

Stop Assimilating; Start Revolting

Book review

MaxZine Weinstein

2005

a review of

That's Revolting! Queer Strategies for Resisting Assimilation, Edited by Mattilda, (AKA Matt Bernstein Sycamore), Soft Skull Press, Brooklyn, 2004, 318 pages, \$16.95.

With a new collection of essays compiled in *That's Revolting!*, radical queer activist Mattilda puts the fun and glamour into radical queer resistance. It starts with a cover featuring a close-up of a mouth covered in lipstick and glitter and encourages the reader to “pick it up and smash something.”

In particular, the authors invite us to join in the queer struggle “to transform gender, revolutionize sexuality, build community/family outside of traditional models, and dismantle hierarchies of race, class, gender, sexuality, and ability”.

The book explores the ways in which consumerism, militarism and family values combine to create a stifling mainstream of gays and lesbians who, in their quest for power and acceptance, marginalize queers who do not want or cannot attain straight privilege.

That's Revolting presents their tales of resistance, from Dean Spade in New York who wrote, “Fighting to Win” to Carol Queen in the Bay Area who contributed, “Never a Bridesmaid, Never a Bride”..

I wanted to fall in love with this book—and at times I laughed with joy and understanding, but I kept getting distracted by not having questions addressed that I would have liked to have seen in a book like this: What exactly is assimilation? What does it feel like to face pressure to assimilate? What are examples of communities which have faced pressures to assimilate and what have been some of their responses?

I have lived with and surrounded myself with mostly radical queers for a couple of decades and I have observed how many of them, including some of the book's authors, have changed their appearance or name or otherwise assimilate in numerous ways: to get a job, to deal with our families, or to simply not get harassed walking down the street. By acknowledging and discussing how we as queers cope with such pressures we might better understand how more “mainstream” queers are struggling with conflicts between queer desire and personal security. How can we help others feel safer to revolt?

The vast majority of the authors are writing from the relatively unique scenes of New York and the San Francisco Bay Area. These communities have long been magnets for radical queers, and it is fabulous to have places to experience a buffet of radical alternatives.

Nonetheless, sometimes such communities of resistance create their own conformist worlds. Jesse Heiwa (a co-founder of Queers for Racial and Economic Justice) addressed this in “Getting to the Root”: “An opposition to a mainstream, commercialized gay community does not automatically result in a radical current not replicating some oppressive patterns”.

Heiwa's piece, coming near the end of *That's Revolting*, opens the door to a more critical examination that would have been a better starting point to further the movement of queer revolt.

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