

JOSE VILLARRUBIA'S BEEFCAKE BONANZA

OUTWEEK

THE LESBIAN
AND GAY
NEWS
MAGAZINE
NO. 81

\$2.95 USA \$1.95 in NYC

GMHC'S BRAFF BLASTS BACK

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together
now:**

Sandra

let's talk about you!

by sarah pettit



NEWS • SEXUAL POLITICS • HEALTH • THE ARTS

On the Frontline

IMAGES FROM THE FRONT: PHOTOGRAPHY CHALLENGING AIDS.

The Lesbian and Gay Community Services Center. 208 W. 13th St. Through Jan. 31.

By John Donahue

On my way to the Lesbian and Gay Community Services Center, I stopped at FIT's galleries to see *Images of Man*, the Armani show that documents 15 years of his fashion photography ads. The show's title may suggest something democratic, with its echo of Edward Steichen's *Family of Man*. Instead, the exhibit conspires to overwhelm the viewer with longing, both for clothes he or she cannot afford and for the men who wear them. The wall text explains that each year's campaign ushered in a new set of models; the photos are organized in "seasonal" groups—spring-summer or fall-winter of each passing year. The show is beautifully mounted and lit, the photos glow, and the walls that hold no pictures are backlit. The setting is like a sealed spaceship cruising safely above the planet.

I went from *Images of Man* to the Center's *Images From the Front: Photography Challenging AIDS*. This made a

brutal double feature.

Images From the Front is installed in one of the Center's threadbare meeting rooms. You may have to wait until a group clears out before having a chance to view it. Here, 15 photographers' broad range of black-and-white pictures illustrate the extent of the battlefield. Unfortunately, AIDS photography needs no embellishment or explanation; the unadorned truth speaks strongest, and these documentary photographs are the most affecting. Arne Svenson's "Clinical Studies" are powerful examples, with each work a closeup of men's faces hooked up with rubber tubes. The portraits are small and cropped close to the face, each bead of sweat visible.

The most startling work was Bryan Wintermute's "Hey There, Purple Face," in which a California license is enlarged showing the owner's face disfigured with lesions. Illustrating the mundane level at

which PWAs must daily fight, it also suggests that the front is right here in our laundromats and even in our mirrors.

Y. Nagasaki contributes a kiss, Tom McGovern a triptych about living with AIDS and John Lesnick's "Memory of a Dead Lover" has been printed from a negative that looks as if it has been scratched, stepped on and mutilated.

Some of the photography is familiar, especially to readers of this magazine: Demonstration photos have become familiar to the point of cliché.

Images is a scrappy show that confronts AIDS with art in an unconventional space. It uses the metaphor of war as an organizing principle and was put together with zero dollars. The recent *Army of Lovers* show at PS 122 was another such exhibition. Appropriate to their tattered and marginal spaces and unfiltered by commercialism, these shows deliver a potent blend of mourning and activism. ▼

Know de Cologne

EPISTEMOLOGY OF THE CLOSET by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick.
University of California Press. \$24.95 cl. 258 pp.

by Max Cavitch

Knowing is all.

—Estée Lauder

Epistemology of the Closet comes in a very pretty package. Its marbled mauve jacket and compact typography frame an elegant black-and-white photograph of an Edwardian dandy, poised on the threshold of a brilliantly lit doorway—an idealized image of Sedgwick's reader, about to be engulfed by the white-hot light of her prose. Laudatory back-ad quotes from Wayne Koestenbaum and Douglas Crimp and the cachet of an academic publisher's imprint on the spine confirm our already ineluctable sense of what is about to be experienced—the seduc-

tive promise, the dazzling scent of knowledge...

But don't judge a book by its cover. Eve Sedgwick would have us know—if we are to know anything at all—that the perfume-counter aroma of knowingness that adorns so much contemporary thinking on gay-related issues is often a mask for less discrete, more human odors. As Sedgwick explains, a great deal of effort has been made in recent scholarship to go beyond the notion that our knowledge of "homosexuality" is simply the result of an increasingly more full and more accurate understanding of same-sex relations, the essence of which

has been constant throughout history. It has become clear how unhelpful it is, for example, to look back at cultures like 14th-



CLOSET CRACKER—Author Eve Sedgwick

BOOKS

century Europe's or at novels written in other centuries in order to pinpoint "evidence" of homosexual identities and behaviors that differ from ours only insofar as they weren't properly recognized as such. Rescuing medieval monks and characters out of Dickens from self-ignorance and repression, after all, has less to say about the unchanging nature of homosexuality than it does about the desire for secure self-knowledge in the present.

Yet even as we recognize the profound differences in same-sex relations throughout history and across cultures, there is, Sedgwick feels, a lingering tendency to ground our exploration of such differences on something called "homosexuality as we know it today." While recognizing fully the vital importance—legal, psychological, social, intellectual—that a unified, consensually defined "homosexuality" has for people who live, love, pay taxes and go to court in a violently heterosexist society, Sedgwick wants us to jump back and take a look at what it is we think that we know about contemporary homo- and heterosexual definition.

In fact, in the introduction to *Epistemology of the Closet*, Sedgwick insists that "a point of the book is *not to know*.... In particular, the book aims to resist in every way it can the deadening pretended knowingness by which the chisel of modern homo/heterosexual definitional crisis tends, in public discourse, to be hammered most fatally home." The fatalities and near fatalities of this crisis are everywhere around us. They result, to a great extent, from the paranoia and willful ignorance of institutions whose business it is to militate against a more complex, less constrained understanding of human sexual relations. These institutions include the US Justice Department, the Supreme Court, the medical community and the would-be cultural dictatorships of reactionaries like William Bennett and Allan Bloom.

But they also include the more humanely motivated, gay affirmative institution of contemporary gay and anti-homophobic theory, which, through the competition of various models (historical/transhistorical, minoritizing/universalizing, gender-transitive/gender-intransitive), tends toward the establishment of a single, supervening model of same-sex relations. The "truth" of human sexuality may never

be established, yet it continues to be the hypothetical goal. Sedgwick's contention is that, while all of these models have enormous practical and theoretical value, more attention should be paid to the gaps and contradictions within and between them, in order to "render less destructively presumable 'homosexuality as we know it today.'"

To this tentative end, Sedgwick offers a book in which the work of unknowing can begin—a book that, in her own words, "not only has, but constitutes, an extended introduction." The conceptually oriented introduction and chapter 1 constitute a full third of the book's length and will be, for all their sophistication, of greater interest to a general audience than the extended reading of Melville, Wilde, Nietzsche, Henry James and Proust that make up the later chapters. However, these chapters necessarily continue the exploration of the definitional crisis that is Sedgwick's reason for writing and are, furthermore, brilliant examples of what a

less-impudent knowingness can bring to the study of sexual difference in the past as well as in the present.

Of course, for all her insistence upon not knowing, Sedgwick knows a great deal, and she is able to communicate what she knows in a very sexy way. The exuberance and playfulness of her writing is intoxicating, and while it often fails to be clear, it rarely fails to charm. Sentences suffering from wild syntax and fancy diction abound and clash, rather than mingle, with the body-chemistry of her ideas. But, unlike the strained, ugly, convoluted language of other high-priced literary theorists, Sedgwick's is unabashedly content with its extravagance. Ultimately, the heady promise of *Epistemology of the Closet's* pretty package is confirmed, not by the arrogant assault of the season's new atomized intellectual scent, but by a smartly nuanced approach to gay studies that outlasts its own perfumery and will surely prove a perennial favorite. ▼

There's a Good Sport

THE ARENA OF MASCULINITY: SPORTS, HOMOSEXUALITY AND THE MEANING OF SEX by Brian Pronger. St. Martin's Press. \$22.95 cl. 320 pp.

by Richard Fumosa

Brian Pronger's *The Arena of Masculinity* is an ambitious and readable—though never lurid—attempt to get a handle on the relationship between athletics and gay men in Western culture. A researcher at the School of Physical and Health Education at the University of Toronto, Pronger uses contemporary gender theory to illustrate his organically personal yet theoretically sound treatise on the interaction between male orthodox heterosexual culture and paradoxical homosexual culture. The author clearly wants to blow the cover on this last bastion of "straightness," making homosexuality as visible in institutional athletics as it has become in the clergy, the military and the police force. Colorful interviews

GRIPPING SUBJECT—*University of Toronto's Brian Pronger*

