LITERARY THEORY:
AN ANTHOLOGY

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CHAPTER 4

Introduction to Guy Hocquenghain’s 
Homosexual Desire

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The problem is not so much homosexual desire as the fear of homosexuality: why does the mere mention of the word trigger off reactions of recoil and hate? We shall therefore be investigating the phantasies and ratiocinations of the heterosexual world on the subject of “homosexuality.” The great majority of “homosexuals” are not even conscious of being such. Homosexual desire is socially eliminated from childhood by means of a series of family and educational mechanisms. The power of oblivion generated by the social mechanisms with respect to the homosexual drive is such as to arouse the immediate answer: this problem does not concern me.

We shall start with what is commonly known as “male homosexuality.” This does not mean that the difference in the sexes goes without saying; on the contrary, it must in the end be questioned. But the organization of desire to which we submit is based on male domination, and the term “homosexuality” refers first and foremost to the imaginary Oedipal construction of male homosexuality. It would be futile to keep trying to deal with the subject of female homosexuality in terms of male ideology.

There are drives of desire which all of us have felt and which nevertheless do not affect our daily conscious existence. That is why we cannot come to terms with what we believe about our own desire. There is a social mechanism forever wiping out the constantly renewed traces of our buried desires. One simply has to think about what happens with an experience as widespread as masturbation to realize how powerful this mechanism is: everybody has masturbated, yet no one ever mentions it, not even to their closest friends.

“Homosexual desire” – the expression is meaningless. There is no subdivision of desire into homosexuality and heterosexuality. Properly speaking, desire is no more homosexual than heterosexual. Desire emerges in a multiple form, whose components are only divisible a posteriori, according to how we manipulate it. Just like heterosexual desire, homosexual desire is an arbitrarily frozen frame in an unbroken and polyvocal flux. The exclusively homosexual characterization of desire

In its endless struggleVerify the correctness of the text.
in its present form is a fallacy of the imaginary; but homosexuality has a specially manifest imagery, and it is possible to undertake a deconstruction of such images. If the homosexual image contains a complex knot of dread and desire, if the homosexual phantasy is more obscene than any other and at the same time more exciting, if it is impossible to appear anywhere as a self-confessed homosexual without upsetting families, causing children to be dragged out of the way and arousing mixed feelings of horror and desire, then the reason must be that for us twentieth-century westerners there is a close connection between desire and homosexuality. Homosexuality expresses something — some aspect of desire — which appears nowhere else, and that something is not merely the accomplishment of the sexual act with a person of the same sex.

Homosexuality haunts the "normal world." Even Adler could not refrain from acknowledging the fact:

the problem of homosexuality hovers over society like a ghost or a scarecrow. In spite of all the condemnation, the number of perverts seems to be on the increase. . . . Neither the harshest penalties nor the most conciliatory attitudes and most lenient sentences have any effect on the development of this abnormality.¹

In its endless struggle against homosexuality, society finds again and again that condemnation seems to breed the very curse it claims to be getting rid of.

And for a very good reason. Capitalist society manufactures homosexuals just as it produces proletarians, constantly defining its own limits: homosexuality is a manufactured product of the normal world. This statement must not be taken in the liberal sense as acquitting the homosexual of his offense and assigning the guilt to society, a falsely progressive position which turns out to be even more ruthless towards homosexuals than open repression. Nobody will ever eliminate the polyvalency of desire. But what is manufactured is a psychologically repressive category, "homosexuality": an abstract division of desire which allows even those who escape to be dominated, inscribing within the law what is outside the law. The category under discussion, as well as the term indicating it, is a fairly recent invention. The growing imperialism of a society seeking to attribute a social status to everything, even to the unclassifiable, has created this particularization of the imbalance: up to the end of the eighteenth century, people who denied the existence of God, could not speak or practiced sodomy were locked up together in the same prisons. The advent of psychiatry and mental hospitals manifests society's ability to invent specific means for classifying the unclassifiable (see Foucault's *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique*); this is how modern thought has created a new disease, homosexuality. According to Havelock Ellis, the word "homosexual" was invented in 1869 by a German doctor.² Dividing in order to rule, psychiatry's modern pseudo-scientific thought has turned barbarous intolerance into civilized intolerance.

Psychiatry has thus classified what is marginal, but in doing so has placed it in a central position. Kinsey's prodigious adventure is a lesson to us. He merely
continued modern psychiatry's efforts to encompass everything by providing it with material, sociological, and statistical foundations; in a world dominated by numbers, he demonstrated that homosexuals may be relegated to a mere 4 or 5 percent. And it was certainly not these few millions who were responsible for the storm which broke out on the publication of the Kinsey report, but a discovery which no amount of scientific naiveté could hide:

since only 50 percent of the population is exclusively heterosexual throughout its adult life, and since only 4 percent of the population is actively homosexual throughout its life, it appears that nearly half (46 percent) of the population engages in both heterosexual and homosexual activities, or reacts to persons of both sexes, in the course of their adult lives.  

It is no longer a matter of the little “queer” everybody knows, but of one person out of two – your neighbor, maybe even your own son. And Kinsey naively writes on:

the world is not to be divided into sheep and goats. Not all things are black nor all things white. It is a fundamental of taxonomy that nature rarely deals with discrete categories. Only the human mind invents categories and tries to force facts into separated pigeon-holes. The living world is a continuum in each and every one of its aspects.

By constantly discriminating and “discerning,” we fall into the indiscernible. Was it really necessary to send out so many questionnaires and investigations in order to establish that everyone is more or less homosexual? The rights of quantitative normality were later to be restored by the famous Kinsey scale, which indexes individuals according to their degree of homosexual practice, reducing the percentage level to the amount of homosexual instinct present in each person.

Thus the margins close in on the norms of sexuality and gnaw at them persistently. Every effort to isolate, explain, reduce the contaminated homosexual simply helps to place him at the center of waking dreams. Sartre is basically right here, whatever other criticisms are to be made of his psychological portrait of Genet: why does society always call on the psychiatrist to speak and never on the homosexual, except in the sad litany of clinical “cases”?

What matters to us is that he does not let us hear the voice of the guilty man himself, that sensational, disturbing voice which seduces the young men, that breathless voice which murmurs with pleasure, that vulgar voice which describes a night of love. The homosexual must remain an object, a flower, an insect, a dweller of ancient Sodom or the planet Uranus, an automaton that hops about in the limelight, anything you like except my fellow man, except my image, except myself. For a choice must be made: if every man is all of man, this black sheep must only be a pebble or must be me.

Difference may be found by investigating the strange seductions of the dragon of Provençal demonology, the dragon of the French Revolution, that vague notion which is what happens at the moment when the vocabulary indicates the semantic immensity of fag, fairy, queen – before the language was ever invented.

And if we could show that homosexuals and girls are not the only ones, female, good and bad, are involved? is it a repeatedly unanswerable question? Insurmountable obstacles? Do they exist, at one and the same time, and again the centuries?

The establishment of the world with its repressions is its repressions, repression is its repression, what is common, is the common, the interpretative deposits, the common homosexual common, common, common.

Hoffman, an homosexual in the Gay World that sometimes makes a good account of himself. Bavarian village, he exploits the libido is focused, and he claim that desire is characterized by the recognizable or at least an awareness of being raped at some time by a homosexual and by the instinctive question:

As if the homosexual had provided him. There is a

1 Alfred Adler, et al., 2 Havelock Ellis, 3 Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin, 656.
4 Ibid., p. 639.
5 Jean-Paul Sartre.
6 The French
Difference may breed security, but the mere word “pederast” turns out to be strangely seductive: “pederastique” (as in the synonym “tarasque,” the medieval dragon of Provençal legends), “pederastre” (as in “Zoroastre”). These common slips of the French tongue appear in letters to newspapers, and are enough to convey what happens at the mere utterance of the word. The exceptional richness of the vocabulary indicating the male homosexual deserves at least to be mentioned: queer, fag, fairy, queen (using the masculine or feminine gender arbitrarily), etc., as if language were exhausting itself in trying to define, to name the unnameable.

And if we constantly need to repeat that there is no difference between homosexuals and heterosexuals, that both are divisible into rich and poor, male and female, good and bad, then this is precisely because there is a distance, because there is a repeatedly unsuccessful effort to draw homosexuality back into normality, an insurmountable chasm which keeps opening up. Homosexuality exists and does not exist, at one and the same time: indeed, its very mode of existence questions again and again the certainty of existence.

The establishment of homosexuality as a separate category goes hand in hand with its repression. It is therefore no surprise to find that anti-homosexual repression is itself an indirect manifestation of homosexual desire. The attitude of what is commonly called “society” is, in this respect, paranoiac: it suffers from an interpretative delusion which leads it to discover all around it the signs of a homosexual conspiracy that prevents it from functioning properly. Even Martin Hoffman, an honest sociologist with no imagination, acknowledged in his book The Gay World that such a paranoia exists. A film like Hunting Scenes from Bavaria gives a good account of the consequences of the paranoiac interpretative delusions of a Bavarian village towards the person on whom the entire population’s homosexual libido is focused: in the hunt sequence which ends the film, the representative of that desire is cut off from all ties with the community. The appearance of a recognizable or avowed homosexual directly results in an unreasoning panic terror of being raped among those around him. The tension in the confrontation between a homosexual and an individual who considers himself normal is created by the instinctive question in the mind of the “normal” individual: Does he desire me? As if the homosexual never chose his object and any male were good enough for him. There is a spontaneous sexualization of all relationships with a homosexual.

Notes

1 Alfred Adler, Das Problem der Homosexualität (Leipzig, 1930).
2 Havelock Ellis, Sexual Inversion (London, 1897; revised edition, 1923).
4 Ibid., p. 639.
6 The French word pédéraste is used in everyday speech for “homosexual.” [Trans.]