

pend judgment" on this theory. Only occasionally does a professorial tone intervene, such as when the ancient Greeks' admiration of masculine beauty at athletic training centers is described: "In the modern world one might find a similar fascination with a female movie star at an isolated military base. It would be unthinkable to imagine such a demonstration of enthusiasm for male good looks." Obviously Crompton's ardent research has prevented him from witnessing what goes on these days at boy band concerts.

Facing down and respectfully disagreeing with such famed historians and theoreticians as John Boswell and Michel Foucault, Crompton is everywhere balanced, sane and courageous. More of a synthesis than a plum pudding of new discoveries, Crompton's take on events is nonetheless fresh and personal. Just as every Jewish person should feel the need to read at least one serious book about the Holocaust, every GLBT person should feel duty-bound to absorb the lessons of this tragic yet essential volume.

**Benjamin Ivry** is author of the poetry collection *Paradise for the Portuguese Queen* (Orchises), as well as biographies of Ravel, Poulenc and Rimbaud. He has translated many books from the French, most recently André Gide's *Judge Not* (University of Illinois Press).

## Strategic Survival

### Stayin' Alive: The Invention of Safe Sex, A Personal History

by Richard Berkowitz

Westview Press

ISBN 0813340926

HB, \$22.00, 224 pp.

#### Reviewed by Benjamin Shepard

**W**ere our brother's keepers." The point becomes a theme of *Stayin' Alive*, Richard Berkowitz's story of the early days of AIDS and the controversy surrounding safe sex.

As an alternative to the confusing messages behind the early approaches to HIV prevention, safer sex offered a realistic route out of the dead end. After all, people were going to have sex, epidemic or no epidemic. As such, best to do it in a safe, mutually satisfying, caring manner. With their pamphlet, "How to Have Sex in an Epidemic: One Approach," Richard Berkowitz and Michael Callen first outlined a harm reduction approach to safer sex which would be recognized around the world as a model which allows for both intimacy and protection. *Stayin' Alive* is the story of the genesis of this life-saving intervention.

Berkowitz locates the story in his own tale of coming out. "Activism was my expression of gratitude for being a survivor, one young gay man who didn't end up leaping off a roof top," the author explains early on. At its best *Stayin' Alive* is one part movement narrative, another part hustler memoir. The early chapters move back and forth between Berkowitz's vacillations about queer sexuality and escape into it, hustling to get through college. After graduation, he finds himself in the milieu of the Greenwich Village gay ghetto of the late 1970s.

I saw gay life bursting out of the bars and pouring into the streets. Gay men were creating a radical new subculture of sex and pleasure—without the danger or furtiveness. There was safety in numbers and a profoundly moving visibility that could only blossom ghettoized away from the suffocating pressures of family and society. New gay bars, discos, and sex clubs were opening every month. The billboard on Christopher Street over Sheridan Square brazenly advertised a hot, new bathhouse called Man's Country. Guys tried to pick me up on the street and in the subway... sexual freedom was on fire in the city.

These early chapters feature Berkowitz's reflections on the bodies of knowledge he gains from the thousands of men he comes into contact with as a hustler with an ad in

the *Advocate*. He recalls stories of tears of joy during ecstasy highs on the balcony of queer cathedral—the Saint—inhalng poppers among a series of utopian memories of public sex.

Throughout these years, Berkowitz recalls running to and from appointments with a sympathetic doctor, Dr. Joseph Sonnabend, he found at Gay Men's Health Project, a gay community health center.

My initiation to bathhouse sex was

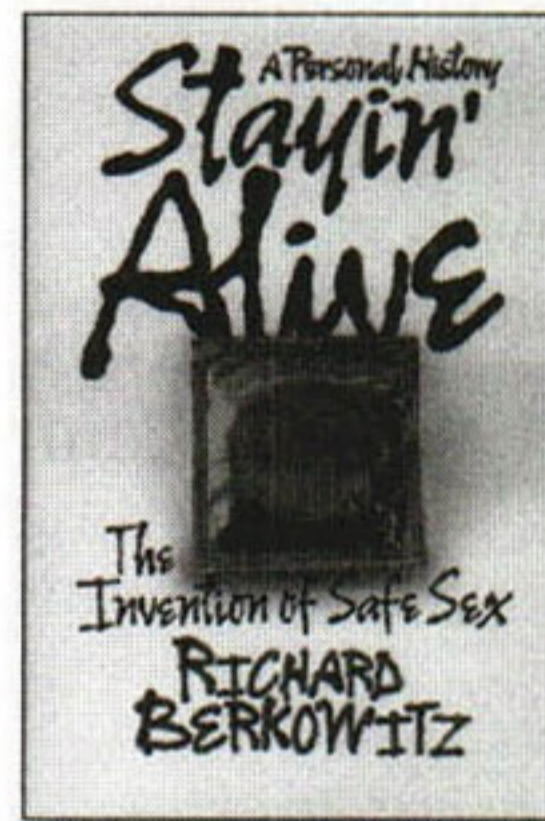
my introduction to disease, propelling me on a long quest of altering my sexual behavior to avoid infections but without giving up sex, even at the baths... "Why go back?" one might ask. Coming of age in the 1970s, many young gay men outside cities had no concept of sex without danger—of being found out, disgraced, arrested, beaten

up, etc. STIs were just one more thing to be added to a long list.

In between frequent appointments for antibiotics to battle venereal disease, Berkowitz and Sonnabend develop a frank relationship. A number of years into this back and forth, Berkowitz develops a case of hepatitis, swollen lymph nodes and a bump behind his ear which gets in the way of his cruising. Sonnabend counsels Berkowitz to stop "screwing around"—not a welcome piece of advice for a hustler whose livelihood depends on a steady flow of sexual commerce. Yet, by 1982 Sonnabend's advice sticks. Berkowitz is terrified.

In between the time of 300 and 700 known HIV/AIDS cases, Berkowitz shuts down his sex business and becomes mired in misunderstandings and conflicting advice. "Listen to me," Berkowitz recalls Sonnabend explaining about GMHC. "If you want to live, you don't want them on your side. They may think they're trying to help, but based on the messages they're promoting and the experiences of my patients who've had dealings with them, they're actually doing great harm."

Instead Sonnabend engages Berkowitz



and another of his patients, the late Michael Callen, to write a call by and for gay men to protect themselves. "You must celebrate gay sex in your writing and give men support," Sonnabend counsels. Despite this advice, Berkowitz and Callen give in to the widespread panic and their own health concerns while descending into a world of condemnations of promiscuity. Turning away from the libertine existences they have lived, Berkowitz begins to imagine himself and Callen as the Carrie Nations of gaydom. Slowly, Berkowitz recognizes this approach will not work. If one asks gay men, much less anyone else to give up sex, the result is usually anger. All or nothing propositions result in variations between hysteria, repression and inevitable lapses.

Within all this, Berkowitz receives a knock on his door from one of his former clients, begging for a scene. Desperate for some contact, Berkowitz pulls out two gloves and perseveres. The result is a very hot scene and a eureka-like recognition. It dawns on Berkowitz that a world without sex is not worth living in. Prohibition is often more dangerous than acknowledgment, careful expression and prevention. It had never occurred to Berkowitz, Callen or Sonnabend that latex offered the life saving compromise needed. From here Berkowitz and Callen build on the lessons of gay liberation to draft "How to Have Sex in an Epidemic." The result is a revolution allowing for personal and political protection and cover for both sex and the liberation movement that dismantled the shackles around it. Queer theorists to this day still look to this seminal essay.

Despite its strengths as a story, there are limitations with *Stayin' Alive*. The author recalls that he basically finished the book in 1993, had Michael Callen read through it, and stopped writing. It shows. With the exception of an introduction that reads like it should have been an afterward, Berkowitz does not substantially account for the battles over prevention within the gay men's sex wars which ensued over safer safe that played out throughout the 1990s. The problems that have unfolded around safe sex can and should be addressed in both practice and research, especially around the development of microbicides to replace latex. Condoms are not a sufficient lifelong

solution. These are nuances that Berkowitz fails to address. Yet, as an alternative to abstinence-only programs, safer sex still presents a viable workable strategy.

**Benjamin Shepard** is a frequent contributor to *Lambda Book Report*.

## Connecting the Dots

### Come Out Fighting: A Century of Essential Writing on Gay & Lesbian Liberation

Edited by Chris Bull  
Thunder's Mouth Press/Nation Books  
ISBN 1560253258  
PB, \$17.95, 362 pp.

#### Reviewed by Benjamin Shepard

After what seems like years of debating what's wrong with the ideas of Andrew Sullivan, Gabriel Rotello, Michelangelo Signorile and the other self-appointed "we're just like them" spokespeople of today's calcified gay journalism (the "turdz," the pro-sexual expression group Sex Panic! called them back in 1997), it's wonderful to dig back through the annals of history to read testaments of what is actually right—that is, what's important for aesthetics, personal liberty and American democracy—about gay liberation.

Chris Bull's wonderful new edited volume, *Come Out Fighting*, features many of the texts which articulated the social and political underpinnings of gay liberation. From poet Walt Whitman and anarchist Emma Goldman's democratic visions, to sexologist Havelock Ellis and psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud's sympathetic readings of sexual "inversion," to SDSer-turned-libera-

tionist Carl Whitman and Black Panther leader Huey Newton's writings on the political importance of liberation, Bull presents the primary documents which made Americans rethink their notions of homosexuality and, by extension, their notions of tolerance for difference itself.

Building on the liberationist era's ethos that citizens should have the right to make decisions about their own bodies, Supreme Court Justice and *Roe vs. Wade* author Harry Blackmun opposed sodomy laws. This volume features Blackmun's principled dissent in *Bowers v. Hardwick*, which the editor suggests lays the groundwork for Justice Anthony Kennedy's 1996 majority opinion in *Romer vs. Evans*.

Bull's volume presents a number of documents from the gay liberation period of the late 1960s and early 1970s as the movement sought linkages with Third World struggles, Black Power, feminism and other leftist movements. Despite the barriers, converts emerged. Take Black Panther Huey Newton. The volume features his 1970 letter asking the Black Panthers to get over their "insecurities" and recognize the interconnected nature of oppression:

I say "Whatever your insecurities are" because, as we very well know,

sometimes our first

instinct is to want to hit the homosexual in the mouth because we're afraid we might be homosexual; and we want to hit the woman and shut her up because we're afraid that she might castrate us, or take the nuts that we might have to start with.

We must gain security in ourselves and therefore have respect and feelings for all

oppressed people.... I don't remember us ever constituting any value that said that a revolutionary must say offensive things towards homosexuals, or that a revolutionary should make sure that women do not speak out about their own particular kind of oppression. Matter of fact, it's just the opposite: we say that we recognize

