
”The Future Unfolds Also Before Us”: Poetry and Queer Community

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Abstract

The AIDS crisis is often portrayed as the end of an era, a truly devastating generational rift which those who did not live through that moment can access only as if through a veil, the other side of the glass. Communities of gay men and queer people in general were blamed for the spread of the disease: yet it was precisely the queer community’s generous re-modelling of social life that enabled queer people to survive it, forming support networks in the criminal absence of the state and in the face of mass public indifference and hostility. Not least amongst these were communities of writers and poets for whom writing served as a crucial place to figure and refigure future directions. Drawing on research for my recently completed book on eight decades of queer poetry in Boston and San Francisco, this paper will provide a quick sketch of the relations between poetry, community and queer activism in these two cities, considering the difficulties of tracing and writing such a history and the need for new narratives that clarify it. “We cannot live in the past, nor can we re-create it”, writes Judy Grahn. “Yet, as we unravel the past, the future also unfolds before us, as though they are mirrors without which neither can be seen or happen”. These poets present a queerness that is always political, and one in which poetry can play a role in articulating community, critiquing it, supporting it, expanding our sense of what’s possible. In their writing, a poem makes and remakes itself and language in community, in common, its sights set on a queered horizon and a transformed world. **David Grundy** is a poet and scholar. He is the author of *A Black Arts Poetry Machine: Amiri Baraka and the Umbra Poets* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), *Present Continuous* (Pamenar Press, 2022), and *A True Account* (The 87 Press, 2023), and co-editor, with Lauri Scheyer, of *Selected Poems of Calvin C. Hernton* (Wesleyan University Press, 2023). *Never by Itself Alone: Queer Poetry in Boston and San Francisco, 1943–Present* is forthcoming from Oxford University Press in 2024. He co-runs the small press Materials/Materialien.

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