

# The Subjective Object; or Harry Hay in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction by Gabriel Saloman

## Part 1: "The Call" and the First Gathering of Radical Faeries

*A CALL TO GAY BROTHERS  
A SPIRITUAL CONFERENCE FOR RADICAL FAERIES  
A Call to Gay Brothers: A Spiritual Conference for Radical Faeries*

*TO BE HELD LABOR DAY WEEKEND  
AUGUST 31-SEPTEMBER 1, 2, 1979  
AT A DESERT SANCTUARY NEAR TUCSON*

*Exploring breakthroughs in gay consciousness  
Sharing gay visions  
The spiritual dimensions of gayness*

*It's in the air. Heard everywhere. At the World Symposium on Humanity the talk is about "New Age Politics" -- beyond Left and Right -- a synthesis of the political and spiritual movements of the past two decades....the need for "conscious beings" assuming responsibilities for social and political change -- a radical Circle of Dharma....something new is happening in our society with more and more people living and perceiving their lives differently....merging of political consciousness and spiritual consciousness -- an interest in healing society rather than championing exclusive claims to "rightness."....Does all of this political/spiritual ferment have any relevance to gay men? Is there a gay vision of New Age society? Is a "paradigm shift" in gay consciousness also manifesting itself?*

*The answer to all of these questions is: YES! And many gay brothers are feeling the need to come together...  
To share insights about ourselves  
To dance in the moonlight  
To renew our oaths against patriarchy/corporations/racism  
To hold, protect, nurture and caress one another*

*To talk about the politics of the gay spiritment/ the spiritment of gay politics*  
*To find the healing place inside our hearts*  
*To become Inspirer/ listener as we share new breakthroughs in how we perceive gay consciousness*  
*To soar like an eagle; to re-discover/ re-invent our myths*  
*To talk about gay living/ loving alternatives*  
*To experience the groundlessness of the calmus root*  
*To share our gay visions; to sing, sing, sing*  
**TO EVOKE THE GREAT FAIRY CIRCLE**

In 1979 220 Gay men found these words printed on a flier decorated with a naked visionary staring into the sun. It was as if an unspoken fantasy had constituted miraculously within the newly mundane confines of Gay and Leftist Bookstores, Schools, Community Centers and Health Food Stores. It had been bubbling up to the surface, murmuring from the shadows, shining like lights in the woods, but this "Call" was the dream in light of day.

On Labor day, they converged upon an ashram in Benson, Arizona, many from the city, some from the growing diaspora of "Rural Faggots". Most of these men had never met, yet they formed brotherhood of intimacy and trust that few had known, even in the newly liberated Gay communities from which they came. Within that desert landscape 220 men were being born into a identity and the creation of a culture that had both never been seen and at same time stretched back through all of time to humanity's cultural origins. The Radical Faerie, be it a tribe, a consciousness, a life way, a counter-culture or all these things, was not so much born, but recognized.

"We had no answers, we cried a lot, and laughed a lot, and sometimes we were cruel to each other. Living in a culture that has this idea that the physical and the spiritual are split, we didn't even have a vocabulary for speaking about what we needed."

To those who arrived as hearers of "The Call", the Gathering which implied so much, actually detailed very little, and its seeming lack of form opened up the possibility for a radical co-creation. Who was a Radical Faerie? It was revealed by the groups inspired spontaneity that this mytho-poetic creature was first and foremost free of not just Heteronormativity, but the Gay assimilationists burden of imitation as well. Straight Gayness was abandoned for "a new Faerie aesthetic blooming: cosmetic rainbows trailed from eyelids, across mustaches and around nipples; feathers, beads and bells dangled everywhere; clothing worn was for shade or to pad a seat. Modesty was quietly banished."(Timmons, 266)

Even men who had travelled from the Gay ghettos of their various urban milieus were profoundly affected by their circumstances. For the first time they were not in a Gay sub-culture, but an explicitly Gay Culture. They were the society, and in this many felt for the first time an emotional, libidinal and spiritual freedom unlike they ever had before. Nakedness, both physical and emotional, was a new norm, while each possessed the power to speak and be heard by others who knew of what they spoke. The circumstances of this was established, by no accident, early on as a tall, powerfully charismatic man named Harry Hay welcomed those at the gathering on the first night calling out to them that they "throw off the ugly green frog-skin of heteroimitation to find the shining Faerie prince beneath."(Timmons, 265)

A general paganism informed the demeanor and activity of the gathering. "Faery Circles" replaced "workshops", and the term, loaded with myth and magical connotations, was appropriate as many felt a transformative sphere was made in their communion where normal physics hardly applied. Conversations went on for hours, unfolding hurts, fears, histories of struggle and violence, enfolding hopes, desires, visions and possibilities. These circles were non-hierarchical, with no leader dictating its path, open to each individual contribution equally. In this way they mirrored, not un-intentionally, the organizational cultures

of Native Americans, Shakers and Anglo proto-anarchists the Levellers, Ranters and Diggers - themselves a subversive mixture of social politics and Britain's old religions.

A Sheriff's report would talk of "Strange doings" and local animals animated by their proximity to rumored orgiastic rites. Indeed, there were these things, but they were contained within the boundaries of infinite possibility. Which is to say that the unbridled sexuality of the gathering was less a gluttonous hedonism than a letting go of inhibitions built with social shame. The now legendary beginnings of the Mudmen was not the kind of lurid messy play that an insensitive outsider might project, but was actually deeply spiritual act of de-colonisation. 40 or so men, stripped of their clothing, all differences levelled by the red mud, a chorus of intuitive chanting, voices before language, touching one another, anointing in Earth. A giant mud phallus is erected, a resonating "Om" builds energy, and the circle of men, seemingly from another time and another place erupt into ecstatic dancing.

Faeries dressed and painted in absurd colors and designs made their way single file and silently for the last evening's ritual. Evocations were made to guides and allies - Walt Whitman, Kali, Marilyn Monroe, Peter Pan - and from the collective a slow moan rose to the sky. The whole camp came together into a swirl of wild dancing and drumming, unself-consciously embodying an archetype of ancient and pre-Colonial humanity. From out of the darkness a black bull is witnessed stepping into the light only to be scared off by the explosion of fireworks. Within the container of the undulating Faerie commune everything is transformed into a visionary trance, an alchemical marriage of dream and waking.

*Come forth, o children,  
under the stars,  
And take your fill of love!  
I am above you and in you.  
My ecstasy is yours.  
My joy is to see your joy.*

- Aleister Crowley,  
quoted on the first "Call"

## **Part 2: Nineteen Seventy-six and the Magickal Gay Spirit Power**

"That a movement came out of it was a shock" Harry Hay would say to his biographer, Stuart Timmons a decade after the first Gathering. I would argue that this is total bullshit, though I say this out of loving respect for the fact that the Radical Faeries clearly were the culmination of a lifetime's work in various liberation movements guided by a visionary belief in the exceptional nature and purpose of Gay people. That's to say nothing of the labors and visions of a critical cadre of powerful collaborators which included Hay's longtime romantic partner and fellow activist John Burnside; Don Kilhefner, an important member of Los Angeles' Gay Liberation Front and co-founder of the L.A. Gay and Lesbian Community Services Center; and Jungian psychologist and spiritual radical Mitch Walker. In fact the beginnings of the Radical Faerie movement mark not just a massive cultural convergence of radically Gay activities, but by many estimations a circling back or returning to a traditional role that Gay people held in human society.

The first Gathering occurred a full decade after the social rupture of the riots at the Stonewall Inn in New York City, and in many ways represented the direct inheritance of that moment. The legend of Stonewall has been absorbed into the Gaystream image of "normal" Gay societie's great counter-cultural moment, jettisoning its more transgressive and insurrectionary narratives. Ten years on, the picture of hairy Queens

and transvestite pugilists battling cops was for many a once-upon-a-time galvanizing force that was best left in the closet as queer communities began their assimilation into the straight world's systems of class and segregation. For many others it was a definitive demand for a separate world not chained to the patriarchal, racist and capitalist architecture that had for so long oppressed Gays, Lesbians and others. For a few it was a public demonstration of what gender-outlaws were doing all along behind closed doors - transforming the world with their bodies and transforming consciousness with their stories and song.

The Gay Liberation movement took many shapes which would profoundly change the landscape of identity, directly leading to the first Gathering of Radical Faeries. In New York, Los Angeles and elsewhere, New Left Politics melded with an emerging Gay Identity in the form of the Gay Liberation Front, an anarchic constellation of organizations that staged "Gay-Ins", public "funky dances", and protested Homophobic businesses and lawmakers. On the West Coast, psychedelic theater groups like the gender-fuck Cockettes and the more overtly politicised Angels of Light drew from anarcho-hippies like the Diggers and the SF Mime Troupe, while carrying on the tradition of Queens like Jose Sarria and the "Royal Courts". As remembered by Allen Ginsberg, "their productions were transvestite-glamour-faerie-theatric masques... [they] brought out into the street what was in the closets." All over, the Utopian position of early Hippies, Student, Anti-war and Anti-Segregationist activists was being lost as groups were turning inward, becoming more combative, and focusing on self-definition and self-liberation. Simultaneously the dissemination of Eastern Mysticism, acid, Occultism, Native American culture, and neo-paganism led to a shifting of focus from outer struggles to inner ones.

Within these contexts an anti-assimilationist Gay spiritual identity was forming. Visionary texts, daring speculative recreations, and fledgling manifestos careened ever closer to their physical manifestation. In 1976 Mitch Walker, who would have a profound role in the formation of the Radical Faeries, published "Visionary Love: The Magickal Gay Spirit Power". It's hypnotic blend of Jungian mytho-poetics, post-Marxian social critique and radical mysticism resonated far beyond it's expected audience. Though not the first to speak of it (certainly Gerald Heard, Harry Hay and, perhaps, Walt Whitman preceded him) Walker's quest for a truly Gay religious identity was a critical catalyst for many. Walker shunned the mainstream Homophile movement's assimilationist agenda, "dead to the gay vision, anti-magickal, counter-revolutionary... [its] spokespeople and theorists shun the roots (the radical, source of nurturance and understanding) in favor of surface values: the social norm, success, integration, acceptance, assimilation", and at the same time challenged Gay Liberationists' adherence to Marxist theories, saying "the origins of anti-gayness are not to be found in economics".(Walker, 11-12) Instead he offered the potential for a new vision rooted in the Earth, magick, and a radical change in consciousness.

That same year, Arthur Evans held "Fairy Circles" in his Haight-Ashbury apartment, exploring among other Gay men the intersections of paganism, ritual, and pre-Christian Celtic mythos. His writings in *Fag Rag*, *Out*, and his seminal book "Witchcraft and the Gay Counter-culture" helped to form a foundation of Gay Paganism. Much of this paralleled the equally influential work of eco-feminist neo-pagans and witches such as Starhawk, who's book "Spiral Dance" provided for many men and women a crucial introduction to Witchcraft. Many early Faeries identified as "Feminists" and their practice of Goddess worship has its roots in feminist writing and organization around a non-patriarchal "Women's Spirituality".

Alongside all of this was Harry Hay and his long gestating articulation of Gay Identity as it began to take flight amongst the pages of *RFD*, a journal for rural gays. Many of Hay's ideas such as "Gay Consciousness" and the "Gay Window" of perception by which Gays experienced the world differently suggested an essential experience of Gayness (in stark contrast to the Social Constructionism popular at the time). After years of dropping hints and suggestions into letters and speeches, Hay's vision finally unfolded in the form of "Gay Liberation: Chapter Two", a self-described "position paper" published in *RFD* in 1976. Within it was contained the first clear articulation of Hay's theory of Subject-Subject

Consciousness. It began in the form of a letter of comfort and solidarity to a young gay Leftist who was in conflict with his straight comrades. Hay was hoping to share with him "newer levels of Marxist perceptions which were emerging in [him] as gay values". As he described, by way of example, his experience of witnessing male high school peers manipulate their dates to "score", using them as objects, while all the while fantasizing of a "wondrous being with whom I would always share as I shared with myself, not subject to object, but subject to subject", Hay had his breakthrough.

In Timmons' biography of Hay he describes how he "traced the development of models of modern thought, from the Cartesian-Newtonian model of a limited universe that Man could control" to a contemporary one that was hardly much different. "'Add or subtract, GO or NO-GO, (if you're not a man, you're a substitute woman - what else is there?)" was Hay's characterization of the dominant mode of thinking, which he called binary, or subject-object thinking. But the style Hay promoted, which he called analog thinking, factors in relativity and other expansive dimensions of comprehending the Universe." Hay believed this corresponded with an inherently Gay way of thinking, a "Subject-Subject relationship" that characterized all Gay relationships - loving and sexual ones between similar beings as well as relationships with other-than-human persons such as nature, craftsmanship and ideals. Hay believed "humanity must expand its experience of thinking of another not as object - to be used, to be manipulated, to be mastered, to be CONSUMED - but as subject - as another like himher self, another self, to be respected, to be appreciated, to be cherished."

Mitch Walker had come to a similar conception of Gay subjectivity. In "Visionary Love" he states: "Our attraction to [Marxism] stems from our attraction to our Gay Vision, which is one of absolute freedom. Such freedom is universal and therefore must encompass all people, destroying every form of oppression." Like many people steeped in a Marxist analysis of the world - Harry certainly being one of them - Walker believed that freedom was a natural state of being, physically, psychically, and spiritually, and that it was the violent forces of society which imposed restrictions upon humanity and the rest of the Earth. His quest led him towards a self-initiated life as a "shaman" and his book gave him a strange status as a messianic figure. Eventually he was introduced to Hay and the two bonded intensely, as they found their affinities for mysticism and Marxism to be remarkably synchronous. Together they began visioning a spiritual retreat for a new Gay Spirit.

Meanwhile Don Kilhefner was emerging from a year long retreat with Baba Ram Dass, the psychedelic guru who's "Be Here Now" still to this day has a tendency to appear on most Faerie bookshelves. Kilhefner had been an intensely active student, working with SNCC and various anti-war groups, eventually moving to Los Angeles where he lead many of the GLF's activities. Having become disillusioned with the de-escalation of the Gay Liberation Movement, he retreated to a Yoga commune. In 1978 he reconnected with Hay, who gave him a copy of "Chapter Two", and was deeply inspired by what he read. When an opportunity arose, Kilhefner invited Walker and Hay to join him in leading a workshop at the annual Gay Academic Union conference, entitled "New Breakthroughs in the Nature of How We Perceive Gay Consciousness". The workshop was a resounding success, and thus the holy trinity of the Radical Faerie movement was formed. With the discovery of Sri Ram Ashram, it was only a matter of releasing the Call.

Early in the history of the Radical Faeries the unity of these founders would falter dramatically. Walker's belief in the "moral imperative" of Jungian psychology was deeply at odds with Hay's intense aversion to psychoanalysis. Likewise Walker's characterization of Hay as authoritarian contrasted with Hay's own self-image, and while most accounts would support some of Walker's assertion, they hardly do justice to a person who spent a whole lifetime organizing collectively. In time, Walker, and for a while Kilhefner, broke from the Radical Faerie movement to form a spiritual group rooted in Jungianism called Treeroots, while Hay continued on to be the Patriarch of the tribe.

### Part 3: Harry Hay and an Emergence of Gay Consciousness

Harry Hay was nearly 70 when the Radical Faeries formed and he had truly lived the Gay Liberation Movement. Not as a witness, but as an instigator, an organizer, a prophet, an icon and till his last day an agitator for a world of total liberation. Hay can't be given all the credit for the variety of groups that he was a part of forming, but his critical presence within them begs the question would there have been a Gay Liberation Movement without him? Certainly the world might not resemble what it does, and many of us, if not all of us, are indebted to his work.

Prior to his involvement in the Radical Faeries, Hay had been a key organizer of L.A.'s Gay Liberation Front. In this he was not stepping into new roles, but rather accepting an existing position as a Los Angeles gay legend, one of the earliest American leaders in the gay movement. Two decades earlier he helped to form the Mattachine Society, the first political organization of Gay men in the United States, which in many regards began Queerdoms great march out of the collective closet.

The Society formed among a group of gay men who responded to a treatise Hay had written describing "the adrogyne" as a "minority group" - a relatively novel conception of the political role of gays. His desire was to form a discussion group who could work towards the political organization of this invisible population. However Harry was riding the crest of a second Red Scare, and homosexuals were as likely to be blacklisted, arrested or publicly shamed as any card carrying member of the Communist Party. Many covert gay communities had formed around meeting social and libidinal needs, especially among the wealthy and elite, in the form of safe houses and speakeasies, bars social circles, but the overall precarity of being "that way" led most into a kind of hiding. To organize publicly and to Lobby for political rights was to buck all social convention and take great personal risk, as an early predecessor called the Chicago Society for Human Rights had learned.

Yet this was Hay. Raised in a conservative family and a life of privilege, Hay was painfully aware of his otherness. Only upon the clandestine discovery of "The Intermediate Sex" by gay British poet and visionary Edward Carpenter did Hay even become aware of the existence of other "Others". In his teenage years he delved into the world of cruising, discovering the in and outs of sex and heartbreak among "Tempermentals", while struggling to conform with his ROTC peers. By the time he had entered his sophomore year at Stanford University he came out publicly, setting off on his parallel paths as a "Free Scholar" and a free homosexual, both of which found as much antagonism as sympathy among Academia and Homophilia alike. Being public in a time when such things made one a "social liability" led to the premature end of many relationships, most painfully perhaps being the one initiated with a teenage James Broughton while at school. His severance from the soon to be celebrated poet and filmmaker was not reconciled until half a century later at the 1980 Fairy Gathering in Denver.

Hay left Stanford to join the Bohemian throngs of LA's artists, writers, actors and intellectuals. His principal introduction was through the curious acquaintance of John Cage who had been his high school tutor. Among his fellow actors he became known as "The Duchess", a drag name that stuck for life, and through the romantic acquaintance of well known leftist actor Will Greer he soon became enmeshed in the vibrant labor politics of the mid-30's. Hay had previously been initiated into class consciousness through itinerant laborers he met while working on a relative's ranch in his teens. The Wobblies who worked beside him introduced him to Marx and the I.W.W., giving him literature to read and testing him while they toiled. They also introduced the tension that would help define Hay's struggle for much of his life, between class struggle and homophobia, telling lurid and violent stories of what would happen if a Wob was discovered to be queer.

His infatuation with Greer was met with passion and respect - Hay had charisma, talent and the gall to

throw a brick at the head of a Cop who was beating up demonstrators. Through Greer he found himself involved in Agit-prop street theater, taking immersion courses in Marxist theory with the Hollywood Communist Party and staring down bullets during July 1934's General Strike in San Francisco. Hay's voracious intellect was challenged and inspired by the complex layers of theory offered by the C.P., while his visionary spirit was pulled in deeply by the Utopian call of the world Revolution. Unfortunately within the Party homosexuality was not permitted, viewed as a product of capitalist decadence, and perhaps more to the point a liability that could harm the Party. Within this context Hay persisted in suggesting that Gays might be organized politically, but his comrades were no more sympathetic or supportive than his often apolitical community of actors. Harry was alone.

Harry learned nearly everything he need to about organizing through his work with the CPUSA, work which became both more critical and more dangerous as Fascism ascended in Europe and the US. Hay was involved publicly in The Anti-Fascist League, and privately in various discussion groups who were reading new translations of Marx and Engels. For Harry the experience of grasping the complexities of this world view was religious, and he chose to conform his life to become one which fit. Hay found few lovers who could comprehend or approve of his politics and his politics completely disapproved of his lovers. So complete was Harry's devotion to the Party that he married a woman named Anita Platky, a fellow Party member, in spite of his proclivities and proclaimed dream of a Gay Utopia.

Straight life was tenuous and emotionally draining for everyone, and though he loved Anita and the family they raised, he couldn't hide his intense longing for male companionship, nor restrain himself from seeking it. Hay severed ties to the temperamental bohemia that had nourished a part of him for so long and dove into a no less marginal life as an artist and devoted laborer for the Communist Party. Harry would say "I missed the forties, because I was being married and a communist." Hay immersed himself into study, developing a complex Marxist analysis of a wide range of historical and anthropological subjects, and in the process became a well respected teacher. As the unofficial theoretician of the leftist musical organization People's Songs, a group which included Pete Seeger, Woodie Guthrie and many others, Hay taught a popular class on musicology called "The Historical Development of Folk Music" (a telling lesson title was "Feudal Formalism and the Guerrilla Warfare of the Carole"). These studies were critical to the development of Hay's vision, even as they were a utilitarian distraction from his unhappiness.

By the late 40s the next Red Scare was percolating. It seemed that homosexuals were becoming a new scapegoat, and a tool to be used by the rising tide of anti-progressive politics and state repression. This heightening oppression only lit a fire within Hay who found The Progressive Party and Henry Wallace a worthy cause and hopeful candidate. He organized the "Bachelors for Wallace" in the hopes of placing a Right to Privacy plank within the platform. In addition to this plank, Hay wrote his aforementioned treatise on the Homosexual as a Social Minority, whose common language and common culture represented two of Stalin's four principles of a minority. In spite of its prescience and potential, it took nearly two years for Harry to hear his Call answered.

The Mattachine Society, which grew out of the initial imagining of Bachelors for Wallace, was structured as a cross between a secret fraternal order and the CPUSA, with its inner circles and outer circles. Within that inner-most circle was Hays lover Rudi Gernreich who would go on to become a famous designer of the Uni-sex look; Robert Hull and Charles Rowland - both fellow Communists; and Dale Jennings, a "fellow traveller" who contributed his talents as a writer to many Mattachine articles, communiques and letters. In time Konrad Stevens and James Gruber joined this core which became known as the "Fifth Order". Their meetings were held in secret, their covertness being a very real need in the 50's with the dangers of a police raid and legal prosecution. Homosexuality was not considered just immoral - it was illegal! Any homosexual act itself was punishable up to 20 years in prison and the convict would have to register as a sex offender. "Treatments" for such offenders included shock therapy and castration. Employment

opportunities didn't exist for someone scandalized as a queer. These unthinkable risks that were being taken only made the prospect of a Gay Organization more fantastic and desirable.

Early meetings were devoted to discussion and dreaming. "Homophile" was chosen as an alternative to Harry's initial "Adrogyne", the limited "Homosexual", the obscure "Uranian", and more politically worthless terms such as "musical", "temperamental", "deviant" or "invert". They held semi-regular, semi-public meetings to discuss "the Homosexual Question". These public meetings were designed to introduce an avenue of communication between Mattachine and the public, with a Masonic inspired series of initiations, and layers of secrecy to protect its members anonymity. The group, inspired by an image of universal brotherhood, worked by consensus, though Hay's fiery temper and dominant personality often worked to conform decisions around the founder's vision. The Brotherhood expanded, creating guilds led by new initiates who led their own satellite groups, and eventually hundreds of men and women were attending the conversations.

The catalyst for a new wave of organizing came when Dale Jennings was entrapped by a cruising police officer. His successful court fight may have been the first co-operative gay civil rights case, and led to an explosion of interest in Mattachine. Guilds and discussion groups proliferated and by the early 50's it had a membership of thousands. At the same time, its new found publicity was met with Red-baiting, the effect of which was to create a reactionary climate of fear and antagonism amongst the rank-and-file and the quiet stepping aside of Hay. Eventually a convention was held to form a new constitution and under the pressure of a "middle class" conservative faction it was decided that the Order would dissolve. As Mattachine has expanded it had attracted a large body of members who bristled at the notion of being considered a Cultural Minority, who believed that their only difference from mainstream society was to be found in their bedrooms. Under their influence Mattachine became far less politically radical, constructing hierarchical forms of "Democratic" organization, yet the organization spread over the next decades to become the largest of its kind, thus laying the groundwork for Stonewall and the Gay Liberation Movement which followed.

For Hay it was a painful turn of events. He had envisioned a form of spiritual union among gay men, heroic and mythical, yet in the conservative transitioning of Mattachine and the focusing of energy behind ONE, the magazine its meetings inspired, Hay saw the first indications of assimilation. After years of a forced Hetero-imitation, he feared that this would become a now internalized expectation, a rejection of the stigma of minority, even at the expense of the liberatory potential that lay with in it. In the interim between Mattachine's dissolution and the spark of the late 60's, Hay stepped aside. Yet the questions he had brought to those early Society meetings remained for him...

"Who are we Gay people?  
Where have we been throughout the ages?  
What might we be for?"

#### **Part 4: subject-SUBJECT and The Gift of Gay People**

Since his discovery of Edward Carpenter, a search for the social and mythic origins of Gay People had possessed Hay, always twining itself within his other studies, be they Marxism, anthropology or the history of Folk Music. Hay was convinced that the Homosexual had been secretly present in all cultures throughout history, their presence being written out or disguised by a "conspiracy of silence". The name of the Mattachine Society itself was a pedagogical tool which in part proved his thesis. It was taken from a musical tradition within 12th and 13th century France and Spain, "les Societes Mattachines", a ritualized song and masquerade performed by cross-dressing city residents who seemingly were re-enacting pagan

Goddess worship for the peasantry. To Hay, these were Gay shamans, religious communicators between worlds. That to Hay was the quintessential role of Gay people in society, and he found his evidence of it wherever he could. If it existed in one time and one place, then it could exist in anyplace and at anytime.

Hay spent most of his years after Mattachine hunting for evidence, writing extensive notes and occasionally publishing papers devoted to this search. He found hints of evidence dating to the stone age; drew connections between Druids, fairies and ancient Goddess worship; combed through biblical texts to find "Christianity's First Closet Case"; and saw evidence throughout Medieval Europe in the form of the mattachines, glee-men and jongleurs. The archetypes of the Fool, the Androgyne, the Upsetter, and the Shaman in every manifestation presented Hay with the possibility of a continuity of experience which homosexuals sorely lacked. He hoped to create a historical materialist study of Gay Roles, the "total corpus of what gay consciousness had discovered and so contributed to human growth in the ancient and modern worlds". Most important to Hay was the discovery of the "Berdache", a french term used by Colonialists to describe cross-dressing, transvestite and homosexual Native Americans. Within first person accounts and turn-of-the century anthropologies, the Berdache was an important exception, a rare depiction of a homosexuality and gender-crossing outside of the influence of Western religion and civilization. It presented the possibility of an uninterrupted look into the essential role which Gay people might play within human society.

Hay's engagement with Native American cultures certainly stemmed from his passionate search for evidence of an archetypal Gay role, and his hunt for evidence of the Berdache is problematic in its essentialization and unfortunate positioning of Indigenous cultures as being pre-Civilisation or primitive and therefore a Time stretching window into indigenous Europe pre-colonisation. In spite of the ways in which Hay's amateur anthropology is dated and perhaps inapplicable by its isolation from mainstream research (due to mainstream Anthropology's shameful homophobia) and its Settler viewpoint of Native Cultures (completely of accord to what is the unfortunate read found in most 20th Century Anthropology) it would be absurd to not see the degree to which Hay honored and admired Native Culture and religious practices. The overt appropriation that Hay and the Radical Faeries commit in regards to Native American culture ignores the degree to which they are directly influenced by that culture through their participation in various groups who's work crosses boundaries between Indigenous and Settler.

Growing up in Los Angeles Hay had joined the Western Rangers, a boys group akin to the Boy Scouts. Organized by Harry James, an Anglo who had supposedly been adopted by the Hopi early in the Century, the Rangers organized around Hopi methods of government and arbitration, drew from Indian motifs, traditions and prayers; acknowledged the Great Spirit (with not a mention of Jesus); assisted in Hopi and Sioux pilgrimages to the Pacific Ocean; and took annual trips to Arizona to visit the Hopi reservation. In addition to fostering a love of music and engagement with Nature and the Wild, James' library provided Hay with his first resource for what would become a lifetime interest in Native American studies. Eventually those studies became primarily a part of his quest for the elusive Berdache, but the accumulative knowledge of Native America culture - limited as it was by being gleaned from other people's studies - developed within Hay a deep internalization of that culture.

An exceptional event out of Hay's past also speaks to his intimate affinity with Native spirituality and the power of visions. The same summer that Hay spent as a laborer on a family ranch, the time of his initiation into the I.W.W., he experienced an dramatic encounter with a Native Shaman. Upon the invitation of a fellow worker and member of the Washoe, Hay visited a gathering of the desert natives. Amidst the food and dancing, contained by a thicket of willow and brush, Harry was offered a blessing by the "sacred old man" at the center of the gathering. Many years later Will Roscoe would help Hay recognize the man, whom he knew as Jack Wilson, to be Wavoka, the Paiute prophet and creator of the Ghost Dance. Blessed, he was told, because "someday you will be a friend", Hay was greatly moved to discover he had been given

the well wishing of such a powerful and important man.

In the late 60s, Hay was an organizer involved in the Committee for Traditional Indian Land and Life, organizing conferences, fundraising, even helping Shoshone people beat the draft through his research into old treaties. The growing atmosphere of violence and fragmentation among the Counter-culture in the late 60's and the generalized intolerance of Homosexuality by members of A.I.M and CTILL alienated Hay and John Burnside. In light of his work a decade later to establish the Radical Faeries, Hays observation that there was "no such thing as a Traditional Indian - only Indians trying to find their way back to a Traditional Way" is telling. Hay and Burnside moved away from City organizing and with their relocation to New Mexico's San Juan Pueblos they actually found themselves in a small and isolated queer community of Natives and non-Natives. In time they became deeply involved in resisting a dam project that would have devastated ancient pueblos in the area.

Situated in close proximity to the emerging bohemian cluster of Santa Fe and Taos filled with gurus, hippies, artists and dropouts, Hay and Burside were hardly outsiders though geographically apart from the scene. They had come hoping to be in proximity to a culture that held within it Kwidos or Mujerados, but their age and openness prevented any "observer-participant" relationship with Gay Indians, and it seemed that assimilation and exposure had perhaps eliminated these roles from a contemporary Native existence. In time Hay did discover anecdotal evidence that confirmed his beliefs, but never a living Berdache.

Though Harry would come to argue that its concepts specifically emerge out of Gay Consciousness, the origins of subject-Subject relationships find their true home in Indigenous cosmology. While certainly we can not pretend to say that a Continent covered with diverse nations and cultures can be summarily represented by totalizing ideas, there is a continuity to the world view of Aboriginal people that can be traced across the earth, even as it has been eradicated from the face of it. The Aboriginal world view is one of Intersubjectivity, in which there is a vast ontological similarity, rather than dissimilarity, of all beings. As Kenneth Morrison describes, the notion of person-hood is attributed to "animals, plants, the Sun, Moon and stars, and even 'objects'... because they behave as such. In this behavioral distinction... the real-world, daily life transpires in the interactions of persons, human and otherwise". To conceive of this we have to stop making distinctions between natural and super-natural, as both phenomena are equivalent in their origin, and both are caused by a "person's" desires and needs. In this animistic cosmology there is no "hierarchy running from the least to the most perfect being", and the only meaningful distinction is between "animate" and "inanimate", the former being defined as that which has the powers of knowledge and influence. Humans and Other-than-human Persons here share the attributes of sentience, will, rationality and emotionality. In a cosmos constituted by such persons, one must think in Relational rather than Objective terms.

Compare this understanding to Hay's conception of the subject-Subject relationship:

"Humanity must expand its experience from people thinking objectively - thinking subject-to-object; that is in terms of opportunism, competitiveness and self-advantage - to thinking subject-to-subject, in terms of equal sharing, loving healing. Humanity would be wise to finally give consideration to these deviants in their ranks - the gays - and to begin to grant us the peace and growing space we will need to display and further develop... our gift. The gift of *analogue consciousness* by which we perceive the world through our gay window of subject-to-subject consciousness... we must transform the experience for people viewing others as objects to be manipulated, mastered and consumed, to subjects like him/herself, to be respected and cherished. We must also remember that the social world we inherit, the total hetero male-oriented and -dominated world of tradition and daily environment - the sum total of our history, philosophy, psychology, culture, our very languages - are all totally subject-object in concept, definitions and evolution. To all this we faeries should be essentially alien."

As he states in his 1983 essay, "A Separate People Who's Time Has Come", the Homosexual possesses neither a Masculine nor a Feminine experience of emotion, temperament or intellectuality. He describes it as a "Spiritual Nietherness" from which "our contributions come. It is from this spiritual *nietherness* that we draw our capacities as *mediators between the seen and unseen*, as berdache priests and shaman seers... and as designers of the possible - *mediators between make believe and the real... mediators between the spirit and the flesh...*" Hay saw in the unique nature of gay love a consciousness which could remake society, heal its deep wounds made by patriarchy and the exploitation of capitalism. As transmitters of this vision, as artists, actors, teachers and counselors who would translate this conception, Gay people would be inheriting and fulfilling their purpose in the world. Gays would have to deconstruct their inherited hetero male subject-object oriented language and behaviors, but such a simple act as lovemaking - where in we "enjoy each other's enjoying" - could be a catalyst for transformation. Hay believed that to some extent hetero women already possessed a limited understanding of this, but he believe that gays and lesbians held an exceptional position outside of the dichotomous construct of the subject-object world.

Harry believed that this transformation of individual consciousness could become a broader transformation that would make obsolete the hetero ideal of Democracy - the tyranny of a majority over a minority. Working and relating collectively in subject-subject terms worked best in small circles, groups of 15-25, where each was afforded a turn to speak freely. "Were we now to transform such circles so that each participant were to relate to his/her neighbor, co-joined in the shared vision of that non-oppressive love we've glimpsed through our gay window, *we might develop for the first time in history a true working model of the loving, sharing consensus* of the whole society. In a community, or a community of communities, functioning through such consensus circles, *all authoritarianism - of course - would vanish*: For, in such circles, who would be head and who the foot? The participants would nourish, sustain and instruct each-other."

In bringing his vision to the development of the Radical Faeries, Hay was able to witness the practice of this consciousness. The Gatherings developed practices of consensus and circles of healing and listening, of non-objectifying relationships between men, women and other gendered and not gendered persons. A new relationship of respect and recognition between people and animals, plants, the earth and spirit. The Faeries were many things: a radical territorialization of Gay Culture; the invention/reinvention of a distinctly Gay Religion; an anarchistic Communism which could encompass all people's liberation; and rejection of the assimilation of Queers into a white hetero male society constructed out of capitalist exploitation, oppression and the total negation of the subjective knowledge and desires of all persons human and other-than-human. Though hardly without its faults, contestations and limitations, Radical Faerie achieved more closely Harry Hay's vision than the Communist Party, The Mattachine Society, The GLF or any others, and lay the grounds for future gender insurrections and radical reclaimings of freedom.

## **Part 5: Objects and the Power of their Subjectivity**

The radical potential of Harry Hay's visionary concept of subject-SUBJECT consciousness is not limited to the transformation of social relationships, nor is it without important precedent. A myriad of phenomena in Hay's life led to the emergence of his conception of this non-hierarchical ontology and what's more is it was refined and publicly revealed in a wider social and cultural context which provided a suitable container for what might have otherwise been wholly rejected (more so than it already is) as New Age babble. What's important is not just what has been created through his concept, but asking what potentials still lay within it. The expanded possibilities of meaning and the powerful call for transformation implied by Hay's concept can arguably imbue a new power into not just people, but the product of their labor, be it the refuse of history, the art object or any material creation that forms a contemporary civilization.

There is an implication in this notion of Intersubjectivity that we need not limit our acknowledgement of Person-hood to "living things" as might be most generally accepted. Certainly in most Animist cultures other-than-human persons include such generalized objects and entities as Mountains, Stars, Wind, River, Sun, Moon, and so on. Though these things convey movement and do in fact have physical and measurable affects upon the world, it is the conviction that these things possess the power of knowledge and influence that differentiates them as person and non-person. The assumption that there is an Ontological similarity of all beings, implies that the person-hood of a Mountain, a Wolf, or a Constellation contains within it desires and needs. Within the cosmology of Earth Based Religions it is easy to see how these attributes can be transferred to the embodiment of the Mother, or Goddess, in the form of Earth, Gaia, and her physical characteristics. What is more profound, particularly for a person who is engaged in a struggle to designate a radical Sacred within the misery of materialism, is the conception that a human made object can equally be an other-than-human person.

Again, Morrison states that "so-called 'sacred' or 'symbolic' objects are intentional beings whose needs are bound up with the desire and needs of all persons." What does it mean to talk of an object's "Use Value" when it could potentially argue for its own autonomous purpose. Certainly it would require a practical metaphysics to audibly hear what it is that such an object desires, yet that is hardly the limits of our ability to perceive the desires and needs of an object. If as I've said above, we live in a Cosmos constituted by Persons, one that depends on relationships between Persons, so it is that a subject-SUBJECT consciousness gives us the tool to access a type of communication with the human-made object. We ask "what does this object desire? What does it need?" and we look at the criteria of its relationship to other phenomena, to the knowledge that it seemingly possesses and most tellingly to its influence.

It is perhaps too difficult for us to witness an object whose existence is pure commodity and consider what its person could be, yet entropy and relationship forms that person-hood even in that material which is mass produced. The Readymade is in some sense a revelation of this. Though its intent was to shatter any sense of qualitative "Is-ness" imbued in art, objects such as Marcel Duchamp's "Fountain" in fact proved the constantly generative potential of anything once in relationship to other Persons. Objects that began as seeming voids entered into relationships with people who by their own interpersonal dialogue with the object transformed what it was that they communicated. Morrison talks of the system of feedback between the maker of the Kachina mask, the Kachina as a conduit of that maker's need, and Rain who in turn nurtures the artisan. Each fulfills its own needs in part by fulfilling the needs of the others in the chain. This pattern which travels along a system of exchange that is determined by the "Gift" finds its parallel even in the Modernist practices of 20th Century artists.

Duchamp isn't alone in his nihilism. Michael Fried describes beautifully the dysfunctional relationship that exists between the Art Object and its beholder, though he is sadly enamored of this being so. "The object, not the beholder, must remain the center or focus of the situation, but the situation itself belongs to the beholder - it is his situation". Here he describes the role of subjectivity in the viewer of the Art in terms of *who* is engaged in a subjective experience. This is akin to suggesting that an Animal in a Zoo is not experiencing its own subjectivity, or likewise a prisoner. The notion that an Art Object has no role in its being viewed is typical of any subject-object relationship. Fried acknowledges that (specifically) Literalist art has "presence" but attributes it to "theatrical effect". He attributes it to a quality of being, essentially size and distance, or relationship to the room within which it is viewed. However he also acknowledges that this "presence" is "extorted from the beholder" and that it creates a "special complicity":

"Something is said to have presence when it demands that the beholder take it in to account, that he take it seriously - and when the fulfilment of that demand consists simply in being aware of the work and, so to speak, in acting accordingly... Here again the experience of being distanced by the work in question seems

crucial: the beholder knows himself to stand in an indeterminate, open-ended - and even unexacting - relation as subject to the impassive object on the wall or floor. In fact, being distanced by such objects is not, I suggest, entirely unlike being distanced, or crowded, by the silent presence of another person..."

Fried is not alone in trying to find a personal autonomy in the face of art, though he belongs to a purely modernist assumption that empiricism and solitude are antidotes to the oppressive qualities of the "Sacred Object". No person in the West has more clearly articulated this imperative than Walter Benjamin who named the power imbued in Art objects as "Aura". His repudiation of the Aura stemmed from an analysis of Art as a tool for legitimating and authenticating historical power structures, rooted in its historical condition of ownership and its rarity. He acknowledges the power of its "here and now" quality, but argues that the loss of its physicality to reproduction is meaningfully equivalent to the worldwide political transformations that were usurping traditions and authority in the political and social sphere. Benjamin acknowledges a historical role of art as a tool of magickal practice (arguing mistakenly that it reflected an urge to master nature), but suggests that the object exhibited within a context that names it Art is divorced of this relationship, and serves only to perpetuate the authority by authenticity of the institutions which created and displayed the work.

Benjamin imagines that a people liberated from the specialization of the Artist and the cult reverence of the "authentic" art object will be served by the mass production of images. Surely he can't be faulted for not envisioning the post-modernist nightmare of the fully mediated life we now live in. However, his Cartesian logic regarding art and the role of artist inevitably leads (as does most Enlightenment influenced thinking) towards a disempowered and inhuman relationship with the act and artifact of creation. He compares the relationships of a Magician to a Surgeon with that of a Painter to a Cinematographer - Magician / Painter maintaining "a natural distance from reality" yet engaging their relationship in a manner that is "person to person" while the Surgeon / Cinematographer "penetrates deeply into [the patient's / reality's] tissue". Perhaps the shock of such a treatment might awaken the viewer of art from their alienated slumber, but there is a parallel denigration that happens in this materialist view of art. Not only is the possibility of art's purpose reduced to an aspirited politics, but the intrinsic human experiences of ritual, magick and transcendent communication are removed in favor of an inanimate science that is dead and devalued. This degraded relationship to materiality may liberate us from certain authorities, but it leaves a lot of useless stuff lying around.

Benjamin gives credit to Surrealism and Dada for their attempts at shocking the public into a similar position. Of the latter he applauds their "ruthless annihilation of the aura with every object they produced." Yet the liminal potency of these objects did not decrease because of their assault on history and authority. In fact, it is the counter-cultural hubris of these works that amplified their mystical otherness. Where as before Art may have been given an Aura due to both its "eternal" and market values, in the Modern Era a work of Art became imbued with "Luminosity" due to its social and political relationships, in tandem with its historical context, and in no small part due to a relationship with the inextinguishable character of Beauty. However, these various qualities depend upon a weaving of subjectivities - the viewer, the creator, and ultimately the object. As John Berger reminds us, "We never look at one thing; we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves".

In his essay *Ways of Seeing*, Berger expands Benjamin's ideas to look at how our relationships transform the objects which we are looking upon. Like Benjamin, Berger challenges the mystification of art: "the spiritual value of an object... can only be explained in terms of magic and religion. And since neither of these is living force, the art object, the 'work of art', is enveloped in an atmosphere of entirely bogus religiosity. Works of art are discussed and presented as though they were holy relics: relics which are first and foremost evidence of their survival." This un-enspired world is the bed which Modernism chose to lay, and it is not hard to see how a radical shift in consciousness can answer this alienation from the past,

present and future potential of the Art Object. Berger himself says "the world-as-it-is is more than pure objective fact, it includes consciousness" acknowledging our own power to alter our subjective position in relationship to art.

"We are not saying there is nothing left to experience before original works of art except a sense of awe because they have survived... we are not saying original works of art are now useless."

Berger identifies the viewer of Art as the one who is culpable for the use or uselessness of an Art Object (or its reproduced image).

"The real question is to whom does the meaning of art of the past properly belong? To those who can apply it to their own lives, or to a cultural hierarchy of relic specialists?... If the new language of images were used differently, it would, through its use, confer a new kind of power."

Berger acknowledges that our own passivity in our relationship to materiality is what abdicates our power to define our relationship to the past, through the act of seeing. To give meaning to our lives we must become "active agents", but what form does that action take? I would argue that it must take the form of *engagement*. We must enter into a relationship with material, with Art Objects, with their reproductions where those reproductions become recognized as inherently unique. All materials pass through history, and most in some capacity holds a relationship with Human beings. Our responsibility is to acknowledge the subjective experience of these objects. Each one has been held, touched, affected, changed by its passing through a material world. It carries with it a memory that can be accessed only through listening, and witnessing. This is the "knowledge" that all Persons, human and other-than-human, possess. What transforms an object from its static mundane existence into one which can convey this knowledge is our presentness. Only when we see these objects as Subjects do they communicate, which is their inherent "desire", and the reason for their survival. It is our duty, if we wish to transform our relationship with the world, to help these Persons fulfill their needs.

The Benjamin "Aura" is coat of paint applied by a world that forces upon all people, all living things, the earth itself, and certainly human made material, a subject-object relationship. The "annihilation" of this relationship can not occur by climbing to the furthest pole represented by Cartesian mechanistic logic. It can only occur when we begin to witness the "Luminosity" of a subjectivity inherent in all things. This revolutionary co-mingling of social and spiritual liberation, the recognition of materialist realities and those defined by consciousness as not antagonistic but inseparable, this is a real pathway towards peace, justice and a life with meaning. When we look around at our material world, we can begin to see the microcosmic and the macrocosmic relationship between the way we treat our lovers, our homes, our gardens, our collectives, our books, our comrades, our water, our families, our artworks and all persons including ourselves. This world view could be the gift of Harry Hay, the gay gift to society, of a world viewed through the gay window, experienced through a gay consciousness, and related to as one subject to another.

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