



PENNIE SMITH

BLOWING THE LID: Gay Liberation, Sexual Revolution and Radical Queens

Stuart Feather

Stuart Feather co-founded GLF Street Theatre; was a member of the radical queens' commune, the Bethnal Rouge commune and bookshop, and later a founding member of Bette Bourne's gay theatre troupe Bloodlips. Since hanging up his tap shoes he has been painting. His first exhibition at the Drill Hall in 1995 received critical acclaim from Emmanuel Cooper.

A history of the Gay Liberation Front, 1970 to 1974

The Gay Liberation Front formed in London in October 1970. It was the dawn of the present century, a time when politics flowed inwards to the intimacy of personal self-transformation before flowing out to transform the destiny of British society. Gay Men and Women in England and Wales were free to find love, but couldn't advertise their desires even in the underground press which was prosecuted and heavily fined for publishing a gay contact column. Freedom to meet was restricted to police patrolled ghettos. Gay love was no longer a criminal act, but the state – with a Tory government – still looked upon, talked, and wrote about homosexuality as a perversion and a crime, while the left thought it was a decadent Capitalist aberration that a socialist revolution would sweep away.

Stuart Feather describes the GLF's founding, its meetings in Central London, principles, fights over revolutionary practice, gender differences and transsexuality. He relates protests and confrontations often with **Women's Liberation** against **Miss World** and the **Festival of Light** in detail, sometimes bitter, often hilarious. A participant in many of the actions described, he also includes contributions from many other activist.

Members of the GLF abandoned their closets to struggle for social justice and liberation. Communal living provided a space to explore and innovate, where radical feminists, gays and drag queens discovered their individuality was based on collectivity – participation, communication and love – living openly within their local communities whose struggles became their own.

Sexuality is at the core of humankind, the centre of our psyche, the organising principle of social life. Revolution is like making a work of art. What drives the hand to make the first mark is instinct. That is how the new comes into being. When you approach the barricades, you don't know whether you will run away, or stand and fight, but your reflex action to the situation will reveal who you truly are. Our revolution is unfinished; to complete it we must learn to grow it. When you join the revolution you will step from this present frozen time into historical time where you will once more encounter these ideas on the politics of gender and sexuality. For the next stage we now have the knowledge that Gay Liberation and Women's Liberation continues to undermine all societies, races and creeds, challenging every individual who desires to keep humanity in chains.

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Many contemporary black and white photographs

To be published by Zero Books, autumn 2015.

'Invaluable as well as entertaining first hand radical testimony from the period, essential for anyone who wants to understand how this country has changed and who wants to think about how it could be changed more'. Neil Bartlett.

'I think Feather provides an interesting lens to understand the movement's internal debates, divisions and problems. This is a very rich understanding of how a social movement emerges and works through internal differences. So I have no doubt that this work will contribute to a lot of discussions on civil society and social movements'. Dr. Hakan Seckinelgin, Department of Social Policy, London School of Economics.

'This is a wonderfully rich and evocative account of an important moment in gay history. Stuart Feather has 'brought it all back' in a marvelous narrative that is a great gift to posterity'. Ken Plummer, University of Essex'.

'Hegel is a Drag: Thesis: scores of Wests, Garlands and boas (and I don't mean Franz). Antithesis: gay, feminist – leftist boos at anything that hobbles in heels. Synthesis? With a vengeance; in a viciously modern attack on sex roles, liberation prudery, and boredom in the orchestra. It's proof that rhinestones and politics *can* live together, but they must'. Harvey Feinstein on *Bloodlips*, Village Voice, 8 Nov 1981.

'Giant cucumbers, fake nuns, dead light-bulbs; weapons of the first lesbian and gay sexual revolution whose demonstrations were colourful, Camp, biting sarcasm: wrong-footing authority at every turn. Maoists, Marxists, Radical Feminists and Radical Queens struggled to define the idea of gay liberation. Agitators with positive anarchy they transformed British society for homosexual and heterosexual alike'. Stuart Feather writing for February Lesbian & Gay History Month 2016.