complementary sissie subjectivity; with a nascent culture around nurturing, caring "gentle men;" with non-Western spiritual practices; and with a sense of temporary rural dwelling drawn from the Rainbow Gatherings.

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[100] Hayes, ibid.
[101] Ibid.
[102] Hayes, ibid.; Wilson, ibid.; Englebert, ibid.
[103] Englebert, ibid. This and the next quote are from this interview.

Also, as a rural event contrasted with conferences by its emphases on affective care work and by its anarchistic lack of planned structure, the gathering both learned and diverged from the Wolf Creek and Atlanta conferences. In that it posed liberationist work not as masculine intellectual labor, it followed a direction opened by Oglesby's socialist-feminist critique of the Faggots & Class Struggle Conference. It accommodated and borrowed from West Coast faggot practices as performed by Murphy and Ben Miriam even as it fleshed out a sissie counterpoint. For example, Englebert remembers, "We had just had a circle where … Dimid had had a skirt on – a really gorgeous long hippie skirt – and it blew my mind because here was a guy in a skirt not trying to look like a woman," stripping away cultural layers to show "it was just fabric".[104] This sissie affective model became a crucial part of these Southeastern gay liberationists' answers to the Atlanta lesbians' charge. And, the rural became a place where they could disarm the urban structures of global capitalism which propped up care*less* masculinities, a place where they could practice an everyday full of improvised care, a place where they would never "miss their star".

If we recall that the Georgia GLF had framed the gay ghetto as a psychological rather than a physical terrain, we may get a better sense of what this gay liberationist gathering was designed to be. If we remember that homosexuality had only been removed from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders a scant few years before, and if we recall the centrality in Atlanta of lesbian and gay counseling services like Karuna and Tempo – and Abbott's work with those service networks -- we can understand how important it was for lesbians and gays to reclaim the psychological

[104] Ibid.

as a tool for themselves. In some ways, this importance was already reflected in the wide practice of consciousness-raising and in the experiments with a liberationist psychological model of the kind I have shown. And if -- maybe especially in the Southeast -- the geography of the urban ghetto spoke less and less to lesbian and gay movements which were also rural and transnational, then maybe the scale of the mind was in some ways more appropriate. The psyche was an affective dimension of special concern.

But, for a culture whose sense of self was androgyne, collective (not discrete and singular), and materialist, the psychological had to be understood in other affective terms, as connecting *bodies* – not merely as thoughts secluded within individual skulls. It is precisely here, in our attempts to re-vision the Running Water Gathering, that it is helpful to return to Broughton's *The Bed.* If we remember how the filmmaker/poet purposefully confuses sexuality with bodily care, especially across socially constructed difference (remember the white businessman attentively bathing the African American woman), then we understand how deeply committed these gay liberationists were to finding ways for men to express corporeal care. For them, a politics not rooted in immediate concrete care for your comrades was a merely theoretical politics bound to wither in arid intellectual formality and rhetorics of obligation.

The city was understood as a concrete place which shaped and disciplined bodies, conditioning what was possible, directing people down gridded streets, choreographed by yellow lines and flashing lights. This was akin to the everyday experience of the city which Michel de Certeau would describe in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1980 [French]; 1984 [English]). Certeau would argue, though, that everyday city dwellers

would develop tactics to defy the strategies of the city – for example, finding alley shortcuts to stump the over-riding logic of street grids.[105] Such tactics required practice: keeping an eye out for openings, clearing paths, learning to climb and sidestep between buildings. Attendees at Rainbow Gatherings and Running Water Farm would likewise see crossing urban-rural divides, moving in and out of the country, as tactics requiring practice. For the Southeastern gay liberationists, with their lesbian-feminist charge, leaving the city also opened space for them to improvise affective connectivity outside their capitalist conditioned masculinities. They couldn't simply decide to abandon one set of practices and pick up another; they had to leave the walls which propped up the old practices, get together with likeminded "gentle men" to improvise new ones, and strategize how to make such fledgling practices sustainable once they returned to the city.

We can imagine that gay liberationists might have been supported in these efforts by finding alternate masculinities among the Appalachians. Among their number was Running Water neighbor Stokes Ledford, who was "delightful". These were men whom Glover remembers being among the Running Water attendees – "longhairs" familiar with foraging food and flowers, the forest's "bread and roses". Neither Pyne nor Wilson remembers Appalachians as anything other than helpful to the counterculturalists in their midst. As historian Williams has indicated, in 1970s Appalachia, activists, counterculturalists, folk craft enthusiasts, and locals had settled into a largely amicable socio-cultural overlap. Possibly, this developing overlap accounts at least partially for how easily even liberationists outside the region began to adopt hillbilly stylistics. Even though attendees, like Glover, who were leaving the conditioned material familiarity of

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[105] Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 3rd edition (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011).

town and city, may have felt like they were taking a "trip into nowhere," into a kind of geographic blank slate, they surely knew from relative locals like Englebert, from back-to-the-landers like Pyne and Wilson, and from activists like Hayes and even Gross (who was back in Atlanta), that Running Water was actually a long-deserted farm in a region which had been wracked by the same global capitalist system which was organizing their New South cities for profits.

Upon returning to Atlanta from Running Water in June 1978, Abbott wrote a poem about his experience titled "Ascent, Lament, and Admonition".[106] The poem opens,

waking up the next morning
the dirt of Roan Mountain still on my feet
I let go of one long sigh
not of relief
but resignation to the fact
I am back. (1-6)

The poem is an aubade, a morning love poem which often depicts the parting of lovers at dawn. The harshness of his dawning realization that he is back in the city is accentuated by the echoing "k" sounds: "waking," "fact," and "back". These sharp sounds puncture the softer, more rounded tones elsewhere in the first stanza. The resignation to fact, though, is short-lived. He knows exactly what to do to return to his lover/s:

I lay in my bed
allowing the city to soften
and fade away beneath my closing eyes
hastening my return (7-10)

By nearly closing his eyes again, he forces a temporal reverse, tracking the sun backwards to the previous days, through his sleeping dreams and back to the gathering

[106] Abbott, *Mortal Love: Selected Poems* (Liberty, TN: RFD Press, 1999). 41.

which persists through dissolving memories and dream fragments. He is literally "remembering forgotten dreams". In folklore, fairies are often described as existing right under our noses, all around us, but obscured by a veil which some can learn to part by liminal practices (like half-closing your eyes), at in-between times (like dusk and dawn), and in in-between places (like boundaries between major geographical features such as town and country). In Abbott's poem, the speaker demonstrates new knowledge that the city and mountain occupy a similarly overlapping space which can be accessed by half-closing the eyes, letting the city's sharp lines "soften". Once the urban-rural divide has been crossed, realizing their persistent connection is possible.

Re-membering forgotten dreams, he climbs back through the night to arrive at the solstice, the longest day of the year, back at Running Water, which he represents metaphorically as a re-birth, a return to the "mother mountain":

up the moonlit mother mountain
up through honeysuckle-scented, star-silvered
    hems of clouds
to a morning of running water, birdsong
and a bright sun climbing to its solstice (11-14)

Whereas the material details of the city (where the poem opens) are withheld, those of the rural gathering overflow their assigned line, forcing the break and wrap-around of line 13 with their sensory abundance: flower and star, scent and color. Lucky line 13 is the only such long line in the poem. As such, it stands out, as an excess of detail flooding into the "real" urban time of the poem – like a flower in a sidewalk crack or a wolf crossing a city park.

Having ascended mountain and day, back-masking twilight, he finds his lovers, his "brothers," who

… hold me
turn me loose, set me free
there will I be heard, listen
and in concert sing
to the opening of hearts
and the laying down of burdens (15-20)

Just as city and country seem to now overlay each other, paired actions like holding and turning loose, being heard and listening, listening and singing seem to hinge on each other, linked by line breaks, repetitions, and little commas. Here are all the connective practices Running Water gathering attendees recall, forming a collective aubade, rather than a coupleist one. Interestingly, line 16 popularly evokes the Merle Haggard country music hit "Big City," even though the song would not be released until 1982. In that song, the singer begs the "dirty old city" – associated with over-work and no pay or play -- to "turn me loose, set me free / somewhere in the middle of Montana". Where the Californian Haggard sets his working-class pastoral in the mountains and prairies of a very big Western state, Abbott, of course, sets his socialist-feminist one on the actual Appalachian Roan Mountain. But the roughly contemporary sentiments are similar.

Except for that gay socialist-feminist part. This is no escape from the city, but a practical realization of urban-rural connection. In the very next line, in the next stanza, with no period or capital letter to separate syntactical geography,

the telephone rings
I have no charm to stop it
and so I am dispatched
to walk the city streets
expected to be the same
but I am now a better lover
my gentleness refined, aligned
and dangerous (21-28)

In fact, as we reach the poem's period-less end, we scan upwards to realize there is not a single period in the whole poem. All the sentences are connected, ineluctably intimate, rolling over one another. Just as city and country are tangled; just as waking and sleeping are tangled. Fact and dream. Night and day. Past and present. All wound in the same sheets. In its erotic rusticity, Abbott's "Ascent, Lament and Admonition" finds through the lens of an affective psychology that the Running Water gay liberationist scale is not the urban ghetto, but the wider region, which allows the recognition that the connected city *and* country have their parts to play in the U.S. bid for global capitalist ascendancy. Further, any socialist politics would benefit from frustrating the capitalist coordination of urban and rural spaces.

The necessary political subjectivity which the Running Water gay liberationists saw emerging from this very regional analysis was the gentle lover, the dreamy builder of connections – defiant connections which the divisive system would rather not see surface. So, instead of pining for the mountain, the poem's speaker carries a rural gentleness with him into the city streets, measuring the danger of his liberationist connectivity. Given the FBI's recent use of informants and counterintelligence to sow division between radicals and, on the other hand, to sew bonds between regional homophobic racists, the power of such connective affect would be hard to deny. Power was widely implemented by strategic connections and disconnections, after all. Building on such new affective realizations, it would be in a city "deeper south" that regional liberationists would next exercise sissie tactics as applications of the mountain practices developed at Running Water.

4 | Delta Pulse: Sissie Desire & Terror in New Orleans, 1977-1979

Like Abbott's disoriented waking in Atlanta, Dimid Hayes' late June return from Running Water Farm to New Orleans was not easy. The Louisiana Sissies in Struggle (LaSiS) now numbered four, and the other three did not know what to make of Hayes' wide-eyed and refined gentleness; it didn't smack of sissie struggle. Hayes remembers that "I wasn't kicked out but I was asked to leave," so he found a room – on Royal Street, deeper in the French Quarter -- to rent for a month or so.[1] Ever a bridge person, he dedicated himself to reconciling the ways of the sissie and the gentle man, of struggle and care, of delta city and mountain farm.

To seal his commitment, he got a tattoo. He explains, "At this point gay/queer liberation was still very tentative and it was always a possibility that there would be new round-ups or whatever, raids and things – you know, life felt very tentative. And this was sort of like doing a tattoo or a mark that I would never be able to remove and couldn't go back."[2] He put a pansy on his chest, with the pink triangle, inverted from its point-downward Holocaust orientation to an upright pyramid – a reversal which gestured towards possible stability. Above that were the first two letters of his chosen name ("Di") with an olive-leaf border and a sun and crescent moon, which "symbolized the masculine and the feminine and the integration of those into the self". Tending both his Louisiana and Appalachian connections, Dimid ultimately took other Louisiana Sissies with him to the fall 1978 Running Water Farm gathering and, with them, secured the New Orleans collective's editorial responsibilities for *RFD* #18, the Winter 1978 issue.

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[1] Dimid Hayes, interview with the author, August 3-4, 2016.
[2] Ibid. The description and quotes in this paragraph come from my interview with Hayes.

Many of my interviewees credit LaSiS with shaping the specifically "radical" spirit of the Southeastern gay liberationists who had originally networked at Running Water Farm. In this chapter I describe that spirit as it was forged from late 1977 to mid-1979. I open with a return to Melba'son's journal – continued for his first month in New Orleans – to understand how he adapted his Arkansas sissie orientation to his new city. Next, I characterize three key affective themes of the LaSiS refrain. To describe how they oriented their Arkansas collectivism to Running Water rural-urban connection, I first analyze Hayes' "Letter to Action" with Stacy Brotherlover's "Sissie Networking". Second, I read the *RFD* playlet "Solidarity Forever" for how LaSiS situated their subjectivity regionally by dramatically connecting local educational activism to broader issues of Southeastern development, racial integration, and spiking homophobia. Third, I interpret sissie "man"ifestoes to characterize how they conceived their gender performance as a highly corporeal and emotional response to mounting terror.

I finish the chapter by arguing that 1979 was a year the sissies affectively experienced as an accelerated gay *liberal* crisis of a national scale, a year bracketed by the November 1978 assassination of Harvey Milk and by the October 1979 March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights. I describe a very emotional poetics of sissie terror characterized by a chaotic telescoping of temporal and spatial proportions. This highly affective experience of gay liberal crisis both fired and tried the gay liberationism of the Southeast network, particularly LaSiS. I outline the frenetic political and cultural activity of the collective during the first half of 1979 which reflected the above poetics only to end with an account of how regional sissie attentions were routed towards the end of the year to a decidedly national scale. One of the events in this redirection of the sissie

refrain was the 1979 Spiritual Conference for Radical Faeries in Benson, Arizona – an event which would lead to Sissies' embracing a new refrain: that of the Faerie. This chapter, then, starts with the fast crafting of the Southeastern sissie in the Big Easy, only to end with that sissie's stepping into the shadow of Faerie wings as the decade flew to a close.

Desire Street: Melba'son's Finding Middle-Class Sissie Opportunity in New Orleans, Fall 1977

When Oglesby and Thornton moved to New Orleans in 1973, just before that summer's UpStairs Lounge fire, they found little evidence of the gay liberationism they sought. What they found instead was a bar culture run by a hand-full of gay entrepreneurs with little interest in gay politics. According to Goss, MCC minister Troy Perry was greeted by that same culture when he flew in from L.A., prompting his efforts to spark gay liberationist fire in an apparent vacuum. Newcomers also found a rich tradition of drag performance and a system of routine police street harassment of gays and "longhairs". Oglesby, who had read John Rechy's *City of Night* (1963) as a teenager, might have understandably connected the Crescent City to Los Angeles, San Francisco, and New York due to that novel's treatment of all four cities as part of a networked urban hustler economy. He would find none of the other three cities' 1970s gay liberationism, though, when he and Thornton arrived.

The city had figured spectacularly in the countercultural imagination, however. It had been the destination of the two motorcyclist drop-outs in *Easy Rider* (1969), and the end of that movie offered a view of the city's cemeteries and Mardi Gras parades through the protagonists' LSD-tinted eyes. Having driven from the Southwest towards the

Southeast, the characters played by lead actors Dennis Hopper and Peter Fonda traced a very similar trajectory to both the *City of Night* narrator and MCC minister Perry. New Orleans seemed to pull California east. Earlier, in 1964, the British musical act the Animals had recorded "House of the Rising Sun," a traditional song about a New Orleans house which ruined youth at the hands of some vague sin – either sex, gambling, or substances, depending on the version. Previously recorded by Appalachian and Southern delta folk artists -- black and white, male and female -- the Animals' "House of the Rising Sun" made the standard one of the earliest folk-rock crossover hits, thereby fixing the city in the imaginations of the late 60s youth movement which was so fueled by folk-rock hybrids.[3] The song's very lyrics and folk performance history also demonstrated the common-ness of a Southern mountain-delta migration pattern which included the crossing of color and gender lines.

In the 70s, such regional mountain-delta migrations were also undertaken by gays and lesbians, evidenced by Oglesby and Thornton's following word of lesbian-separatist rural communities from New Orleans to the Ozarks, a pattern of lesbian migration which Brock Thompson has shown persisted into the following decades.[4] Although the Big Easy had figured prominently as a crossroads in countercultural and even same-sex sexual migration routes, by most accounts, no gay liberationist roots had been planted in the city. Oglesby and Thornton found none in 1973, and Melba'son found very little in 1977.

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[3] For an overview of the song's history, see Dave Thompson, *Bayou Underground: Tracing the Mythical Roots of American Popular Music* (Toronto, ON: ECW Press, 2010).
[4] Thompson, *The Un-Natural State*.

Goss shows how the city was actually hostile in the wake of the UpStairs Lounge fire. Even successful gay entrepreneurs turned blind eyes to homophobic violence as they built a gentrifying infrastructure which Knopp documented in the next decades. Louisiana historian Alecia Long has likewise commented that, given the city's current reputation for sexual permissiveness, it is important to remember that this hasn't always been the case.[5] Whereas Goss viscerally places the hostility at the urban level, Long stresses how critical it is to understand that systemic violence of the period and region was networked, between cities and at different political scales. Reporting on evidence from her current research, Long contends that mid-century New Orleans leaders set against the visible congregation of homosexuals and crossdressers lobbied the state to write a 1961 law prohibiting the rental of property for "obscene purposes".[6] Essentially, the city appealed to the state to write laws which would give teeth to local harassment. Long sees this strategy as consistent with how regional White Citizens Councils had conferred with each other in different cities to develop "best practices" in undermining desegregation laws. Although local institutions like the New Orleans ones Goss blames seem every bit as insidious as he describes, Long would argue that understanding them as networked within a broader system of oppression is important.

In fact, her own current research centers New Orleans gay businessman Clay Shaw, famously tried as a conspirator in the assassination of JFK. Attempting to re-write the events surrounding Shaw's trial as an important part of U.S. LGBT rights history,

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[5] Long, "Southern Queer Histories" (roundtable presentation, Organization of American Historians, New Orleans, LA, April 6-9, 2017).

[6] Long summarizes some of these arguments in a profile with local journalist Ruth Laney in "The Trouble with Tight Pants," *Country Roads Magazine* (September 23, 2014). http://countryroadsmagazine.com/art-and-culture/history/the-trouble-with-tight-pants/

Long frames his fate as part of a "decades-long construction of a Louisiana legal regime made up of local ordinances and state laws designed to limit the visibility of gay and lesbian people [which] amplified the peculiarities of New Orleans politics in the late 1960s".[7] She further relays how, after Shaw died from cancer in August 1974 in his home at the edge of the French Quarter, his civil suit against his accuser, district attorney Garrison, was ultimately abandoned in accordance with state law and with the support of a U.S. Supreme Court decision. In the eyes of the three dissenting judges, that decision neglected to extend the spirit of national civil rights laws intended to protect the rights of "disfavored groups".[8] New Orleans gays and lesbians witnessed Shaw's very body fought over when, as Long shows, the coroner -- a friend of Garrison's -- demanded a senseless autopsy. In just such moments, any nascent community must have felt threatened to death --and beyond -- by forces at the urban, state, and national levels. As Long so clearly shows, the regional racism and heterosexism of the period operated at the entangled multiplicity of scale which liberationists were intimately learning. No wonder, then, when Dimid returned to these very streets from Running Water Farm, he would think of gay liberation as "tentative."

Such was the New Orleans Melba'son came to in fall 1977, one haunted by the bodies of Clay Shaw and MCC minister Bill Larson. It was a city whose open homophobia was composed by city-state collaborations. By returning to Melba'son's journal, we once again develop a narrative of sissie life in a different place, see how he translated the lessons learned from Mulberry House to the Crescent City. Specifically, we see how he framed New Orleans as a city with unique opportunity for a middle-class

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[7] Long, "'Death Delights to Serve the Living,'" 391.
[8] Ibid., 399.

sissie refrain. At first, it was the last-minute lure of the King Tut exhibit which drew Melba'son further south. As the rest of Mulberry House seems to have thought, this reported motivation -- without feeling com*plete*ly true -- is a story which fit Melba'son's taste for the dramatic: a regal death with spiritual overtones of immortality set in a delta city. Melba'son himself felt conflicted. On October 7th, he wrote, "Is this an extended adventure I have embarked upon? or an extended death wish? What am I doing here?"[9] We can see that, while he may have counted this trip to New Orleans his last pilgrimage, he also knowingly put himself in the way of a possible rescue, and a re-birth of sorts.

He mentions the chance of staying with a "Nick and Terry," friends of Thornton's. Nick and Terry had visited Fayetteville earlier in the summer of 1977, and Melba'son was intrigued – specifically by their combination of liberationist commitment, class mobility, and cultural interests. In his August 7th entry, back in Fayetteville, he had written of the how the pair's working-class background informed their politics but also their sense of vocation: Terry was already a teacher, and Nick was studying languages to work with the poor who didn't speak English. Written just a couple of months before his suicide letter and disappearance to New Orleans, Melba'son's entry reveals an identification with Nick and Terry which he no longer felt with the others from Mulberry House. The New Orleans couple's working-class commitments to a traditional education *and* liberationist consciousness surely gave him hope that middle- and working-class perspectives could be bridged. In fact, trying to realize that hope would become Melba'son's sissie work in New Orleans. He immersed himself in manual labor.

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[9] Williams, Unpublished Personal Journal, 1977-1978. Private collection of Dimid Hayes. All the quotes by Williams in this section come from this journal.

He did end up staying with Nick and Terry. Nick got him a job as a dishwasher at the restaurant where he was a cook: Tortilla Flats, a Southwestern-inflected Mexican restaurant in the Quarter. Nick and Terry lived Uptown, and the Flats was on the far side of the Quarter, near the Old Mint and the Marigny, just a block from the Mississippi River. That meant Melba'son spent much of his "free" time walking the length of the Quarter or riding the St. Charles streetcar, which ran Uptown. He recorded that the walk across the Quarter took him about an hour and the streetcar ride about thirty minutes. So, during his first month in New Orleans, he spent about three hours per day in transit – most of the rest at work or in sleep. Nick and Terry were gone nearly as much, at work or school all the time themselves. Since he rarely saw the couple, his anticipated intimacy with them was re-routed to developing an intimacy with the city and his new work.

Melba'son's journal reveals just how thoroughly he was occupied with orienting his body during this month. No mere self-consciousness, this was a political position. On October 7th, he wrote, "At times … I wld think that perhaps what I am doing is attempting to shorten the ten years that Chairperson Mao says it takes for 'intellectuals' like me to *fanshen*." Literally translated, *fanshen* refers to turning over, as one does when lying down, but in Maoist cultural politics, it also referred to a revolutionary change in consciousness, from the perspective, say, of the bourgeois urban intellectual to that of the peasant.[10] Such ideological work was not presented as a quick change of heart or as a logical shift; instead, it was conveyed as a very slow somatic re-orientation, a very

[10] For more on *fanshen*, refer to William Hinton, *Fanshen: A Documentary of Revolution in a Chinese Village*, new edition (New York City, Monthly Review Press, 2008). First published in 1966, this first-hand account of the Chinese Revolution surely shaped many U.S. socialists' and liberationists' view of Maoism.

deliberate bodily turn, which could take up to a decade. (This conviction lay behind Mao's forcibly re-locating urban students to the countryside to learn, by hard work, from the peasants.) Feeling himself old among young liberationists, Melba'son didn't think he had ten years to become a sissie; he hoped his dive into New Orleans and into its working-class life would leapfrog him into that revolutionary subjectivity which he had been unable to achieve with Mulberry House.

As usual, though, he was wracked by self-doubt. In the same entry, he wondered whether his strategy of throwing himself into working-class labor was "just as liberal -- & as foolish – as Ralph Ellison's painting himself w walnut juice in order to experience black oppression." Likely meaning to refer to John Howard Griffin, author of *Black Like Me* (1961), Ellison was surely also on Melba'son's mind, as he struggled with both the heightened visibility and *in*visibility he experienced as his body became newly classed. On October 10th, he noted how his clothing and work made him invisible to the customers at the restaurant, how they would never move aside when he was in their path: "Cld it be they didn't see me at all? … Eventually I began to feel like the sudras in India, who dare not even let their shadow fall across that of a Brahmin." Ironically, this new invisibility resulted from the ways his body was clearly marked by clothing and act. Even his skin began to wear his working-class occupation: On October 15th, he mentioned the telltale detergent burns on his arms, which he nightly treated with Vaseline.

Even so, he didn't imagine that he was literally becoming working-class with such a short experience. As he reflected in his October 7th entry, he doubted whether he would ever even be able to share Thornton's or Oglesby's classed "pain" or "anger" but

that "perhaps at best I cld acquire a deeper analysis & spout a more correct political line." On the other hand, he felt himself increasingly connected to his kitchen co-workers, caring about how he made their days easier and becoming proud of the space he helped keep in the name of that care. On October 16th, he wrote, "When I close up at nite, I am as proud of the way that kitchen looks as I was of the most difficult index I ever did." In a November 9th entry addressed to Thornton, Melba'son wrote

> I am in New Orleans to learn & one of the first things I am learning here is how to care. It may not seem like much, but I care whether the buspeople have enough silverware & the cooks have enough plates. And I find that they care, too. Last weekend when I insisted on the right to take a break after the last dinner is served, before beginning the pots & the final dishes, the workers stood behind me & management had to back down. … It has something to do w my learning how to care about you.

Trying to find other ways of expressing care than words, he was discovering intimacy within a shared context of manual labor. This was important to him because, just months before, he had asserted in the same journal that crucial class politics had to be led by a newly gendered commitment to mutual care. In New Orleans, he echoed that position; on October 8th, he wrote, "We need to be strong and compassionate. We must learn to struggle with love."

In the masculine working-class context of the restaurant kitchen, though, it was always important that he hold tight to his sissie identity. Melba'son felt strongly as ever that the way to politically apply compassion and love required undoing hidebound masculinities across all classes. In recounting one of his first days at work, he carefully plotted his gendered location not only in the workplace, but also in the city and the world:

> The hardest part of my job is enduring the constant macho energy of the het cooks. The kitchen faces out onto Barracks St, across from the Old Mint & around the corner from where the last streetcar named Desire is parked, & has a large screened window in front of the stove & prepping table. (The sinks face the wall; I stand w my back to the window & the cooks behind me.) The tourists can see us, if they choose to notice workers at all,

> but more often it is the cooks who see the tourists – particularly the female ones, about whom they comment constantly. Even Nick gets drawn into their male energy. Tho he never makes sexist comments about women, he sometimes comments on the men who pass by – 'just like one of the boys'. I say very little at all. When my brain & body are not on automatic from exhaustion, I am usually brooding over Mulberry House as I furiously scrub off baked-on beans from fake pewter serving dishes (made in Taiwan & bearing the inscription GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD – at $4.95 per serving!). (10/10/1977)

This passage is important for how it demonstrates the daily press of a territorial assemblage, the ways systemic layers exert wave-like pressure on laboring bodies. Melba'son is no less marked as a dishwasher by the detergent burns on his skin than he is by the sexual objectification voiced at his back by the all-male staff. In the space of the kitchen, not only is he not a cook, but he is also not a man, since he does not participate in the gender-defining sexual commentary. He is not a woman; he doesn't draw the sexual attention of his male co-workers. He is also not gay, like Nick, able to claim masculinity by voicing his own sexual objectifications; as a sissie, he refused objectifying sexual relations, trying instead to develop a sexuality of communicative exchange. He was acutely *not* one of the boys, instead pressed to the blank wall by the sexual talk in which he had no part. He was a dishwasher, quiet, with his eyes down on his work – and little else.

If his vision was limited, though, by the way he was cornered into his work, he still *felt* the presence of the larger city. From walking the Quarter daily, he was aware of his work address, a street name which evoked the city's military history: *Barracks*. He could feel the architectural form of the national economy by mentally remembering the location of the Old Mint nearby. Perhaps, knowing that the literal streetcar named "Desire" was parked around the corner was a balm of sorts. It remained as the shell left behind the title of another theatrical queer's work in the city, and it pointed not only

towards the desire he – like Emma Goldman – felt should be central to politics but also pointed, quite simply, to the New Orleans neighborhood which was itself named "Desire."

Even when cowed into focus on the material objects of his work -- the dishes -- Melba'son felt the press of the broader world. He obsessed over his unclear relationship with the Mulberry House he left behind. Struggling to return his focus back to his job, the markings on the cheap serving dishes sent his attention into broader orbits, reminding him that the dish in his hand was produced in Taiwan and bore a reminder of the ubiquity of Christianity, and hunger, and exploitative pricing. No matter how singular his position as dishwasher in the New Orleans restaurant kitchen felt, he could not escape awareness that his singularity was the product of global capitalist forces. The differing systemic scales were tangible in the moment of work. As we have seen with Finley's poem, awareness of global geographies bear a psychological intimacy.

This felt experience of being made a particular labor type and fit for a specific purpose, by diverse capitalist forces of different scales and media, *is* the experience of assemblage. But, Melba'son's sissie *refrain*, as such, improvised connections out of felt dissonances – especially those at the fissure lines between class, gender, and sexuality. He refused to be pinched into even the gay working-class masculinity which he saw Nick fitted to. Conveyed as a chance moment of inspiration, he wrote of his first day of work that "When Jim, the owner, introduced me to the cooks w the line, 'Give this man some work,' I immediately said that I wasn't a man, but a Sissie. Everyone laughed & no one got uptight. How different from the atmosphere I had left behind in Fayettenam!"

(10/10/2017).[11] Where his sissie experiences in Arkansas had been more domesticated – defined, aside from the experiences at the co-op, to the scale of the house and characterized primarily by radically re-working how one entered rooms and conversations – Melba'son in New Orleans learned to carry the Sissie into the everyday street. He mentioned urban gay men stopping him to question his choice to wear two earrings as opposed to one, or his choice to wear a Maoist red star. In his October 16th entry, he wrote, "When anyone, gay or het, compliments me on my earrings & calls me 'girl' or 'lady,' I smile sweetly & say, 'Thank you, but I'm not a girl (or lady). I'm a Sissie.' Chairperson Mao wld, I think, approve of my strategy, if not my tactics."

In Arkansas, Melba'son had found his and the other middle-class sissies' racial analysis under-developed. He had been unhappy with how, in the food co-op, his response to hippie racism had been to engage the white racists and the police more than his black co-workers. As a liberationist and sissie, he must have understood this as an important connective failure. New Orleans, then, must have presented itself as an opportunity to put some of those lessons about the racial frame of regional sissie politics into practice. In fact, in the context of his new city, it would have been impossible to represent socialist class politics with the iconography of the white male factory worker's body. New Orleans workers were people of color. When he saved up enough money, he decided to rent a poorly kept apartment from his gay boss – 3100 North Rampart Street, which was then considered part of the Lower Ninth Ward and now part of the Bywater neighborhood. Reflecting on his new place in the city, he wrote on October 25th,

I am learning what it means to be w-c poor in an American city. My neighbors in the 9th Ward are predominantly Black or Spanish (Mexican? Cuban? Puerto Rican? How racist

[11] This verbal collapse of Fayetteville, Arkansas, and Vietnam represents the confusion of global scale I have been referencing throughout, as well as a perspective of interior colonialism.

of me not to know). Very few Anglo faces are seen. And yet I feel no resentment of me here, & I feel no fear. News of the dishwasher at the Flats who wears earrings has spread thru the Quarter. And the workers in the Quarter – indeed, throughout the whole city – are black or Spanish.

In New Orleans, the figure at the heart of any local socialist politics would have to be a worker of color. As Melba'son carefully oriented himself to his new city, he didn't feel resentment or fear around his entry into the local working-class milieu as a white sissie, but it's important to note that he could also claim no familiarity or connection with his Lower Ninth Ward neighbors of color.

In that first month, he struggled to make any individual or group connection whatsoever. On October 10th, he wrote, "I've been here a week today & so far have met only one faggot: Nick. I've met lotsa homosexuals & one liberal gayman – Jim, the owner of Tortilla Flats. But he's a racist & very much a capitalist. It's too soon to get discouraged, of course, but I have little hope of finding (or starting) a faggot movement in New Orleans. This is a party town; my brothers here will dance their way into the concentration camp." This perceived absence of faggots and sissies curtailed much social opportunity but also dented his sex drive. On the 17th of that month, he mused on the downshift in his attraction and regretted the betrayal of his sissie sexual values by engaging in mechanical anonymous sex at a porn theater near the restaurant. In that entry, he itemized, "Once I got blown, & once I blew someone … . My guess is, it means that anonymous sex is less threatening, that I am afraid of being rejected by someone I have to relate to."

He got wind, though, that there was a gay baths in the Quarter and tried it out, noting in his October 22nd entry that, instead of taking the twenty-minute bus ride home after closing Tortilla Flats, he resolved to stay overnight in a room at the baths. He was

outraged at the cost ($7) but paid it anyway: "I lay down to sleep, leaving my door discreetly wide open. Eventually a beautiful black Sissie asked if I wanted any company. 'Sure,' I said. Those were the only words we spoke. But we made love." Given how reluctant he was to describe anyone else in New Orleans as a sissie, I speculate that, while Melba'son could see such a cross-racial mutuality as an index of authentic sissie relations, he was in no way equipped to consider it more than a graced moment, unable to imagine the possibility that his evening's lover might represent a larger sissie community of color. His account of this brief, sweet exchange makes me wonder whether, at this point, when standing at the color line, Melba'son is only able to look back over his shoulder to find fellow sissie *community* on the white side of things.

This reading gains traction when considered alongside an entry from the previous week in which he surprisingly characterized New Orleans as a middle-class city -- in contrast to San Francisco as a working-class one! (10/16/1977). Despite taking note of the place as a city full of black and Latino workers, he ironically classified the city by the white entrepreneurial "gaymen," like his boss Jim, those who made him feel isolated as a sissie. It is possible, then, that the 1970s perception of New Orleans as a gay liberationist vacuum was partly due to expectations of outsiders' finding gay liberationism only in white spaces -- even when in a city whose largest populations were people of color. It is also possible that it was the urban dynamic of very visible, liberal, white entrepreneurial "gaymen" within a city full of workers of color which framed New Orleans to Melba'son as a chance suited for middle-class sissies with socialist feminist convictions to roll up their sleeves and put their politics in action.

In October 1977, his newfound sissie spirituality was a source of energy and direction towards that vision. And he had no doubt that New Orleans was key to that process. In the October 15th journal entry, he referred to his travels South as happening in a "daze," saying that he felt "possessed": "I feel the Goddess has brought me here for a reason, & I trust that in time She will reveal it to me." He continued to conceive of self as spiritual and multiple, rather than biological and singular. He campily referenced multiple personality disorder as a way to describe his view of the soul, just without the sense of pathology: "Melba'son came to life on the trip down. It felt like Joann Woodward in *Three Faces of Eve*: all our personalities being merged at once! … Our name is Dennis Melba'son." His use of the plural pronoun demonstrates his refusal to accept the singular identity so important to capitalist labor formation and so central to Western concepts of psychological health.[12]

Further, as in Arkansas, this "Melba'son" soul who came to life, was an evolved sissie spirit – one who could move Dennis towards more intuitive revolutionary sissie behaviors. Presumably, it was Melba'son who guided Dennis in more inspired moments, like his good-humored refusals to be classed as man or woman and his graced connection to the black sissie at the baths. Dennis, now as Melba'son, began to notice that the New Orleans landscape gave him "symbols" to support his sissie intuitions. The most important one, which he referred to multiple times and called "ironic," was the prevalence of the word "desire". As a neighborhood and a street name, it appeared on the bus he rode to work ("DESIRE/FLORIDA") and on the storied "last" streetcar

[12] Melba'son's reference also opens the possibility of connecting feminist witchcraft concepts of the tripartite soul to anti-psychiatry movements.

("SPECIAL/DESIRE – which I feel is much closer to what Tennessee had in mind" [10/31/1977]).

He even practiced ritual – sex magic – to consecrate his home as a place dedicated to a sissie orientation. As he wrote in his October 23rd entry, Nick had given him some charms to remove any "alien spirits" from his new apartment; "And then I took off all my clothes, including my glasses and earrings, & traversed the four corners of each room while masturbating. When I came, I prayed to the Goddess for help & guidance, dedicating my sacred sexuality to Her, & swallowed the sperm. 3100 N. Rampart, New Orleans, is now sanctified faggot space. // Evoe!" I understand this ritual performance as a way for Melba'son to recognize sissie potential as operating at different geographic scales – his body, his apartment, the neighborhood, the desire-networked city, etc. – which mirror the different scales at which territorial assemblage itself operates. When he dedicated his body to sissie relational forms which perform care rather than masculine objectification, that care is returned – possibly in the form of co-workers' support for his need for a break or possibly in the form of a bus showing him "desire" when he most needed to remember it. This was the shape of his magic: "Melba'son" was the name for the place in himself where he kept the energy and vision necessary to enact his sissie politics day after day. And, as for Deleuze and Guattari, an amplified desire was crucial to realizing some other revolutionary mode of being.

The magic started to work. His dream of a sissie collective slowly began to materialize. His communications with Mulberry House were more understanding than he expected. His conviction that he had done the right thing grew: As a middle-class sissie, he needed to work on his class issues before he could fully contribute within a cross-class

collective. Dimid and Duane came to visit. Duane reported to the Arkansas Sissies that Dennis was "romanticizing [his] experience" in New Orleans (11/9/1977). In response, Melba'son framed Duane's critique as part of a habit sharpened at Mulberry House in which class analysis was treated as the only relevant lens and in which class was effectively defined as an absolute and un-bridgeable difference. Speaking directly to Dimid, he explained, "As I see it, it comes down to a matter of whether the w-c … are going to take seriously the struggles of you & me – two faggots <u>from</u> the m-c who are dedicated to revolutionary change" (11/9/1977). They had forgotten their unity in the process of struggle, but Melba'son implied that recovering that unity would involve the middle-class sissies' taking time apart to practice, and to demonstrate, their dedication to their socialist feminist politics.

Melba'son argued that New Orleans was the perfect place for the middle-class sissies to apply themselves. As he wrote to Thornton, "It has something to do w my learning how to care about you" (11/9/2017). Looking back to Dimid's visit the week before, he felt that the Goddess had graced them both: "… she began Her bounty on the nite of our festival, which the patriarchy calls Halloween" (11/8/2017). The next day, Dimid, Dennis, and Nick went to see the King Tut exhibit. Melba'son was disappointed that a statue of Anubis he had wanted to see wasn't on display, but he was awed by the figure of the goddess Selket. He remembered the golden pharaoh mask as "indescribable," exerting a magnetic pull, drawing both him and Dimid towards it from opposite sides of the display case. Having been separated for the entire tour, when they met, speechless before the death mask, Dennis broke into tears and Dimid held him. Afterward, Melba'son and Dimid went to Café Du Monde. They took some mescaline.

Dimid was already feeling attached to the city, and Melba'son wrote that "the du Monde became 'our place' bec Dean loved to hang out there & watch the people". It wouldn't be long after Dimid's return to Arkansas that he would decide to join Melba'son in New Orleans.

Roughly covering the months between the Wiccan holidays of Beltane and Samhain, Melba'son's now extended journal accounts for his transition from Arkansas to Louisiana. Through suicide attempt and name change, he re-tooled his understanding of the sissie refrain to fit his middle-class commitments to gay liberation and socialist feminism as they were shaped by his experiences as a dishwasher in New Orleans. In many ways, it was Melba'son's very bodily orientation in the Crescent City which lay the groundwork for the new urban sissie collective to come. He dedicated himself to working-class labor experience, to a deepened racial understanding of class, to somatic expressions of sissie gender in public streets, and spiritual means of managing his political energy, vision, and instinct. These affective practices would set a tenor that the future Louisiana Sissies would play with and against. In the next section, I narrate the formation of LaSiS before looking at Dimid's "Letter of Action" and Stacy Brotherlover's "Sissie Networking" as expressions of the Sissies' orienting themselves regionally through a "Southeast network" more than to the West Coast cultures they had before.

Mending a Regional Heart: Sissie Proposals for Getting the Rural and Urban Back Together

Dimid was the first to join Melba'son in New Orleans. Dimid was fresh from the 1978 Southeast Conference on Lesbians and Gay Men in Atlanta, where he had met

many of the other regionally scattered gay liberationists who had begun to expand their *RFD* network. Dimid presented at the conference, distributing a bibliography, with a section on "Sissie Effeminism," which would later be published in the Summer 1978 issue of *RFD* (#16).[13] Compiled by himself and Melba'son, this bibliographic work required an author – an occasion which led to the duo naming themselves the "Louisiana Sissies in Struggle" (LaSiS). A textual snapshot of how the fledgling LaSiS positioned themselves as sissies, the bibliography interestingly oriented the group bicoastally by most prominently anchoring them to West Coast and New York movements. This orientation would shift following the Running Water gatherings.

At the top was the *Morning Due* magazine report on the Faggots and Class Struggle conference, with specific reference to its "sissie manifesto". Perhaps this is not surprising, since, as we have seen, even though Mulberry House's sissie culture predated the 1976 Oregon conference, it was crucially shaped in dialog with West Coast faggots and sissies. *Double F Journal* followed on the list. This was the short-lived New York serial edited by Steven Dansky, John Knoebel, and Kenneth Pitchford where "The Effeminist Manifesto" appeared. Because we know an effeminist group was active in Atlanta in 1972, we can surmise that the New York manifesto traveled into the Southeast at least a half decade earlier, likely through GLF chapters. Writings about male feminism, male sexuality and violence, and gay men's sexual health round out the sissies'

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[13] Original "Sissie Effeminism" bibliography, Dimid Hayes personal collection; *RFD* #16, Summer 1978, 31. This is the San Francisco-based Women issue, the last to be published on the West Coast. Interestingly, when the then Bay Area editors published the "Sissie Effeminism" bibliography, they appended some titles to the bottom of the list, including a 1977 *Advocate* article by Californian writer Mark Thompson and their own *RFD* Issue #13, on spirituality. This addition blurred authorship of the list between the Bay Area *RFD* editors and the newly forming LaSiS, securing a firmer West-Coast orientation for sissie culture after the fact.

short list. Possibly as an effort to expand upon the politically imperative genre of the manifesto and to approach a sense of the lived everyday, the new Louisianans footed their list with several literary "Sissiestories": Quentin Crisp's *The Naked Civil Servant* (1968), Christopher Isherwood's *Christopher and His Kind* (1976), Tennessee Williams' *Memoirs* (1975), and Allen Ginsberg's *Gay Sunshine* interview (1974). All Anglo/American life stories, this brief list also still shows a small preference for the West Coast perspective; only the Williams – which we can now imagine appearing directly from Melba'son's "Desire"-inflected experiences from the fall before – reflected any Southeastern orientation.

Two other sissies shortly followed Dimid from Arkansas. One of these others was David Speakman.[14] Speakman was born in Kansas City in 1954, but his family relocated to a suburb of Salt Lake City in 1959. That move was not easy for a child his age. Being new to the city and nearing school age, he was treated harshly for not being Mormon. Looking back on the experience, he says he now appreciates what he calls that "dark gift of bigotry" because he credits it with teaching him empathy – the basis for so many of his diverse political commitments. The family returned to Kansas, though, to Lawrence, in 1964, where he received a superlative education in the local public schools but also from his mother's extensive library. He had a seemingly tireless curiosity, which he applied to both his school and independent pursuits.

He recalls how, as a young teen, he was "terrified" to realize he was gay when he had a wet dream involving an all-male sexual encounter. Although his mother wasn't particularly religious, his father was a Baptist and would take the kids to church weekly.

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[14] David Speakman, interview with author, April 1, 2017. The following short background – including quotes – is taken from this interview.

The terror he felt was surely due, in some part, to a general Christian condemnation of homosexuality. He prayed daily that he would change until, in his school library in 1969, he happened on a newspaper article about Stonewall, which made him realize he wasn't alone or monstrous or a "demon". He later moved out of the house, briefly, when he was eighteen, only to return not long after, when his father passed away. It was during that period when his sister read his diary and promptly outed him to his mother. Very angry, she said something like "Wait until I get my hands on the man who did this to you …" – to which Speakman replied, squaring up to face her, "You're looking at him." He recalls their stand-off as an "intense" one, but his mother came to terms with the situation about six months later.

By the mid-70s, Speakman had a friend he enjoyed hitch-hiking with. They took their thumbs to the highways and got rides to Eureka Springs, Arkansas. On their route home, they stopped in Fayetteville where, walking across the University of Arkansas campus, they bumped into Oglesby and Thornton. The local couple decided to take Speakman and his friend to Mulberry house, putting them in the back of their van – "very cloak and dagger," as Speakman remembers it, because they wanted to take some minimum precautions to protect the collective in a time when such radical households were targeted by government and homophobe alike. Once there, the Kansan travelers met Dimid, Dennis, and a Stacy. Dennis struck Speakman as "amazing … very intelligent. He was very opinionated. He was pretty feisty. He was short in stature but huge in personality." Speakman remembers that Stacy had been born in Troy, New York, and educated at Rutgers and Tulane, focusing on business and history. He "could talk to anybody" and was a "warm and delightful person to be with". A book-keeper,

Stacy was "brilliant with math" and entrenched in the whole food movement, which had brought him to Fayetteville to work for the food co-op distribution warehouse there. He drove a delivery truck for the wider Southeastern region.

David and Stacy hit it off, connecting over food – since Speakman himself then worked at a hippie restaurant called Sister Kettle back in Lawrence. Speakman and his friend spent the night at Mulberry House and then started their way back to Kansas the next day. He and Stacy kept up by letter, though, and on New Year's Day 1978, Speakman moved to Fayetteville. Stacy and he became lovers and got their own place. In May 1978, the couple moved to New Orleans to join Dimid and Dennis. Although the couple never lived at Mulberry House, their relocation was part of a larger plan to benefit all in the former collective: They would get city jobs in New Orleans and send money back to Arkansas to aid the working-class sissies. (This arrangement clearly reflects the kind of separation-within-union, separatism-as-process discussed earlier.) With this move south, the core four Sissies came together. LaSiS was born.

Surely shaped by the literature on their bibliography, the four recently transplanted Arkansas sissies formed a collective on Rampart Street, downriver of the Quarter, outside the Marigny. Dimid describes it as a larger but "traditional shotgun".[15] There were three bedrooms, a living room, and a kitchen which stretched the length of the house. There was a driveway that ran to the back, where there was a concrete "yard" with a banana tree growing at its edge. Despite their clearly urban location, following the lead of the Mulberry House collective, which had credited its own *RFD* letter to "The Arkansas Sissies," the Rampart House didn't name themselves directly after their new

[15] Hayes, ibid. This description of the house, with quotes, is taken from this interview.

city, but after their state: The *Louisiana* Sissies in Struggle. In part, this reflected the growing awareness of the regional scale of the Southeastern gay liberationist refrain. The Arkansas Sissies had emphasized this scale in their letter to the San Francisco editors of *RFD,* and the Atlanta conference confirmed it. Whether they thought of this or not, their name also reflected the ways historian Alecia Long describes New Orleans' anti-homosexual practices as buttressed by state "obscenity" laws. Beyond underscoring tensions of scale, my interviewees liked the lilt of the acronym: LaSiS.

Before the sissie quartet had the chance to fully gel, Dimid went to the June Running Water Farm gathering in Appalachia, and came back changed. He remembers coming back with a sense that what had been missing in his earlier sissie practice was a sense of heart, of forgiveness. As already noted, his new air of mountain "gentle man-liness" didn't jibe well with the sissies in struggle, and he was asked to find another place to live, which he did -- on Royal Street, in the French Quarter. He got his pansy tattoo, thinking hard about the "tentative" status of late-70s gay life. One important aspect of his post-gathering reflection was his writing a call to the Running Water attendees, urging them to collectivize. Although he doesn't now remember receiving a response, the twenty-five-year-old Dimid wrote "A Letter of Action" over "a cup of strong New Orleans chicory coffee and a case of the highest hopes," and mailed copies to each of the attendees for whom he had addresses – "around 40".[16] In an annotation added to a May 2011 re-typed version of the call, Hayes wrote, "The letter now, 33 years later, reads a little strident and naïve," but it's important to look more carefully behind Dimid's

[16] Dimid Hayes, "A Letter of Action," Dimid Hayes' Personal Collection. Note: Hayes emailed me a May 2011 annotated copy of the original draft on February 8, 2016. The quotes in the following analysis come from this document.

modesty at a document which captures the meeting of two important regional gay liberationist refrains: the sissie and the "gentle man".

In the opening, Dimid made the letter's purpose plain: "I write this 'letter of action, looking for actors.'" Use of the word "actors" is important, I think, underscoring performative concerns with the intersections of the everyday and the political – concerns reflected in his political "urgency" around "the creation of new forms of living" for gay liberationists. As he saw it, the vision for these new forms of living depended on the close coordination of two kinds of geographies: "collective living" (houses) and "open rural queer spaces". He stressed that he didn't propose these two forms casually or abstractly: "It is very queer (clear) to me that in the very near future we will need these support systems in the most real ways."[17] In fact, Dimid saw an example in the Running Water Farm gathering itself: "In the country we were all renewed in spirit to go back to our 'homes' and carry on our individual struggles with new insights into what is and what can be."

This description shows several important aspects of the culture developing around the meeting of the sissie collective and the rural gathering format begun at Running Water. First, as with Rainbow gatherings, there was less emphasis on rural residence than on circulation across urban-rural divides. Second, in that the rural was thought of as "open," this circulation took on a socio-political cardiac affect of rural expansion (diastole) and urban contraction (systole). Third, that urban-rural cycle was also politically understood as (often urban) collective *practice* paired to rural *vision-making*.

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[17] I will later note how use of the word "queer" for "clear" will become a common feature of LaSiS communication, a practice I read as further emphasizing the cultural importance of seeing differently, rather than with normative clarity.

Fourth, collective living was explicitly framed as putting the very concept of "home" in question --in scare quotes -- as a feature of patriarchal, anti-homosexual, bourgeois society. And finally, rural vision-making involved creative, spiritual, and energetic care work to ground revolutionary politics -- so often thought of as "militant" – in less masculinist modes which emphasized affective connection and the production of political energy. Further, while Dimid saw the network sparked by the Running Water Farm gathering as holding relevance for the wider "gaymale community," he explicitly names its significance "specifically here in the Southeast region of the United States of America".

In his notes on collective living, Dimid clearly drew from the Mulberry House experience. Heading his list of reasons to collectivize was that it is "a great conservation and generation of energy" which can in turn be applied to cultural-political work. The collective saves money by sharing resources, but it is also "mentally and psychically stimulating" and "calls upon the individual to change in very constructive revolutionary ways". Casting *fanshen* as a small-group process which re-wrote the traditional American concept of home and individual, Dimid also echoed a Reclaiming witchcraft concern with spiritually managing energy for political purposes, to "create healing spaces … to rekindle our spirits and strengthen us to return to our struggles in the cities." He stressed the need to work against coupleist relations, to forge egalitarian ways of sharing sex and affection, and he focused on redistribution of housework in ways that defied traditional, everyday forms of assigning work by gender and class. These aspects of collective living seem to reflect what Mulberry House had put into practice after the 1976 Faggots and Class Struggle conference.

There were several important distinctions from Mulberry House, however. First was a revolutionary feminist commitment not to cling exclusively or over simply to class analysis but to conduct it with care and in context. This political calibration was clearly meant as an extension of socialism rather than a de-prioritization. Second, reflecting Melba'son's challenges in Fayetteville, Dimid called for collective spaces to plan for privacy rather than critique it. Finally, as if in revision of LaSiS' characterization of their move as "exile," Dimid's letter urged others to think of collectives as temporary arrangements towards particular purposes which should be "continually affirmed." Clearly the relational model of the sissie collective was never intended to be *marriage*, framed as an eternally binding contract (with its hetero/sexist dimensions), but a more temporary commitment of shared caring energy towards a radical purpose.[18] Speaking of the purpose of this process, Dimid wrote, "It is also the most successful way I know to strive for radical-to-the-root personal change leading to political change."[19]

Dimid's letter did not define the role of the rural as a pastoral one. As he saw it, they were being plunged into the future at an accelerating rate – with social changes "accompanied by a chaos of … new proportions" and moving "at a greater speed than any of us cn be/are aware of." Rural spaces like Running Water were training grounds for survival and vital resistance. As with the Rainbow gatherings, "Sissie-faggot" rural space was figured as an opportunity for building peace in a larger environment of violence. As an urgent space of survival, it shouldn't be hoarded by those who had the

[18] This perspective would also allow for not understanding the splitting of Mulberry House into two collectives as a "divorce" but rather as a re-dedication to two different purposes in different spaces which would allow for possible re-uniting later.

[19] This "radical-to-the-root" phrase will be important later in this chapter when I discuss the founding of the Radical Faeries.

resources to buy it. To reflect that value, the Rainbow Tribe decided to gather in national forests and parks; the Sissie-faggots sought to collectivize privately owned rural space. At Running Water, Mikel Wilson expressed his wish to give up individual ownership of the Appalachian farm, and Dimid called on gathering attendees to "return that energy" towards collectivization.

In response to "new right" forces, Dimid also asserted his New Left and liberationist values by arguing that that collectivization should not be one of sissies only: "We have to examine the politics of a group of mostly young white gaymales 'owning' land, especially in relation to other active revolutionary forces." He went further to say that a passive approach to inclusion was inadequate: "We have a responsibility to actively seek out individuals and organized groups of other oppressed peoples and include them in this (specific) privilege of open rural queer space." He named "women, children, older gays, handicapped gays, transgenderists, etc.," but spoke at length about their regional relationship to regional gay black men:

> We, as mostly young white men, cannot assume … that black gaymen in the south are satisfied just because they're not right in front of us letting us know they're not. If anything, I feel we need to assume their needs are NOT met. I know mine aren't, and I've got it easier than most black Sissies I know. Making this assumption seems to me to be an (unconscious) attempt to totally deny the historical and contemporary facts of racism in this country.

Because so much of his letter was haunted by those intense Mulberry House experiences, this last part likely reflects the middle-class sissies' realizations that they really needed to work on their racial analysis, especially given their views that Southern racism was a kind of prototype of other forms of U.S. systemic violence which was destined to spread beyond the region. This conviction was surely strengthened both as their travels in the Southeast broadened and as LaSiS set up house in New Orleans.

In an *RFD* piece called "Sissie Networking," fellow LaSiS member Stacy Brotherlover expanded on the regional urban-rural circulation advocated in Dimid's "Letter to Action". He wrote, "I've often felt it was an either/or decision: spend my life in the country or in the city. I need opportunities to move back and forth, becoming part of a sissie caring/sharing network."[20] For Stacy, like Dimid, that back-and-forth involved cycling from rural vision to city praxis, but it also enabled an alternative economy. Instead of being beholden to one sort of labor, in one geography, rural and urban Sissie collective members could trade places, taking city jobs for money for a season, and doing rural work for another. The Sissie network, then, was conceived as a way of playing one regional economy off of another, to get the better of both. Stacy saw *RFD* as the vehicle for regional and urban collectives to profile their skills, projects, and methods so that practical partnerships between sister collectives could be formed. He proposed a template for information sharing: "I'd like to urge existing sissie groups to write into RFD about themselves: their backgrounds, structure process skills, goals, visions, politics, etc." He then describes LaSiS by using this exact format.

"Sissie Networking" was accompanied by an interesting map, drawn by Milo. Comparing this map to the one from *RFD* #2 (Winter 1974) -- the one of dotted "RFD Country" -- yields insights as to what had changed in the five years between Iowan rusticity and Southeastern Sissie networking. First, that Milo's map only represents the Southeast, and not the nation of the earlier cartography, confirms the regional scale of the Sissie refrain. Second, this regional focus visually excises the hubs of gay bicoastal gay

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[20] Brotherlover, "Sissie Networking," *RFD* #18, Winter 1978, 20. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.

normativity that Herring describes; New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco are literally off the map. Third, whereas "RFD Country" boldly traces national and state borders, "Sissie Networking" drops even its state lines, replacing those political lines with line drawings of river paths. This approach employs regional topographical and environmental perspectives to erode statist ones. As such, the map also reflects what Brotherlover described as the "*anarcho*-effeminist" political stance of LaSiS.[21] Fourth, the labeled dots name urban, rural, *and* small-town collectives; interestingly, the new map plants dots in three delta states which "RFD Country" marked with question marks: Louisiana, Arkansas, and Mississippi, effectively joining delta Sissie geographies to Appalachian ones. And, finally, saltwater bodies are labeled in Spanish, recognizing the non-Anglo colonial histories of the region and the on-going influence of the Cuban Venceremos Brigades. These recognitions underscore that the operative Sissie view of the rural-urban region was not a *sub*-national but an *inter*- or *trans*national one. Milo's map invites its readers to understand this regional Sissie networking as oriented towards a Caribbean Atlantic world more than towards the larger United States. Next, a reading of the playlet "Solidary Forever" characterizes how the collective affectively articulated a regional politics which was grounded in their new city.

Playing Teacher: "Solidarity Forever" and the 1978 Labor Day UTNO Strike

Written in the Crescent City, during the early summer of 1978, Dimid's Letter to Action got no response from the wider gathering network. LaSiS had plenty to do in their new city, though. The group was eager to commemorate and extend a local gay

[21] Although LaSiS was still very committed to socialist feminism, as we have seen, it seriously questioned both any exclusive privileging of class analysis and any centralized, hierarchical organizational structure. These leanings, in addition to Melba'son's increasing interest in Emma Goldman, point to a stronger anarchist political orientation.

liberationist precedent which they discovered had occurred just months before Melba'son landed in the city. In late June of 1977, Anita Bryant had been scheduled to perform in New Orleans – only two weeks on the heels of her campaign's successful overturn of gay rights ordinances in Florida. The local Gertrude Stein Society and Human Equal Rights for Everyone (HERE) staged a protest that, with the influx of outside activists, numbered around 1500, a stark contrast to Bryant's Christian defenders who were no more than forty strong.[22] Naming that action as an inspiration, LaSiS formed the Pink Triangle Alliance (PTA) -- which Dimid identifies as "their first outreach into the wider gay community" – and organized a Jackson Square event which Speakman says they billed as a "gay liberation rally".[23] Speakman further says that, in May, he and Dimid had "hit the bricks," inviting a diverse set of attendees: the Gertrude Stein Society but also the ACLU, many churches, and a host of non-gay traditional leftists and progressives. The late June event was well attended – with, as Speakman recalls, an ACLU leader and a Unitarian minister as speakers – and a significant number of people of color, especially women. This success led to the event's being named "Gay Fest," and it was later relocated to the Marigny's Washington Square.

Slowly, gay liberationist sympathies gained traction in the city. Dimid mentions that Tom Horner opened his gay and lesbian bookstore Faubourg Marigny Books and became a kind of "informal ally".[24] A local Catholic Church offered the PTA space to meet. In the Mulberry House spirit, they networked with women – for example, Nikki

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[22] Clayton Delery-Edwards, *The Up Stairs Lounge Arson: Thirty-Two Deaths in a New Orleans Gay Bar, June 24, 1973* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2014), 140-141.
[23] Hayes, ibid., Speakman, ibid. The remainder of the paragraph on Gay Fest is from Speakman's interview. "Gay Fest" would quickly become New Orleans Gay Pride.
[24] Hayes, ibid. The details of this paragraph are taken from his interview.

Kirby and Betty Caldwell, feminists they met at a PFLAG meeting and who were interested in the feminist writing the sissies were working on. Dimid says LaSiS participated in anti-police harassment and anti-racism demonstrations as well.

Naming their organization the PTA was no accident. In the wake of Bryant's successful Save the Children campaign, Southern (white, hetero/sexist) majoritarian ideologies started to take national momentum as people everywhere became convinced of a perverse homosexual agenda aimed at innocent (white, straight) children. Conservatives sought to erect laws which would limit contact between these children and supposedly predatory lesbians and gays. In 1978, California state senator John Briggs sponsored Proposition 6, a ballot initiative which would prevent gays and lesbians from teaching public school in the state. As we have seen from his letter, Dimid interpreted this wave of anti-homosexual legislative activity as part of a rapidly mobilizing systemic violence. Hyper-aware of the dangerous rhetoric which pitched the classroom as a prime site of children's vulnerability to homosexual threat, LaSiS defied this rhetoric by embracing the PTA acronym as an echo of the more familiar PTA -- the Parent Teacher Association. They then turned their eyes to more local educational activism.

Late spring 1978, a city teachers union, United Teachers of New Orleans (UTNO), made clear that the time for increased teacher salaries was long past. [25] Everyone knew to take this as forewarning of a fall strike, and the city watched on as the game of negotiations played out over the summer. New Orleans teachers had gone on strike unsuccessfully in 1966 and 1969, during a period of intense debate over the pace of

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[25] Devore and Logsdon, *Crescent City Schools: Public Education in New Orleans, 1841-1991* (Lafayette, LA: University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1991). The background on New Orleans education, the teachers unions, and the strike come from this book.

school and faculty desegregation, before forming the UTNO in 1972 with a surprising merger of two usually opposed teacher organizations, one black and the other white. Local educational historians Donald E. Devore and Joseph Logsdon narrate how, building on this new-found alliance, the UTNO felt prepared to conduct a successful strike by 1978, when pay was not significantly better. As the fall semester approached, the requisite waiting game got tenser and the board began to issue warnings about the results of a strike and to offer meager settlements, which the union refused. Teachers were resolved to strike, refusing to staff the classrooms on the first day of school. Devore and Logsdon credit solid union strategies and popular support as important factors in the high participation of city teachers – ranging in percentage from the high 60s to the mid-70s. The strike continued through the Labor Day weekend until September 11th, when modest teacher raises and other demands were granted, but more importantly, teachers felt unified and empowered.

In the *RFD* issue (#17) which covered the Running Water gathering, LaSiS documented their joining in the UTNO strike with a piece called "Solidarity Forever," subtitled "A Gay Playlet in One Act with Applause".[26] Textually framing their political participation as a kind of street theater, the "playlet" surely satisfied Melba'son's theatrical sensibility while it echoed the performative overlap of the everyday and the political which Dimid referenced in his call for "actors". With only a few instances of quoted dialogue – instead tending to narrate conversation – the one-act ironically downplays speaking in favor of foregrounding bodily action, visual signs, and scene as

[26] Louisiana Sissies in Struggle (LaSiS), "Solidarity Forever," *RFD* #17, Fall 1978, 3. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.

the more important components of "the drama". By looking at the "Background" and "Setting", the use of political signage, and the closing attribution of "Solidarity Forever," we can see the sort of regional orientation LaSiS aimed to perform.

The playlet opens with "The Background," which serves to set the geographic and historical scope of the analysis which informs the political action to follow. The geographic unit is clearly urban as the text begins with "New Orleans, historic Queen City of the South," and the historical view is a long one, referring to the year 1769 in order to establish an anti/colonial lens which, by predating the formation of the U.S. and by nodding to the city's French and Spanish colonial histories, denaturalizes the current Anglo-based nation-state. In short, LaSiS wanted to stress that the city was older than the country. But, the implication was that the American city had fallen into neglect: "In 1978, New Orleans is resting on fading glory and a slipping tax base." They first referenced the city's majority (51%) black population before listing high unemployment and some of the lowest teacher salaries in the nation, which the mostly black UTNO was then protesting to a mostly apathetic city leadership.

The specific setting is the looming downtown architecture of the Superdome: "an enormous money-losing structure built several years ago, in an attempt to attract more tourists to shore up a sagging economy". Again, the over-riding affect is of a city sinking and fading under the weight of the wrong-headed development schemes imposed on it. LaSiS' view of New Orleans was not unique. In a July 1978 *Atlantic* feature on the city, James K. Glassman dimly placed New Orleans in the context of the regional development of the "New South".[27] Titled "New Orleans: I Have Seen the Future, and It's Houston,"

[27] Glassman, "New Orleans: I Have Seen the Future, and It's Houston," *The Atlantic* 242 (July 1978), 10ff. The quotes and details from this paragraph are taken from this article.

the article pinned a lot of its critique on the Superdome as well: "The Superdome did not, however, turn out to be the greatest building in the history of man, or even the second greatest. It was beset with cost overruns and political scandals. Voters in 1966 were told that the Superdome would cost $35 million, the same as Houston's Astrodome, which it would dwarf; instead, the final figure was $165 million." Glassman cited the 1977 operating loss for the arena ($5.5 million) and the daily cost of keeping it open, "used or not" ($50,000).

Name-dropping the regional development schemes which surround New Orleans – the "New South" or "Sunbelt" or "any other geoeconomic unit conjured up" – Glassman argued that, instead of strategically defying or joining those regional development strategies which engulfed it, New Orleans had invested steeply in half-baked growth initiatives only to tend them half-heartedly and drive the city into deeper poverty. For LaSiS, the Superdome was emblematic of this landscape of urban poverty, which they additionally saw as racist, since the arena shadowed "the razed ruins of an old black community." This portrait echoed the urban wasteland captured in *Dreamwood*, but instead of invoking a mythical industrial City which could be anywhere, as Broughton did, LaSiS set their drama in a very specific, fading New Orleans which was sinking under the weight of failed regional development.

Enter "The Actors" with their clutch of political signs. Naming themselves "four Sissies (three ex-Yankees and one prodigal Southerner)" who had formed the "Pink Triangle Alliance (P.T.A.)" and sought to join the "3,000 striking teachers and their supporters," they capitalize on the overlap of acronyms to confusingly link political actors: parents, teachers, and gay liberationists. The description of their arrival

approaches vaudeville humor: They emphasize their status as confused newcomers -- circling buildings by ramps, searching for the protesters, "carefully skirting security guards," looking this way and that, until the striking teachers spot them and cheer to see four Sissies carrying signs which support the cause. With no dialogue, we see the "Drama" unfold like a silent film, echoing the comedic rhythms of Broughton's *The Bed*. The sheer number of political signs they carry is a crucial part of this humor: "GAYS SUPPORT UTNO TEACHERS STRIKE … DOWN WITH BAKKE! DOWN WITH WEBER! GAYS FOR AFFIRMATIVE ACTION … GAYS AGAINST RIGHT-TO-WORK-FOR-LE$$ LAWS … FREE GARY TYLER! GAYS FOR JUSTICE … GAYS AGAINST RACISM … GAYS FOR THE E.R.A. We had more signs than we had Sissies!"

Building on the political expansion found in Dimid's "Letter to Action," this proliferation of causes on political signs – nearly too many to carry – generates a light-hearted tenor around the process of forming political connections, even as the issues themselves were obviously serious. The tone of "Solidarity Forever" is therefore an odd mix of political fervor and low-frequency humor. Admittedly, the comic proliferation of political signs here threatens to thin the specific importance of each issue, but I argue that that is only an effect of historical and geographic distance. These signs were actually very carefully chosen and would have elicited a more concerted response from the mostly black striking teachers in 1978 New Orleans. In other words, this bouquet of signs was a very purposeful assemblage designed to invite new refrains, new orientations, in the late 70s Crescent City.

Let's take a look at the signs that name names. Allan P. Bakke was a white ex-Marine who brought suit against the University of California for rejecting his application to medical school while admitting students of color whose measurable qualifications were slightly lower than his. The 1978 Supreme Court decision rejected Bakke's claim, upholding the university's right to apply affirmative action strategies in higher education admissions policies, as long as they didn't employ strict quota systems.[28] Brian Weber was an employee at Kaiser Aluminum and Chemical who in 1974 brought suit against his company for using an affirmative action strategy which rejected him for an internal training program while admitting more junior black workers who were in the minority at the plant. The Supreme Court ruling – handed down the summer of 1979 – would decide in the company's favor.[29] Weber's factory was in Gramercy, Louisiana – just under 50 miles west of New Orleans, south of Lake Maurepas. Gary Tyler was a black teenager who, at the age of 17 became the youngest person on death row, convicted in 1975 for the shooting death of a 13-year-old white boy who had been part of a white mob that, angry over desegregation, attacked a black school bus. Tyler was arrested despite the fact no weapon was found on him or on the bus during initial searches – the beginning of a trial process roundly determined to be unfair after the fact.[30] The shooting occurred in Destrehan, Louisiana, a small town in a rural area about 25 miles west of New Orleans. The mostly black striking teachers of UTNO would have known these names.

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[28] University of California Regents v. Bakke (1978), *Findlaw,* Accessed Nov. 4, 2017, http://caselaw.findlaw.com/us-supreme-court/438/265.html

[29] Steelworkers v. Weber (1979), *Findlaw,* Accessed Nov. 4, 2017, http://caselaw.findlaw.com/us-supreme-court/443/193.html

[30] Bob Herbert, "Gary Tyler's Lost Decades," *New York Times* (New York City, NY), February 05, 2007. Tyler was not released from prison until 2016.

The signs didn't mention the Briggs Initiative, but the sissies' fliers did. Knowing that Anita Bryant had met with Briggs shortly after her Miami success, inspiring the California politician to capitalize on her success, teachers would have thought of the Save Our Children campaign. Knowing its roots in racist anti-busing initiatives, UTNO teachers would have connected New Orleans' own slow path to desegregation with Miami's, and would have seen Gary Tyler as a victim of similar racist practices. Successful desegregation required strategic plans of active integration, of which university and industry affirmative action plans and teacher integration were part. Again, striking New Orleans teachers would have seen all these cases as inter-related, and they would have likely seen their city to share key commonalities with Bryant's Miami.

The Briggs initiative likely sparked other responses. Education historian Karen Graves has pointed out that Briggs failed where Bryant succeeded based on a number of key missteps: "Had he not threatened every teacher with dismissal, wandered into labor union territory, and cavalierly trampled the First Amendment he might have succeeded in keeping gay and lesbian teachers out of California classrooms."[31] These New Orleans teachers would have read Briggs as a force set against the union and status they had fought so hard to win as well as a proponent of child protectionism predicated on whiteness and straightness. All the referenced cases drew national attention, and what's more, the Sissies' signs plotted a geographic course from Davis, California west, to the New Orleans city line. This cartography cast New Orleans *with* its rural environs as a critical stage where national problems were played out, a Southern stage intimately tied to Californian ones in a wide Sunbelt setting.

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[31] Graves, "Political Pawns in an Educational Endgame: Reflections on Bryant, Briggs, and Some Twentieth-Century School Questions," *History of Education Quarterly* 53, no. 1, (2013), 9.

As the four Sissies joined the striking teachers, they "took [their] place at the end of the line, passing out leaflets and pamphlets on the Briggs Initiative all the way along". The case their signs made for a California-Louisiana connection lent new relevance to the Western law which would prohibit gays and lesbians from teaching in public schools. Their audience of striking teachers would have gotten the connection: educational systems sought to control their labor pool of teachers, by racial, and sexual, divisions. The UTNO itself, as Devore and Logsdon show, answered such divisive strategies with an unexpected black-white union. It was this very spirit of local connection which LaSiS hoped to join.

Union leadership didn't receive them well. "Solidarity Forever" documents how two officials – a UTNO vice-president and a "parade marshall" – approached the Sissies and informed them that the march was for *teachers*, which the Sissies clearly were not.[32] The framing of the playlet, with its inclusion of the Briggs Initiative pamphlets, casts this rebuff as an extension of the Briggs ideology: gays, sissies, *cannot* be teachers. Instead of defiantly claiming to be teachers themselves, the sissies responded in two interesting ways: they stated their intentions to stay in "solidarity with gay teachers in the strike who cannot come out for fear of losing their jobs" and they responded by pointing out how the strike already included other allies: "There are parents in this march. And children. And representatives from trade and craft unions."

Thes sissies' first response assumed that teacher populations are naturally made up of gays and lesbians – why else would a measure like the Briggs Initiative focus so

[32] Reporting a funny case of incidental female impersonation, "Solidarity Forever" claims parenthetically that "We found out later that he [the UTNO vice-president] was misrepresenting himself; the vice-president is a woman."

narrowly on the profession? It took the show of threatening power behind the Briggs Initiative and re-wrote it as an expression of fear – fear of the power held by unknown masses of lesbians and gays who, though afraid of how visibility may cost them their jobs, maintained the power that came with raising generations. Given that the UTNO striking teachers were mostly black, the first response also refused any assumption that gay liberation was a de facto white movement; it was also, of course, formed of black lesbians and gay men who wouldn't have to "come out" to participate in a movement, which was by definition, multi-issue. On the other hand, the second response – that the strike already included other allies – forced the coordinators to recognize the strike as not just mult-issue but also formed of diversely invested bodies, a protest composition which had room for the loudly supportive Sissies, too.

Although the two union leaders didn't seem impressed by these arguments, the rank-and-file teachers apparently recognized the connections the sissies were demonstrating through sign and response: "Word spread among the teachers in front of us. Waves of energy and support came flooding back. // 'You walk! Don't let them people tell you what to do! You march with us!'" Leadership caved. They allowed the sissies to march, but under one condition: Since it was a teacher strike, they wanted the media to recognize it as such, so they requested the sissies wear the "standard union strike placards". LaSiS responded with "Would we? We'd be PROUD to wear them." They then marched on with their other signs held high.

It's the all-caps word "PROUD," though, which reveals to the reader what has actually happened in the "drama." Using the gay affective register of "pride" to don a striking teacher's placard underscores that the gender-deviant sissies, in open defiance of

the Briggs Initiative, had visually *become* teachers in New Orleans. Anyone watching the news or looking at newspaper photos would see the teacher placard *and* the sissie gender-bending attire at once. "Solidarity Forever," then, as a "playlet," maps the relevance of the Southeast Louisiana region to national liberationist politics, sets the stage as a region of poverty produced within wider regional development schemes (Sunbelt geographies), visually negotiates political connection through its use of signs and comic tone, and finally, coordinates the visual assumption of the sissie to the role of teacher in a political context of homophobic educational "reform".

Even though the "playlet" demands reception as a literary piece, by its title and dramatic textual organization, it only does so to put the exceptionalism of the aesthetic under question, to argue that the artful and the political are *part* of the everyday, not separate from it. One way it achieved this was by being a play with very little dialogue. In fact, it was written in such an off-hand style that it sounds more like a casual story overheard than something crafted. The meaning comes from the details it invites the reader to focus on by their inclusion in such a short piece, "one act," but those details were actually embedded in the real-life action itself. Political life on New Orleans streets was where the art really was.

Another way that it defied the literary was in its authorship. The end of the piece announces that it was "Recorded for the Sissies in Struggle … by Dennis Melba'son". This implies that the "authors" were the protesters and the "play" was the strike; Melba'son was simply a scribe who "recorded" it. It's ironic, then, that they appended a copyright symbol to "Solidarity Forever" and say "Permission to reprint granted". The reader who recognizes the art in the political action will see this as a winking urge to

reproduce the strike elsewhere, rather than simply copying the words that emphatically point to the politicized street. From the striking UTNO teachers to LaSiS to sissies everywhere (through *RFD*), in ever widening circles, the work was thoroughly collective, belonging everywhere.

And only in successive small, committed "playlets," in single acts, could one attain anything like the eponymous "forever". LaSiS could by no means claim to have formed a full alliance with the striking UTNO teachers. Their track record in local politics was too short to win them the title of "ally". They could also claim no dramatic contribution to the affectively successful strike; that was, instead, the fruit of the mostly black unionized teachers' labors. What "Solidarity Forever" captures, though, is the complex moment of joining a struggle – a *way* of entering the street which borrowed from the group's previous exercises in learning to enter a room. To complete the affective picture, I next describe the public gender performance of LaSiS as an emotional and corporeal response to mounting terror.

"Sissie Terror in the Photo Booth": Man-ifestoes with Nail Polish, Winter 1978

The other Louisiana Sissies accompanied Dimid to the Fall 1978 Running Water Farm gathering. As a group, LaSiS made an impression not unlike that of Mulberry House at Wolf Creek. In a planning circle for *RFD*, three of them agreed to take responsibility for the Winter 1978 (#18) issue of the magazine, but they were asked by others in the circle to "come-out more about our 'politics' or 'world-views' as Sissie-identified beings".[33] If LaSiS had questioned the influence of the mountain gathering on Dimid's political orientation, it seems Running Water's "gentle men" had similar

[33] "Sissie," *RFD* #18, Winter 1978, 4. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.

questions about the Sissies. Some of these questions surely involved an effort to understand the specifically gendered aspects of the group's political affect. If the earlier Mulberry House had turned away from the West Coast faggot idealization of the militant femme to improvise Sissie subjectivity, what replaced the militancy itself? We can begin to answer such questions by looking at how LaSiS – and others -- riffed on the genre of the manifesto in the Winter 1978 *RFD* to articulate a sense of "Sissie terrorism".

Page four of the issue is headed by the title "Sissie," the word's first "I" dotted by a heart and the second by a star. Embedded in the third column of text is a photo-booth photo with two vertical images of a pair of Sissies holding each other close. In the left image, they grin widely, one with his tongue out. In the right image, the two are making out, and the viewer sees suggestive flashes of skin. Between the two images, text cascades downward: "SISSIE TERROR IN". The text-image simultaneously leaves the phrase unfinished (What *is* the terror in?) -- therefore, inciting a sense of mystery -- *and* seems to finish the phrase with the second lusty photo (The terror is in seeing the sissie sex!). The reader's eye easily follows to the facing page, though, where a mirror image sits just across the staple. Here, the pair continue to ham for the camera, but the phrase from the previous page is finished with "THE PHOTO BOOTH". Clearly not in terror themselves, these Sissies cast themselves as the agents of terror – but of what kind?

The first written entry on page four is titled "A Sissie's Personal Manifesto". Credited to musician Charlie Murphy, Issue #19 corrects the attribution; it was actually written by Russ Cravens, Cathy Gross' close friend. Because the title refers to a single manifesto, we can assume it only refers to Craven's three short paragraphs; but, since none of the other writers' entries on this page bear their own titles, it's also natural to

assume that what follows are other manifestoes, a collection of Sissie mini-manifestoes by different authors. As such, this practice departs from earlier liberationist manifesto formats – different from Wittman's manifesto, which was authored and published alone, and different from "The Woman-Identified Woman," which was a single piece collectively authored. It also departs from the *RFD* precedent of a single collective editorial statement like the Wolf Creek one in which a single definition of "faggot" was offered. Here, multiple authors and multiple texts offer mini-manifestoes which give varying but overlapping definitions of the sissie. This approach echoes the mounting emphasis they placed on multiplicity.

Following feminist political theorist Kathi Weeks in her description of the utopian manifesto, we can see where these writings adhere to and depart from the genre's conventions. Weeks writes that "As an exemplary literature of provocation, the manifesto seeks to bridge the divide between writing and acting".[34] That characterization is consonant with the whole of *RFD*'s textual poetics, seeking as it did to animate the page enough to serve as an extension of the writer's body into the everyday world of its readers. According to Weeks, the manifesto also "seeks to fashion its readers into a collective subject" (215) by more affective than rational means, making it a tool of the refrain as I have described it. She further names its typical affective strategies to hinge on exclamation marks and declarative sentences to produce a sense of a palpably "immanent" future, a "militant optimism" (a phrase taken from Marxist Ernst Bloch), "dare," and "excess" – "at its best … a provocation of anger and power". To be sure, there are clear notes of war in these sissie manifestoes – references to terrorism, guerilla

[34] Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2011), discussion of manifestoes 213-218; quote from 214.

tactics, and treason – but they are decentralized and indirect acts, not the unified corps found in Lavender Country's "Back in the Closet". Implicitly a critique of the masculinity inherent in militancy, these sissies' manifestoes encourage a stealthy, decentralized guerilla style of politics and concentrate its content on an excess in their sexuality and gender deviance – as the accompanying photos attest.

Their gender deviance was specific. As they had done in Arkansas, they wore skirts, earrings, bright and flowing fabrics, and long hair. They carried purses and painted their nails. They also almost always sported facial hair. Eschewing a polished feminine look, they would often leave certain nails unpainted, or paint them different colors. They amplified the overlap of gender conventions, sometimes calling this practice "gender fucking," as Speakman -- writing here under the old family name of "House," and later under the chosen name of "Aurora" -- and Melba'son do in their sissie manifestoes. Milo writes of sissie gender fuck as an act of "treason to 'my' gender". Melba'son and House describe it as a form of "sexual terrorism," and Melba'son also couches it as "guerilla theater". The effect was additionally confrontational when combined with open sexual displays between sissies. Historian Betty Luther Hillman has shown how such "gender fuck" was actually a common practice of early gay liberation.[35] If, as Weeks argues, one effect of the manifesto is to perform a critique or neutralization of what has been proscribed as natural, then sissie gender fuck served as a walking manifesto, refusing to be scuttled into either male or female socialized appearances, defiantly occupying the space between genders. Its provocation was to generate

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[35] Luther Hillman, "'Wearing a Dress is A Revolutionary Act': Political Drag and Self-Presentation in the Gay Liberation Movement", *Dressing for the Culture Wars: Style and the Politics of Self-Presentation in the 1960s and 1970s,* (Lincoln, NE: U of Nebraska P, 2015). 91-122.

discomfort in others invested in gender as naturally binary. Luther Hillman cites gender fuck's spirit in NYC GLF member Martha Shelley's statement: "We want you to be uneasy, to be a little less comfortable in your straight roles" (99).

Characterizing gender fuck as "political drag," Luther Hillman's definition doesn't fully apply to the Southeastern sissies. She seems to describe sissie practice when she writes, "As opposed to traditional drag attire, activists wearing political drag were not attempting to pass as women; indeed, the presence of beards and facial hair on many men in political drag easily signaled their true biological gender" (100). But, the Sissies did not think of themselves as men at all. When asked on the street about their gender, they would deny being men *or* women and insisted on *sissie* as the only accurate description. We have already seen that Melba'son had adopted this practice, but other sissies' manifestoes mention this dual disavowal. Milo states that visiting New Orleans to help with *RFD* #18 gave him the opportunity to try out sissie gender fuck as a critical step in his personal process towards a lived androgyny. These Sissies did not see themselves as merely *men* in dresses, as Luther Hillman's description of political drag would suggest.

Similarly, Luther Hillman offers as one factor in the 1970s decline of political drag the powerful feminist critique of drag in general. She cites Robin Morgan's 1973 comparison of drag to blackface, and describes Bay Area and New York effeminists' critiques of cross-dressing as an expression of similar critique – that drag perpetuated the stereotypes which feminists fought against. While the Southeastern sissies certainly struggled with this particular view of drag and cross-dressing, they didn't understand their own gender fuck as drag at all in that it didn't *cross* the gender divide but stayed

resolutely and volubly at its intersections. In fact, they saw sissie gender fuck *as* an expression of effeminism and used the word to describe themselves. In fact, these sissies saw their gender fuck as a feminist expression, an attempt to call political attention to the oppression of women. Dimid asserts that "I do not attempt to pass as a woman. … I *do* attempt to affirm women and the feminine spirits within myself." He further contends that "I'm not mocking the woman, but the *society* that tries to define a woman." As he phrases it, he was "identifying with and not imitating … women."

Weeks argues that what makes a manifesto *utopian* is its ability to hinge on both the "no" of critique (or the "neutralization" of dominance) and the "yes" of a connection to some other possibility.[36] Dimid saw sissie practice as an embrace of "tenderness, emotions, delicacy" and a rejection of being "emotionally immature, competitive, and individualistic." Cravens saw it as a rejection of the death-obsession endemic to masculinity and also as an attempt to take responsibility for "life" in all its forms. Both Melba'son and House frame their Sissy practice as an effort to respond to the critiques put forth by Cathy Gross in *RFD* #17. Sissies, like their compatriots at Running Water, saw gender fuck as a sign of their efforts to *manifest* their feminist convictions in body and deed, to distance their bodies from patriarchal masculinity while not presuming a womanhood which had far too often been presumed to be there for the taking. In fact, one of the most common threads through these manifestoes was the hope that their gender fuck, at the very least, loudly communicated "We are not rapists!" House in particular described how refusing to perform traditional masculinity was, for him, an experience in what it felt like to be another's potential property – just as all "not-men"

[36] Weeks, 207.

(women, children, animals, etc.) were considered there for men's taking. To walk under the eye of masculine proprietary rage while expressing sexual communicative joy towards each other was a very complex and public affect which these sissies felt they needed to practice. While Luther Hillman argues that "political drag" waned due, in part, to feminist critique, sissie terrorist gender fuck emerged as an extension of that critique.

In fact, LaSiS saw their gender performance as an extension of anti-rape politics. On Fat Tuesday, 1979, the opening day of Mardi Gras, five Sissies were returning from the gay "cruise-and-backroom bar" Jewel's when they encountered a drunk man cornering a frightened woman. House/Aurora offered to help the woman when the man grabbed his arm, telling them all it was none of their business. Stacy insisted it was certainly their business and raised an oversized "hairy phallus," which was part of his Mardi Gras costume, and threatened the man, which addled the latter enough that the woman could run away. The man ran in a different direction and the sissies chased him, yelling "Stop Rape!" at the top of their lungs. Stunned the next morning by newspaper reports that there had been three rapes reported the night before, the group concluded that "Individual action is not enough." Sobered by their own experience and that of a female friend who had been raped in December, LaSiS put together a booklet for distribution called "(Gay)Men and Rape" which was offered as an unfinished, exploratory analysis of the roles of men – gay and straight – in rape culture. In the introduction, the authors wrote, "This beginning analysis took shape in the midst of our lives as workers and lovers. It is the best we could do at this time. We expect and encourage criticism and further dialogue … ."[37] By performance and print culture, LaSiS sought to perform a

[37] LaSiS, "(Gay)Men and Rape," Personal collection of Dimid Hayes. 1979. The quotes and descriptions of this occurrence come from this pamphlet.

sissie gender fuck which would turn the terror of rape, in all its forms, against its perpetrators.

Luther Hillman, echoing drag ethnographer Esther Newton, also mentions how political drag was divided along class lines by distinctions between stage and street queens.[38] The former enjoyed a certain popularity if it limited its crossdressing to entertainment confined to certain events and semi-private spaces. By such discretions, stage queens facilitated others' and won their own (circumscribed) respectability. Street queens (or "fairies," according to Newton), usually poor, didn't have access to such semi-private events and spaces and so cross-dressed every day, in public, right on the street, and often resorted to sex work. Militant gay liberalism -- a useful term offered by historian Christina Hanhardt – which was a movement with increasing interests in gaining rights and in marching streets in Pride parades, not only had to invest in militant masculinity but also, according to Luther Hillman, had to distance itself from any less than respectable association with street queens, limiting its cultural indulgences in drag to the occasional stage queen performance.[39] Luther Hillman mentions that, on the other hand, more radical gay liberationists would center street queens as the vanguard of the movement.

As we have seen, for LaSiS, the street *was* the stage. In his *RFD* sissie manifesto, Melba'son especially struggled with how to relate to street and drag queens. He credited them for their liberationist roles in the Stonewall Riots and mentioned how, in New Orleans, when LaSiS wanted to host a "No on 6" campaign, only a drag bar would

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[38] Newton, *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America* 2nd edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).
[39] Hanhardt, *Safe Space.*

welcome them. He acknowledged, too, that all queens bear the brunt of the misogyny of liberal "gaymen". He made explicit reference to the transvestites and transsexuals hustling on Bourbon Street, saying they would be denied any other kind of labor than sex work, even by the Quarter's "gaymen," because of their being Sissies. Following that statement, Melba'son conceded the feminist point that their "high drag" looks were likely oppressive in some way to women but that their class situation forced them to "oppress themselves" as well. Calling this a "contradiction" he must struggle with, he owned that his own political response to it was not to focus his energy on a critique of the street queens but to redouble his pressure on the system: "DESTROY PATRIARCHY – SMASH HETEROSEXISM!"

Decidedly not liberal "gaymen" themselves, the sissies did conceive of street queens as sissies, too. But by 1978, these sissies *were* in the minority. According to Luther Hillman, the mainline national movement had so distanced itself from what she calls "political drag" or any other cross-dressing that, in 1976, a gay activist would wonder what had become of all the "gender confusion" he associated with gay liberation, assuming from its absence that the movement was dead. The militant masculinity of gay liberalism and the feminist critique of drag were certainly factors in its decline, but Luther Hillman maintains that a more powerful cause was how the Anita Bryant Save Our Children campaign depended so much on the repulsive image of the queer man in a dress to trigger national homophobia. The response of gay liberalism was to openly embrace masculinity and reject femininity. Also, 1978 was the year the Village People's song "Macho Man" was released, and Luther Hillman cites how the group's creator, Jacques Morali, formed the clone-like Village People as a contrast to Bryant's feminized

notion of gay men. Several of the *RFD* Sissie "man"ifestoes, published at the close of the same year, expressly named their authors as *not* "macho men". In 1978, if gay liberation was effectively dead for the people of Greenwich Village, it was doggedly alive for the Southeastern network which increasingly anchored its sense of a radical subjectivity to the French Quarter sissies of LaSiS.

It's important, though, to stress again how the category of "political drag" doesn't quite fit the Southeastern sissie phenomenon. Luther Hillman's description of "political drag" implies that both gender fuck and politics are acts which, once performed in public, can just as easily be left in the street when one returns to the more natural comforts of home. The Mulberry House collective had already torn that very private concept of home down, board by board. For them, the public was the everyday. Rooted in performance, sissie gender fuck was not bound by the stage or event but instead occupied the house and street as everyday nodes in a public continuum. For those sissies whose occupation wouldn't allow them full-time gender fuck, as soon as they left work and hit the sidewalk or boarded the bus, they began putting in their earrings. This was a way of controlling volume. House's manifesto mentions amplifying his sissie vibe by wearing buttons with phrases like "Commie Faggot," "Cocksucker," and "Sissie Magick".

Intensely loud and visible on the same corners as the street queens, sissies' very public and everyday gender fuck similarly demanded to be understood as its own gender category. They were akin to *trans*sexuals but different in that their transitions were glaringly incomplete. Still, although one manifesto calls it an "identity," the concept of a gender *identity* risks casting the sissie as a permanent, essential, possibly biological category – and it decidedly was not. Phyll Schuster, the sissie who used the word

"identity," defined it as a way of being that one "develops at an early age" rather than miraculously discovering it through consciousness-raising. The performance of sissie gender fuck was something practiced over time, a kind of *habitus* which could be muted or amplified, sped or slowed; and it was a habit formed as a counter-rhythmic dance with the capitalist patriarchy. It was fully historical and far from "natural" – a category which it further defied by its obstinate incompleteness.

This carefully kept, unfinished state was important. In terms of gender, for these Sissies to achieve either a clearly masculine or feminine appearance would involve their becoming finished, defined, standardized. In socialist feminist terms, it would mean they had been pressed into the labor roles which capitalism intended for them. For the sissies, so much more was possible in the spaces *between*, in the moments *before* fruition. The consummate bridger, Dimid, expressed this sense of possibility nicely, not surprisingly, in the context of the Briggs initiative. His manifesto implied that the more fundamental reason so many conservatives feared the idea of gay teachers was that, instead of pressing the children into their proscribed, gendered labor roles, sissie teachers would introduce them to the worlds of other gender possibilities. In fact, he suggested that boys in particular desperately needed other models than "G.I. Joe, Tarzan, Joe Namath". His logic was that the *sexual* dynamic between gays and children was a red herring; the real concern was the more dangerous dynamic of shared wonder and potential which the establishment feared. Re-counting his own street scenario of being asked by children about his gender, his answer of "sissie" provoked "eyes big like saucers as all the categories in their minds crumble and somewhere inside of them they realize that there are alternatives." Near the end of his manifesto, Dimid insisted "There are countless

ways for us to relate to each other." For the sissies, it was only in the unfinished state that the countless could be experienced.

The sissie corporeal aesthetic of the unfinished was experienced and expressed – temporally and spatially – as the palpably imminent. Sissies sought to live at brinks and they flirted with but hardly took standard form. They focused on the electric art of connection and shirked the work of becoming. This was the spirit of their gender fuck, but that spirit also infused their textual practices. Melba'son presented his manifesto as an "imperfect analysis" of Sissies' relations to women, insisting that his feelings were "unqueer". Since his Mulberry House days, Melba'son's socialist feminist path demanded a new relationship to language. Adopting the unfinished somatic practice of sissie gender fuck was a move towards more bodily and performative forms of relating; in a parallel move, building on his journal practice, he began to think of both writing and thought as processes rather than finished products. His use of the word "unqueer," on one level, evoked the imperfect body by introducing a sissie speech impediment (/kl/ pronounced as /kw/) to rival the lisp. His use of the word also described a communication practice which fell somewhere between perfectly executed analysis (clarity) and graced and reciprocal connection ("queerness"). He knew his manifesto was neither "clear" or "queer" enough. But this is as it should have been because, for Melba'son, such writing should never be the final say; its value was in its capacity to "begin to explore" with others.

This sissie textual aesthetic should be understood as an extension of the critical rusticity Herring ascribes to early *RFD*. Just as the first editors of the magazine neglected to finish the sentences which described what RFD was, the sissies refused to finish their

bodies or thoughts. And, just as this practice represented the Iowan collective's refusal to "clone" themselves, the Sissies likewise refused to reproduce themselves. Although we might say that the photo-booth photos reproduce the sissies' bodies – gender and sexuality – on the page, they are actually a calculated tease. The photos have been photocopied, resulting in a low-resolution, high-contrast rendering. The flashes of white skin and black body hair actually lack all detail, reduced to a flat binary of ink and paper. The images seem to argue that the act of obsessive reproduction itself only erodes any mythical original. In this way, the photo-booth sissies became 1970s versions of Gertrude Stein's rose(s).

The photo booth, as a common site for making passport photos, also evoked the increased capacity for international travel in the world of a networked global economy, but it simultaneously evoked the heightened systemic need to document the traveler with text and image in order to control border-crossing. The sissies – between genders and over-exposed, shedding birth names and set addresses – laugh back at any effort to document them. But, in offering the photo anyway, they most importantly *generate desire* – the system's desire to fix them and the would-be sissie's desire to join them. As with "Solidarity Forever," the Sissies tried to find a political art in the contexts of connection. In its critical form, it sought to inspire terror around the unabashed erosion of norms, and in its erotic form, it sought to seduce comrades.

Should Herring's critical rusticity, though, as a firmly rural and anti-urban stylistic, be stretched to apply to what appears to be a resolutely urban sissie orientation, anchored as it was around the New Orleans French Quarter? My argument is that the sissie subjectivity was a regional rather than a rural or urban one, built on the kind of

rural-urban erotic rusticity I outlined in Chapter 1. Not only did all of LaSiS arrive in New Orleans by way of the *more* rural Fayetteville, Arkansas, and its Ozark environs, but as the use of signs in "Solidarity Forever" shows, these Sissies understood the Crescent City to be embedded in a wider geography of systemic racial inequity and violence which included places like Destrehan and Gramercy, Louisiana. As such, I believe the regional rusticity is both critical and erotic, emphasizing difference and connection between its rural and urban spaces, just as the *utopian* manifesto, according to Weeks, depends on both a critical No and a connective Yes.

Furthermore, the salience of the sissie subjectivity had already circulated beyond the city and into the veins of the Southeastern network described in Chapter 3. The appearance of Russ Cravens' and Milo's sissie manifestoes here testifies to that fact. Milo's manifesto, in particular, speaks to a rural-urban continuum. Gently pointing up differences in rural and urban (labor) genders, Milo confesses that "Back up in Tennessee, I get tired of wearing mostly work clothes, which is usually what the farm scene calls for." On the farm, even women would tend towards a more unisex or masculinized work garb.[40] He complains that "Only at parties or around the garden or kitchen sometimes do I wear a skirt or robe," indicating, I think, that sissie gender fuck depends on a social affect which is more concentrated and dynamic in the city – but not irrelevant in the country. On the other hand, going nude is more possible in the country, where, as Milo, humorously points out, "society" is more-than-human: He may take the liberty of going nude "but so do the goats. The chickens are more modest: They wear their feathers." But, Milo shared that his main reason for coming to New Orleans was to

[40] For more on the gender formation of farm women, see Chapter 6 ("Hard Women: Rural Women and Female Masculinity") in Colin R. Johnson's *Just Queer Folks*, 158-180.

"check out my feelings" as "on the streets in New Orleans' Vieux Carre I can wear my skirt with dangly earrings and a brilliant lily-flowered Goodwill shirt". Likely, there were similar reverse feelings practiced as city gay liberationists wended off the interstate and into the "nowhere" of deep Appalachia. As a regional subjectivity, the sissie refrain involved developing the skill to carry its unfinished aesthetic, its gender fuck, across lines of regional scale – from house to street to farm, and back – even if the Louisiana Sissies themselves were, for the time being, based in New Orleans.

Beyond widening rusticity to include this later regional scale and erotic register, I think it's important to stress a further nuanced difference between the sissie refrain and the early Iowan *RFD*'s critical rusticity. This nuance is best understood by looking at their preferred textual genres. Whereas early *RFD* was saturated with poetry and a collective statement which, in its unfinished and imperfect mode, actually resembled concrete poetry, the sissies chose – at least in the editorial voice for their first issue – to represent themselves primarily through the lens of the "man"ifesto. Both are genres which depend more on affective than logical registers. As such, both hinge on highly suggestive gestures *towards* political action rather than painstakingly proscribed plans. Weeks, citing Bloch's assessment of *The Communist Manifesto*, says this is critical to the success of the form: "The lack of a blueprint should be understood – as it was in Marx's work – as 'a *keeping open*' … to call the proletariat as a political agent into existence, to stimulate the organization of its power and to arm it with a sense of its own strength rather than to burden it with a ready-made model" (216).

Weeks is clear that the manifesto, as a genre, *must* "call … a political agent into existence". In early *RFD*, though, the "agents" which the acronym *might* refer to are

always changing: The *F* in *RFD* is "fruit" in one instance and "faggot" in the next, and both the poetic "country soul" and "city soul" dissolve into their waving wheat field. Early *RFD*'s is a poetic politics built on mutability, withdrawal, inscrutability.[41] As writers of ironic "man"ifestoes, the sissies, though, clearly name themselves as agents and call upon would-be sissies. Essentially, they recognize the power a name, a body, has to focus desire – political and otherwise. But, they refuse to deliver the goods; theirs is a bait-and-switch game. Their gender fuck might promise either man or woman, but in the end, it remains a "both" which is other than a sum. Rather than serially blurring one subjectivity into another, as seems to be the primary strategy of early *RFD*, the Sissies' version seems to accrue subjectivities which are almost, always, all there. This is why, instead of replacing subjectivities like "faggot" or "effeminist," we see Sissies stringing, hyphenating, and combining them – as in Dimid's use of "Sissyfaggot". This is also why, for example, Melba'son interprets the resolution of the film *The Three Faces of Eve,* not as the subsumption of the two "Eves" (Black and White) into a single, more capacious "Jane," but as all three "merged at once". Put another way, both early and sissie *RFD* embrace the multiplicity of subjectivity, but early *RFD* thinks that multiplicity as a temporal interchangeability while sissie *RFD* thinks it as a spatial, nearly formed, jumbled presence.

Each subjective model has its political liabilities. Weeks' tempered assessment of the manifesto speaks to the risks the sissie subjectivity, rooted in the manifesto form, took. She writes of the limitations of the manifesto, that "The future may not be known,

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[41] In an interesting variation on *RFD*'s use of acronyms, Weeks mentions that the writer of "The BITCH Manifesto" (1973) asserts that "BITCH is an organization which does not yet exist" and "The name is not an acronym." BITCH, then, casts itself as *pre*-production while *RFD* poses itself as *hyper*-production.

but its agent – the political subject that the manifesto seeks to address and constitute – is often prefigured. … the manifesto has traditionally claimed in this regard 'to know too much too soon'" (218). No matter how multiple or how unfinished or how in-between, the figure of the sissie lent a name and body to the radical action the Southeast gay liberationists wanted to see. If this offered their politics substance, it also gambled with the radical connective inclusivity which was at the heart of their practice. Specifically, could their increasingly regional s*issie* politics make good on the local political connections made in New Orleans? Could four white Sissies build on their connections to French Quarter drag queens, lesbian feminists, and striking black teachers to forge a politics which was more than single-issue but also not simply serial-issue? Early 1979 would find LaSiS busy applying themselves to such questions, but the coasts were already calling their attentions elsewhere.

Time to Fly, 1979: The Rhythms of a Gay Liberal Crisis; Or, the Time Sissies Turned to Faeries

Harvey Milk was assassinated in the winter of 1978. California's Briggs Initiative had been inspired by the success of Anita Bryant's Florida-based Save Our Children campaign, riding the wave of expanding New Right ideologies which were in turn propelled by images of gay people as cross-dressing predatory pedophiles. Graves notes that Briggs added a note of violence to his initiative by linking it to a campaign for expanded capital punishment, dually calling for protection from killers and homosexuals.[42]

[42] Graves, ibid., 7.

This was the wave Dimid's "Letter to Action" described in terms of accelerated chaos. Superintendent Milk, elected to office in a San Francisco increasingly understood to be gay America's capital city, worked tirelessly on counter-campaigns against this wave, particularly against the Briggs Initiative. As a result, on November 7th, California voters roundly rejected the homophobic ballot initiative. Twenty days later, Milk would be dead, shot by former fellow city supervisor, Dan White. Milo told me that the news was devastating, and that the loss colored the editorial work being done at that very time on the sissies' New Orleans issue of *RFD*.[43] It's no surprise, then, that the issue opened on the "man"ifestoes' notes of terror.

The issue wasn't devoid of poetry. Both Dimid and Aurora/House contributed poems written a month before Milk was killed. Simply titled "Poem One" and "Poem Two" – followed by the same date for both, 10/18/1978 – the paired pieces exhibit a marked departure of style for *RFD* poetry. Unlike earlier poems which often adopted erotic or pastoral forms to subvert them, these sissie poems turn on many of the conventions Weeks ascribes to manifestos: exclamation points, declarative sentences, dashes, and capital letters. The lines are mostly devoid of rhyme, and what rhythm there is comes from the sequencing of trailing off (ellipses), interruption (dashes), and volume (exclamation, capital letters). Both poems make interesting use of numbers, especially dates.

"Poem One" yokes commercialism to U.S. nationalism by referring to 1976 as the "Buy-- centennial" and the approximate year that the liberationist "1970s fell over dead". Liberationism and capitalist nationalism are directly opposed. The 1978 poem then oddly

[43] Milo Pyne, interview with author, July 1, 2016.

declares that 1984 had "already come and gone," jumping the reader into the future. The affect is one of lost time, lulling the reader with three sequential tapering lines ending with ellipses before repeating the obviously inaccurate date of 1984 at the beginning of two of those lines. "1984" references Orwell's literary critique of totalitarianism, which the poem implies is the actual form of government in the U.S. Creating a kind of temporal vertigo, the poem then jumps *back* to 1980, which is still in the real-time future, to scoff at how that year's Presidential election will go through the theatrical motions of a democracy which had already been lost. The poem concludes that awareness of the country's actual totalitarian state and democratic sham is the first step towards a thoroughly appropriate terrorist response. "Poem One" ends with a parenthetical stage whisper, still more bang than whimper: "(TO KNOW WHAT WE KNOW AND NOT TELL THEM IS A TERRORIST WEAPON.)"[44]

"Poem Two" starts with a statistic: "25% … inmates in the United St-r-ates are // Vietnam Era War Veterans?!!!!!!!!!!!!" The neutral tone of fact is interrupted by a kind of stutter effect which is produced by the tightly timed rhyme of "inmates" and "St-r-ates" and by the intrusive "r" which reveals the U.S. to be a "straight," carceral, capitalist country. Continuing the documentary tone, the poem becomes a series of unattributed, often interrupted quotes with jumping dates as in "Poem One" – 1972, followed, in order, by 1974, 1960, 1972, and 1984. Also extending its critique of a sham democracy, the poem insists that since 1974, "WE HAVE THE NEW, THE SAME RICHARD NIXON – ". If time jumps, corruption remains. By poem's close, the only hope offered is an

[44] Dimid Hayes, "Poem One, 10/18/1978," *RFD* #18, Winter 1978, 7. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.

apocalyptic one: that some system other than the state -- "maybe GAIA—Earth-Being-Entity/Single-Cell Organism"-- "knows what she is doing," which is destroying everything with a "NEW-CLEAR EXPLOSION / A cancer".[45]

Already feeling deeply desperate, even before news of Milk's assassination, the Southeastern sissies experienced the closing of the 1970s as a looming crisis, one which played out with rapidly shifting rhythms and scales. Despite the liberationist promise of 1970, as it turned out, the present was actually a horrific future predicted in a book from the past. Navigating such a systemically staged temporal vertigo would require meeting it with an equal breakneck capacity for controlling pace and volume -- the ability, for example, to walk out or shout back. Recognizing the static scale of the state might require resorting to solutions of different scales, either smaller or larger – maybe planetary or cellular ones. Again, this was the affective experience of assemblage for those who did not fit the plan: spatial and temporal chaos. What I see in "Poem One" and "Poem Two" is an attempt to improvise a counter-rhythm to that acceleration. And, indeed, LaSiS was unbelievably active during the first half of 1979. The last part of this chapter quickly describes that activity, ending with three important summer events which would change the New Orleans quartet's course: the collective's run-ins with the New Orleans police, plans for the 1979 March on Washington, and the Spiritual Conference for Radical Faeries in Benson, Arizona. This sequence would route the Sissies' orientation West again.

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[45] Dimid Hayes and House (David Speakman, also Aurora), "Poem Two, 10-18-78," *RFD* #18, Winter 1978, 18. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.

Aurora/Speakman insists that, despite their busyness, life for LaSiS in New Orleans was very everyday: they worked jobs, made food, met with friends and allies. In "Sissie Networking," Stacy shared that the group referred to their day-to-day life as the "delta of experience," implying a meeting of culture and politics in the everyday.[46] Collective life was less strained than it had been in Arkansas, possibly because they were all middle-class, but Dimid believes that their less "insular" life was a major factor.[47] Maybe, their tendency towards socialist feminist struggle had been tempered by the "heart" they were newly practicing. As for jobs, Stacy used his financial background to secure a job as a bank examiner, which he didn't very much like. According to Dimid, unlike the other sissies, Brotherlover worked a 9-5 job for the city, requiring early hours. Aurora and Dimid worked in the food industry. Dimid worked for the same "gaymen" as Melba'son, working as the cook in a small café.

Their lives were concentrated on the downriver side of the Quarter – around the Marigny. Dimid remembers it as a very musical city.[48] Gerry Rafferty's "Baker Street," with its haunting saxophone solo, had been released shortly before his arrival in 1978, and he speaks of it as a kind of soundtrack for his first year there. The café where he worked was adjacent to the Dream Palace, a Frenchmen Street musical venue of local fame. When he worked the late shift, he would often close and go have a drink at the bar. Catering to a mostly local, rather than a tourist crowd, the Palace featured artists like the Isley Brothers, Irma Thomas, Dr. John, and Odetta -- whom Dimid met while in New Orleans.

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[46]Brotherlover, ibid.
[47] Hayes, interview with author. They worked different jobs outside the home and hosted often as the Southeastern network expanded.
[48] Ibid.

Such music likely drove their political work. They also brought Charlie Murphy to perform in New Orleans.[49] In addition to the UTNO strike, the liberationist Gay Fest, and the drag-hosted No on 6 fundraiser, the group took regular opportunity to push the gay liberal New Orleans community towards a more liberationist stance which exceeded single-issue politics. In "Sissie Networking," Stacy mentioned that their political body (the P.T.A.) picketed gay bars which employed racist or sexist policies, and that they wrote a fairly outspoken column for the local gay paper *Impact*.[50] In fact, the Summer 1979 *RFD* #20 mentions that the paper's editors censored their writing – suppressing the collective's critiques of the gay establishment and removing any use of the words "sissie" or "faggot" from their column.[51] Following their UTNO strike experience, they also actively supported other initiatives. Stacy's manifesto mentions ERA, pro-choice, and anti-Klan demonstrations as well as supporting childcare and health food collectives.[52]

Highly visible locally, LaSiS was also a delta anchor for the Southeastern gay liberationist network. Following Running Water's summer and fall 1978 gatherings, the growing group didn't want to lose its networking momentum, but the Appalachian farm was all but unreachable and unaccommodating in the winter. As a solution, LaSiS hosted a winter gathering in New Orleans.[53] Held around Valentine's Day at the Bywater event space ironically called the Country Club (the venue was housed in an unassuming bungalow), the timing was appropriate because this gathering just preceded the city's Mardi Gras season – surely a good urban opportunity for creative vision-making. It was

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[49] Charlie Murphy performance flier, Dimid Hayes' personal collection. (June 30, no year.)
[50] Brotherlover, ibid.
[51] "LaSiS Update," *RFD* 20, Summer 1979, 3. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.
[52] Brotherlover, ibid.
[53] Hayes, interview by author, ibid.

a fated season, though, because a city police strike, which was timed strategically before Mardi Gras, led local krewes to cancel their parades out of disgust with the police unions holding the holiday "hostage".[54] True to the city's spirit, informal celebrations carried on in defiance of the police strike.

While LaSiS was doing its best to engage in local political struggles and to take an active position in the burgeoning Southeastern gay liberationist network, the radical sissie refrain wasn't without its detractors in the wider *RFD* network. In a parallel to how rural readers had responded to the urban gay liberationist orientation of the Bay Area faggot editorship, some readers, many rural, took exception to the radicalized sissie refrain, not only claiming contrasting political positions but also claiming "Butch" gender positions instead of sissie ones. In the Spring 1979 issue, a Larry Norris – originally from east Tennessee but at the time living in Santa Rosa, California – wrote that "I have no desire to change the world by joining the radical revolutionary war marching thru the barnyards or down main streets waving political banners … nor do I wish to knock on any doors trying to explain sissieism, ageism, classism or any other kind of ism. Besides, I don't even know what they mean (nothing)."[55] Making overt reference to "Solidarity Forever" and the sissie "man"ifestoes in previous issues, he expressed that, instead, he'd rather that *RFD* be devoted to gay men trading stories of life in the country.

Similarly, a Steve Ginsburg wrote in the Summer 1979 issue that his survey of rural gay men had been printed by LaSiS in #18 without his input, making the data and

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[54] Paul Atkinson, Joe Massa, and Bill Grady. "Captains Cancel Mardi Gras," *The Times Picayune* (New Orleans, LA), February 21, 1979, cover story.

[55] Norris, letter to the editors, *RFD* #19, Spring 1979, 19. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.

findings unclear.[56] Angry, he contended that "People trying to survive in the country just don't have time for this political bullshit, unless they are in a commune or a wolf creek type of gay town atmosphere. … Bluntly decide who RFD is publishing for: us country faggots trying to survive or you sisters in struggle in the sissie city." Aurora responded to Ginsburg , exhibiting a sissie combination of both heartfelt apology and refusal of Ginsburg's divisive, either/or logic.[57] He followed the apology with empathy ("I can understand how you feel blown off/fucked over"), with an expression of the value of the survey, and with an explanation that the editors were rushed. But then Aurora shifted registers to offer his own childhood rural experience as an exception to Ginsburg's divisive logic: "So I am rural, I am a sissie, and I am political"; by this, he pointed out that *RFD* was a *shared* dialogue including all its readers. He added the news that Wolf Creek had recently been fire-bombed, a fact which defied the "Gayberry" image Ginsburg cast. And, he closed with the simple statement that Ginsburg's use of the word "sisters" was sexist.[58] LaSiS had to contend with older faggot *RFD*'s urban-rural antagonisms as part of their editorial duties. Aurora's response nimbly reminded the *RFD* network that such gendered and geographic agonism was not a pattern they – as proponents of rural-urban, feminine-masculine connection --were interested in perpetuating. In a move similar to Oregonian *RFD*, though, when the magazine returned

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[56] Ginsburg, letter to the editors, *RFD* #20, Summer 1979, 12. The following quote is also from this letter. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.

[57] Aurora, editor's response, *RFD* #20, Summer 1979, 12. The following quotes are from Aurora's response on this page.

[58] In a January 25th (1979) letter to LaSiS, Faygele had shared the Wolf Creek news, conveying that a "building & adjacent coolhouse burned to the ground. Thus, my two previous homes have been fire-bombed & the consciousness of that vulnerability weighs heavily … ." Letter courtesy of Dimid Hayes' personal collection.

to New Orleans in the Winter of 1979, they changed the tagline by adding the word "everywhere": "a country journal for gay men everywhere," cities included.

Oddly, while they were struggling with image control within such gay print media, LaSiS was being showcased by national mainstream TV. ABC's documentary series *Closeup!* was filming a program called "Homosexuals" which profiled gay life in three U.S. cities. New Orleans represented the middle ground between the bicoastal urbanity of New York City and San Francisco. An improvement on the 1967 *CBS Reports'* "The Homosexuals," which was hosted by Mike Wallace and pandered in damning caricatures of gay men, the new "Homosexuals," while still sinking to yellow journalism, allowed gay men *and* women to speak for themselves.[59] In letters written in February and March of 1979, Melba'son shared humorous stories of how the crew attempted to frame LaSiS as "typical" – alternating personal stories and home life against the backdrop of Mardi Gras and even staging a "typical" dawn shopping trip to the French Market.[60] LaSiS put their performance acumen to playing against this grain.

Billing themselves "Casa Maricon Commune," LaSiS pushed back against this normalization.[61] Melba'son wrote to a Dav that the group spoke openly to the crew about the program's "perpetuating the myth of homosxlty bng an urban phenomenon." He also mentioned their asking for support from local "faggots," which led to one segment

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[59] Ruth Largay, "Television," *Encyclopedia of Lesbian Histories and Cultures, Volume 1,* Bonnie Zimmerman, editor. New York, Garland, 2000), 758-759.
[60] Williams, letter to a Kathy (2/19 and 3/1/1979) and letter to a Dav (3/1/1979). Dimid Hayes' personal collection.
[61] This name is included in the archival description of the program: "ABC News Close-Up: Homosexuals (1979)," *The Paley Center for Media*, accessed Nov. 4, 2017, https://www.paleycenter.org/collection/item/?q=Homosexuals&p=1&item=T:31876 and in the above letters by Melba'son. Presumably, like Milo's map of Sissie networking, this choice reflects their sense of a Caribbean orientation, a multiple postcolonial analytical perspective, and the ideological influence of the Venceremos Brigades. It may also have been intended to reflect the sizable Latino population of their neighborhood.

capturing a scene in which "9 fggts wer found in a circl massag & group hug in th crtyrd."[62] This not only testified to the erotic and connective aspects of the sissie refrain, but was intended to work against any hagiography of the core quartet and against a portrait of a hermetically private home. As Melba'son put it, "At all times thr wer mor Ss present thn jst the four of us, whch nt only gav us spprt Bt also actd as a rlty chk."[63] They tried to push their many political concerns into the interviews: "rape, mal condtng, hetrsxsm, lvng cllctivly, the deth culture all humn bngs liv in, gy histry, N.O.".[64] Based on their theatrical and poetic experiences, they tried to meet each framing and editing decision with an equally improvised counter-representation, trying to push the sissie through a lens focused to the scale of a "Homosexual".

At the same time, Melba'son wrote his friend Kathy that they were well aware that the twenty rolls of film recorded, the roughly 2.5 hours of footage, would result in no more than ten minutes of air time.[65] And they knew the rhetorical constraints of the mainstream television industry. They only hoped some of their efforts came through. Both Dimid and Aurora remember the experience as a pleasant one, though.[66] And this, as Melba'son told Kathy, was mostly due to the crew's being composed of six unionized women and one man, and one of them – a lighting technician – who came out on the set as a "dyke". After this, the filming had a more collaborative spirit, even if everyone involved knew that collaboration took place within the confines of a media scale which had only very instrumental interest in its subjects or its workers.

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[62] Williams, letter to Dav, ibid. By this point, Melba'son's shorthand has become more difficult, and he often erratically dropped most – but not all – of the vowels in his words.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Williams, letter to Kathy, ibid.
[65] Ibid. This and the info about the crew are from the letter to Kathy.
[66] Hayes, interview with the author, ibid.; Speakman, ibid.

The spring of 1979 saw the sissies engaging their refrain at local, regional, and national scales, in print and video media. The pace of their activity matched the breakneck chaos of Dimid and Aurora's "Poem One" and "Poem Two". As summer came on, three events would throw LaSiS off its tracks, forcing the group to turn to national urgencies. The first of these was actually local blowback. As reported in the Summer 1979 *RFD*, in early May, Dimid and Melba'son were arrested at their home, charged with violation of the state obscenity statute.[67] The *RFD* "update" quoted the New Orleans *Times-Picayune*, which exaggerated reports that the two were "parading around" nude on their front porch "in full view of … students at Charles J. Colton Junior High School". This local reporting clearly played on national fears spawned by the Anita Bryant campaign and the Briggs Initiative, and the obscenity statute itself was part of the state-city homophobic legislative collusion Alecia Long describes in her research. The LaSiS update further noted that none of the sissies were naked on the porch, and that, at the station, "Contrary to usual procedure, their [Dimid and Melba'son's] cases were separated. No lawyer came to their assistance. Dennis was singled out and forced to declare himself a 'homosexual'," resulting in his being held much longer than Dimid after Stacy posted their bail. At the point of their arrest, they had been inaccurately identified by a black couple whom the sissies took to have been intimidated into cooperation by the sheer number (10) of (white) officers who circled them at the arrest.

Harassment continued. Dimid, Melba'son, and Stacy were arrested for lewd conduct a week later on their back patio, this time admittedly nude, but not in public. From the police car, the three Sissies watched as the two police officers went door-to-

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[67] "LaSiS Update," ibid. The newspaper quote is also taken from this page as well as the accounts in this and the next two paragraphs.

door, finally extracting a complaint, after the fact, from an Hispanic woman who spoke no English. (Her daughter later reported to LaSiS that her mother had no idea what the police were asking her.) The LaSiS members were told in the car that "We're gonna keep coming back until they lock you perverts up forever." Again, Dennis was held longer, and the group were told that the charges would be dropped if they could avoid arrest until their August trial, but that their house would be under regular surveillance until that time.

LaSiS understood this surveillance as an harassment leveled against them for their voluble local political actions, which included open critique of city educational leadership, the entrepreneurial gay establishment, and the Superintendent of Police. Like the lesbian collectives which Hobson, Chesnut, and Gable describe as targeted by the FBI, the New Orleans sissie collective felt similarly victimized by local authorities. In fact, the reactions of the local gay liberal culture corroborate this interpretation. As local gay rights activist Alan Robinson put it, "I have never seen collectives, common in the Lesbian/Feminist community, work in the gay male setting before. For that success alone they are worth noticing. My objection to them is that politically they are a disaster … They brought with them a confrontation style politics that is not really applicable to the delicate internal and external politics of the New Orleans gay community."[68] LaSiS responded to the harassment by reaching back into the *RFD* network with the Summer 1979 update, assuring readers that all files and mailing lists had been removed from "la Casa Maricon," to protect individual identities. At the same time, they requested that the network of collectives tirelessly recycle news of the arrests in order to shine a widespread

[68] Quoted in Sears, ibid., 393. Letter written from Alan Robinson to David Williams, July 14, 1979.

light on the city's harassment: "Notify your local gay media. Spread the word in your gay community. Our only hope of survival is letting large numbers of gay people know what's happening."[69] In the meantime, they lay low.

Melba'son shared in his letter to Kathy that ABC was considering airing "Homosexuals" later in the year so that it would coincide with the October 1979 March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights.[70] The planning of the D.C. march, catalyzed by the shooting death of Milk, was already a matter of much regional debate. In the Spring 1979 issue of *RFD*, Faygele reported that he and two other coordinators of the Southeastern Conference for Lesbians and Gay Men had traveled to Philadelphia for a conference to plan the national march. His repetition of the word "national" -- and putting it in scare quotes – conveyed the concern they felt over a national movement. In fact, Faygele shared that several "felt the [Philadelphia] conference to be dominated by the New York/San Francisco axis" and "felt it necessary to help form a hinterlands caucus, representing not only rural and small town folk, but even those from big cities other than N.Y. and S.F."[71] Not opposed to the march on principle, many felt the timing was far from strategic.

Sharing the page with the LaSiS arrest update was a re-print of a letter to the coordinating committee for the National March. The letter was signed by "19 Lesbians and Gay men from Tennessee".[72] Since this Summer 1979 issue was put together by Short Mountain, it's reasonable to assume that Milo was among these nineteen. The

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[69] "LaSiS Update," ibid.
[70] Williams, letter to Kathy, ibid.
[71] *RFD* #19,Spring 1979, 4. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta. This and the previous quoted observations are from this same page.
[72] *RFD* #20, Summer, 1979, 3. All the details in this paragraph are taken from this page.

letter voiced a shared concern about timing but added reservations about limited grassroots involvement, the vagueness of the demands, a conflict with the Los Angeles NOW conference, uneven support from other national gay organizations, and the marginalization of local D.C. gay organizations in the planning. Based on these concerns, the nineteen Tennesseans recommend canceling the march and re-planning for the next year, to overlap with the 1980 Presidential elections. On the other hand, the LaSiS arrest update itself mentioned that the New Orleans Sissies were busy that summer contacting networks in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Arkansas to organize attendance at the march. Not only were national groups splintered over the D.C. march, but the Southeastern region was as well. Groups' positions on the march were often mixed; what was certain was that *some* stance on the national march was absolutely necessary.

For groups like those in the Southeastern network, their allegiances and priorities lay in a million different directions. As gay liberationists, they must have felt conflicted about a rights-centric movement, even as it would have been difficult to deny their own vulnerability in the wake of the assassination of a gay public figure like Milk. As radicals newly convinced that rural-urban regions (often conceived transnationally) were the most strategic scale for political analysis and action, a national movement set in a city of state monuments must have felt a bit false, too. But, what were the alternatives? Between the November 1978 bullet-fall of Harvey Milk and the October 1979 March on Washington emerged an event which would draw rurally oriented gay liberationists from across the country with the energy and numbers to match national urgency. On Labor Day weekend of 1979, the first Spiritual Conference for Radical Faeries would be held on an ashram in Benson, Arizona. The sissies would attend. The Winter 1979 issue (#22) of

RFD would again be published from New Orleans, with help from Short Mountain, and nearly forty pages of that issue would be devoted to documenting the Arizona conference. Reports of the October D.C. march would be scuttled to just a few pages towards the end of the issue. In an editorial statement, Milo would comment that *RFD* "is now a Faerie journal," and the sissies were referred to as the "Fairies of LaSiS".[73]

In a matter of months, during the last seasons of the 1970s decade, a fiery regional sissie subjectivity would pass into the shadow of the more national Faerie one. It's important to note that that shadow was drawn almost entirely by the sissies' own editorial hand, in the pages of *RFD*. In some ways, they had staged their own eclipse. Those I interviewed, though, on the whole, claim to have embraced the Radical Faerie subjectivity. Steeped in the somatic logic of *fanshen*, the sissies wouldn't have changed overnight, though. The next chapter aims to more clearly describe the nature of this transition in refrains, from the figure of the sissie to the faerie and from a Southeastern orientation to an apparently renewed Western one. Understanding this figural and orientational transition had implications both for the Southeast gay liberationist network as well as for the broader Radical Faerie culture to come.

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[73] Pyne (Guthrie), *RFD* #22, Winter 1979, no page number. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.

5| From Camelot to Snow White: Towards Appalachian Faeryist Sanctuary At the Dawn of the 1980s

Faygele Ben Miriam and LaSiS marched on Washington. Of the latter, Sears mentions off-handedly that they marched on Washington with "Stop Rape" signs. Now able to understand this gesture within the repertoire established by "Solidarity Forever," we recognize this as a performative articulation of very specific connection. In their pamphlet "Gay(Men) and Rape," the collective had defined rape in multiple forms: "We believe that unless major global changes are made, beginning with each man, rape in all its forms – physical, emotional, verbal, economic, military – will destroy life."[1] So, while LaSiS marched on Washington, they did so in the context of simultaneously charging fellow gay men with combatting interpersonal and systemic forms of patriarchy. They also did so with the intention of demonstrating alliances with women and other non-masculine marchers. And, they certainly didn't march in a spirit of collaboration with the U.S. government. As example to the contrary, Sears quotes a Phillip Pendleton, who marched with LaSiS: "No one I knew went to lobby Congress the next day. Our goal was to overthrow the government, not enter into dialogue with it!"[2]

Still, the experience of being part of growing numbers was life-changing. The somatic experience of moving from a collective movement to a mass one, of going from a collective of four to a march of around 100,000, must have been staggering. In *RFD*, Dimid wrote of looking "for football-field lengths in every direction [to] see nothing and everything but out, open, smiling, grinning, dancing GAY faces – to experience your

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[1] "(Gay)Men and Rape," ibid.
[2] Sears, 306. This quote and Sears' descriptions of Ben Miriam and LaSiS at the march all come from this passage.

very Self in all those directions – to no longer maintain the unconscious armors of our trained masks … was for me … the high point of my life."[3] In many ways, this was just the expansive, multiple experience the sissie refrain had prepared him for. But, in the same piece, Dimid shared his fears about the press of global powers and mentioned the persistent lure of suicide. The ticking pace of sissie terror was as accelerated as ever. He recognized there was much work to do and named the Arizona Faerie Gathering as being of equal importance to the March on Washington.

In ending his regional history with the March, Sears presents it as a culmination of Stonewall. March organizers invited this interpretation when they chose to conduct it as a ten-year anniversary of the New York City "riot". Many LGBT movement historians have traced similar lines. Such framing risks implying that local movements become national ones, that gay liberation yielded to gay rights politics. Certainly, Sears' intention was to complicate national LGBT history by detailing a very diverse and sometimes gay liberationist regional background to the emerging national (and mostly bi-coastal) gay rights history. But, that strategy fixes Southeastern local movement histories as mere preamble to the bigger story. The story of *how* the Southeastern gay liberationist network persisted well into the ascendance of the national gay rights movement lies by design, then, outside Sears' frame, like an impossibility. This chapter extends the history of that regional network into the years after the march as an effort to tell a story of gay liberationist persistence in unexpected places.

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[3] Hayes, "A Bit of Faerie Madness & Pain from Living in the Real World," *RFD* #22, Winter 1979, 94-95. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.

Telling that story, though, involves a comparison of regional rurally oriented gay liberations. I will describe, in four parts, the interactions of the Southeastern network with/in the burgeoning Radical Faerie movement which was heavily anchored in the West. First, I compare how the "radical faerie," as articulated at the rural Arizona "spiritual conference," differed from the figure of the sissie as it had been developed via LaSiS' attendance at Running Water Farm gatherings. To do that, I draw primarily on accounts of the 1979 Arizona conference in Stuart Timmons' *The Trouble with Harry Hay*, in my oral history interview with Dimid Hayes, and in the Winter 1979 *RFD* #22. Second, I show how Running Water, Atlanta, and Short Mountain developed a more nuanced sense of rural-urban networking even as they embraced the Faerie name. Third, I analyze how the next Radical Faerie rural event, in Colorado, stressed the need for a secured Faerie land trust at the same time the Southeastern Network was experimenting in similar land relations. Fourth, I close the chapter with an intra-regional comparison of Running Water's and Short Mountain's models of Appalachian rural "sanctuary" to show how liberationist concepts of figure, event, and site were deployed differently even within the Southeastern network. Essentially, the proliferation of gay liberationist orientations, at local, regional, and national scales, produced significant differences within the Southeastern Network around 1980.

The course of this chapter offers the various ways which these gay liberationists – both within their regional network and beyond – found to operationalize rural-urban connection as part of their politics. It also describes the ways both Southeastern and Western gay liberationist political cultures of the time informed each other. And, most importantly, by tracing the specific directions of a few similar refrains, it hopefully

suggests other possibilities for improvising liberationist political cultures of a regional scale in response to current and local conditions.

Between F Words: Setting the Sissie Gathering in the Faerie Conference, Labor Day 1979*

Before turning to the pivotal 1979 Arizona Spiritual Conference itself, it's helpful to further contextualize the names in circulation for the gay liberationist refrains. In the cultural lines I have been following, the Wolf Creek *RFD faggot* was succeeded by the Arkansas/Louisiana *sissies*, which in 1979 would largely be displaced by the *faerie*. Sissies at the Oregon Faggots and Class Struggle conference took exception to the masculine assumptions operational behind the faggots' idealization of the militant femme. Also, Bay Area gay liberationists of color critiqued use of the word *faggot* for its being so rooted in white European experiences of colonialism.

As we have already seen from his 1977 journals, Melba'son had been reminded of this argument by Thornton, and he recognized *faggot* as a racially exclusive term. Although he liked *fairy*, he implied that, because of the concept's basis in Celtic folklore, it would operate in a similarly exclusive way as *faggot*. He and other sissies typically used *gayman* to refer to those who espoused gay liberalism. Based on the above culturally operative definitions, he continued to embrace *sissie* as his favorite. Despite this, following a sissie aesthetic of proliferative presence, the Louisiana Sissies came to sometimes use *faggot* interchangeably with *sissie* but more commonly to join it – in a secondary position – to *sissie*, as with the *Sissyfaggot* used in Dimid's "Letter to Action".

This ongoing cultural accommodation of the word *faggot* might have been influenced by wider cultural forces than the immediate Western or Southeastern gay

liberationist circles that we have looked at so far. The term surely enjoyed renewed popularity with the 1977 publication of *The Faggots and Their Friends Between Revolutions*, written by New Yorker Larry Mitchell with illustrations by Ned Asta.[4] As early as the Summer 1978 issue, ink drawings by Asta began to appear in *RFD*.[5] Asta's lithe figures which elongated to frame text and meld into one another became a fixture of gay liberationist print culture. Not only did they evoke the tapering, effeminate bodies which were at the center of the hippy/sissie aesthetic of the time, but their very design harkened to a Victorian "decadence" which itself could serve as a shorthand for a homosexuality associated with subversive forms of utopian fantasy.

Writer Mitchell, who founded the gay press Calamus Books, authored a mischievous myth of effeminate male subversion. Sissie Aurora/House reviewed the book positively in the Winter 1978 *RFD*, conveying the general politics of the book by describing the oppressive revolutions of the title: the first was a systemic assault on women's culture and the second was an amassing of wealth by "men without color".[6] As we have seen, this reflects the nascent politics of the sissies who have begun to prioritize feminist action against the patriarchy as a step towards a socialist stance against racialized capitalism. Aurora explained that the book was intended as a primer in

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[4] Mitchell and Asta, *The Faggots and Their Friends Between Revolutions* (New York City: Calamus Books, 1978).

[5] See Asta's illustrations in *RFD* #16, Summer 1978, 36-37. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.

[6] David Speakman (House), "Faggots & Friends …" *RFD* #18, Winter 1978, 12. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta. This and the other quote and paraphrase at the end of the paragraph come from this review.

"developing our own mythology from out of the stories" in preparation for the third revolution "which will soon engulf us all".

Mitchell and Asta's version of the *faggot*, though, is not rooted in militancy at all, but a kind of connective eroticism:

> The faggots' fantasies create play – dressing up and dressing down.
> The men's fantasies create responsibilities – going here and doing that.
> The faggots' fantasies are about love and sex and solidarity.
> The men's fantasies are about control and domination and winning.
> The faggots move towards the limits of living in the body, for they have known body ecstasy and
> want to live there with everyone always.
> The men move towards the limits of living among things, for they have seen great collections and want to live there alone always.[7]

This kind of parallelism pervades the book, suggesting a faggot refrain built on a sense of the intimacy of difference, a sense that we must lie beside each other for difference to become visible. That difference is not solely binary, though, because the book encourages that relationship with many and even seems to offer a multiplicity of revolutionary refrains in the forms of the "friends": "This wonderful book clearly presents the distinctions among our community; there are the faggots, the fairies, the queens (named after the glorious past reign of the women), the dreamboats, the women who love women, the queer men, and the Men. 'Even weak links in the chain are links in the chain'."[8] Interestingly, this version of the *faggot* sounds more like the *sissie*, and in true form, a poem called "Faggot Fairy" appeared below Aurora's *RFD* review.

There were other print influences on their lingo. In the same issue, Milo offered a positive review of Evans' book *Witchcraft and the Gay Counterculture*, which had been

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[7] Qtd in Speakman (House) House, "Faggots & Friends …," ibid.
[8] Ibid.

published that year, 1978. Although Milo doesn't mention it, Evans' book includes a chapter called "Who Were the Fairies?" which ends with this observation:

> Though outlawed, the worshippers of this matriarchal mix … persisted underground and were known in folklore as fairies, named after the fateful goddesses whom they worshipped. Later in the medieval period, various remnants of the old religion were to emerge again, only this time they were called heretics and witches. As we'll see, they're greatest 'crime' was that they experienced the highest manifestations of the divine in the free practice of sexuality.[9]

Evans book ultimately focuses on the *faggot* figure as the criminalized homosexual heretic, but in the above passage, we see a possibility of understanding fairies as faggots in a phase of persistence underground, "between revolutions" as it were. Given that both the Mitchell/Asta and the Evans books were in heavy circulation in these gay liberationist cultures of the late 1970s, it is possible to see that both invited an understanding of the *fairy* and *faggot* as overlapping roles which center a kind of liminal but imminent eroticism thought of as crucial to survival. I have argued that it is by a similar eroticism that gay liberation survives in these rurally oriented networks.

That those in the Southeastern network recognized the *sissie* refrain as part of this overlap is made clear in how Milo framed Evans' book: "Those who undertake this endeavor [advocated by Evans' book] are creating a genuine Gay culture, one that is free from hatred and oppression of women and sissies."[10] Obviously, translating *fairy* / *faggot* to *sissies* came naturally, requiring no explanation. While much of Milo's review is otherwise summary, the metaphor he offers for the imminent liminality of the book is both dramatic and reflective of his time spent in both New Orleans and rural Tennessee:

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[9] Evans, 28.

[10] Pyne, "Witchcraft and the Gay Counterculture: Book Review," *RFD* #18, Winter 1978, 9. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.

"just like the tree roots which erupt from beneath the city sidewalks, splitting the concrete".[11] Instead of a parallel or temporal relation, Milo translates this liminality as a spatial layering of the rural and the urban, an interpenetration which borders on the violent, suggesting a stronger affinity with the faggot militancy which Evans ultimately focuses on.

As we have seen, though, a connective, erotic sissie "terrorism" more consonant with the tone of *Faggots and Their Friends* was on the rise. Partly, this response was due to the widely held sense that militant gay liberationism had exhausted itself and that gay rights politics had ascended. Partly, within gay liberationist circles, there was a disavowal of the sexism and racism which a faggot militancy increasingly implied as well as an intuition that what gay liberation uniquely had to offer to other liberationists was a political application of relational sexuality, of cross-movement connection. Likely, a final factor in these gay liberationists' distancing themselves from the term *faggot* was the 1978 publication of New Yorker Larry Kramer's novel *Faggots*, which, according to Reynolds Price's introduction, was a scathing satire of a gay male sexual ("faggot") culture which threatened to reduce its practitioners to "subhuman predators of random flesh".[12] While also critical, like Kramer, of gay male objectifying sexuality, these gay liberationists invested in the abundance of the sexual body as mutually communicative. They celebrated sex. Instead of identifying with a word that would be more and more associated with urban male cruise cultures, they needed a refrain that would allow for open, full, mutual connection which was also political.

Enter the Radical Faerie.

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[11] Ibid.
[12] Price, "Introduction" to Larry Kramer's *Faggots* (New York City: Grove, 1978), xiv.

To give an account of the origins of the first Spiritual Conference for Radical Faeries, I depend on Stuart Timmons' *The Trouble with Harry Hay: Founder of the Modern Gay Movement* (1990). I recognize that this would be problematic for a rich history of the Western rurally oriented gay liberationist culture, but that is not the purpose of this chapter. Instead, I only want to sketch the culture's basic background in order to contextualize a comparison of the two regional cultures' main events (spiritual conference and gathering) and figures (Faerie and Sissie). According to Timmons, the idea for the Arizona conference emerged from the success of a workshop called "New Breakthroughs in the Nature of How We View Gay Consciousness," which was held at the national Gay Academic Union conference in Los Angeles, at the University of Southern California in November 1978. Lesbian therapist Betty Berzon invited Don Kilhefner, Mitch Walker, and Harry Hay to conduct the workshop.[13] Unlike the Running Water gathering, which resulted from a lesbian feminist charge at a regional political conference, the 1979 Arizona conference was catalyzed by a successful presentation on gay consciousness at a national gay academic conference. The three presenters, whose recent connections in the previous year were sparked by a shared interest in the role of spirituality in gay consciousness-raising, were determined to follow the success with a gay retreat.

Hay brought cultural cachet and political experience to the event.[14] He had been a member of the Communist Party USA (CPUSA) from the 1930s until 1951, when he was dismissed as a "security risk" based on his homosexuality. He helped form the

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[13] Timmons, *The Trouble With Harry Hay: Founder of the Modern Gay Movement* (New York City: Allyson Books, 1990). 261.
[14] These biographical overviews of Hay, Walker, and Kilheffner come from Timmons.

Mattachine Society around 1950. That society hinged on the notion of the homosexual as a minority and structured itself superficially on the model of the Communist cell, but more elaborately on Masonic fraternal orders. What this meant was that there was secrecy around membership, with oath-bound initiations into greater hierarchies of responsibility – all of which was designed to frustrate infiltration by outside opposition of a kind which was pervasive in the Cold War U.S. After modest success in using publicity to impact legal decisions in cases of entrapment of homosexuals, the Mattachine Society turned towards a politics of respectability, making bids for acceptance by the wider society. Hay, the former Communist, was seen as a liability in such pursuits, so he left the society a few years later, becoming increasingly interested in gay anti-assimilationism as a result. After years of research into anthropological and scientific accounts of homosexuality, he helped to found the Los Angeles GLF in 1969 but moved with his partner John Burnside to rural New Mexico shortly afterwards, where his past political work was recognized in Jonathan Ned Katz's book *Gay American History* (1976) and in Peter Adair's documentary *Word is Out* (1977).

Hay first published in *RFD* in 1975 – an essay on the genetic origins of a homosexuality whose outsider social function was to innovate the larger hidebound institutionalized society. According to Timmons, editor Carl Wittman was inspired, but also frustrated, by the article's stressing spirituality over political organizing.[15] In 1976, Hay extended his theories, still arguing that gays had a biological predisposition to support, as Timmons describes it, "cultural evolution, always shifting with changing social needs," but adding that, in the mid-70s, homosexuals were particularly called to

[15] Ibid., 254.

lead society from treating each other in objectifying ways towards treating each other as mutual subjects.[16] In 1976, *RFD* declined to publish the new essay, though. Dimid says that it was rumored that Hay had been slotted to lead the 1976 Faggots and Class Struggle conference but then chose not to because of too little emphasis on spirituality.[17] Possibly, differences over his writing were also a factor. In both cases, though, whether the culture called for a spiritual politics or a political spirituality seemed to be at stake. In 1979, though, following so close on his being ensconced as a gay elder in *Gay American History*, *Word is Out*, and the Gay Academic Union workshop, Hay – at the age of 67 -- was poised to take on a new leadership role.

Timmons characterizes Hay as the political mind of the conference. He casts the young Mitch Walker as the spiritual leader. Walker published his essay "Visionary Love" in *Gay Sunshine* during the winter of 1976. Trained as a Jungian psychoanalyst at San Francisco's Lone Mountain College, Walker translated archetypes like the anima (the feminine aspect of men's psyches) into spiritual components much like the tripartite soul of the Feri tradition which had so influenced Reclaiming witchcraft. For example, in "Visionary Love," Walker describes a "trueself identity" which is older than the "falseself" that is constructed by the historical social categories one is born into.[18] Although Walker saw identities as thoroughly constructed ("Humans don't come into the world with an identity; this identity must be made"), the "trueself" transcends immediate historical conditions. By such theories, he reflected the wider gay liberationist takes on the psychic elements of affect but with his own unique terms.

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[16] Ibid., 256.
[17] Hayes, interview with author, ibid.
[18] Walker, *Visionary Love: A Spirit Book of Gay Mythology and Transmutational Faerie* (San Francisco: Treeroots Press, 1980). 18.

His vision departed from Evans' in that he maintained that "An economic analysis of gay oppression is absurd, like forming a composite animal by tacking the legs of a kangaroo onto a tuna fish … ."[19] Likely reflecting many then-contemporary debates between socialist feminists and cultural feminists, Walker seemed to assume that patriarchy and gay oppression pre-date capitalism; therefore, he advocated a gay liberation which was in no way assimilationist but was at the same time absolutely not Marxist – a political theory whose homophobia he was quick to note. In the winter of 1977, he wrote a companion piece to "Visionary Love" called "Becoming Gay Shamanism," and Walker thought of himself as filling a shamanic role at the 1979 Spiritual Conference.

Kilhefner, whose role in the conference has often gone understated, played an important administrative role alongside the two visionaries. Timmons mentions that, after running the Los Angeles GLF as a kind of support figure for Morris Kight, in 1971, Kilhefner became the executive director of what that organization became: the L.A. Gay Community Center. In that role, he won and managed millions of dollars in grants but was disillusioned with the center's quick transition into a bureaucratic form which was confined too much by its funding lines. He stepped away from his directorship in 1976 and sought for new directions in spiritual work -- specifically with countercultural spiritual teacher, Ram Dass, with whom he studied for a year. Kilhefner was the one who handled most of the conference logistics.[20]

Like many of the other rurally oriented gay liberationists, these three had turned to spirituality, mainly for its perceived capacity to help manage radicals' dashed affective

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[19] Ibid, 16, 12.
[20] Timmons, 257-258.

energy during a period when liberationism was widely thought to have failed. They also thought of it as a helpful tool in the consciousness-raising so central to radical culture after the first wave of Maoist influence. At the same time, they were distancing themselves from radical Marxist politics concerned primarily with class, mostly because so many such radical organizations were homophobic and de-prioritized analyses of gender, sexuality, and race. As we have seen, the sissies, in their transition from Arkansas to Louisiana, made a similar move, but their theoretical separations weren't as extreme as Hays' or Walker's. The sissies thought of feminist analysis and care labor as vital pre-requisites to a class analysis attentive to race. In this way, they reflected the political spirit of *Faggots and Their Friends*. But Walker thought application of class analysis to homophobia was "absurd," and Timmons comments that, at this time, Hay thought Marx and Engels too short-sighted to be deeply relevant to the twentieth century.[21] Interestingly, both Hay and Walker took their steps away from historical materialism while proposing forms of quasi-essentialism – Hay with his genetic, cross-cultural view of gayness and Walker with his notion of a "trueself" which is longer than immediate historical conditions.[22] These were new directions in rurally oriented gay liberationism.

The sissies attended the Arizona conference. They pooled resources and bought a Volkswagen van which they named "SissyBus," a name Dimid says was meant to evoke

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[21] Ibid, 256.

[22] Timmons comments that Hay's interest in a "gay essence" gained him popular attention but also garnered academic disapproval, because of widespread intellectual investment in social constructionism. He further suggests that his essentialism may have been over-emphasized due to his association with the "California essentialists," thereby leading commentators to overlook the aspects of his thought that were social constructionist. See Timmons 251, footnote.

the mythological Sisyphus, ever rolling a stone up a hill.[23] True to their past patterns, they arrived late at night. In many ways, the event was familiar territory for them. There were lots of circles, and LaSiS conducted one on men and rape.[24] On the first night, there was a long circle where each person shared about themselves – a kind of vulnerability which had been built into the Running Water gatherings, too. There was elaborate dress – skirts, bells, and feathers. There was nudity and open sexuality.

One important difference, though, was the added momentousness sounded by the past year's accelerated national crisis of gay liberalism. When invited to share names of brothers who had been lost, Harvey Milk – not quite a year dead – was one of the first ones named.[25] One attendee remembered it felt like a "homecoming," especially in light of the ten-year anniversary of Stonewall.[26] Reflecting the temporal framing of the upcoming National March, the Arizona conference similarly felt like an inheritance of a decade's gay liberation, but instead of turning to concerns with gay rights, the attendees saw it as a renewed commitment to those early liberationist values. Still, the momentousness of the event also lent it a comparable national geographic scope: A poem represented those who answered the call to the conference as ranging "From coast to coast, from North to South" and from city and country."[27] There were other differences

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[23] Hayes, interview with author, ibid.
[24] "An Incredible Weekend," *RFD* #22, Winter 1979, 29. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta. The recollections of the 1979 event in *RFD* #22, pages 25-72, are collectively titled "The Fairies Gather" in the table of contents. On the pages themselves, there may be other titles to distinguish pieces but usually no author names.
[25] Ibid, 29.
[26] Ibid., 28.
[27] "The Faeries Gather: A True Tale," *RFD* #22, Winter 1979, 30. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.

from Running Water Farm gatherings, though, relating to the event's name, networking, site, and spiritual composition.

In some ways it was a "conference," with a few planned talks and presentations. But spontaneous discussions were more common. Circle topics multiplied as they were thought up and scrawled onto a blackboard. Timmons notes that "The word 'conference' was quickly rejected as 'too hetero' and replaced by the word 'gathering'."[28] Even though he doesn't attribute this suggestion to anyone, since we know LaSiS was present and that a similar thought process was employed in the naming of the Running Water gatherings, Southeastern attendees likely participated in this decision, drawing upon their own experience to re-shape the format. Its name was changed immediately to reflect a more dispersed, participatory structure.

The Rainbow "gathering" format which Running Water modeled itself on relied a lot on word-of-mouth communication, but it also depended on elaborate contact lists with lists of skills for sharing. These lists allowed attendees to network after the gatherings and remain mobile when necessary, moving from contact to contact with the promise of exchanging skills as a form of barter for temporary residence. One attendee mentioned seeing an argument erupt between Hay and two other Faeries. Hay was angry that they were copying a mailing list. The onlooker appreciated Hay's Cold War perspective, formed in an era of constant FBI surveillance, blacklisting, and politico-sexual "witch hunts": Mailing lists could be seized and whole networks of households infiltrated.[29] Hay must have imagined the conference culture to adopt an organizational structure much like

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[28] Timmons, 267.

[29] "A Meeting of Points of View," *RFD* #22, Winter 1979, 42. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.

the Mattachine's, built on general secrecy and leadership hierarchies. Even though the onlooker doesn't mention the perspective of the other two Faeries, it is reasonable to assume they were more accustomed to the gathering networking model which relied far more on decentralized organization and regular mobility to combat surveillance. As we saw with LaSiS, even when such risks as Hay imagined came to light – as when LaSiS members were harassed and arrested in New Orleans – they took measures to immediately relocate themselves and all records and then blasted news of the surveillance back through their decentralized networks, using increased visibility of greater scales to expose local harassment.

The site was clearly different than Running Water. While both were remote, one was in a desert and the other in the Appalachian Mountains. Whereas Running Water's steep incline and small area allowed only an intimate number at close quarters, the Desert Sanctuary ashram in Benson, Arizona, offered expansive vistas and hosted many more attendees. The Running Water events could host around fifty; Desert Sanctuary hosted nearly four times as many. There was a somatic difference between attending an event for an intimate few and one for a gathering mass. What's more, the Appalachian site was a former farm, organically connecting the attending men's care labor to the agricultural work which haunted the place. Desert Sanctuary was an ashram with – as Dimid remembers – an old swimming pool, which invited different associations of spiritual retreat.[30] Even though this fact surely prompted a tone of tourism for some, that impression was undercut by the fact that the owner had made the ashram an "exclusively

[30] Hayes, interview with author, ibid.

Gay-oriented" enterprise and that he had donated use of the space for the Spiritual Conference.[31]

And, true to the interests of its organizers, the conference was clearly spiritual. Dimid comments that, while any spirituality at Running Water was mostly improvised in small groups, at the Arizona conference certain events were clearly planned and mostly spiritual. There were elaborately designed ceremonial rituals. And it is through analysis of two such events that I want to develop the central contrast between the Sissie and Faerie refrains: the mud-bath ritual and Hay's talk on subject-SUBJECT consciousness.

Although it was spontaneous, the mud-bath ritual towards the end of the conference both drew upon earlier rituals and talks for its energetic impact *and* made the most lasting impression with most attendees. It was photographed and shared, through *RFD* and elsewhere.[32] Faeries dragged buckets of water to a dry arroyo and began to cover themselves and each other in mud. At one point, the group focused on a single man, piling mud on him and fashioning a large earthen phallus over his cock. They laced the mud with plants and paraded him around the grounds, ending with a joyous group washing at which everyone embraced, kissed, and laughed. A simple group act, it was remembered with interesting consistency by most participants. One said that it "evoked a sensation of timelessness that I sometimes feel during especially satisfying lovemaking, that I am in touch with something thousands and thousands of years old."[33] Another described it as an effort to "act-out the erasing of your personality. Act-out the return to

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[31] "An Incredible Weekend, " ibid.
[32] *RFD* #22, Winter 1979, 64. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta. There are a few photos of the mud ritual on the facing page, 65.
[33] Ibid.

the mineral elements. Act-out the discovery of your form as the mud is washed off. Act-out the disengagement from your image."[34]

Conference attendees returned repeatedly to sensations of being out of time and out of place, somewhere cosmic and somewhere ancient, somewhere away from their current conditions: "We know that it [fairy-spirit] is an ancient, timeless spirit. Rituals, raw image-making, primitive rituals create the images that bring associations back to our primordial sensations and functions … unlocked spirit memories and ancient visions".[35] Another found a more geographic way of saying it: "oh, oh, I know we have left the poor planet earth far behind, I know we have soared beyond our bodies at last, understood at last we were not born there, we were not meant to 'be' there, were not meant to stay – still, yet, the final reason of our time on this planet just slipping around the corner ahead … ."[36] Timmons observes that the photos, taken by Allen Page and Mark Thompson, captured "a different tribe from another time."[37] The participants identified most with the washing away of the mud as a way to reveal a more authentic, ancient self. Surely, this echoed the powerful, closing image of Hay's opening-night speech.

Friday night, Hay had spoken on subject-SUBJECT consciousness, a non-objectifying orientation which he argued "fairies" (certain in-tune gay men) were born to practice and ultimately shift society towards. He ended the speech with a figure which, connected to the mud-bath ritual, shifts the faerie refrain decidedly: "Fairies must begin to throw off the filthy green frogskin of hetero-imitation, by which disguise they

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[34] "Desert Circle: Passages and Images from the Spiritual Conference," *RFD* #22, Winter 1979, 35. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid., 36.
[37] Timmons, 268.

managed to get through school with a full set of teeth, and discover the lovely Gay-Conscious notMAN (as the early Greeks called us) underneath."[38] While Hay was literally calling for participants to resist enacting forms of respectability based in heterosexually normative institutions, he was also characterizing complex material conditioning as something which could be stripped away like a second skin to reveal a more timeless (or at least ancient, cross-cultural) authentic self "underneath". Not only did this imbue the washing away of dirty skins at the mud-bath ritual with meaning, but it also reflected his and Walker's new quasi-essentialist theories of gayness – "biosocial" predispositions and "trueselfs". In fact, as Timmons and others have noted, it was Hay who coined the phrase "radical faerie," where "radical" was understood to mean "'root' or 'essence' as well as 'politically extreme'."[39]

And so, between speech and ritual, the Faerie refrain was born.

It's important to remember the instability, the mutability, of a refrain, though. I find Dimid's memory of the mud-bath ritual very interesting.[40] He told me that, despite his awareness of many people's criticisms of Hay, he admired the man. He said he always felt that, when with Hay, he was in the presence of a kind of inspired elder and leader. Even given this feeling of connection with Hay, Dimid's description of the mud-bath ritual doesn't quite line up with Hay's vision. Dimid's account remains focused on the layering of mud, the building of a mass body, the sticky connections. He spends little time, by comparison, talking about the cleansing, and he doesn't mention a timeless, ancient, or cosmic gayness. Dimid had spent the previous several years practicing a

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[38] *RFD* #22, Winter 1979, 45. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.
[39] Timmons, 250.
[40] Hayes, interview with the author, ibid.

sissie refrain which, by contrast to the Faerie one, emphasized the elaboration of one's self by the performance of multiple connections within the very specific, intimate, everyday conditions within which one lives. The Faerie refrain depended on a figure who turns inward to plunge past the depths of current material conditions to discover an older self elsewhere who can be unveiled as the authentic self needed now. The Faerie refrain was consonant with Walker's psychological model of spirituality which depended on introspection towards collective forms of consciousness; that collective was increasingly formed of the examples of gender deviance and male-male sexuality which Hay found in other (often indigenous) cultures. The "Faerie" required a "shaman" returned from his inner depths.

The sissie refrain depended more on an everyday performative element. It had less use of historical archetypes, instead drawing its figures from public interactions and sometimes from popular culture. It depended on intricate knowledge of the powerful dynamics of everyday life, which was gained from making connections and living at the borders of those points of contact. Its sense of self was collective and outward-looking but concentrated, not cosmic and ancient. I understand Dimid to have experienced the mud-bath ritual more as a sissie than as a new-born Faerie.

But, as a sissie, Dimid would have taken his experience of the Spiritual Conference for Radical Faeries as a connective experience, one which multiplied his sense of self. This relation to difference also explains why *RFD* #22, published once again in New Orleans, devoted around forty pages to writings about the 1979 Arizona conference. It explains why Milo's editorial statement would admit that *RFD* "is now a

'fairy journal' and would refer to the "fairies of LaSiS".[41] This is a form of subjective capaciousness we have seen exercised, for example, when embracing terms like *Sissyfaggot*. Even as Southeastern sissies embraced the Radical Faerie refrain, they performed it in ways which suited their own regional purposes. As initial evidence of this regional adaptation, I note that *RFD* #22 with its forty pages of Arizona conference content, was titled "Returning Forest Darlings." This move subtly marks the Arizona conference experience as part of a return to the Appalachian gathering. In the next section, I describe how the affective figure of the *Faerie* was applied to their ongoing regional work.

Making Triangles: Running the Faerie through the Southeastern Rural-Urban Network, early 1980

If the Winter 1979 *RFD* (#22) subtly framed the Arizona conference as a return to the forest, it did so to highlight the importance of local application. What was learned in the desert had to be uniquely applied in the context of the forest. More and more, the Southeastern *RFD* editors thought of their refrain-making in ecological terms. Interestingly, from the historian's perspective, Sears argues that "Localities from Atlanta to Charlotte are better understood as local queer ecologies: queer spaces occupied by various groups with differing beliefs, symbols, identities, lifestyles, languages, and interests operating inside a common border and within a cultural context of homophobia and heteronormativity."[42] Whereas Sears most often thinks of these "local queer ecologies" as urban units with rural "common borders" – an urbanormative concept in

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[41] *RFD* #22, Winter 1979, inside cover. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.
[42] Sears, 319.

that the rural is conceived merely as an urban frame – the Southeastern sissies tended to think of local queer ecologies at the regional scale, allowing for rural-urban connection.[43] It is this view which allowed the *RFD* editors to imagine the desert within the forest.

If we remember Melba'son's description of standing at the Tortilla Flats sink, shaped by the press of co-workers' gendered sexuality, the passing tourists, the city's literary history, memories of Mulberry House, and even production in Taiwan, then we get a sissie sense of how the local is produced. It is a much more porous system, to them, than Sears' definition of a local queer ecology would suggest. Milo provides a similar description in the editorial statement for *RFD* #22:

> Sunset on the Mississippi – A train clanging by behind me – the earth shaking – Waves lapping the rox in front of me while riverboats, tugboats, barges and freighters pass by. New Orleans – Queen City of the south. It was here we migrated, joining forces with the sissies for the winter RFD. I don't belong here. My heart is in the mountains of Colorado; My heart is in the hills of Tennessee; But there was a job to be done … and we did it. Sure it's not all country (and I'm a purist) but working with my city brothers has opened many doors for me. We might live in the country far away from the diversions and distractions of the city; We might live in the bowels of the monster; We might be on the road, wanderers, vagabonds, seekers, but we are one family/river. A strong river growing stronger only as we join forces. Part of RFD's purpose is to help with that flow …. . Somehow sitting here sensurrounded by the city I can smile knowing that upriver there are quiet places where the water flows sweet and clear.[44]

The word *sensurround* nicely conveys the somatic experience of assemblage. While Melba'son's description of *sensurround* in the same city, two years prior, had been more claustrophobic, more urban, more animated by currents of gendered and sexualized labor, Milo's connects the city to the rural by regional forms of transport (boats and trains), natural forms (rivers and mountains), and emotional connection (his heart, "brothers").

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[43] I would qualify my assessment of Sears' practice by saying that, while he clearly includes rural places like Short Mountain on his map, their uniqueness and urban connection are rarely analyzed. As a result, his "Stonewall South" region often resembles a collection of complex cities.

[44] Pyne, editorial statement, *RFD* #22, Winter 1979, inside front cover, ibid.

The concept of flow does not erase the distinctions inherent in unity but evokes the kind of spatial analysis we have seen Mary Pat Brady recommend when she urges scholars to "shift the focus to networks of relationships and the obstructions and flows between people and events and the sites of their coming together …." And with Milo's description, referencing Colorado, we see a flow emerging *between regions* just after the Arizona gathering.

In this section, I analyze the "obstructions and flows" which occurred in the Southeastern network between the Arizona Radical Faerie conference and the second Western gathering in Colorado. Specifically, I look first at evidence of early Short Mountain's orientation of ambivalence about and difference from the Radical Faerie refrain. Next, I examine Atlanta's different Faerie orientation. The city tentatively posed itself as an "urban fairyspace" which would facilitate not only year-round gathering but also more detailed thought about the function of the regional network. Finally, I describe how Running Water Farm adopted new gathering and editorial formats in dialog with the Radical Faerie refrain and the widening network in mind.

Short Mountain ambivalence towards Hay was not without its precedent. The small Tennessee collective published the summer 1979 issue (#20) of *RFD*. In that issue, just months before the Arizona conference, Short Mountain editors decided to publish Hay's second *RFD* article: "Gay Awareness and the First Americans". They did so, though, with an editorial note: "In reviewing this article we were able to appreciate it only with careful reading but the time spent in doing so more than rewarded us with new and interesting perspectives. The opening paragraphs, however, propose that homosexuals represent a genotypic entity which is in exclusive possession of certain

superior awarenesses. Our publishing of this article should … not necessarily be taken as giving assent to these or related hypotheses."[45] The comment about "careful reading" surely refers to the difficulty of Hay's writing. The arguments of Hay's article are often unclear (linking subject-SUBJECT consciousness, indigenous forms of gender and sexuality, and settler colonialism), and the essay quickly assumes reader agreement, ending with an invitation to the Arizona gathering to begin work on the problems it names. In 1976, Wolf Creek editors had rejected Hay's article on subject-SUBJECT consciousness as, according to Hays himself, "gobbledygook".[46] It is possible that Short Mountain editors who three years later found an article on the same general topic similarly confused wanted to show some deference to the established gay activist and organizer of the upcoming conference. Perhaps, they thought the print essay would facilitate upcoming discussions. Either way, they had to voice their issue with its genetic, essentialist position.

As I have already argued, those in the Southeastern network who still identified with their mostly socialist lesbian feminist peers would have found this essentialism hard to swallow. Others may have been additionally bothered by the fact that Hay's essentialist theories of gay "superior awarenesses" tended to refer exclusively to gay men. The sissies and "gentle men" who gathered at Running Water in response to lesbian outrage over gay male behaviors of superiority were trying to move away from practices of that kind; they certainly weren't trying to theorize it as a part of their natures.

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[45] Editorial comment, *RFD* #20, Summer 1979, 18. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.
[46] Timmons, 257.

In fact, with *RFD* #20, the editorial collective had taken a bolder step towards inclusion of women in the network. Naming the issue "Roaring Fresh Decisions," the Short Mountain editorial team essentially presented a return to the magazine's rural roots as a renewed commitment to its flexibility, changing relevance, and inclusion. After providing a lush and rustic description of the Short Mountain landscape, they threw the I Ching over the future direction of *RFD*. They got the hexagram for thunder and wind – meaning duration -- which they interpreted as saying that "our independence is not based on rigidity and immobility of character, but always keeps abreast of the time and changes with it."[47] Describing this responsiveness to change as "organic," they chose to demonstrate this flexibility by including two feature articles by women: an autobiographical poetic piece by June Boyd, an incarcerated black lesbian, and an essay on nuclear power by lesbian anarchist musician Kathy Fire.[48]

Whereas previous issues – like #16 – had featured women's writing as a theme, #20 considers lesbians regular contributors based on the relevance of their cultural political thought. Given that early *RFD* had fostered thinking of its material as a print extension of writers' bodies, this inclusion of women was more radical than it first appears. On a certain level, it amounted to centering women as part of the erotic circuit the magazine charged. In fact, it was actually only a formal recognition of a status which already existed in practice: these two articles were not solicited but submitted to *RFD* by the authors, meaning the two lesbians must have already been readers of the journal "for

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[47] Editorial comment, *RFD* #20, Summer 1979, 2. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.
[48] June Boyd, "June Boyd: A Black Strong Woman," 4 and Kathy Fire, "Nuclear Realities, Part One," 16-17, *RFD* #20, Summer 1979, Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.

gay men everywhere". The Short Mountain editors made clear what their choice meant when they wrote, "Each editing becomes a gathering in itself, bringing together strands of the web, and the 'RFD collective' grows, forming and reforming."[49] While the "Radical Faerie Digest" sought to grow along gender lines, the Western gatherings and theories would remain steadily focused on gay men.

The editors' rationale for inclusion of the two lesbian-written articles was, again, their political relevance. Because "Brothers Behind Bars" had become a recurring feature since its inception in Oregon, the editors claimed the relevance of June Boyd's prison experiences to gay male readers. Based on the large-scale dangers of nuclear power, they contended that Fire's article was relevant to everyone. There was another level of relevance they didn't mention but which the regular reader of *RFD* would have recognized: both these issues were of unique regional and rural relevance due to the common location of prisons and nuclear plants in those areas.

Although June Boyd was imprisoned in Muncie, Indiana, the earlier New Orleans issue of *RFD* (#18) included a feature called "Prison Page … Prison Rage …"; of the four prisoner letters featured on that page, two were from Memphis inmates and one was from an Atlanta prison.[50] In response to Boyd's article, in issue #22, an Ed Meade at Leavenworth expressed thanks for her article and for the fact the issue was edited from Tennessee, saying "I will soon need some friends in that state".[51] Meade was being

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[49] Editorial comment, *RFD* #20, Summer 1979, 2.

[50] "Prison Page … Prison Rage …," *RFD* #18, Winter 1978, 16. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.

[51] Ed Meade, letter in "Brothers Behind Bars," *RFD* #22, Winter 1979, 20. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.

transferred to Brushy Mountain Prison in Appalachian Tennessee as a "problem" inmate, for organizing fellow gay prisoners. On the facing page, a Leonard Star Carter at Walla Walla in Washington wrote, "I have plans for serving life for this here picture"; below Star's letter appears a photo of an African American outside his prison cell, wearing a short floral dress, a matching scarf, a shoulder bag, and flip-flops.[52] If Boyd was already a part of the *RFD* network, then so were these prison writers and activists, many of whom were imprisoned in the Southeast, some of whom were black, and some of whom flouted normative gender. They were all already active in the rural *RFD*'s flow.

The editors annotated Fire's article more pointedly. In an opening note, they commented, "Our layout headquarters is in a little old log cabin up in a beautiful holler. We have electricity here, a necessity for a typewriter of this kind. We burn precious few watts, but we are tied in to TVA's nuclear expansion program nonetheless. We are in the heart of an area destined for development, exploitation, and internal colonialism."[53] To illustrate that location, an image accompanied Fire's text with an upside-down triangle charting the concentrations of energy infrastructure in Tennessee and northern Alabama. The caption reads, "The biggest power project ever undertaken in America is centered in Middle Tennessee's 'Electric Triangle'."[54] On this topic, in issue #18, Clear Englebert wrote, "I would be interested in hearing from any gay people (female/male) involved in working against nuclear power."[55] In issue #23, Englebert responded to a reader who

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[52] Leonard Star Carter, Ibid, 21.
[53] Editorial comment, *RFD* #20, Summer 1979, 16. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Englebert, announcement, *RFD* #18, Winter 1978, 13. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.

complained about the irrelevancy of the topic of nuclear power and of content by women; his answers were simple, essentially explaining the connection of both to him – that he lived within forty miles of the Brown's Ferry reactor (which had recently nearly suffered a meltdown) and that "considering how important wimmin are in my life, I wouldn't mind seeing more articles [by them] … ."[56]

Rather than stress an essentialist gay (male) nature, Short Mountain editors insisted on thinking of *RFD* and its network as changing in response to historical demands and local exigencies. They framed this stance as an "organic," rural orientation. They also foregrounded regional / rural political issues in that they looked at the tendency of the government to locate nodes of its carceral and energy systems in the Southeast, often in rural areas. Prisons brought jobs to economically depressed Appalachia and its surrounding cities, conscripting its poor populations to participate in its racist, sexist, and homophobic control practices.[57] Nuclear plants were also located in rural regions like Tennessee and northern Alabama, communicating to those in the area that they were expendable. These industries themselves were rural-urban affairs: Prisoners were transported across city, county, and state lines, and Englebert describes how power generated by rural nuclear plants was sent to power city infrastructures.[58] Short Mountain editors made clear in Issue #20 that women and people of color who wrote about these issues of increasing regional relevance would find a fitting platform in *RFD*.

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[56] Englebert, letter to the editors, *RFD* #23, Spring 1980, 3. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.

[57] In a conference presentation, Carol Mason referenced the prevalence of high-security prisons and mountaintop removal in Appalachia within the context of "necropolitics". Mason, "Buckwild Mad Men: Masculinity and Necropolitics in Appalachia" (presentation, annual conference of the Appalachian Studies Association, Shepherdstown, WV, March 18-20, 2016).

[58] Englebert, letter to the editors, *RFD* #23, Spring 1980, 3.

The woman who figured most prominently in the Southeastern network at this time was Cathy Gross. Having moved from Appalachian Virginia to Atlanta with her friend Russ Cravens, she helped plan the legendary 1978 Southeastern Conference for Lesbians and Gay Men. Her letter in critique of the San Francisco Women's Issue of *RFD* established her as a voice passionate about maintaining lesbian-gay male dialogue in the region even when gay men didn't initially demonstrate the care necessary to foster those conversations. She was the woman the sissie manifestoes cited and engaged as their impetus. Having lived six years in Appalachia, as an activist and cultural worker, she brought tried rural know-how with her to the big city of Atlanta. She moved into an apartment she shared with Cravens, Abbott, and Abbott's lover. She remembers her early years in Atlanta as bright ones: She moved relatively easily from the ALFA collectives into gay drag clubs, maintaining her place in lesbian and gay male social circles.[59] By the time *RFD* came to Atlanta, though, for the Spring 1980 issue (#23), she had moved to the Short Mountain area, to rural Gassaway.

Following on the Short Mountain Issue #20's inclusion of women writers, Gross assumed her place in the network quite seriously. Not only did she physically move to one of its most active rural nodes, but she also contributed *two* pieces to the Atlanta issue from her new Appalachian home. One – in that it was a political piece – was similar to Boyd's and Fire's: "A Resource Guide to Understanding and Combatting the Corporate Food Chain".[60] In the author byline for the essay, she parenthetically referred to herself

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[59] Hope (Gross), interview with the author, ibid.

[60] Gross,"A Resource Guide to Understanding and Combatting the Corporate Food Chain," *RFD* #23, Spring 1980, 74-77. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.

as "mountain dyke," trying on a possible new name for herself, as was more and more a part of the culture.

Boyd's article had poetically blended autobiography and political observations. Gross did something similar in her other contribution to *RFD* #23. Deploying the textual playfulness of the magazine's Iowan days, her piece defies genre expectations. It's difficult to know whether the piece even has a title. Handwritten in two columns, each column has a bold header: 1) "**THAT I AM A DYKE.**" and 2) "**AND NOT WEIRD.**" Splitting two columns is a line written on its side, offering, between slashes, the details of her birth. This line begins with the date, time and place of her birth, followed by "BORN ANESTHETIZED / BREAST-FED / AT ONE WEEK REARED UP, HELD HEAD UP / DEFIANT."[61] The poetic slippage from a non-feeling state to an image of dependence – which sticks in the double meanings of "reared" and "held up" – to the sudden "defiant" creates a sense of accelerated independence. The two columns are a kind of biography which begins with "My mother was afraid of me". Flat, declarative, short single-line sentences -- most beginning with "I" -- follow, taking on the look of a poem. Mostly, they detail her struggles with her parents and her butch behavior, which depressed her: "Depression crept in on cat's feet." Referencing the Carl Sandburg urban-set poem "Fog," this disorienting association prepares the reader for the second column.

The first column ends with "I was placed in a mental hospital." What follows is a textual representation of what lesbians and gays of the time suffered at the hands of the psychiatric profession. Gross improvises towards an alternative psychic affect. The lines

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[61] Gross, "That I Am A Dyke. And Not Weird," *RFD* #23, Spring 1980, 57. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.

at the top of the second column run together, more like a hazy paragraph, as she recounts the horrors of her hospital experiences. The disorientation of the script reflects the disorientation of her experience in the institution. Once she is released from the hospital, the lines return to their short, one-line formula, except that now, they're more fractured: Some longer lines are followed by a phrasal fragment. One line says, "I went South," literally referring to her move to rural Appalachia but also playing on the idiomatic meaning of "to go south," which means for a situation to worsen. Ironically, it is in the South that she first enters the highly circumscribed relation with a woman, and it is when she "moved further south" that she came out, entered therapy, "became political".

The "poem" ends with "Now I am in my Saturn return and seeking a / refuge for awhile. The goddess within calls to me / and I must respond. I go to the mountains alone." If it is ironic that she falls (goes South) to acknowledge herself as a dyke, then it's also ironic that she ascends (goes to the mountains) alone. If each *RFD* is now a gathering, then this very rustic autobiographical poem functions like Gross' revealing herself as a dyke in the opening circle of that gathering. She went to the Short Mountain area for refuge but also to work as part of the network. Still, being the only woman physically in that circle would surely be acutely lonely. The poem marks her place there, but also registers her reservations about how the connection would unfold.

The women's writing in *RFD* not only asserted their place in the Southeastern Faerie circle; it also made clear the culture's developing political views of the rural and regional. Appearing in a "country" journal, Boyd's, Fire's, and Gross' articles emphasized the centrality of prison, energy, and agricultural industries as forms of rural development. For liberationists with roots in socialist feminism, critique of such

development would have been important. As lesbian and gay liberationists in the Southeast, there was even more recent reason for such forms of critique. The Short Mountain issue was released the summer of 1979 -- the same summer Virginian Jerry Falwell officially formed the Moral Majority, amplifying the homophobic political voice of the conservative white family heard so clearly with the Save Our Children campaign. What was unique about Falwell's Moral Majority was how it yoked its conservative interests to the development interests of New Right Republicans.

Historian of the Christian Right, Daniel K. Williams argues that Falwell and the Moral Majority should be understood as a phenomenon of the regional Sunbelt political economy.[62] LaSiS, in "Solidarity Forever," had already critiqued the New Orleans Superdome as a Sunbelt tourist development strategy which razed downtown black neighborhoods, thereby citing it as relevant context for the UTNO teachers' strike and the Briggs Initiative. In that the Sunbelt's strategy was to shift U.S. development initiatives from the north and Midwest to the entire southern band of the country, from Florida to southern California, a broad linking of Orange County's Briggs to New Orleans wasn't particularly a stretch. Recounting the collaborative relationship of Reagan and Falwell, Williams shows how Reagan's support of sanctity-of-the-family social politics won him Moral Majority's advocacy of laissez faire deregulation and military spending. The latter

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[62] Williams, "Jerry Falwell's Sunbelt Politics: The Regional Origins of the Moral Majority," *The Journal of Policy History* 2, no. 2 (2010): 125-147. Later *RFD*s will make direct reference to the moral majority, critiquing the implication of an "immoral minorities" (#25, 5) and advertising the formation of a sex-positive oppositional group, the "Oral Majority" (#26, 7). For more on Sunbelt development, see Richard M. Bernard and Bradley R. Rice, eds., *Sunbelt Cities: Politics and Growth Since World War II* (Austin, TX: University of Austin Press, 1983), Randall M. Miller and George E. Pozzetta, eds., *Shades of the Sunbelt: Essays on Ethnicity, Race, and the Urban South* (New York City: Greenwood Press, 1988), and Bruce J. Schulman, *From Cottonbelt to Sunbelt: Federal Policy, Economic Development, and the Transformation of the South, 1938-1980* (New York City: Oxford University Press, 1991).

was regionally important because one of the main features of Sunbelt development was backing military-related industries in urban areas like Atlanta, Huntsville, and Houston. Williams further points out that this was when the megachurches arose, almost all of which were located in the suburbs of Sunbelt cities, and those mega-churches relied heavily on corporate organizational and media models. Outside of mentioning the importance of Sunbelt energy industries, Williams doesn't focus on rural development, but it's reasonable to expect that *RFD* writers would have drawn such parallels, especially as they saw development leadership become bedfellows with the very religious forces behind the Save Our Children campaign and the Briggs initiative. Area gay and lesbian liberationists would have been alert to how the rural Sunbelt was mobilized to support regional urban growth popularized by appeals to a racist and hetero/sexist ideology. Rural development as with carceral, energy, and agricultural industries, was backed by Moral Majority political-economic alliances.

As if in a counter-move, Atlanta positioned itself to similarly coordinate the Appalachian gay liberationist sites. The Georgia city had actually hosted its own first gathering before the Arizona conference. Billed as "A gay men's Weekend in the City," it was held February 2-4, 1979, and the flier featured a line-drawing of skyscrapers with the lines tapering at the bottom to form the name of the host city.[63] This was around the same time that LaSiS held their Valentine's gathering at the New Orleans Country Club. Aurora/House and Dimid attended the Atlanta event; also there were Faygele ben Miriam, Milo, Clear Englebert, John ("Gabby Haze") Harris, and Mikel Wilson, who had

[63] Flier for Atlanta Gathering (Feb. 2-4, 1979), Conference – Radical Faeries – "Gatherings" at Running Water, 1979-1981 (Box 1, Folder 6), Gay Spirit Visions records, W127, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.

temporarily relocated to Atlanta because the Running Water winter had again proven impossible. Franklin Abbott was a key organizer of the Atlanta event. Atlanta began to orient itself as a hub in the network, especially for the nearby Appalachian sites.

Since attending a couple of Running Water gatherings and writing "Ascent, Lament, and Admonition," Abbott had devoted much thought to how rural-urban relations functioned for the network. After the February Atlanta gathering, he wrote a sketch on the subject called "Space for Support" for the Spring 1979 (#19) *RFD*. In a parallel to Dimid's sense of a rural-urban cardiac cycle of expansion-contraction, Abbott described the movement between country and city as a fluctuation between space and form: "The city-country analysis that gaymen in the Southeast are developing appears to recognize the need for balancing the formal and the spacious. The country focus, the space and anarchy of the Running Water experiences, and the deliberate setting aside of space by urban gaymen's support circles were both essential in the unfolding of the Atlanta weekend."[64] There's a sense that the collective "city-country analysis" was less intellectual than it was primarily experiential and then meditative. The experience of the rural at Running Water was open and anarchistic, *un*formed, while the urban experience struck these gay liberationists – as we have seen with Melba'son's and Milo's accounts of "sensurround" assemblage – as *hyper*formed, overdetermined.

Keeping in mind that Abbott was a young mental health professional, it should come as no surprise that, while he was invested in the political (of being "dangerous" in the capitalist, dense city), he was most interested in the means of making one's gentleness

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[64] Abbot, "Space for Support," *RFD* #19, Spring 1979, 7. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta. This and the analysis in the next two paragraphs draw from this same page.

"refined" and "aligned" in order to implement that politics. He struggled with how to access the benefits of rural space in the constrictive city. In "Space for Support," he drew upon Buddhist meditation and aesthetics to reflect on how our perceptional compulsion towards sensing form renders space invisible. He then turned his thoughts towards "gaps" in daily form – time alone, illness, naps, silence – to see them, not as setbacks or deficits, but as "safe space" for healing. He referenced the Taoist understanding of space (yin) as feminine and form (yang) as masculine, suggesting that sissies and gentle men were charged with better learning the nurturing qualities of the former.

As a result, what he most appreciated in the Atlanta gathering circles were moments of shared silence: "In quietly being together, we were healing ourselves and healing each other. The dis-ease we often feel from isolation/competition/imbalance was reduced leaving us space to explore new possibilities of being together." Clearly a spiritual-aesthetic therapeutic approach, Abbott's practice still differs from what Hay and Walker would recommend in Arizona. More like LaSiS, his approach doesn't depend so much on queer archetypes or indigenous social forms as it does on a collective somatic practice which seeks an affective balance of space and form, expansion and contraction. Further, it was no mere abstraction that those in the Southeast network felt this also as a balance of feminine and masculine, rural and urban. Just as sissies sought to live in that space between male and female, they also sought to layer the rural and urban. If Milo envisioned this layering as tree roots breaking through sidewalks (a more militant faggot analogy), Abbott worked on a gentler version, ending "Space for Support" with a poem: "flowers in the city / need sweet rain falling / … need loving hands / to tend them / many hands / many flowers."

Also at that February 1979 Atlanta gathering was Cal Gough. Gough – originally from Little Rock and a new librarian educated at Atlanta's Emory University – attended Running Water gatherings himself and began to struggle with the express purpose of the Southeastern Network and its gatherings. He attended the February 1980 Atlanta gathering, too. This time organizers called it – following the previous Labor Day's Arizona conference – an "Urban Faerie-Gathering".[65] The flier stated that "The Network's growing, and this notice is being sent to about 150 people!" If all came, the gathering would approach the size of the Desert Sanctuary event. Laying out the specifics for the gathering, the flier also bluntly stated "AGENDA: There isn't one," further commenting that if attendees wanted such a structure, it could be settled on the fly at the gathering itself. Atlanta would keep the improvisational "anarchy of Running Water" as an effort to create the "space" of the rural in the city. The gathering was held at a Unitarian Fellowship Hall.

Gough was on the editorial team for the Spring 1980 Atlanta issue of *RFD*. For it, he wrote "An Open Letter to the 'Southeastern Network'".[66] By this time, using the phrase "Southeastern Network" had become standard practice, but as I believe Gough's use of quotation marks indicates, the concept was going through growing pains. The regional gatherings were threatening to match the first, large Western one. In a matter of months, not only had *RFD* and LaSiS gone "Fairy," but in Atlanta, the gathering, too,

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[65] Flier for Atlanta Gathering (Feb. 8-10, 1980), Conference – Radical Faeries – "Gatherings" at Running Water, 1979-1981 (Box 1, Folder 6), Gay Spirit Visions records, W127, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.

[66] Gough, "An Open Letter to the 'Southeastern Network'," *RFD* #23, Spring 1980, 23-25. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta. The analysis on the next two pages are drawn from this passage as well.

was linked to the Faerie refrain by its name ("Atlanta Faerie-Gathering"). Since *RFD* had come to live in the Southeast, most of its regional editorial collectives contributed substantial regional network-related content to its pages. As early gathering-goers quickly ascended to gathering "veteran" status and the structure remained doggedly open, individuals began to question their roles in collectives, collectives wondered about their roles in the network, and the network puzzled over its position in the wider Faerie culture which had brought so many regions together at once.

In his "Open Letter," Gough admitted his perspective of the regional gatherings had changed. He wanted them to be more than a "mountaintop experience". He had originally thought their purpose was to build a network of those who shared the same cultural and political beliefs around their differences with gay liberalism. Recently, in the Atlanta gathering circles, he had more than once encountered attendees whose political views were very different than his. At first frustrated by this, he ultimately decided that the network gatherings could be "more interesting" than a scrupulously shared politics.

Recognizing that different sorts of circles had spontaneously developed – some for "discussion" and some for "sharing" – Gough urged the acknowledgment that, in "sharing circles," ideas were often raw feelings or nascent analyses. In those circles, he had personally decided to exercise a very active and loving listening, using silence like Abbott had earlier suggested. Discussion circles were the more appropriate place to share analyses intended to shape actions. He was also concerned that, with the growth of the network, veteran attendees tended, in opening circles, to stress how many gatherings they had already attended and to offer no introduction to gathering experiences for

newcomers. Gough worried that this created an insider/outsider dynamic which would ultimately stunt network growth. He suggested that opening circles be used to share individuals' *intentions* for the gathering at hand and that some minimal sense of gathering structure be outlined to pass on to first-time attendees.

Most importantly, he raised the question of what purpose was served by the *particular* anarchistic structure the culture had embraced. He admitted that he personally appreciated the gatherings' open-ness. But, he wrote, "I've also wondered whether or not our reluctance to articulate the extent, purpose, and direction of our network and of our gatherings has been deliberate – and, deliberate or not, whether that's been a good thing." Not ready to offer answers, he only offered that he had begun to see a tension between two primary expectations of the gatherings. Some saw them as "retreats," emphasizing an individual's "rekindling" personal energy after the attrition of morale brought on by daily life in the city. Others saw the gatherings as "a means for political activism" with a focus on collective action rather than individual energetic re-boots. I would argue that the network's core work was to resist seeing this as an either/or question but to work towards finding the individual's place in the collective, finding the desire in politics, and finding the open space in the form of the circle. But, I also read Gough's letter as a recognition that *how* to achieve such a both/and was still an open question – one which was, importantly, not being collectively discussed.

It seems fair to say this wasn't a matter of neglect but a function of the addling experience of the previous year. As we have seen, regional attentions had been split by the national, bicoastal urgencies of, first, the assassination of Harvey Milk in San Francisco and, then, by the March on Washington. In between, a call of a similar scope

but of a more familiar gay liberationist bent had led most to embrace the Radical Faerie refrain in a matter of months, still trying to figure out what to do with it back home. Furthermore, the Southeastern Network had visibly grown, not only by numbers of individuals, but also by numbers of sites: Two cities (New Orleans and Atlanta) had started hosting gatherings which had been inaugurated in rural Appalachia. Also, the Southeastern Conference for Lesbians and Gay Men continued, having moved back to North Carolina for 1979. Regional gay liberationists like Gough, though, had also begun to notice the differing politics within their own network, too. With the 1980 U.S. Presidential election looming in the wake of the rapid expansion of a Moral Majority and New Right base which – interestingly, likewise characterized itself as largely rural, anti-bicoastal, and uniquely Southern -- those in the gay liberationist Southeastern Network must have physically felt themselves in a panicked flurry. The acceleration of the previous year was by no means over.

It's important to note, though, that in the midst of this break-neck change, the Network didn't embrace the Faerie refrain exactly as it was given. First, influence went the other way, too; as we have seen, the Arizona "conference" immediately began to call itself a "gathering," endorsing at least some of the more decentralized structural elements which that decision entailed. Southeastern attendees in Arizona must have played some role in this shift. New Orleans *RFD* editors framed the conference as a "return to the forest". Melba'son had made a ceremonial shawl to be draped around the shoulders of Faerie gathering speakers thereafter, and an image of that shawl was the centerpiece of the cover documenting the Arizona conference. In addition, Short Mountain editors had openly expressed a collective ambivalence around Hay's quasi-essentialist and

pedestalized view of gay manhood; instead, they stressed responsiveness to historical situation rather than to timelessness, and they stressed cross-gender and cross-racial connection within the *RFD* network rather than an exclusive focus on gay males. If, as a counselor himself, Abbot – like Walker – turned to psychological models of mitigating heterosexist social construction, he urged a very corporeal practice which didn't rely on the archetypal, depth psychological model of Walker and Hay.

But, as Gough's letter witnessed, there were ripples in the Network, too. And, to be fair, significant differences had been there all along. As much as the Louisiana Sissies had parlayed their Wolf Creek and Mulberry House experiences into a refrain which surviving members of the Network still admiringly recognize as "radical," it wasn't an act everyone else would faithfully re-enact, either. Clearly, Gross was no sissie, even though her lesbian feminist, "mountain dyke" voice helped to forge their "man"ifestoes. And even though the sissies were central to Running Water culture, so was the concept of the "gentle man". While Abbott, with his more interpersonal sense of androgyny, wouldn't have insisted on the masculinity of that refrain, he obviously endorsed the value of its gentle affect. Maybe it's more useful to think of various Southeastern refrains contributing differently to a larger purpose. Employing far from gentle imagery, Milo often leaned towards a faggot affect, prepared for militancy, but also thought of his sissie practice in New Orleans as part of his process towards a more androgyne capacity. The sissies eschewed the militancy of the faggot to practice a performative terror and desire, which they hoped would use points of public intimacy to both disrupt dominant normativities and to articulate cross-movement connections. Abbott, as a counselor, sensed that faggots' and sissies' provocative form of politics needed to be complexly

nurtured. In part, that care work was therapeutic, cultivating spaces of safety and health; it also involved inspiration – which was the function of his poetry.

Practitioners of these different modes of gay liberationist work sometimes struggled to see themselves as working together. In the Atlanta *RFD*, Michael Mason – from Winter Park, Florida – poetically struggled with the figure of the sissie. Like Gough's open letter, Mason's "Sissie / I Thought My Father Was A Man / What Will We Be When We Are Free???" asks questions of the Network. With triple question marks, though, the tone is more personally urgent, bordering on despair. In the title and first stanza, he addresses Sissies directly:

> Sissie, with earrings dangling like the laws you want to pass.
> Eyes seeing too clearly the botched reflections
> Of Justice, in a scratched glass.
> A man in a dress is a man nonetheless
> Despite the stress of the carnal or the criminal law.
> Sissie, <u>you</u> are the trigger, and your knowledge is the draw.
> How can they let you forget it
> When you won't let them forget it?
> They with the manifold loops and turns and bows –
> Sissie, dismiss it, it ain't worthy of your vow.
> No, it ain't worth the price you pay
> In the blood of the lash and brow.
> But what can you do now, with all that you see?
> Knowing there's something, and It aches to be free.[67]

This opening stanza is emotionally complicated, offering critique, then admiration, and then confusion. The first three lines question a politics of legal reform. When Mason compares laws to earrings which "dangle," he doubly critiques them as things which are trivialized and suspended. In other words, they don't carry the weight we are led to think

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[67] Mason, "Sissie / I Thought My Father Was A Man / What Will We Be When We Are Free???" *RFD* #23, Spring 1980, 43. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.

they do; their execution is not mandatory and their meaning is up for interpretation. They are "botched reflections" of the spirit we invest them with.

Taking a harsh tone, he directly contradicts the sissies' own stated understanding of their gender (as neither man nor woman) by calling the sissie a "man in a dress". Presenting their masculinity as a biological fact and their femininity as a matter of voluntary attire, he doesn't do so to demean them but to describe that choice as the source of their power, their threat, to the system and its laws. Possibly referencing the earlier poem by House and Dimid, he affirms their knowledge that U.S. democratic law was mere theater, knowledge which allows them to "act" against it. But, he seems to question this stance of constant provocation, characterizing it as an agonistic circle which only leads to the perpetuation of the bodily harm ("blood of the lash and brow") which, as gender deviants, sissies suffer. At first begging them to stop this cycle by relinquishing their political, voluntary gender, he makes an abrupt about-face in the last couplet: He realizes that their "seeing behind the curtain" of gendered politics has itself *produced* "something" which he chooses to subjectify with a capital letter but *dis*gender by his word choice – "It". Suggesting that the sissie gender is not an identity but instead a subjectivity produced by its performance within a sexist legal-criminal system, he rejects the multiplicative gender of the sissies and insists on neutralizing it.

The second stanza interestingly casts Mason's father as a mountain, associating masculinity with an altitude that suggests deity or perfect Platonic form, but also possibly with an alpine subjectivity rather than a delta sissie one. When he is forced into the "real world" of the woods, to interactions with an actual, flawed father, he is forced into a world of animal cruelty, dominated by hunting and hungry dogs. When it became clear

that "With the man I wanted to lie," that he was sexually attracted to men, he was rejected by mountain and forest alike, by ideal and animal masculinity. With the refrain "I thought my father was a man," Mason likewise neuters both the ideal and animal masculinities, letting the reader remember they were merely geographic features all along. But, as we move into the final and third stanza, he seems to remember the performative, producible gender of the sissies. Addressing them again, he says,

And now with these illusions shattered,
Just as I must, you must make it all matter.
Life is both for learning and unlearning
The truth of virile manliness.
Now it seems to take a lot
To really be a man of new denomination.
What will we Be when we are free?

Left with the Sissies' lesson -- that gender is a kind of performative "denomination" in a legal, economic, religious system – he is also left with his nostalgic desire for a man who does not exist. The emotional floor of the poem seems to have shifted. Instead of challenging the sissies, he appeals to their experience for advice. In the final line, he seems to cast nature (the non-performative "Be") and liberation ("free") as irreconcilable. And the poem ends on that note – a despairing appeal to the sissies to help him make sense of his personal desire for a manliness which sissie liberationism had revealed to be a fabrication of the system.

Mason – I contend – was conflicted enough not to invest in the faggot, sissie, Faerie, *or* gentle man refrains. Even though it is tempting to think this poem through the lens of Hay's ancient Greek "not-man," this is ultimately inadequate because Mason nowhere intimates a return to the ideal father he has effectively emasculated. Instead, by poem's end he seems determined to occupy a visceral space of more radical negation

which would never turn to history or archetypes for false consolation. Instead, he turns to the sissie as if to learn more directly experiential methods of gendering. Mason was representative of the internal cultural political differences Gough was witnessing. But, Mason would find a surer place in the network. In fact, in our interview, Abbott suggested two important developing modes of gay liberationist work – the provocative radical mode and the visionary poetic mode. Abbott felt particularly called to the latter. And he named Mason as a fellow exemplary spirit.[68]

If the Southeastern Network was going through growing pains with its refrains, it was undergoing similar changes with its rural sites. In fact, since the first Arizona conference, rural land relations were a subject of wide concern. As an urban hub in the Southeastern Network, Atlanta was close to Running Water and to Short Mountain. In a geographical irony, the three sites at the southern edge of Appalachia formed a very similar triangle to the Energy Triangle pictured in Kathy Fire's article on nuclear power. Rural-urban migrations between all three were relatively frequent, and Atlanta became an intimate urban focal point for the rural Appalachian sites. As we have seen, Gross had already relocated from Atlanta to Short Mountain, and Wilson had begun wintering in Atlanta when the harsh season made living at Running Water undoable. As questions arose about the purpose of the Network and its gatherings, it was natural that re-visions of Running Water's role would come up. The answers would shape the broader culture's relations to rural land.

[68] Abbott, interview with the author, Dec. 14, 2015.

Sanctuary: Southeastern Rural Site-Crafting during the Faerie Call for Land, 1979-1980

Modeled after the Rainbow gatherings, which took place at different national parks and forests, on publicly owned lands, Running Water gatherers questioned the site's privately owned status from the outset. Dimid's "Letter to Action," which followed the first gathering, mentioned that Wilson himself had asked attendees for help in collectivizing it. In Rainbow circles, gathering in national parks and forests was originally meant both to question private ownership of land and to press governmental definitions of the "public," to push for a commons space. I suggest that efforts to collectivize Running Water served three purposes: 1) to question private property as individual or family-based by using the model offered by the collective model of many lesbian feminists and the sissies; 2) to serve as a rural site in the rural-urban networking proposed, as we have seen, in the work of Brotherlover and Dimid; and 3) to share responsibilities for maintaining the farm and running the gatherings.

The last was a logistical but urgent question. Running Water was a mere 16 acres of fairly remote and steep land, which was a challenge to live on in the winter. Although the first June 1978 gathering was modest by Arizona standards, Running Water was also not an established resort, with all the infrastructure that entailed; it was a lapsed farm. Wilson recognized that facilitating a rural unstructured weekend event for forty gay liberationists – many from cities – was not something he as an individual could or should take on. And a pattern had been established: In 1978, there was a summer and fall gathering, two a year. All agreed that hosting at the site needed to be collectivized. As we have seen, February gatherings were hosted in cities – Atlanta and New Orleans – because a winter gathering at Running Water was impossible. In fact, Wilson couldn't

even live there, which broke his heart. In Atlanta for the winter following the first two gatherings, he wrote in *RFD*, "My existence has been a wreck ever since I abandoned it last time. I'm going back. I'm looking for support for the Running Water Healing Center."[69] In the same article he reflected on the healing property of the natural features of the land: Roan Mountain itself, the running water, the trees, and the stones and boulders. The value of the site was clear; he needed help to actualize that value.

Before it was collectivized, there would be two more 1979 Running Water gatherings. The flier for the third gathering, summer 1979, billed that event as "A Celebration of Gay Men"[70]. Wilson's text describes it, though, as an event for "sissies/faggots/queers/gaymen to come together and affirm our beings, emotions, thoughts, common bonds, and differences."[71] On the mailing lists sent out after the event, there were reproductions of Ned Asta's drawings from *The Faggots and their Friends* and a quote from Larry Mitchell's text. Interestingly, the quote selected deals with the relationship between fairies and faggots:

> The fairies are the friends of the faggots. They help each other whenever they can. The fairies do not live among the men. They live in trees and caves and bushes. They come out at night to dance and sing. The men know there are fairies but are not sure if they have seen one or not. Only the faggots have seen them for sure. Sometimes the fairies dance and sing for the faggots and sometimes the faggots dance and sing for the fairies and sometimes, the best times, they dance and sing together.[72]

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[69] Wilson, "A Dreamer's Reality," *RFD* #19, Spring 1979, 5. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.
[70] Flier for Running Water Farm Gathering (June 15-17, 1979), Conference – Radical Faeries – "Gatherings" at Running Water, 1979-1981 (Box 1, Folder 6), Gay Spirit Visions records, W127, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Running Water Farm mailing list (summer solstice 1979), Conference – Radical Faeries – "Gatherings" at Running Water, 1979-1981 (Box 1, Folder 6), Gay Spirit Visions records, W127, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.

Because this June gathering preceded the Radical Faerie conference by a few months, the selection of the Mitchell quote and Asta illustration represents an effort to define the "Faerie" before the Labor Day event occurred. In fact a note on the flier, from Milo, mentions that a leaflet for the Arizona conference would accompany each flier. Asta's image shows a circle of dancers – some nude, some dressed in hippie effeminate clothing – in a forest clearing with a winged figure overhead. Running Water gatherers would have identified with the dancers in the forest setting. Mitchell casts the fairies as the most rural, implying that, in contrast, faggots live more on the urban margins near the "men". Mapped to the Southeastern Network and its plans for connected rural and urban collectives, this text-image allowed for rural collectives to think of themselves as fairies and urban ones to think of themselves as faggots, often meeting to "dance and sing together".

Thus, visually establishing the rural-urban dynamic of the gathering network, the flier also offers a regional organization of its attendees. The mailing list divided attendees into "regional groupings". The two largest were "Mountain Folk" (from Appalachian North Carolina, Tennessee, and Kentucky) and "Piedmont People" (from hilly North Carolina, Virginia, and Georgia – mostly Atlanta). Also from within the region were "Coastal Folk" (from North Carolina, Virginia, and Louisiana). Those outside the region were grouped as "Northlanders" – a handful of people from Philadelphia and New England with one from Michigan and another from Surrey, UK. I read this grouping as an effort to not only cultivate rural-urban sub-regions within the Southeast, for more frequent and local networking, but also as an admittedly scrambled way to promote thinking at the regional scale outside the Southeast.

The flier promotes political action beyond that of coordinating the gathering itself. In the top right corner, there is a stamp-shaped announcement encouraging attendees to boycott the Nestle company for promoting baby formula in developing countries, where it was known to cause infant illness and death. Milo's note also announced that, besides the leaflet for the Arizona conference, there was an accompanying leaflet for the 3rd World Gay conference to be held that October in Washington, D.C. He requests, "Please help spread the word about it – reproduce and post where 3rd world people will have access to it." In June of 1979, we can see that the gatherings at the "Running Water Healing Center" possessed both a curative and an activist purpose, just as Gough would later observe.

It's important to remember that that summer's gathering fell in the middle of a very rough year, the time of accelerated panic which Dimid and Aurora/House captured so well in their poetry. Everyone was still reeling from Milk's murder the previous fall. Aurora was the only member of LaSiS to attend the summer 1979 Running Water gathering; the rest were in New Orleans being watched closely by the police who were harassing them. Further, after Milk's assassination, local instances of homophobia seemed to be backed by national approval. Gay men in the U.S. scrambled to respond to this increased sense of vulnerability. Perhaps this explains the focus on Running Water as a healing space. For some, as we have seen, healing involved the need for heightened senses of safety. It was at the June 1979 gathering that Running Water was declared exclusively "faggot space".

Faygele ben Miriam's flier announcing the next gathering (September 1979) simply stated, "After intense discussion last time, the general feeling was that this is

specifically faggot space; children welcome."[73] That the discussion was intense indicates that many likely disagreed with an isolationist response. This coincided with the summer 1979 Short Mountain collective's decision to publish the writings of lesbians June Boyd and Kathy Fire in *RFD*, performing, as I have shown, an effective inclusion in the Network. But if the print and gathering networks functioned differently in relation to women, then the internal differences were far more specific than Gough implied.

The September 1979 Running Water gathering continued its unstructured format, but there were many concrete discussions to hold. At the top of Faygele's list was to plan a gathering to focus on racism. Other urgent discussions were the March on Washington, editorial duties for upcoming *RFD* issues, reports on the Radical Faerie conference, and updates on the status of LaSiS' "legal hassles". The other main item was the "sale of Running Water / future of gatherings". The "sale" was part of the collectivization strategy, but the future of the gatherings was part of a bigger discussion, mostly having to do with the farm's having already reached its capacity. Faygele mentioned that their mailing list had reached two hundred and that "the land will not comfortably hold that many." He mentions the dominant strategy was to get attendees, possibly from more distant regions to host their own rural gatherings -- based on the Running Water model -- at the same time. (Faygela wrote that a "Bruce" was already planning such a simultaneous gathering in upstate New York.)

Too, attendees' comfort wasn't the only concern with the growing numbers. Urban dwellers expecting to find an utterly remote rural space may have been surprised to find that it wasn't actually a "nowhere". And, attendees may have thought of

[73] Flier for Running Water Farm Gathering (June 15-17, 1979), ibid.

themselves as "fairies," following the Mitchell tale, expecting a wilderness "not among the men" – but this was far from the case. Faygele chided attendees: "If a gate is closed, please close it behind you, as there may be animals wandering around. The path to the gathering goes right by neighbors – please remember that sounds carry, and we don't want to cause any unnecessary friction." As gathering numbers grew and as veterans returned, urban gathering attendees recognized that they were entering a rural *society* and not a wilderness. Although members like Wilson, Milo, Englebert, Gross, and Cravens might have had a better understanding of what that might mean for the group, for others, this kind of contact was relatively new.

However, a solution to the collectivization of Running Water would be found before the close of the year. Ron Lambe attended the June 1979 Running Water gathering, and his ears pricked when he heard Wilson's appeals to sell the farm. Born not far away in Greensboro, NC, in 1936, Lambe served in the army three years, assigned as the typist to an Episcopalian chaplain first stationed in Monterrey, California, and then in Korea.[74] He got a degree in comparative literature (German and French) and played the cello in the orchestra. Introduced to a vibrant underground gay life at Chapel Hill during the late 1950's and early 1960s, Lambe was acutely aware of the gay purge he had narrowly missed in his hometown of Greensboro in 1957. He and his friends in Chapel Hill would take whatever opportunity they could to travel to pre-Stonewall New York City to party. After graduating and working a few years, no longer willing to hide his

[74] Details of Lambe's biography and the early days of Stepping Stone were gleaned from the following two sources: 1) Lambe. Oral History Interview. Gender and Sexuality Oral History Project, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta, and 2) James T. Sears, "Ron Lambe: Time in Camelot (1999)," James T. Sears Papers, Research and Writings, 1941-2007 Box 220, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

sexuality, he moved to San Francisco in 1964, where he sold records in a classical music shop and lived for fifteen years, ultimately in an old Victorian close to Haight-Ashbury.

Lambe was in San Francisco when Milk was shot. After that, he resolved to leave the city. Always a spiritual person, he had grown up a Quaker, converted to Episcopalianism, and then in San Francisco joined the Catholic Church of the East and became fascinated by the writings of Edgar Cayce. Despite this, he found San Francisco more sexual than spiritual and decided to sell his house and travel to Europe. That didn't happen. He had learned about *RFD* through Stella Mifsud (a Running Water regular from Michigan), and read the Fall 1978 feature on Running Water. After attending a conference on Cayce in Virginia Beach, he went to the June 1979 Running Water gathering. After Wilson's appeal to relinquish the farm, Lambe asked to come back to the site after the gathering. He found that three others were also interested – John Jones, Peter Kendrick, and Rocco Patt. They decided to form a collective and purchase the property as a private corporation which they named Stepping Stone, evoking both an experiential path as well as the property's rocky boulders which Wilson had written of in *RFD*.

Ownership was fully transferred fall 1979, but since they weren't prepared to attempt a winter move-in, they set up a base in nearby Asheville, with plans to move to the farm permanently in the spring. They also took on organizing responsibility for future gatherings and editorship for *RFD* with the Summer 1980 (#24 issue). In the meantime, they sent out a newsletter to the Network, explaining that they needed a small "home business" to make year-round residence at the farm possible. Their first idea was to harvest and sell honey, and they announced they had already bought ten hives for the

property. The newsletter, printed in black ink on yellow paper, featured a cover illustration of a unicorn facing a bright star under the title "Gatherings". It also included a poem by Mason ("Unicorn"); a drawing (of multiple faces overlapping) with the statement "the width of the circle is the balance of the share"; a recipe for pumpernickel bread; a prayer/"blessing" by Mason and Lambe; and this quote from Gautama Buddha: "The forest is a peculiar organism of unlimited kindness and benevolence that makes no demands for its sustenance and extends generously the products of its life activity; it affords protection to all beings, offering shade even to the axeman who destroys it."[75] There is, I think, an overt spiritual ecumenism – the vague paganism evoked by the unicorn, Buddhism, and the "blessing" which reads like a traditional Christian prayer (addressing "You, Lord"). Since the first gathering, there had been a mixture of politicized witchcraft traditions and Asian spiritual practices, but this first newsletter foregrounds the breadth of spirituality and makes place for a general Christian note as well.

Interestingly, the newsletter for the June 1980 gathering opens with a quote from New Age teacher David Spangler's "Festivals in the New Age" (1975), which includes the line "For just as we are sons of Christ, … we are also children of Pan."[76] What follows – as a kind of nod to the Arizona conference from the summer before – is an excerpt from Mitch Walker's "Man Loving Men" (1977), which emphasizes his Jungian

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[75] Running Water Farm newsletter from Stepping Stone, Fall 1979. Conference – Radical Faeries – "Gatherings" at Running Water, 1979-1981 (Box 1, Folder 6), Gay Spirit Visions records, W127, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.
[76] Running Water Farm newsletter from Stepping Stone, June 1980. Conference – Radical Faeries – "Gatherings" at Running Water, 1979-1981 (Box 1, Folder 6), Gay Spirit Visions records, W127, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta. The quotes from Walker later in this paragraph are also taken from this newsletter.

theories of gayness, his advocacy for gay people to achieve the "Androgyne within," which "the Hindus call Atman and the Christians call God". As we have seen, Walker advocates a psychological model of depth: "Feel within yourself; search for your magical spirit-source and open it. Go below the mundane surface of daily life and grasp your wonderful beauty." Spangler is then quoted again with a definition of a "festival," saying that "a time of joy / a time of sharing / a time of song / and mirth / and dance // all of which is simply / the outer manifestation / of an inner state of being." The new Running Water collective stated in the newsletter that the "pamphlet has been prepared to help set the tone of the Gathering" and that "we want this to be a time and place of healing as well as one of joy and love."

There is no overt political content to either newsletter, and clearly, in the year following the March on Washington, the Stepping Stone quartet wanted to emphasize the curative aspects of the gatherings. The model of spiritual health recommended by the pamphlet involved an inward-looking psychological approach which characterized the androgyne as a psychological state more than a performative, somatic practice. The paganism was not clearly politicized, as with the Bay Area Reclaiming witchcraft tradition; in fact, it was neutralized by a logic of interchangeability with figures from other religions: Pan was blended with Christ, and the Androgyne became one with Atman and God. These new Stepping Stone pamphlets seemed to reach for spiritual diversity but risked equivocation.

Newly ensconced at the Running Water site and newly responsible for the Southeastern Network's rural gatherings, Stepping Stone also suddenly found themselves the editors of *RFD*. Faygele ben Miriam was exhausted from overseeing the rotation of

the editorship. The four weren't unanimously behind the decision to take it on, but Lambe was eager and ben Miriam was persuasive.[77] The quartet introduced themselves collectively to *RFD* readers by writing, "We have recently come to live here [Running Water] from different urban areas of the country."[78] They also announced a new editorial strategy. Core editorial and production duties would remain indefinitely at Running Water while responsibilities for a cover and one feature would rotate to different collectives.

One of the main drivers they named for this decision was that, with a rotating editorship, late or missed submissions were being forwarded to the next editorial collective so that Running Water was receiving pieces that were over a year old. Such a practice disrupted theme continuity and upset reader-writers, creating un-necessary rifts in the wider network. By taking on the core editorial role, they also took responsibility for representing the diversity of the network: "Our general sense is that we'd like RFD to appeal to as varied a readership as possible: clones, sissies, fems, isolated men living alone, those living in groups or with lovers, bisexual men who want to explore and nurture their gay awareness, radical fairies, faggot warriors, rural and urban males of these and still other perspectives."[79] It's surprising that their catalog of readers starts with the "clone," a figure which the rurally oriented gay liberationist publication had identified itself *against* from its very inception, as Herring so clearly shows. This shows a fairly daring gesture of inclusion, possibly sparked by the new editors' recent relocation

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[77] Sears, "Ron Lambe: Time in Camelot," ibid.
[78] Editorial comment, *RFD* #24, Summer 1980, 7. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.
[79] Ibid, 2.

from urban areas or by the recent nationalization of gay identity which worked to emphasize gays' bonds more than their differences.

But, it's also noteworthy that, following on the Short Mountain and Atlanta issue – both of which included women's writing – women aren't listed. The impression is that *RFD* variety is expanded (by inclusion, at least, of clones) to include *only* gay males.[80] The decision, framed as inclusive, might have just as easily been seen as exclusive, but since previous *RFD* editorial decisions were understood to apply to a single issue, this may not have struck readers immediately as a decision having any lasting impact. But, with their new editorial approach, how the collective framed diversity was critical. Upon closer analysis, this new vision for *RFD* seemed to treat gay liberation (with its cross-liberationist connections) as reconcilable with a gay liberalism which at least tacitly isolated itself from women.

Of the topical content of the Summer 1980 issue, the editors say, "This issue does not have a particular theme, as such. If pressed to give it one, we would probably point to the fairy consciousness articles in this issue, but this is our first one and we're frazzled and confused, so we hope you won't press us."[81] Those articles included Hay's article on subject-SUBJECT consciousness, which he had been honing on page and at events since 1976. Another article was Kilhefner's "A Sprinkling of Radical Faerie Dust: Gay People at a Critical Crossroad – Assimilation or Affirmation?"[82] In this article, Kilhefner

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[80] The inclusion of sissies disrupts this category, I think, but I also think it's likely that the Sissies might have been understood by the group to be "men in dresses". This is even more likely since LaSiS role in the network had been temporarily stunted by the previous summer's police harassment.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Kilhefner, , "A Sprinkling of Radical Faerie Dust: Gay People at a Critical Crossroad – Assimilation or Affirmation?" *RFD #24*, Summer 1980, 25-27. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.

bemoaned the fact that, with the cultural move away from gay liberationism, gay people didn't just abandon their politics; they also abandoned gay self-definition to heterosexist institutions. In the rest of the article, he does something quite remarkable: He sketches a (Western) history of ideas of "Gay consciousness" which essentially supplies Radical Faerie identity with an iconographic canon, providing the very new movement with a sense of history. He treats Walt Whitman as a kind of first visionary who also influenced his peer, the gay British socialist, activist, and poet Edward Carpenter, whose synthesis of Victorian-era ethnographies led him to theorize a cross-cultural "Intermediate Sex". Kilhefner also cites Gerald Heard's theories of the role of gayness in evolutionary biology. Kilhefner knew, of course, that Carpenter and Heard were major influences on Hay, so it's natural that he would then name Hay "a singularly pivotal figure in the growth of the Gay movement in this country."[83] Whitman, Carpenter, Heard, and Hay were thus established as major forces in the (now) long development of the Radical Faerie refrain, and Kilhefner highlights Evans, Walker, and San Francisco poet Aaron Shurin as emergent vital voices in the flowering of this tradition. In a few pages, Kilhefner gave the Radical Faerie refrain a deep bibliography, its own canon.[84]

With the 1980 Radical Faerie event (this time a "gathering") slated for Colorado, these two articles generated a certain excitement about the gathering to come. There were also essays by veterans of the Southeastern Network, which provided an interesting counterpoint. Abbott published "Faerie Power / Gentle Resolve: Meditations on a Magickal Wheel," which by its very title effected a balance between Western and

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[83] Ibid., 27.

[84] It's interesting to contrast this with the Sissie/Effeminism bibliography which almost completely includes works published within a few years of the list. This again underscores Sissie investment in immediacy and Faeries' in much longer traditions.

Southeastern refrains.[85] A poetic reflection, the piece not only embraced the "Faerie" while injecting it with his own concept of Southeastern gentleness, but it also embraced it to inflect it with Reclaiming witchcraft's politicized sense of magic, framing his sense of magic as energy set against patriarchy. (In his interview with me, Abbott playfully informed me that Hay was himself known to be intolerant of the pagan movement, so I contend that his "Meditations on a Magickal Wheel" would *not* have struck Harry as paradigmatic "Faerie Power".)[86]

There was also Milo's "What's Left?" a continuation of a previous column he had written as an attempt to offer *RFD* readers a way to engage the 1980 Presidential elections.[87] In the previous essay, he had endorsed the Citizens Party but a few months later saw it as more a platform for its candidate than of any issues. He invested, though, in supporting third-party candidates in order to incrementally shift electoral politics, so he then decided to endorse the Socialist Party, U.S.A. Although his tone was one of exhaustion and disillusionment, his statement that the gay S.P.U.S.A. candidate "doesn't identify with a movement based only on sexuality. Neither do I,"[88] sharply parted ways with the apparent drift of the new *RFD* editorial collective which seemed to be increasingly and exclusively focused on gay men. At the same time, it seemed to place more faith in the "theater" of U.S. democracy than either the sissies or Michael Mason would have been able to.

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[85] Abbott, "Faerie Power / Gentle Resolve: Meditations on a Magickal Wheel," *RFD* #24, Summer 1980, 35. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.
[86] Abbot, interview with the author, Dec. 14, 2015.
[87] Pyne, "What's Left?" *RFD* #24, Summer 1980, 12-14. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta. Milo's previous article "The 1980 Elections: A Place for Us" was in *RFD* #23, 72-73.
[88] Ibid., 14.

The previous year, Milo had announced that *RFD* was a fairy journal. And so it was, in many ways. The articles by Hay and Kilhefner bolstered the sense of a unified refrain with a clear role in society (promoting subject-SUBJECT consciousness) and a fairly long lineage in Western culture (at least to Whitman). The Summer 1980 *RFD* also gave the Western Faerie leadership a forum to unveil their plans for a "Gay Community Land Trust," which would be discussed in more detail at the Colorado gathering.[89] Recognizing that no real extensive gay infrastructure existed outside of the "gay ghettoes," the Western Radical Faerie founders had already begun plans to form a land trust – ownership of land by a non-profit organization which then grants long-term use rights to a collective of residents. Like the Rainbow Tribes, they conceived of this strategy as an affront to the concept of private property and implicitly likened it to indigenous land relations by leading their article with a quote from Tecumseh: "Sell the land? Why not sell the air, the clouds, the great sea."[90] They also offer that they modeled the strategy on similar women's and black rural land relations, explicitly naming the Oregon Women's Land Trust and the black farmers' New Communities, Inc. in New Albany, Georgia. What they proposed, though, was new in that it would be a separatist community exclusively for gay men. They envisioned starting with a core of 5-8 residents and growing to accommodations for 20-25 gay men who would then hosts

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[89] "Gay Community Land Trust," *RFD* #24, Summer 1980, 37-38. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.

[90] Ibid., 37. Anthropologist Scott Lauria Morgensen sees such Radical Faerie practices as risking a "queer settler colonialism". As an echo of his critique, I point out that for Faeries to collectivize land originally taken from indigenous people is not really analogous to indigenous sovereignty movements, although uses of quotes like this imply that it is.

gatherings and workshops, including ones that would help others learn how to start their own land trusts. They had discussed looking for rural properties of 20-100 acres.

It sounded very much like what Running Water Farm had just done on a smaller scale. Stepping Stone possibly hadn't made such long-term plans, past continuing Southeastern gatherings, producing *RFD*, attempting a cottage industry to support full-time residence, and fostering a curative culture of healing for gay men. And, there was some evidence that the new Running Water collective might be less invested in an anti-assimilationist, gay liberationist refrain than were the Radical Faeries. But, it was all too soon to tell. The Colorado gathering would surely clarify next steps for everyone.

Camelot and Snow White: Divergent Versions of Sanctuary in the Southeastern Network, Early 1980s

The August Colorado Faerie gathering was held in Estes National Forest, near Boulder, sealing its event form as a gathering, in the Rainbow sense of the word. Melba'son presented his shawl featuring the Celtic Pan-like God Cernunnos, and this drape would be used ritually by speakers at Faerie gatherings for some time thereafter.[91] Timmons tells us that, in a rainy afternoon circle of around one hundred Faeries, Hay discussed the urgent need for committed gay communities to support each other "economically as well as spiritually," especially considering a Reagan presidency.[92] Following the Arizona conference at the Desert Sanctuary ashram, it became natural to

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[91] There is more import, I think, to this bit of material culture than immediately meets the eye. Given *RFD* tensions between rural gays and sissie editors, Melba'son had published an article on his crocheting (*RFD* #22, 82), which I see as a way to stress the role of rural craft in LaSiS' cultural practice. The Cernunnos shawl shows how that craft can be applied to enhance Faerie ceremony. On another note, as a specifically Celtic deity, Cernunnos' image can be read to confirm the white, European lineage of the "faerie," an argument which we have seen Melba'son to be well aware.

[92] Harry Hay qtd in Timmons, 274; Timmons summary of the key events concerning the gathering and the land project can be found on pages 271-279. I summarize them on the following pages.

speak of the sites for such community as "sanctuaries". The suggestion for sanctuary resonated in Colorado as "many expressed alarm about the instability of American cities and about the endangered natural ecology".[93] Despite this well received call for gay unity, Timmons also reports a rift in the Radical Faerie leadership. Walker had become increasingly concerned about what he saw as an autocratic tendency in Hay. According to Timmons, at the Colorado gathering, Walker began to spread concern of "Faerie fascism" and even to assign people to watch Hay to collect examples of manipulation.

This distrust would ultimately seriously impact the Faerie land project. The careful planning work of the previous year would gain momentum after the gathering, and non-profit formation, fundraising plans, and site location were taken up with gusto. In late 1980, while searching for Oregon sites, though, the earlier tensions came to a head. During a decision-making meeting, Timmons relays how Walker brought two newcomers who reacted negatively to Hay's insistence that the sanctuary simply couldn't be open at all times to any gay men who felt they needed to be there. For Hay, it was a matter of sustainability; for the two newcomers, it was a matter of exclusivity, an exclusivity which they saw Hay to authoritatively promote. Tempers flared, voices rose, food was thrown, and factions scattered. Rumors flew, creating schisms in the local community, and ultimately, the Western Radical Faeries wouldn't be able to secure their Oregon land trust until 1987.

Timmons primarily describes these differences as a personality clash between Walker and Hay. I argue it was more than that. A Western rift between socialist and anarchist organizational philosophies had been active for some time. Even at the largely

[93] Ibid., 275. This and the next quoted phrase are taken from this page.

socialist feminist 1976 Faggots and Class Struggle conference, anarchists felt marginalized. In Arizona, Hay was angered about the copying of mailing lists, in part because that communication approach conflicted with the structural organization he was familiar with from the Mattachine days. Surely, as that disagreement revealed, there were generational differences, too. Gay men of the McCarthy era had experience to support their reasons for heightened concerns about security. Post-Stonewall gay liberationists often found more security in a decentralized and open structure. So, while Walker and Hay did likely butt heads, the context of their doing so had broader and deeper roots within the movement.

Running Water's own gay land trust experiment had begun before the 1980 call, with the formation of Stepping Stone. Also, Timmons notes that, at one of the Colorado land trust circles, someone from Short Mountain commented that such projects were already underway in Tennessee, too. The speaker added that "All you Faeries who flew away from the South because it was the South, come home".[94] If the Western Faeries faced certain challenges based in conflicts of leadership and organizational philosophy, how did the two Appalachian sites build sanctuary?

Running Water had already come up against questions of sustainability. When the new collective moved to the farm, Wilson took a place in nearby Asheville. While this provided another somewhat urban hub for the rural site, it also meant the new residents were virtual strangers in their new rural community. According to an article by Douglas B. Caulkins, Mikel Wilson's partner, just before the fall 1980 gathering, a pair of local boys shot their guns towards the farmhouse. After Patt followed the boys to their

[94] Timmons, 275.

home and instructed them on the dangers of shooting into other people's properties, their father later warned the new residents that, if the Running Water folks ever came onto his land and lectured his children again, that they would "run [them] off of this mountain."[95] Caulkins goes on to note, though, that following a record turn-out of around one hundred and fifty attendees at the fall 1980 Running Water "fairies" gathering, relationships with the neighbors improved dramatically.

And, other interactions with the larger rural community were benign, and occasionally positive. The mailing list for the summer 1980 gathering mentioned "a gentle old fellow living up the road who happened through one afternoon."[96] Possibly referring to this same event, Caulkins records a Gary Briggs' memory of playing twister on the farm's steep lawn – some men in flannel, some nude, and some in dresses – when an older neighbor passed through, wide-eyed but with no comment.[97] And Ron Lambe later got to know a neighbor by the name of "Harold" who would ask permission to cut across the property; when Harold once happened upon three men erotically tangled on a mattress in the woods, he simply said, "You boys having a rest?" According to Lambe, Harold always spoke highly of the residents and gathering attendees.[98] For their part, the Running Water collective always reminded visitors to be respectful of neighbors in terms of parking and noise.

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[95] Caulkins, "Running Water Farm," 2010, GSV Letters and Magazine Articles, Gay Spirit Visions Records, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.
[96] 1980 Running Water mailing list. Conference – Radical Faeries – "Gatherings" at Running Water, 1979-1981 (Box 1, Folder 6), Gay Spirit Visions records, W127, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.
[97] Caulkins, ibid.
[98] Ibid.

The large number of attendees at the fall 1980 gathering was an issue, though. As Faygele had pointed out, the land couldn't hold that many. The members of Stepping Stone decided in 1980 that about fifty visitors was about all the land could handle, and that such a number would still allow for the intimacy which had always been a hallmark of the Running Water gatherings. They decided to accept the first ones who returned informal registration cards sent through the mail.[99] And the intimate tenor seemed to be an impressive aspect of the gatherings according to those Caulkins spoke to. Music was central to the experience, with Lambe often playing piano for singalongs. Mason and Abbott read poetry. Briggs and Haze brought their children. There was a wood stove to cook on, and the porch was the site of much treasured socializing, sometimes captured by photograph. And the impromptu sharing and discussion circles were a regular feature. Newcomers like Briggs, commented, though, that compared to the lesbian and gay conferences he had attended, the lack of structure and rules were a bit of a shock.[100] The farm site for the gathering of "gentle men" would face many challenges, though, as the years went on, and eventually Lambe would have to sell it.

Looking back, Lambe said, "Running Water is now gone. It was like a Camelot – magical, empowering, healing, and dream-like."[101] This Camelot was a Faerie sanctuary that they had to struggle very hard to maintain. Caulkins relays how the collective had no luck finding jobs in the area; minimal *RFD* profits and gathering donations allowed them to pay the property taxes, and otherwise they barely got by – eating by growing food in

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[99] Fall 1980 Running Water flier. Conference – Radical Faeries – "Gatherings" at Running Water, 1979-1981 (Box 1, Folder 6), Gay Spirit Visions records, W127, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.
[100] Caulkins, ibid.
[101] Sears, "Ron Lambe: Time in Camelot," ibid., 11.

their garden and joining a food co-op.[102] Kendrick and Jones moved to Asheville for jobs, living with Wilson, and eventually Lambe was the only one left on the farm. About three years into the venture, Lambe announced the dissolution of the collective (but not of Stepping Stone) and appealed to the network for solutions.[103] New shareholders produced enough money to keep the gatherings going for most of the 1980s – the last event was actually in 1989 – but the site was actually never a success as a collective residence, with all four members living there only for a very short time in the first year after purchase.[104]

Since the size of the Running Water gatherings had been an issue from the very beginning, they encouraged other rural collectives to offer parallel events, to serve as sanctuaries. Short Mountain was one of those. Both in Appalachia, the two were quite different. Short Mountain was a much bigger space, and with Kathy Gross there, it actively involved women. Lambe himself gestured towards some of the differences: Structurally, Short Mountain was an established and very open collective whereas they at Running Water simply "were not," and culturally, Short Mountain was more "laid back" in general, and accepting of marijuana usage, while Running Water was "compulsive and neat" and "<u>might</u> have wine".[105] Lambe offers the differences between the two Appalachian sanctuaries as matters of structure and personality, but these were elements of deeper ideological differences, too.

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[102] Caulkins, ibid.
[103] "A Collective Living Manifesto, or a Modest Proposal by the 'Gang of Four' (of Running Water)," *RFD* #30, Spring 1982, 12-14. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.
[104] Caulkins, ibid.
[105] Sears, "Ron Lambe: Time in Camelot," ibid, 5.

Running Water leadership in the early 1980s generally reflected the trajectory of the wider Radical Faerie culture rooted in the West. As we have seen, others in the Southeastern Network were clearly more cautious about their entry into the Faerie refrain. Following the Colorado gathering, Melba'son wrote an *RFD* review of Walker's recently published *Visionary Love: A Spirit Book of Gay Mythology and Trans-mutational Faerie* (1980). Adopting the more collective model of authorship we saw with "Solidarity Forever," the author byline reads "written by Dennis Melba'son with love, support and criticism from Stacy Brotherlover, Aurora Corona, and Clover Chango".[106] This review worked both to struggle and connect with Walker as an author and spiritual seeker, but on two points, Melba'son's disagreement clearly took place on fundamental grounds and, as such, were emotional.

First, as we might expect, the Sissie took issue with the Faerie Walker's easy dismissal of Marxist political cultures within the gay liberationist movement: "He dismisses the contributions Gay Marxists have made to our collective visions … . I profoundly disagree."[107] Referring to the depth model I discussed earlier in this chapter – similar to how Hay urges gay men to shed their "frogskins" – the flabbergasted Melba'son wrote, "Mitch is asking nothing less of us than that we blast ourselves out of conditioned ways of thinking/acting/being and join him in becoming faggot warriors …".[108] This struck Melba'son as an impossibly tall order. Having worked with the Maoist concept of *fanshen*, Melba'son's process was a much slower turning than a

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[106] Melba'son, book review of Mitch Walker's *Visionary Love, RFD* #25, Fall 1980. 85. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.
[107] Ibid, 82.
[108] Ibid.

sudden shedding. Walker's process for achieving this faggot warrior status involved working spiritually against deified figures of the patriarchy such as the "Senex," who appeared as the elderly bearded man so often used to picture God. Not only did Melba'son find this ageist, but he also didn't think it was practical: "I find it easier (though of course not at all 'easy') to root out of myself knowable/known historical/cultural inhibitions … than to struggle with amorphous out-there-somewhere spirit beings."[109] As we have seen, Melba'son used Goddess figures to inspire new, intuitive, positive behaviors, not to replace self-analysis. Sissie self-analysis was drawn not from spiritual introspection through such negative figures as a "Senex," but from performative social interactions which tested actual behaviors in context.

Second, Melba'son ended his critique of Walker with a discussion of his perpetuation of racist stereotypes: "The most troubling passage of all in *Visionary Love* for me is in this second section. Mitch calls it The Black Faggot Magickal Wand, by which he means, if I understand him correctly, our cock".[110] He laments that Walker uses an exhausted "light/dark color dualism" to frame the power of sexuality, saying "This bothers me a lot because I know in my heart that Mitch Walker is not a racist".[111] Still, Melba'son insists that the West Coast Faerie

> romanticizes the color black in a way that seems to me, alienating to blacks and whites alike. I'm not black, so how could I ever partake of this magickal sexuality? Indeed, not all blacks are black. I wonder how a light-skinned black would react to this passage? Or a black Latino? Or an Asian? Or a Native American? In this one instance I do not hesitate to say that Mitch's way is <u>not</u> The Way. I think Mitch is wrong here, and I hope he hears my criticism with all the love and compassion that I offer it.

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[109] Ibid., 83.
[110] Ibid., 84.
[111] Ibid. Both this and the block quote are taken from page 84.

Unlike the previous critique of the faggot refrain, for deriving its symbology exclusively from white experiences of colonialism, Melba'son seemed to correct Walker for basing the Faerie refrain in part on a racist association of blackness with a confrontational ("faggot") sexuality. Of course, one of the broader issues implied by Melba'son's "wonder[ing] how a light-skinned black would respond" was that both the Faerie and Southeastern Sissie refrain remained mostly white. Where LaSiS had successfully joined mostly black political demonstrations – for example, the UTNO teacher strike – as points of contact, they were not necessarily on-going relationships, and there was little to no racial diversity within the Southeastern Network at this point.

Milo submitted a similar article exhibiting a very qualified embrace of the Faerie refrain to *RFD* #25. His "A Faeryist Not-Man-ifesto" uses key terms of the new movement – "Faerie" and "Not-Man" – but changes them.[112] "Faeryist" may only be an adjective, but it also implies variation on the original, and the term "not-man-ifesto" name-drops Hay's Greek "not-man" while evoking the Sissie man-ifestoes published only the year before. A draft of Milo's essay is filed at Duke University with the ALFA papers, in a folder labeled "Effeminism," because Milo sent a copy with a letter addressed "Dear Sisters" to the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance, whose newsletter he regularly read.[113] This indicates to me that Milo sought regional lesbian feminist assistance in shaping a Southeastern FaeryIST refrain. In the piece, unlike Melba'son, Milo offers no overt critique. He instead outlines what he saw as the key components of

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[112] Pyne, "A Faeryist Not-Man-ifesto,"*RFD* #25, Fall 1980, 56-58. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.The quotes and analysis on the following page are also taken from this passage.
[113] Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance Papers Box 16, Southeast Gay Coalition, Folder 29 Effeminists. David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

the eclipsed gay liberation movement in order to secure them as central to the Faerie subjectivity which he then embraced. He proceeded to offer a shared Faerie vision based, first, in gay non-assimilation, but primarily characterized by its allied struggles against sexism and racism.

Even though Milo's "A Faeryist Not-Man-ifesto" assumes a gay male audience, it also assumes a non-separatist politics. Of Faeryist anti-sexism, he wrote, "The time has come for faeries and lesbians to begin to talk, walk, and breathe together (con-spire) for the further development of each other's visions and dreams".[114] As an example, he cited the summer 1980 Pan-Pagan Festival at which Z. Budapest's women-only witchcraft ritual was circled by Faeries and ultimately protected by them from an attacking "born-again Baptist". He specifically mentioned the important work of "[sharing] our material and spiritual resources with wimmin and their movements" and "[offering] concrete support to wimmin". The anti-sexism work Milo imagined wasn't merely internal or theoretical – or separatist.

He found more challenges with anti-racist work, expressing concern about the racism in their own gay liberationist circles and, like Wittman, concern about the homophobia in race-based nationalist movements. He prioritized extending "material support" to lesbian and gay people of color, and their organizations, but expressed doubt about whether joining various nationalist movements' efforts would succeed, based on others gay liberationists' failed attempts to do similar. What he advocated most was participation in ant-Klan and anti-white supremacist work. He mentioned, as an example, that, earlier in the year, he and others had marched with signs reading "QUEERS

[114] Pyne, "A Faeryist," ibid., 57. The following quotes are also from this page.

AGAINST RACISM" in North Carolina, participating in the rallies which followed the 1979 Greensboro Massacre. Finally, he urged support for nationalists' parallel pursuit of independent land – naming Puerto Rico, Chicana/Mexicana land in Texas, and the New Afrika movement. As with Melba'son, this work was framed as an alliance, a framing which shows no signs that he was imagining a "Faeryist" of color.

Perhaps it isn't surprising that, following Running Water's summer 1979 decision to become a "faggot-only" space, LaSiS chose to enter a strategic pairing with Short Mountain. Considering the group's history of work alongside lesbian feminists, it was a logical choice, especially given that Gross was now in Tennessee. And, due to the shared editorial work on *RFD*, the two collectives already had established working relationships. According to Dimid, Short Mountain hosted a "Fall Re-Inhabitation Project," planning to make the space more habitable, and in spring 1980 Dimid relocated to Tennessee. LaSiS, likely with the support of Brotherlover's accounting skills, led light fundraising and money management. The collective was comprised of eight: Cathy, Dimid, Milo, John Greenwall, Pearl, Jerry, David, and a Crazy Owl. They jokingly called themselves "Snow White and the Seven Dwarves" with Gross laughingly playing the lead.[115]

Gross remembers that being the lone lesbian wasn't always easy. In retrospect, she feels, though, that she was successful and respected in the collective for holding her everyday frustrations to instead speak forcefully and clearly for herself when she needed something more fundamental to change. She recalls that her relationship with Crazy Owl was a bit strained, given the latter's difficult relationships with women, difficulties rooted

[115] Hayes, interview with the author, ibid.

in childhood abuse at the hands of his mother. Still, with patience, she found ways to work through that, too.[116]

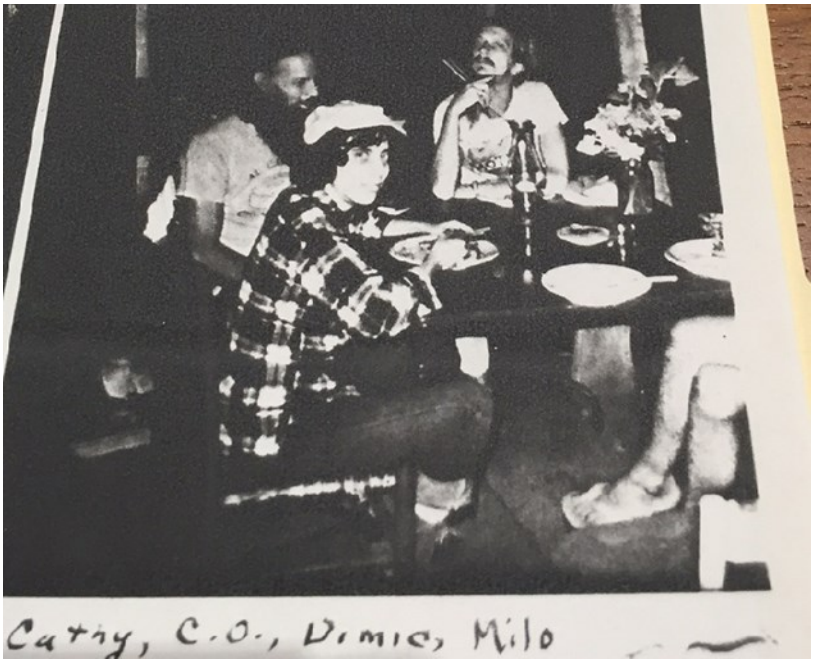

Fig. 7. Short Mountain, 1980, "Cathy, C[razy] O[wl], Dimd, and Milo [foot only]. (Photo courtesy of Duke University, James T. Sears Papers, Box 137, Folder 8.)

Born in 1927, Crazy Owl was a generation older, had a PhD in counseling, and had worked for years in Boston as a corporate statistician before leaving that world to pursue a midlife career in Chinese medicine.[117] According to Abbott, he had moved around the Southeast, living in various rural hippie communities before settling at Short Mountain. He had decided to focus on Chinese medicine in order to find ways to mediate what he saw as a "cancer epidemic" and to counter what he saw as the reduction of touch to purposes of sex and violence by the "white race".[118] During Short Mountain's first

[116] Hope, interview with the author, ibid.
[117] [author not known] "An Interview with Charles E. Hall, Ph.D," James T Sears Papers, Box 136, Folder 1, Radical Faeries (general). David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University. Photocopied 1985 interview with Crazy Owl. Crazy Owl had lived previously at a hippie community in Virginia and also had a small Chinese medicine practice in Eureka Springs, Arkansas.
[118] Ibid.

May Day celebration, during the spring of 1980, after an elevated lookout structure collapsed, leaving several gathering attendees injured, it was Gross who made contact with Crazy Owl, improvising a ritual in which she and he stood back-to-back, becoming a dyke-faerie androgyne to serve as a human May Pole for the ceremony.

Following the August 1980 Colorado gathering, the Short Mountain collective moved quickly. In July of 1981, the charter for Short Mountain, Inc., was filed with the state of Tennessee, and the by-laws were written.[119] In a 1981 proofed flier about the site, a very different gendered understanding of the Faerie refrain than that of Running Water or the Western network was clear. *The Short Mountain Rag* described Short Mountain Sanctuary as formed

> to create a sanctuary for all living things, to create and nourish a community of \ faeries on the 250 acres we live on, a community open to all faeries male and female, an environment that is ~~anti~~non-sexist and ~~anti~~non-racist, nurturing and caring … . LesbianS ~~faeries~~ are welcome at our gatherings, and are encouraged to become members. We are open to wimmin living on the land and creating their own autonomous space.[120]

This document exposes the confusion around defining the Radical Faerie in the early 1980s within the Southeastern Network. Extending the "Faeryist Not-Manifesto," the Short Mountain collective didn't simply imagine women were allies; they understood them as potential Faeries. Still, that understanding was clearly fraught, as evidenced by their re-writing the term "lesbian faeries" to read simply "lesbians" and further establishing a tone of welcome without clearly stating that there had *already* been a woman resident among the authorial "we". This conflicted tone was the result of the Short Mountain collective's negotiating its recent embrace of the Faerie refrain while

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[119] James T Sears Papers, Box 136, Folder 2, Short Mountain Minutes, 1980-1989. David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.
[120] 1981 Short Mountain flier.Ibid.

positioning itself alongside its more emphatically male versions like nearby Running Water. The result is a local variation on the Faerie refrain which de-emphasized gender identity in order to focus on a spiritual-political subjectivity dedicated to the creation of environments of care predicated on the neutralization of sexism and racism. (It's important they chose not to use the prefix "anti-"; I think this may represent a distancing from more militant political stances, at least within the sanctuary context.)

Although both Gross and Dimid would stay only a short time at Short Mountain – both going, eventually, to New Mexico – the precedent for women's presence at Short Mountain was set. 1980s Short Mountain meeting minutes show that a woman usually sat on the board – Linda Kybek and Louise Coggins were long-standing female leadership in that decade.[121] They might've been a relatively small group, but women were a consistent presence. The same minutes show that women were integrated into event and space, too. Women were welcome at all early gatherings, but there were also women's weekends. And there was a Wimmin's Ridge dedicated as a women's space. (Later in the decade, when Michael Mason relocated there, the board had a joking meeting about whether or not Mason could set up a temporary residence on Wimmin's Ridge without undergoing a sex change.) And, although women residents and gathering attendees were always fairly small in number, a 1992 Short Mountain women's mailing list featured multiple pages, bearing mostly Southeastern regional addresses.[122]

As Short Mountain's ample space began in the 1980s to attract wider interest and draw residents and visitors alike from all over the country, they also doggedly maintained

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[121] Ibid.

[122] Short Mountain women's mailing list. James T Sears Papers, Box 136, Folder 13, Short Mountain Women. David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

a regional function. One way they did this was understanding the site environmentally as a bio-region. In 1986, Short Mountain registered with the Tennessee Department of Conservation as a "natural area" in order to protect the unique biological diversity on two hundred of its acres.[123] This move inherently linked the environmental and liberationist understandings of "sanctuary" via a value of cultivated local diversity. The established site also provided a place to go for regional queers for whom the city was not an option. For example, in an August 30th letter of 1982, a gay man from Appalachian north Georgia, from Hiawassee, wrote to Short Mountain, seeking *some* kind of connection with other gay people when there were none he knew to turn to in his home town; he closed his letter with the request "discretion appreciated".[124] On March 14th, 1983, a young man who had burned out after a few months in San Francisco, had returned to nearby Manchester, Tennessee, to be closer to family; writing to Pearl, he expressed interest in connecting with the Faeries there, offering to barter farm labor at the Sanctuary for his temporary keep.[125]

If such letters indicate that sanctuary was made available to locals who weren't necessarily Faeries, it's also important to stress that many in the Network visited and promoted both Running Water and Short Mountain. In fact, the Hiawassee man above was referred to Short Mountain by Franklin Abbott, who was also very active at Running Water. Abbott also researched alternative incorporation models for the collective at their

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[123] Official correspondence and paperwork. James T Sears Papers, Box 136, Folder 4, Short Mountain Natural Area, 1986. David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.
[124] Letter to Short Mountain from Hiawassee, GA man. James T Sears Papers, Box 137, Folder 7, Short Mountain Gay Era, 1980-1985. David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University
[125] Letter to Short Mountain from Manchester, TN man. Ibid.

very outset.[126] In October 1980, Abbott wrote letters of thanks to Short Mountain for hosting him for a needed restorative visit after he'd been to see his family, presumably back in the Birmingham area.[127] Of course, in New Orleans, LaSiS helped with the financial side of things, also hosting sanctuary board meetings at their winter gatherings. After all, the Short Mountain-New Orleans connection *was* the first attempt at realizing the kind of sissie rural-urban networking which Brotherlover and Dimid had suggested in 1978 and 1979. Arkansas was connected to Short Mountain, too: In January of 1981, a man from Little Rock working with a women's collective wrote them, interested in networking with regional feminist men.[128]

Even though Running Water and Short Mountain developed two different models of sanctuary in the wake of the first two Western Radical Faerie events, it would be inaccurate to characterize their differences as opposed or separate. That there was overlap among regional attendees at both sites' gatherings, indicates that they may have been seen by many as serving complementary functions. For example, regional gay liberationists may have turned to Running Water for "separatist" curative purposes and Short Mountain for open, connective purposes. In other words, it's possible to think of "separatism" in Enszer's terms – as a *process* which informs a longer politics. As such, I think it's also helpful to think of the various Southeastern gay liberationist sites – urban and rural – as "local queer ecologies" but to extend Sears' definitional emphasis on "common borders" and internal diversity to also include mutual regional connection and

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[126] James T Sears Papers, Box 136, Folder 2, Short Mountain Minutes, 1980-1989. David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.
[127] Letter to Short Mountain from Abbott. James T Sears Papers, Box 137, Folder 7, Short Mountain Gay Era, 1980-1985. David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.
[128] Letter to Short Mountain from Little Rock, AR man. Ibid.

influence. Basically, various functions in the process of separatism took place at different but connected sites – these two Appalachian sanctuaries.

Before the 1979 Spiritual Conference for Radical Faeries, the Southeastern Network had already begun to practice a specifically gay liberationist rural-urban connection through its use of the gathering. This event allowed for the experiential, affective articulation of sissie and "gentle men" subjectivities which then went on to inform and influence the Western Radical Faerie refrain, which then served as a kind of umbrella term for the wider movement. As an umbrella refrain, the Faerie often accommodated the previous refrains within it. The Faerie call for sanctuary was first answered in Appalachia, then, but because of the persistence of various Faerie orientations (in relation to the West or Southeast, to New Orleans or Atlanta, to women or "clones") these rural sites were shaped on different models. The resulting travel across rural-urban borders allowed those in the network to see how certain institutions – like the prison and energy industrial complexes – exploited rural regions for systemic purposes. This presented the opportunity for revising earlier concepts of the rural as wilderness or escape so that these later gay liberationist cultures internalized a kind of critical rural or critical regional perspective.

Many of these insights had been sparked before gay liberation proper, in those first countercultural years of "hippie/fairy chic". In fact, many in the Southeastern Network would re-discover inspiration in the work of James Broughton in the 1980s and 1990s. Broughton, who had attended the 1980 Colorado gathering, was afterwards taken up as the "bard of the Radical Faeries". Russ Cravens ("Raven Wolfdancer," by this point) and Franklin Abbott corresponded with Broughton in efforts to bring him to the

region.[129] Broughton sent a cheerful postcard to the Short Mountain collective in January of 1981.[130] And, a film-maker/poet named Feyson had taken up residence at the Tennessee sanctuary the year before, working on a film which may or may not have been finished -- a film called *Vocations* with poems for a script. In a journal entry from December of 1980, Feyson shared how he had been inspired by a poem from Broughton's *Seeing the Light: A Metaphysics of Cinema*.[131] The younger film-maker mentioned his Short Mountain "family of dykes and faggots," and in some ways, we can certainly see Gross and Crazy Owl as a May Day variation on the androgyne, and see Running Water's Camelot and Short Mountain's Snow White settings as deeper-south *Dreamwoods.* They do stand as highly affective instances of how gay liberation itself entered the forest, and stayed.

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[129] Abbott to Broughton, April 18, 1981. James Broughton Papers. Kent State University Library. Special Collections and Archives. Kent, OH. Accessed Nov. 9, 2017, http://digitalcollections.library.gsu.edu/cdm/ref/collection/abbott/id/10 ; Wolfdancer to Broughton and Singer, June 26, 1983. James Broughton Papers. Kent State University Library. Special Collections and Archives. Kent, OH. Accessed Nov. 9, 2017, http://digitalcollections.library.gsu.edu/cdm/ref/collection/abbott/id/53.

[130] Postcard to Short Mountain from Broughton. James T Sears Papers, Box 137, Folder 17, Short Mountain Correspondence, 1980-1983. David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

[131] Feyson's journal. James T Sears Papers, Box 137, Folder 8, Short Mountain, 1980. David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

Conclusion| Reading Liberationism in Other Voices and Other Rooms

In the late 1980s, as Running Water realized its days as a sanctuary were numbered, editorial hands for *RFD* transferred to Short Mountain. The gay serial would stay there until 2009 – around thirty years. The Tennessee Radical Faerie sanctuary would house *RFD*'s production offices in a little wooden shed, only steps from the barn. Visitors would wander the farm with a copy in their hands – to read on the farmhouse porch or in a hammock on the knoll. I encountered the Winter 2001/2002 War issue on that porch in the months following 9/11, thirty years after the founding of Short Mountain Sanctuary, nearly forty years after Milo Pyne had come to the then abandoned Appalachian farm. At that point, when the graphic red, white, and blue cover of the War issue caught my eye, it was easy to imagine that *RFD* had always essentially been a "Radical Faerie Digest". But, it hadn't. The publication had been brought by Faygele ben Miriam to Appalachia in 1978, at the exact time the gay liberationist Southeastern Network was discovering synergy. This was the summer before the Arizona "spiritual conference" which would be understood to found the Radical Faeries.

Having been active in the print networks of *RFD* since its inception, members of the Southeastern Network were as engaged with rural ways of sustaining gay liberation as were any others within that magazine's surprisingly far reach. In fact, they played at least three critical roles in the formation of the Radical Faerie refrain anchored in the West. First, they had already fashioned a rural gathering event form at Running Water which would influence the immediate shift of the Radical Faerie "spiritual conference" to a "gathering" format. Second, regional sissie editorial decisions for the Winter 1979 issue (#22) re-shaped *RFD* as a Faerie publication by heavily documenting the

liberationist Arizona event during a time of liberal gay crisis of national scale. Third, these Southeastern gay liberationists first answered the call for sanctuary, developing different models at Running Water and Short Mountain. After, other Faerie sanctuaries would pop up in the U.S., and in Europe, Australia, and Asia.

Their regional network also sustained gay liberationism. Even if urban gay men in the region, parallel to those on the West and East coasts, overwhelmingly embraced a liberalism increasingly invested in gay rights, the collectives which *Between F* Words* describes networked at the regional scale as a way of re-energizing their liberationist values. They were certainly engaged in regional activism: protesting Anita Bryant, Dessie Woods' imprisonment, the New Orleans school board, and white supremacy in North Carolina. These political actions weren't incidental. The systemic critique so essential to a liberationist political vision was, for the Southeastern Network, focused on a regional Jim Crow regime which was, in many ways, simply incorporated into a wider Moral Majority ideology which itself hinged on white, gender normative, heterosexual child protectionism. Further, they saw how this moralism came to be linked to laissez faire economic policy and regional Sunbelt development. Many of those in the network, like the Arkansas Sissies, feared this oppressive assemblage would spread beyond the region and become a national terror. Considering the Reagan era which followed, it arguably did.

To live within this particular political geography, these liberationists formed refrains, sissie and gentle men subjectivities which were improvised alternatives to living as part of the moral majority. The cultures which they built to reflect these subjectivities should be understood as a form of prefigurative politics, an attempt to live the better

society which gay liberationists envisioned. As very personal and everyday cultures rooted in liberationist connective values, their affective dimensions were important. I have discussed these affects in four ways. First, I talk about the *orientations* of these regional liberationists – the most important being how they kept their alliances with lesbian socialist feminists, even within separatist contexts. Second, these liberationists' affect included improvising with *psychic* models different than those found in traditional psychiatry. Usually these liberationist models involved thinking of the self as multiple and in regular flux, changing with successive connections. A prime example was how Dennis Williams worked with the self he called Melba'son, a practice which echoed, for example, West Coast witchcraft practices of working with a tripartite soul.

Third, *emotions* were a key part of the culture's affective work. These liberationists responded to loneliness and terror, often by experimenting with radical forms of care for each other, through print venues like *RFD* and at gathering circles like those at Running Water. Finally, the *corporeal* forms of affect were important. These manifested in their work towards more communicative sexual relations and in their sissie gender-fuck drag. These affects not only supported and defined sissie and gentle man subjectivities; they also helped to re-generate the energy for politics in an era when most reports had declared gay liberation dead.

There were other factors which contributed to gay liberation's survival in these parts. Lord and Zajicek point out that the radical women's movement in the Arkansas Ozarks reached a peak after similar movements had already begun to subside in major cities. The Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance (ALFA) flowered in the Little Five Points area around the same time. This delayed formation revived regional gay liberation during

its waning years. What's more, Appalachia, as a 1970s geography of activist and countercultural activity not only drew gay liberationists to its rural enclaves, but these liberationists began to recognize each other, in overlapping communities and in *RFD*. In many ways, 1970s Appalachia was poised to attract gay liberationists who moved in such circles.

What's more, just as they began to recognize each other in such rural radical contexts, lesbian and gay movements anchored in Georgia engaged in broad regional networking which reached those in the Ozarks and Appalachia. As we have seen, the 1972 convention for gay militants in Athens, Georgia, drew attendees from across the region. ALFA corresponded with and supported regional women's rural collectives, including some in the Ozarks. Gay liberationists from similar collectives were networked enough to serve as presenters at the 1978 Southeastern Conference on Lesbians and Gay Men in Atlanta. The timing of such networking was perfect, connecting scattered collectives who had just become aware of each other through *RFD* and regional activist and countercultural circles. It also made possible the rural (Ozark, Appalachian) and urban (New Orleans, Atlanta) connections that would characterize the regional outlook of the network.

The Southeastern gay liberationist regionalism which resulted had a particular spirit. Definitely, it was inflected by sustained ties to lesbian feminist cultures and networks. It was certainly shaped by its concerns with an expanding political economy with roots in Jim Crow, child protectionist, and Moral Majority ideologies associated with the region. It was synergized by Appalachian countercultural and activist enclaves and wide lesbian and gay political networking. Its sense of region, though, was not

defined by simple location in a certain set of states. The network understood region through the highly affective lens of early *RFD*'s erotic rusticity. That is to say, in the process of innovating forms of connection across urban-rural boundaries, they both came to see how city and country are jointly mobilized in the larger political economy and how lives could be improvised outside that mobilization. Through *RFD* and rural gathering intimacies which crisscrossed from cities like Atlanta and New Orleans to rural outposts in mountain Arkansas, Tennessee, and North Carolina, a very sensuous identification with all these places, in disregard of political boundaries, became possible. As Milo's map of regional Sissie Networking shows, this spirit was an anarcho-eco-feminist one which ignored national and state lines to face the Caribbean, rather than the rest of the nation, and to define itself by the various locations of collectives and natural features. Their sense of the region was an anarchist, gay liberationist network which depended on linking the urban and rural. Its very forms insisted that loneliness was produced by the system and wide connection was a more natural state.

This specific regional spirit was vibrant, arising alongside the urban clone, in the years just after the supposed death of gay liberation. Like gay liberation's first chapter, its story was short. Emerging in the mid-1970s, it soon faced crisis in the form of a series of terrifying events: the Save Our Children Campaign, the Briggs Initiative, and the assassination of Harvey Milk. This terror followed a Sunbelt arc, shot like an arrow from Florida to California. It fomented both the Moral Majority and a more unified national gay liberalism – the latter of which took the form of the 1979 March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights. The Southeastern Network effectively embraced the Radical Faerie as a gay liberationist umbrella term of comparable national reach during this time

of crisis for gay liberalism. As was also the case with gay liberation's first chapter, its second chapter was still, I contend, not the end of the longer story. Those in the Southeastern Network improvised their own practices within the still foggy outlines of the Faerie refrain. Not only did gay liberation survive; so did the sissie and the gentle man, in their Reagan-era, Faerie variations. And they did so as all eyes turned to the gay cities.

The sanctuaries would serve important roles in the coming decade. As the spiking numbers at Running Water indicate, more and more seemed interested in these rural spaces and their gatherings. Apparently, the regional need for sanctuary was acute in these years of national gay liberal crisis. As the gathering numbers grew, though, their original culture of intimacy was challenged. In the face of such change, not all those who helped to build the sanctuaries visited them so frequently. As mentioned, Dimid and Cathy Hope left Short Mountain not long after working towards its re-inhabitation as a sanctuary. For many, the early culture of the Southeastern Network was as much about dispersing and diversifying as it was about gathering. In his interview with me, Dimid remembered that many in the Network less advocated establishing centralized sanctuary sites with large gatherings than they did proliferating small local collectives everywhere.[1]

Clear Englebert, in the Fall 1981 issue of *RFD*, confessed in an interview to having "cautionary feelings about the gatherings": "such an emotionally self-sufficient, predominately white, exclusively male support system would hopefully be actively involved in self-analysis and self-criticism in regards to racism & sexism. I don't see that

[1] Hayes, interviewed by author, August 3-4, 2016.

happening."[2] Some feared that fast, uncritical growth could result in a homogenization of the culture. Under Stepping Stone, Inc., Running Water framed sanctuary as a curative space specifically for gay men. The more "anarchistic" Short Mountain, with the help of Cathy Gross, conceived of sanctuary as "non-sexist" -- not only to be generally welcoming to women, but to have spaces and events dedicated to them. As an earlier draft of a flier indicates, Short Mountain even considered the possibility that women might be Radical Faeries – counter to common West Coast trends set forth by Hay and Walker. This design reflected the long cultural affinity which regional gay liberationists, especially sissies, held towards lesbian feminists. It also reflected a response to women's "separatism" as a process towards better relations, rather than a simple divorce. Still, even with women's residence and leadership at early Short Mountain, men were a clear majority, surely making women's experience challenging at times.

Short Mountain also dedicated itself to being a non-racist place. Familiar with the violent racial dimensions of the SOC and Moral Majority assemblage, racial analysis had long been central to the culture. Faygele ben Miriam presented on racism within the gay activist community at regional conferences and at Running Water. Mulberry House had emphasized the importance of white consciousness-raising around issues of race. Dimid Hayes had urged active forms of outreach to gay people of color when conceiving rural sanctuary. Dennis Melba'son had early on recognized, though, his own tendencies to address white racist institutions while neglecting to build strong connections with people of color themselves.

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[2] Englebert, "Profiles and Interviews: A Visit with Clear Englebert in S.E. Tennessee," *RFD* #28, Fall 1981, 50-52. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.

Such may have been a trend. Pyne's "Faeryist Not-Manifesto" cited specific work in anti-Klan and anti-white supremacist demonstrations. At the same time, it expressed doubts about collaborating with people of color's nationalist movements directly, instead urging support for the groups' land-based politics. There is little evidence to indicate that the latter ever fully materialized, even when such movements like the black farmers' New Communities, Inc. in New Albany, Georgia, cited by Hay in his call for sanctuaries, occupied the Southeast region, too. Unfortunately, the racial dimensions of rural sanctuary, aside from that in Dimid's letter, appear under-analyzed.

For example, questions about the different stakes around rural gathering for Southern gay African Americans rarely appeared in the archive. When they did, there was little comment; for example, Bob Strain, remembering a 1991 Gay Spirit Visions event which succeeded Running Water in Western North Carolina, noted, "We were feeling pretty unsafe two days earlier. Gay, black, and urban, my best friend Ricky was anxious about a trip into the South. It didn't help that we spent a night in Lynchburg (!), Jerry Falwell's home. We got lost in the mountains between Johnson City and Asheville (there was no interstate there yet), and we arrived in a fog to what seemed a deserted camp. Despite our nerves, we still felt called there."[3] Although black gay men were clearly welcome, I found no record of conversations about how to address the ways rural Appalachian sanctuary might have presented a specific form of fearful barrier to African Americans.

So, at least in this early period, these Southeastern gay liberationists focused their anti-racism work more on demonstrations against white supremacism and built no formal

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[3] Caulkins, Ibid.

strategies for collaborations with people of color's land movements or for wider racial access to sanctuary. For a politics so measured by its erotic rusticity, such tendencies must have particularly struck many sissies and gentle men as failure of connection. So, in regards to race, the Southeastern refrains struggled to match their erotic with their critical modes.

Clearly, the form and purpose of sanctuary was a matter of much debate very early on. A sense of crisis drove more people to the rural gatherings, and attendees brought with them a host of ideas about what sanctuaries were for. Many of those who helped to start the sanctuaries disagreed over their size, permanence, purpose, and audiences. So, to these gay liberationists, sanctuaries may have seemed to change almost as soon as they were created. For this reason, I see the formation of the sanctuaries as a phenomenon of the gay liberationist culture which persisted in the Southeastern Network of the 1970s. As I have shown, that culture's influence on the sanctuaries is clear, but its specific form in the years to come – after the formation of the Radical Faeries, after the advent of both the Reagan administration and the AIDS crisis – deserves its own chapter.

This regional history of gay liberation has, I argue, a couple of key implications for LGBT and other movement history. The first relates to the geographic scale of analysis. As the sanctuaries formed, more frequent crossing of rural-urban borders led to new experiences of how regional systemic development mobilized rural areas along with urban ones. *RFD* editors and writers drew particular attention to the rural location of prison and energy industries. Sometimes, such experiences didn't lead immediately to overt analysis, but it did allow for observations which would beg later questions. For

example, the Fall/Winter 1980 *RFD* (#25) included many notices urging support for gay Cuban refugees from the 1980 Mariel boatlift; as a special issue on Arkansas, it also featured a map of that state with a site labeled "Little Havana".[4] Although no overt connections were made, this map represents regional gay liberationists' awareness that Fort Chaffee, in rural Northwest Arkansas, was a Cuban refugee camp which detained straight and gay Cubans.[5]

Visually placing Havana in rural Arkansas, following the Mariel boatlifts, shed light on another systemic use of the rural: as a site for military bases which might also serve as refugee camps. I argue that such critical rural representations sustain transnational rather than merely sub-national understandings of the rural. Again, as Mary Pat Brady has indicated, attention to the lived experiences of place, as political space, enables an intersectional analysis which attends to the ways a political economic system routes and denies connection and flow. In the case of the above gay liberationist spotlight on Arkansas' Little Havana, *RFD* mapmakers expose how the rural was used to contain transnational, Cuba-to-U.S. *gay* migration. On the other hand, *RFD*'s efforts to network sponsors for gay Marielitos represented an effort to improvise something like a home for gay detainees who had no family to justify their release. I argue that looking closely at sites of systemic regional assemblage may also uncover their refrains.

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[4] "Ozark Faerie Land," *RFD* #25, Fall 1980, 48-49. Gender & Sexuality Periodicals Collection, Archives for Research on Women and Gender, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta.
[5] Maranda Radcliff, "Fort Chaffee," *The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History & Culture*, September 19, 2017 (latest update), accessed November 8, 2017, http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=2263; Edwin Unzalu, "The Cuban Exodus of 1980: The Stories and News Coverage of the Undesirables" (undergraduate honors thesis, Loyola University New Orleans, 2017), accessed Nov. 8, 2017, http://www.louisianadigitallibrary.org/islandora/object/loyno-etd%3A243.

I propose that, among the more radical in the Southeastern network, such a critical perspective was related to a greater reluctance to dispense with a Marxist historical materialist approach than was the case with Westerners like Hay and Walker. Melba'son critiqued Walker on these grounds, and the Short Mountain *RFD* editors expressed their discomfort with Hay's essentialism. Rooted in Marxist analysis, they were accustomed to basing their politics on considerations of the local and contemporary political economy. Their locations made this tricky. Situated at the southernmost seams of the mountain south, they had to account for Ozark, Appalachian, and Deep South contexts at the regional borders where they met. At the same time, 1970s Appalachia was uniquely poised to enable gay liberationist networking. Lesbians and gay men were already embedded in its amicable mix of countercultural, activist, and local cultures, and the emphasis on internal colonialism and women's leadership in Appalachian activist culture resonated with broader liberationist politics. When nearby cities like Atlanta and Chapel Hill hosted gay political networking, gays in rural Appalachia initially networked by *RFD* immediately plugged into regional gay activist circles anchored in nearby cities. The regional circuit came to life. Members' sympathies with Marxist views and their lived experience in rural areas combined to form a regional gay liberationist subjectivity which was also a critical rural one.

This kind of materialist and gay wrestling with regional development is not a purely historical phenomenon locked in the 1970s. Later critical regional LGBTQ organizations like Southerners on New Ground (SONG), not directly related to the gay liberationists I describe in *Between F* Words*, do build similar observations into fuller

analyses and political actions.[6] For example, SONG's definition of the South depends on recognition of the region as a space with a unique concentration of churches and military bases. I make this particular connection only to show that such histories as this one point up how analyzing LGBTQ political cultural formation at the regional scale may uncover active critical rural perspectives and activisms set against regional development. As "Southerners" on "new ground," SONG members, like sissies and gentle men, improvised subjectivities and spaces very different than the Moral Majority geography which they inherited.

Clearly, regional development is an on-going concern. For example, "America 2050" commits itself to developing "megaregions" and asserts that "global integration zones are the new competitive unit":

> Our competitors in Asia and Europe are creating Global Integration Zones by linking specialized economic functions across vast geographic areas and national boundaries with high-speed rail and separated goods movement systems. The increased mobility of workers, business travelers, information, and goods between the networked cities of these megaregions enables greater collaboration, flexibility, and innovation. Efficient mobility is also a competitive advantage in the global playing field, where value is created by time savings.[7]

Such development clearly involves the shaping of whisked and pliable worker bodies. It involves the erection of transportation, communications, agribusiness, tourism, and energy infrastructures. It will also involve complementary industries predicated on the control of movement: prison, military, and detention centers. Many of the nodes of these

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[6] Southerners on New Ground (SONG), "A Convening of Out South LGBTQ Leadership," *Southerners on New Ground,* 2015, accessed Nov. 8, 2017, http://southernersonnewground.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Out-South-CONVENING-REPORT-digital.pdf. Also, notice how the organization's beliefs and vision stress connection, spirituality, and "whole selves": Southerners on New Ground, "About," *Southerners on New Ground,* accessed Nov. 8, 2017, http://southernersonnewground.org/about/.

[7] America 2050, "Megaregions," *America2050,* accessed July 31, 2017, http://www.america2050.org/content/megaregions.html.

megaregions' infrastructures will be in the rural spaces which surround and connect cities. Understanding how the system coordinates city and country within the "megaregion" will be critical to resisting the inevitable racial, gendered, and sexual means by which bodies are determined to be "workers," "business travelers," or simply expendable.

Of the eleven U.S. megaregions America 2050 lists, four are in the Southeast: the Piedmont Atlantic, Florida, the Gulf Coast, and the Texas Triangle. Within the megaregions, rural spaces don't simply exist between "principal cities"; they are managed. Furthermore, each megaregion is not only defined by its unique infrastructural assets, but also by its geographic limits – the latter of which creates even more extensive rural expanses defined as external to megaregions. Within megaregional development schemes, these two sorts of rural geographies represent degrees of economic cultivation, degrees of "wilderness". Surely, practitioners of liberationist critical and erotic rusticity would make it their business to familiarize themselves with the various rural-urban boundaries of such megaregions.

Also, in 2000, Congress formed the Delta Regional Authority (DRA) on the model of the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC)[8]. Given how historians of the latter have argued that the regional commission, more than alleviating poverty, developed transportation and communications infrastructures in ways that both brought business to middle-class, town merchants and incorporated the relatively remote region more firmly into the dominant political economy, the DRA warrants critically rustic attention of the type begun by Clyde Woods in his *Development Arrested: Race, Power, and the Blues in*

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[8] Delta Regional Authority, "About Delta Regional Authority," *Delta Regional Authority,* accessed July 31, 2017, http://dra.gov/about-dra/mission-and-vision/.

the Mississippi Delta.[9] I read Woods' theory of the racist neo-plantation economy -- introduced as part of delta regional development -- along with his accounts of a "blues epistemology," as generally operating in a rustic mode. In his book, Woods argues for the regional – rural and urban – as the best scale for tracking development. In a liberationist vein, he also warned against the risks of rights-based politics to deflect from more revolutionary politics.

My point in introducing America 2050 and the Delta Regional Authority is not to wrest *Between F* Words* from its historical or LGBTQ frame. Rather, my aim is to highlight how active and strategic regional development still is. Just as Sunbelt political economies produced Save Our Children, the Briggs Initiative, and the Moral Majority, and hinged on figures like Anita Bryant, John Briggs, Jerry Falwell, and Ronald Reagan, these new regional development initiatives will produce their own campaigns and figures. Their assemblage is already on the ground; it involves new problematic racial, gendered, and sexual configurations. Such strategies demand equally nuanced improvisation. For such, I am not calling for a return to gay liberation or sissie revolution. But, I am arguing that such historical refrains both call for radical LGBTQ attention to ongoing development *and* provide examples (successful and not) of improvising responses to unique material, historical conditions.

I contend that historians cannot afford to take the regional dimension of political movements for granted, cannot simply take them as LGBTQ identities in different places. Not only must we take seriously their difference from gay subjectivities, movements, and cultures rooted in major bicoastal cities, but we must also – as Hobson indicates – take

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[9] Woods, *Development Arrested: Race, Power, and the Blues in the Mississippi Delta* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 1998).

seriously their difference in scale from the "gay ghetto". As with the two examples above, a regional scale may indicate responsiveness to regional development rather than to urban gentrification and ghettoization alone. While this history has given an account of a broadly materialist and critical rural response to the Southeastern experience of Sunbelt development, histories of other responses, in other regions, in other periods, with different development schemes and different cultures and subjectivities, are needed. It also becomes possible to re-frame existing urban LGBTQ histories within broader regional contexts. For example, a regional understanding of 1970s LGBTQ San Francisco *within* a West Coast regional history that accounts for its own back-to-the-land, countercultural circuits, possibly including places like Wolf Creek and Lavender Country, could speak to that area's role in Sunbelt development schemes.

Between F Words* poses a related shift in approach for LGBTQ and other movement history. Describing the political beyond the *polis* may involve conceiving of politics more broadly – outside of electoral booth, capital city, and street protest. These latter are politics of high visibility, of speaking truth to power. They usually require being out. The London GLF, though, portrayed such as a mere first step in its politics when they stated their principles to "come out, come together, unite with the revolutionaries of the world."[10] Central to my argument is that historians have paid too little attention to how we come together and unite. I agree with Abelove that many popular, liberal histories of gay liberation reify Stonewall as an originary instance of visibly coming out to angrily demand rights, that whole gay liberationist ways of being

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[10] Lucy Robinson, "Carnival of the Oppressed: The Angry Brigade and the Gay Liberation Front," *University of Sussex,* accessed Nov. 8, 2017, https://www.sussex.ac.uk/webteam/gateway/file.php?name=lr&site=15.

are lost in such a narrative. *Between F* Words* focuses on the complex affective strategies gay liberationists in the Southeastern Network adopted to come together, to connect with one another.

To find evidence of such strategies, we may have to look to more intimate than public sources. We may have to look to letters and journals, poems and drawings. Liberationists, who thoroughly believed that the personal is political, wouldn't write a love letter or journal entry the same way that a liberal would – as a hermetically private document. Their forms and tones would be different, as we see with the critically rustic correspondence poetics of early *RFD*. Also, their contents reveal how they re-conceived things normally taken to be intensely personal -- our bodies, our relationships, our psyches, our feelings, our homes – as fundamentally social, connected, mutable, and political. For these gay liberationists, daily life in the collective was every bit as political as the moment of protest on the street. As a specifically *affective* history, *Between F* Words* documents these personal strategies *as* political, as a fuller portrait of a gay liberation which was as much about coming together as coming out. I contend that our histories of gay liberation should also be affective histories.

At the same time, I do take a liberationist view of politics in general. There were reasons these gay liberationists stressed the affective dimensions of politics. First, learning from socialist feminists, they recognized how, far from being *a*political, interior spaces associated with the feminine (the home, the heart, the body, the family, and – arguably – the rural) were essential to capitalist domination. Like the international Wages for Housework feminists, they saw these feminine spaces as sites of reproductive labor necessary to produce and sustain capitalist labor pools. Sissies at the Faggots and

Class Struggle conference in Wolf Creek insisted that feminine, affective work like care and culture labor was likewise essential to sustain liberationist politics. They implied that inattention to its value explained why gay liberation exhausted itself so quickly. It was all fire with little fuel.

In many ways, gay liberation's apparently short life made it a movement obsessed with its own sustainability. How could it survive? The faggot organizers of the Wolf Creek conference seemed initially convinced it was a matter of coming up with the right analysis, one rooted in sexuality, but with the same coherence as liberationist analyses of race and gender. Sissies like Oglesby found this intellectual solution too little feminist. Sissies proposed greater attention to the labor of connection, care, and culture. Allen Young similarly proposed that gay liberation offered means for dealing with "the politics of personal relations". No mere abstract feminine counterpart to masculine militancy, the sissies believed that, collectively, they could better nurture the exhaustion liberationists faced. They could build sweet way stations between front lines, rich everydays around moments of conflict. Like Reclaiming witches, they saw it as a way of crafting continuously responsive bodies and of managing their energy.

But surely, although these views were central to gay liberation, the concern with managing political exhaustion is shared by many movements. Decades before, in his "Study of Philosophy," Antonio Gramsci, talking about political motivation, wrote, "The most important element is undoubtedly one whose character is determined not by reason but by faith. But faith in whom, or in what? In particular in the social group to which he belongs, in so far as in a diffuse way it thinks as he does."[11] This passage invests little

[11] Gramsci, "Notes for an Introduction and an Approach to the Study of Philosophy in the History of Culture," in *An Antonio Gramsci Reader*, ed. David Forgacs (New York City: Schocken Books, 1988), 339.

hope in the motivations often associated with politics – reason and moral obligation. Instead, it invests in faith, belonging, and action-as-thought. I think it offers an interesting parallel with latter-day gay liberationists' concerns with spirituality, care, connection, and improvisation as sustained and sustaining forms of liberationist politics. Based on such parallels, I propose that more political histories attend to the everyday, affective political cultures which nourish what we have understood to be politics proper.

Between F Words* provides one model for doing so. When looking to the personal and creative works of those in political movements, we can conduct what I have called "nervous readings," taking less note of intellectual positions and strategy and paying more attention to repertoires of immediate, affective responses. For my own work, I have categorized my readings of affect as either *orientational* (related to politicized relationships and alliances, as with gay liberationists' orientation to lesbian feminists), *emotional* (related to feelings cultivated to address, for example, systemic loneliness or terror), *psychic* (related to alternative psychological models, like that of Reclaiming witchcraft's tripartite soul), and *corporeal* (dealing with alternative body cultures, such as sissie drag or sexuality). Such affects constitute everyday ways of living which are themselves a prefigurative politics and also support political actions.

Further, by improvising such affects, political actors shape distinct relations, feelings, selves, and bodies for themselves. They become *figures* who are recognizable – both to the larger society and to each other. They come out and they come together. By crafting a unique sociality out of their politics, they daily, collectively reinforce the political. Instead of simply suffering the affects the system produces in them in order to control them, they reclaim figures like the sissie and the gentle man and thereby produce

affects in their would-be detractors. This is why New Orleans gay rights activist Alan Robinson expressed objection to LaSiS' lesbian-like sociality and indelicate political style. Their very sissie way of being was dissonant to him. While such affective, figural dimensions are particularly relevant to a gay liberationist politics so invested in connection, they are surely also factors in the persistence of any political movement.

Between F Words*, though, specifically describes the regional Southeastern assemblage of sissie and gentle man figures in the interstices between the emergence of a West Coast faggot and then faerie. It can't be stressed enough that the fading of each figure in no way indicates the fading of the liberationism. Such figures are subjectivities improvised for a season in response to specific historical conditions. They are not essential identities. The historical materialist bent which persists in Southeastern gay liberationism insures this understanding. In fact, according to the accretive naming practice of the sissies, this succession of figures is better understood as an adhesion: *faeriesissiefaggot*. The liberationist multiplicative logic found in Ahmed's feminist wonder and in Broughton's androgyne still applies. Bodies shouldn't be understood as discrete, separatism shouldn't be understood as divorce, and history shouldn't be understood as succession.

In these senses, gay liberation continues – in other voices, and in other rooms.

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Note on documentation of archival sources: In general, I followed the practice of including formally published titles in the traditional bibliography and referencing unpublished items from archival collections in footnotes with collection information here.

I have made exceptions, mostly in the case of *RFD*. The political climate of the time and the critical rusticity of the culture often resulted in intentionally partial or vague citation and pseudonymous or collective authorship. In those cases, I just refer to these texts in the notes. I also decided only to refer to editorial comment, letters to editors, and images exclusively in the notes as well.

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