

Towards a Gay Communism

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Elements of Homosexual Critique

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Homosexual Desire is Universal

The Gay Movement Against Oppression

Contemporary gay movements have developed in countries where capital has reached the stage of real domination.¹ However, while still under the formal domination of capital, and for the first time in history, homosexuals had organised themselves into a movement. This happened first of all in Germany, in the second half of the nineteenth century, thanks to the spread of the work of Karl Ulrichs and the subsequent foundation of the Scientific Humanitarian Committee in 1897,² as it did in different ways in England, and then in the first decades of this century in Holland, Austria, the USA, Soviet Russia, and other countries. The homosexual movement did not invariably take the fixed organisational form that distinguished the Scientific Humanitarian Committee and its international offshoot, the World League for Sexual Reform, but in many countries, even without producing specific formal organisations, it still gave rise to a wide debate on homosexuality that involved for the first time a considerable number of cultural and political ‘personalities’ and brought to light problems and arguments which had until then been passed over in silence, in deference to one of the severest of taboos.

1. See Karl Marx, ‘Results of the Immediate Process of Production’, published as an appendix to *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume 1* (New York: Pelican Books, 1976). [Translator’s note: particularly pp. 1019–36; see also Jacques Camatte, *Il capitale totale: il <<capitolo VI>> inedito de «Il capitale» e la critica dell’economia politica* [Total Capital] (Bari, Dedalo Libri, 1976). This volume of Camatte’s from which Mieli is working has not been translated into English directly, but there is a 1988 English translation by David Brown for Unpopular Books of a French volume that comprises the same texts: Jacques Camatte, *Capital and Community: The Results of the Immediate Process of Production and the Economic Work of Marx*, trans. David Brown (London: Unpopular Books, 1988). Given this, however, in Appendix B, I am translating and citing the Camatte passages from the Italian version on which Mieli himself was drawing, although I am consulting the French for accuracy.]

2. See John Lauritsen and David Thorstad, *The Early Homosexual Rights Movement (1864–1935)* (New York: Times Change Press, 1974), pp. 9ff.

The violent persecution of homosexuals by Nazism, Stalinism and fascism obliterated this movement, and with it the very memory of this first major international homosexual self-assertion, thereby re-establishing the absolute ideology of the Norm. Due to this setback, it was only through the research of the new gay movement, re-emerging in 1969 with the Gay Liberation Front in the United States, and subsequently spreading to several other countries, that those of us born in more recent decades became at all aware of the existence of an earlier gay movement, and came to see ourselves as engaged – contrary to what we had believed – in a second wave of the liberation movement and not in the first. Some of the questions that we raise today, for example, involve themes that were already tackled by the first gay movement. One of these, in particular, still concerns homosexuals today as much as those in the past: *for what reasons does society marginalise us and repress us so harshly?*

To this and other questions, we have tried to reply with a research starting from our own personal experience, whether by talking together at general meetings about our existential and social condition as homosexuals and comparing our experiences, or by committing ourselves more deeply to the analysis of individual experience, undertaking the ‘work’ of self-awareness in smaller consciousness-raising or ‘awareness’ groups. As a result, we have begun to understand better what we are, and why we have been oppressed, in the process of coming together on the basis of our common desire and with the viewpoint of liberation.

The new gay movement has also resumed the historical and anthropological investigations started by the first wave, shedding light on the persecution of homosexuals across the centuries and on the historical origin of anti-gay condemnation, a condemnation that is almost invariably peddled by the ideology of heterosexual primacy as simply *natural*. And if the old movement had a strong commitment to psychological research, in the new movement groups have formed that concern themselves instead with psychiatry, struggling against the anti-homosexual persecution perpetrated in the guise of psychiatric treatment. The gay movement totally rejects the reactionary (pre)judices against homosexuality displayed by mainstream psychiatry, yet revolutionary homosexuals also oppose the new ‘progressive’ but completely heterosexual view of homosexuality currently widespread in anti-psychiatry circles.³

3. [Editor’s note from the original volume: Anti-psychiatry, or alternative psychiatry, is an orientation that challenges the repressive function of traditional psychiatry and

The work of consciousness-raising has also brought us face to face with elements of psychoanalytic theory that refers to homosexuality. We have discovered in psychoanalysis some important ideas, such as that of the unconscious, for example, and repression – ideas which we can integrate at least temporarily into our own gay science. As a result, we have reached the firm conclusion that the hatred generated towards us within heterosexual society is caused by the repression of the homoerotic component of desire in those individuals who are apparently heterosexual. The general repression of homosexuality, in other words, determines the rejection by society of the manifest expressions of the gay desire. The question now is what it is that provokes this repression; and we believe we shall discover the hidden motives for this by combatting the repression itself, i.e. by spreading the pleasure and desire of homosexuality.⁴ It is in the struggle for liberation that we shall come to understand why we have up till now been slaves – and we are all slaves, both gay and straight alike.

But if repression is a psychoanalytic concept, it was also psychoanalysis, in modern times that first upheld the universality of homosexual desire. In Freud's words, 'in all of us, throughout life, the libido normally oscillates between male and female objects'.⁵ Why, then, we might ask,

proposes a new way of treating mental illness, no longer based on the use of violence and of segregation as 'therapy' and no longer organised around the centrality of the concept of social normality. It developed on an international level between the end of the 1960s and start of the 1970s. Its most well-known representative in Italy was Franco Basaglia (1924–1980), to whose work we also owe Law 180 in 1978, which abolished mental hospitals.]

4. [Translator's note: Mieli's language here turns on an essentially untranslatable pun on the words *combattendo* (struggling) and *battendo* (cruising). While obscure in English, his original footnote in Italian explaining the sense is as follows: 'In this book I always use the term *battere* (to beat) in the gay sense of going to look for someone with whom to have sex (or making the effort, or putting one's self on display). If in the language of male and female prostitutes *battere* means looking for clients, for us homosexuals *battere* doesn't mean prostituting ourselves but rather, more simply, searching for other people 'like us'. (It can always happen, in this way, that you meet an American or a man from [the wealthy area around Lake] Como who offers you a room at the Hilton and a Baccarat pink crystal *corbeille* [fruit bowl].) In the gay sense, the Italian *battere* corresponds to the French *dragner*, to *cruise* in English, to the German . . . I don't know. (There's here with me at the moment a Viennese gay, helpless to recall the equivalent expression in his mother tongue.)']

5. Freud, 'The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman', *Standard Edition*, Vol. 18 (London: Vintage, 2001), p. 158.

if all people are also homosexual, do so few admit this and enjoy their homosexuality?

Polymorphous Perversity, Bisexuality and Transsexuality

The hermaphrodite was a distinct sex in form as well as in name, with the characteristics of both male and female, but now the name alone remains, and that solely as a term of abuse. – Plato⁶

Psychoanalysis comes to the conclusion of an infantile ‘*perverse*’ *polymorphism* and recognises in every individual an erotic disposition towards others of the same sex. According to Freud, the child is ‘constitutionally disposed’ to this ‘*perverse*’ *polymorphism*, and all the so-called ‘perversions’ form part of infantile sexuality (sadism, masochism, coprophilia, exhibitionism, voyeurism, homosexuality, etc.). In fact, ‘a disposition to perversions is an original and universal disposition of the human sexual instinct and . . . normal sexual behaviour is developed out of it as a result of organic changes and psychical inhibitions occurring in the course of maturation.’⁷

Among the forces that inhibit and restrict the direction of the sexual drive are, above all, ‘the structures of morality and authority erected by society.’⁸ Repressive society and dominant morality consider only heterosexuality as ‘normal’ – and only genital heterosexuality at that. Society operates repressively on children, above all through an *educas-tration* designed to eradicate those congenital sexual tendencies deemed ‘perverse.’ (Moreover, one could say that today, more or less all infantile sexual impulses are considered ‘perverse,’ including heterosexual ones, the child having no right to erotic enjoyment.) The objective of *educas-tration* is the transformation of the infant, in tendency polymorphous and ‘perverse,’ into a heterosexual adult, erotically mutilated but conforming to the Norm.

The majority of psychoanalysts recognise sexual expressions even in the very first months of life, and have established steps of sexual development that we can sum up as *autoeroticism – homosexuality – heterosexuality*.

6. Plato, *Symposium* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1966), p. 59.

7. Sigmund Freud, ‘Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality’, *Standard Edition*, Vol. 7 (London: Vintage, 2001), p. 231.

8. *Ibid.*

But this is in no way a 'natural' evolution; it rather reflects the repressive influence of the child's social and family environment. There is nothing in life itself that requires the child to 'grow out' of autoeroticism and the homosexual 'stage' in order to attain this exclusive heterosexuality. The environment in which we live is heterosexual (in the first place the family, the cell of the social tissue), in that it forces the child, through a sense of guilt, to abandon the satisfaction of his auto- and homoerotic desires, obliging him to identify with a mutilated monosexual (heterosexual) model. Obviously, this does not always succeed.

Psychoanalysis defines the first expressions of eroticism as 'undifferentiated,' or only a little so. In other words, the selection of an object, for the infant, is due more to circumstances than to biological sex (and to circumstances that can change even in the course of a day). Little girls are all also lesbians, and little boys are all also gay.

To those who still wonder whether they are born homosexual or become so, we must reply that everyone is born endowed with a wide range of erotic propensity, directed first of all towards the self and the mother, then gradually turning outward to 'everyone' else, irrespective of their sex, and in fact towards the entire world. They become either heterosexual or homosexual only as a result of eduction (repressing their homoerotic impulses in the first case, and their heterosexual ones in the second).

At this point, however, we might pause to consider whether these tendencies are actually repressed in the strict sense. According to Georg Groddeck, for example, no heterosexual really represses all his homoerotic desires, even if he believes himself to have done so. Rather than repressed, the majority of people most commonly exhibit a latent homosexuality (just as the desire for the opposite sex is latent, as a general rule, in gays). According to Freud, again, 'we have two kinds of unconscious: the one which is latent but capable of becoming conscious, and the one which is repressed and which is not, in itself and without more ado, capable of becoming conscious'.⁹ To be quite correct, we should therefore speak of both latent homosexual desires and others that are effectively repressed. But since it is not always easy to distinguish the two, I shall speak sometimes of latent homosexual desire and in other contexts of the repression of homosexuality, without establishing too fine a distinc-

9. Sigmund Freud, 'The Ego and The Id', *Standard Edition*, Vol. 19 (London: Vintage, 2001), p. 14.

tion and thus using the concept in a somewhat elastic sense. In any case, faced with skilled seduction by a gay person, it is not repression that wins out; sooner or later, all heterosexuals give in. All are latent queens.

In actual fact, latent homosexuality exists in everyone who is not a manifest homosexual, as a residue of infantile sexuality, polymorphous and 'perverse', and hence also gay. A *residue*, because homoeroticism has been repressed by society, condemned to latency and sublimated in the form of feelings of friendship, comradeship, etc., as well as being converted, or rather distorted, into pathological syndromes.¹⁰

I shall use the term *transsexuality* throughout this book to refer to the infantile polymorphous and 'undifferentiated' erotic disposition, which society suppresses and which, in adult life, every human being carries within him either in a latent state, or else confined in the depths of the unconscious under the yoke of repression. 'Transsexuality' seems to me the best word for expressing, at one and the same time, both the plurality of the erotic tendencies and the original and deep hermaphroditism of every individual. But what exactly is this hermaphroditism?

In psychoanalytic theory, the claim of 'perverse' infantile polymorphism goes hand in hand with the theory of *original bisexuality*. (And this theory will also make clearer what I mean by transsexuality and the transsexual nature of our underlying being.) The theory of original bisexuality was first put forward – among other reasons – to explain the causes of so-called 'sexual inversion' (i.e. homosexuality).¹¹ Its roots lay in the discovery of the coexistence in the individual of somatic factors common to both sexes. This was well summed up by Daniel Paul Schreber (even though he was not a medical man but a crazy old queen): 'In the first months of pregnancy the rudiments of both sexes are laid down and the characteristics of the sex which is not developed remain as rudimentary organs at a lower stage of development, like the nipples of the male.'¹² The same applies to the female clitoris. *Similar observations of this kind were taken to mean that sex is never unitary, and that monosexuality rather conceals a certain bisexuality (a hermaphroditism)*. According to psychoanalysis, we are all bisexual beings.

10. See Chapter 3.

11. The term 'homosexuality' (from the Greek *homos*, alike) was coined in 1869 by the Hungarian doctor Benkert; Lauritsen and Thorstad, *The Early Homosexual Rights Movement (1864–1935)*, p. 6.

12. Daniel Paul Schreber, *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness* (London: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 231.

This question has been comprehensively studied by genetic theory and endocrinology. In the words of Gilbert Dreyfus:

Although genetic sex is determined by the composition of the fertilising spermatozoon, so that the father alone is responsible for the genetic sex of his offspring, the embryo undergoes in its early development a phase of apparently undifferentiated sexuality. It is only in the second month of foetal life that the rudimentary genitals begin to differentiate, so as to end up – after a long process and according to whether the first growth of tissue later develops or atrophies to make way for a second growth – with the formation of a testicle or an ovary. But even in adults, there remain in both sexes residues of the other, as evidence of the dual male and female development of the embryonic gonads and the double reproductive system with which the embryo is initially endowed.¹³

It can happen, in this embryonic development, that discrepancies arise between genetic and genital sex (and so, the son of Hermes and Aphrodite merges with the body of the nymph Salmacis).¹⁴ This gives rise to combinations of male and female characteristics, causes of what is termed ‘pseudo hermaphroditism’, ‘inter-sexuals’, or, better, ‘cases’ of *manifest transsexuality*.¹⁵

But not all these ‘cases’ are determined simply by unusual physiological conditions. There are many conscious transsexuals, for example, who are physiologically every bit as male as the butchest heterosexual. What does it mean, then, to be manifestly transsexual today?

In general, we call ‘transsexuals’ those adults who consciously live out their own hermaphroditism, and who recognise in themselves, in their body and mind, the presence of the ‘opposite’ sex.

At the present time, the ‘cases’ of manifest transsexuality are still subject to the contradiction between the sexes and the repression of Eros, which

13. Gilbert Dreyfus, ‘L’omosessualità vista da un medico’, *Ulisse xviii* (1953), p. 642.

14. [Translator’s note: Mieli is riffing off the description in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* of the rape of Hermaphroditus by the nymph Salmacis, who traps them beneath the water until the two merge into an inseparable, intersex form that is no longer distinct bodies but a ‘two-fold form’. In a fitting nod to Mieli’s argument here, Salmacis declares that, ‘It is right to struggle, perverse one, but you will still not escape.’]

15. The most informative work on this subject is Harry Benjamin, *The Transsexual Phenomenon* (New York: Warner Books, 1966).

is the repression of the universal transsexual (or polymorphous and hermaphrodite) disposition common to all human individuals. Persecuted by a society that cannot accept any confusion between the sexes, they frequently tend to reduce their effective transsexuality to an apparent monosexuality, seeking to identify with a historically 'normal' gender opposite to their genital definition. Thus a female transsexual feels herself a man, opting for the male gender role, while a male transsexual feels himself a woman. A human being of 'imprecise' sex has a much harder time just getting around than does a male person who seems, by all external signs, to be a woman, or vice versa. This is why people who recognise themselves as transsexual in the present society often want to 'change' (genital) sex by surgical operation, in Casablanca or Copenhagen, or rather more frequently, restrict themselves to strict psychological identification with the 'opposite' sex.¹⁶ Society induces these manifest transsexuals to feel monosexual and to conceal their real hermaphroditism. To tell the truth, however, this is exactly how society behaves with all of us. *In fact we are all, deep down, transsexuals, we have all been transsexual infants, and we have been forced to identify with a specific monosexual role, masculine or feminine.* In the case of manifest transsexuals, or those rare persons who have not repressed their transsexuality in growing up, the social constraint produces the opposite effect from what it does in 'normal' people, in as much as a male person tends to identify with the feminine role, and vice versa.

As we shall see, manifest transsexualism does not necessarily involve a particular propensity for homosexuality. There are many heterosexual transsexuals. But when, for example, these are males who feel themselves to be women, but who also sexually desire other women, their heterosexuality is then, in a certain sense, homosexuality. Far from being particularly absurd, transsexualism overthrows the presently separate and counterposed categories of that sexuality considered 'normal,' revealing it to be, in fact, a ridiculous constraint.

In any case, *through those people who recognise themselves as transsexuals today, we can glimpse the transsexuality (bisexuality) that is latent in everyone.* Their particular condition has brought them more or less close

16. [Translator's note: Mieli's reference to Casablanca and Copenhagen is linked to the fact that at the time he was writing this, gender reassignment surgery was illegal in Italy; the cities named were two of the better-known alternatives in which to seek operations. Gender reassignment surgery would become legalised in Italy by 1982.]

to an awareness, potentially a revolutionary one, *of the fact that every human being, embryologically bisexual, maintains for his or her whole life, both in biological and psychological aspects, the presence of the other sex.* I believe that the resolution of the present separate and antithetical categories of sexuality will be transsexual, and that transsexuality discloses the synthesis, one and many, of the expressions of a liberated Eros. I shall often return to this argument later on.¹⁷

For the time being, I simply want to stress how ‘our hormonal bisexuality is amply demonstrated,’¹⁸ and how the determination of ‘definitive’ and manifest sex membership at birth generally signifies only the ‘predominance’ of this sex in the individual, and does not eliminate altogether the ‘opposite’ sexual presence.

From the phylogenic standpoint, registration of such biological, anatomical and endocrinological data leads to the conception of ‘an originally bisexual physical disposition [which] has, in the course of evolution, become modified into a unisexual one, leaving behind only a few traces of the sex that has become atrophied’.¹⁹

The transposition of this conception into the mental field was of particularly great importance, leading to the interpretation of homosexuality ‘in all its varieties as the expression of a psychical hermaphroditism.’²⁰ But if the theory of psychical hermaphroditism helped psychoanalysis to demonstrate the possibility of so-called sexual ‘inversion’, it also raised very far-reaching questions as to the fixation of the sexual drive in so-called ‘normal’ people onto ‘objects’ of the ‘opposite’ sex. ‘Thus from the point of view of psychoanalysis the exclusive sexual interest felt by men for women is also a problem that needs elucidating and is not a self-evident fact based upon an attraction that is ultimately of a chemical nature.’²¹ According to Groddeck, it is more difficult to explain why heterosexual impulses are averted than to understand why there exist in all

17. This book is intended, above all, for a popular audience. I am therefore not diving into all the esoteric debates over the issue of the androgynous (or the gyan-dromorphic). This is also because on this long path, I am taking only some first steps – and from my own experiences alone I might, if so desired, write a novel, but certainly not a scholarly study, given my ignorance. All the same, I deal in Chapter 5 with the theme of the transsexual in relation to the trip deemed as ‘schizophrenic’.

18. Dreyfus, ‘Lomosessualità vista da un medico’, p. 643.

19. Freud, ‘Three Essays’, *Standard Edition*, Vol. 7 (London: Vintage, 2001), p. 141.

20. *Ibid.*

21. *Ibid.*, p. 146 (note added in 1915).

people homosexual tendencies, which as he sees it, 'necessarily follows upon self-love'.²²

Is there a close relationship, then, between hermaphroditism, physical and mental, and homosexuality? Yes, in that homosexuality is congenital in everyone and hence expresses the polymorphism of our underlying transsexual and hermaphrodite being. In the same way, too, the erotic tendencies directed towards the 'opposite' sex form part of our polymorphism, so that these are equally expressions of this underlying hermaphroditism. Both homosexual desire and desire for the other sex derive from the transsexual nature of our underlying being.

This is shown all the more clearly in the fact that heterosexuality is itself often accompanied by what the doctors, in repressive language, call 'morphological and hormonal disturbances'. Continuing to borrow this hateful medical jargon, heterosexual men can also be 'hypomascu-line' and 'effeminate'. The hormonal characteristic that accompanies these forms of 'hypomascularity' is 'a collapse of the androgen/estrogen ratio, as a result of a fall in the numerator and a rise in the denominator'.²³ Manifest heterosexuality, therefore, is often accompanied by clear expressions of physical hermaphroditism.

On the other hand, despite the stereotype that identifies the gay man as 'effeminate', a high percentage of manifest homosexuals do not show any particular form of 'hypomascularity' or 'effeminacy'. To sum up, there is no direct correspondence between 'hypomascularity' and male homosexuality, nor between 'hypofemininity' and female homosexuality. 'Masculine' women may be decidedly heterosexual, and very 'feminine' women can be gay.

As for the presumed relationship between 'mental effeminacy' and male homosexuality, and conversely for women, Freud noted:

The literature of homosexuality usually fails to distinguish clearly enough between the questions of the choice of object on the one hand, and of the sexual characteristics and sexual attitude of the subject on the other, as though the answer to the former necessarily involved the answers to the latter. Experience, however, proves the contrary: a man with predominantly male characteristics and also masculine in his erotic life may still be inverted in respect to his object, loving

22. Georg Groddeck, *The Book of the It* (London: C.W. Daniel, 1935), p. 202.

23. Dreyfus, 'L'omosessualità vista da un medico', p. 644.