



Jon Davies

## *The Masculine Mystique*

*The bourgeoisie invented the notion of homosexuality and made it into a ghetto. We must not forget this. There are two sexes on earth, but this is only to hide the fact that there are three, four, ten, thousands, once you throw that old hag of the idea of nature overboard.*  
—Guy Hocquenghem<sup>1</sup>

The 2011 book *Queer Spirits* documents a performance project in which Canadian artists AA Bronson and Peter Hobbs conducted a series of invitation-only seances under the banner *Invocation of the Queer Spirits*. “Documents” does not, however, accurately reflect the actual proceedings of the five seances, which remain a secret kept by the two to seven male participants involved. Taking place at night, the seances sought to reach out to the “queer spirits”—marginalized individuals with effaced histories to communicate—haunting the various sites Bronson and Hobbs selected to inhabit. With no division between “performer” and “audience,” the men present during these events related experiencing altered states of consciousness and a warped sense of time as they opened themselves up to visitation from the queer spirits. The publication’s omission of visual representation of the rituals and the spirits invoked offers a fertile gap between the men’s firsthand experiences, knowledge, and emotions and we outsiders curious about those mysterious sessions. Driven by this curiosity, we have to use our imaginations to reassemble what took place those magical evenings by following the book’s “trail of proverbial breadcrumbs.”<sup>2</sup> However, the dominant elision evident throughout *Queer Spirits* is the real and potential presence and value of women within the conceptualization of “queer” that the project puts forward, which compels critical questions such as what are the different meanings of “queer” in our current historical moment, and is there anything the term can’t include under its umbrella? If the central tenet of “queer” is the malleability of all identity and desire, can it accurately—and ethically—describe a project that adheres to

gender essentialism? I intend here to poke, prod, and trouble what appears to be an anachronistic and limiting male exclusivity operating within the *Queer Spirits* project, which ultimately channels spirits originating more in a pre-“queer” era of gendered boundaries and homosocial segregation than from the radical destabilizing of gender and sexuality identity that “queer” represented in the context of the 1980s and early 1990s, as well as during the AIDS crisis.

The *Queer Spirits* publication is a handsome one: printed on an assortment of stocks and beautifully designed, the entire book is an unquestionably gorgeous record and extension of the project and the ideas behind it. It brings together a preface and an “About This Book” by Bronson with dossiers on the different *Queer Spirits* manifestations in Banff, Alberta; New Orleans, Louisiana; Winnipeg, Manitoba; and Governors Island and Fire Island, New York. Each dossier lists the participants, the invocations and vows made, and includes supplementary material.<sup>3</sup> Each dossier compiles photos of the participants and the sites taken before and after the invocations, as well as charming pencil crayon drawings by Governors Island participant Elijah Burgher that, coyly, may or may not be evidence of what took place during that seance. There are also show-and-tell-style spreads identifying various key readings, props, talismans, and research into the sites visited. The book’s primary piece of writing unfolds in an episodic, anecdotal manifesto by Hobbs entitled “The Art of Drifting: 43 Lessons from a Naked Cocktail Party,” which charts the theory and practice of the invocations while referencing sexual, ecological, financial, colonial, and other contexts for the rituals. Lessons 9 through 37 link back to particular seances, framing the *Queer Spirits* book as a pedagogical project, in which Hobbs reflects on what the participants had been through before offering the public his findings and attendant insights. The book also includes two photographic folios that act in an invocatory fashion like visitations from past historical moments or from sites that carry a certain historical gravitas. The first consists of spiritualist photography by Dr. T. G. Hamilton, a president of the Manitoba Medical Association who began investigating psychic and paranormal phenomena in 1918.<sup>4</sup> The



second set of plates reproduces Bronson's photos of the Magic Forest, the legendary wooded area on Fire Island (where Bronson has a home) that acts as a well-travelled gay cruising "meat market" linking the communities of Cherry Grove and the Pines. (The authors note that a group of volunteer "survivors from the '80s and '90s" lovingly tend the forest, pruning its trees and distributing condoms.)<sup>5</sup> Hobbs claims that the *Queer Spirits* book is not meant as an explanation of what took place in the invocations; instead, "the inspiration was to make art for ghosts."<sup>6</sup> The book invokes the past seances and key referents and phenomena in order to learn from them and to ultimately advocate for the value of spiritualist and magic practices to queer people in the present and future.

The *Queer Spirits* project came about in 2008 in a cabin in the woods near the Banff Centre, where Bronson and Hobbs sought refuge together as gay men from an unsatisfying artist residency.<sup>7</sup> The invocations called out: *To all the dispossessed and abandoned, to all those who have died but cannot leave this place, we invite each of you to join us in this queer community of the quick and the dead.*<sup>8</sup> The events involved a promiscuous bricolage of a wide range of rituals, including group therapy, ceremonial magic, sweat lodges, witches' covens, heart circles, quilting bees, circle jerks, and nineteenth-century spiritualist seances.<sup>9</sup> The artists forbade live documentation "out of respect for the dead, and to maintain a sense of mystery, which is all-important to works of magic and art."<sup>10</sup> Only the Governors Island seance had an explicitly public exhibition component, where visitors could peer through peepholes—evoking glory holes—that looked into the room of the historic officer's house where the invocation had taken place earlier.<sup>11</sup> (Of course, one could argue that visitors to the sites were and will be affected in myriad ways by the rituals that took place there.) It is worth highlighting that the secrecy around these seances produces a sense of mystique and glamour to those not involved in them: a lesson learned from the artistic strategies of General Idea.<sup>12</sup> However, one could argue that the events' clandestine quality also shields them from retrospective critical scrutiny, including by the "atheists" that Hobbs warns not to trust in Lesson 41.<sup>13</sup>

The rituals began with an invocation summoning the presence of the site's queer dead. The artists extensively researched each site in order to be as specific to the location's indigenous and settler spiritual practices as possible. For example, in New Orleans they reached out to "the French explorers, trappers, traders, pirates, and other adventurers of an all-male life," as well as artists, gamblers, spiritualists, activists, Indians, "galley-slaves and prostitutes," and "the thirty-two men and women killed in the 1972 fire at a gay nightclub in the French Quarter called the Upstairs Lounge."<sup>14</sup> The participants read queer history into the site by casting it as thoroughly marked and shaped by the queer people and spaces typically excluded from heterocentric narratives of place. Sharing similarities to Bronson's other recent projects, the seances were highly intimate, open-ended, performative, and exclusive to a select group of people who ostensibly trust one another and are privy to a shared experience.<sup>15</sup> Participants gathered naked in a protective circle, and as Hobbs describes it in Lesson 2, the seances were akin to "naked cocktail parties in which groups of gay men lounged on pillows, each with a butt plug in his bum, taking swigs from a bottle of whiskey that was passed around the circle. Eventually we would hit a groove—a queer spirit—and find ourselves engaged in deep gossip, chatting about death, community, ghost, history, and boyfriends."<sup>16</sup>

*Queer Spirits* offers new insights related to recent theoretical considerations of queer time and temporality. For instance, queer theorist Elizabeth Freeman notes how queers are often constructed as without past or future: on the one hand, "no childhood, no origin or precedent in nature, no family traditions or legends, and, crucially, no history as a distinct people."<sup>17</sup> On the other, "no children, no succeeding generations, no meaningful way to contribute to society, no hope, no plans, and nothing to offer most political tomorrows."<sup>18</sup> Bronson and Hobbs's efforts to expand queer community and kinship to include the dead are admirable and force a shift in thinking about generational legacies and cultural transmission that are specific to the queer community. The queer spirit is a potent metaphor for the way that queer



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artists from the past continue to have a presence in  
the here and now, in some cases haunting us with  
reminders of more radical and liberatory paths not  
taken for the queer movement, which has arguably  
descended into a hollow, consumer-capitalist shell  
of its former self.<sup>19</sup> The figure of the spirit refuses  
to completely dematerialize after biological life  
has expired: neither quite dead nor fully alive, the  
figure shows evidence of open wounds, unfinished  
business, moving freely between the past and the  
present, confronting the living against our will.  
With the spectral past "placing a demand on the  
present in the form of an ethical imperative,"<sup>20</sup> as  
queer theorist Carla Freccero puts it, the spirit or  
ghost has become a central figure in queer culture.  
In an audio discussion with Creative Time, Hobbs  
refers to this practice as a queer "lingering on  
death... lingering on the past... lingering on an  
identity that's been stifled or lost, erased... that's  
the psychic energy," while Bronson proposes that  
"the dead have to be included in a queer commu-  
nity for the community to exist."<sup>21</sup> Bronson's as-  
sertion is potent considering that AIDS in particu-  
lar has eroded the boundaries between the living  
and the dead in the queer community, demanding  
that we make room for the spirits of figures like  
his partners in General Idea, Felix Partz and Jorge  
Zontal, whose deaths from AIDS in 1994 had an  
enormous impact on Bronson's life and work.

In wiping out a generation of gay men in the  
1980s and 1990s (and, of course, beyond), AIDS  
disrupted the pedagogical impulse so important  
to fostering a sense of identity and history among  
queer people; thirtysomethings like myself stood  
like wide-eyed and helpless children as our  
"parents" were buried by their friends and lovers.  
However, the queer pedagogical impulse flour-  
ishes on the streets, in the sheets, and in all facets  
of online life. As opposed to the heterosexual  
reproductive model, participating in queer gene-  
alogies is consensual and self-directed—in other  
words, we can pick and choose our queer ances-  
tors and families according to our desires rather  
than a procreative obligation—making queers  
potentially less beholden to the imperative that  
theorist Lee Edelman has called "reproductive  
futurism."<sup>22</sup> Today, queer cultural transmission  
tends to happen primarily virtually, but Bronson

and Hobbs's practice is almost archaically about  
the experience of "being there." As they state in  
their vow, "we resolve to be present in our bodies,  
present to ourselves, present to each other, and  
present to queer spirit. We resolve to claim our  
voices and our collective history as queers."<sup>23</sup>

A key aspect of this need for bodily presence is  
arguably invoked in reaction to the dematerializa-  
tion and the "being not there" of the Internet (and  
the transformation of gay male social and sexual  
kinship that it has engendered). Bodily presence  
easily slips into a retrenchment of the integrity of  
biology as an inescapable fact, exemplified by the  
exclusion of women's bodies and identities. That  
this exclusion takes place under the auspices of an  
intergenerational queer communion that promises  
a kind of transcendence and healing is decidedly  
ungenerous. In short, why must a reductive view  
of the gendered body be so central to Bronson and  
Hobbs's spiritual work in this project?

While the *Queer Spirits* project has a shared  
intergenerational authorship with Bronson hav-  
ing been born in 1946 and Hobbs in 1963 (and  
participants in the rituals varying widely in age),  
I am interested in contextualizing it here within  
the senior artist's forty-year artistic, pedagogical,  
and spiritual practices.<sup>24</sup> For instance, in Bronson's  
post-1994 solo projects the artist has variously cast  
himself in the roles of "healer," "guru," and "sha-  
man," while simultaneously taking on the elder  
statesman position and role model for a younger  
generation of, specifically, gay men. Bronson has  
developed an extensive, self-conscious cosmology  
around himself and his work. Reading his exten-  
sive body of writing from this period, which con-  
sistently takes on a diaristic form, one feels great  
empathy for the trauma of the AIDS crisis that he  
suffered through and the transformation of mind,  
body, and spirit that it engendered. He writes  
extremely personally, vulnerably, and eloquently  
about his state of mind and his experiences. Bron-  
son has made spiritualism and occult practices part  
of his life and work since his childhood, reading  
books on such topics as astrology and shamanism  
in his bedroom, which culminated in an ecstatic  
spiritual experience as a teenager. In the late  
1960s, Bronson was a hippie; interested in radical  
education, he formed a commune, underground



newspaper, and free school, and experimented with alternative therapies. He even met the Dalai Lama and practiced transcendental meditation. If General Idea was a master of irony, Bronson, Partz, and Zontal were also products of their time, the tumult of countercultural experimentation that surrounded their formation in 1969.

Emerging from the devastation of the AIDS crisis that stole his two lifelong collaborators, Bronson had to figure out how to live and work as a singular entity rather than one body among three. Reflecting a few years later on *Felix, June 5, 1994* (1994/99), his shattering photographic portrait of Partz taken moments after his death, Bronson wrote: *Felix and Jorge and I lived and worked together for 27 years: during that time we became one organism, one group mind, one nervous system; one set of habits, mannerisms and preferences. We presented ourselves as a "group" called General Idea and we pictured ourselves in doctored photographs as the ultimate artwork of our own design: we transformed our borrowed bodies into props, significations manipulated to create an image, a reality. We chose to inhabit the world of mass media and advertising. We made of ourselves the artists we wanted to be.*

Since Jorge and Felix died I have been struggling to find the limits of my own body as an independent organism, as a being outside of General Idea. Over the last five years I have found myself, much like a stroke victim, learning again the limits of my nervous system, how to function without my extended body (no longer three heads, twelve limbs), how to create possibilities from my reduced physicality.

*I have had to place Jorge and Felix and General Idea at a distance. This has been difficult, like escaping from my own skin.*

*Dear Felix, by the act of exhibiting this image I declare that we are no longer of one mind, one body. I return you to General Idea's world of mass media, there to function without me.*

*We need to remember that the diseased, the disabled and, yes, even the dead walk among us. They are part of our community, our history, our continuity. They are our co-inhabitants in this dream city.*<sup>25</sup>

It is worth recalling that daily life for those immersed in the AIDS crisis then and now consists of, among other things, visiting friends and lovers in the hospital, tending to failing bodies, living in

fear of seroconverting and getting sick, being present when friends and lovers die, going to memorial services, and helping loved ones end their own lives.<sup>26</sup> The psychic impact of such a routine is difficult to fully convey. Tracing Bronson's writings over the past fifteen years or so, one notes a transformation from his preoccupation with death and shutting himself down to a resurgence of energy and engagement, seemingly timed with his burgeoning collaborations with younger artists and with the panoply of spiritual and healing practices he undertook.

In recent years, Bronson has completed extensive training in bodywork, including Body Electric's "Sacred Intimate" workshops in California, which he described as "radical gay neo-tantric pseudo-psychological sex-positive retreats that were to spawn an international community of men seeking to be healers to their people, and seeking to be healed."<sup>27</sup> These wildly intense sessions would find primarily gay men emotionally testifying to past traumas and seeking transformation by healing themselves through ritual and sharing in a singular vision. Bronson explains: *We had among us the talents of a thousand lifetimes. We had come to [the workshops to] learn and we had come to teach. We were hermits and healers, monks and wise men, psychics and mediums, priests and ecstasies, prostitutes and shamans, empaths and oracles. Sex was in the air. Death was in the air. Our ancestors were among us. And the great secret of America, the abused sons of abused fathers, the multitudinous dead of Russian River, fallen collectively to AIDS, who had gathered here in this transcendental gay resort, and gathered here to die, they were among us.*<sup>28</sup>

From 2002 to 2005, in the persona of AA Bronson\*Healer, Bronson offered one-on-one healing sessions to men only that included full-body, tantric, or butt massages. The butt massages became a bit of a phenomenon, with the New York gallery John Connelly Presents advertising them as "infamous" and organizing an event during Bronson's exhibition there where "a select group of curators, collectors, artists and writers will witness a demonstration of the AA BRONSON\*BUTT MASSAGE, featuring a live model. Canapés and cocktails will be served, including the AA BRONSON\*ROSEBUD



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ELIXIR."<sup>29</sup> Attuned to advertising's powers of persuasion, AA Bronson\*Healer self-consciously played with the marketing-speak of the New Age industry: Bronson is fully aware that those who purport to heal, cure, or save are often hustlers and con men, but somehow to claim oneself as a "healer" invokes that potential ameliorative power into being.

Bronson is a magnet for young gay male artists who come across his work predominantly online. He devotes considerable time to fostering these mentoring relationships, which sometimes lead to collaborations. Bronson views this as a kind of extension of his healing work, with these inter-generational collaborations "conflating the role of the spectator with those of the participant and the collaborator,"<sup>30</sup> as writer Steve Lafreniere put it in an interview with Bronson. It is telling that Bronson conceptualizes his extensive work with younger gay artists through the symbol of the mirror, particularly as he has produced self-portraits using mirrors for decades. As he describes it in an interview with Bill Arning: *In each case, I find myself looking over their shoulders, as it were, and proposing ideas that utilize their methods of working, their "styles," and their identities. The works are double self-portraits; a look, then, at the younger with the older. In each case there is a mirroring effect; we find the similarities and the differences in each other. We are not so unique, after all; we are each looking into the looking glass and finding each other. . . . I am an empath, and my powers as an empath come into play in these pieces. I reflect, and thus acknowledge, the other's presence, his identity as an artist, his way of being in this world. My idea is to reflect and amplify that which the other is. In this sense, yes, I am a shaman, or I occupy that role for these younger men (they might not agree, but I do think it is true).*<sup>31</sup>

Similarly, in 2002, Bronson described his mentoring work in a letter to collaborator Nayland Blake: *I came to this collaboration as I feel an older gay man must in coming to a younger, as a willing mirror and as an acknowledgement of the other man's essential being. As gay men, we have too little acknowledgement in this world. We must bear witness for each other, and we do.*<sup>32</sup> The mirror reflects back at oneself, fostering an imaginative space for experiments in self-performance and

self-actualization. But while the mirror can distort and refract, it ultimately produces self-sameness: looking into the mirror is not where one finds a difference that might challenge the self. Bronson's collaborative spirit in art and in healing largely extends exclusively to men, premised inevitably on an erotic dimension.<sup>33</sup> Fascinated by homo-sociality, Bronson has made many of his projects men-only, from *Queer Spirits*, to his butt massages, to his aborted School of Young Shamans residency at Banff, to curatorial efforts such as his "Queer Cinema from the Collection" series at New York's Museum of Modern Art in March 2011. This androcentric orientation raises the question of what past is being "lingered on" and invoked in the seances. It is perhaps a nostalgia for a kind of "pure" gay male homosociality unbesieged by queer forces bent on collapsing the gender and sexual identity binaries that all-male formations rely on for their self-understanding and legibility.

Bronson and Hobbs are drawn to spaces where women are verboten. Whether wilderness or city, the sites of all the *Queer Spirits* seances "have histories of all-male communities in various forms: sweat and hunting lodges, fishing camps, trading post, frontier towns, pirate colonies, military bases, major sea ports, railroad hubs, stockyards, mining and logging camps, major public work projects, and prison camps."<sup>34</sup> While clearly generating and fostering homosexual relationships, such homosocial male enclaves have historically been hostile to overt expressions of homosexual love or lust and to gender-role transgressions like male effeminacy. For Bronson and Hobbs, men-only spaces, particularly sexualized ones like bathhouses and the *Queer Spirits* seances, are magical. On walking into a bathhouse for the first time, Hobbs claims, "That night I openly declared my desire for other men and found the same desires and fears reflected back in the faces of strangers. In this declaration, I joined the brotherhood of the anus and found some peace."<sup>35</sup> He goes on to compare this experience to the feeling he received from the brotherhood of the queer seances. Sex creates community, but can one associate only with the objects of one's desire and still claim to be engaged in a queer practice, let alone be attuned to a world where gender, sexuality, desire, and



power are increasingly more complex? The pull of solidarity to one's own gender is strong, but is ultimately limiting: excluding "women" fixes both "men" and "women" into essential categories that refuse individuals the opportunity to manifest the myriad and complex gender identities that we are all capable of imagining, of being. It is also limiting for those who are doing the excluding in that they shut themselves off from a particular difference, and the knowledge and emotions that come with it. It is unclear what role, if any, women might play in the masculinist societies the artists seek not only to reference and honour, but to emulate and manifest in the here and now through the seances.

In a transcribed interview with Anne Pasternak of *Creative Time*, Bronson and Hobbs articulate their interpretation of "queer" as such: *The concept of gayness is of course a modernist invention, and the word "queer" is an attempt to escape the limitations of that word. In the history of the world, magicians, shamans, mediums, priests, adventurers, and healers have always been more sexually ambiguous. We are particularly interested in the presence of all-male societies, like pirates, explorers, traders and trappers, and the military. . . . In the end, we have used the word queer to include all kinds of marginal and disenfranchised communities.*<sup>36</sup>

Bronson and Hobbs's definition displays a lacklustre understanding of the potential threat "queer" poses to traditional identity categories like "man" and "woman," "straight" and "gay," and of its value as a worldview that embraces process, fluidity, and indeterminacy rather than the supposedly self-evident "facts" of bodies, identities, and desires poised in a fixed constellation. Beyond stating their yen for all-male societies, Bronson and Hobbs evasively try not to draw too much attention to the gendered exclusivity of their project. While occasional references to women are included in the invocations, it is, frankly, stingy that the artists did not invite any women to invoke the *Queer Spirits* themselves. In Hobbs's text, a manifesto of sorts, he proclaims, "The brotherhood of the anus is open to anyone with a lubed bum,"<sup>37</sup> clearly unaware of the irony that a "brotherhood" cannot possibly be open to "anyone," bum lubed or not. They proclaim to *invoke a queer ancestry that transcends the limitations of time and*

*space, history and geography. In this way, we practice what in postcolonial theory is referred to as strategic essentialism. For the participants of the Invocation, this involves adopting a group identity that supersedes the differences informing our individual lives. In other words, by invoking a queer ancestry we encourage participants to embrace the fiction of a queer family: one big, happy organism that transcends the equally fictive markers of life, such as race, class, age, nationality, ethnicity, species, and death.*<sup>38</sup>

Bronson and Hobbs cannot declare gender to be as fictive a marker of life as the others in their list because if it were, then their queer ancestry and family would have to broaden to include a panoply of genders real and imagined outside their own. Instead the artists maintain gender as some sort of "truth." Elsewhere, Bronson and Hobbs's queerness purports to transcend gender, as if acknowledging that the feminine is still vital to include, but as an adornment to the male body: *With my cap, sweetgrass, and rooster feathers, I am a hybrid of shaman, leather daddy, and Voodoo priestess. Gender has vanished. I am AA Bronson, gay priestess of Winnipeg, shaman daddy, trans medicine woman, man on the street.*<sup>39</sup>

One of the most valuable legacies from the first decade of the AIDS crisis—one that, crucially, Bronson and Hobbs seem to be neglecting—was the radical cross-gender cooperation and solidarity that saw gay men and lesbians socializing and working together in groups like ACT UP, becoming friends and political allies through care work and direct action activism. This cooperation came after many decades of rebelling and revelling apart in the gay liberation and women's movements. As Deborah Gould states in her *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP's Fight Against AIDS*, "ACT UP. . . unleashed a queer coming together of lesbians and gay men, dykes and fags, and that made the movement enormously compelling."<sup>40</sup> Even if they were being infected and were dying in fewer numbers than gay men, lesbians saw AIDS as their issue for a number of reasons. In particular, the AIDS epidemic brought with it a tide of governmental, media, and social homophobia that impacted all queer people; that discrimination became officially sanctioned when the highest court in the land upheld the notorious



1986 *Bowers v. Hardwick* ruling, enshrining states' rights to enforce sodomy laws. Gould summarizes: *ACT UP* queers opened up ways of being gay and of being political that had been foreclosed by the more mainstream-oriented lesbian and gay establishment, paving the way for new identity and political formations among sexual and gender outlaws of all ages.<sup>41</sup>

"Queer" developed its own body of theory roughly in parallel to the first decade of the AIDS crisis. Here "queer" represented a constant questioning and unsettling of gender and sexual identity categories (whether homosexual, heterosexual, or otherwise), a rhetoric of difference and opposition to the prevailing order, and an embrace of indeterminacy over fixity and performativity over essentialism. Queer theory originated in the crossroads of theoretical and political streams including gay liberation, lesbian-feminism, and post-colonial, poststructuralist, and feminist thought, and was forged in the trauma of the AIDS crisis. The feminist thought that was so foundational to queer theory has ended up marginalized from the definition of queer, and the word queer now connotes a vague, "alternative" manifestation of gay or lesbian identity and community. The boom in post-political, style-conscious gay men's zines that emerged in the 2000s with *BUTT* magazine and its dozens of similar-looking spawn—and now the multitudes of gay men's Tumblrs—is paradigmatic of how, in many ways, "queer" has come to mean "gay" again, marking off and celebrating a gender-segregated space for men who desire men.<sup>42</sup> One could argue that Bronson is lionized in this gay male subculture by virtue of his offering a kind of permission to surround oneself with men, a longstanding legacy of homosocial bonding that excludes the involvement and contributions of women. However, I would suggest a male-only enterprise that is not constantly troubling what being a "man" actually is, cannot in good faith take on the queer moniker.

It is easier to glean in retrospect examples of the breaking down of gender binaries that were so radically visible in the middle of the AIDS crisis and in its intellectual and cultural impact, and no one should be scolded for not learning a lesson in the middle of a pandemic. I could not possibly overstate the scale of the grief and trauma

generated by the AIDS crisis, and the men like Bronson who buried their dead and survived do not owe us anything, least of all political correctness. Desire respects no politics. Art, however, offers us a vision of what the world could be, and in leaving out more than half the story, the *Queer Spirits* project invokes a poorer world into being than what we should be capable of imagining.

#### About the Author

Jon Davies is a Toronto-based writer and Assistant Curator at the Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery, where he has organized the exhibitions *Ryan Trecartin: Any Ever* (with Helena Reckitt, 2010), *To What Earth Does This Sweet Cold Belong?* (2011), and *Coming After* (2011–12). In addition to numerous magazine and journal articles, his publications include *Trash: A Queer Film Classic* (Arsenal Pulp Press, 2009) and *The Gossip of Colin Campbell* (Oakville Galleries, 2008), which accompanied the touring retrospective of Campbell's work he curated.

Review of AA Bronson and Peter Hobbs, *Queer Spirits* (New York: Creative Time; Winnipeg: Plug In Editions), 2011.

Notes begin on page 129.



hibition that he organized at the Galerie im Künstlerhaus in 1993. *Kontext Kunst*, Peter Weibel, ed., *der 90er Jahre* (Graz: Neue Galerie Künstlerhaus, 1992). Catalogue of the exhibition.

Stefan Germer, "Parmi les voutours, contextuel dans son contexte," *Anthologie de la revue Texte Zur Kunst de 1990 à 1998*, eds. Catherine Malier and Andreas Fohr (Dijon: Les Presses du réel, 2011), 384–401.

Isabelle Graw, "Beyond Institutional Critique," in *Institutional Critique and Collaboration* (London: Black Dog, 2011), 147.

See Nina Möntmann, ed., *Art and Its Institutions: Current Conflicts, Critique and Collaboration* (London: Black Dog, 2011).

See Simon Sheikh, "The Trouble with Institutions, or, Art and Its Publics," in *Art and Its Institutions*, 142–49. For her perspective on this redefinition of institutions as co-authors in the exhibition context, especially as it relates to institutional reflexivity, see Marianne Heer, Barnaby Drabble, and Heide Richter, eds., *Curating Critique* (Kufurt am Main: Revolver, 2007).

See *Art and Its Institutions: Current Conflicts, Critique and Collaboration* and Möntmann, "The Rise and Fall of Institutionalism, Perspectives on a Possible Future," European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies, August 2006, <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0407/itmenn/en>.

See Boris Buden, "What Is the Problem? An Attempt at Interpretation," European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies, July 2007, <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0407/buden/en>.

See Gerald Raunig, "Instituent Practices: Organizing, Instituting, Transforming," in *Art and Its Institutions: Current Conflicts, Critique and Collaboration*, eds. Gerald Raunig and Gene Ray (London: Routledge, 2009), 3–12.

See the same book, Stefan Nowotny's similar observations. See Stefan Nowotny, "Anti-Canonization: The Institutional Knowledge of Institutional Critique," in *Art and Contemporary Critique*, 21–28.

See Andrea Fraser, "Speaking of the Institutional World," *Texte Zur Kunst*, March 2006, 153–56.

See AA Bronson, "The Humiliation of the Bureaucrat: Artist-Run Centres as Museums by Artists," *Museums by Artists*, 2000.

See Vincent Bonin, "Protocoles documentaires/Documentary Protocols," in

*Protocoles documentaires/Documentary Protocols (1967–1975)*, 18–59.

38. For a history of the impact of 1970s and 1980s American politics on alternative spaces, see Brian Wallis, "Public Funding and Alternative Spaces," *Alternative Art New York, 1965–1985*, ed. Julie Ault (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press; London: Drawing Center, 2002), 161.

39. In a conference given in 1999, Ken Lum describes the prosperous era of the mid 1980s, a period when artists enjoyed the full extent of the "funding complex": *In a perfect cradle to coffin scenario, a Canadian artist in 1980 could conceivably receive a financial grant from the government to produce work, which could then be shown in an artist run space from which the artist would receive an exhibition fee and perhaps a residency stipend. The artist could get to the place of exhibition with assistance from a Travel Grant. Afterwards, the artist could make a submission to the Canada Council Art Bank to purchase the exhibited art. A jury comprised of [sic] other artists, each representative of a region in Canada, would make a decision about purchase. If at some future time, the artist would like to repurchase work sold to the Art Bank, he or she need only pay the original purchase price plus a supplementary charge for storage, maintenance and administration for the period the work was kept in the Art Bank. The important point is that at every stage of this hypothetical but highly possible scenario, Canadian artists are the ones to don the hats of the curator, the critic and the collector. In the name of a non-hierarchical system of artistic measurement, Canadian artists would be evaluated first and foremost by Canadian artists, peer groups in effect, without the need to rely on expert opinions from non-artists.* Ken Lum, "Canadian Cultural Policy: A Metaphysical Problem," paper given in Wrocław, Poland, June 1999, <http://apex-art.org/conference/lum.htm>.

40. Frank Georgi, ed., *Autogestion: La Dernière Utopie?* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2003).

41. Georgi, "Avant-propos," *Autogestion*, 8.

42. Clive Robertson, *Policy Matters: Administration of Art and Culture* (Toronto: YYZ Books, 2006), 26.

43. *Ibid.*

44. Robert Labossière, ed., *Decentre: Concerning Artist-Run Culture/à propos des centres d'artistes*, (Toronto: YYZ Books, 2008).

45. Here is an incomplete sample of such organizations created since the

mid 1980s: in the United States: Colab, Fashion Moda, Orchard (New York); in Germany: Friesenwall 120 (Cologne); in Canada: Instant Coffee (Toronto), Cornershop Projects, colourschool (Vancouver), Silver Flag, Holding Environment, We Left the Warm Stable and Entered the Latex Void (Montreal). To this day, most of these structures have disbanded. Some of them had established ties with the market, while others survived solely through the investment of its members' own economic resources.

46. See Orchard's Web site at <http://www.orchard47.org/>

47. See "Orchard Dossier," *Grey Room*, no. 39 (Spring 2009), 90–127, which is composed of the following articles: John Miller, "Fun Gallery," 92–99; Melanie Gilligan, "Public Image LLC: The Three Years Plan," 100–07; David Joselit, "Institutional Responsibility: The Short Life of Orchard," 108–15; and Andrea Geyer and Ulrike Muller, "An Idea-Driven Space," 116–27.

48. Hito Steyerl, "The Institution of Critique," European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies, January 2006, <http://www.eipcp.net/transversal/0106/steyerl/en>.

49. "Malaise dans le réseau: sur l'absence de critique institutionnelle au Canada."

#### Pages 96–105

Jon Davies  
*The Masculine Mystique*

1. Guy Hocquenghem, *The Screwball Asses*, trans. Noura Wedell (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2010), 69.
2. AA Bronson, preface to *Queer Spirits*, ed. AA Bronson and Peter Hobbs (New York: Creative Time; Winnipeg: Plug In Editions, 2011), 4.
3. However, the authors do not note the dates that the seances took place.
4. In *Queer Spirits*, the authors have playfully treated the ectoplasm pictured in Hamilton's photographs—the gauzy substance that enfolds spirits when channeled by a medium—with a glow-in-the-dark substance.
5. Bronson and Hobbs, *Queer Spirits*, 113.
6. Peter Hobbs quoted in Michael Slenske, "AA Bronson and Peter Hobbs, On Butt Plugs, Magic," *Art in America*, March 23, 2011, <http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-opinion/>

the-scene/2011-03-23/aa-bronson-invocation-queer-spirits-peter-hobbs-creative-time/.

7. Bronson, preface to *Queer Spirits*, 4. Only the opening seance in Banff and the concluding one on Fire Island were attended exclusively by Bronson and Hobbs.

8. Bronson and Hobbs, *Queer Spirits*, 26.

9. "AA Bronson: We Are the Revolution," Plug In ICA, accessed October 23, 2011, <http://plugin.org/exhibitions/2010/aa-bronson-we-are-revolution>.

10. Peter Hobbs, "The Art of Drifting: 43 Lessons from a Naked Cocktail Party," in *Queer Spirits*, 132.

11. I found no evidence in the book or in my other research of other public exhibition components to the project beyond the aftermath of the invocation on Governors Island.

12. General Idea is the pioneering conceptual artists' group that Bronson formed with Felix Partz and Jorge Zontal in 1969.

13. Hobbs, "The Art of Drifting," 171.

14. Bronson and Hobbs, *Queer Spirits*, 26.

15. Examples include his work as a healer and the *School for Young Shamans* project.

16. Hobbs, "The Art of Drifting," 132.

17. Elizabeth Freeman, introduction to "Queer Temporalities," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 13, nos. 2–3 (2007), 165.

18. *Ibid.*

19. A fate by no means exclusive to the queer movement.

20. Carla Freccero et al., "Theorizing Queer Temporalities: A Roundtable Discussion," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 13, nos. 2–3 (2007), 184.

21. "AA Bronson and Peter Hobbs talk about *Invocation of the Queer Spirits*," audio recording of a conversation with Anne Pasternak, *Invocation of the Queer Spirits*, Creative Time, 2008, <http://creativetime.org/programs/archive/2008/invocation/home.html>. Both Creative Time, New York, and Plug In ICA, Winnipeg, supported the *Invocation of the Queer Spirits* project and co-published the book.

22. Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004). In a (very crude) nutshell, "reproductive futurism" refers to Edelman's influential theory that every politic is ultimately about enshrining a future Child (and therefore the ongoing reproduction of the species), and that non-procreative queerness is the site of a "death drive"



that places us in a position to resist this ultimate heteronormativity: *[The] Child remains the perpetual horizon of every acknowledged politics, the fantasmatic beneficiary of every political intervention...* Queerness names the side of those not "fighting for the children," the side outside the consensus by which all politics confirms the absolute value of reproductive futurism (3).

23. Bronson and Hobbs, *Queer Spirits*, 26.

24. I am interested in this in part because Bronson meticulously documents his work, which is the object of decades of critical discourse on which I can draw.

25. AA Bronson, "Felix, June 5, 1994," *Looking Glass*, Vienna Secession, 2000, <http://aabronson.com/art/LookingGlass/Wien8.htm>.

26. Deborah Gould, *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP's Fight Against AIDS* (University of Chicago Press, 2009), 421–22.

27. AA Bronson, "Part 2: HIV-Negative," *Negative Thoughts*, MCA Chicago, 2001, <http://www.aabronson.com/art/Negative/MCAframe.htm>.

28. *Ibid.*

29. "Introducing Butt Massage at John Connelly Presents," John Connelly Presents, March 31, 2004, [http://aabronson.com/art/connelly/press\\_release.htm](http://aabronson.com/art/connelly/press_release.htm).

30. Steve Lafreniere, "AA Bronson: Shaman," *Things That Fall*, accessed October 23, 2011, <http://thingsthatfall.com/commercebooks/PIT-shaman.php>.

31. "On Looking in the Mirror and Finding AA Looking Back: Bill Arning Interviews AA Bronson," *AA Bronson: The Quick and the Dead* (Toronto: Power Plant; Vancouver: Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, 2003), 22.

32. AA Bronson, "Nayland and AA," *MIRROR MIRROR*, MIT List Visual Arts Center, 2002, <http://aabronson.com/art/mirrormirror/lookingglass/video1b.htm>.

33. Bronson has collaborated with women in his projects, especially more recently; for example, he co-founded the Institute for Art, Religion, and Social Justice at Union Theological Seminary in New York with Kathryn Reklis, and the Institute's first exhibition, *Compassion* (2009–10), curated by Bronson, included several women artists. Bronson was also a juror and visiting artist in 2011 for the inaugural Fire Island Artist Residency, which is open to applications from any GLBTQ artist, and to any artist working on queer themes.

34. AA Bronson, "About This Book," in

*Queer Spirits*, 6.

35. Hobbs, "The Art of Drifting," 134.

36. "Interview with Anne Pasternak and AA Bronson," *Invocation of the Queer Spirits*, Creative Time, 2008, <http://creativetime.org/programs/archive/2008/invocation/interview.html>.

37. Hobbs, "The Art of Drifting," 133.

38. *Ibid.*, 162.

39. Bronson and Hobbs, *Queer Spirits*, 47.

40. Deborah Gould, *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP's Fight Against AIDS* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 258.

41. *Ibid.*, 5.

42. Bronson also literally wrote the book on queer zines: Phillip Aarons and AA Bronson, eds., *Queer Zines* (New York: Printed Matter, 2008). The publication traces a distinctly multi-gender queer zine history—acknowledging the impact of feminism in the process—as compared to the recent, more fashion- and design-oriented, men's-interest wave I refer to here.

#### Pages 106–112

Philip Monk  
*Crises (and Coping) in the Work of General Idea*

1. "Smoking in Bedlam," *Showcard* 1093, 1977.

2. In the performances *Hot Property* (Winnipeg Art Gallery, October 22, 1977) and *The Ruins of the 1984 Miss General Idea Pavillion* (Kingston, November 1977).

3. *Consider your mirror's feelings. Must it always reflect you? A) Coerce all your mirrors to look at each other. B) Now that you've turned them onto the ultimate narcissism, steal away your reflection while they aren't watching. Carefully. It's all done without mirrors. How they'll talk about you! The vacuum created by your invisibility has got to be filled with words. They'll talk and talk....* "Are You Truly Invisible," *IFEL* 2, no. 3 (September 1973), 35.

4. "Glamour is a passive defense [whose strategies are] simple but evasive: 1. Concealment, i.e., separation, postured innocence; 2. Hardening of the Target, i.e., closure of the object, a seeming immobility, a brilliance; 3. Mobility of the Target, i.e., the superficial image hides an APPARENT emptiness (changing one's mind, shifting stance, 'feminine' logic)." "Glamour," *FILE* 3, no. 1 (Autumn 1975), n.p.

5. See General Idea's second and third *Borderline Cases: Imitation of Life (Mimicry): ... There's safety in numbers and two can have a mind of its own. Our two hands applauded the engagement and came out dueling. In the crack of dawn a narcissus is blooming. All together now, one two, one two, one two. Self Conscious: ... Driving the wedge down deep through the centre and splitting the images in halves. There is two of us now to contend with now. Two heads are better than one but it's really just one more mouth to feed on. Casting our image in the mirror revealed a cast of two. Our very own dialogue to talk to ourselves. We're not the one we used to be.* "General Idea's Borderline Cases," *IFEL* 2, no. 3 (September 1973), 14, 16.

6. See the 1977 *Showcards* "Three Heads are Better" (1–078), "Three Men" (1–079), "Group Decision" (1–080), and "Right Hand Man" (1–076): *The three of them are all each others right-hand man but they aren't taking any chances. If one was lost on the job it would throw off the balance. They know that three's a crowd and a basic social unit and they'd hate to be reduced to a couple.*

7. *We are the poodle, banal and effete; note our relished role as watchdog, retriever and gay companion; our wit, pampered presence and ornamental physique; our eagerness for affection and affectation; our delicious desire to be groomed and preened for public appearances; in a word, our desire to please: those that live to please must please to live.* General Idea, "How Our Mascots Love to Humiliate Us," in *General Idea: 1968–1984* (Eindhoven: Stedelijk Van Abbeuseum, 1984), 23.

8. *The irony disappeared when we moved to New York in 1986. It was the first year we exhibited in the U.S., at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo, although we had been exhibiting in Europe for ten years. The American audience wasn't prepared to deal with the complexity of our narratives. They didn't want something that couldn't be digested in a split second. We had to completely rethink what we were doing for the work to have any meaning, for it to communicate in any way with the New York audience.* Snowden Snowden, "Bzzz Bzzz Bzzz: AA Bronson on General Idea," *Metropolis* 1, February/March 2011. Or as AA Bronson said more directly in an interview with Hans Ulrich Obrist, "We had to make that very complex narrative less visible because it was too confusing for America" (*UOVO*, April/May/June 2008, 205).