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Soaked in Semen and Blood: Gay Men and the Queering of Metaformic Consciousness

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"...all the gatekeepers are going to find their positions again. We cannot tell them where the gates are. They know. If we start to heal ourselves, they will remember. It will kick in." – Malidoma Somi [\[1\]](#)

As a Queer Cultural Theorist and a Gay man, I have spent twenty years thinking and writing in handcuffs. Inside of the Academy, these restraints are called Queer Theory, Post-Colonial Analysis, Post-Modernism and Social Constructivism. I was enthralled with the ideas of queer identity being the product of colonization. My research, and almost everyone else's asked how do we construct our sexual acts and gender presentation and how does society respond. It may seem plain that this is a circular argument; but, oh the romance, how we kissed this discourse and whispered in the ears of Structuralists and Linguists. Queer Theory has been useful in provoking Queer people to think critically about how we posit our cultural forms in relation to the dominant hetero-patriarchy and to interrogate what essentialist traits we might share. But, this constructivist vs. essentialist dialectic leaves us cold. We still seek knowledge and truth about who we are, what our lineage is and where we are going. However, to see ourselves as Shamans, persons who bring something to the culture that it must have to sustain it, we demand a theory that honors our place in the origins of humankind and see us as more than the silhouette cast by homophobia.

My gay brothers and I are ancient gatekeepers of consciousness, pleasure and sustainability. One need only to read Judy Grahn's *Another Mother Tongue*[\[2\]](#), Randy Conner's *Blossom of Bone: Reclaiming the Connections Between Homoeroticism and the Sacred*[\[3\]](#), or *The Gnostic Gospel of Bartholomew* to see how scholars have begun to rediscover the shamanic role of queer people throughout known history. A study of the North American and South American Berdache traditions, the Galli male priestesses of Ancient Rome, or the very contemporary ways of the Hijra in India reveal the potential

moral authority of third gender people within societies. Our position in culture may go unacknowledged, even within Queer communities, but our persistent mannerisms, language, occupations, and sexual desires are a kind of map leading to our past and future. As I will explain, the axiom of a new theology, Metaformic Consciousness, distilled through the lessons of Queer Theory provides, finally, a way out of the dark, a legend to decode the great critical geography of Gay Men's semen, blood and shakti.

The Work of Judy Grahn

I have modeled much of my thinking on the iconoclastic work of Judy Grahn. Grahn's grand work of creative non-fiction, *Another Mother Tongue*, still stands as the primary guide to re-imagining Queer roots. So many people today are considered to be iconoclasts. Anyone who sells many books or albums or achieves high office is called this provocative noun. But, really they are just popular – they have won celebrity. A true iconoclast is literally a smasher of images. From the Greek *eikōn* which means image and *clast* which is small particles of rock or the rubble that you get when you have smashed something[4], the Byzantine emperor Leo III was the first iconoclast who destroyed idols of the church to emphasize the humanity of Christ. Grahn, through her founding of Gay Women's Liberation, her viral poetry, and the development of queer cultural theory (*Another Mother Tongue*) and Metaformic Theory (*Blood, Bread and Roses*) has smashed the holy images of hetero-patriarchy. But, her art of liberation is not just a series of manifestos that fight and leave us with nothing, rather Grahn always gives us new ground to dig in, new ideas about our archetypal origins, personal histories and social movements. I have watched tears roll down the faces of my ghetto-hardened students as Grahn quietly and dispassionately read them the last of "A Woman Is Talking To Death":

I want nothing left of me for you, ho death
except some fertilizer
for the next batch of us
who do not hold hands with you
who do not embrace you
who try not to work for you
or sacrifice themselves or trust
or believe you, ho ignorant
death, how do you know
we happened to you?

wherever our meat hangs on our own bones
for our own use
your pot is so empty
death, ho death
you shall be poor[5]

In my queer cultural circles, there has always been talk that Grahn's work is at least 30 years ahead of the culture, particularly "A Woman Is Talking To Death" written in 1973 and published by The Women's Press Collective in 1974. Proof that Grahn navigated this work by the stars came during the Oscar awards last year when the film *Crash* won for best picture. *Crash*, coming exactly 30 years after "A Woman...", is litigiously similar in tone, story and character.

However, Grahn's project to place women at the center of the formation of culture, *Blood, Bread and Roses, How Menstruation Created the World*[\[6\]](#), was a very difficult text for me to understand when I first read it in 1993. Anxious for a follow-up to *Another Mother Tongue*, I could not accept a menarchal woman-centered origin story steeped in blood stories. I could not place myself inside of Metaformic Consciousness, my body did not fit the thinking and I instantly rejected this work as a wrong turn for Grahn. It was only in 2005, frustrated with the secular dead-end of Queer Theory, marked by Dana Neacsu's brilliant analysis of Queer Theory, Marxism and religion in her essay "The Wrongful Rejection of Big Theory by Feminism and Queer Theory"[\[7\]](#), that I again picked up *Blood, Bread and Roses*, desperate for an origin story that might reconcile Queer folks relationship to culture.

In an interview conducted with Grahn at her home in Palo Alto, I confessed my peevishness with Metaformic Theory and feeling of disconnection. Grahn suggested that I consider how I can "situate" within the theory. She asked if I had a "stake" in it and how I might construct methodology to work with it.[\[8\]](#) The larger question for my work was how Metaformic Theory and Queer Theory might be reconciled and would that project speak to the ways in which gay sex and behaviors helped to create culture.

She suggested that access to Metaformic Consciousness must come from my own body and I began to meditate on my own blood. We discussed anal bleeding from gay sex, the blood of AIDS, and the blood produced by the cuttings, tattooing, and piercing that had become so pervasive within our Queer communities.[\[9\]](#) I began to interrogate my own story for the meanings of my bleeding.

Personal Analysis

The first time that I bled was the night I lost my virginity. I had charmed a doorman at the decadent queer Miami Beach institution known then as the Warsaw Ballroom, a lovely art deco dance hall, into letting me pass through the velvet ropes into the dark, thumping, disco underworld. I was sixteen and sexually active. I had been sucking cock at the beach park and on the boardwalk and fucking other boys in an out-of-the-way men's room in the back of my high school library, but was too afraid to try intercourse as a bottom. I was wearing a white tank top and soft white cotton boxer shorts printed with lipstick kiss marks. I danced to the primal beats and light show till drenched with sweat. Madonna speaking directly to me:

Look around everywhere you turn is heartache
It's everywhere that you go (look around)
You try everything you can to escape
The pain of life that you know (life that you know)

When all else fails and you long to be
Something better than you are today
I know a place where you can get away
It's a dance floor, and here's what it's for, so

All you need is your own imagination
So use it that's what it's for (that's what it's for)
Go inside, for your finest inspiration
Your dreams will open the door (open up the door)[\[10\]](#)

I collapsed into a sofa, ice cold Heineken in hand, in a dark back corner of the club, whole, filled with a sense of possibility and totally humming with energy from the connection felt to so many men like me on the dance floor. Moments later a dark skinned, dark eyed, black haired Cuban beauty approached and sat on my lap straddling me, wearing only a pair of hoop earrings and bikini briefs. He looked me in the eyes, grabbed the back of my head and shoved his tongue in my mouth. He tasted of gin and cocaine and freedom. I knew that I wanted him inside of me.

I had passed through one gate that night and found myself in a safe temple of gay pleasure and seclusion. I wanted to complete my initiation and forever give myself to this community; my new anthem was pounding through the club's sound system, "what you find-ah, what you feel now, what you know-a, to be real."[\[11\]](#) I was going to be real and I was going to have this man. We left the club and went out to the beach. He lubed up my ass with suntan lotion and entered me. I still think of him and this night when I smell the mothball and coconut aroma of suntan lotion. I was in a shakti state and felt only pleasure as he fucked me hard and deep pushing me into the sand and chaffing my stomach and face. I came on the beach in unison with him as I felt his penis swell inside of me and his moaning became a growl. We finished and he walked off towards the moon along the ripple line of the waves on the beach. I watched him go as quickly as he had appeared earlier in the club.

I was prepared for my feelings. I knew that I would fall in love with the first man that I gave my boy-pussy to. I saw him as a brother, lover, father, angel, god, devil, shaman, and trade. I was not prepared for the blood, though. I picked up my tank top to clean up with. I wiped off my own cum smeared across my belly and cleaned my bottom. The shirt was soaked in semen and blood and lotion. A small smattering of blood on the sand glimmered almost blue in the moon light. I walked into the ocean, sobbing, and bathed in the cold salty water, starred at the moon and wondered how I could ever understand this bleeding that made me feel like I had become a man.

Parallel Menstruation

It might be possible for Gay Men alone to romanticize this type of bleeding. The menstrual blood of women, bound to birthing, the moon and the tides may be easier to hyperbolize into mythology and honor as the center piece of reproductive culture creation. Yet, it is the very non-reproductive nature of Gay Men's bleeding that makes it romantic. Gay anal sex is pure pleasure, bleeding as "shakti"[\[12\]](#) (not trauma) and creativity without a biological goal – simply magic and ritual. Anal bleeding from gay sex fits neatly into Grahn's metaformic concept of a parallel ritual to menstruation. It is trickster in intent and wildly steeped in male separation from the mother. If we take the work of radical anthropologist Chris Knight seriously, we might imagine the males of a tribe - 300,000 years ago - during the period of the new moon out on a hunt engaging in body painting, piercing ritual and intercourse with each other to produce bleeding from the anus during a "no meat, no sex... sex-strike."[\[13\]](#) I say these kinds of sex acts are trickster because they are not tied to the survival or economy of the tribe and they destabilize the cultural code of the sex strike. The men act out a thievery of the sex that is being withheld by the women *and* steal their menstruation. This bleeding is wholly non-reproductive: it does not produce meat, offspring or rule of law.

Commonality

If we utilize the simplest definition of queer that it is any behavior that operates outside of the social norms of the society then we must also view bleeding from body modification in the West and the blood of AIDS as queer blood. To use Metaformic Consciousness as a tool to understand the development of Queer Cultural forms it is necessary to create a framework to situate Queer Theory inside of Metaformic Theory. Further, I will argue that the philosophy of Metaformia is the abstraction that can propel Queer Theory into a "Post-Queer Theory"[\[14\]](#) or Consciousness, based in commonality that might offer real insight into the direction of culture. By commonality I mean critiquing human development from a subject/subject consciousness, leaving behind the oppositional or subject/object consciousness that rose with the patriarchy and was enshrined by Christianity.

Harry Hay, considered the founder of the Radical Faerie movement of which I am a part, while sitting with me days before his death in 2002 described subject/SUBJECT consciousness:

Confronted with the loving-sharing consensus of subject-SUBJECT relationships all authoritarianism must vanish. The fairy family circle, co-joined in the shared vision of non-possessive love which is the granting to any other and all others that total space wherein each may grow and soar to his own freely selected, full

potential reaching out to one another subject-to-SUBJECT, becomes for the first time in history the true working model of a sharing consensus. The Hausa people of West Africa say that the men and women of the village who relate to each other have, each one, an eye in their soul by which they perceive themselves, however dimly, on the right path in the dark and perilous realm of spirit. But the souls of those men among them who relate to other men, and women who relate to other women, have two eyes! This two-eyes feature, different from the way Eurocentric Imperialisms might misinterpret it, bestows neither special powers nor privileges – instead it lays upon the Two-Eyed ones a sacred responsibility. For Two-Eyed ones have the capacity of vision to penetrate the dread gloom of the spirit world to discern the path that their group, their community should follow to discover the next resting place, where they all will be temporarily safe and nurtured, on the spirit journey all must take. Subject-SUBJECT way of viewing the world is queer people's most valuable contribution to the greater society. By empathizing with all people, relating to each other as equal to equal, society will change drastically and social injustice will be eradicated.[15]

When we can give up the notion of queer = transgressive and view all people as queer we will have succeeded in creating true commonality and we can transform the problematic discourses of racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, and otherness into new conversations that have practical political implications for the creation of social justice. In *Really Reading Gertrude Stein*, Grahn develops Stein's notion of "the entire text as a field in which every element mattered as much as any other" into a broader social ideal:

Using the idea of commonality means standing exactly where you are and/or your group (of whatever current definition) are, and noticing what part of you overlaps with others who are standing exactly where they are. Commonality differs from "universality" by having infinite numbers of changeable centers, where "universal" by definition and by usage, has only one – "uni," one. When universality is the principle, we search another's work for that portion we can identify with – and dismiss the remainder as not relevant (because not "ours"). When commonality is the principle, we search for what overlaps with ourselves, then learn what we can from the remainder and leave it alone with respect as a whole that belongs to, that is, is centered in, someone else, not "us." [16]

Commonality offers an antidote to the problematic ahistorical discourse of Queer Theory and Identity Politics; a new foundational position to deal with mass politics.

Queer Theory and Metaformic Theory in Relationship

The foremost hypothesis of Queer Theory is performativity. Judith Butler, the queer philosopher and feminist theorist in *Critically Queer* describes performativity as "...the reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and

constrains.”[17] The concept places emphasis on the manners in which identity is passed or brought to life through discourse. Performative acts are types of authoritative speech. This can only happen and be enforced through the law or norms of the society though. These statements, just by speaking them, carry out a certain action and exhibit a certain level of power. Butler insists that gender is an act that has been rehearsed, much like a script, and we, as the actors make this script a reality over and over again by performing these actions.

Butler understands gender not as an expression of what one is, rather as something that one does. According to her theory, homosexuality and heterosexuality are not fixed categories. A person is merely in a condition of performing heterosexuality or performing homosexuality. Performativity is helpful for understanding the ways in which identity is constructed in our daily lives but does not attempt to explain how these systems were created. Grahn’s “body of language”[18] conceptions: entrainment and *cosmetikos*, offer another and deeper way of understanding how performativity (which we might simply call ritual) developed:

The body arts that taught us how to think and act as human beings underlie our everyday lives. We are so dependent on them we hardly give them a thought. *Cosmetikos* gave us the body paint, ornamentation, and clothing that so strikingly differentiate us from other creatures... Most important, *cosmetikos* gave us the ideas with which we regulate our bodies, chiefly in terms of paired opposites that are also polarities of the menstrual cycle (bleeding/not bleeding) and the lunar cycle (dark moon/light moon).[19]

Metaformic consciousness provides us a tool to understand how language creates object and identity. The elaboration of *cosmetikos* over thousands of years of human ritual is the engine that drives the linguistic construction of performativity. Grahn’s idea of substitution as a menstrual creation principle provides the flexibility needed to understand how “men’s blood transformed ritually into ‘menstrual’ blood through parallel rites.”[20] Therefore men’s blood rituals, like women’s, also have germinated culture. Queer theory would suggest that anal bleeding is simply men performing homosexuality.

If Queer people can understand their bleeding as metaformic, new possibilities open up for creating further substitutions towards social justice. Today, it is unthinkable that the patriarchal men’s blood ritual of war could be replaced by anything. But the spread of Metaformic Consciousness could create an opening for the honoring of gay men’s blood rituals; what if the need for the blood ritual of war could be satisfied by the anal bleeding of gay men for pleasure?

Queer Theory and Metaformic Theory blend at other crucial sites. The mechanisms of Colonial Power or hegemony are described metaformically as “necroforms.”[21] Or literally, dead forms. Queer metaforms have been surviving through the use of permeable underground critical geography for thousands of years. Today, we have a proliferation of Queer identities, cultural forms and consciousness in the open, in media and discourse.

This reappearance of Queer forms at a moment when the old metaforms (necroforms) are inching us towards the annihilation of the ecosystem is a premonition of the needed switch in rituals to sustain existence.

Queered Thievery

With the proliferation of Queer rituals comes the subversion of the necroforms by what I call **queered thievery**. Rather than a ritual theft of men from women as during the last great transition from Magna Mater to Christ, the queer rituals are a direct insertion of queer forms into the necroform. Queered thievery reverses the idea of ritual theft and ultimately demoralizes the necroform: queered thievery is a Trojan Horse. The great gay blood sacrifice of AIDS in the 1980's was the real start of the subversion. The culture could not resist – it had to slow down at the accident and look.

The blood sacrifice of gay men placed blood and queers to be linked again in the collective consciousness. Rather than a curse from God, as proclaimed by Jerry Falwell and others in the American Evangelical Movement, Gay men as “gatekeepers” [\[22\]](#) proved to be sensitive to the disease and provided society a time and body buffer, a sort of early warning system typical of Shamans, to develop treatments. Gay men were again elevated to a Christ representation of suffering, bleeding sores, and emaciation. The same queer form that marked the ancient male Galli priestesses and their Attis rituals, before this image was appropriated by Christianity.

Since then the mass culture has become addicted to queer cultural forms, demanding more commodification of our images. The global capital/media system that props up the feeble necroform is increasingly permeable and at risk from queer penetration due to its systemic need for ever greater numbers of consumers, and never-ending pursuit of what is cool, in-style, or controversial.

Queered thievery in the service of commonality holds the promise of delivering us from an all out collapse of the planet. Queers must embrace a shamanic role, the role of gatekeeper for this crossing to occur. With the expansion of Queer forms and trans identities the crossing will be accomplished at the site of individual bodies.

Conclusion

There is a great amount of work to be done to decode how our individual sub-cultures are metaformically rooted and how we can change our community rituals in the service of a sustainable future that promotes social justice. Grahn's recent long poem, “*Women are Tired of the Ways Men Bleed*” reasons:

*imagine if we knew our vampire hearts
would drink any blood offered, even the blood of peace?*

Imagine if we undertook the bleeding consciously
offering the earth's many peaceful bloods
with intent to omit violence, celebrating
blood of life, and caring, and connection,
bitter blood of vengeance converted into sweet blood
of it's ok to love
the cosmos and its patterns
as we pretend not to notice how eagerly
the fiery vampire tongue slips out of us
to drink and drink the red elixir
cedar vinegar cinnamon honeypot saffron
until how soon we have lost interest in war and woundedness
imagine unfamiliar satisfactions setting in
filling our breasts with maple syrup swellings

constructing rituals that account for violent emotions
discharging them appropriately, artfully,
dominating ourselves but not each other,
leaving children and trees in peace
instead of pieces
filling our hearts with luscious feelings,
and no vengeance to exact
on anyone, not even the Mother, not even God.[\[23\]](#)

I have attempted to begin this work for my Gay brothers, feeling situated appropriately to do that work. Others are needed: Trans folk of all kinds, Gender Queers, Biker Dykes, Eco-Feminist Straight Men, Cyberqueers, and those positioned at thousands of different points on the matrix of identity.

Because of the need for so many to engage in this liminal work so soon I must advocate for us to frame this discussion as Metaformic Consciousness, akin to theology, rather than Metaformic Theory, which connotes that we are seeking to prove some material fact. As gatekeepers, the Queer Theorist and Metaformic Theorist must seek out and engage with artists and cultural workers to preserve queer and metaformic memory. Judith Halberstam, Drag King and Queer thinker, suggests that:

...the organic intellectual undermines the role of the traditional intellectual who serves to legitimize and authorize elite political interests, in subcultures where academics might labor side by side with artists, the "historical bloc" can easily describe an alliance between the minority academic and the minority subculture producer. Where such alliances exist academics can play a big role in the construction of queer archives, and queer memory, and, furthermore, queer

academics can and some should participate in the ongoing project of recoding queer culture and interpreting it and circulating a sense of its multiplicity and sophistication. The more intellectual records we have of queer culture, the more we contribute to the project of claiming for the subculture the radical cultural work that either gets absorbed into or claimed by mainstream media.[\[24\]](#)

At the dawn of the post-queer age, we can predict a further elaboration of the notion of queer into a cyborg future. Consciousness must move from a male or female body-based axiom to one where the body is a subject for designing rather than an object of desire. Trans folks have begun to prepare us for this crossing. The elaboration of men's ritual theft, to male priestesses, to the gay love story of Gilgamesh and Enkidu that is the foundation of patriarchy, to the suppression of queer forms, to the reemergence of gay forms in the AIDS blood sacrifice, have set the stage for the next great drama of human development.

The impacts of this next crossing on culture are unpredictable. To be sure, we will continue to experience braided evolution, cosmetikos, thieveries and crossings. It is vital to spread metaformic consciousness now as the origins of culture will become increasingly difficult to comprehend as we move deeper into a cyborg reality.

[\[1\]](#) Bert Hoff, *Gays: Guardians of the Gates, An Interview with Malidoma Somi*, originally appeared in *M.E.N.*, September 1993, <http://www.menweb.org/somegay.htm>.

[\[2\]](#) Judy Grahn, *Another Mother Tongue: Gay Words, Gay Worlds* (Boston: Beacon, 1984).

[\[3\]](#) Randy Conner, *Blossom of Bone: Reclaiming the Connections Between Homoeroticism and the Sacred* (San Francisco: Harper, 1993)..

[\[4\]](#) *Funk & Wagnalls New Practical Standard Dictionary*, 8th ed., s.v. "iconoclast."

[\[5\]](#) Judy Grahn, "A Woman is Talking to Death"(Oakland: The Women's Press Collective, 1974), 12.

[\[6\]](#) Judy Grahn, *Blood, Bread and Roses, How Menstruation Created the World* (Boston: Beacon, 1993).

[\[7\]](#) Dana Neacsu, "The Wrongful Rejection of Big Theory (Marxism) by Feminism and Queer Theory: A Brief Debate" (May 9, 2005). Working Paper 616. <http://law.bepress.com/expresso/eps/616>

[\[8\]](#) Judy Grahn, interview by the author, October 17, 2006.

- [9] Judy Grahn, interview by the author, February 20, 2007.
- [10] Madonna, *I'm Breathless*. Sire Records. 1990.
- [11] Cheryl Lynn, *Gotta To Be Real*. Columbia Records. 1978.
- [12] Judy Grahn, "Are Goddesses Metaformic Constructs? An Application of Metaformic Theory to Menarche Celebrations and Goddess Rituals of Kerala and Contiguous States in South India" (PhD diss., California Institute of Integral Studies, 1999), 81-89.
- [13] Chris Knight, "The Human Revolution" (provisional draft prepared for the Alice V. and David H. Morris Symposium on the Evolution of Language at Stony Brook University, New York, October 14, 2005).
- [14] Gregory Gajus, "A Manifesto in Defiance of the Lavender Tower: Towards a Post-Queer Identity, Theory and Consciousness" (MA thesis, in preparation, New College of California, 2007).
- [15] Harry Hay, interview by the author, October 19, 2002.
- [16] Judy Grahn, *Really Reading Gertrude Stein* (Freedom, California: The Crossing Press, 1989), 8.
- [17] Judith Butler, "From *Critically Queer*," in *Identity: A Reader*, ed. Paul du Gay (London: Sage Publications, 2001) 108.
- [18] Judy Grahn, interview by the author, May 3, 2007.
- [19] Grahn, *Blood*, 149.
- [20] *Ibid.*, 275.
- [21] *Ibid.*, 266.
- [22] Hoff, Gays: *Guardians*.
- [23] Judy Grahn, "Women are Tired of the Ways Men Bleed" (2007).
- [24] Judith Halberstam, "What's that Smell: Queer Temporalities and Subcultural Lives," *Public Sentiments* 2, no. 1 (2003).

