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I'M NOT THE MAN I USED TO BE

Sex, HIV, and Cultural "Responsibility" 89277402b9d4618a96cf8dc1a0d239e7
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The cost of safety is to deny bodily pleasure.
—Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Sexual Politics*

Eros is a force that culture has always tried to control. For the idea of "social order" itself to exist, desire must be controlled. —Urvashi Vaid, *Virtual Equality*

In September 2003 an arrest warrant was issued for Gary Cox, deputy chief operating officer for the City of Atlanta. He was charged with, and subsequently indicted for, pandering, soliciting of sodomy, and sexual battery. The latter charge was a misdemeanor; however, the initial two were felony charges because Cox's accuser was a minor. This individual, sixteen-year-old Greg Martin, claimed that in August of that year he had arrived at the Greyhound bus station in Atlanta. His connecting bus to Michigan had been delayed, forcing him to remain at the station for several hours. Having no money for food, Martin approached Cox, who was awaiting the arrival of his nephew. Cox said that he had no money on his person but offered to take Martin to his home to acquire some. Testifying during the trial, Martin stated that while he was at Cox's home, Cox offered him \$100 if Cox

could perform oral sex on him. Martin rejected the offer. Cox made a counter-offer of \$50 for Martin to disrobe. Martin refused and demanded that Cox return him to the Greyhound station. Having arrived back at the station, Cox touched Martin's genital area and instructed him not to tell anyone. He gave Martin \$25.

The jury deliberated for one hour prior to finding Cox guilty of all charges. The judge sentenced him to seven years in prison, stipulating that he serve two years in house and be placed on probation for the remaining five. On the day the verdict was read, Mayor Shirley Franklin fired Cox, who had been on unpaid leave since his arrest.

The action was entirely unplanned.

I was in Cancun attending a conference. I had had way too much to drink at the conference's opening reception and was now stumbling back to my hotel. The walk was not too daunting; all I had to do was follow one appreciably well-lit boulevard while trying not to let the signs warning of possible alligators register too much in my consciousness.

Midway through the trek, I noticed a slightly concealed path leading from the main road to a pier overlooking the lagoon. Never one to pass up a sightseeing opportunity, I left the road and walked down the dirt path to the pier, carefully brushing aside the tree branches obscuring the trail. When I made it to the pier, I realized I was not alone. A figure had cast a line off the pier and was awaiting a bite. He turned in my direction, frowned at the intrusion, and turned away. I positioned myself away from him on the other side of the pier and gazed at downtown Cancun off in the distance. I did not think about the contrast between the relatively squat buildings in front of me and the sleek high-rise resorts behind me. I did not think about the paper I was presenting the next morning. Instead, I thought about how much scotch, gin, and tequila I had imbibed in a very short period of time and how good it felt to be alive. I could be, do, and have anything I wanted, and in that moment, I wanted him.

I abruptly turned away from the lights of downtown Cancun and approached him.

"¿Perdóneme; habla inglés?" I inquired, as if I would know what to say next if he replied in the affirmative.

"No," came the response with nary a glance in my direction.

I saw my right hand stealthily reach for this individual's package. Lucidity intervened as I forced myself to realize that my hand was not acting on its own; I was causing this to happen. I made contact.

"No." He pushed my hand away.

I sighed in frustration at this obstruction and, as if schooled in the act, reached into my pocket to extract a bill. I held it so that he could see the denomination and pushed it into the hand not holding the fishing rod. I made contact. Two hundred pesos, or twenty U.S. dollars, allowed me to. Shortly thereafter, I dropped to my knees. The money continued working in my favor for one, two, however many minutes, until he stiffened and pushed me away. I looked up — this was the first time I saw his face — and saw him gazing anxiously toward the main road. A man and a woman were staring at us through the branches. Neither my friend nor I moved. Eventually, the man said something to the woman that made her laugh. I watched them briefly as they turned away and traveled in the direction of, I can only hope, the alligators.

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Having assessed the situation, he moved to the other side of the pier which was not visible from the road. He lowered his shorts past his knees and stood with his back to the lagoon, facing the Hotel Zone. He still held the fishing rod in one hand. He beckoned me over.

It did not take long to finish. His demeanor did not change even when he came. For the second time, I looked up into his face as I swallowed. I saw neither contentment, nor surprise, nor satisfaction. I discerned tolerance. That is all.

Afterward, I felt awkward, not knowing what to do or how to act. Recalling my mother's insistence on always extending common courtesy, I uttered "Muchas gracias" as I careened back toward the main road. Upon my arrival at my hotel, the bellhop smiled and touched his hat.

"I hope you had a nice evening, Señor."

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I managed a weak smile as I walked past, trying to figure out how he could so cavalierly ignore the scarlet letter "P" emblazoned on my shirt.

I had barely made it to the elevator when what I had done dawned on me. As I was whisked to my floor, I replayed the events in my head. When the doors opened, I walked to my room with them still on my mind. I spent the next hour focusing on my fifteen-minute escapade: I wondered why I had allowed it to happen. I wondered about the two witnesses. I worried about Mexican penal law. Sitting alone in a hotel room in Cancun that I could barely afford, I realized I had done something that had brought me pleasure despite its illegality. It made me feel good, and it brought harm to no one, I thought. So why should it not happen again? And why could I not orchestrate events so that it would happen again?

Sleep came easily.

In November 2004 Gary Wayne Carriker was charged in Fayette County, Georgia, thirty miles south of the city of Atlanta, with having consensual sex with an individual between December 2003 and May 2004 while not telling this individual of his HIV-positive status. After posting bond, Carriker returned to his studies at Emory Medical School, where he was a fourth-year student. A few months later, in April 2005, Carriker was arrested in Fulton County, where Atlanta is located, and charged with two felony counts of reckless conduct. Two men asserted that Carriker had had sex with them while not apprising them of his HIV-positive status. One of the men claimed that Carriker had participated in consensual oral sex with him throughout the month of January 2005; the other indicated that Carriker had engaged in consensual oral and anal sex with him between June and September 2004.

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In November 2005 Carriker entered a guilty plea to correspond with the first charge of felony reckless conduct in Fayette County. The judge sentenced him to ten years in prison, with the stipulation that he serve two. The balance of the sentence would be served on probation, and he was also mandated to undergo counseling. During the initial two years of his probationary period, Carriker was required to honor a 10 p.m. curfew as well as fulfill five hundred hours of community service with an AIDS service organization. He was expelled from Emory Medical School and ordered to reimburse scholarship funds to that school as well as to his undergraduate institution, the United States Air Force Academy. He voluntarily relinquished his commission as an Air Force Officer. Later that month, Carriker entered a guilty plea in Fulton County for the two indictments for reckless conduct there. His accusers testified that they did not think Carriker should receive additional prison time, especially since he informed them of his HIV-positive status, albeit after the acts. The judge agreed, sentencing him, despite the prosecutor's insistence on a harsher penalty, to ten years—two in prison, eight on probation—just as the judge in Fayette County had, with the sentences to run concurrently. None of the individuals contracted HIV from Carriker.

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It happened seamlessly, almost as if it were meant to be.

Summer was waning, although you would never know it this particular night in Chicago, where the temps were in the 70s even at 4 a.m.

I was returning home from a party at a friend's house where I had had quite a bit to drink. Since it was such a nice night, I opted to take a quick stroll up Milwaukee Avenue. This meant that after disembarking from the train, I did not exit

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at the turnstile adjacent to my apartment; rather, I walked to the other end of the platform and exited from there.

There were few pedestrians out at that time of morning, although the occasional taxi meandered by. I reveled in the silence of this block that in the daytime was abuzz with energy. As soon as I saw him standing under the awning of the Washington Mutual at the end of the block, I knew what was about to happen. I walked past him and heard him call after me “¿Cerveza?” I crossed the street and turned in his direction when I had reached the other side. One glance was all it took. He followed me across Milwaukee and accepted the twenty dollar bill I offered him. For a split second I contemplated the observational reach of the cameras outside of Washington Mutual, my bank, but then I cast those thoughts aside. As I walked toward my building, he wordlessly fell into step behind me.

I entered the courtyard of my apartment building, and he followed suit. I keyed into the building and held the door for him. We walked up the three flights of stairs to my apartment. As soon as we entered, I led the way to the kitchen, where I frowned and said “¿Cerveza? No más.” (I felt a pang of regret in that I did not know how to say “I don’t have any” in Spanish. I don’t drink beer; thus, stating that there was no more, when there had never been any in my apartment, felt morally wrong.) I reached into the cupboard and extracted two glasses and a bottle of rum I’d picked up in Puerto Rico not long before. This satisfied both of us.

And then it happened. The TV cast its glow on us as we maneuvered on the couch. I marveled at the swiftness with which he put the condom on much more so than the fact that he put it on. And then it was over.

I closed the door behind him, presuming he would know how to find his way back to the courtyard, then the street, then the bank, and then wherever. I made my way back to the couch. As the sun came up, I closed my eyes and slept.

It was entirely uncomplicated.

Both the Cox and Carriker cases are fitting points of departure for an examination of not only the politics of HIV disclosure but the contexts (or social spaces) in which that disclosure does or does not occur. Although Cox was HIV positive, this fact was barely reported in the media and was not focused on during the trial proceedings. The central issue was his propositioning of a minor individual. The charges against Carriker, in contrast, pertained wholly to the nondisclosure of his seropositive status. In his analysis of the Carriker case, “Policing Positives,” the journalist Kai Wright traces the history of partner notification laws in the United States:

Western efforts at disease control have been firmly rooted in paternalism and policing from their inception. The German doctor Johann Peter Frank first spelled out the state's responsibility—and authority—for maintaining a healthy citizenry in a series of groundbreaking, turn-of-the-19th century volumes, aptly titled *A System of Complete Medical Police*. It was a soup-to-nuts guide on what people needed to do to stay healthy, and how the state should encourage that behavior. Predictably, moralism was a recurring theme—one infamous section urged local officials to place time limits on dances that seemed too erotic, like the waltz.

That top-down perspective on prevention has persisted, and it informed government's initial response to HIV. . . . [W]hen, in 1990, Congress passed the Ryan White CARE Act, which is now the federal government's primary vehicle for funding AIDS services[, lawmakers] included a provision demanding that every state have a criminal code that allows it to prosecute a person's failure to disclose an HIV diagnosis to someone who may be put at risk by it.

Ultimately, for all the talk about sending messages to people who are positive, the real message of criminalization laws may be to everyone else: this troubling and complicated epidemic isn't your problem, it's that of monstrous outsiders who we can simply wall off from regular folks' lives.

The history of AIDS criminalization laws in the United States is the history of marginalization, demonization, and scapegoating. It is also a history that has precedent in other countries.¹ In essence, the history of AIDS criminalization laws is an instructive one based on the rigorous disciplining and punishment of ostensibly deviant bodies.

On an April evening following the uncomplicated September night, I found myself walking down Listopada Street in Bielsko-Biala, a city in southwestern Poland. I had moved to Bielsko that January to teach cultural studies classes at the university and to undertake disability-related research at Auschwitz and Birkenau.

I had been drinking this evening at my favorite restaurant, Mimoza. Having polished off a trout, a side of leafy-green szpinak, and the better part of a bottle of red wine, I knew what I needed.

As I walked down Listopada, my thoughts turned to a conversation I had had in Warsaw with a friend a few weeks prior:

"I've taken to prowling the streets looking for men to pay to have sex with me."

"You what?!"

"You heard me."

"But why?"

"Why not?"

"Because it's prostitution, and you can go to jail for it."

"Actually, I think the legal term is 'pandering.' But in any event, you don't have to be so negative."

"Christopher! How often do you do this?"

"Oh, every once in awhile. The first time was in Mexico, and it happened again when I was living in Chicago, and I tried to make it happen last night here in Warsaw over by the train station but the guy freaked out and ran away. It was really dramatic, too. I mean, he was the one who came up and asked me for money. But then he got all weird when I told him I'd give him some if he let me suck him off. I don't understand some people."

"This happened last night?! Here? I left you at a bar. Why couldn't you just pick someone up there? Or go to the sex club? You certainly know where it is."

"True. But it's not the same. And don't get me wrong; I still have standards. Like last night while walking through the train station, a guy approached me and asked for money. I could have taken him back with me to the hotel, but he looked drugged out. So I declined. Surely there must be something said for that."

"Yeah, but I don't know what. In any event, I think you should stop it. What happens if you get beaten up?"

"But I haven't."

"But you could."

"But I haven't."

"You should stop."

"I know I should stop. But I can't. It feels nice to be in control."

That night on Listopada, I went home alone.

The next afternoon, I was walking down the same street, having spent the better part of the morning sipping tea and reading Trollope, when I felt a tug on my arm. I glanced over to see a dark-skinned individual looking at me inquisitively. All around us, the locals tried to disguise their amazement at the sight of two nonwhite people on a street in southwestern Poland. "What's going on in our world?" they most likely thought to themselves. "I'm going to have him," I vowed to myself.

We walked back to my flat near the City Hall. As we entered the foyer, the landlord's son did a double take. I greeted him more cheerfully than usual and entered my flat uninhibitedly.

We shared a bottle of Zubrowka vodka and, despite the presence of three chairs, sat on my bed, talking for some time. He spoke no English but I knew enough Polish to grasp most of what he said. He was a security guard at a bank in a small town outside of Bielsko and also a bouncer in a club in that same town. Although he was shorter than me, he was heavily built and carried himself with evident ease.

"What happens if you get beaten up?"

"But I haven't."

"But you could."

He told me he was from Romania. It seemed more of a confession than an addition to the conversation. Then he explained that he was a Roma gypsy and that Polish people tend to look down on these individuals. "Not me," I said. "Not me."

I noticed that he drank faster than I did (which rarely happens), so I was quick on the refills. Our conversation was interesting, and I tried to act animated as I talked about myself and listened to him, but I had something else on my mind.

An hour after our arrival, I noticed his movements had slowed. I allowed the conversation to taper off. He closed his eyes. I quietly stood up, turned off the overhead light, and sat back down next to him. His eyes fluttered open. "Co to jest?" he asked, gesturing toward the darkened light. "It's okay" I assured him. I placed my hand on his crotch. "No" he said, displacing it. I reached into my pocket and pulled out a fifty zloty note. I extended it to him. He looked at it for what seemed like a very long time. Then he sighed, took the fifty (eighteen U.S. dollars), stood up, walked to the center of the room, took out his wallet, carefully folded the note, placed it into his wallet, and then repositioned himself next to me. The orchestrations, while impressive, did not obscure the realization that he was mine.

He moved well, doing things that I did not expect him to do or to allow me to do. Toward the end our eyes met. To my surprise, he leaned in and kissed me, passionately, lingeringly.

When it was over, he once again became his talkative self. He wanted to have a drink in the city center. I declined. "I'm tired now, and I must travel to the United States tomorrow for a quick visit. I need to rest." He seemed genuinely sorry to leave.

The experience was nice, but I could have done without the kiss, which I enjoyed a little too much.

Laws change to take into account modifications in cultural norms. The Cox case bears this out. During the course of his trial, the prosecution unsuccessfully attempted to include evidence of an earlier arrest. In 1991 Cox had been arrested at a rest stop in Gwinnett County, which is adjacent to Atlanta and includes many

of the city's suburbs. He had been arrested for propositioning an undercover Georgia Department of Transportation officer. He entered a "no contest" plea to the charge and was issued a fine of five hundred dollars and a one-year suspended sentence. During the Cox and Martin trial in 2004, the judge refused to hear this evidence on the grounds that the more recent case involved soliciting a minor for pay, while the previous one involved an adult with no offer of remuneration; and in 1998 the Georgia Supreme Court invalidated the state's sodomy law, allowing the act to occur when it involved consensual, noncommercial sex between adults in private.

The kind of jurisprudential rethinking evidenced in the Georgia Supreme Court's decision in 1998 is an incentive to reevaluate the state's AIDS criminalization law, the same law that penalized Carriker. One major problem with the current law is its failure to distinguish among types of sexual practice. The Centers for Disease Control (headquartered, ironically, in Atlanta, in the same county in which Carriker was convicted) has differentiated among sex acts along the lines of risk. Performing oral sex on an individual—which Carriker did and which Cox offered to do—does not carry the same risk as anal or vaginal sex. Nonetheless, the acts are prosecuted in the same manner. This is indicative of a failure in policy. The law should be updated to reflect biomedical knowledge about risk and transmission.

The time had come to leave Poland. The train was scheduled to depart Bielsko at 3:45 a.m., arriving in Warsaw at 8 a.m. From there I would fly to Zurich for a conference. After that I would begin my new life as a PhD student in England.

I had spent the day saying goodbye to friends, cleaning up my flat, and reading Wilkie Collins. Now, at 2 a.m., all I had to do was take out the trash, give the flat one final once over, and allow time to pass.

The street was as quiet as usual; the air crisp, courtesy of a cool mountain breeze. I deposited the bag into the trash receptacle at the end of the street and turned back in the direction of the flat. I saw him watching me. He was walking across the street in the same direction I was headed in. Without hesitation, I approached him and flashed the fifty zloty note. I gestured for him to follow me, holding onto the note. We entered the foyer and proceeded into the flat. Once inside, I closed the door, tossed the keys and the note on the table, and dropped to my knees. I unzipped him and put him in my mouth. "I like women," he protested weakly. He spoke in English but I did not pause to ponder this. I kept moving, working on his balls now. "I like women," he reiterated when I indicated that he should lower his pants. "I believe

you,” I mumbled, appreciating how readily he complied with my unspoken demand while simultaneously placing his hand on the back of my head to guide me.

Before long, I was on the bed with him beside me. He was clothed, although his shirt was pulled up and his pants were pulled in the opposite direction. I wasn’t wearing anything. I began to finish myself off. As I did so, I noticed him watching my technique. This was a turn-on: a man who “likes women” lying with me on a bed and watching me jack off. I came quickly, placing my mouth on his neck as I did. He did not protest, nor did he take his eyes off of the spectacle I was creating. I was very proud of myself.

He took his time buckling up. Then he took a spin around the flat. He seemed quite comfortable and began to strike up a conversation. I half participated, explaining that I would be leaving for Zurich shortly. I was still reveling in the impossibly simple seduction, while also thinking back to a conversation I had had earlier that summer with Darek, an individual I’d dated for a short time.

“You pick men up on the streets here in Bielsko? How? It’s impossible.”

“It’s not as difficult as you might think. I mean, if you think about it, that’s how we met.”

“What are you talking about? We met because Jacek introduced us.”

“And I met Jacek one afternoon when I got off the train and walked past him on my way home. I’m telling you, it’s simple. People just want to be with someone, to touch someone, for a short time. I provide that with no strings attached. What’s wrong with that?”

When it came time for me to leave, I walked out with my baggage. He preceded me into the hallway. I placed my baggage on the floor and locked the door. I explained that I had to go upstairs to place the key in my landlady’s mail slot. Without waiting for a response, I dashed up the stairs. On my way back down, I heard the front door slam; the echo reverberated throughout the hallway and the stairwell. I wondered if he had taken the bag with my laptop in it or the one with my passport. He had claimed neither. I can only guess that he had had enough for one night and was on his way home to fail to remember. I picked up my baggage and headed into the night. It wasn’t until I was an hour into *The Woman in White* on the train to Warsaw that I realized I still had the fifty zloty note.

In the 1980s and 1990s, social spaces in parts of the United States underwent a dramatic change from relatively liberal environments wherein pleasure could be sought and found to increasingly staid environments wherein pleasure might be sought but at the risk of not being found and incarceration. The prime example

of this sanitizing of public spaces is New York City's Times Square, often referred to as the crossroads of the world. Whereas Times Square had previously toggled between a destination for families (the Broadway Theater district and the host of hotels and restaurants surrounding the district) and a destination for sexual hookups (peep shows and strip joints), by the twenty-first century, the white-washing of Times Square was complete. The crossroads of the world had erected barriers at its borders, which aimed to keep sexual perversion out.

In *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*, Samuel Delany comments on the sociocultural shift that occurred in Times Square in the late twentieth century:

As a sign system, what the neon visibility of sex shops and peep shows and porn theatres signaled to people passing by was: Unattached men (or men whose attachments are, however temporarily, not uppermost in their mind), this is the place for you to spend money. Such men have traditionally spent freely and fast. Though some of them are gay, as we all know most are not. Remove those signs in an area where once they were prominent, and it's like reversing the signal: Now it means that men *with* attachments can spend their money here — which is often men with a great deal more money, men who want to spend it in business. (95; emphasis in original)

The Times Square of the pre-1980s allowed men of all races, ages, and sexual orientations to come together. But once it was determined that the site was not honoring its potential as *enough* of a revenue-producing force, it had to be re-invented: “the city wanted to get the current owners out of those movie houses, ‘J/O Clubs’ (Jack Off Clubs, advertised as just that on the marquees), and peep shows, and open up the sites for developers” (Delany 91). But where were the patrons of these venues supposed to go? In the 1980s and particularly in the pre-combination therapy 1990s, an era in which AIDS scapegoating often operated in an unabated fashion, this was not a question that warranted discussion, let alone a comprehensive response from city officials. Out of sight, out of mind, conventional wisdom dictated.

Arguably, for those who did patronize the now-vanished sex clubs and movie theaters in Times Square, the shuttering of those establishments did not create a catastrophe insofar as access to each other. Public parks and washrooms retained their appeal, and later the Internet would also facilitate the search for casual sexual encounters. However, the loss of the Times Square sexual free zone

should not be casually dismissed. Indeed, as Delany argues, it might be viewed as an immensely effective salvo against freedom of sexual expression.

"I'm not happy here," I kept repeating to my PhD supervisor. "I need to be somewhere else in order to be productive." That "somewhere else" ended up being Poland once more. After a depressing three and a half months spent in the UK, I was returning to my adopted country to write my thesis.

But I would not leave for another week. It was the New Year and Nottingham was decked out accordingly. I walked through the Old Market Square, desperately attempting to ignore the crush of activity. "It's two o'clock in the afternoon," I thought. "Shouldn't these people be home nursing hangovers?" As I walked past McDonald's, I saw him: cute, young, and asking for assistance. He was the perfect target, but something held me back. He asked me for money, and I brushed past him without making eye contact.

I thought about him throughout the afternoon. Around 5:30, curiosity got the best of me. I realized that there was no likelihood that he'd still be there. I also realized that I had lived in this city for months and never seen him before, a fact that decreased the likelihood of his presence even more. But he was there. And I was prepared.

As I approached, he made his plea. I flipped him a two pound coin. He clasped his hands together, performed a little bow, and thanked me profusely. I walked around the block. As I came up on him again, he began to make his plea. When he recognized me, he stopped and thanked me again for the money. I recognized his sincerity as a performance, but I was taken in. I stepped up to him and, sotto voce, in the midst of the activity in Old Market Square, said, "I'll give you twenty pounds more if you'd like." His eyebrows raised and his lips parted in reply but no words came out. Finally, he nodded and said, "Yes. Thank you." We began walking homeward.

His name was Jon; I'll never forget that. He had been living on the streets since his stepfather had thrown him out of the house several months earlier. He had had a few run-ins with the law in Sheffield but was trying to do the right thing by relocating to Notts. His father was in Spain, and he hoped to go there someday to be with him. As he talked, I couldn't help but want to hear more. I found him fascinating. I wanted to protect him.

"What is this place?" he asked as we entered the rambling home I shared with eleven other individuals.

"Oh it's a place where a bunch of students live. We're all from different countries, and we study here."

"It's nice."

"C'mon," I said, beckoning to him to follow me upstairs to my room.

"No, I'd better stay here. I, ah, don't want to get blamed if something comes up, um, missing."

I did not tell him that all of my housemates were away for a few more days and that we would be alone for some time. It's not that I thought something untoward would happen if I told him, so much as that I had the confidence that nothing would happen as a result of my disclosing this. So why waste the words?

I bounded to my room and pretended to retrieve the twenty-pound note that was already in my pocket. Back downstairs, I handed it to him. Again, he thanked me with unfailing politeness, and I felt something for him again.

"Would you like something to eat?"

"That's right nice of you, but I don't want to be a bother."

"It's no bother. Come in here."

We entered the kitchen and I listened to him marvel at its size. I reminded him that twelve college students lived in the house; hence, the dual refrigerators, stoves, and ovens, and the massive space in general. I began to make him a sandwich, spreading black currant jelly on the bread. When I began to do the same with the peanut butter, he intervened, saying that he did not like peanut butter.

"Would you like more jelly then?"

"Yes, I would."

I handed him the knife and encouraged him to make his sandwich as he saw fit.

"Thanks a lot. You're cool, and you're also really photogenic. You should model."

This caused me to laugh and protest.

"You're American, aren't you?"

"Unfortunately."

"From whereabouts?"

"The last place I lived while there was Chicago, although I'm originally from St. Louis."

"Chicago. I'd like to go there someday. I'd like to go to a lot of places someday."

I never saw anyone down a sandwich that swiftly. I urged him to make another. He did and ate it just as swiftly, while talking about Michael Jordan and the Chicago Bulls. Despite the large size of the room, we stood next to each other at the counter. He emitted the stale odor of sweat and desperation. This detracted from his appeal.

"I should go now. But thank you for being so nice to me. And good luck with your studies. Maybe I'll see you around someday and I can thank you."

I didn't really want to do it, but I couldn't think of anything else to do or say that would make him stay. And so I caressed the outside of his sweatpants and explained that he could thank me in that moment if he wanted to. I regretted it instantly. His expression clouded and he seemed genuinely disappointed. I had changed in his eyes.

"I'll do it, I mean, I've done it before. But you'll have to pay me."

He was a businessman through and through.

"What about the twenty quid I gave you?"

"You said that was mine! You said I could have it!"

He was insistent and, for once, was making me uncomfortable.

"But I didn't get anything for it."

He began to pace back and forth, looking at his watch.

"Look mate, I gotta go. I gotta take this money and go get a hit. I like to shoot up."

He raised the sleeve of his jacket to display a line of deeply embedded track marks along the length of his left arm.

"I gotta go score with this dude before it's too late. It's twenty-five quid and I got it. But I can come back later."

His agitated mood had turned me off almost as much as my propositioning him. I was no longer interested, just curious.

"What do you do when you shoot up?"

"Heroin and crack."

"Oh."

He provided detailed instructions on how to mix the concoction with a spoon and what to do with it. And then:

"Do you want me to come back later?"

"No, that's okay."

"I can come back later tonight or tomorrow."

"I leave for Scotland in the morning and I won't be back for a few days. After that, I'm going to Poland for several months. Don't worry about it."

"Oh."

I could not let him leave with the memory of his arm so firmly embedded in my memory.

"Do me a favor though. Just show me your dick."

He thought about this for a few seconds and then he slowly began to untie the

white ribbon of his sweatpants. As he lowered them as well as his shorts, he grimaced, allowing, "It's not very big." I looked, and then he left.

I thought about Jon for some time afterwards. Occasionally, I still do. I smile when I recall his reference to me as "photogenic." I wonder if he ever made it to Spain. I'm awaiting a resolution that will probably never come.

In viewing the space of the city as a sexual free zone, it is not uncommon to view it as an incubator of AIDS as well. From *Boys on the Side* to *Longtime Companion* to, of course, *Philadelphia*, the city is often depicted in AIDS narratives as "too free" a sexual free zone. The city as AIDS incubator in contraposition to the rural town as protected terrain is a theme briefly alluded to in Delany's text. Describing one of the city's "AIDS tragedies," he recalls this conversation: "You remember your little hustler friend Mark?" a redheaded hustler, Tony, in black leather pants and black leather jacket, who specialized in heavy S&M topping, told me one evening, elbow to elbow with me. . . . 'Two weeks before he died, we all got together and sent him home—upstate to Binghamton. He wanted to die at home. So we sent him there. And he did'" (48). While it may not be accurate to describe Binghamton, New York as "rural," the space is certainly not as urban as New York City. Accordingly, it is not enough to report that Mark was sent home. It should also be stressed that he was sent out of the city. The return of Times Square and other urban locales in the United States to spaces not of sexual pleasure, but of "family values," is, in a sense, a return to the model of the colonial and settler family, whose members kept each others' best interests in mind and shunned outside interference. Rural areas, although they can be depicted as wild, unexplored terrain, are most often envisioned as wholesome spaces of peace and tranquility. Rural life is assumed to be safe life. Judith Halberstam notes, "Delany suggests that we break away from the cozy fantasies of small-town safety and big-city danger, and reconsider the actual risks of different locations in terms of the different populations that inhabit them. Specifically, he recommends that we not design urban areas to suit suburban visitors" (*Queer Time* 15).

Within spaces where public sex is accessed—bathhouses, movie theaters, sex clubs—the disclosure of an HIV-positive status does not always occur. This is not surprising given the emphasis on anonymity in these venues. As Stephen Murray observes: "Even in metropolises with venues for male-male sex, many men who have sex with men seek to keep their desires from being known (i.e., as part of their public persona) and do not reveal their names to sexual partners. Anony-

mous sex can be seen as more private than sex in bedrooms shared by people in ongoing relationships in that most everything about the self remains unknown to sexual partners in anonymous encounters” (161). To reiterate, people do not always disclose their status in sexual free zones (or elsewhere for that matter). But that does not mean they are lacking in moral fiber. It implies that those acting in sexual free zones realize that they are occupying a space in which the rules (read “family values”) of the outside are not in effect. Within the sexual free zone, a different (but not necessarily inferior) code of conduct is practiced.

I’m in St. Louis, having come from the doctor’s office. I had spent six additional months in Poland. One day, during the sixth month, I noticed lesions on my left leg. I had been waiting for this moment for nearly eight years; the moment when AIDS began to make its presence unmistakably known. I thought about contacting Darek, the doctor I’d dated the year before, but I opted not to. I decided the best thing would be to return to the States, where it all began.

Having no health coverage, I was forced to rely on the services of the Ryan White CARE program. Prior to accessing those services, I was required to have an intake with a case manager.

Our meeting was fairly mundane, involving lots of paperwork and signatures. One of the forms I was obligated to sign prior to receiving services pertained to Missouri law RSMO 191.677, which reads, in part:

It is your responsibility to alter your behavior so that you do not expose other people to the HIV virus. Criminal charges could be filed against you if you know you carry the HIV virus and you create a risk of infecting another person (for example: your partner) with the virus through sex, needle sharing, biting or other established means of transmitting the virus.

Violation is considered a Class B Felony, punishable by five to fifteen years in prison or if the other person contracts HIV, a Class A Felony, punishable by ten to thirty years or life imprisonment. The use of condoms is not a defense to this violation.

At the conclusion of our meeting, I received a copy of all of the paperwork. I took it and used it to attain a doctor’s appointment. The lesions were biopsied and were revealed to be nonharmful. Shortly thereafter, I successfully interviewed for a teaching position in Baltimore, which would have me leaving the state of Missouri, and its laws, behind.

Prior to leaving for Maryland, I discarded all of the case management paraphernalia except for my copy of RSMO 191.677. It came with me to Baltimore, where I still have it tucked away.

Restricting access to sexual freedom in Times Square, Delany asserts, rendered the space “safe” in fraught ways: “Desire and knowledge (body and mind) are not a fundamental opposition; rather, they are intricately imbricated and mutually constitutive aspects of political and social life. . . . [W]e might give more thought to the necessary and productive aspect of this imbrication of knowledge and desire as it expresses itself so positively in so many forms of contact, before—with a wrecking ball and even more sweeping legislation—we render that central structure asexual and ‘safe’ in the name of family values and corporate giantism” (168–69).

The politics of containment are alive and well as evidenced in: the Cox and Carriker cases, the questionable laws in Atlanta (which is often referred to as “the New York of the South”) specifically and Georgia overarchingly, and the (mis)management of urban spaces such as New York. It is not enough to cleanse mainstream culture of individuals such as Cox and Carriker; it is not enough to reinvent sexual free zones as sanitized playgrounds for the mainstream masses. As John D’Emilio has argued regarding the gay liberation movement: “The acceptance of our erotic choices ultimately depends on the degree to which society is willing to affirm sexual expression as a form of play, positive and life-enhancing. Our movement may have begun as the struggle of a ‘minority,’ but what we should now be trying to ‘liberate’ is an aspect of the personal lives of all people—sexual expression” (“Capitalism” 474).

These individuals and those zones offer opportunities to interrogate the codes that sustain us to our delight and constrict us to our disadvantage.

I have lived in Baltimore for nearly two years. Picking up men on the street here is amazingly easy. I remember:

The first one, the one who passed me on the street one Friday night and asked for help. I replied that I’d give him twenty dollars. We walked to my apartment, which was just steps away. While I relieved myself of the alcohol I had just imbibed, he sat in my living room. When I finally returned, I gave him the twenty and made my request. He agreed and even gave me instructions on paying particular attention to the head because that made him feel good. He also apologized for not being as fresh as he could be due to sweating while sitting in jail most of the day. We wound

up in my bed for a few brief moments, but he grew uncomfortable because he kept thinking about getting home to his young son.

Another one, whom I passed in an alleyway. He offered to sell me a watch. When I asked the price and he replied seven dollars, I made him an offer of twenty if he'd do my bidding. He agreed immediately. As we walked back to my place, he kept asking if I was a cop, because this was "just too good to be true." I was chagrined when he couldn't perform. He was too, and he chided me mildly for not having any porn for him to view, because "that's how you're supposed to do it." He left without the twenty and in somewhat depressed spirits since, as he termed it, he "could have used a good nut."

The one on Thanksgiving who whistled after me while I walked down an alleyway. I stopped and said "What up?" to which he ineffectually replied "You." I began to walk away when he called after me. "I've got ten inches." "Show me," I countered. And there, against the wall in the alleyway, he started stripping, first removing his shirt. When I saw the muscles, I stereotypically began to think of prison gyms, but I quickly pushed that thought from my mind. Before he had a chance to unzip his jeans, I said, "You're coming with me." He was very friendly on the short walk home, apprising me that he'd come up from Virginia with a girlfriend who had left him and how he too hated Baltimore and wanted to go elsewhere. At my place, he spent time in the bathroom soaping himself up and then came into the bedroom and suggested I do the same. "I tend to stay clean," I replied. After a sufficient period of time with him in my mouth, I was ready to move on, but, as he claimed in suggesting I continue, "We've got all night." "Actually we don't, so let's fuck and get on with it." This put pressure on him and he remained soft. He grew angry, and I asked him to leave. He became belligerent and loud when I declined to pay him. I finally got him outside where he stood in front of my apartment for several minutes banging on the window, declaring, "I know where you live." "Obviously," I said to myself. I'm sure my neighbors loved this.

The hairy one who wanted to screw with the lights on so he could see me. He tried very hard, and even broke a dripping sweat. But try as he might, he could not insert part A into part B. "The tightest ass I've ever seen," he repeated over and over. He too got nothing.

The failed one whom I approached outside of the Central Library on one exceptionally hot afternoon and offered twenty dollars to perform. "How 'bout I give you an ass whipping for free?" I threw up my hands in resignation and walked away to the sound of "I hate fuckin' faggots" over my shoulder.

The eager one who seemed so happy to have me pick him up and made no secret

of being impressed by the luxury apartment I struggle to live in. As we entered the building, I was thankful the doorman was elsewhere, although I felt tense sharing the elevator with my visitor and another tenant. The act itself was swift and to the point. Afterwards, he asked for forty dollars. I offered thirty and a Pellegrino, which he accepted. As he left, he commented, "You're a good guy."

I've resigned myself to the fact that this is the way my life is. Perhaps these dalliances will decrease in frequency; perhaps they will increase. I doubt they'll ever stop. The action is a part of me now. I'm making myself happy by making other people happy. It's what I do because I'm a good guy.

The aims to legislate codes of conduct of HIV-positive individuals under an ideology of "responsibility" may have been effective when modes of transmission were still unknown, but that time has long since passed. This is the HIV age of reason when HIV transmission laws should be categorized by measurable level of risk and, even then, reconciled on a case-by-case basis. Denying the HIV-positive subject access to a variety of sexual experiences through the threat of litigation and incarceration is supremely ill-advised because doing so, initially, does not work and, more importantly, forecloses possibilities of pleasure. In the final analysis, it is important to be mindful of the health status of *both* the HIV-negative and the HIV-positive partners as, drawing on an early safer sex slogan, protection is the priority. In the case of negative individuals protection pertains to not contracting HIV, while in the case of positive individuals protection pertains to preventing reinfection. But this is not all. It is also important to consider the oft-maligned and rarely discussed wishes of HIV-positive individuals because the protection of sexual desire must be a priority too.

An additional conclusion is warranted.

I was twenty-three years old when I was diagnosed as HIV-positive; I am now thirty-four. Previously, I never would have imagined that I would pay individuals for sex or that I would do so while not, in some instances, disclosing my status. I'm not the man I used to be. Admittedly, I may not be "responsible" as determined by conventional norms, but that doesn't immediately relegate me to the realm of "irresponsibility." Some of my behaviors might dwell in that realm, but I don't have to be positioned there, or position myself there, in totality or permanently. I can occupy a middle space, moving toward and away from responsibility and irresponsibility as circumstance, agency, and desire dictate. While I would prefer to remain as rooted as possible in the realm of responsibility (because I have been socialized to believe

this is what I should do), there are aspects of that other place that I find fetching. Sometimes irresponsibility works for me and, I believe, is not as harmful as it is posited as.

In a similar vein, just as I do not always have to perform responsibility (or responsibly), mainstream culture does not always have to demonize me for engaging in sex practices. To reiterate, I was twenty-three when diagnosed; I'm thirty-four now. It is ludicrous to imagine that I have not engaged in sexual activity during the intervening years, and it is foolish to categorize all of those actions under the umbrella term "sex." Indeed, I wonder, what is sex? It's a given that oral sex is not the same as anal sex, but that fact does not stop them from being equally criminalized in some locales. If I engage in mutual masturbation with an individual, which may or may not involve our bodies actually touching, must I disclose my status? Redefinitions are called for and a discussion about the applicability of those redefinitions is in order as well. We can also realize that we live in a culture of risk in which engaging in sexual activity with any individual, with or without consent, can lead to complications. On that score, I wonder what happens if an HIV-positive subject makes it a point to disclose his status prior to the sex act, but the partner claims he did not? It's very clear to me who will be penalized in this instance.

Writing in Fearless Speech, Michel Foucault summons the Greek concept of parrhesia, "frankness in speaking the truth" (7). He explains that "the commitment involved in parrhesia is linked . . . to the fact that the parrhesiastes [one who uses parrhesia, thus one who speaks the truth frankly] says something which is dangerous to himself and thus involves a risk" (13). Risk is at the heart of this chapter. Of course there is the obvious risk: the question of individuals placing others in danger of contracting a deadly virus. There is, as well, the risk of having pleasure stymied. But there is another risk as well: the risk an individual takes by speaking of his actions truthfully. As Melvin Dixon asks: "What truthtelling are you brave enough to utter and endure the consequences of your unpopular message?" (200). Perhaps in telling stories of my life I'm tired of being good; maybe I'm trying to be and do better. I wrote this; I inserted myself into it; I admitted knowledge of wrongdoing; but mostly, I have tried to reach for, to access, the truthtelling Dixon imagines. I call upon others both in and out of mainstream culture to truthfully examine their own actions and to try to follow the same path.

NOTES

Chris Bell died on December 25, 2009, while final revisions were being made on this chapter and volume. The version printed here was prepared for publication by the editors, based on conversations with Bell prior to his death. Beyond minor copyediting, the words are his own.

- 1. Recall the treatment of HIV-positive subjects in Cuba in the 1980s who were quarantined in state-sponsored camps.