

Bi All Means

Bisexuality Hits The Mainstream

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a review of

Vice Versa: Bisexuality and The Eroticism of Everyday Life, Marjorie Garber, Simon and Schuster, 1995, 606 pp., \$30.

Bisexual Politics: Theories, Queries and Visions, Edited by Naomi Tucker with Liz Highleyman and Rebecca Kaplan. Haworth Publishers, 1995, 358 pp., \$14.95 paper (available from FE Books).

With the recent publication of *Vice Versa*, a voluminous “mainstream” book and a *Newsweek* cover story, bisexuality is flaunting its transgressive implications in public discourse. Genuine sex radicals realize both blessing and damnation are contained in this flurry of attention and pseudo-acceptance.

Every collective gaze diverted from theaters of death and death-dealing politicians, to momentarily focus on the meaning of pleasure, pleases me. But let’s not be fooled by Jane Doe’s voyeurism either: the same people momentarily enchanted by the exotic charge of “alternative lifestyles” when they consume our difference through the mediated barriers of books, magazines and talk-shows are doing nothing to ensure our liberation.

A few moments in the televisual spotlight usually augments assimilation and recuperation. Like all the “straight gays” invisibly infiltrating suburbia, some bisexuals may hop on the publicity train for all it’s worth, but as even Garber’s restrained analysis assures us, bisexuality is not so easily packaged.

Garber’s book is ostensibly bold, but conveniently monocultural. Her sites of exploration reduce sexuality to a white European preoccupation best understood by pop culture, psychoanalysis and literature. These traditional academic fetishes fascinate and titillate but rarely illuminate. Her section on “politics” borders on the provocative, but ultimately lumps all activists together as she discusses bisexual “politicians,” making little distinction between the insights of Eleanor Roosevelt and Emma Goldman.

The Eroticism of Texts

The “eroticism of everyday life” makes for a great phrase in the book’s title but if you go to *Vice Versa* looking for anything resembling a post-Situationist perspective on “everyday life,” you’re bound to be disappointed. Garber’s sharp tongue understands the eroticism of texts and metatexts. but anything vital pertaining to the erotic transformation of lived experience lies outside the pages of this book.

If bisexuality “provides a crucial paradigm...for thinking differently about human freedom” as Garber argues, what is the specific nature of that freedom and where can it be found? We have the “choice” to fuck “anything that moves,” which is a fine place to start the discussion. But if we remain content to locate our notions of freedom in the insular confines of conventional discourse and deviance, we will not be moving very far.

I choose to identify with “bisexuality,” but see no reason to stop there. I’m looking for the unwritten chapter of this book which is explosively erotic, uplifting everyday life to the ludic expansiveness of ecstatic revolt

Despite her obvious sympathies with sexual variety, Garber remains content to examine bisexuality from the detached perspective of academic research. In contrast, the voices of 33 outspoken bisexual protagonists comprise the diverse collection of essays in Naomi Tucker’s new anthology *Bisexual Politics*, adding to the recent body of books written by bisexuals (like *Bisexuality: A Reader and Sourcebook* or *Bi Any Other Name: Bisexual People Speak Out*, both available from FE Books).

Some work here merely inscribes “bisexual politics” as another reformist tendency within the left-liberal morass known as “identity politics,” which includes among its demands having the word “bisexual” added to the name of traditional lesbian and gay rights organizations or fighting discrimination in the realm of employment.

Sex and Gender Radicals

Other writers, like Liz Highleyman, propose an alternative in “the creation of a broad, inclusive sexual and gender liberation movement that welcomes sex and gender radicals of all sorts, including bi-sexuals, transsexuals and transgendered people, genderfuckers, androgynies, leatherfolk, fetishists, body modifiers, boy lovers, sex workers, nonmonogamists, polyamorists, their friends and lovers, and those of all sexualities who reject sexism, heterosexism, compulsory relationship models, restrictive sex/gender roles, and sex-phobic morality.”

The best essays here view bisexuals as more than another category of oppressed persons requiring “rights.” Contributors like Tucker, Carol Queen, Elias Farajaje-Jones, Mark Pritchard and Starhawk, among others, offer a coherent political, sexual and philosophical challenge to break free from society’s pervasive “erotophobia,” anti-sex assumptions which prevail in both heterosexual and homosexual (or “monosexual”) communities where conventional chastity inhibits freedom.

In this area of pleasure politics, sex radicals have important insights for members of the anti-authoritarian milieu, regardless of one’s sexual orientation or gender identification. The pursuit of pleasure remains a controversial topic among anarchists. For some of us, the desire for pleasure, and its wholesale censure by systems of domination, forms the core of our rebellion against church, state and corporation. For others, gratification of desire represents an indulgence in the quick-fix gadgetry of consumer capitalism where sexual ecstasy cannot be separated from sexist advertising and the commodification of the flesh.

“I Am A Great Sinner”

In his essay, “Liberating Pornography,” Mark Pritchard maintains a profound defense of pleasure: “Using the Calvinistic criteria of my youth, I am a great sinner. I have rejected marriage and consumerism, and I revel in pleasure. I do drugs and publish pornography. And the more I do it, the less I feel like growing up and settling down. The politic’s’ of pleasure which has its fulfillment in my bisexuality subverts the status quo by offering an alternative to all the negative things the nuclear family represents economically, environmentally, and sexually. It is true that my life sometimes revolves around the pursuit of pleasure; what’s wrong with that? I like to suck cock; I like to eat pussy; I like to flick and get “flicked. In those moments; when I am giving and receiving pleasure, I am most myself—at peace with myself, my partner, and the world. What’s wrong with that? Pleasure is worth pursuing for its own sake.”

Some monosexuals, with radical philosophies in other realms, fear a bisexual ethic of erotic excess. Do bisexuals think they are more radical than monosexuals because they have more potential sexual partners? Not necessarily. An authentic radical community which honors pleasure will still have committed monogamists and promiscuous polyamorists, with homo, hetero, bi, poly, trans and celibate people. With *Bisexual Politics*, we have an abundance of visionary ideas and theories which contribute to the creation of a defiantly inclusive new world.

In “The Sacredness of Pleasure,” Starhawk suggests: “We need to envision a new world, one with room in it for whales and howler monkeys and drag queens and grizzly bears and ancient sacred tribal lands and leather dykes

and plentiful rain and happily married couples with two-point-five children and people who just can't make up their mind and black-white-red-brown-tan-golden-sepiachocolate-ivory-ebony and (who knows?) maybe striped and spotted ones of us.”

Let us go there.

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