
*After Homosexual: The legacies of Gay Liberation* is a collection of reflective essays, edited by Carolyn D’Cruz and Mark Pendleton, on Dennis Altman’s seminal book, *Homosexual: Liberation and Oppression*. The collection was published after a conference marking the fortieth anniversary of Altman’s work and is divided into three parts. The first, ‘Looking Back’, has pieces by Altman’s contemporaries, reflecting on their first encounter with the book and the politically charged context of its publication. The second part is a selection of materials from the Australian Gay and Lesbian Archives (AGLA), chronicling the burgeoning gay rights movement in Australia that Altman was intimately involved in upon his return to the country in 1969. The last part, ‘Moving on’, contains pieces from a wide range of scholars, including Christos Siolkas, Neville Hoad and Elena Jeffreys, that reflect on the current state of the gay rights movement in the context of the Western world and its likely direction in the future.

*Homosexual* was a provocative book written in provocative times and took its energy from a variety of powerful radical movements that swept the world in the 1960s and 70s. While the Stonewall riots and the ensuing gay liberation movement formed Altman’s main focus, he was extremely conscious of the interconnectedness of the activist communities in New York at the time, from the Black Panthers, to women’s rights activists, to the protests against the Vietnam war. Although *Homosexual* was written about a specific time and place, the responses show the manner in which its mix of auto-ethnography, historical chronicling and theoretical musings were received in Australia and the United Kingdom, as well as in America. The last part of Altman’s book, ‘The End of the Homosexual’, remains its most controversial for the prophecy that the culmination of gay liberation would (and should) mean the dissolution of sexual categories into a ‘polymorphous whole’ (p. 80).

*After Homosexual*, quite appropriately, is also part-history, part-personal anecdote, part-critique, and part-appeal to the current moment in gay liberation movements to reinvigorate their radical roots. Altman has long been concerned with the ‘selling out’ and mainstreaming of the movement, commenting in 1996 that:

> Neither the radicals of the Gay Liberation Front, nor the moral conservatives who dominated the Right of twenty years ago, were

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prepared for the changes which have made the gay and lesbian market a favourite target for car and telephone companies.2

He has also been skeptical of the rise of queer studies as a discipline, remarking in the same 1996 article that it is ‘the bastard child of the gay and lesbian movement and postmodern literary theory, which, like other unwed mothers, has been very loathe to acknowledge the father’.

It is not surprising, then, that one of the main themes of the collection is a focus on the ways in which capitalism and neoliberalism have influenced, or, as many contributors even argue, have co-opted the radical energy of the movement to make its present focus equal marriage rights. There is also an examination of the impact of AIDS on the movement in the 1990s, with Dion Kagan examining the epidemic’s effect on gay communities in terms of human costs, as well as the more broadscale activism it prompted within national and, crucially, international spheres. Kagan also points to the fading of the threat from the Western public imagination with the advent of retroviral drugs, which is linked to the ‘thirdworldisation’ of the epidemic as well as its association with the ‘bad kind’ of homosexual.

Some of the critiques seem to stem from a kind of nostalgia for a time that, as put forward in the introduction, ‘seemed much more exciting—even more fun-than the dull grind of legislative reform and the mundaneness of social tolerance’ (p. 2). Others, on the other hand—and I would argue that these form the strongest part of the book-critique the current movement from the perspective of those it has left behind. Elena Jeffrey’s piece on the way sex workers have been at the forefront of gay rights since Stonewall while being continually erased by the mainstream is excellent; as is Dean Spade’s withering critique of the way white-led mainstream gay rights movements in America have continually ignored poor people, people with disabilities, immigrants and prisoners. Spade expresses his hope in ‘critical queer and trans political engagements [that] have built and deepened a solidarity-based politics’ (p. 207).

The book succeeds in recalling and contextualising a very important period in the history of the gay rights movement in America, the UK and Australia, and, in doing so, fills in, to some extent, a history that receives too little attention, even within the communities that have sprung from it. The archival materials included in After Homosexual are both interesting in their own right as well as vital to reconstructing the debates that informed the nascent movement in Australia; also, perhaps, drawing attention to the blind spots that hampered the movement from becoming a truly inclusive one. While a sense of nostalgia is somewhat detrimental to the sharpness of the critiques as it places the 1960s and 70s in a pre-Capitalist and somehow ‘purer’ revolutionary glow, the inclusion of pieces like the interview of Aboriginal activist, Gary Foley, allows for more self-reflexivity. Foley maintains that the reason that prominent gay Aboriginal individuals (in this case, John Newfong) were not active in the larger gay liberation movement was a lack of intersectionality that continues to the present day. He points out that this makes ‘any claims to be a

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progressive [state] laughable. So you know, we’re still at the bottom of the heap. We were then and we still are’. (p. 67)

Taking a lesson from this temperance, I would suggest that the book is an excellent historical examination of the roots of today’s (Western) multifaceted queer rights movement and an excellent resource for undergraduates, postgraduates, general researchers, or even lay readers who have an interest in the area of queer history. While the 1960s and 70s are certainly romanticised and the essays are from a particular leftist and radical perspective, the analyses of contemporary issues remain sharp and insightful. They offer a compelling counterpoint to the dominant feeling that the heyday of the movement is over in a Western context. Clearly there is much work, both in terms of activism and theory to be done. Indeed, the urge to retain the synergy between both is underlined.

*Rukmini Pande, The University of Western Australia*