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MATERIALIZING DEMOCRACY

Toward a Revitalized Cultural Politics

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- courageously break the silence. Families and friends of women who have died as a result of violence can make a shirt to express their deep loss" (from the Web site <http://canes.gsw.peachnet.edu/~gswnow/clothesline.html>).
- 43 "A Millennial March of Empty Shoes. Like the AIDS quilt, the Silent March is a deeply moving way of showing the human toll taken by the gun epidemic. In election year 2000, the Silent March will mobilize Americans to call for comprehensive federal regulation of firearms, just like cars, pharmaceuticals and other consumer products. Our fourth national campaign will again portray the terrible human toll taken by guns through a 'silent march'—rows and rows of silent, empty shoes, some with personal notes tucked inside sent by family members of victims. This sea of shoes represents the tens of thousands of Americans who lose their lives to guns every year" (from the Web site <http://www.silentmarch.org/noguns/data/who.html>).
- 44 Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon* (New York: Plume, 1987). This segment extends the work on the aesthetic of representative fragments in minor literatures in my "'68 or Something," *Critical Inquiry* 21, no. 1 (fall 1994): 124–55.
- 45 See Lauren Berlant, "Pax Americana: The Case of *Show Boat*," in *Institutions of the Novel*, ed. Deidre Lynch and William B. Warner (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 399–422.
- 46 Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, trans. Julie Rose (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 121.
- 47 Sue Golding, *The Eight Technologies of Otherness* (New York: Routledge, 1997).
- 48 Liveness describes a continually negotiated quality of sexuality and citizenship. See my "Live Sex Acts (Parental Advisory)," in *The Queen of America*, 55–81.
- 49 *Island of Lost Souls* (dir. Erle C. Kenton, 1933) is a remake of H. G. Wells's *The Island of Dr. Moreau*. I choose not to name the characters here because names humanize, and their subhumanity is the point both of the film and this anecdote.
- 50 Jacques Rancière, *On the Shores of Politics* (London: Verso, 1995), 11.

LISA DUGGAN

*The New Homonormativity: The Sexual
Politics of Neoliberalism*



At the 1999 "Liberty for All" Log Cabin National Leadership Conference in New York, gay Republicans assembled from across the United States heard a keynote address from New York City mayor Rudolph Guiliani along with a series of plenary lectures from Winnie Stachelberg of the Human Rights Campaign; Brian Bond of the Gay and Lesbian Victory Fund; Jonathan Rauch of the *National Journal*; and Urvashi Vaid, director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute. From her plenary platform, Vaid called for real dialogue, mutual respect, and even affinity between gay groups and gay leaders at serious political odds, against a backdrop of community unity.

But the conference sponsors were only superficially receptive to Vaid's call for respectful, inclusive dialogue. Rich Tafel, executive director of the Log Cabin Republicans, expressed a different notion of the basis for gay political unity—a transformed movement with a new center and definite exclusions: "The conference was the most important we've ever held, and its success solidified a clear shift that is taking place in the gay movement. There is a transformation going on across the country. . . . And [as] with any such transformation, those who had the most invested in the polarized status quo, notably extremists on the far left and far right, are beginning to resort to increasingly desperate tactics to stop it."¹ At the conference, Jonathan Rauch named this new center "libertarian radical independent," and pointed to the online writers' group, the Independent Gay Forum (IGF), as the "cutting edge" of a new gay movement.

Under the banner "Forging a Gay Mainstream," the IGF Web site proclaims the organization's principles:

—We support the full inclusion of gays and lesbians in civil society with legal equality and equal social respect. We argue that gays and lesbians, in turn, contribute to the creativity, robustness, and decency of our national life.

- We share a belief in the fundamental virtues of the American system and its traditions of individual liberty, personal moral autonomy and responsibility, and equality before the law. We believe those traditions depend on the institutions of a market economy, free discussion, and limited government.
- We deny “conservative” claims that gays and lesbians pose any threat to social morality or the political order.
- We equally oppose “progressive” claims that gays should support radical social change or restructuring of society.
- We share an approach, but we disagree on many particulars. We include libertarians, moderates, and classical liberals. We hold differing views on the role of government, personal morality, religious faith, and personal relationships. We share these disagreements openly: we hope that readers will find them interesting and thought provoking.²

This variety of “third way” rhetoric is now widespread in Western politics; it became familiar fare in the early 1990s, offered up by Western leaders ranging from Bill Clinton’s New Democrats in the United States and Tony Blair’s New Laborites in Great Britain to George W. Bush’s “compassionate conservatism.” It invokes a political mainstream described as reasonable, centrist and pragmatic—a mainstream constructed rhetorically through triangulation. The “new” center is contrasted with unacceptable poles of “extremism” or “old” politics on the Left and Right. The IGF follows this format, positioning itself against antigay conservatism and queer progressive politics—between which poles the “differing views” of its listed writers may range. Among the thirty men and three women named on the Web site (all white, with the exception of one African American man) are well-known writers such as Andrew Sullivan, author of *Virtually Normal: An Argument about Homosexuality*, and Bruce Bawer, author of *A Place at the Table: The Gay Individual in American Society*, as well as somewhat more obscure figures such as Walter Olson, a columnist for the magazine *Reason* and author of *The Excuse Factory: How Employment Law Is Paralyzing the American Workplace*, and David Boaz, executive vice president of the libertarian Cato Institute and author of *Libertarianism: A Primer*. Also included are a few popular writers with more murkily centrist views like Eric Marcus, coauthor with Greg Louganis of *Breaking the Surface*, and a handful of academically trained intellectuals, such as sociologist Stephen O. Murray, author of *American Gay*.

On the surface the IGF Web site’s collection of downloadable articles is targeted on the one hand at conservative moralists, antigay church doctrine, and exgay

propaganda (e.g., Paul Varnell’s “Changing Churches” and “The Ex-Gay Pop-Gun”), and at queer cultural and intellectual radicalism on the other (e.g., Stephen O. Murray’s “Why I Don’t Take Queer Theory Seriously” and Jennifer Vanasco’s “Queer Dominance Syndrome”). But surrounding and shaping the familiar political triangulation and the repeated assimilationist tirades against more flamboyant in-your-face gay activists is a broader agenda for the future of democracy. This highly visible and influential center-libertarian-conservative-classical liberal formation in gay politics aims to contest and displace the expansively democratic vision represented by progressive activists such as Urvashi Vaid, replacing it with a model of a narrowly constrained public life cordoned off from the “private” control and vast inequalities of economic life. This new formation is not merely a position on the spectrum of gay movement politics but is a crucial new part of the cultural front of neoliberalism in the United States.

Neoliberalism, the brand name for the form of procorporate, “free market,” anti-“big government” rhetoric shaping U.S. policy and dominating international financial institutions since the early 1980s, is associated primarily with economic and trade policy. The cultural politics of neoliberalism are considered and debated relatively rarely in discussions of the economic and political mechanisms of U.S. cultural imperialism. In the domestic arena, the “culture wars” of the past twenty years are generally discussed separately from questions of monetary and fiscal policy, trade negotiations, and economic indicators—the recognized realm of neoliberal policy. But in a wide range of cultural policy territories—from public spending for culture and education to the “moral” foundations for welfare reform, from affirmative action to marriage and domestic partnership debates—neoliberalism’s profoundly antidemocratic and antiegalitarian agenda has shaped public discussion. Neoliberalism in fact *has* a sexual politics, albeit a contradictory and contested sexual politics not unlike the equally contradictory and internally contested economic and trade politics that have defined the location “neoliberal” since the 1980s of Reagan and Thatcher.³

Neoliberalism is often presented not as a particular set of interests and political interventions but as a kind of nonpolitics—a way of being reasonable and of promoting universally desirable forms of economic expansion and democratic government globally. Who could be against greater wealth and more democracy? Especially since the fall of the Soviet empire at the end of the 1980s, neoliberals argue that all alternatives to the U.S. model have failed, including fascism, communism, socialism, and even the relatively mild forms of the welfare state advocated by social democrats, labor movements, and Keynesians. Not trumpeted are the sharply declining participation rates in the Western “democracies,” and the

rapidly expanding, vast economic inequalities that neoliberal policies have generated in the United States and Great Britain especially.⁴

The primary strategy of turn of the millennium neoliberalism is *privatization*, the term that describes the transfer of wealth and decision making from public, more-or-less accountable decision-making bodies to individual or corporate, unaccountable hands. Neoliberals advocate privatization of economic enterprises, which they consider fundamentally “private” and inappropriately placed in any “public” arena. They go further to advocate that many ostensibly public services and functions be placed in private profit-making hands, including education, garbage collection, prison building and operation, and cultural production.⁵ All this privacy is rendered desirable by the recycling and updating of nineteenth-century liberalism’s equation of economic activity with voluntary, uncoerced, private freedom and with productivity, efficiency, and wealth expansion. This private world appears as an imaginary construction not a historical reality—it operates as a phantom ideal that is then contrasted with coercive, plodding, incompetent, and intrusive post-World War II governments, from fallen totalitarian regimes to stagnant or bankrupt welfare states.⁶

Of course, this rhetorical universe in no way matches the “really existing” policies of neoliberal politicians, who often advocate government support for “private” industries, regulated economic competition to soften the effects of “free” market discipline, and a range of welfare state programs (especially those that benefit more affluent, voting populations). In actual policy debates, the project of coding the operative rhetorics of public and private can thus become quite complex. When the state acts to support “private” business interests, meaning the interests of business owners and corporations, that can be good. But when the state acts in the “public” interest, meaning in the interest of nonmarket forces or disadvantaged populations, that can be intrusive, coercive, and bad. The proper range for debate over government action is understood as relatively narrow, covering monetary, fiscal, and trade policies, infrastructure maintenance, and “nightwatchman” property protection and law and order measures. Thus neoliberalism shrinks the scope of democracy dramatically in all areas of material production and distribution.⁷

In the policy arenas of cultural and personal life, neoliberalism is currently more pointedly conflicted. Ranging from New Democrats to “compassionate conservatives,” neoliberal politicians and organizations debate the relative merits of a more-or-less liberal, libertarian, or socially conservative agenda. Most flexi-

bly combine apparently contradictory positions, in a kind of productive incoherence designed to appeal and appease: Bill Clinton supported affirmative action and the death penalty, abortion rights and the Defense of Marriage Act. But the debate and continuing flexibility in these arenas, particularly in the United States, is working toward a “third way” rhetoric positioned between the moral conservatism of the religious Right and the perceived “multiculturalism” and “civil rights agenda” of the progressive Left. This is where the IGF with its “new gay politics” comes in. By producing gay equality rhetoric and lobbying for specific policies that work within the framework of neoliberal politics generally, the IGF and its affiliated writers hope first to shore up the strength of neoliberalism in relation to its critics on the Right and Left, but especially in relation to the gay Left; and, second, to push the neoliberal consensus in the direction of their brand of libertarian/moderate/conservative gay politics and away from politically attractive antigay alternatives and compromises.

The beachhead established by the writers now posted on the IGF Web site has been remarkably effective in creating what Michael Warner has called “a virtual gay movement” in the mainstream and gay press since the mid 1990s.⁸ By invoking a phantom mainstream public of “conventional” gays who represent the responsible center, these writers have worked to position “liberationists” and leftists as irresponsible “extremists” or as simply anachronistic. But this group has been much less successful in influencing national policy; they have failed to persuade many mainstream politicians to support their core issues of full access by gays to marriage and military service. But they are certainly not yet defeated on these issues or in their overall project of providing a new sexual politics for neoliberalism in the new millennium.

The new neoliberal sexual politics of the IGF might be termed the *new homonormativity*—it is a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption.⁹ Writers in the IGF produce this politics through a double-voiced address to an imagined gay public, on the one hand, and to the national mainstream constructed by neoliberalism on the other.¹⁰ This address works to bring the desired public into political salience as a perceived mainstream, primarily through a rhetorical remapping of public/private boundaries designed to shrink gay public spheres and redefine gay equality against the “civil rights agenda” and “liberationism,” as access to the institutions of domestic privacy, the “free” market, and patriotism.

This remapping is a big job given the history of gay rights activism in the United States. Although the fight for gay equality has since the emergence of the homophile movement in the 1950s been rocked by internal conflict over assimilationist versus confrontational tactics, the overall goals and directions of change have been relatively consistent: the expansion of a right to sexual privacy against the intrusive, investigatory labeling powers of the state, and the simultaneous expansion of gay public life through institution building and publicity.¹¹

During the 1950s and 1960s, homophile movement organizations entered a fraught rhetorical battlefield, riddled with intensely contradictory conflicts over public/private distinctions. The New Deal's expansion of public action into previously privatized bastions of economic power and cultural production, and the Civil Rights movement's struggle to further expand the arena of formal public equality from the state to "private" employment practices, civil institutions, and public accommodations, were under fierce attack by conservatives intent on reprivatizing as much of the common life of the nation as possible. However, in the kind of contradictory move that produced their constitutive hierarchies and exclusions, conservatives also worked to deny the protections of privacy against state interference in domestic and sexual life to all but the procreatively, intraracially married. Here they were countered by progressive efforts to eliminate laws against miscegenation, birth control, and sexually themed cultural expression.¹²

Thus, in the arena of economic and collective activities, conservatives coded the state as a bad, coercive, intrusive force against freedom, while New Deal and Keynesian liberals and many leftists invoked a democratically accountable "public" state interest in guaranteeing equality of access, if not always of distribution (here liberals and leftists often parted company). In the arena of personal, sexual, and domestic life, conservatives accorded "privacy" only to the favored form of family life, and supported state regulation of intimate relations in the name of social order for all others. Progressives ambivalently and unevenly, but increasingly, defended a right to sexual and domestic privacy for all, defined as autonomy or liberty from state interference.¹³

Homophile movement organizations, including the Mattachine Society, the Janus Society, and the Daughters of Bilitis, and homophile publications ranging from *One*, the *Mattachine Review*, and the *Ladder* to the *Homosexual Citizen* and *Drum*, served as platforms and forums for radicals like Mattachine founder and Communist Party member Harry Hay and well-known playwright Lorraine

Hansberry, cautious and assimilationist reformers including Daughters of Bilitis stalwarts Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, and militant single-issue activists such as Franklin Kameny and Barbara Gittings. But despite internal disputes and significant political shifts over time, the homophile activists intervened in postwar conflicts by steadily expanding the notion of sexual or personal privacy to include not only sexual relations between consenting adults at home but freedom from surveillance and entrapment in public and collective settings. These activists worked in company with an expanding commercial sector serving gay and lesbian constituencies to attack the investigatory activities, in public settings including bars and parks as well as workplaces, of the local police, state liquor authorities, the FBI, and federal government employers. This complex maneuver involved not only defending the right to privacy of couples at home but defining a kind of right-to-privacy-in-public: a zone of immunity from state regulation, surveillance, and harassment. This project worked along with efforts to expand the allowable scope of sexual expression in public culture, both commercial and nonprofit/artistic, to complexly remap zones of collective autonomy in ways that displaced the conservative boundaries of corporate freedoms and personal/public moral constraints.¹⁴

In the 1970s, gay liberation exploded onto a rapidly shifting scene of contest over the meanings of public and private and the related meanings of democracy and autonomy in collective and personal life. Following the 1969 Stonewall rebellion and the subsequent emergence of new organizations and rhetorics, gay politics began to interact intensely with feminist, countercultural and antiracist rhetorics and strategies. The emphasis of political activism shifted away from arguments for privacy as autonomy, and toward public visibility and publicity. But the work of recombining rhetorics of public and private was not abandoned; the project of building an unmolested collective life required continuing remappings of a right-to-privacy-in-public and a right to publicize "private" matters considered offensive to the phantom "general public."

By the 1980s, antigay forces had retooled their strategies. They began slowly and unevenly to concede a right to privacy, but they defined privacy as a kind of confinement, a cordon sanitaire protecting "public" sensibilities. They attacked gay rhetorical claims for privacy-in-public and for publicizing the private, specifically, and worked to define the private sphere as an isolated, domestic site completely out of range of any public venue. Thus the strategy of state No Promo Homo referenda and attacks on public funding for homoerotic art: gay sex is fine in "private" but should not be "displayed" or "promoted" in public.

Meanwhile AIDS activism deepened and expanded the scope of gay politics, crucially supplementing a newly well-established gay rights movement focused on antidiscrimination and decriminalization. New activist energies organized in the face of the AIDS pandemic also helped to spawn a vigorous, emergent queer political front with visions of social and cultural transformation beyond the limits of identity politics.¹⁵

By the time of the 1992 presidential contest that elected Bill Clinton, neoliberal organizations and politicians had begun the task of separating themselves from the moral conservatism of the religious Right, as well as from the “failed” policies of “old” tax-and-spend liberals. And alongside radical and progressive AIDS activism a new strain of gay moralism appeared—attacks on “promiscuity” and the “gay lifestyle” accompanied advocacy of monogamous marriage as a responsible disease-prevention strategy.¹⁶ In this fertile ground, the coterie of writers attached to the IGF began to spread the word about their new gay politics—a politics that offers a dramatically shrunken public sphere and a narrow zone of “responsible” domestic privacy, in terms arguably more broadly antidemocratic and antiegalitarian than the homophile movement at its most cautious and assimilationist.

The authors and articles collected on the IGF Web site are generally glib; the arguments assembled are characterized more by put-downs, pleas, and polemics than by sustained argument or analysis. One of the best-known writers on the site exemplifying this approach is Bruce Bawer, self-described elitist and monogamous churchgoing Christian, former writer for the right-wing *American Spectator*; editor of an anthology of articles by IGF colleagues, *Beyond Queer: Challenging Gay Left Orthodoxy*; and author of a long list of essays and reviews as well as of his own thoroughly humorless little homily, *A Place at the Table: The Gay Individual in American Society*. Bawer is practiced at the rhetorical techniques of triangulation, as well as the less-subtle joys of naked Left bashing. He invokes “most gay people” as a Nixonian “silent majority” of the conventional and opposed to Left “queerthink.” He describes his own and his wished-for constituency’s views as “postideological,” and positions them in relation to the “anachronistic” multi-issue progressive politics of the Stonewall generation.¹⁷ In two of his shorter screeds, he takes special aim at Urvashi Vaid, positioning her well outside the new center of the IGF’s gay public by calling her an “ideological extremist” whose rhetoric is “old.” He goes well beyond simple Left bashing, though, to set forth his alternative vision of the best sources of social change for gay equality, arguing that

In 1995, even as veteran activist Urvashi Vaid issued a call for a radical gay rights movement aligned with workers and other victim groups against the capitalist oppressor, mounting evidence suggested that major corporations may well do more to bring about gay equality than any other Establishment institution (or, for that matter, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force). . . . More than ever, it seemed reasonable to suggest that much of gay America’s hope resides not in working-class revolt but in its exact opposite—a trickling down of gay-positive sentiments from elite corporate boardrooms into shops, farms, and factories.¹⁸

Bawer looks unabashedly to a trickle-down vision of equality as corporate largess, and gleefully anticipates the Disneyfication of democracy as boardroom deal making.

As basic Left bashing, though, Bawer’s attacks on Vaid have been mild and inconsequential compared with the efforts of IGF writer Rob Blanchard (now deceased) and his associates in San Antonio, Texas, who joined with Christian Right forces to attack the reputation and funding of the Esperanza Peace and Justice Center, the progressive arts and community organization led by lesbians of color. In 1997, Blanchard and five other white gay men claiming affiliation with the National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association, the San Antonio Equal Rights Political Caucus, the Log Cabin Republicans, and the San Antonio Gay and Lesbian Community Center signed a letter to the city’s mayor and city council members asking that Esperanza be denied city funding, arguing that “it is a political organization—obsessed with victimhood and using ‘sexism, racism, classism, and homophobia’ as rhetorical and political ploys to extract guilt money from individuals and organizations, including the City. Esperanza has made its battle for tax dollars a referendum on homosexuality and we resent this. But Esperanza’s greatest damage to the gay and lesbian community is the divisiveness it creates within by repeatedly injecting issues of class, race and gender for self-serving purposes.”¹⁹ This attack attributes “divisiveness” to an inclusive agenda and locates unity in the unmarked centrality of prosperous white men, whose interests unproblematically define the interests of “the gay and lesbian community.” It goes further to participate aggressively in the right-wing strategy of denying public funding for “political” arts projects, defining neoliberal advocacy by contrast as the nonpolitical exclusion of “issues of class, race, and gender.”

Such attacks, while both ugly and revealing, do not clearly illuminate the

underlying political logic of the IGF's new gay paradigm. The writer whose work most fully elaborates an overarching framework for the efforts of this group is former *New Republic* editor Andrew Sullivan, a prolific essayist with a Ph.D. in political science from Harvard and analytic aspirations somewhat higher than the level of earnest exhortation, vituperative attack, or clever polemics.

Well, Sullivan may aim higher, but in his most widely cited book, *Virtually Normal*, he falls well short of sustained, coherent analysis. He nonetheless sets the terms for neoliberal arguments about sexual politics, beginning with a triangulating framework that attacks the "extremes" of what he calls *prohibitionism* and *liberationism* and claims to reconcile the best arguments of contemporary conservatives and liberals to offer, in the "third way" mode, a new approach.

Sullivan's prohibitionism is the kind of social conservatism that would morally condemn and legally punish homosexuality. He distinguishes this view from bigotry, however, and argues respectfully that "in an appeal to 'nature,' the most persuasive form of this argument is rooted in one of the oldest traditions of thought in the West, a tradition that still carries a great deal of intuitive sense. It posits a norm—the heterosexual identity—that is undeniably valuable in any society and any culture, that seems to characterize the vast majority of humanity, and without which civilization would simply evaporate; and it attempts to judge homosexuality by the standards of that norm."²⁰ He follows this claim with an extended discussion of the published views of the Roman Catholic Church, from the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas to statements of church dogma published in 1975 and 1986 on homosexual relations. The centrality of Catholic doctrine to his analysis, rather than, say, the religious views of Baptists or the political opinions of the Republican Party, is not explained or justified—the fact that Sullivan is himself Catholic seems to be the motivation for this choice. He ultimately rejects the prohibitionist view, even in the respectfully distorted form in which he presents one variant of antigay discourse, as internally inconsistent (in a consistent approach nonprocreative heterosexuality would have to be condemned and punished as well as homosexuality) and just plain wrong in positing homosexuality as a threat to the predominance and prestige of the traditional heterosexual family. The core of Sullivan's argument here is also key to his entire framework—he argues that homosexuality is an involuntary condition (created by both nature and nurture at a very young age) in a small fixed minority of the population. In an analogy to natural variation he argues that "as albinos remind us of the brilliance of color; as redheads offer a startling contrast to the blandness of their peers; as genius teaches us, by contrast, of the virtue of moderation: so the

homosexual person might be seen as a natural foil to the heterosexual norm, a variation that does not eclipse the theme, but resonates with it."²¹ He implicitly concedes, here and throughout the book, that if homosexuality could be somehow chosen by more people than a very, very tiny percentage of "waverers," then antigay policies might make sense as discouragement of this choice. In his view it is only because homosexuality is involuntary, and therefore cannot threaten an equally involuntary heterosexual majority, that attacking it morally and legally does not make sense.

Sullivan inveighs against liberationism for a similar reason—its proponents' insistence that sexual identities are socially constructed rather than timelessly fixed within contemporary categories. On his side here he claims that "history itself" as uncovered by "contemporary historians" concurs with science and psychology in affirming the presence of homosexuals in all times and places. The fact that the overwhelming majority of historians of sexuality (several of whom he names or footnotes in other contexts) makes precisely the opposite argument is not mentioned.²²

But it is not only his historical arguments that are unsupported; Sullivan's description of what he calls liberationism is completely confused and ultimately much more cartoonishly reductive than his description of prohibitionism. For the purpose of ridicule and dismissal, he collapses virtually all the political and intellectual approaches to sexual politics on the contemporary radical or progressive Left (approaches wildly at odds with each other analytically and strategically) into one big pot labeled "Foucauldean." He includes and collapses militant identity politics, such as Michelangelo Signorile's favored tactic of "outing" hypocritical closeted gays, or Larry Kramer's plans and pronouncements on AIDS politics, with anti-identity versions of queer coalition politics (which explicitly reject the parameters of narrow gay identity politics like Signorile's and Kramer's) and the writings of academics from social constructionist historians and sociologists to poststructuralist critics and philosophers, especially Judith Butler.

This hodgepodge of diverse and contentious activists and intellectuals is presented as a monolith of rigid orthodoxies. The strategy of "outing" is hilariously described as "a classic case of Foucauldean resistance," though no Foucauldian ever supported it (and its practitioners were generally nearly as hostile to Foucauldian academics as Sullivan himself). "Queer" is described as a uniform and compulsory identity "used to label . . . [and] to tell everyone that they have a single and particular identity," when "queer" has been used most often precisely

to question the uniformity of sexual identities (like Sullivan's "gay" identity). And as a final summary and dismissal Sullivan proclaims that "the liberationists prefer to concentrate—for where else can they go?—on those instruments of power which require no broader conversation, no process of dialogue, no moment of compromise, no act of engagement. So they focus on outing, on speech codes, on punitive measures against opponents on campuses, on the enforcement of new forms of language, by censorship and intimidation."²³ This "authoritarian" project well describes the fantasied enemies of the right-wing front in the culture wars, but it bears no relation to the range of policies, projects, and arguments Sullivan tries to collect under the umbrella "liberationist." While some campus activists support speech codes and some liberal organizations fight for hate crime laws, many of the writers Sullivan names have opposed these specific proposals; his *bête noire*, Judith Butler, wrote *Excitable Speech* specifically to oppose efforts to regulate speech or belief.²⁴ But then, coherent analysis and engagement is less the point in Sullivan's discussion of so-called liberationists than it is in his discussion of the Catholic Church. Sullivan is not *addressing* the Left, he is caricaturing it.

Sullivan really gets down to business when he turns to classical liberalism in its contemporary liberal and conservative formations. These are the political perspectives he takes seriously; the ones he hopes to "marry" to derive a new politics of homosexuality. He defines liberalism as the commitment to a formally neutral state and to the foundational freedoms of action, speech, and choice—most fundamentally expressed in freedom of contract. By this definition, contemporary liberalism has deviated dangerously; in Sullivan's view, this has occurred particularly as a response to the politics of race in the United States.

Sullivan's account of the history of the state in the United States, and of the background and legacies of progressive liberalism, is severely stunted and distorted, leaving out, for instance, little details like the role of the turn-of-the-century women's movement, the labor movement, and the New Deal.²⁵ But his project is not to get history right, it is to set up his argument. He wants to position the "civil rights agenda" as *the* wrong road in contemporary liberal politics. And, although he vacillates about whether the historical injustices of race might have justified some departure from the tenets of classical liberalism, he ultimately critiques the Civil Rights movement's legacy of antidiscrimination law, particularly affirmative action, as veering too far away from the proper goals of state neutrality and private freedom of contract. If the politics of homosexuality continues to follow this model, he argues, the state and the law "will be

forced into being a mixture of moral education, psychotherapy and absolution. Liberalism was invented specifically to oppose that use of the law."²⁶

But when Sullivan turns his attention to contemporary conservatism, he suddenly alters his attitude toward the public inculcation of "values." He mostly endorses what he calls "conservative goods," with the exception of the hypocritical practice of private tolerance coupled with public disapproval of homosexuality. He believes that this conservative public/private pact of discretion is breaking down, even though it still underlies many state policies, including the logic behind the military's "don't ask, don't tell" policy. But he doesn't argue that in the face of such breakdown conservative family values should retreat to state neutrality, as he recommends for progressive values of equality and diversity. Instead, he claims to have a plan to offer a new public/private mapping that can combine conservative goods with classical liberal state neutrality.

Sullivan's plan is simple. It involves focusing primarily on two issues—gay access to marriage and the military—then demobilizing the gay population to a "prepolitical" condition. For Sullivan, the beauty of the debate over gays in the military is that even though it has temporarily been lost for the forces of gay inclusion, it garnered "the best of both worlds"; that is, it allows the conservative to "point to the virtues of a loyal and dedicated soldier, homosexual or heterosexual, and to celebrate his patriotism" with absolutely no abrogation of liberal principles. The marriage debate provides an even better opportunity. As the proclaimed centerpiece of Sullivan's new politics, "marriage is not simply a private contract; it is a social and public recognition of a private commitment. As such, it is the highest public recognition of personal integrity."²⁷

But wait! Doesn't this role for marriage sound an awful lot like the dangerous mixture of "moral education, psychotherapy and absolution" that Sullivan warns progressive liberals against? According to Sullivan's account of liberal principles, should the state be in the business of recognizing one version of "personal integrity"? Apparently so. In comparing support for gay marriage to the currently available alternative government policy, specifically the passage of domestic partnership provisions for unmarried couples, Sullivan is the most explicit about the benefits of his plan:

The conservative's worries start with the ease of the relationship. To be sure, domestic partners have to prove financial interdependence, shared living arrangements, and a commitment to mutual caring. But they don't need to have a sexual relationship or even closely mirror old-style marriage. In

principle, an elderly woman and her live-in nurse could qualify, or a pair of frat buddies. Left as it is, the concept of domestic partnership could open a Pandora's box of litigation and subjective judicial decision making about who qualifies. . . .

More important for conservatives, the concept of domestic partnership chips away at the prestige of traditional relationships and undermines the priority we give them. . . . Marriage provides an anchor, if an arbitrary and often weak one, in the maelstrom of sex and relationships to which we are all prone. It provides a mechanism for emotional stability and economic security. We rig the law in its favor not because we disparage all forms of relationship other than the nuclear family, but because we recognize that not to promote marriage would be to ask too much of human virtue.²⁸

One might argue that domestic partnership as Sullivan describes it meets the criteria of state neutrality about "values" better than the marriages to which he advocates the state supply prestige. It certainly seems more democratic and less steeped in hierarchy and subjective judgment, as well as more egalitarian about how material and symbolic benefits might be allocated to households—not to mention a better approximation of his vaunted freedom of contract. But Sullivan upholds the most conventional and idealized form of marriage as lifetime monogamy (he says that he has tried to construct for himself the "mirror image of the happy heterosexuality I imagined around me") in utterly prefeminist terms (the operative word is *imagined*, and clearly from a husbandly point of view).²⁹

But Sullivan's support for gay marriage is more than a conservative opinion on a hot issue—it is a linchpin for his broader political vision, one that overlaps considerably with most of the writers in the IGF panoply. Sullivan aims to construct a new public/private distinction that mobilizes gay equality rhetoric on behalf of a miniaturized state and constricted public life, confined to a very few policy decisions, coupled with a vast zone of "private" life dominated by "voluntary" economic and civic transactions, however conglomerated, oligarchic, and unaccountable. Marriage is a strategy for privatizing gay politics and culture for the new neoliberal world order. He explains:

It is, of course, not the least of the ironies of this politics—and of predominantly political argument—that, in the last resort, its objectives are in some sense not political at all. The family is prior to the state; the military is coincident with it. Heterosexuals would not conceive of such rights as things to be won, but as things that predate modern political discussion. But

it says something about the unique status of homosexuals in our society that we now have to be political in order to be prepolitical. Our battle, after all, is not for political victory but for personal integrity. In the same way that many of us had to leave our families in order to join them again, so now as citizens, we have to embrace politics if only ultimately to be free of it.³⁰

There is no vision of a collective, democratic public culture or of an ongoing engagement with contentious, cantankerous queer politics. Instead we have been administered a kind of political sedative—we get marriage and the military then we go home and cook dinner, forever.³¹

Sullivan is probably the single most influential writer among the neoliberal gang of gays published in a wide range of mainstream and gay newspapers and periodicals. But he is certainly not the sole voice along the range of moderate Democrats and Republicans to radical right-wing libertarians in the mix. Libertarians are particularly voluble; the IGF Web site probably adapted its name from the rightist, libertarian Independent Women's Forum and its brand of neoliberal "equality feminism."³² We might imagine that in the more libertarian environs of such politics we might find more of a deregulating fervor in relation to intimate life. But no, opposition to state administration of marriage among gay libertarians, other than among the left-wing variety, is rare. But rare also is the kind of sentimentality and sanctimoniousness that is rife in discussions like Sullivan's. More typical of libertarian thinking is the hard-edged argumentation of David Boaz, vice president of the Cato Institute. Boaz argues, like Sullivan, that gay marriage is preferable to domestic partnership, because the latter undermines marriage's premium on commitment. But Boaz is much more explicit about the economic role of marriage and its relation to the "free" market—both impose discipline and privatize dependency among the poor. In "Reviving the Inner City," Boaz argues, in fine libertarian fashion, that drug laws as well as welfare state programs are "plantations" for blacks. But he makes clear that the problem is ultimately that welfare programs offer resources especially to poor women, who are thus enabled to make undesirable choices. The combination of market discipline, in the form of dependency on low-wage jobs, and family discipline, in the form of dependency on husbands, operates to create the best environment for Boaz's ideal world: "The stark truth is that as long as the welfare state makes it possible for young women to have children without a husband and to survive without a job, the inner city will continue to be marked by poverty, crime and despair."³³

This kind of political vision ultimately displaces any belief that Urvashi Vaid or other progressive activists might have that “the gay movement” is one big tent of advocacy for generally democratic and egalitarian goals, with variation from single-issue focuses and assimilationist styles and strategies to multi-issue coalitionism and confrontational tactics. Arguably, such a description may accurately represent the organized gay movement from the homophile activism in the 1950s and 1960s through lesbian feminism and gay liberation in the 1970s to liberal gay rights advocacy in the 1980s. But since the 1990s, the influential new gay politics of the IGF writers have marked a decisive break from the centrist liberal/progressive to radical Left continuum generally invoked by the phrase “the gay movement.”

This gay right wing, self-constituted as a new center, is definitively *not* a single-issue political lobby. The IGF’s gay equality rhetoric is a proffered new window dressing for a broad multi-issue neoliberal politics. The privacy-in-public claims and publicizing strategies of “the gay movement” are rejected in favor of public recognition of a domesticated, depoliticized privacy. The democratic diversity of proliferating forms of sexual dissidence is rejected in favor of the naturalized variation of a fixed minority arrayed around a state-endorsed heterosexual primacy and prestige. This New Homonormativity comes equipped with a rhetorical recoding of key terms in the history of gay politics: “equality” becomes narrow, formal access to a few conservatizing institutions, “freedom” becomes impunity for bigotry and vast inequalities in commercial life and civil society, the “right to privacy” becomes domestic confinement, and democratic politics itself becomes something to be escaped. All of this adds up to a corporate culture managed by a minimal state, achieved by the neoliberal privatization of affective as well as economic and public life.

Welcome to the New World Order! Coming soon to a mainstream near you.

NOTES

- 1 Quoted in “‘Liberty for All’ Conference Spotlights Political Transformation Under Way in Gay Movement,” Log Cabin Republican press release, August 30, 1999. The kind of superficial inclusiveness that characterized this conference, coupled with a harshly elitist agenda, received national attention during the August 2000 Republican Convention at which George W. Bush’s “compassionate conservatism” was deceptively and manipulatively sold on network television.
- 2 <http://www.indogayforum.org>.
- 3 See the special issue of *Public Culture*, “Millennial Capitalism and the Culture of

Neoliberalism,” vol. 12, no. 2 (spring 2000), especially the introductory essay by volume editors Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, “Millennial Capitalism: First Thoughts on a Second Coming,” 291–343.

- 4 For an excellent discussion of the contours of neoliberal policies, see Andriana Vlachou, ed., *Contemporary Economic Theory: Radical Critiques of Neoliberalism* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), especially the introduction to the volume by Vlachou and Georgios K. Christou.
- 5 Although many neoliberals would argue for the expansion of the institutions of civil society as alternatives to state action in the public interest, in practice this often means recommendations for corporate sponsorship (and thus corporate control of, for instance, arts institutions) or for the conversion of nonprofit to profit-making operations.
- 6 “Phantoms” of public and private spheres operate as highly productive rhetorics in the history of U.S. politics. The imaginary public/private boundary is invoked to support or contest a very broad array of cultural and political projects. For a sampling of discussions of this debate, see Bruce Robbins, ed., *The Phantom Public Sphere* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993). See especially Robbins’s “Introduction: The Public as Phantom,” which takes off from Walter Lippmann’s *The Phantom Public* (New York: Macmillan, 1927). An especially stark example of this kind of rhetoric as it is mobilized within contemporary neoliberalism can be found in a volume coedited by IGF contributor David Boaz and Edward H. Crane, *Market Liberalism: A Paradigm for the Twenty-First Century* (Washington, D.C.: Cato Institute, 1993). Boaz and Crane are officers of the rightist libertarian Cato Institute, which frequently advises the Republican “establishment” on issues of privatization, while maintaining its separate libertarian purity and sense of superiority.
- 7 See Noam Chomsky, *Profits over People: Neoliberalism and Global Order* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 1999). Chomsky clearly shows how “really existing free market capitalism” contrasts with the doctrines of neoliberalism by providing income supports and trade protections for politically powerful U.S. corporations while imposing “market discipline” on less-advantaged nations and businesses. Robert W. McChesney’s introduction to the volume is a very lucid and helpful summary of the major tenets and historical effects of neoliberalism over the past two decades.
- 8 Michael Warner, “Media Gays: A New Stone Wall,” *Nation*, July 14, 1997. Warner’s article takes aim at a slightly different, though overlapping, target than the neoliberal writers I examine here. He analyzes the conservative sexual politics of a broader group including many who would not fall under the neoliberal rubric; for instance, Larry Kramer, Gabriel Rotello, and Michelangelo Signorile, none of whom would be included in the IGF’s new gay paradigm.
- 9 I am riffing here on the term *heteronormativity*, introduced by Michael Warner. I don’t mean the terms to be parallel; there is no structure for gay life, no matter how conservative or normalizing, that might compare with the institutions promoting and sustaining heterosexual coupling.
- 10 I use “gay” throughout my discussion here because it is the operative term for the

- neoliberals. Although they occasionally gesture toward lesbian inclusion, women and gender issues are not substantively addressed in any of their policy recommendations. Terms such as *bisexual*, *transgender*, or *queer* occur only as targets of ridicule, and the presumptive whiteness of the audiences for these writers is unwavering.
- 11 The best description and analysis of the politics of the homophile movement remains John D'Emilio's classic *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940–1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).
- 12 I am using the terms *public* and *private* not as literally geographic spaces or social zones but as rhetorics employed in political debates. Moreover, I am necessarily compressing a very complex array of debates here. For a somewhat different account of the politics of public and private in relation to sexuality during this period, see David Allyn, "Private Acts/Public Policy: Alfred Kinsey, the American Law Institute, and the Privatization of American Sexual Morality," *Journal of American Studies* 30 (1996): 405–28.
- 13 The conservative version of family "privacy" amounted more to a kind of fathers' rights rhetoric than to an autonomy claim. Certainly in relation to women the "privacy" accorded was of a sequestering rather than protective sort. On the liberal/progressive side, the very slow and uneven expansion of claims to a right to privacy as autonomy is illustrated by the rocky course of the ACLU's policies; in 1957 the organization endorsed the constitutionality of statutes criminalizing homosexuality, but by 1967 it had adopted a broad gay rights position (see D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics*, 112, 213).
- 14 See D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics*; Rodger Streitmatter, *Unspeakable: The Rise of the Lesbian and Gay Rights Press in America* (Boston: Faber & Faber, 1995); Jim Kepner, *Rough News, Daring Views: 1950s Pioneer Gay Press Journalism* (New York: The Haworth Press, 1998); and Manuela Soares, "The Purloined Ladder: Its Place in Lesbian History," in *Gay and Lesbian Literature since World War II: History and Memory*, ed. Sonya Jones (New York: The Haworth Press, 1998), 27–49.
- 15 For an extended analysis of the 1980s antigay initiatives and the explosion of new queer activism in the face of AIDS, see Lisa Duggan and Nan Hunter, eds., *Sex Wars: Sexual Dissent and Political Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1995).
- 16 For a sharp analysis of this new gay moralism, see Michael Warner, *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life* (New York: The Free Press, 1999).
- 17 "Most gay people," "queerthink," and "post-ideological" are quoted from Bruce Bawer, ed., *Beyond Queer: Challenging Gay Left Orthodoxy* (New York: The Free Press, 1996), ix–xv. "Silent majority" is from *A Place at the Table: The Gay Individual in American Society* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993), 26. The reference to "anachronistic" Stonewall politics is in his "Notes on Stonewall: Is the Gay Rights Movement Living in the Past?" *New Republic*, June 13, 1994, 24.
- 18 Bruce Bawer, "Up (with) the Establishment," *Advocate*, January 23, 1996, 112. The accusation of ideological extremism is from Bawer's review of Vaid's book, *Virtual Equality: The Mainstreaming of Gay and Lesbian Liberation* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), which appeared as "Radically Different: Do Gay People Have a Responsibility to Be Revolutionaries?" in *New York Times Book Review*, November 5, 1995, 21.

- 19 The text of this letter, published in the *New York Times* on September 11, 1997, is included on a Web site with many other documents relating to this arts funding conflict: <http://www.esperanzacenter.org>. For an excellent, brief summary of events, see Alexandra Chasin, *Selling Out: The Gay and Lesbian Movement Goes to Market* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 228–33. Since 1997, the Esperanza Center has undergone repeated battles over the funding issue, and it is still involved in litigation as of this writing.
- 20 Andrew Sullivan, *Virtually Normal: An Argument about Homosexuality* (New York: Knopf, 1995), 21.
- 21 *Ibid.*, 47.
- 22 *Ibid.*, 69, 71. Sullivan cites U.S. social historian George Chauncey, historian and classicist David Halperin, and historical sociologist David Greenberg, so he cannot be unaware of the consensus against him on this point. As support for his version of "history itself" he names only John Boswell, a medieval Catholic Church historian who is nearly the lone voice on the issue of unvarying homosexual identity.
- 23 Sullivan, *Virtually Normal*, 85, 93.
- 24 Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997).
- 25 For a restrained yet scathing review of Sullivan's historical account in *Virtually Normal*, see K. Anthony Appiah, "The Marrying Kind," *New York Review of Books*, June 20, 1996, 48–52.
- 26 Sullivan, *Virtually Normal*, p. 151.
- 27 *Ibid.*, 176–79.
- 28 *Ibid.*, 182.
- 29 *Ibid.*, 192. In a hilarious critique of gay conservative idealizations of marriage, "Gay Marriage? Don't Say I Didn't Warn You" *Nation*, April 29, 1996, 9, Katha Pollitt writes: "When gay friends argue in favor of same-sex marriage, I always agree and offer them the one my husband and I are leaving. Why should straights be the only ones to have their unenforceable promise to love, honor and cherish trap them like houseflies in the web of law? Marriage will not only open up to gay men and lesbians whole new vistas of guilt, frustration, claustrophobia, bewilderment, declining self-esteem, unfairness and sorrow, it will offer them the opportunity to prolong this misery by tormenting each other in court."
- 30 Sullivan, *Virtually Normal*, 186–87.
- 31 In the epilogue to *Virtually Normal* Sullivan indulges a strange ambivalence, acknowledging that gay life, always and only white gay male life (his subject and audience are only ever presumptively white and male—for a perceptive exposure of the whiteness of Sullivan's "gays" see Phillip Brian Harper, "Gay Male Identities, Personal Privacy, and Relations of Public Exchange: Notes on Directions for Queer Critique" *Social Text* 52 (fall-winter 1997) 5–29, contains, in its differences, resources for the society at large. He points to the supportive role of friendship networks and to the admiral flexibility of many gay men who allow for "extramarital outlets" in their relationships. He was excoriated by the Right for the "extramarital outlets" reference, and retracted it in a new afterword to the paperback edition of the book. In a letter to the editor in

Commentary (November 1996)—a response to an attack by Norman Podhoretz on this issue—Sullivan clarified that “it is my view that, in same-sex marriage, adultery should be as anathema as it is in heterosexual marriage.” One might ask, exactly how anathema is that?

- 32 An excellent discussion of the politics of right-wing libertarianism, including the activities of the Independent Women’s Forum, is included in Jean Hardisty’s “Libertarianism and Civil Society: The Romance of Free-Market Capitalism,” in her *Mobilizing Resentment: Conservative Resurgence from the John Birch Society to the Promise Keepers* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999), 162–88.
- 33 David Boaz, “Reviving the Inner City,” in David Boaz and Edward Crane, eds., *Market Liberalism*, 189–203. Boaz expounds his position on marriage versus domestic partnership for gays in “Domestic Justice,” *New York Times*, January 4, 1995. For a sharp and influential discussion of the relation of queer politics and the gender/race/class issues surrounding welfare politics, see Cathy Cohen, “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens,” *GLQ* 3 (1997): 437–65.

CHRIS CASTIGLIA

The Genealogy of a Democratic Crush



I had a full life in drama.

—Monica Lewinsky, in Andrew Morton, *Monica’s Story*

All critical challenges to already existing democracy occur in the public sphere. Or so a good deal of Habermasian-inflected social theory would have us believe, contending that citizens speak from a realm detached from the state, from which they contest the assumptions of state-operated democracy.¹ By the same token, laments about collective exclusions from civil society—most notably those based on race, gender, sexuality, and class—for the most part take “exclusion” as a mendable shortcoming of public discourse, not as an argument for the location of revisionary democracy some “place” else.² In this sense, “exclusion” works for public debate in much the same way as “repression” in Foucault’s famous critique of Freud works for sexual confession, inciting more articulations of citizens’ desire to be in public, making the public, in effect, the sole location of democratic desire.³

Although theorizing (and, one would hope, mobilizing) against exclusions from public debate is urgently important, my concern in this essay is the framing of democratic citizens through discourses—often trivial and sentimental—constituted as “other” (and vastly inferior) to rational public debate. By this I don’t mean to rehearse a tired distinction between public and private “spheres,” but rather to assert the importance of democratic *interiority* to explorations of the sometimes dangerous, sometimes revisionary, interplay between the fantasies of citizens and their public utterances.⁴ Extended analyses of democratic exchange in the public sphere often obscure how citizens are prepared—and prepare themselves—for their public performances, how the desire to debate in public arises, how certain constrictions of subjective interiority preclude the possibility