

Queer Mutiny Turns Six in Amsterdam

By **JESSE SANFORD**

Imagine a wonderland in the midst of urban decay. You are on the side of a wide, slow-moving canal, in a cool northern city. On the bank, two hundred people, a galaxy of genders and hair colors, are laughing, chatting, drinking and dancing. A bridge leaps over the water; from it hangs a banner: "Queer Mutiny Now!"

Beyond the crowd a dilapidated warehouse of brick and concrete has somehow escaped conversion into luxury lofts despite impossibly large windows. Should you climb the steps and enter, you would find a vast, dimly lit space, a giant kitchen along one edge, a stage, and a shop where everything is free. You could build your own bicycle from parts piled in one corner, or pass through a curtain into a working cinema, just built last week, complete with red carpets, floor lighting, and rows of plushly upholstered theater seats. All this from nothing, or barely anything: the warehouse is squatted space, the furniture from donations or scavenged from dumpsters. Even in the days of capitalism's supreme triumph, it is still possible to host a weeklong festival, providing food, water and housing for 300 people free of charge, on a budget less than \$6000.

Another banner hung luxuriously down two stories of the warehouse. "Fuck the pope," it read, "but use a condom." That caption pretty much encapsulates the philosophy behind the Queeruptions, a series of political gatherings that take place once or twice a year in an increasingly global spread of cities. It scarcely need be said that this latest, in Amsterdam June 1-7, was damn straight punk rock.

I can still remember the first Queeruption organizing meeting I attended, held in the women-run bookstore Bluestockings on New York City's Lower East Side. Anti-capitalist politics were nothing new to me. In college I had written a column for the campus newspaper called "Yuppicide," and my grandmother took me to my first demo

when I was eight. The queer connection, though, I hadn't yet explored. At that meeting were thirty queers of a more dizzying array of genders than I had ever imagined, moving through the organization of what I could see was a vastly more complex event than any I had produced in the past, and doing it with remarkably little handwringing. (I didn't realize at the time that this was due primarily to Mattilda's particular talent as a facilitator.) Housing shares, food, a wheelchair access ramp, workshop schedules, plans for a demonstration or two: all these things and more were on the agenda.

During the next few years, I was to move into a queer anarchist collective, attend, enjoy and finally organize massive pan-gender sex parties, and begin amassing a sizeable arrest record as a protestor against corporate hegemony and the abusive norms of the heterosexual family which support it. I spent countless hours in discussion of white supremacy, the politics of gender, sexuality and the family, of ageism, classism, state surveillance and veganism. For me, and for hundreds of other queer organizers and artists, the Queeruptions have become a source of strength, sustenance, new ideas – and occasionally a battle ground, where hard political work comes as we all seek ways to get along together.

Because Queeruption is a do-it-yourself event, the participants are responsible for the logistics; because it is organized by consensus, many different needs must be taken into account before a decision can be reached. It is due to these organizing techniques, and to a deep commitment to minimizing engagement with the money economy, that broader issues arise out of such seeming banalities as food, water, waste, event setup and security.

At Queeruption 6, for example, admission to the sex party required a special 'X' on the wrist which could only be obtained after reading, in one of five languages, a long list of guidelines and background information on such topics as condoms and consent. Much discussion of racism, body fascism, and

gender had been necessary to develop a layout for the space: there was open space, dungeon space, gendered space, foodfight space. When someone mentioned at a meeting earlier in the day that cameras would be prohibited at the party, there was an objection – and organizers decided to create as well a clearly-marked camera space to accommodate film and photo fetishists.

At all the Queeruptions I have attended, well over half the workshops never took place. This is not necessarily a problem, since discussion and training in activism takes place as circumstances arise. In Amsterdam, half the attendees bussed off to the Hague to protest against the far-right Dutch Nationalist Party, widely considered a neo-Nazi front group. When we made the mistake of marching past the US embassy – which last year had its windows smashed in a protest against the Iraq invasion – we were surrounded by riot cops, beaten, and arrested. Back at the gathering, the remaining attendees swung into action – and those which had never done legal support for a demonstration had a perfect chance to learn.

Likewise, those workshops that did take place more often than not were discussions of power and bias issues that emerged during the logistics discussions. As has been documented in *Market This!* a recent film from Paper Tiger Television, the NYC Queeruption ended in a bitter conflict over white supremacy and diversity in organizing.

Queeruptions are not for the faint of heart, though when difficult discussions seem a bit much – perhaps one has been lingering too long in Amsterdam's legendary coffee shops – one can always show up for samba drumming or bicycle ballet. ▼

Jesse Sanford is an activist and a doctoral student in anthropology at the University of California-Berkeley. His work focuses on ecology, sexuality and technology in relation to contemporary politics.

Good legal advice can make all the difference.



Langrock Sperry & Wool takes **PRIDE** in contributing to the advance in civil rights for gay and lesbian citizens, and to making our state a better place for all Vermonters.

Langrock Sperry & Wool offers the services of 22 lawyers with over 300 years combined experience in all areas of the law – including two lesbian attorneys with special expertise serving the legal needs of the g/l/b/t/q community

SUSAN MURRAY & BETH ROBINSON

With offices in Middlebury and Burlington

Middlebury (802) 388-6356

Burlington (802) 864-0217

smurray@langrock.com brobinson@langrock.com

Langrock Sperry & Wool, LLP

ATTORNEYS AT LAW

Ronnie Carol Lesser, Ph.D.

Licensed Psychologist-Doctorate

58 Hardscrabble Lane

Lyme, N.H.

(603)-795-4216

Psychotherapy for the gay, lesbian,
and bisexual community