

SALA DELL'ERMAFRODITO

Walter D'Alph Russo
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The exhibition takes its title from the room in the Villa Borghese which was created in the eighteenth century to display a collection of marble sculptures of hermaphrodites. The project seeks to evoke both this room and its historical development of ideas associated with the emblem of the hermaphrodite. The exhibition is divided into three sections. Two colour photographic details of the room's ceiling fresco are suspended in the gallery, hanging over a staircase resembling the one designed by Bernini. The large scale detail of the gallery's ceiling fresco depicts a group of drawings and drawings of a large classical hermaphrodite sculpture created from the sixteenth through the eighteenth century. The exhibition's images vary along opposite classical and traditional boundaries. The images are mounted and hinged to the wall behind glass panels. The display is divided into the wall three nineteenth century copy manuals of photographs and medical illustrations of anatomical hermaphrodites.

SALA DELL'ERMAFRODITO

Bruce Hugh Russell
Or Gallery, Vancouver
December 1996

Historical etchings and engravings:

Thomas de Bry *engraver*
Jacques Le Moyne de Morgues *deliniator*
Plate XVII, *Hermaphroditum officia*
engraving, 15 x 18 cm. (plate)
America. part II. Brevis narratio eorum quae in Florida Americae prouicia Gallis acciderunt.
Frankfurt, 1591

Thomas de Bry *engraver*
Jacques Le Moyne de Morgues *deliniator*
Plate XXIII, *Hermaphroditum*
engraving, 15 x 18 cm. (plate)
America. part II. Brevis narratio eorum quae in Florida Americae prouicia Gallis acciderunt.
Frankfurt, 1591

Thomas de Bry *engraver*
Plate XX, *Valboa Indos nefandum Sodomiae*
engraving, 15 x 18 cm. (plate)
America. part iv. Benzoni's Voyages to the Spanish Colonies.
Frankfurt, c.1595

François Perrier c1600-1650
Plate 90, *Borghese Hermaphrodite in Landscape.*
from: Segmenta nobillium signorum et statuarum que temporis dentem invidium evase.
Roma/Paris, 1638.
etching, (plate) 12 x 23 cm; [20 x 16"]

Dom. Campiglia *deliniator*
Marco Pitteri *engraver*
Plate XL, *Uffizi Hermaphroditus.*
from: Francesco Gori. Museum Florentinum, III, (Statuae Antiquae Deorum). Firenze, 1734.
engraving, (plate) 34.5 x 21.5 cm; [13½ x 8½"]

Dom. Campiglia *deliniator*
Carol Gregori *engraver*
Plate XLI, *Uffizi Hermaphroditus.*
from: Francesco Gori. Museum Florentinum, III, Statuae Antiquae Deorum. Firenze, 1734.
engraving, (plate) 35.5 x 32 cm; [14 x 8½"]

Images to be relief printed in facsimile:

Medal of Marcantonio Passeri,
with impresa *Philosophia duce regredimur*
woodcut, from: Iacobus Philippus Tomasinus. (Giacomo Filippo Tomasini, 1595-1655)
Illustrorum virorum elogja. Padua, 1630.
[In: Edgar Wind. *Pagan Mysteries of the Renaissance*. Oxford, 1980. fig 68.]

Ambrose Paré
Portrait d'un hermafrodite homme & femme
Deux Livres de chirurgie... II: Des Monstres et prodiges.
Paris: André Wechel, 1573.

Nicolas Reusner.
Heraphrodit mit Moses und Satyr
Emblemata. Heidelberg: Sigismundi, 1581.

Ceiling mounted photographs:

Contemporary chromogenic photograph after
Nicola Buonvicini.
Salmace scopre Ermafrodito
ceiling fresco
Roma, Villa Borghese, Sala del'ermafrodito

Contemporary chromogenic photograph after
Nicola Buonvicini.
Ermafrodito dormente scopresa da un Satiro
ceiling fresco
Roma, Villa Borghese, Sala del'ermafrodito

Books:

Magnus Hirschfeld
Geschlechtsübergänge. Mischungen männlicher und weiblicher Geschlechtscharaktere.
Leipzig: W. Malende, 1905. plates iii & xii.

Dr. med. Krek. *Geheimnisse der Bergung und das Geschlechtsleben des Menschen*. Dresden:
M. Wolf's Verlag, [c.1890].

Bruce Hugh Russell

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Born 16 January 1952
Vancouver, British Columbia

Citizenship: Canadian

Education

Vancouver School of Art, 1975-1978.
(now Emily Carr College of Art and Design)

Curatorial and critical experience

Curator of a exhibition *Pentimenti: Process in Contemporary Canadian Architecture* exploring the design process of twelve younger architects. While focusing on drawing the exhibition will also explore the use of new technologies such as computer animation and video in the elaboration of both conceptual and built design projects. **Ottawa Art Gallery**, February-April 1997.

Sala del'ermafrodito. Sixteenth and seventeenth century European and New World images of hermaphrodites will be presented in this installation exploring the successive narrowing of allegorical narrative as scientific method replaced humanist tradition. This project is part of an ongoing work which seeks to explore the intellectual sources which contributed to the emergence of modern homosexual identity. The installation derives from a paper presented at an international lesbian and gay studies conference, *La ville en rose* held at the Université de Québec à Montréal in November 1992. The installation, combining actual historical prints with contemporary reproductions, is also intended to interrogate museological conventions which separate artist/curator, image/artifact, and publication/exhibition. **Or Gallery**, Vancouver in December 1996.

Contributor to the catalogue for the exhibition *The Ingenious Machine of Nature: Four Centuries of Art and Anatomy*, **National Gallery of Canada**, Ottawa, November 1996 - January 1997; will also lecture on *The Hermetic Science of Robert Fludd* at the NGC, November 7, 1996.

Contributor to the catalogue for the exhibition curated by Annette Hurtig of recent works by Philippe Raphanel from the *Poisons/Phobia* series organized and circulated by the Kamloops Art Gallery, 1996-1997

Contributor to the catalogue for the Evergon exhibition *Ramboys: A Bookless Novel and Other Fictions*, Ottawa Art Gallery, May - June 1995.

Curator of the exhibition *Le Mile-End d'hier. Souvenirs de notre quartier au XIX^e siècle* presented at the **Bibliothèque Mile-End** in Montréal. The exhibition explored the local history of this important Montréal working-class and multi-ethnic neighbourhood through period works of art, vintage photographs, documents, and artifacts. Organized for the Mile End Society for History and Culture. September-October 1993.

Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montréal, Communication and Development Department (consultant), writing of information texts on buildings and programmes; coordination of publications for the department, including brochures, posters, invitations. 1987-1990.

Visual Arts, Design, and Architecture editor, *MTL* magazine. 1987-1988.

Smith College Museum of Art, Northampton, Massachusetts. Guest Curator of exhibition *Three American Painters in Québec: Winslow Homer, Georgia O'Keeffe and Milton Avery*. 1984. Exhibition and catalogue funded by the Québec Ministry of International Relations.

Articule, Montréal. Active curatorial member of the board of this A.N.N.P.A.C. parallel gallery. Organized exhibitions, as well as performance, video, and literary events. 1982-1984

Grants and awards

National Gallery of Canada, 1993-1994 Resident Research Fellowship in Canadian Art History, Canadian Centre for the Visual Arts, for research on the life and work of patron, collector and craftsman Douglas Duncan 1902-1988. An article based on the lecture given at the annual Fellows forum on Duncan is soon to be published in the *Journal of Canadian Art History*.

Ottawa Carleton Arts Grant, 1994. To write a biographical study of Douglas M.Duncan.

Canada Council Exhibitions Assistance Programme 1991, curatorial research grant for the planning of an exhibition *Les histoires de nos vies* documenting the history of gay and lesbian experience in Montréal; subsequently the funding for the exhibition itself was denied. A modified version of this exhibition was presented in June 1992 at the Centre communautaire gais et lesbiennes de Montréal through a grant from the City of Montréal.

Canada Council Explorations Grant 1980-1981, to research the life and work of Canadian poet, Frank Oliver Call (1878-1956).

Major Research Projects

Twilight Men. A study of works and lives of artists and writers in New York City from 1917-1938. This book length work explores the importance of cultural materials in developing an understanding of social history. This project has been the basis of papers and lectures given at the University of Toronto, Concordia University, Amherst College, Wellesley College, Hampshire College, the University of Massachusetts, and Johns Hopkins University, 1985-1991. Barbara Haskell, curator, the Whitney Museum of American Art made use of unpublished material from this research for the Museum's Charles Demuth retrospective. (see Acknowledgments Haskell 1987:8).

A Bibliographic Checklist of North American English-Language Gay Poets 1900-1994. A comprehensive bibliography of American and Canadian twentieth century gay poets, with an introduction by Robert K. Martin. This work presents descriptions of the complete works of 115 authors and some 1650 titles and is expected to fill a major gap in existing research support materials. The manuscript is completed and is forthcoming from Scarecrow Press in 1996.

Reciprocal Affections: Homosexuality in Canada before 1900. A Documentary History. A collection of documents pertaining to the history of gay and lesbian experience in what is now Canada from 1648 to 1900. These documents range from trial records to personal memoirs and travel writings. Each text is accompanied by a social historical introduction, period illustrations, and notes designed to contextualize the material for a broad non-specialist readership. The collection comprises groups of documents drawn from each region of the country. (forthcoming)

Northeast/Southwest: The Other Place on the Map. Early American Modernists in Canada. A book length study of American modernist painters and photographers who worked in Canada during the first decades of this century. The work will focus on Paul Strand and Georgia O'Keeffe and consider the importance of their Canadian works in their development and in relation to similar subjects undertaken by such peers as Marsden Hartley, Gertrude Käsebier, Rockwell Kent, and Clara Sipprell. The importance of Québec and maritime Canada as a pole of attraction similar to the American southwest will be an important theme explored in this study. Parts of this work were given as a lecture at Carleton University in March 1994 and as a paper at an international colloquium *American Modernism* organized by the Université de Montréal, June 1995.

Essays on the History Canadian Taste. (tentative title) A Collection of miscellaneous essays on aspects of the history of collecting, museums and exhibitions etc. in Canada since the colonial era. Papers include studies of the fluctuation of interest in the Baroque, and collections of plaster casts formed institutions for art education in the nineteenth century. Another area of research has been both the visual arts traditions of Canada's East Asian communities in the years between 1880 and 1940, and the history of the Asian art collections of Canadian museums, focusing on the National Gallery of Canada. The latter was presented at the Universities Art Association of Canada Conference in Guelph in November 1995.

Selected publications

Ottawa Art Gallery. *Queer Epiphanies and the Pathogenesis of Paranoia*. catalogue essay for Evergon exhibition *Ramboys a Bookless Novel and Other Fictions*, May 1995.

Allgemeines Künstler-Lexikon. Contributor to multi-volume biographic dictionary of artists published by K.G. Saur Verlag, Leipzig, articles on *Bill Bissett, Eva Brandl, Miller Brittain, AA Bronson, David Buchan, Donald Buchanan, Jack Bush, Melvin Charney*.

Canadian Encyclopedia. Contributor of biographical entries on *Melvin Charney and Evergon*.

The Beaver. *John Singer Sargent in the Canadian Rockies*. (forthcoming)

FUSE. Review of the AIDS exhibitions *Ecstatic Antibodies & Apprentis sages*. Montréal, xv:3, Winter 1992.

[Anon.] *The CCA Garden*. Montréal: Canadian Centre for Architecture, 1991. [A guide book to Melvin Charney's CCA Garden.]

[Anon.] *The Canadian Centre for Architecture*. Montréal: Canadian Centre for Architecture, 1990. [An introductory guide to the CCA, its building and collections.]

The Massachusetts Review. *True North*, xxxi:1/2, Spring/Summer 1990. [fiction.]

London Regional Art & Historical Museums. *Stephen Andrews*. catalogue essay. Septembre 1989.

Studies in Visual Communications. *Wilhelm von Pluschow and Wilhelm von Gloeden: Two Essays*, ix:2 Spring 1983.

Montréal: A Guide Book. *A City with a Past: A Short History of Montréal*. Montréal: Editions Prestige, 1990.

MTL Montréal. *Figures. Betty Goodwin: emotional*, January- February, 1988: 14-15.

MTL Montréal. *Geneviève Cadieux: looking ahead*, December, 1987: 73.

Canadian Art. *Paysage*, Winter, 1987: 96-98. [review of exhibition, Dazibao, Montréal, exhibition.]

Vanguard. *Marina Abramovich and Ulay*, November, 1987: 43-44. [review of exhibition at Galerie René Blouin, Montréal.]

Canadian Art. *Safdie at the drawing board*, Fall, 1987: 10. [article on the proposed expansion of the Montréal Musée des beaux-arts.]

MTL Montréal. *Art in Space*, June-July, 1987: 44-48. [interview with Phyllis Lambert on public sculpture in Montréal.]

SAW Panel, Ottawa, April 5, 1992

*When the organizers of Saw's *The Individual Within* exhibition began to approach Ottawa area gay and lesbian artists to participate in a group exhibition of their work they encountered a number of negative responses. One of these was that some artists felt that their sexual orientation was not a central focus of their work and that participation in such an exhibition would limit its universality. It is easy to dismiss this reaction as cowardice or anachronistic, but it has been and probably will continue to be a concern. It raises a number of interesting questions, and should be responded to in a serious manner. To open up this discussion Saw organized a panel *Coming Out in Art* which was moderated by exhibition curator Stephane Beauchamp at SAW in the Ottawa Artscourt on April 5, 1992, with participants Evergon, Donna Quince, Bruce Hugh Russell, and Diane Trépanier. This is a slightly extended and revised version of a my SAW presentation.*

Discussions such as this always reminds me of a joke made by the American post-Stonewall gay poet William Barber: "A gay poem is one that's sexually attracted to other poems of the same sex".¹

Sloppy semantics are a particular danger in this terrain, but they only reflect more serious conceptual footfalls that await the unwary. One *a priori* maxim that we must keep in mind in such discussions is that all human sexuality is unnatural. By that I mean that sexuality is socially constructed behaviour mediated by conditions particular to the time and place in which it occurs. Just think of the change from the extended families of rural Canada in our grandparents generation, to its mid-century nuclear replacement, through today's seeming inevitability of single parenthood. Over the same period the image of homosexual identity has shifted from effeminate queens and bull dykes to mustachioed clones and tom-boy lesbian feminists, through to today's lipstick lesbians and baseball-capped queer nationalists.

Art historians in particular must guard against using today's model of gay and lesbian identity to measure the sexual orientation of historic figures. It

¹ Ian Young ed. *The Male Homosexual in Literature: A Bibliography*. Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1975. page 175.

is absurd to call one Florentine quattrocento painter homosexual and an other bisexual because a marriage contract survives for one and a judicial denunciation for sodomy survives for the other. Marriages were economic unions and sodomy denunciations were most often motivated by spite. And neither document addresses what motivated church authorities and princely patrons to commission strongly homoerotic works from both Sandro Botticelli and Luca della Signorelli, respectively the two artists to whom I have been referring.

Let's take another historical example: in the year 1730 the sexton of the Cathedral of the city of Utrecht discovered two men engaged in sodomy in his bell tower. They were arrested and in the course of their trial evidence of a complex network of friendships, meeting places and a private jargon enjoyed by sodomites in cities throughout the Dutch Republic became known. The Calvinist civil authorities decided to respond with the full weight of law. Genesis taught, and a millennium and a half of western law had decreed, that the sins of sodomites were so dreadful that if unpunished by man God would destroy the entire community in which they had been committed. In the next year some 300 men between the ages of 15 and 48 were charged with crimes against nature. The penalty was death. In Amsterdam the convicted sodomites were garroted in front of the Town Hall in the Dam Square. Garrotting, death by strangulation, was the traditional means of executing women. In the Hague they were hanged, their bodies burnt or thrown into the sea. In the north in one small village called Faan, the local judge, Rudolf de Mepshce, encouraged by his friend the local preacher Van Bijler, convicted and condemned 24 men and boys to death. This in brief is the story of one of the most vicious and concentrated pogroms directed against homosexuals in premodern western history.²

But by contrast, during the same era, Dutch sailors as they circled the globe accumulating the vast wealth which sustained their Republic would have encountered vastly different attitudes towards what their divines considered the worst of sins.

If these Dutch sailors had encountered tribal societies in Australia or New Guinea on their way to obtain spices in the Molakas, they would have observed ritualized norms which held that homosexuality was a necessary

² *Two of a Kind: A history of gays and lesbians in Holland. Amsterdam: Amsterdam Historisch Museum, 1989. exhibition catalogue.*

means to make men of boys. For instance some groups of Papuan highlanders believed that sperm had to be given to boys; that it was not produced by the body and that it had to be passed from generation to generation, and that frequent sexual exchanges between men and boys therefore were necessary for human reproduction.³

In the southern port cities of China, where the Dutch purchased silks and porcelain, our sailors would have observed that the most respectable of mandarin civil servants, while surrounded at home by their wives and children, relaxed in their studies in the arms of male opera singers. It was not unknown for their wives to spy on them making loves with their effeminate companions, the women enjoyed comparing their husbands' sexual technique. And further to the north, Japan had been closed to Dutch and other European traders since the preceding century precisely because European morality and sexual attitudes were considered socially disruptive. Here the sexual expression of love between Samurai warriors was at the heart of the code of honour which preserved order in feudal Japanese society. The Jesuits' relentless harangue about the wickedness of sodomy had been a central factor resulting in their expulsion.⁴

Today the attitudes towards homosexuality of each of these societies has been profoundly transformed: there is an age of consent law in Australia; Communist Chinese civil servants deny that homosexuality exists in their Republic; the Japanese abolished all the institutions of the Samurai in their embarrassed efforts to emulate western industrial society in the late nineteenth century; and it is difficult to find any equivalent of the extent to which homosexuality is integrated in contemporary Holland.

Human sexuality is as diverse as human imagination can imagine it. Nothing pertaining to it is natural or constant or essential. Just as it is absurd to think that race or gender determines aptitudes such as rhythm or culinary

³ for primary sources see David F. Greenberg, *The Construction of Homosexuality*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988, pages 27-29.

⁴ see Chinese novels of the time such as *The Scholars* by Wu Jingzi, or *The Dream of the Red Chamber* by Cao Xueqin; see also: Bert Hinsch, *Passions of the Cut Sleeve: The Homosexual Tradition in China*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990; for survey of Japanese literature and traditional perceptions of homosexuality see the introduction of Paul Gordon Schalow, translation of Ihara Saikaku's *The Great Mirror of Manly Love*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990.

skills, gayness must not be seen as some ahistorical innate sensitivity. Contemporary lesbian and gay identities are constantly in flux. And great subtlety is required to proceed mindful of distinctions between objective and subjective considerations.

Contemporary gay and lesbian theoretical discourse has been to a degree structured around the twin poles of social construction theory versus essentialism. Like any good dialectic, this antagonism is to a degree a rhetorical invention. As the work of Mary Mackintosh and Michel Foucault and the influence of the new historiography found broad acceptance in North America during the 1970's it seemed at one point that at least in the humanities and social sciences pure essentialists were as rare as dragons. The sadder reality is that while many scholars acknowledge a debt to Foucault they have not thoroughly assimilated the consequences of this position in their work. This has been especially true in the visual arts where muted traces of essentialism can be found in most gay art criticism and journalism of the Post-Stonewall era. More recently, the unabashed essentialism of one of the first *out* exhibition in a museum context, the New Museum's *Extended Sensibilities* exhibition, curated by Daniel J. Cameron in 1982, finds its articulation today is the rhetoric of Queer Nation and some AIDS activists. An even more dangerous development is the current vogue in the mass media of socio-biological notions of the etiology of homosexuality, and the speed which liberals and some gay activists have embraced new "evidence" of biological determinism of sexual orientation as the basis of pleading that somehow our sexuality is not our fault.

Artists of earlier generations, even ones such as Paul Cadmus who have repeatedly and publicly made visible their homosexual orientation, insist that their sexuality is unimportant to their work, separate, a private matter. Today for many younger artists, their race, gender, and sexual orientation has a centrality to their artistic identity which in a way perhaps equates how their seniors would speak of themselves as sculptors, photographers or painters. This transition in sexual self-imaging, from irrelevance to centrality, though gradual, is unlikely to have occurred without tension and confrontation. And there are plenty of artists and writers who make no attempt to hide their sexual orientation in the arts community but who will say that "my work is not gay".

How important then is sexual orientation to making or looking at works of art? If the forms of sexual expression are variables in human society, the importance of sexual roles is at least a trans-historical source of human diversity perhaps precisely because of their very mutability. A comparison of

jokes and humour across time and cultures makes this readily apparent. The popularity in our own context of comics from Laurel and Hardy, to Jerry Lewis and Pee Wee Herman illustrates that in popular culture the anxiety which surrounds encounters with gender confusion is considered profoundly entertaining. This is, for example, just as true in traditional South-western American Pueblo communities or in the popular folk theatre of Korea.⁵

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick reminds us in the introduction to her recent book *Epistemology of the Closet*:

Many of the major nodes of thought and knowledge in twentieth-century Western culture as a whole are structured - indeed fractured - by chronic, now endemic crisis of homo/heterosexual definition, indicatively male, dating from the end of the nineteenth century....an understanding of virtually any aspect of modern Western culture must be, not merely incomplete, but damaged in its central substance to the degree that it does not incorporate a critical analysis of modern homo/heterosexual definition; and ... the appropriate place for that critical analysis to begin is from the relatively decentered perspective of modern gay and antihomophobic theory.

The passage of time, the bestowal of thought and necessary political struggle since the turn of the century have only spread and deepened the long crisis of modern sexual definition, dramatizing, often violently, the internal incoherence and mutual contradiction of each of the forms of discursive and institutional "common sense" on this subject inherited from the architects of our present culture.⁶

Sedgwick argues that awareness of homosexual panic is not only useful in understanding the writing of extreme cases such as D.H. Lawrence, Ernest Hemingway, or Raymond Chandler, but more fundamentally that it is so in our culture that it can contribute to a better understanding of

⁵ Young Ja Kim. "The Korean Namsadang". *The Drama Review*. 25:1 March, 1981, pages 9-16.

⁶ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. *Epistemology of the Closet*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990. page 1.

almost any cultural artefact.

To illustrate this I would like to look at aspects of the work of Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns. If there was a trajectory in visual Modernism, from art for art's sake, through cubism, to abstract expressionism, by which art was to be rescued from illustration, from the bondage of narrative, from mimetic representation of the natural world, the reintroduction of signs in American art in the mid-1950's was supposed to be its flag of victory. The targets, tires, goats and flags of Johns and Rauschenberg were presented by institutions such as MOMA and the Whitney and their critical champions as essays in pure form, as stripped of meaning as any found element in a cubist collage. Sign not symbols, the critics called them. After all the word yellow was written in blue and what could a light bulb or a beer can signify anyway? When some sort of allusion seemed to suggest itself it was usually a joke at the expense of signification itself. Were canvases painted with numbers figurative or non-figurative works of art? The two related sculptures by Johns: *The Critic Smiles* 1959 [W.62]; a tooth brush with teeth instead of bristles; and *The Critic Sees* 1961 [W.90]; in which spectacles frame speaking mouths rather than eyes, both serve as if to warn us simply to shut up and look. Yet this playfulness and wit seemed to be directed as towards a specific if somewhat occluded target. Repeatedly their contemporary critics posed these two artists' work in dialogue with the Abstract Expressionists. It is full of quotes, puns and references to the cliches of these senior members of the New York school's work. On a purely formal level Johns and Rauschenberg address and carry forward exploration of flatness, the picture plane, and gesture.

Although this was one of those situations where everyone *in the know* knew that they were had been lovers, looking for evidence of their sexual orientation in their work produces only limited results. Beginning in 1959 Rauschenberg began a series of works on paper in response to each Canto of the *Inferno*; not so much illustrations as a visualization of unconscious responses to Dante's epic. They were produced by dissolving the ink of printed magazine photographs onto sheets of paper by pressure with a stylus. In recent years Rauschenberg has called these works *Trans-Plants*, but in the earlier literature, such as the 1964 Rauschenberg Whitechapel catalogue, they were called *frottages*. The latter can be innocently construed as a pretentious francisation for the act of rubbing involved in the transfer of the images, but of course the erotic sense of the word would not be lost, even on many anglophones. Let me explain to the innocent that it refers to the stimulation, without penetration, of genitals by rubbing against parts of one's own or a partner's body. As masturbatory fantasies the Dante drawings are replete with

homoerotic imagery: i.e. Dante himself is consistently figured as a young hunk in a white bathing suit. But it is the artist's version of the poet's encounter with the infernal sodomites of Canto XVI that is the test, here as it is in Botticelli or the early illustrated manuscript and printed versions, of an illustrators approach to this issue. In the series, now in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art, the sodomites are runners pelted like the citizens of Sodom with burning sulphur, spurned on by the burning sand on which they tread. In the frottage the image is surmounted by the imprint of a single life size footprint, as if the artist himself steps onto the burning page in solidarity with the Dante's fleet sodomites. Obscure, perhaps, but it is as much of a coming out statement as he made until recent years. To be fair we should keep in mind that when these works were produced Rauschenberg had not as yet much of a public to address, and therefore no reason to dissemble. These works were produced within an isolated circle who would have been well aware on a daily basis of what he was doing. But that is about as explicit as it gets in terms of manifest gay content. The effect of critical and popular success on these artists work is a question which has been looked at in part by writers such as Moira Roth.⁷ In the view of many critics both artists had by the mid-sixties given themselves over to repetitions of their earlier work, in Johns' case quite literally making prints after his own first decade of production à la Duchamp. This is not the place to discuss the radical new directions his production has taken in recent years. The "frottage" pun, however takes us in another more productive direction.

The interrogation of Abstract Expressionism, which underlies much of these artists' practice, takes on not only formal issues, but also comprises a contestation of the machismo of the Ceder Bar crowd. The Ab Ex team seemed to hysterically over-compensate for the popular view that there was something fruity about artists. Their heavy drinking, bravado womanizing, and frat-boy comraderey all point to a degree of homosexual panic which parallels that of Hemingway, Lawrence and Chandler, referred to above. And the jokes which our heroes make at their expense are legion. In *Bed*, a combine of 1955, Rauschenberg, taking up the ubiquitous concern with the picture plane as the site of painterly drama, replaces canvas with a quilted coverlet on which he drips his Freudian suggestion of the etiology of Pollock's infamous numbered monuments. Johns in his appropriately named *Painting with Two*

⁷ Those interested in exploring further the work of these artists should look at Roth's article in *ARTFORUM* November 1977 pages 46-53. Entitled "The Aesthetic of Indifference" Roth explores their self-positioning in relation to both the abstract Expressionists and the acute homophobia and anti-communism of the McCarthy era.

Balls places two small spheres in a slit which runs across a polychromatic gestural canvas, in a rather giggly assertion that this same picture plane has got its victims by the balls. This work of which there are several versions, can be for male viewers as disturbingly unheimlich as the lunar scene in **Chien andalou**.

The point is that the social exclusion of these young artists, because of their homosexuality, set up in their work a series of responses both on the level of content and form to the dominant modes of American avant garde painting of the time. Knowledge of this contributes key factors to a comprehensive reading of their work, and the work itself reads Abstract Expressionism precisely from Sedgwick's decentered modern gay and antihomophobic perspective, at least in an embryonic manifestation. Johns and Rauschenberg are not manifesting some innate sensitivity determined by chromosomes, but rather by looking in the window of where they were not allowed to go they become the return of the repressed.⁸

I am concerned with attempting to develop object-based critical strategies which would explore these issues, particularly this interegration of contemporary identities in relation to the construction of sexual orientation in pre-modern and non-western art. For some time I have wanted to put together an exhibition of a dozen works from as many cultures and times, none of which have any immediately apparent homoerotic significance. It perhaps resemble a recent acquisitions exhibition of a small museum with broad collecting interests. And yet the curatorial premise would be completely antithetical to conventional museum practice by which objects stripped of the specificity of their original meaning and context are displayed as luxury commodities posing as monuments of some sort of universalized "human spirit". There would be a Chinese porcelain, a South Asian stone relief, a Japanese woodblock print, a Byzantine coin, an engraved Baroque drinking glass etc. Yet accompanying documentation would reveal ways in which each of these objects can only be fully understood by considering the experience, status, and practice of homosexuality in the cultures in which they were produced. The intent would not be to create some sort of transhistorical genealogy of contemporary queer identity, instead it would undermine

⁸ Jonathan Weinberg, "Its in the Can: Jasper Johns and the Anal Society", *GENDERS* i (Spring 1988):40-56; Max Kozloff, *Jasper Johns*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, n.d.; Henry Geldzahler et al. *Robert Rauschenberg, paintings, drawings and combines*. London: Whitechapel Gallery, 1964; Roberta Smith. "Drawings by Robert Rauschenberg 1958-68". *New York Times*: October 31 1986.

assumptions of the *nature* of homosexuality by presenting social roles antithetical to both assumed and imposed stereotypes.

Another project with a similar strategy would involve a series of installations that would explore the inherited concepts which coalesced to form the modern concept of the homosexual. These installations would present an archaeology of legal, religious and narrative elements such as Sodom, the hermaphrodite, and the traditions of Platonism, passionate friendship, libertinage, the pastoral etc., which constitute the vocabulary from which these identities would be articulated.

By shifting sexual orientation from the margins of societal discourse received aesthetic and ethnocentric constructs of "human nature" and our own subject position as viewers, or as producers of either art or theory can be undermined. I feel that we must move towards an understanding of sexual orientation not only as something which can be the subject of a work of art: it can become an oculus which thinking viewers should always have ready at hand, which can contribute enormously to a wide range of critical insights.