

# Sex and Pleasure Activism

Unruhlee

1996

a review of

*More Out Than In: Notes on Sex, Art, and Community*, edited, by Rachel Kaplan and Keith Hennessy, Abundant Fuck Publications, San Francisco, 1995, 100 pp., \$5

Get out your scissors for that standard Map of the Possible! There have been some bold scouting parties for a world of liberated desire the last few years, and some of the boldest have just put a book out on their discoveries.

*More Out than In* is a collection of writings about the 848 community space, a do-it-yourself, multi-use space available to all manner of experimenters, crossing the boundaries of art, oppositional politics, and sexual liberation. Since it opened in San Francisco in 1992, 848 has probably hosted a wider range and volume of sex positive events than any other public space in the world.

The book is remarkable for its introspection and invitation to self-criticism. It takes rare courage to step back and examine what you've done the way 848 has and to be open to change. Also, it's inspiring to read personal anecdotes of public, fully uncloseted love and realize its incredible diversity.

But the more I think about it, the more irritated I get with much of the criticism. Phrases like "too much sex," and "sacrifice and service" are used amid discussions of the "relative exchange weight" of "issues of sexual identity to issues of inequality..." This reminds me of Murray Bookchin's recently published *Lifestyle Anarchism or Social Anarchism: An Unbridgable Chasm*. His book is largely an attack on *Anarchy, A Journal of Desire Armed*, *Fifth Estate*, and Hakim Bey for their treatment of the liberation of desire and the expansion of autonomy for authentic lives of adventure and rebellion, as opposed to programmatic political organization building.

## Sex & Pleasure Activism

Much of the criticism of "sex and pleasure activism" in the 848 book seems akin to Bookchin's morality-based "social" anarchist perspective. To speak of pleasure activism and class war activism as distinct and competing seems curious to me. Still, much of the dialogue in *More Out Than In* seems aimed at a further evolution of the discussion about sex and liberation, which is positive. The book also includes an excerpt from a 1966 interview with Henry Miller about the shallowness of the "sexual revolution" at that time.

"It was always more the total liberation of one's self that I was concerned with" as he saw it: "Sexual freedom and the effort toward that should only be one aspect of a movement toward much larger freedom—to think and act freely and creatively, in every domain!" One more effort, sex-pots. We don't just want better sex lives, we want our whole lives to be sex lives!

Similarly, I want to foment an insurgence of erotic, playful activity that knows no boundaries, to pursue the "emergence and rapid spread of creatures that will be living embodiments of the surreal, those who will stop the World and open up new possibilities for meeting our needs and relating to one another and the natural world in a more balanced and pleasurable way," as my friend, Paul E. Morphous puts it.

## Gardeners Against Work

I've tried to make this real through such forms as the Gardeners Against the Work Ethic Association in Carbondale, Ill. This 1994 attempt at a summer of sprawling festivity included a costumed lawn rip-up for a "free feast garden," many mind-altering experiments in non-verbal behavior and non-sexual, but intense physical touch and play ("eroplay", as Frank Moore calls it), a prank proclamation where the city council declared Wednesdays a holiday and various "space poaching" contestations of normalcy, like a group erotic stumbling exercise in a mall.

I've traveled across country with a nomadic band in a school bus as another anarchic experiment. In contrast to the socialistic somberness of Bookchin's *anarchism*, we seek to create *anarchy* on the level of immediate experience. Our activity is an underground current of libertarian enticement to a revolutionary transformation that is a geyser of pleasure pushing away all constraints.

When I read about the 848 space; I feel a deep resonance as well as significant differences with the participants. Inspired largely by the Living Theater's call for an "art that would instigate and support and be a revolution," 848's approach to the fusion-of art/politics/life might benefit from an encounter with that of the situationists, with their call for a revolution that would abolish art as a separate category by realizing it in every day life. At the same time, the situationist-inspired milieu has largely ceased to have any living creative practice whereas 848 has much of the vital quality of a launching pad for contestations beyond the boundaries of art.

As I dream of what could be next for me and my shifting webwork of collaborators, I ask myself what have been the limits of our insurgent play? Are we ready for something more intense; some deeper and more-conscious alteration of consciousness, post-linguistic frolics and eroplay? Momentum is building for centers of experimental ludic life, such as rural base camps in dynamic interplay with urban areas.

How might we attempt a sustained psycho-geographic assault on' an environment? And how might our projects being formed by the 848 experience?

*More Out Than In* is available from 848 Community Space,, 848 Divisadero, San. Francisco, CA 94101.

# fifth Estate

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<https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/348-fall-1996/sex-and-pleasure-activism>  
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