

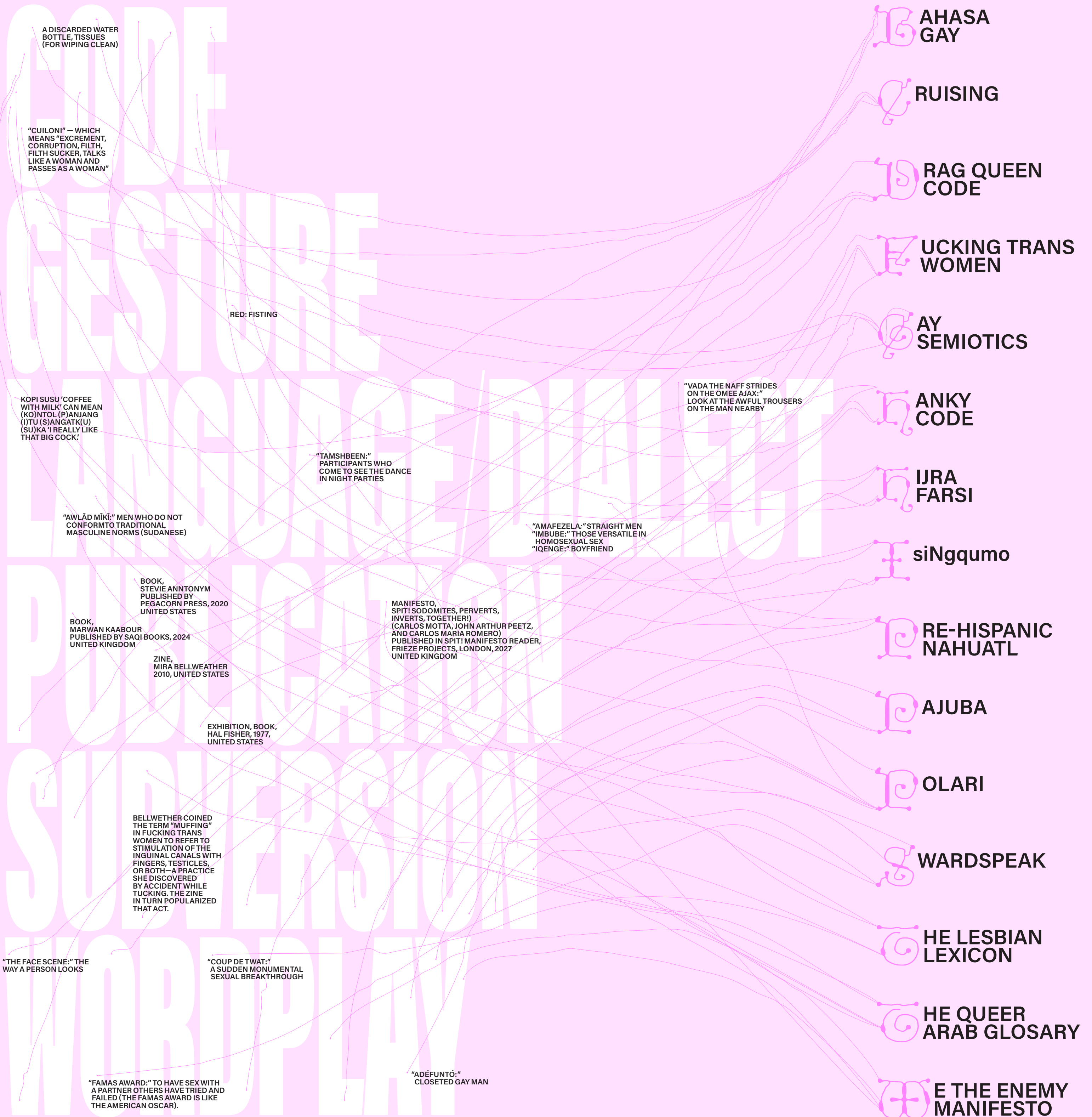
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QUEER WORD PLAY



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FOR CHAOS &
PRECISION STUDIO



QUEERWORDPLAY is a living document on forms of communication used by LGBTQAI+ people, including languages, dialects, slang, coded gestures, and the semantics of cruising. These entries represent systems of “wordplay,” developed around the world and through time that have enabled parallel and covert communication for self-selected communities that don’t wish to be perceived by mainstream publics or the heteronormative dominant society.

This document is not intended to be a comprehensive guide, a timeline, nor an index. By featuring these entries in a graphic form, we seek to be anti-taxonomic, to establish possible solidarities, and to perceive connections between queers separated by geography and time. The descriptions draw from publicly available sources and have been left intentionally vague, affirming the secretive and coded nature of the entries, which pertain to sexual and gender minorities.

Bahasa Gay

1970S, INDONESIA
Bahasa Gay's wordplay processes include unique suffixes and word substitutions, the creation of acronyms, the use of foreign mass media terms, vowel shifts, suffixation, and coining neologisms. Bahasa Gay's "lexicon" is more than just a collection of words; it is a language game. In its emphasis on language gaming processes, it resembles gay languages, including Swardspeak and Polari. Bahasa Gay is often spoken in a high-pitched tone, and rising utterance, characteristics that Indonesians associate with images of demure femininity and softness. Not all the word play in Bahasa Gay is feminizing, but some speakers explain that speaking in an effeminate manner is also indicative of Bahasa Gay. It's true fluency is signaled not just by knowing the vocabulary, but by knowing the processes and being able to coin neologisms oneself.

E.G.
"BEKI:" GAY MAN
"BORLOGS:" CASUAL HOOKUP
"JOWA:" BOYFRIEND

Cruising

TIMELESS, EVERYWHERE
Non-verbal, gestural, intuitive, gazing, public.
The stranger is clearly heading in my direction. Until he is five or even three feet away, I cannot be sure he is committing to this interaction, cruising me and not someone else, or simply on a walk alone in nature. Soon he is within an arm's reach and addressing me positively — smiling or smirking or batting his eyelashes. I am not sure this is happening; he could turn and move away, the hot sand could fail to melt his icy feet, and he might abandon me. But now he is so close I could shake his hand. So, I drop my hand to my crotch, and he does the same and I turn on the spot, and walk further away from the beach into the dunes, shrubs, and tall grass.

Marks of previous cruising encounters scatter across the landscape. The dune grasses are depressed by accumulated footsteps. Creeping vines are halted in their growth by the consistent nudging forward and pushing away of those seeking privacy. The detritus of past encounters is embedded into the cruising grounds: a discarded water bottle or some tissues for wiping clean; a condom wrapper is a clear beacon that you're in the right place, and maybe a trash bag is hanging from a small tree, notched there by a horny, conscientious fellow who wanted to keep the cruising grounds clear.

Those who know the language of cruising see what looks to non-speakers as wild, happenstance paths. They read the directions of a composite compass. Here we find a bed of sand, a circle of dappled shade below flowering yellow honeysuckle — if one could communicate cruising in fragrances and odors, it would smell of new flowers and sweat, lube on poppers, sunscreen by ass, spit with the sea. J.L., Fort Tilden, NY 2024.

E.G. (YOU MIGHT FIND):
A DISCARDED WATER BOTTLE
SOME TISSUES FOR WIPING CLEAN

Drag Queen Code

1950S, LOWER EAST SIDE, NEW YORK CITY
Drag queens used language in these letters playfully, making up spelling and continually inventing code words to describe their lived experience. "The flexibility of the vernacular is part of its charm," even if it impedes transparency and interpretation for outsiders.
"As a result of their need for secrecy, drag queens developed an extraordinary lexicon of their own. It likely served both as queer shorthand while simultaneously protecting their conversations from being understood from an outsider." The lexicon is derived from a cache of letters written by drag queens working in Lower East Side clubs in the 1950s. The letters were discovered in 2014 and are compiled in Craig Olsen's P.S. *Burn This Letter Please: the Fabulous and Fraught Birth of Modern Drag, In the Queens' Own Words* (London: Sphere, 2023).

Fucking Trans Women

ZINE, MIRA BELLWEATHER, 2010, UNITED STATES
Here be dragons and sea monsters, my fellow genital cartographers, and we have a lot to learn from poking them. Let the metaphors, the language, the analogies come: afterward. They are helpful, but I believe with great conviction that what I have between my legs is not a metaphor or an analogy but something new and wonderful. Best to begin from the beautiful explosive moments of pleasure and discovery, and to let the rest come after. - Mira Bellweather.
Bellweather's wordplay invents new language to match the experience of trans women. Language is used to create community, share know-ledge, and expand sexual pleasure. The author celebrates "gentle and casual tweeking of language," but resists making "a lecture on terminology." She "invents words, metaphors, and stories, to explain to myself and to others how I think my body works, and what it can do."

E.G.
BELLWEATHER COINED THE TERM "MUFFING" IN FUCKING TRANS WOMEN TO REFER TO STIMULATION OF THE INGUINAL CANALS WITH FINGERS, TESTICLES, OR BOTH—A PRACTICE SHE DISCOVERED BY ACCIDENT WHILE TUCKING. THE ZINE IN TURN POPULARIZED THAT ACT.

"My original motive for starting this zine was simple: I wanted to talk to other trans women about how we like to fuck. Although over the last two years I've found other reasons for making this zine, the overall motive has remained basically the same: to generate conversations about sex with trans women with the knowledge that the more we talk to each other and our lovers about how we like to fuck, the better off we'll all be."

Gay Semiotics

EXHIBITION AND BOOK, HAL FISHER
FIRST EDITION PUBLISHED BY NPS PRESS, SAN FRANCISCO, 1977
REPUBLICED BY CHERRY AND MARTIN, LOS ANGELES, 2015, UNITED STATES
Analysis of a gay historical vernacular and irreverent appropriation of structuralist theory, focusing on the coded language of cruising. The work includes black and white portraits of gay archetypes, along with text that deconstructs the symbols of the era's looks. The work also presents detailed descriptions of signifiers like handkerchiefs, keys, and earrings.
Since 1977—when the first exhibition of this series took place in San Francisco—Gay Semiotics has been recognized as a unique and pioneering analysis of a gay historical vernacular and as an irreverent appropriation of structuralist theory focusing on the coded language of cruising. The work includes black and white portraits of gay archetypes, along with text that deconstructs the symbols of the era's looks. The work also presents detailed descriptions of signifiers like handkerchiefs, keys, and earrings.

Hanky Code

1970S, VARIOUS GLOBAL CITIES
The hanky code employs secretive, silent, and decorative modes of communication. This wordplay is less about words and more about symbols, although those symbols correspond to a lexicon of fetishes. The placement of the hanky in the left pocket means "top/giving" and right pocket means "bottom/receiving," so there is a further sartorial form of queer communication-play.
E.G.
BLACK: S/M
RED: FISTING
GREY: BONDAGE

Hijra Farsi

CONTEMPORARY, PAKISTAN AND INDIA
Secrecy and gatekeeping. Hijra Farsi has more than 10000 words including some words absorbed from local languages like Urdu, Pashto, and Hindi.
Hijra Farsi is a language of Khawaja Sara and Hijras that has been spoken in Mughal periods since the 15th century. Hijra Farsi has more than 10000 words, including some words absorbed from local languages like Urdu, Pashto, and Hindi. The Hijra were/are advisors, warrior-priests, political administrators, royal deputies, court functionaries, ritual performers, Sufi-informed identities, mystics, and emissaries between men and women, who are visible in Pakistani and Indian society. Hijra Farsi is a secret language: "We have our own language that only we can speak. We gate keep it quite tightly. Other queer people are welcome into it as well and of course the words flow in and flow out, but other than that only trans women in Pakistan are fluent in Hijra Farsi," claims Pakistani transgender rights activist Mehrub Moiz.
E.G.
"SUWA:" BEAUTIFUL
"FASSHATI:" A PERSON WITH NO MONEY
"TAMSHBEE:" PARTICIPANTS WHO COME TO SEE THE DANCE IN NIGHT PARTIES
"BELAGAN:" PEOPLE WITH CRIMINAL BACKGROUND OR "BADMASH"

isiNgqumo

20TH CENTURY, ZULU SPEAKING SOUTH AFRICA
Unlike the speakers of many other gay dialects in the world, speakers of isiNgqumo make little to no use of English lexical borrowings, but instead employ many re-contextualized Zulu words. Its lexicon transcends a mere sexual register by the incorporation of many non-sexual/lexical items.
Originating in Mkhumbane, as early as 1940, isiNgqumo is grammatically based on the Nguni languages and is a linguistic variety in South Africa. It is spoken predominantly by African men who engage in same-sex relations, many of whom are Zulu mother tongue speakers. The variety can be considered a genderlect because when people speak isiNgqumo, "people do gender linguistically." Although there are also many neologisms in isiNgqumo, the bulk of the vocabulary is based on so-called "deep" isiZulu terms drawn from the isiHlonipho variety of Zulu, a linguistic variety that can be described as a politeness register. Hlonipha can manifest itself in multifaceted relations of superordination and subordination, and it is based on complex mechanisms that control language use, posture, gesture, movements, dress code, and other dynamics of a material nature or status.
E.G.
"AMAFEZELA:" STRAIGHT MEN
"IMBUBE:" THOSE VERSATILE IN HOMOSEXUAL SEX
"IQENGE:" BOYFRIEND

Pre-Hispanic Nahuatl

Nahuatl has been spoken in Central Mexico since at least the 7th Century CE. A uniquely ancient sexual-linguistic cosmology in which sexual behaviors and desires were linked to a panoply of gods, human sacrifice, and warfare.
The Florentine Codex* of the 1570 reveals:
The "Xochihua" — a cross-dressing figure whose name also means "has women's speech", "women's form of address", "men's speech", "men's form of address" "Corrupts, confuses, and bewitches people" ... "uses flowers on someone [texochihua]." The "Cuiloni" — which means "excrement, corruption, filth, filth sucker, talks like a woman and passes as a woman"
The "Patlache": a filthy woman, a woman with a penis, possessor of an erect penis, a penis, and testicles; pairs up with a woman, befriends a woman, procures young women, and possesses young women.

Pajuba

1960S, BRAZIL
The "secrecy effect" of Pajubá could be achieved through various linguistic strategies of illegibility, devising a clandestine and creative system of meaning, including the use of African lexicon, the invention of hybrid words, slang, and the reassembling of these elements through figures of speech, resulting in the multiplication of possible meanings. Pajubá is not only a lexical repertoire, but also lived "performativity;" it involves tones, rhythms, gestures, mannerisms, bodily motions, and facial expressions in various combinations.
Pajubá is a word rooted in the Yoruba-Nago languages of West Africa, originally meaning "secret" or "mystery," but re-signified in its mobilization by queer speakers to mean "news" or "gossip." As a linguistic style and as a practice of resistance, it was first mobilized by travestis in the context of the military dictatorship in 1964. Its origins as a living language emerge from the streets, the nightly practice of sex work and the lived struggle during the military regime. As such, it allowed in-group communication while ensuring that outsiders, and particularly the police, would not "understand what we are saying."

E.G.
"ADÉ:" GAY MAN
"ADEFUNTO:" CLOSETED GAY MAN
"AMAPÓ:" MEANS WOMAN

Polari

19TH CENTURY, ENGLAND
Spelling backwards, lexical replacement, rhyming, indexing, camp use of foreign languages—especially French—and taking feminine names, are all examples of wordplay in Polari.
Polari is a slang terminology coming from different sources, including Cockney Rhyming Slang, back slang (pronouncing a word as if it was spelt backwards), French, Yiddish and American Air Force slang. In a period when homosexuality was illegal and heavily stigmatized, it was useful as a means of conducting conversations in public spaces, so as not to alert others to your sexuality. The language itself is full of camp, irony, innuendo and sarcasm.
E.G.
"VADA THE NAFF STRIDES ON THE OMEE AJAX:"
LOOK AT THE AWFUL TROUSERS ON THE MAN NEARBY
"THE DILLY:" PICCADILLY CIRCUS, A POPULAR HANG-OUT FOR MALE PROSTITUTES IN LONDON
"EEK:" FACE
"FEELY:" YOUNG

Swardspeak

1970S ONWARD, PHILIPPINES
Deriving or creating new words through borrowing, metathesis, affixation, substitution, acronym, duplication, repetition, clipping/reduction, blending. It often employs onomatopoeia and the names of popular people or places.
Over half of the root words in Swardspeak are Cebuano, along with English, Taglish (a combination of Tagalog and English), Spanish, Japanese, Bikol, and Hilagaynon as other sources. Most of the words and phrases in the argot have to do with the sex act. Some speakers perform exaggerated feminine sounds or baby talk. One process, ipis talk, is said by some to make the face look "queenie" due to the frequent [i] and [v] sounds that purse the lips." Many words are compounds, alliterations, or double entendres, like "AC/DC," which means heterosexual; "double blade," bisexual; and "tra-la-la," fellatio.
E.G.
"SEVENTH HEAVEN:" TO HAVE AN ORGASM
"FAMAS AWARD:" TO HAVE SEX WITH A PARTNER OTHERS HAVE TRIED AND FAILED (THE FAMAS AWARD IS LIKE THE AMERICAN OSCAR).

The Lesbian Lexicon

BOOK, STEVIE ANNTONYM
PUBLISHED BY PEGACORN PRESS, 2020
UNITED STATES
The lesbian lexicon revels in humor and wit, describing subtle dynamics and sexual/horny elements of lesbian life. It celebrates accuracy in wordplay and word creation, what it calls "lexis orgasmus" and the abandonment of old, outdated terminology in a lexical place of abandonment known as the "Word Graveyard."
"The lesbian lexicon documents invented words describing previously unnamed queer phenomena, refurbished words and terms already used in popular queer vernacular, and gay words of antiquity. (It) offers 49 gems fresh from the texts, DMs, emails, snail mail, damp bar napkins, postcards from the edge, and filthy dirty mouths of babes, all lovingly picked and preened for print."
E.G.
"BLOUSE:" FEMME TOP
"COUP DE TWAT:" A SUDDEN MONUMENTAL SEXUAL BREAKTHROUGH
"FAGNET:" A LADY WHO IS BELOVED BY, AND A MAGNET FOR GAY MEN

The Queer Arab Glossary

BOOK, MARWAN KAABOUR
PUBLISHED BY SAQI BOOKS, 2024
UNITED KINGDOM
"The Queer Arab Glossary is the first published collection of Arabic LGBTQ+ slang. This guide captures the lexicon of the queer Arab community in all its differences, quirks and felicities. Featuring fascinating facts and anecdotes, it contains more than 300 terms in both English and Arabic, ranging from the humorous to the harrowing, serious to tongue-in-cheek, pejorative to endearing. Here, leading queer Arab artists, academics, activists and writers offer insightful essays situating this groundbreaking glossary in a modern social and political context. The glossary is a powerful response to pervasive myths and stereotypes around sexuality and an invitation to take a journey into queerness throughout the Arab world."
"NAGAFA:" FLAMBOYANT (EGYPTIAN)
"QAYISO-L-MÁ:" EFFEMINATE MAN (MAGHREBI)
"AWLAD MIKI:" MEN WHO DO NOT CONFORM TO TRADITIONAL MASCULINE NORMS (SUDANESE)

WE THE ENEMY MANIFESTO

MANIFESTO, SPIT! SODOMITES, PERVERTS, INVERTS, TOGETHER!
(CARLOS MOTTA, JOHN ARTHUR PEETZ, AND CARLOS MARIA ROMERO) PUBLISHED IN SPIT! MANIFESTO READER, FRIEZE PROJECTS, LONDON, 2027 UNITED KINGDOM
SPIT! (Sodomites, Perverts, Inverts, Together!) is a collective formed in 2017 by SPIT! that wrote a series of queer manifestos that were initially performed at Frieze projects, London. WE THE ENEMY MANIFESTO is a summary of derogatory slangs and insults to queer people that are re-appropriated, becoming watchwords or a kind of summoning of the powerless.
"The sodomite, the perverts, the inverters, the faggots, the deviants, the queers, the keepers of spoiled identities...are and will always be the enemy!"



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* All Illustrations are from the Florentine Codex, an encyclopedia of Aztec (or Nahuatl) knowledge written by Mexica scholars and artists working with a Franciscan friar from Spain in mid-16th century Mexico at the Colegio Imperial de Santa Cruz in Tlatelolco. The codex is one of the earliest "languages" to codify homo sex.

PARTIAL LIST OF SOURCES

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