JOSEPH KRAMER

PORTRAIT OF A SEXUAL HEALER

BY DON SHEWEY
"Most Western sex is necrophilia -- one dead body having sex with another dead body," Joseph Kramer told the UC Berkeley crowd. In contrast to the Chinese concept of sex as energy -- ching-chi, a life force that through continual charging can take you to high erotic states and keep you there for hours at a time -- he said, most Western men's erotic experience is "balloon sex: you tense your legs, squeeze your chest, and blow up the middle 'til it pops."

Then someone in the audience called out, "This is a great lecture. When's the lab period?"

A sex lab period! He'd never thought about it. But Kramer, a professional masseur who'd divided his adult years between training with the Jesuits and investigating "high erotic states" among Manhattan's sex piers at the height of the post-Stonewall gay subculture, was up for it. He quickly invited any interested men to come to his house the following night for a session that would involve nude oil massage. Twelve showed up. "I was really nervous. What to do?" Kramer recalls. "Then I thought, 'Oh, Joe, you had five hours of sex a day for four years in New York City -- what do you mean, what are you going to do?'"

"We had just three hours," Kramer continues. "It was tribal. We had a fire going. Everything was structured -- breathing, genital touching. Sometimes six people stood in a circle and the other six knelt before them touching their heart and genitals, and then the men in the middle would move to the next man. Nobody came the whole evening. But at the end four of the men said this was the highest erotic experience of their lives.

"This, surprisingly, did not make me feel good," he adds. "It made me feel sad because I started to realize how paltry sex was in most people's lives. All that happened was they got out of their rut, and it was, like, 'Wow!' I started to understand how easy it is just to set up environments that can pull people out of
wherever they are and let them play in another realm. I said, 'This is what I want to do.'"

Inspired by that first sex lab period, Kramer created the Body Electric School for massage in 1984, and began his life as a sexual healer.

What is "sexual healing," anyway, besides being the name of Marvin Gaye's last great record? Partly it has to do with healing the wounds to the spirit and the flesh caused by sexual abuse, addiction, and AIDS. But it also has a lot to do with acknowledging that the fun and the pleasure, the vitality and the divine mystery of sex have nourishing properties in and of themselves -- a message that can easily get overwhelmed in a culture where "sex appeal" is routinely exploited to sell products but sexuality (read: actual fucking) is usually discussed only in the context of abuse, addiction, or AIDS transmission. The sex negativity of the culture creates its own damage and alienation. For some people, their sexuality -- their juiciness, their comfort with their bodies, their talent for intimacy -- is a gift they're not asked to share often enough; when they act on it, they run the risk of being viewed as pathologically compulsive, promiscuous, or somehow perverted. How often do we encounter public discourse that treats sex as something other than a sin or a joke?

Kramer's on a mission to change all that, with, among other things, his two-day, all-nude, hands-on workshop called Celebrating the Body Erotic for (as Kramer puts it) "pioneering gay, bisexual and non-gay men." (Kramer hopes eventually to do workshops with both men and women, possibly with his friend Annie Sprinkle -- "the only woman I've had sex with in 15 years.") "You will relearn sex as sacred, playful, non-addictive, non-compulsive, and non-stop," he promises
participants. In 1988, Kramer taught the course himself 15 times, mostly in Los Angeles and Oakland. Last year he and a faculty of five gave almost 40 workshops in 17 cities across the country and abroad (including Amsterdam and Berlin).

I've noticed that many people recoil from the merest description of Kramer's workshop. It brings up all kinds of body shame, religious guilt, intimidation. "I don't like even my doctor looking at me naked," wrote a young reporter who interviewed Kramer last year for Au Courant, Philadelphia's gay weekly. "I couldn't imagine getting naked in a well-lit room in front of a group of equally naked men...It wouldn't be worth the stress." Others snigger and dismiss the workshop as some kind of two-day circle jerk.

Personally, I was hoping it would be a two-day circle jerk. I somehow managed to get through eight years in the Boy Scouts without ever encountering that boyhood ritual. And when I showed up for Celebrating the Body Erotic, I couldn't wait to get naked. After all, I've spent more than a decade working out at the gym. But then I'm a card-carrying member of not only the YMCA but also the New York Jacks, the genial gentlemen's club where erotic exhibitionists and J/O enthusiasts have been meeting for 12 years.

To my surprise, Kramer's workshop turned out to be less of an erotic experience than a spiritual awakening. (For the purposes of this discussion, let's separate spirituality from organized religion.) By introducing tantric, Taoist, and Native American ritual practices -- including conscious breathing, shamanic drumming, continuous eye contact, simultaneous heart- and-genital connection, and building ecstatic sexual energy without ejaculation -- Kramer places within a spiritual tradition the discussion of exchanging body fluids usually confined to safer-sex manuals.
Not that he would characterize his work as AIDS-prevention education per se. That makes it sound too much like those bland, sexually squeamish but eminently fundable seminars in "negotiating social skills" that organizations like GMHC offer and Kramer dismisses "scurvy for the soul." Nonetheless, if AIDS brought a shift in consciousness about sex, pleasure, life, death, and the spirit within all these things, Kramer's workshop permanently altered the way I have sex -- motivated not by fear of AIDS but by desire for change. It made me realize that not just my aging body but my soul wants more from sex than just getting it up and getting it off as quickly as possible.

On the other hand, Kramer doesn't let his unabashed spiritual approach to eroticism settle into cant or New Age mumbo-jumbo. At the end of the first day of the workshop, he introduced an exercise that he said was inspired by listening to one of Marianne Williamson's lectures on A Course in Miracles while driving. "I wasn't paying too much attention until suddenly she said, 'God is but love.' Only this is the way my mind works: I heard her say 'God is Butt Love.' And I thought, 'Yes!'" And he proceeded to give instructions for the most popular ritual of the day: two men covered with oil stand with their backs to a third man and massage him all over with their rear ends. God's Butt Love, We Deliver.

Much of Kramer's work emphasizes massage as a way of restoring a healthy attitude toward sex and intimacy among gay men threatened by or afflicted with HIV disease. It's no accident that he named his school after Walt Whitman. A major part of Whitman's legacy comes from the years he spent during the Civil War nursing the wounded and dying -- an all-too-common experience in San Francisco over the last decade. Kramer formed the first AIDS hospice massage team in the United States, and both his teaching and his private
practice revolved around touching people with life-threatening illness. "From very early in the epidemic, the major thing I saw was men terrorized," he says. "Not just in fear, not just in depression -- those were states that all kinds of human beings had. I never saw so many people in terror in all my life. Terror just shuts down everything. Psychotherapy takes a long time to deal with terror. But breath work and massage and touching and caressing is like spring thawing out the ice."

Besides fear of AIDS, though, Kramer's classes also focus on healing the unsatisfactory socialization of American gay men in general. While a few major cities have gay community centers that offer a wide range of social activities, many gay men still meet friends and partners in bars and bathhouses, environments that require great physical attractiveness, superior social skills, and/or extraordinary tolerance for alcohol and rejection to achieve sexual success or self-esteem. For nude gay men to interact in broad daylight, making eye contact and concentrating on the connection between their hearts and their genitals, is practically revolutionary.

Whatever you might imagine a sexual revolutionary would look like, Joe Kramer is not it. Tall, bespectacled, big-bellied and pink-cheeked, with reddish brown hair and mustache trimmed in a very proper Chamber of Commerce style, he looks like nothing more than an elementary school principal. Which, considering his background, isn't that far from the truth.

Born and raised in St. Louis, Kramer grew up in a devoutly Catholic family. His parents went to Mass every day -- "probably still do," he says -- and Joseph himself, the oldest of six children, went to Catholic schools from first grade through university. Still, he was a sexual radical from early on. "I loved to masturbate," Kramer says in an interview during one of
his trips to New York. "I think the Catholic church helped me there, because it was a mortal sin to masturbate. I didn't want to go to confession and tell the priest I masturbated six times yesterday or 25 times last week. I figured after coming I would just keep going, so it would only be one mortal sin. That's how I learned multiple orgasms.

"The other thing that repressiveness of Catholicism did was it brought God and sex together in my mind. God cared every time I had sex. It made sex not just some paltry thing, but God of heaven and earth was concerned about me touching my little penis from the time I was five on. Later, once I got rid of the guilt, I realized that the God space, the religious space in me was intimately tied up with sex."

Kramer attended an all-boys Jesuit high school where he says he learned about male bonding. "There wasn't a hint of homosexuality, but there was tremendous male intimacy. The Jesuits taught me to love myself and to love boys. Part of it was making the homophobia very low, so touching was okay. I really felt weird with my body and my orientation until I was 14. That homoerotic high school experience made me want to be a Jesuit. This was 1965, four years before Stonewall. The only other option I knew about homosexuals was there were homosexuals in prison. If I could just get into prison! But I was too good a boy to do anything bad. So I joined the Jesuits and trained toward being a priest for 11 years."

For seven years he studied mathematics, philosophy, and theology while maintaining his celibacy. Then in 1972, while taking classes at Berkeley's Graduate Theological Union, he found himself sitting for hours a day in Sproul Plaza, the headquarters for the free speech movement in the '60s, watching the students, the street singers, the preachers, the politicos, the Hare Krishnas and the Moonies. "In New York I think there's toleration of diversity, but in
Berkeley there was celebration of diversity. And I realized I was diverse, I was a gay man, and I was not celebrating my diversity." He continued his theological studies for a few years until it became clear that he didn't want to be a Jesuit. "Vatican II had just happened, and Pope John XXIII's whole thing was 'Open the windows of the Catholic church.' There was a lot of emphasis on love and following your heart. So that's what I did."

His heart took him to New York in 1976, a time when gay liberation had met the sexual revolution head-on. "I moved from a monastic tradition in seminary life to a sex monastery," Kramer recalls fondly. "Everybody was having sex everywhere. And when I went into sex, I wanted to drink life to the lees. Later, when I studied Reich, I realized I was doing Reichian therapy. It wasn't compulsive, addictive acting out. I was vibrating out all the dead spots in myself. And everybody else was, too. This is where I learned tantra. Because it wasn't about coming, it was about being in the erotic vibration and staying there." Of course, tantra don't pay the rent. Kramer took his most marketable skills -- his Jesuit training -- and got a job teaching at the Convent of the Sacred Heart, an elite Catholic girls' school on the Upper East Side. "By day I was teaching girls Roman Catholic theology, and by night I'd be in the basement of the Anvil or the Mineshaft. Actually, for me it was Man's Country and the piers and 12 West."

Although he joined the board of directors of Dignity (an organization of gay Catholics) and gave talks in support of the New York City gay rights bill, the school didn't know about his homosexuality -- until he took his lover to a party and word got back to Cardinal Cooke, who conveyed his displeasure to the school's headmistress. "They fired me. I wanted to fight it. There was no gay rights bill. Even when the gay rights bill was passed, Catholic schools were exempt." Kramer went back to Berkeley to complete his degree,
changing the focus to sex and spirituality.

Besides studying acupressure and conscious breathing (also known as rebirthing, or holotropic breathing) to raise energy in the body, Kramer's scholarly interest brought him to the teaching of Wilhelm Reich. One of Freud's star pupils, Reich became a true revolutionary through his insistence, in works like The Function of the Orgasm (published in 1926!), that "those who are psychically ill need but one thing – complete and repeated genital gratification." Even more threatening than his championing of sex as therapy was Reich's political perspective: that authoritarian societies intentionally suppress the natural sexuality of children to paralyze rebellion and to inhibit critical thinking. The American government considered him a dangerous quack and arrested him for shipping an "orgone box" across state lines. Reich claimed the device (really no more than a lined wooden box big enough to sit in) could, among other things, cure cancer by containing and concentrating healing energy. His books were pulled from libraries and burned, and Reich was sentenced to two years in jail, where he died in 1957.

Not overlooking the political parable in Reich's story, Kramer saw that Reich was one of the first Westerners to share the Eastern view of health as energy. Steeped in these teachings, Kramer began to explore a massage practice, then a school, that would specifically connect conscious breathing with eroticism.

"Celebrating the Body Erotic" packages the various talents Kramer has accumulated over the years: spiritual counselor, ritual priest, educator, gay historian, Fire Island disco bunny, marathon masturbator. Probably the most important skill that comes into play is his ability to handle terror. Coaxing 20 or 30 or 40 strangers out
of their clothes and into giving up established patterns of sexual behavior -- not to mention paying $250 for the privilege -- requires a certain amount of finesse.

I've been through the workshop several times (both as a paying customer and as a paid assistant, supporting Kramer as temple dancer and sacred DJ), and I know that the class attracts many veterans of the New York Jacks, the Radical Faeries, S&M clubs, and other explorations into what one Kramer graduate calls "the post-monogamy lack-of-scarcity approach to group sex." But on the whole each workshop winds up with such a wild mix of characters that it looks like one of those World War II submarine movies.

The first time I take it, the class includes a physician's assistant who works as an HIV counselor for drug addicts at Harlem Hospital and a man with AIDS who's just been through a scary bout of toxoplasmosis; a Canadian conceptual artist and an Off Broadway stage manager; a half-Filipino, half-Mexican restaurateur and a daily newspaper journalist (my lover of 13 years). No matter how young, how old, or how brazen, though, when we form a circle that first morning -- still in our street clothes -- we all feel those junior-high-dance emotions: shyness, anticipation, sweaty palms. We've all come in off 14th Street through the grim lobby, climbed the stairs to this funky second-floor dance studio, and shed our coats and shoes. Now we stand uneasily looking around the room, rehearsing our mantras of body imperfection (I'm too fat, I'm too sweaty, my dick isn't big enough) and counting the cuties and the trolls (I hope I get to be with him, I don't want him anywhere near me).

This is where Kramer starts to work his magic. He immediately gets people breathing together, for relaxation and bonding. He casts a spell with language, clearly stating intentions, naming fears, and drawing guidelines: don't worry if you have an erection or not,
the goal for the class is to build erotic energy without ejaculation, buttplay is off-limits for hygienic reasons. Working with facing concentric circles, changing partners frequently and randomly, he gets participants to breathe, stretch, warm up, make eye contact, place hands on hearts, learn each other's names, and practice saying out loud "That feels good" and "Please stop."

Looking in other people's eyes, windows of the soul -- does anyone ever get to do that to their heart's content? I was taught it was rude to look at people directly. Reich always began his therapy working on people's eyes and wouldn't go any further until he could get them to release the blocks held there. After a morning of swimming in one pair of eyeballs after another, trust has been established, and the rest of the rituals -- the undressing, the oiling, the touching, Butt Love -- are a breeze.

The climax of the workshop comes on the second day with Taoist erotic massage instruction, where participants take turns massaging and then being massaged by seven different men, one at a time. This ritual gives concrete practice in extending orgasmic sexual pleasure (using 20 or so strokes other than the basic up-and-down-the-shaft-til-he-squirts). For an alternative to ejaculation that would satisfy the Western urge for climax, he borrows from contemporary Taoist master Mantak Chia an exercise called The Big Draw. After an extended period of breathing and continuous cock massage, you take a deep breath, clench all our muscles from head to toe, hold the breath as long as possible, and then release it. The combined flooding of breath and erotic energies can trigger a full-body orgasm with profound effects. Some people hallucinate, weep, or have physical contractions that look for all the world like grand mal seizures. Some just feel a pleasant tingling in their hands.

The vigorous breathwork frequently brings up a
deluge of emotions. For some this means mean total joy. For me, it was quite the opposite. The Big Draw produced no big physical effects but only made me realize how in-my-head I'd been for the whole thing: remembering the sequence of strokes, listening to the instructions, judging each masseur on his technique, my critical nature compounding my good-Catholic-boy follow-the-rules upbringing, thinking, "No, you're doing it wrong, hands off the body when you breathe on me, slower circles, not that leg the other one," etc. Then I felt sad and depressed and angry because I'd screwed myself out of the experience. As my final masseur wrapped my sheet around me and some seraphic music began to play, I felt like I was experiencing my own death and began to cry, grieving over my lack of generosity to myself. That inevitably connected with a seemingly bottomless pool of grief over friends who've died of AIDS, and I found myself sobbing. I discovered, quite unexpectedly, that by trying to cultivate only positive emotions I had created a logjam of grief that blocked me from feeling almost anything, including sexual arousal. And once I let it out, suddenly the spectrum of emotions spread out like a peacock's tail, and I felt cleansed, exorcised, light enough to levitate.

The Taoist erotic massage ritual also serves another, more down-to-earth purpose that goes to the heart of Kramer's work on erotic spirituality. It breaks down the tyranny of types (men, especially the gay tribe, are just as susceptible as women to The Beauty Myth) by allowing you to look, as if in a mirror, at the range of answers to the question, What is a man?

During the ritual, the varieties of manhood are laid out before you like specimens on the table. Each one is different, and you learn each particularity: the hair pattern, the size and shape of the balls, the belly button, which dicks are spotted or red or thick or stiffen fast or not at all. And you observe how they
work, how they receive sensation in the form of pleasure, pain, or pressure (sometimes hard to distinguish). This one loves to have fingernails scrape his nipples; for others, nipples are a waste of time. One man asks to have his balls fondled, rubbed, tugged away from his body; another prefers you never touch them at all. Brisk? Slow? Concentrate on the "magic wand" and all else follows? Open the chest and emotion flows? You see each man's history in his body -- the layers of fat, the hours at the gym, the surgical scars, the intentional piercings and curious, dainty tattooes. What makes them laugh, moan, shout with pleasure, sob like a baby.

By the end of the day, you look around the closing circle and see not cuties and trolls -- and certainly not necrophiliacs. This landscape of bodies can't help reflecting your own divine possibilities, calling to mind Whitman's refrain: "I am large, I contain multitudes."

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Note: In October of 1992, Joseph Kramer sold the Body Electric School to his longtime associate Collin Brown. Body Electric faculty members continue to teach Celebrating the Body Erotic in cities around the country.
What follows is the complete transcript of the interview with Joseph Kramer briefly excerpted above. Edited only in order to be comprehensible, the conversation goes into much greater detail about Kramer's background, his workshops, his vision of the vocation he calls "sacred intimate," Andrew Ramer's notion of the "consciousness scout," and his own understanding of the erotic consciousness scout and its function in society, among other topics.

I don't know anything about you or your background. The two-day workshop was a powerful experience for me, and as anyone discovers travelling around the country, there's a whole network now of people who've taken your workshop and are spreading the gospel. It's clearly having a transformative effect...

Oh, look what you have here -- is this in my honor? [He picks up a paperback copy of Walt Whitman's Leaves of Grass sitting on the windowsill, opens it, and reads from the first thing he sees.] "City of orgies! O Manhattan!" Perfect!

So I'd like to know your personal history and the story of how you got into doing this and how your work has evolved.

I'd also like to put out visions of the future.

Great.

So what do you want, the past, present, or future?

Go back to the beginning. Tell me where you're from.

I'll try to be as succinct and as powerful as possible. I grew up in St. Louis in a very religious family.
What religion?

Roman Catholic. My parents went to Mass every single day, still probably do. I went to Catholic schools all the way through university. What Kinsey said in his studies in the '40s was only 10% of boys masturbate before puberty. What I've found as a sex researcher is that a high percentage of those boys show up in my classes, and it's an indication of greater sexual power or energy after puberty. In some Polynesian cultures and other cultures, up to 90% masturbate before puberty. What that statistic says to me is how repressive our society is and how it clamps down on children's sexuality, a boy's sexuality. Even though I had this very repressive, guilt-ridden, mortal-sin mentality thrown at me in Catholic schools, that this was horrible, I loved to masturbate.

I think the Catholic church helped me there because it was a mortal sin to masturbate. So I figured, if it's a mortal sin, maybe even after coming I would just keep stroking, so it would only be one mortal sin. So I learned multiple orgasms. I didn't want to go in to the priest in confession and say I masturbated six times yesterday or 25 times last week. Just out of guilt and embarrassment, I would just keep on masturbating clear on through. Yeah, to keep the tally down. But I found that it was just like waking up more and more. So that was a positive benefit from this repressive environment.

The other thing that the repressiveness of Catholicism did was it brought God and sex together in my mind. God cared every time I had sex. It was a matter of life and death. And mostly, for me, it was eternal damnation in hell because I was enjoying this. It made sex not just some paltry thing. God of heaven and earth was concerned about me touching my little penis from the time I was five on. Later on, once I got rid of the guilt, I realized that the God space, the
religious space, in me was still intimately tied up with sex. This was part of what spirituality meant to me. So unwittingly the Catholic church helped me out there.

**Do you have siblings?**

Yes, I have two brothers and three sisters.

**Where are you?**

I'm the oldest. They are all married and have kids. As Karen Finley would say, I'm the black sheep of the family. I went to a Jesuit school, an all-boys high school. And what the Jesuits taught me was male bonding. They were masters of male bonding. The Jesuits are a homosexual order that, instead of expressing sexuality, has learned a way of turning it around. In a Jesuit school, there's always a high percentage of gay kids, because you're going to an intellectual, all-boys school. But through the bonding they create amazing things. Great sports teams from intellectual kids. My school, when I was there, was twice the state basketball champ, the football champ, the soccer champ and all this. It wasn't that we had better talent than all the other schools. It's because the Jesuits knew about male bonding, the synergy of bringing people together.

**What did they know about that?**

They set up an environment. It's hard to describe. I've tried to take this apart and think of it. Part of it was making the homophobia very low, so touching was okay, when I was growing up. With gay liberation, it's kind of broken up normal male bonding. The high school kids today are more aware of it. They're either out or hostile. But when I was in school, there wasn't even a hint of homosexuality. I went four years of high school without having a homosexual experience,
which is amazing, because I was so fed by the male intimacy. There was tremendous male intimacy. I think the Jesuits taught about that. They taught me to love myself and to love boys. Until I was 14, I really felt weird with my orientation, loving male bodies, boy bodies, my own body. I didn't once I went to St. Louis University High School. Then I went to St. Louis University. What that homosexual/homoerotic high school experience did was it made me want to be a Jesuit. "I want to live in this environment where there are no other options. I want to teach boys, give my life to God." It all fit together.

Was this high school training boys for the priesthood?

No, no, no. It's like Xavier High School in the village, Regis High School, Fordham High School -- those are the three Jesuit high schools in New York. The Jesuits run a network of high schools all over the country. That used to be the major source of vocations for people who joined the Jesuits. Boys coming from these homosexual, all-male environments of men who taught boys. There were no women faculty on the staff whatsoever, no women cheerleaders, no girls from other schools coming in. I wanted to stay in this. This was 1965, four years before Stonewall. The only other option I knew about homosexuals was there were homosexuals in prison. I read about homosexual rape. "Omigod, if I could just get into prison." But I was too good a boy to do anything bad. "Can they send me to prison without committing a crime?"

So I joined the Jesuits. And I was a Jesuit for 11 years. I went back and taught at that high school.

What does being a Jesuit mean?

Joining a religious order. Training toward being a priest. It's a long training, 12 or 13 years. I left the Jesuits a year before I would have been ordained a
priest.

So you went to college with that thought?

Yes, all my college was as a Jesuit. I also taught high school and ran all sorts of social programs.

When you're a Jesuit in training, are you called something, or do you use your own name?

In the first few years, we spoke Latin. It was still in the pre-Vatican II days.

During the Mass?

Oh, in the halls. Those were the rules. You spoke Latin. So you were called Frater, the Latin word for brother. Frater Kramer. Later in high school the students referred to me as Mr. Kramer, although I wore a cassock. I wore a dress, open in the front. People were always looking: "what's under them?" We wore regular clothes with a cassock over them.

It was fun. It was fun. But as I went on...my body tells me when I've gone too far. And I wasn't listening to my body. This was all an intellectual trip. I studied mathematics, philosophy, theology, all this on a spiritual trip, and for my body this was a celibate path. I was really good at it. I realized that the transmutation of eroticism is what empowers a lot of people, especially young Jesuits or young anything. But if it's transmutational without stoking the fires at all, after a while the fires dwindle, the coals burn out, and there is nothing.

So it got to that point. I went to Berkeley in 1972 to study theology as a Jesuit. There were nine other schools in Berkeley, including the Graduate Theological Union. The University of California at Berkeley is part of this. I took some courses at UC, some at other
schools. When I went to Berkeley, I went to Sproul Plaza. Even when I was in high school, the free speech movement was important to me. I watched it on television. Because I knew I was not speaking the truth in my life. I couldn't speak the truth. I looked at my parents, I looked around, and I knew this was the place for free speech. I went and sat in Sproul Plaza for hours every day. It was the freest place. You'd see professors walk by and students and wheelchair people and street people and entertainers and always preachers and political people and the Hare Krishnas, Sun Myung Moon. And everybody got along. And I saw, "There is celebration of diversity here." In New York I think there's toleration of diversity, but in Berkeley there was celebration of diversity. Everybody recognized that this is what made this such a wonderful place. And I realized I was diverse, and I was not celebrating my diversity. I was fitting into a Jesuit mold, the Catholic mold, and I'd never been who I was.

So 1972 was my coming out in Sproul Plaza. "I am diverse, too. I am a gay man. I want to say this." It didn't fit in with the Jesuit thing, because if you're celibate you don't have to say it. In fact, they have power over you if you're guilty about it. So most of the Jesuits are guilty, and that way they have power, as any organization does. But as soon as I started saying it, I felt liberated and out. Other Jesuits at that time were coming to the same awareness. So two years I studied theology there. It was Catholic theology, so I had to take very focused classes. Eventually it became clear living in Berkeley that I did not want to be a Jesuit. It wasn't for me. It took another year of discernment and looking at this. But I moved to New York, leaving the Jesuits, but with a kind of buffer. The idea was that if I still felt called to go back, I'd go back within six months or a year. But in January 1976 I moved to New York, for the Bicentennial year. That was my leaving the Jesuits.
One thing that happened with the Jesuits was that Vatican II had just happened. Pope John XXIII's whole thing was "Open the windows of the Catholic church." The emphasis was on love, rather than the old tradition of...whatever, order, law. There was a lot of emphasis in that training on being in your heart, being really open. So following my heart is what I eventually did.

When I moved to New York, I moved from a monastic tradition, the seminary life, to New York City in '76.

**You poor thing!**

What I moved to was a sex monastery. Everybody was having sex. And when I went into sex, I wanted to drink life to the lees. I wandered around. I very quickly met a lover, who was my lover for four years, the whole time I was here. But we had an open relationship. Everybody I knew was having sex, everywhere. On the piers. Larry Kramer's book *Faggots* starts out with "There are 150 places I can go to have sex within a mile of here," something like that. That's what New York was like. Later, when I studied Reich, I realized it was like Reichian therapy. I was vibrating out all the dead spots in myself. And I felt everybody else was. It wasn't compulsive, addictive acting out. It was vibrating out and really being free. With my open-heart orientation, every time I met someone, it was like, oh, I'm right there with them, looking them in the eyes. And I thought everybody was doing this. I think there were just several thousand core people who were the real generators, then there were like 20,000 hangers on from Fire Island all the way through to Manhattan.

**Not to mention the out of towners.**

Yeah. But this is where I learned tantra. Because it
wasn't about coming, it was about being in the erotic vibration. New York was this erotic vibration. I remember in '77, when one of the radio stations went disco, all the blacks, all the Puerto Ricans, and all the gays were listening to the same station. It had the highest jump in the ratings any radio station had ever experienced. The whole city played the same music for the next year or two. It was this erotic music. Now we chuckle at disco, but that was the sex music.

It still has vibrations, doesn't it?

Mmm. 12 West and everything. When Saturday Night Fever came out, I went and saw it and I thought it was the silliest thing ever. It was a nice movie, but I thought, "How heterosexual!" The idea, with that movie, is you wait 'til Saturday night to get into your sexual space. Well, forget it. Everybody I knew was in it all the time.

So this was what I'd always wanted. I met some of the greatest people. For the last 10 years I've been meeting people who I had sex with in New York and made such powerful connections with that I meet them again and again and again. Sometimes I'll meet people who I don't exactly recognize but I feel, "God, I've already connected with this person intimately. Maybe it was dark..." It may have been five minutes or five hours or five days. But I made amazing amounts of connections. It was open-hearted, fun, innocent. It was enlightening. Everyone I knew then was getting younger and healthier. Sex was clearing out all the shit in their lives. Everybody realized we were doing something new that hadn't been done before. I felt that consciousness all around me. It was everywhere -- in the grocery store, anywhere on the subway. People just looked at each other. New York is always one level on top of another, but this one level was a
vibration everywhere. Fire Island was the epitome of it for beauty. You'd go to the Pines or the Grove; I did for one summer. That was extraordinary.

What I learned during that was that I didn't want to come, that I just wanted to be in this vibration, and coming was the end. For me, it wasn't about getting off. It was about being in this state. There were peaks, certainly, when I wanted to come, but that's what hooked me into Tantra and Taoism.

So, at the same time, I had to have a job in town. What did I know? Roman Catholicism. What did I know? Theology, Jesuits. Here I'm in New York. So I looked around for a job, and the job I got was teaching religion at the Convent of the Sacred Heart on Fifth Avenue, which is the utmost elite Catholic girls' school in all of Manhattan. It's where Caroline Kennedy went and all the wealthy kids. There were six girls in this class and 12 girls in this class. It's on 91st and Fifth Avenue in an old mansion. So by day I was teaching girls Roman Catholic theology, and by night I'd be in the basement of the Anvil or the Mineshaft. Actually, it was Man's Country and the piers and 12 West. Two days before the Everhard burned down, I was there. And I remember going to a school picnic with all the girls in the spring, May or June, and the principal of the school said, "Did you see in the paper what happened last night?" I said no. He said, "The Everhard Baths, this homosexual place, it was so sad, five or eight people were killed." I was among all these girls, and I felt, "Yikes! My people!"

Were you openly gay at work?

I was not openly gay at work. But I was openly pro-homosexual in all my classes. So anytime there was anything homosexual, I brought it up. We were talking about Willa Cather. I said, "Why did she write such strong portraits of women? Because she was a
lesbian. *My Antonia* is a beautiful thing, and it comes from her sexual preference." I was also on the board of directors of Dignity. Dignity used to meet in a Lutheran church. I said, why? I knew some of the Jesuits in the city. I asked an acquaintance on 15th Street, "Why can't Dignity meet here?" That helped Dignity move. They were just kicked out by the cardinal two years ago.

This was around the time the gay rights bill was coming up. I was giving talks around the city for the gay rights bill. Andy Humm was a biggie in Dignity, and he's political, so I was doing pro-gay rights stuff. But in the Catholic Church I would say, "I'm head of the theology department at Convent of the Sacred Heart" and go from there. Well, this grated on Cardinal Cook. He sent word out to the school. I was called in by the headmistress, and she said, "I've never gotten a letter from a cardinal about anybody like you." I said, "Forget it. This is the truth, what do you want me to say? Is this the middle ages?"

Anyway, I got fired. I got fired because I went to a party with my lover, and somebody said, "What are you doing?" I said, "I teach at Convent of the Sacred Heart," and it got back to the school. I was open everywhere about it, so eventually it was going to happen. They fired me. I wanted to fight it. There was no gay rights bill. Even when the gay rights bill was passed, Catholic schools were exempt. They can still fire people.

When I was fired, it was February '78? '79? I had a contract, they paid out my contract for the rest of the year. And since they fired me, I knew that I could get unemployment in June. I had another semester to go to finish my theology degree. So I decided to go back to school, finish by June, look for a job, and be on unemployment. I went back to Berkeley to finish my theology degree. This time, I
wanted to finish it in sex and spirituality.

What had you started in?

Oh, just whatever. I was interested in counseling all along. When I went back, I called it "counseling sexual minorities." That flew for a while. They're a liberal school. But since there wasn't a lot about gay studies or anything, I worked at the University of California in their gay counseling program. They have a great program there, and I counseled students as my internship for this theology degree. So two days a week I saw students in my office. It was coming out counseling. Eighteen-year-olds, 20-year-olds. I'd done the same thing in Jesuit schools, counseling boys, but here it was counseling gay kids about being normal and helping. It was wonderful. And I led groups.

You'd done that before you left Berkeley?

I'd done it as a Jesuit in Jesuit high schools, guidance counseling. But never gay counseling. This was out. I was doing it. So I got my degree, and I was focusing on sexuality and spirituality, how these two come together. My idea was that I was gonna counsel, because that's what my internship was. But after counseling a lot, I thought, "What every one of these boys needs -- there were women counseling the girls -- ... Joseph Campbell said this once: "People don't need to know the meaning of life. They need to have the experience of it." These kids didn't need to know. They needed to have the experience of intimacy. So I realized counseling is not what I want to do. Right then I thought, "I'm going to massage school." I told the head of the counseling department that I wanted to do a massage weekend. I said there'd be no sex. But they're gay kids, all 18 to 22. They would just look at each other, and their social skills were -- aagh! They were all raised straight. I said, "I want to
do a massage weekend with these kids." He said, "Absolutely not. This is a counseling department. You cannot do this." So I quit the counseling department and started to do massage groups.

You were working in the department after you got your degree?

I worked in the department as an intern before I got my degree and I stayed in the department, still as an intern. I was not paid -- in fact, nobody in this program was paid, except for one staff person. Most people were accruing hours toward a clinical psychologist degree or whatever. I stayed in the program because I just liked doing it. I was very close to the director of the program. It was what I wanted to do with my life.

So if you did want to get some additional degree, you'd be racking up hours for that?

California has a degree called M.F.C.C. It's a counseling degree. You needed 3000 hours. That's what I was doing. I thought I'd get this massage license. Finally, I just let it go. I wanted to do massage.

After a year?

I may have started the personal massage degree while I was doing all this counseling. I had about a year at UC. I worked there as a math advisor. I got another job for two more years while I started my massage business and practice. I had a full-time job and then a part-time job with UC til 1983.

In the math department, it didn't bother them that you were running a massage business.

Right, no conflict. In fact, my boss was intrigued with what I did. He loved it. I didn't think he even knew I
was gay. He came in one day and said, "What do you think of Harvey Milk?" This was a straight man. This is what I found Berkeley was like. People bending over backwards to be conscious. It was wonderful.

So then I decided to go into massage. What I was getting at was: What is my heart's desire? Maybe this is the same as What is my purpose in life, or What is my mission. And my desire was to celebrate men, in quality ways. And not so much verbally but with touch. So I wanted to find wonderful ways to touch men. For four years I had done wonderful things in New York. I think all sex is massage. It's body parts against body parts, rubbing and interacting. So I wanted to find wonderful ways to do that.

Had you encountered that in any kind of structured way?

I'd taken a couple of classes early on. I'd gotten my first massage in Berkeley when I was still a Jesuit. The first massage I had just woke my body up. This man gave me a massage, and it was a wonderful ritual way of making love to me. I said, "I want to do this. I want to know shiatsu. I want to know acupressure. I want to know every way I can to make love to men." This was my life's desire. I'm a man who loves men.

Did you ever go to Esalen?

No. Only late at night to sit in their spa, not for a class. Some of my exploration was fumbling. I wanted really precise instruction. I wanted to know what happened beyond the skin, beneath the skin. I wanted to know about energy and breathing. I studied rebirthing -- this was 1981 -- for a whole year. So when people breathed, I found I had full-body orgasms. My rebirthing teacher was a wonderful lesbian. She right away said, "Hook this up with sex." So I would masturbate and breathe and move the
energy around. So this was another level of learning about sexuality.

Is rebirthing all about breathing?

Yes. It's conscious breathing. Certain breathing patterns raise the energy. When one breathes fully, a lot of energy comes into the body, and you have power to take all kinds of wonderful action. If you're about pleasure, you have more power to put behind pleasure. And when you prolong your genital stimulation, sex, not a quick two- or five-minute thing, there's erotic energy coming at it. So you can have an orgasm from breath energy and an orgasm from erotic energy, and when the two orgasms come together, there's a synergy that causes a leap in consciousness if you choose to take it. It's a breakthrough of ego. The ego dissolves. That's the core of tantric teaching and Taoist teaching. The synergy of yin and yang come together, and something happens.

I gave a talk at Columbia University when I was here last year. Darrell Yates Rist invited me to give a talk. It was Tobias Schneebaum and myself and Annie Sprinkle. It was called "Sexual Radicals." I said what I just told you, and this man came up afterwards who was a Buddhist who said, "You should not have told these people that secret. You will burn in hell." I didn't even know Buddhists had a hell. He was really adamant that this was one of the great secrets of tantra, that the breath is the coming together of opposites, this alchemical thing.

Anyway, I got into breathing. It wasn't so much therapeutic as ritualistic. Men would come in and disrobe and they'd come into another consciousness, and they would get on my massage table. Usually we'd stretch and breathe together. I didn't look at my massage table as a massage table, like therapy, but
this place of celebration, almost like an altar, a high
elevated place.

Of course you did. You're a Jesuit.

Right. I would hope that this came from another life,
more pagan, among the grove of trees or in the great
cave or in the kiva or something. They're on the
table, and I anoint them with oil and make them
shudder with delight in their own being and work out
kinks. But I hated it when people came in and said, "I
have lower back pain." I didn't want to be a fix-it. I
wanted to go the other way, be a celebrant.

I found celebrating didn't mean the American Massage
Therapy Association's way of celebrating, which meant
no genital touching. So about 1983, '84, I started
doing erotic massage. Some erotic massage is "I give
you a massage and then a hand job," but this was
from what I learned in New York. To celebrate was to
take somebody to this erotic place, where the whole
body was in this state. It didn't have anything to do
with coming. The Taoists call the cock the erotic
generator, the generator of ching-chi or erotic
energy. I studied Taoism a lot. So my goal in
celebrating men is to charge them with as much
ching-chi as possible. That's what everybody I knew
in New York was doing and having a good time at it.
Great results. And I became a massage monk. I did
this 10 hours a day, 12 hours a day.

One on one?

All one on one. I did one class a week, Monday nights.
I remember during the Haight Ashbury days,
somebody wrote a book called Monday Night Class, and
I kind of liked the idea, so I did a Monday night
class every week for a year.
Was it people massaging each other?

Yes. It was massage class. Ways to touch. Not erotic. None of it was erotic in that era. It was face massage, back massage, breathing and all this. One thing about that Monday night class was I knew I wanted to open a massage school. So I was practicing teaching all the different aspects I wanted to teach as a unified course.

Where were you giving these classes?

In my home in Berkeley. There was a fireplace and all this. At the same time I was giving talks on sex, on tantra and Taoism. This is '83, '84, so AIDS was already upon us. I wasn't giving the talks because of AIDS, but what I was putting out, what I knew about sex, was that you could have the best time in the world nonstop without ejaculating, so the exchange of bodily fluids -- which was the big term in those days -- was not a factor.

I remember right at that time, the very first safe sex thing came out. Michael Callen wrote "How to Have Sex in an Epidemic." I was in New York and I picked it up at Walt Whitman Books on Christopher Street.

Oscar Wilde.

Oscar Wilde.

Walt Whitman is...DC?

There used to be one in San Francisco. Anyway, his way was very basic, but it was the first safe sex thing, trying to get people to get their acts together. I remember people laughing and chuckling about safe sex in '83 and '84. There was a concern, but almost nobody had seen somebody die, so it wasn't that real.
This is a good part. I was giving these talks. And I gave this talk at University of California. It wasn't just students. It was the Gay People's Union, all these non-students and students. And somebody said, "This is a great lecture. When's the lab period?" I hadn't started my massage school, I was still teaching classes in my home, and I thought, A sex lab period! There were men and women there, and I said, "If any of you men are interested in a lab period, come up and give me your name and address afterwards and I'll consider doing a lab period."

It was the very first time I considered it. This was the forerunner of the class you've been in. About 25 men came up afterward, and I said, "Instead of names and addresses, how about tomorrow night at my house? How many people can come?" Twelve men said they could come. I said, "Good. I'm going to charge $10 for the night, and it's gonna be oil and it's gonna be nude." So all 12 men showed up, all Berkeley types, San Francisco types, and I was really nervous -- what to do? And I thought, "Oh Joe, you had five hours of sex a day for four years in New York City -- what do you mean, what are you going to do?"

When I moved to Berkeley, I was really going through withdrawal. So while I was finishing my degree at the graduate theological union, I had a part time job working 20 hours a week at the Steam Works.

Is that a bathhouse?

Yes, in Berkeley. So then I had total access to sex. Even when I wasn't working, because I was an employee, I could go there for free, so I would hang out there. That's where I learned that the Berkeley or California way of sex was very different from New York.

Tell me about that.
I had some experiences of conscious touching and conscious sex that just blew me away. One was with a very old man. Do you know Crazy Owl? It was like Crazy Owl, this old man. My type was energy, conscious touching, presence -- it wasn't about any one look. Certainly there were parts that pleased me, but what I learned in New York was to go for the vibrancy and aliveness. There are beauties who have no energy and no aliveness, they're like statues.

So this guy had me stand there. He said, "Take some deep breaths." And he knelt down and he started sucking me. Then his fingers started doing different things. He would hold them and vibrate them. Suddenly I started to recognize these feelings: he was doing was this whole energetic, acupuncture type stuff while he was sucking me. This went on for about an hour, and I said, "What is this?" He said, "I was just doing acupressure, pulling the erotic energy around through your body." Right after that I went and studied acupressure. I took four classes. Now in my school, it's a major part of all my trainings. A lot of men play with their tits. This is an acupressure point. But you can do this at any point on your body when you're in a high erotic state, pull the energy there. And this man taught me that.

At the Steam Works!

At the Steam Works. Oh, the Steam Works is a place of high erotic energy. It was called the Mayan Baths at this time. They had all this Mayan stuff. I remember I went there for the Harmonic Convergence a couple of years ago, because it was the Mayan place that I knew.

Does it still exist?

Oh, it's still there in Berkeley. It's the closest bathhouse to San Francisco, so it's packed, it's
nonstop. I used to work for a minimum wage plus all I could eat. Now they have me come in for $100 an hour to give talks. So I've moved up in the world. They have a safe sex education program. It's a very hot place. But it's still a bathhouse, still restrictive. It's not my fun place to go. It's not a free, liberated place. I want to create my own spaces. I like the spaces that I create better.

Where was I? All these people came over for this very first sex class. They came over to my house for the lab period. There were 12 men there, and a boyfriend of mine, so there were 13 of us. We had just three hours. It was tribal. Everything was circle sex with breathing. Everything was structured that we did. Nobody came the whole evening. But four of the men at the end said this was the highest erotic experience of their lives.

This, surprisingly, did not make me feel good. It made me feel sad, because then I started to realize how paltry sex was in most people's lives. All that happened was they got out of their rut, and it was like Wow! So this is where I started to understand what shamanistic sex could be. Just pulling people out of wherever they are and playing in another realm. I said, this is what I want to do. It's so easy just to set up environments where people can play, just jump to another level.

So this was structured in terms of breathing, group massage...?

We had a fire going, genital touching, sometimes six people were kneeling in a circle and six people stood on the outside, and the kneeling ones touched their heart and genitals. Then the men in the middle would move to the next man.

Recreating your Steam Works experience?
Yeah, a little bit, but ritualizing it. What I'm really good at is creating rituals with groups of men. When I went to the Radical Faeries, I expected that I would be among people who were doing all this. I first met Mark Thompson at Pecos in 1980, it was a great gathering, the third national gathering of Radical Faeries. I found rituals, but I didn't find any erotic rituals. There was no consciousness of this. So I made my own. I've heard that because of what I'm doing, there's more sex rituals happening at faerie gatherings all around. But I was hoping that I didn't have to recreate the wheel. I wanted to find some group that's already doing this. There were no groups! I still feel that about where I'm going in the future. I'd like to find some sex monastery. Why do I have to start it?

Tell me about the process. Let's go a little deeper into that. Without there being a path or models of erotic ritual, how did you search in yourself for how to make them?

There are a couple of gifts that I know I have. One of my shamanistic, tribal names is Sacred Weaver. I'm a weaver. I have this ability to weave people and things together. The other is I have the gift of foresight. I can see things ten years in the future, where things are going, where things need to go. When AIDS came along, I saw exactly what's happening now. I was working at the Steam Works. The very first time I read about gay cancer, I stopped having unsafe sex at that moment. I could see exactly what was going to happen. I started developing alternatives that were no risk. I didn't even like the idea of low risk. So I kind of categorized sexuality in tribes: there's the anal penetration tribe, there's the oral tribe, and then there's the hand tribe. (You can belong to more than one tribe.) Well, this is the era for the hand tribe. Even if you're not in the hand tribe, you need to learn the rituals of the hand tribe, because it's about
reaching ecstatic places without risk. The oral and anal tribes’ rituals still involve degrees of risk.

Growing up Roman Catholic in the Midwest, I was taught that who I was was immoral, illegal, sick, psychologically. I cleaned all that out. Now I don’t believe all that. All of sudden AIDS came in and tainted again this innocent space. This is my mentality: I don’t want to ever have to say, "Did I give something to somebody, or did I get something from somebody?" This is too special, this interaction between men. One man who started the Body Electric School with me lives in New York now. He has AIDS, and he has a recurring dream. He sees man after man over him, fucking him, and he keeps saying, "Was it you? Was it you? Was it you?"

Right at the very beginning I thought, "God, I know enough about tainted love. I do not want my love of men to be tainted. AIDS is not going to be a part of this." As much as possible that’s what I’ve developed -- no-risk sex.

Did you find resistance from partners?

Oh, people were going, "How stupid." You’d have these beautiful, hot people who just had totally different belief systems. The faeries would go, "Just have unconditional love and don’t worry." I remember the first faerie dying in the Bay Area. It just shocked this whole circle. The idea that faeries don’t get AIDS. You know what? I didn’t think they were wrong or right. I just knew that I didn’t believe this. I thought, maybe they’re right, but I’m not going to risk this.

What I felt happened in the ’70s is that gay men became my people. The people I grew up with were not my people. All of a sudden I found a community that became my father, my brother, my mother, my
teachers, my sons. And like I committed myself to the Jesuits, I committed my life to this. This is my path. This is my purpose. This is what I want to be about. I want to celebrate. This is where Whitman comes in -- the Dear Love of Comrades. That's what I call everything I do. That is my motivation, to celebrate the dear love of comrades. And the major celebration was that we be in our bodies electric. That we just sing our bodies. Whitman's two images, his mystical images, became mine. The healing image is body electric, the other is celebrate the dear love of comrades. Period. That's all I want to do with my life. I dedicate myself to that.

Is there a moment when that epiphany happened?

I remember in college in St. Louis reading *Leaves of Grass*. I started reading it aloud, and I got high. I'd never smoked marijuana before that, and later when I smoked marijuana I remembered I'd had this feeling reading *Leaves of Grass*. But I didn't even know Walt Whitman was gay when I started reading *Leaves of Grass*. I just got into this state. Then a few years later, in the early '80s, when I started thinking about starting my school, I wanted to know what I wanted to call it. I thought of naming it after the 56th hexagram of the I Ching, which is Fire on the Mountain. Sexuality taken to the mountain. But something happened in 1983 in Berkeley that made Body Electric come to me. I can't believe I'm even saying this...what I felt then was that Walt Whitman's energy was there. That he loved men, and I had the exact same feelings he did. I felt the spirit of Walt Whitman was there. I felt compelled to call it Body Electric. I have a lot of connection with Walt Whitman, and I feel there is a part of him alive in me.

Stage directors often describe that feeling, of doing a play by Shakespeare or Moliere and feeling the
playwright in the room with them.

Well, I felt this. Then when AIDS came along, it reminded me that Whitman said at one point, in "The Wound Dresser," that the turning point of his life as a poet was the Civil War and spending three years taking care, holding and loving and writing letters for boys, soldiers. I was a masseur, and I was taking care of people, in a sense celebrating them. They weren't dying then, but some of the people I celebrated started to get sick. In 1984, when AIDS really hit, I started the first AIDS hospice massage team in the United States, for Hospice San Francisco. I called all the masseurs that I knew, got them together. That team is still going. There's only one person from that original team still on the hospice massage team, but it's influenced Elisabeth Kubler-Ross and the American Massage Therapy Association.

I feel right now there's two aspects to what I do. I run a massage school where one of the main themes is touching people with life-threatening illness. We gay men have lived so much in our bodies; it's very different from our grandmothers dying or our parents dying, who don't need to be touched as much as they die. Maybe they need it, but they don't expect it. This is a branch of what I do. I run a massage school where that's an emphasis.

The other thing is celebrating the dear love of comrades. So part of it is taking care of people as they die, and the other part is just celebrating it. All the classes that I teach came from that. All the men and women and teachers who come around and teach with me come from those two visions -- being with people in the physical as they are dying, and celebrating the dear love of comrades.

Most of the rituals I've done, it's as if I'm remembering things that have already been done. I
feel like we're doing something that has happened in Babylonian or Egyptian or Guatemalan culture. My experience in New York opened me up to interact with men in very high energetic environments. I became part of a web, a very open and sensing energy. So if Jung is right and there are archetypal energy fields, I'm real clear where the energy fields are coming from.

The men's movement, Robert Moore especially and Robert Bly and all these people, talk about energy fields and archetypes: the warrior, the lover, and the king, etc. They say that awareness of these archetypes will help us live out our life. Well, I think there are other archetypes prevalent today. One that I vibrate with is ritual leader. I pull all the ritual leader energy I can feel, and just let it express itself.

There's another archetype that I've tied into, and that's consciousness scout. It's the same energy field that Karen Finley calls Black Sheep. She says, "Their contribution is never recognized 'til the next generation." Well, it's naming what a lot of my life has been and what I've seen a lot of other people's life has been, as artists or outsiders. Black Sheep is the way the culture names it, from inside the culture. Consciousness scout is naming it from the outside.

I've always been interested in consciousness scouts. Even in the movies with the wagon trains. I wasn't interested in the wagon trains so much but those guys who rode out. And often they looked up and there were three Indians up there on the ridge, who were the scouts from the Indian tribe. Like Dances With Wolves -- here's this soldier, who goes to the very outskirts, then the Native Americans from the tribe come, and it's scouts meeting scouts. I thought, "This is my movie!"
So this is a time for all the consciousness scouts to really activate. Right this minute [in the middle of the Persian Gulf War], we need someone who's a consciousness scout who knows how to turn off 600 oil wells, because the regular people say it's going to take 5 years, 10 years. I think it's going to happen. It's going to take a lot of work, but somebody who's really an Einstein will figure out, click, all of a sudden, how to put those fires out.

I think erotic consciousness scouts are three hills out. Here's the big sludge, in the middle, and the consciousness scouts invite people outward. Erotically we're in a big constriction time.

When you said there were a lot around in the '70s, who do you mean?

I think there were hundreds and thousands of people who were exploring the outer realms of what it meant to be erotic. A lot of gay liberation then was exploring the realms of what our bodies could do and what that could affect in us. There was a lot of exploration with drugs along this line -- acid was big, speed and poppers and alcohol. It was exploring. I think some of it was compulsive, but a lot of it was really exploring what's possible.

Once the exploring is done, you get into addictive behavior. But at the beginning it was consciousness scouts. Now I feel all the consciousness scouts hook up. Annie Sprinkle is my best friend. She's the only woman that I've had sex with in the last 15 years. She says, "Let's move in together." I've spent time with her in Europe. The only reason I don't stay with her is she has two cats, and it's me or them when I stay there. But she's a consciousness scout. She's right on the edge. Heart and genitals. Betty Dodson. Michael Callen, I think.
Michael Callen told me two weeks ago, "I'm sick to death of these walk-quietly-into-the-light workshops. Yours gets down. Thank you." And during one erotic massage, I played his version of "Where the Boys Are." He says, "I've never heard it so good."

He did the workshop in LA?

Yeah. In fact, here's his thing about sex. He did this two-day workshop on Thursday and Friday. Then we did a Saturday and Sunday, but he was leaving on Sunday with the Flirtations for a tour. He said, "Can I come back just for one day on Saturday, because this is charging me up for this tour. This is bringing in erotic energy so I can sing like I've never sung before." That's understanding erotic energy.

I don't know if you know Michael Goodwin, who makes videos. You know what he does? He does art while he jerks off. I've seen him do this. So he knows how to transmute the erotic energy right into these amazing drawings. They're very graphic. These are transmuters of erotic energy to other media. I think people like Picasso and Georgia O'Keefe were like this. Some writers probably write with one hand on their typewriter and one hand on their magic wand.

Anyway, right now I need to listen to erotic consciousness scouts because there's no consciousness around sex. Safe sex education is scurvy for the soul. I was in New Zealand two weeks ago and did my classes, and the two main safe sex educators in the country came and took my class. Afterwards they decided this is one of the major directions they're going to go for education in all of New Zealand. We're going back there for ten more workshops in the next year, in little towns.

Do they have enough of a gay population to do it?
The classes we had there were full. They're also more liberated sexually. It's Polynesia. There's no one like Jesse Helms around. Only 6% of the population goes to church. That's a fact. They were the hottest classes I've ever taught. Here's a whole country's AIDS education program deciding this is the direction.

Looking at the future, the other archetype I'm most interested in is what I call sacred intimate.

I was going to ask you about that. This has just emerged in the literature.

It comes from what was called the sacred prostitute. And the sacred prostitute is the greatest challenge of all to this culture. It weaves together spirituality and sexuality. It was a great challenge to the Jews. But Andrew Ramer pointed out to me that in the Old Testament, the Jerusalem Bible, when they talk about male sacred temple prostitutes, the translation was "the holy ones." Even the Jewish interpretation of it was, "These are the people you have sex with to have sex with God." In New York in the '70s there were times when I had sex, and I had sex with God. Everything became white light, and it was clear that that's why I did it. If it was about paltriness, why continue with this? Why commit your whole life to this? But it was about a connection with wholeness, with the divine, with god/goddess, whatever names you want to say.

I've learned something in the last few years. And I have a special place, because I've done 100 weekend workshops and six-day workshops, all over the country, all over Germany, in Amsterdam, in New Zealand, where the risk-takers, the pioneers show up who know they're going to take their clothes off and have tribal sexuality. I look around at all these risk-takers, and what I see is that some men are so gifted sexually they glow in a special way. They
shine. It comes out not just in their cock but their heart, their cock, their eyes, everything. Just by being around them other people shudder. Sometimes they're old, sometimes they're fat, sometimes they're ugly, and sometimes they're Blueboy centerfolds, or In Touch. It doesn't matter what they look like, it's an energy. What I see is they belong to the sacred intimate. I don't like the word "prostitute," because it's an ugly word that we as a culture have put on that phenomenon to denigrate it. In Starhawk's book, Truth or Dare, she says, "As long as we use the word prostitute, we hold some arrogance or superiority over that vocation."

So I see all kinds of gay men who are sacred intimates. When they're intimate with you, a transformation takes place. You feel your wholeness. There are plenty of prostitutes around, so you can go and get off with a prostitute. And you might feel a craving to do it the next day and the next day. This is about being around someone who you're transformed by. You either model him, like Mitch Walker's idea of the double, where you see that energy and you can bring it into yourself. Or maybe there's an energy that comes from higher places through this person into you. Or you have the experience of being with an unconditional lover, just for a while, that changes you and you learn what unconditional love can be.

This is what's important: these are the teachers, but there's no place for them to teach. So what happens to a lot of them is they end up in Love and Sex Addicts Anonymous and Sexual Compulsives. I've gone to these meetings, and I went to a national convention in Oakland last year, and I think half the people there are sacred intimates. These are people who've been given special gifts. If you believe in lifetime after lifetime, they've brought this gift into this
lifetime. And this sick, dysfunctional society has no place for them. So when they feel a desire to act this out, to be in that space, it ends up being in a bookstore tricking, or paltry sex. So I've been thinking about how to activate this profession.

I committed myself in 1988 to teaching erotic massage. I committed myself to it for three years. People say, "How can you do this every weekend?" I love it. But -- three years. I want to get as much of it done as possible. So in three years I've done 100 workshops, teaching this approach to erotic spirituality. I've trained three master teachers. One's from LA, John Pasquiletti. He's a Tantric of the highest order. Eric Maynard, from Madison, Wisconsin, is the person who's been teaching Taoist erotic massage the longest besides me. He's been teaching it at faerie gatherings and everywhere for the last six years all through the Midwest. The other is Matthew Simmons, who's been assisting me for the last couple of years.

So I've trained these teachers. I've made a video that explains everything that I know about Taoist erotic massage. I'm leaving that, and what I'm going to do now is focus on activating the archetype, the vocation of the sacred intimate. Because we need sexual healers. We need those people who are healers to be there and stand there. Annie Sprinkle is doing this with Prostitutes of New York, PONY. She's putting this out among women. And we're going to work together. But the first year, I want to bring together as many people as possible in whom this archetype is activated. I have some ideas to develop a specific training so that their gifts could be used in this culture.

There's all kinds of sacred intimates. By the way, where sacred intimate is most activated in the gay culture right now is as midwives to the dying. This is one of those sacred intimate roles. People were
brought to the temple, and as they died they were there with the divine, with the god/ goddess person. I think lots of people who sit with people while they're dying or do hospice work have moments where all of a sudden they recognize that they are living out a very old profession, midwife to the dying. This erotic energy is about the leaving of that energy, too, from the body and going on.

My next two years will be devoted to training and activating and being a cheerleader of this archetype. The men's movement is centered around archetypal imagery and activating those images. It started with He, the Robert Johnson book. And Mark Thompson and Mitch Walker are coming out with their version of Gilgamesh, which will be the gay equivalent of that.

Yes, I've been waiting to see what the gay archetypes are, what the gay input will be to that mythology. Ritual leader is one that hasn't been talked about much. I don't think even Bly mentions it. The priest function isn't quite the same as the magician in Robert Moore's language.

But it overlaps. It's a shaman tradition, ritual leader. Erotic shaman is similar to sacred intimate. The shaman is the mediator between the two worlds.

I guess it's related to the berdache tradition.

Exactly. The chief would take a second wife, being the berdache, because he wanted to connect to the great medicine. Sex being the great medicine.

The main role of the sacred intimate is to clear out one's body totally of toxins and just to bring in light and wholeness and holiness and God, and by seeing that, other people are transformed. It's a very personal path. In the old days it was done in the
temple, so there were many people together. And there were teachers. They taught each other, and they had teachers. That's what I call right now a sex monastery. But I really am interested in temples, where people come together and do this. Clear themselves out.

For the last three years, I've noticed I put all my energy into being a ritual leader and let go of some of the bringing the light into myself. And it was fine. It was a trade-off that I wanted to do. But now I'm starting a different path and a different myth and letting go of that. The erotic massage is going to continue and grow and take all kinds of forms. We're teaching teachers and safe-sex educators.

Some sacred intimate stuff as it's reached the culture: Leonard Cohen's song "Suzanne" is a song about a sacred intimate. "Suzanne takes you down to her place by the river..." And just when you think nothing's happening, she gets you on her wavelength, and bam! Pasolini's movie Teorema is about a sacred intimate. This boy shows up, has sex with the whole family, leaves and they're all transformed, crazy, whatever. Their whole lives are changed by his interaction with them.

Erotic consciousness scouts -- I think of Henry Miller. The movie Henry and June is worth seeing for one scene about erotic energy. Anais Nin gets into this state at a party at a nightclub. She's on the dance floor, and she clicks into this erotic state where she's just there. It's not a rough erotic state, it's like honey. She's totally turned on, and she looks around the room, at the men and the women. The camera makes a 360-degree turn, and all the people recognize that state. She weaves everybody together because she's in that state and she's exuding it. I've never seen it on film before. I've felt it and known it but
I've never seen in so clearly on film as there. It made the whole movie worth it. I have to say I don't like a lot about Henry Miller. I read all of Henry Miller when I was young because he was the most erotic writer. I liked John Rechy, because it was like, sex, that's all there is.

I used to stand up in the library jerking off reading Genet. That was the only erotic writing I could get my hands on.

I was too young when I read Genet. I was 22 or 23. I heard *Our Lady of the Flowers* was his masturbation fantasy, so I read it and tried to get into it but I couldn't. Do you recommend anything in particular?

I did the same thing. I was only reading it for pornography when I was 13. I distinctly remembering crouching in the aisle of the Aurora Public Library in Denver. My face would get hot reading. I've tried sometimes to go back and find these passages that were so loaded with eroticism for me, and it's hard because your erotic sense is so different when you're an adult from when you were 13 or 14. For some reason those boys in jail sniffing each other's farts someone totally turned me on.

Here's a transformation point in my life. The Jesuits sent me to Regis College, in Denver, and I worked at Little Sisters of the Poor, an old folks' home. There was another guy who worked there, kind of a hippie type. This was 1968. I remember going to a concert in the college gym. I'd never been to a real rock concert. It cost $3, and I went in, and it blew me away. It was Jimi Hendrix. This guy says, "Do you want to smoke some grass? Come over to my place and smoke some grass." I'd never smoked grass. I'd been in the Jesuits three years, and I'd never masturbated. I loved masturbating, the world's most ardent fan. So
here I was, 17 to 19 or 20, not having masturbating.

You just gave it up?

Well, I joined the Jesuits, and you made a problem of celibacy, you're not going to have sex, you're not going to masturbate. So when I entered the Jesuits... I was going to enter on a Tuesday, and I remember deciding to spend the whole weekend beforehand jerking off, because this was going to be the last time in my life I was going to have sex. Then on Monday, like a good Catholic boy, I went to confession and confessed that I masturbated 25 times or something, and that was the end. I joined the Jesuits. And for three years, no masturbation. There was cravings, but no masturbation.

Then in Denver, I go to this guy's house. I didn't realize he was gay. I didn't realize 'til years later. He put on Donovan albums and got out some grass, and he says, "I'm going to take a bath, if you want to take a bath with me, it's a big bathtub." I went, ugh, no. He sat in the bathtub and we smoked, and then I went out and started trying to feel what the grass was doing. And Donovan's playing, "Mellow Yellow" and all this. I didn't know what I could feel. And he kept saying, "Are you sure you don't want to come in? Take off your clothes, come into the tub." I didn't see this as a come-on, I just saw it as a threat. I wanted to, but I didn't want to. I was fearful. I didn't understand what was going on.

So I figured I'd better go back to Regis College, to the dorm. I went back to my room, and my body was going, "Whoa!" Something was going on with my body. I started touching myself all over, and all of a sudden my hands were on my cock, jerking off wildly. This went on for hours! I played with myself, and I said, "I know masturbation is supposed to be morally wrong, but this is not morally wrong. This is God,
this is the best thing that could happen."

That was my Denver experience. Since then, never has more than a few months gone by, even though I was in the Jesuits, without masturbation. I'd try not to, but I'd fail. Self-erotic massage was happening. But Denver was a breakthrough. My first drug experience just turned on my sexuality.

Did drugs play a role in your New York experience?

Acid. I was the type of person who had to read every book on acid and read Timothy Leary's books. I don't remember whether I read Stanislav Grof at that time, but I read everything I could on acid, a very intellectual approach. In four years I took about 20 acid trips. I've never seen drugs as something you do and go out to a party. I've always seen it as a real private thing. But I do remember one time...

I was still Catholic at the time. I took acid, I was in my apartment, and I go, "I want to go to Man's Country." It was like 4:30. So I'm walking over to Man's Country, which is on 15th Street, and the next block was St. Francis Xavier. I'd been a Jesuit. It was getting close to Mass time. So I decided I was going to go to Mass. Here I am on acid, this is the only time I've ever done this, I'm kneeling in the church, there's like 20 people in this big cavernous church, I'm kind of toward the back. I was in this amazing place. When the priest held up the host and said "This is my body," I saw lights coming out of it and all that. So at communion time I went up, and I thought, "Can I even walk? Will they know I'm on acid?" I was just exploring. I took communion, and the priest looked at me. He was probably cruising me, but I thought he looked right through me. I wasn't paranoid, but I took communion, and it was wonderful coming into me. I left church after Mass and went right across the street into Man's Country to take
other men into my mouth and into my body in other ways. I felt no cognitive dissonance. I felt these two meshed together perfectly. My spirituality. But more and more I let go of Christian spirituality.

I didn't know what was going on on acid. This was the first time I'd ever gone out of my own meditation on my own body. So I was having sex with this man, thinking "This is really interesting having sex on acid." I thought, "I'm really doing fine, this is okay." And the man I was having sex with said, "It's okay, I know where you're at, I know what you're doing right now." I said, "How can you know?" He said, "I know this is your first time having sex." And I go, "What?!?" I thought, "Hmm, maybe I'm not doing as well as I thought...." That made me realize this is not something you should go out into the city with.

I had this view in the '60s that drugs were a window on a way of being. Every drug has taught me different things, but the drug that I found that taught me a lot was poppers. It taught me to go from a stress mode to a relaxation mode.

That's funny. I don't think of poppers as relaxing.

It puts the autonomic nervous system in massage mode. A lot of men will lose their erections because they're too relaxed to have an erection. What always interested me was those men, maybe 10%, who got harder on poppers -- they were the ones who, in the parasympathetic mode, which is the heart mode, the relax, the lover mode, could have an erection. Tthe men who sniffed poppers and lost their erections were often the men who only had sex in a sympathetic mode, stress mode, fight or flight. Tension.

There's a toxicity to poppers, though. Early on, it was supposedly the root of AIDS. So for years I laid off. Maybe once every couple of years. Recently I've tried
it, before it became illegal. Just last month, poppers became illegal nationally.

I didn't know that.

They're gone forever. But I learned a lot. Sometimes when I'm with someone having sex, I'll say, "Let's imagine taking poppers. Breathe in, now shift" -- which I think is the goal of any drug, to learn how to do whatever that shift is, without the drug. Certainly it's easier sometimes with the drug. It's easier to walk with crutches. But if you can throw the crutches away and walk, then do it.

Tell me about starting the school. How did that happen?

After teaching Monday Night Class for a year, I clearly saw I wanted to start a center, a commune, a group. I wasn't sure what form it was going to take. I knew it had to do with the ritual touching of men. Women have come to Body Electric over the years, I have to say, but it's the only massage school probably in the country that has been predominantly men. Although I'm an excellent masseur with women, my passion is that I'm a man who loves men. So men show up knowing that they're especially welcome.

So in this year of teaching Monday Night Class, I became very skilled. About 20 men in the course of this year said, "You've turned us on to massage so much that I want to do this as a profession," and they'd go off to massage school. And I go, "This is crazy, because a lot of these people I'd like to hang out with more." Then it became clear that the form of what I wanted to do was not just to teach massage but to have a school. This was when the Walt Whitman influence came -- Body Electric, Body Electric, Body Electric. I also knew that breathwork was important, rebirthing, so I started the Body Electric School of
Massage and Rebirthing.

In those days there was no consciousness of rebirthing. Hardly anybody knew what rebirthing was. Today it's, like, ho-hum. When I teach class, even in New Zealand, two-thirds of the men in the class have done rebirthing, breath work. So I started out, AIDS was coming along, so one of the first things I did was provide touch. I gave 50% discount on tuition to any people who were volunteers in AIDS agencies. There was only three agencies in the Bay Area -- Hospice San Francisco, Shanti was just starting, and the East Bay Pacific Center. So I knew all the people, and a lot of people got training in massage. It just started growing. I was still doing a lot of massage and then teaching at the massage school two evenings a week and some weekends. Everything was located in Oakland, where Body Electric is now.

Were you still working out of your house?

No, as I opened the school in January-February of 1984, I separated where I slept and lived from where I did work. So all my work was done at the school. It was a very powerful space. I wanted a space on Telegraph Ave, because Telegraph Ave is a street that comes right out of Sproul Plaza, and I felt that was the place where I got an insight about celebrating my diversity and freedom of speech. So I wanted to extend free speech to ecstatic touch. That was my contribution from my kinesthetic perspective.

I started this school, and right from the beginning people came. The main reason is that all the other massage schools -- and there were 25 or 30 of them in the Bay Area; it's the massage capital of the world -- had, I thought, a great deal of homophobia. This is 1984, you'd think there'd be a gay consciousness, but in schools where I was there were fears. I went to six different massage schools to take different classes,
and I noticed that two-thirds of the men were gay, and nobody came out to each other or to the classes. I thought, "This is the dark ages." About half the women were lesbians. Then I realized this is a profession of gay men and lesbians. And they're all getting trained in straight massage schools. So I said, "This is a school dedicated to a homophobia-free environment." Everybody flocked. It was an instant success; we could come and be among ourselves.

Gay men and lesbians are further away from each other than people think. This was a real weaving together. Many lesbians have been abused by men, and here were gay men who were touching them. They were nude together in classes and breathing together. It's amazing how many gay men and lesbians have been abused. I would say 50% of the people who come to my school have been physically or sexually abused, and all of them have had psychological/spiritual abuse.

What I understood in the first year was that the whole psychotherapy tradition of coming out was one-dimensional. Coming out of the closet meant that we had physical constrictions that we were holding. We held our energy, we screened our movements and our bodies. If you went to a straight massage school to learn to relax, you still didn't learn, you were still in the closet. All of a sudden, this was a free space where gay men and lesbians could come out in their bodies, their energy, in their breathing, and let go of it all. There's very few spaces -- there's psychotherapeutic spaces, but not physical spaces. The homophobia-free environment meant that people could come out physically and heal themselves physically.

I started doing intensives because I was doing three weeks in a row, all day every day, men and women. Incredible transformations took place. A third to a
half of the people who came through my school said, "This was the most important, transformative week of my life." A lot of people looked at becoming masseurs as downwardly mobile -- manual labor. That's one way the culture looks at it. In Japan, it's a trade that's accepted on a professional level; it's part of the healer motif. Here I found that doctors, Ph.D.s would show up and take massage training. All these people were tying into their shamanistic traditions or sacred intimate tradition.

Right from the beginning I started to educate people, and the way that I did it is I said, "No matter if you ever do erotic massage, masseurs are waking up the body erotically, so you are sexual healers." This is a theme to men and women, gay and straight, who are in my school. So I've been training sacred intimates right from the beginning. A lot of Body Electric graduates aren't doing genital massage but are very aware and not fearful of the erotic. They're aware that's a major energy force. It's not just like the elbow or some other place. It's a major place to be honored and respected and awakened.

As the school got going, it took up a lot of my time. I toned down doing individual sessions. My practice was one-third women, one-third gay men who didn't have AIDS, and one-third were people with AIDS. The women came to me, gay and straight, because I was gay and dealt with sexuality. Just by touching they felt they would get a male energetic environment, but they didn't want a straight man putting energy on them. I wasn't doing genital massage, but they just wanted that environment. I see this with a lot of people I educate. A lot of women need healing work with men, but there's always the fear that we're going to cross a boundary. With gay men, that boundary is already clearly set, so you can work deeply without crossing that boundary, because there's not the natural inclination to cross it. I still think boundaries
can be broken in that situation, but it is a very safe situation for women.

One thing that happened during my individual sessions was more and more people with AIDS were coming. The major thing I saw early on in the epidemic was men terrorized. Not just in fear, not just in depression -- those were states that all kinds of human beings had. I never saw so many people in terror in all my life. Terror just shuts down everything. It immobilizes someone. Psychotherapy takes a long time to deal with terror. But breathwork and massage and touching and caressing is like spring thawing out the ice.

Working with terror, I found that I had not dealt with my own terror about death. So for two years I became an expert in relieving terror or breaking up terror in others, and it accumulated in me. I'd not dealt with the fact that I was mortal. So I made it my commitment to do that. And the way to do that is to go into sexuality. Because from the tantric perspective, the way someone dies is the way someone has sex. That became very interesting to me.

First I want to say, I had let go of doing individual sessions, because I found it took me three or four days to clear. It wasn't that I took on their terror -- my own terror was activated. I didn't find somebody who could heal me or clear it out the way I was doing with somebody else. I became immobilized a lot. I decided I had to stop doing this until I could deal with death. This was about three years ago. It became a commitment to deal with death -- to practice dying, to do visualizations about death. The Big Draw, that we teach in the class, is the Tantric way of dying. I read The Tibetan Book of the Dead. I noticed in America there's the same attitude of denial toward sex and death -- they're not a main part of our life. These core things -- erotic life force energy and the
passage beyond this -- are just not important. But both are coming back now, and AIDS brings the two together. Sex and death. AIDS and Woody Allen.

That consciousness scout Woody Allen.

It's the American rugged individualist way to go off by yourself and deal with this or meditate and find spiritual enlightenment. But I feel now that terror is best dealt with in a communal context. It's not about hermits. So part of my interest in sacred intimates and being midwives to the dying is to be clear in myself on what this is. That's part of my path now.

When I bring it up to a lot of people dealing with AIDS or a life-threatening illness, I notice it's not talked about a lot. All of a sudden someone's naming a major thing that might happen at three in the morning -- they wake up petrified, immobilized with terror. A lot of people do this -- you don't have to have a life-threatening illness. People have anxiety attacks and they're just terrified. It's an existential angst moment. But that's what I'm interested in dealing with. I feel that the activating of god energy, life force energy, sexual creative energy in myself and around me as a sacred intimate -- I want to do that.

Tell me about how you created the Healing the Body Erotic two-day workshop.

I was teaching erotic massage and prolonging orgasm for a couple of years, ever since that first night when I did a lab period. I started doing lots of evening things, but people didn't want to come to the lectures anymore. They wanted the lab period. So I taught classes that all involved breathing and non-ejaculation. Men sometimes ejaculated, but the idea was: if you don't ejaculate, if you commit yourself to the energy, then instead of a quick going
from A to B, what happens is that you reach a high
erotic state, and the breathing was to circulate that
energy. Conscious breathing keeps people from going
off into fantasy. It keeps them right in the moment. I
had learned that state well in New York, in Chelsea, in
the Village, in the piers, on Fire Island, and now I
was finding ways that I could recreate the state in a
classroom for long periods of time.

So then I got a call from Buck Rhoades. He has a
foundation for gay spirituality in Albuquerque, called
the New Mexico Foundation for Human Enrichment.
They put on the Gay and Lesbian spirituality
conference every year now. He called me and said,
"I've heard of you, and we have a group of 25 men
who for 10 years have been meeting and gathering
and doing spiritual work. We do massage, we do hot
tubbing, a lot of spiritual investigation. Where there
is a block is sex with friends." This is 1987, we're in
the middle of the AIDS era. He says, "We would like to
cross through that threshold. Can you come to New
Mexico and do a weekend with us on sex with
friends?" I don't know what he wanted or if he
thought it would be a discussion weekend or what,
but I said, "Let me think about it." And it just came
to me. Everything I was doing wasn't about lover sex,
it wasn't about casual anonymous sex -- it was about
male bonding sexuality. I call it tribal tantra now. I
called him back and said, "I can do it. How about the
weekend after the march on Washington?" I wanted to
use the energy from the March on Washington to go
down there.

The March on Washington was incredible. It was the
most open-hearted gathering of gay men and lesbians.
It was all heart. I didn't listen to one word of the
speeches. Did you march with the faeries?

No, I didn't.
I marched with the faeries, and a chant came up there. It was "Purple hands of healing." Have you heard that chant?

Sure. "Faggot god, faerie god/My love, come to me."

Here it was! Purple hands of healing! It was this empowering chant. As the faeries went down the street, all kinds of people joined in. It was incredible. It was the first time I ever saw ACT UP. There was this dark, angry mass with arms coming out of it. It kind of scared me. I guess I'm scared by anger. Then came the faeries, tra-la tra-la, frolicking... Anyway, I took that purple hands of healing energy with me to New Mexico.

That was the first time I did this two-day workshop. I knew we had to breathe, to come together. I knew we had to take each other's clothes off. We had to honor and touch from the heart, and touch genitals, and play, and exercise all the dead places in the genital area. So we did erotic massage. We had some massage tables, but some people on the floor. We did it at this place called The Place of Peace in Albuquerque. It's Buck Rhoades' wonderful home. Twenty-five men were there.

I'd been in Pecos to the faerie gathering in 1980. This was 7 years later, and all I knew about the area was that it felt to me energetically like I was coming to the Tibet of the United States. I said to the group, "I am honored. I am coming to the Tibet of the United States." Then at the end of the workshop, one man said, "Well, if this is the Tibet, the Dalai Lama has just shown up." I'm embarrassed...actually, I'm not embarrassed, I was proud of that. Because I was teaching tantra. We activated something that was just wild.

So I've gone back every year and done a reunion
class with that group. And I've gone to the Gay & Lesbian Spirituality conference. They had 120 people at this Gay & Lesbian Spirituality conference a couple of summers ago. I went to the first big one at the Lama Foundation. I didn't want to teach. I wanted just to take. There was nothing on erotic spirituality. People talked about spiritual paths of lovers, but nothing about sex as part of the spiritual path of lovers. That's where I got the idea that I am an erotic consciousness scout. This person is a drummer, this person is a meditator, this person does Tai Chi. All their gifts are different. This is my gift.

There aren't that many erotic consciousness scouts out there teaching in the major league. There weren't any there at Lama. I got angry that I had to do it. I taught a class I wasn't scheduled to teach. Matthew led an erotic ritual where men marched into the woods and we did this "soloving" ritual. "Soloving" is my word for what used to be called masturbation -- solo and loving coming together.

Anyway, after that first two-day workshop, I came back and decided to teach this two-day form, because it was very powerful. The form constantly changed, because I'm an artist. Different people taught with me. Matthew has taught with me recently, and these other teachers who work with me now have all contributed, and it's changed over the years. It's gotten more focused and powerful, with the breathing and erotic energy.

It's evolved pretty fast then into one of the central things of the Body Electric School.

Here's what happened. In '88, about four months into this, I said, "I'm going to do this for three years. This is my commitment." At the end of '88, I said, "I don't have the energy to run a massage school." So for a year I let go of the massage school. As soon as
I let go of it, Amsterdam, Australia, Berlin, Paris, people started saying, "We want you to come here and teach this." I put all my energy into this, and it just expanded.

About eight months ago, because I knew this was coming to an end, I decided to bring back those massage trainings. When I did that, they were packed with men who'd taken the two days. They said, "You really taught us well how to touch and honor men's genitals, the genital area. I want to be able to do that head to toe, back to front, with Eastern approaches and Western approaches." The majority of people who've come to the school, from all over the country and New Zealand and Germany, could go to another massage school, but they want a massage school that has this energy.

The massage trainings are California state-approved trainings, so there's no erotic massage in them. And they're men and women, gay and straight, but the majority are people who've been through this two-day class, who are actually sacred intimates, who want to celebrate the dear love of comrades in the physical.

So it's a three-week intensive training, and they get their certificate?

Yes. California only requires 100 hours. I cut that down to two weeks now. I just offer the minimum. My feeling is that then people can train in all kinds of other modalities.

I'm coming to understand how massage is related to neurolinguistic programming. The majority of people contact the outside world through visuals; a lesser amount contact the outside world through hearing, the audio. Even a smaller amount, maybe 10%, contact the world kinesthetically, through feeling states. This is an anti-touch culture, and if you're a kinesthetic,
you're out of luck. You're dysfunctional by the time you reach our age. The mantra of grade schools is "Keep your hands to yourself." We get all these messages not to touch. So a lot of people show up at massage schools who've been frustrated all their lives. In whatever else they do, they're kinesthetic, and all of a sudden they're given training and permission to celebrate the world of touch. And they get paid for it! That's one reason massage has come so quickly into the culture, because there are people predisposed to it.

Tell me about your theoretical training and study in these things. You mentioned studying Reich.

I studied mathematics, philosophy, psychology, a lot of systematic things, how everything fits together. I see myself as a sex researcher. I belong to the Quad-S: Society for the Scientific Study of Sex. But I'm not in universities using rats. I'm really researching and exploring a lot of things, keeping journals and notebooks. The philosophy of sex and the theories behind it are very important to me. Why is this happening? There are some dead ends, like: why are people homosexual, why are people heterosexual? There are loops you can get into, but I'm interested in some of the arguments. Sociobiology and stuff. But mainly my philosophizing and thinking comes from the data that's so evident: "Here's what I see." The sacred intimate idea came from seeing this gift and seeing it frustrated. Not many people are creative enough to activate it in healthy ways.

Let me go into one theoretical area that I'm really looking at: addiction. I think core to healing codependency is learning to make love to yourself ceremonially. First of all, I think John Bradshaw's the most radical cultural prophet today that's having the widest effect -- especially as far as we gay people go. Because the conservative right and the fundamentalist
Christians say "Homosexuals and pornography are the problem and they're destroying the family." He's got it: the family has created the perverts, the addictions. It's in the family. Family is where all the abuse and the sexual stuff takes place. He's speaking eloquently on public television and in his books to middle-class and working-class people. That's radical. That's having an influence. Not homosexuals.

The major thing that's come out of all this addiction stuff is that the underlying addiction is addiction to codependence -- it means I need something outside myself to be me. And maybe that's true. But if it's not, it means that if I make love to myself, I know that right here I am enough. I think we Westerners learn an addictive way of having sex. Boys especially, because we learn right away that "I'm not enough." I need an image outside myself, or I need a memory, or I need a video. Codependence right away! We're hooked into it.

Kinsey said 95% of men masturbate while having fantasies. Codependence. We learn that early on. That's the American way. This is not the tantric or Taoist or Native American or Sufi way. The Cherokee word for masturbation translated means "heart pleasuring." So masturbation means to open up your heart to all your relations. But we've got these fantasies.

My underlying supposition is if we can make love to our selves and we are enough, it's cutting the bonds of codependence. A lot of 12-step programs say "100 meetings in 100 days." Or "60 meetings in 60 days and you get over the hump." I say 60 hours of soloving in 60 days. If you can make love to yourself every day, it's cutting those bonds of codependence, because it's saying "I am enough." It's not jerking off, it's not addiction to the sedation of ejaculation. It's making love, it celebrates, it's bringing that energy up. This
is enough. This is life force. I don't need alcohol, cocaine, television, romance, whatever the addictions or compulsions are. I can have them, but I don't need them, because I know who I am and I love who I am and I'm satisfied.

We are creatures of ritual. I think most addictions are rituals of loving. I'm going to drink this, it feels so good, this margarita -- it's a ritual. Grass was always a ritual. Cocaine has become one. Pretty soon the ritual of loving becomes like that. We love ourselves so much we have to numb ourselves out. We have to go away. Part of sacred intimate training is soloving every day -- a session of making love with yourself to be clear in your body.

I have to say I have been doing this only erratically, and I can feel the lack in my body. But part of my commitment is to really look at substances that I use, moods that I use, and to make love to myself every day.

**Is this your last cup of coffee?**

There's all kinds of other things I'm aware of that control me more than coffee. Rather than saying "I'm not going to drink coffee," I'm going to make love to myself and be centered in my self.

Now, why will this not work? Because -- this is where Reich and others come in -- I have in my body emotional records from 3, 4, 5. All the abuse, all the self-abuse, all the horrors of my life, and I can't just go "Here I am, making love to myself!" So there are levels of soloving, of raising this energy, that are about emotional clearing.

This is where Wilhelm Reich comes in. All kinds of people do Reichian therapy, and in a sex-negative culture they don't even tie it into sex. He said, "Orgasm is the healing state. And if you can have a
full-bodied orgasm, toe to fingertips, not just genital, you've cleared out everything." So I feel soloving, making love to yourself, is a healing path to clear out your emotional records. Those people who believe in past lives, that you bring emotional records from other lives, it's a clearing of the physical. It's a vibration. It's a self-love vibration. And one's attention isn't out with Jeff Stryker or Joey Stefano's butt but it's with oneself. And it's not about getting off quickly because you can't stand the vibration. It's about being in that vibration and vibrating it out. What I foresee is a temple for sacred intimates, a place where you can stay in that vibration for a long time.

There are certain people -- Gary Wright is an example. He's a mystic in this. Gary went to Paris, and he went to the chateau where the Paris Jacks have an annual gathering. He came back and told me he had a wonderful time, three days of jerking off, masturbating, whatever words he uses. My question is always, "How many times did you come?" He said, "Oh, let me think -- I didn't come." He went to be in that state! Now that's a high place, a healing state, a clear state. Gary's one of the clearest people I know. Ten years he's been doing that stuff. I call him a flesh mystic. He's vibrated out. And he's so clear with his massage clients now. He's so successful, people come because he's a sacred intimate. He loves his work, he honors his clients, and he himself is clear.

Theoretically, the important thing is ceremonies of self-loving. Instead of going to 12-step programs and not having sex, have sex! What if one in ten times that we jerked off, we actually made love to ourselves? You don't have to make love to yourself every time, but just half the time, bring that intention to it, whether it's five minutes or five hours. So part of my training for sacred intimates is we learn to give ourselves full-body massages. I've
taught hundreds, thousands of people to touch each other. Now learn to touch yourself and wake up.

Just as that man in the baths put his mouth on my cock and moved the energy all around, I see raising the erotic energy and pulling it around the body and waking up the whole body. To heal codependence. I don't need anybody else, as long as I can make love to myself. Then I'm ready, from that loving place, to be with other people who are loving themselves, to share. It's an alternative to "I'm looking for someone to turn me on," which is the ultimate codependency. "He doesn't turn me on, she does, he does, she does, he does."

The idea of a sex temple is fascinating.

Can this work in San Francisco? I'm going to try it. There are three gay supervisors. In the middle of the AIDS epidemic, we should be able to legally touch each other's genitals in therapeutic and healing and ceremonial situations and set up a sex temple where people come even for a week to have this kind of experience. If it can't, the place where it can be done is Amsterdam. I'm already looking at setting this up there.

What's the legal obstacle?

The legal obstacle is if there's a monastery, and this is somebody's profession, and people give any money to this temple, then it's prostitution in this society. When people went to the temple, they contributed to the god or goddess, and that was the upkeep of this whole temple. I'm really into value for value, in body work and healing. Anybody who gives value gets value. That's why it's illegal in this country. If you get sexual gifts, you're not supposed to give back. It's only within committed relationships. In Amsterdam you can have a sex temple where people contribute to
the temple.

But this is the thing: how can people dedicate their whole lives to this? You have to be independently wealthy if you are a sacred intimate. Or your right livelihood has to come somehow. That's been the problem: "I work as an office boy or a computer programmer, but my gift is healing with people sexually." I'm not clear on this. The form hasn't come to me. But there's no place in the United States where it's going to be accepted. Amsterdam is one place where it could be. Or where there's some independent source of income so money doesn't have to be involved at all. Which would be fine.

That's what the NEA is for.

Right.

The idea is people would go to the sex temple and... what?

Every sacred intimate is different. The temple is just a place for a gathering of people who share this vocation. One of my goals is to put this image out as strongly as possible, so that it will be activated in people.

For example, what's happening right now is soldiers are coming back from the war. One of the roles of the sacred intimate in other times was to have sex with the soldiers. You vibrate the war out of them so they can come back to this country. I feel the war coming back into this country. I just saw in the Atlanta airport all these boys getting off the plane in their fatigues and I felt bad. They have war in them. I'm sure there are many gay men who'd volunteer to have sex with them.

You could set up a booth right in the airport.
This is what used to happen. At least it's part of the mythology, and it makes sense to me on an energetic level, even if there's no historic precedent. During the Vietnam War, there were people thinking about the sacred prostitute, that there should be women who love the horrors of war out of the men as they come back.

There are all these different functions, like midwives to the dying. Someone who sits all day with someone who's dying, the society's not going to have any trouble with; they're reimbursed for that. But if there's any kind of sexual touch... And I think the sacred intimate role in the past has been sometimes just to talk. Maybe there wasn't sex. Sometimes they just washed the person, and the person was so transformed it was enough. Sometimes they fed the person. They went away feeling, "I'm full, I'm whole." Sometimes they just touched them; massage was enough. But sometimes they had sexual contact. In all those traditions, these were people who lived in the temple, and money was given to the temple. Value given for value. Or a cow was given. Whatever.

So one of my commitments is not just to activate sacred intimates but to acknowledge this culturally and present it as a valid profession, just as a computer programmer is. A sexual healer is a valid profession. It's the prejudice of the society that doesn't allow that.

This is a little different from, though parallel to, COYOTE or those other organizations that say prostitution is valid. I agree with that, too. Prostitution is a valid profession. But this is sacred healer. I'm not sure what form this will take. Part of the way that I work is you put out an idea, and it comes back. One way is a sex monastery where people come together just to heighten this energy.
I had an interesting experience when I came back from LA after interviewing Madonna, which was a stressful experience in various ways. I was kind of depressed and tense and angry and down. I went to a movie, felt really terrible, and I decided to go to the Jacks. And two hours at the Jacks, being naked in a room with men, it was a particularly special night. It was one big group scene. Something Dionysian happened. I walked out of there and I felt totally myself, as opposed to whatever I felt when I went in. It was an amazing experience. I miss that. I want to be in that place tonight. I want to have some place to go.

I have all kinds of unformed ideas, but I see two men working together as healers who get into that energy, without touching each other, and build it up. They're in that state and stay in that state, and other men one at a time come in and see what it's like to be in that state. And the healers invite that man to get into that state himself.

Two Flutes Playing.

Well, that's where it came from. Andrew Ramer. I got from Andrew the idea that two people in such a state invite other people in and teach techniques and all this. A lot of sacred intimate work that would be legal is soloving, where you never touch the person but you help them make love to themselves, showing it and modelling it, mirror work.

I'm offering a whole training program. But I'd like to go further. I don't expect validation. I just expect celebration of diversity and to allow someone to do what they are.

Do you know anything about these places in Thailand?

I've talked to everybody that I can who's visited.
But you've not been there.

No. There they have, I think, the prostitution model with a consciousness of sexual healing that is getting weaker all the time. People who embody the joy of sex, being in the physical with an open heart, men and women, boys and girls. Al Goldstein, who does Screw magazine, did a column in Penthouse Forum just about a year ago and said, "Everybody talks about Thailand, Thailand, Thailand. So I finally went there. First thing I want to say is everybody reading this must go there immediately. It's the most healing place in the world for sex, the most transformative. You cannot believe the consciousness. I love pussy, and I fucked pussy for two weeks straight. Pussy, pussy, pussy, and they were the most beautiful women in the world. They loved me, they cared for me, they caressed me." Here's this guy, Mr. Sex, and he says, "Here is utopia." But he was talking about it in different terms, which I found really interesting.

One more thing he said was, "I had this experience where these women put me on the table and they had this mixture of all kinds of soap suds and they start massaging my cock and all around the front of my body and I got into a state where my whole body was like a penis. It was an amazing state. Then I went and had another week of fucking." And I realized -- his thing is to fuck. He experienced this most amazing state, which was what I'm teaching, Taoist erotic massage, but it was like, "Good, that's interesting, but fucking is the real thing."

So I talk to all the men I can who go to Thailand. I would like to go because of the consciousness of the boys and men. But it's waning more and more. AIDS has caused so much fear there now. Even in the last five years it's changed drastically. But it's like New Orleans, there's a different consciousness about slow
living. I found this in Amsterdam, too. It's different from the United States, much freer, in terms of types of bodies and so on.

In Thailand, isn't there a whole town devoted to the god of sexuality? The polyntheistic idea that there is a god who governs sexuality, and you must pay homage to that god because it's part of human life, and it's in a whole cosmic context.

I've heard this, but none of the people I've spoken to who've come back have spoken of it. I've quizzed them. That may be the historical motivation, but the tourists don't seem to get it.

The reading list you distribute in your workshops has a bunch of books by Rajneesh.

He's one of the greatest popularizers of tantra in the whole Western world.

Is that how you encountered tantra?

No. I encountered tantra not from any one teacher but from thousands of teachers who are men in New York City. I learned tantra by doing it. I learned the names and things later.

There are about 20 major tantra teachers in the U.S. now. Most of them know each other or know of each other. I'd say two-thirds of them are influenced directly or indirectly by Rajneesh. When I was in Europe, I'd say one-fourth of the men who took my classes had been sannyasins, followers of Rajneesh. For one thing, he put out so much information in books to teachers, so several thousand people had received in-depth training, not a weekend workshop but months, in Poona and in Oregon. It was the largest tantra school for a while. Rajneesh was a popularizer. Whatever the machine guns and the Rolls
Royces, he popularized tantra. The books on my reading list are two thin little books that are easy to read that give a lot of information. In my workshop there's not a lot of giving of traditional information.

I'm impressed with Rajneesh. He's been a major teacher of mine through books. I've read everything I could about tantra and Taoism. There's a lot coming out right now. Margo Anand is a new teacher on the scene. She's a sannyasin from Germany who's now teaching in the U.S. Jowalla is a major tantra teacher in the U.S. Annie Sprinkle's been greatly influenced by Rajneesh through other traditions. I don't think anybody who does tantra has not been influenced by him, just as the Maharishi exported TM, his gift to the world.

It's fascinating to me that you put him on your reading list, because he's someone who's been sort of discredited because of the publicity.

It depends on your view of gurus or teachers. You look at what the teaching is rather than the publicity. I know a lot of people who consider him their guru. They're plugged into him. I'm not plugged into him. He's been an information giver to me, and those books resonate with me.

It's one of the problems of our culture that anybody who seems to be a guru, whether they say so or not, is automatically a bad thing. Have you noticed that in the media? It's a way of putting someone down. It's like saying you're a villain, a con artist. Guru equals con artist.

One of the reasons I have allowed myself to be 30 pounds overweight and drink coffee and alcohol and all this is to make sure that I don't have to deal with the guru stuff. I am a teacher. I have some information. I'm a ritual leader. Take from this what
you will. You're in charge of your own process. I do have some things to offer. But nobody mistakes me for a guru. Nobody. People show up and say, "You look so ordinary. You look so dumpy. I was expecting somebody who looks enlightened." I hear this all the time.

What's the difference between teacher, ritual leader, and guru?

I think a guru is someone who says, "I have reached a level of enlightenment in my body, and I am living this, and you can learn by looking at me and plugging into me because this is in my being." A guru is supposedly self-realized. A teacher isn't. I am struggling. I am on my path. Gurus have already gotten there. Rajneesh was there. Yogananda supposedly realized it.

So I'm influenced by the work of Wilhelm Reich, Rajneesh, Chinese medical system of energy movement and sexuality, Mantak Chia, Mitch Walker, Walt Whitman. But other than those traditions, almost all my training has been one on one with men, when I was honoring men on the massage table, on my altar, I wanted to take them to the highest place they could possibly get. Then when I started working with groups, I wanted the whole group to go to the highest place it could as a group. Carlos Castaneda would call it looking at the assemblage point of someone and raising it to the pleasure place.

The two-day class is a version of that that's just about pleasure. The Big Draw, the erotic massage, the synergy of the whole room is me kinesthetically doing that, rather than doing what some healers do -- sensing the pain and working on the pain, the lower back or the psychic pain. That's another form of healing. I'm using my skills as a kinesthetic empath to create areas where people are in their highest
vibration. Not many people have been in a tribal situation where they've been that high. I just wish there were more places -- like every street corner.

The New York Jacks now meets in a bar where anybody can go in, so there's a mixture of Jacks members and anybody who wants to come in off the street. You can always tell which is which, because the Jacks immediately get naked, and the others often stay fully dressed for a while, sit at the bar, watching, getting comfortable, thinking it's a one-on-one scene. But when there are enough Jacks people there, something gets going, and they inevitably join in. It becomes something else. On nights when there aren't enough Jacks members, then it's mostly defined by people who will maybe take off their shirt and want to go off in a corner with someone.

I pride myself on having the gift of foresight. But I was totally wrong about something. Five years ago, I thought there'd be 100 jerkoff groups in Manhattan by now and 100 in San Francisco. I thought there'd be amazing clubs everywhere. It hasn't happened.

What I didn't figure in was the amount of sex that's addictive, compulsive, and paltry. I think for huge amounts of people, jerking off is five minutes. Kinsey said the average length of heterosexual intercourse was two to four minutes; now Masters and Johnson say four to six minutes. This is not enough time to get into any state, not without a lot of foreplay. This is heterosexual. Well, for the majority of gay men, jerking off means ten minutes or under, and it's functional. To get from A to B and release. One of the advantages of pornography, of video, is that a lot of gay men prolong sexplay because they watch the videos. There's more of a charge built up.

This is where I as a teacher come in. A lot of people
are opposed to teachers, but people don't have any social skills.

Also a lot of the leaders, the consciousness scouts, died. The people who had the social skills to make it happen went away.

This is not the time to be an erotic consciousness scout. They're not honored at all. My brochures were sent to the Gay Community Center in LA, and they were taken away as inappropriate to be in the center. I thought, "This is erotophobia." In one of my old brochures, I quoted somebody from the Center for Disease Control talking about safe-sex education who said, "We're using fear, because the more fear the better." That's what we're in -- we're in a state of fear.

My next move is all about soloving, for everybody, gay, straight. Imagine if a 13- or 14-year-old boy were given videos and instruction to be free. You learn to make love to yourself and be free, celebrate that energy. Once you do that, it's like learning to breathe. You're free. Nobody else can take that away from you. You are yourself, and you can celebrate yourself. This goes beyond gay, straight, man or woman. I think it does speak to the male wound. It softens the aggressiveness. One of the reasons I think we're so aggressive as males is sexual frustration. We don't get in that state enough.

Have you had contact with the men's work, the men's spirituality stuff?

I've read and listened to some of Bly's stuff and I get Wingspan. We have gay drumming circles at Body Electric now, and get-in-touch-with-your-power-animal. But the issues are not my issues, so I've not been attracted. I read an article about drumming that
said, "We got so liberated in the woods that we stripped down to our boxer shorts." I thought, "That characterizes the liberation of the men's movement. I'm sorry."

A friend of mine went to see Robert Bly last week in LA, and he said, "A lot of straight men are just discovering that there's such a thing as issues." Friendship with men is not my issue. I have that. That's what it's about for a lot of them: I don't have any mirrors, any close friends. So that's not my issue. Raising sons isn't my issue. In *A Gathering of Men*, though, Robert Bly says, "If you have not hugged a young man in the last month and told him you love him and how wonderful he is, you are perpetrating the same state you're in right now." He's saying radical things for transformation, for change. But I'm not attracted.

For example, his whole image of wild men is eviscerated. He's missing the erotic component. The comfort with sex with women and with male bonding sex. Wild men feel comfortable dancing around the fire erect, in the presence of their brothers. So even developing his major image, the wild man, he's still buying into the homophobia. Even his major image, wild man.

You know what someone said to me? "Don't criticize Robert Bly, add to it. Supplement. He's doing his gift, do yours." So I'm an adjunct. We're walking parallel paths, and people can take nourishment from both. That's my perspective. If I found it nourishing, I would follow that path more. I like Robert Moore's work. I've just read the synopsis of his books in *Wingspan*, I haven't read the book, but I'm going to look at it more, because I do feel empowered by archetype, and I want to look at that. My warrior is strong, but I want to see what he says about lover. I
think it's important.

A thing that Bly said that really makes sense to me is that almost all the men who show up there are over 35. He says, "Until men are 35, they don't know their life isn't working." I started looking at my workshops, and almost everybody is about 30 or 35. "It's not working for me sexually, so I've go to look around for something that's going to kick-start my sexuality." He gave me a real insight there.

**When were you 35?**

Eight years ago.

**Was that when you started the school?**

Yes. That's right when I started the school. Thank you, Robert Bly.

**Do you know anything about Justin Sterling?**

Yes. He once advertised himself, about 1985 or so, as teaching "Beyond Tantra." I thought, "People will put anything in their ads. I consider tantra a coming together with the universe. So what is beyond tantra?" I called him up and asked him that. I was actually quite hostile. He said, "Well, you know, most people don't know what tantra is. They think it's just having sex slowly. So I'm using this to say that I'm teaching more than what most people say."

What he is doing, though, in his "Men, Sex, and Power" workshop is creating a male initiation rite. He'll have 100 or 400 men, and they come for all weekend./ It's almost like est or boot camp. You stay up late. There's a part of it where everybody takes off their clothes. There's a certain liberation involved in 400 men with their clothes off. There's usually only about five gay men. He's really good at a group that
size. My limit is 30 or 40 for my rituals. He's good at leading this whole group through this initiation into honoring being a man, as opposed to "We're the war-mongers, we're the polluters, we're the abuser." It's a rite of passage. He's done a version of this since 1984, seven years, eight years. A lot of gay men who've come to my thing have been empowered by going through initiation.

I've changed a lot. There's some initiation stuff now. Did you go through adolescent initiation when you did my two-day?

I think so.

Oh yeah, it was the very first time. Whenever I teach a new class, I get all kinds of new rituals. In June I did my first intensive. There's some wonderful initiation processes now, and I got it from Robert Bly and Justin Sterling's emphasizing that men are uninitiated. We've never walked through the threshold and said, "I now am in this space." Puberty, sexual initiation, is about saying, "I now feel myself and others in a new way. Sexuality gives me a feeling state." For most people, it's a quick feeling state. In a sex-negative culture, we only want to have it for a little bit. We're not taught at that time that this is a hormonal leap where you now will feel the world, yourself, everything, in a new way. We're taught that you get hair, you ejaculate or whatever. But it's more than that. It's really about new ways of feeling.

I've only heard good things about Justin Sterling, aside from my own little thing about tantra. And only good things about Michael Meade and Robert Bly. I've watched for homophobia in Justin Sterling. I see no homophobia. I see a celebration of heterosexuality. And in Robert Bly, there's just blind spots. In Iron John,
he says, "This is mainly for straight men, gay men may get something out of it." In his workshop, if somebody challenges him, he says, "I'm a straight man, we're talking to straight men, there's a difference." But that's been important to me. I don't find this to be a homophobic movement.

Bly once said something in an interview, he criticized John Ashbery, saying that in his poems there were no women, and I took that to be a homophobic remark.

For me, Bly has an androgyny that's like a Tiresias. He could be a gay man or a straight man, but he's reached this age where there's both female and male energy.

He says, at the very beginning of *Iron John*, "Most of the language in this book speaks to heterosexual men but does not exclude homosexual men. The mythology as I see it does not make a big distinction between homosexual and heterosexual men." I agree with you that there are things that are left out. But I have the same attitude that the idea is to add on to it, to look for parts that he skips over, or look at masculine mythology and see where things are different between gay and straight men.

Here's something that's come to me -- the latest insight about my tribe. When I was in New York, everybody I knew had sex. They taught me tantra. I used to think gay men were sexual men, erotic men. What I found is there are some straight men who are very erotic and who are not homophobic and who are into male bonding sex, and they're coming to my classes. In Amsterdam half the class were straight and half were gay. They had a wonderful time. Male bonding sex, liberated men. Afterwards nobody was upset. It was refreshing.
So what I've come to is maybe my tribe right now is not gay men. It is sexual consciousness scouts. I'm really interested in those people who honor sexuality. There are some gay men who are not erotic. When Stonewall first happened, it was the far-out edge. Now we have people who are totally within the culture: gay Republicans who have nothing in common with the Radical Faeries or a drag queen. This comes up all the time: why can't those people assimilate? I'm not talking just about assimilationists but the people whose sexuality is like their brother's and sister's exactly. They just happen to be same-sexual. Whereas there can be heterosexuals whose sexuality is totally different from their tribe.

The image of consciousness scout is from Andrew Ramer. The biggest mass of society has settler mentality. The people live in the center of town, and the awareness moves very slowly. Then there are people who go out one hill or two hills or three hills or ten hills. They go way out on the edge and come back. When the really far out erotic consciousness scouts bring back information, the whole town screams, "Aagh, save the kids!" They don't want to have anything to do with it. It frightens the horses. But what I find now is I identify as an erotic consciousness scout; that's my tribe. I also belong to the tribe of men who love men, but some of those men are horrified by erotic consciousness scouts.

I used to think that almost all gay men were consciousness scouts. They overlapped. But you don't have to go out ten hills to be a gay man anymore. You can be right in the middle of town. That's what Rob Eichberg and The Experience is about -- assimilationism. It's about being safe within the town. But I really want to get all the people who are sitting out on the hills by their fire together and build a monastery out there, or a temple, ten hills out and get that crowd together. A lot of them are coming
together. There's a lot of networking. Annie Sprinkle is way out there. She did all this porn, and that gave her the wisdom to explore further and further and further out.

Almost everybody I know who's an erotic consciousness scout is not about a better ejaculation or higher erotic pleasure. It's about the pleasure of weaving together every level of our being, especially the heart and genitals. It doesn't mean romantic love or couple love. It's something about the erotic energy as wholeness.

So right now I see my tribe, the people who most feed me, are erotic consciousness scouts. My path for the next two years are sacred intimates, people exploring the limits of what the erotic can bring into our bodies. I would hope that in six months, in a year, in two years, when you see me you'll see a different person. Because my commitment is to do a different thing with my energy. Not just to put it out but to pull it in.

Annie Sprinkle's major movement, when she's in sexual bliss, is pulling energy in to her bosom, to her breasts. (She does have bosoms, too!). She's teaching me this. I always was uneasy with that.

Why were you uneasy? Because men are only supposed to be giving it out?

I don't know. But I know something new is beginning for me. I want to teach soloving, sacred intimate, advanced tantra. I want to teach longer trainings. I have scheduled six classes in the next year and a half during the summer, including six days of anal massage.

Last year was the first time you did the weeklong intensive?
Six days. Yes. That was what I called a maethuna ritual. It's a five-day tantric ritual. Classically a couple comes together to a pleasure garden to spend five days to raise the erotic energy. There's bathing and eating and lots of sex without ejaculation on the man's part to go higher and higher 'til at the end of the five days there's stillness on the outside and vibrant communion. We did this with 50 men. For five days our commitment was with breathing and erotic massage and all these rituals to raise the energy to the highest height we could. One of the things we did was take that whole energy and cast it as a healing energy over anybody healing from AIDS. Another intention was for each of us to take into our own bodies any of that energy we needed, the group energy. The rest was just left as an erotic weave in which we are connected. About one third of those people quit their jobs last year. They decided, "I don't want to do what I've been doing," and they moved into other realms. They weren't all 35 either, but many were around that age.

I'm doing it three times this summer because there are 150 men who want to do it. There's people coming from all over the world this time, so it's like a weave of men from all over the world coming together in that pleasure garden. One other area that I want to learn is anal massage. Anal massage is where our fears and our security issues collect, and it's the place of kundalini activation. We have all kinds of trauma from potty training on. A lot of gay men have trauma from what is considered ecstatic anal sex -- "It'll only hurt for a while, then it'll feel good." The idea is to spend six days clearing out all that trauma and waking up the prostate and especially the anal sphincter, and connecting the heart-cock energy with that.

Is anal eroticism something that's new for you?
I teach it in some other classes. A technique I use a lot is called flooding -- intense focus on something, rather than mete it out a little at a time, like psychotherapy once a week. Somebody can play with themselves for half an hour, but what about 25 hours of erotic massage in 6 days? Then having modeled what's possible from somebody else, it releases the chains. It allows a neurological imprint. Quick flashes of experience may be an interesting thing, but there's not a neurological imprint. I may be somewhat Skinnerian here. The more, the deeper.

Rajneesh said, and I've found this to be true, that if somebody is in a prolonged orgasmic state for three hours, they're cured -- he uses the word cured -- of normal sex forever. Why would you ever want to do a quickie? Once you get to these ecstatic states and you're there for a while, not just a flash, if you have the choice that's where you want to go. It's finding the technology to get back there and stay there for as long as you want.

So anal sex is a particular technology. You need to know the breathing, the letting go, the trust level that you need, the cleansing, so any hygienic issues that you or your partner have are out of the way, and the ability simply to be present with the pleasure. Most people in anal situations go off into some other place. These are areas I'm exploring, so that's why I want to teach them.

Both the weeklong and the sacred intimate training sound very appealing.

This is what I learned from Robert Bly and Robert Moore. When you name archetypes and people understand them, it frees them to structure the dynamic. Since I've been putting this out the image of the sacred intimate in my classes, people come up to me and say, "You spoke to me." One 28-year-old boy
said, "I'm in AA, I've been a drunk for five years. I've been blotting out my sexual gift. Before that I was a prostitute for a while. I didn't know why I was doing this. When you talked about sexual healer, that's me. Since I was a little boy, people around me, I've been special in that energy. And I don't know how to use it. Alcohol was blotting it out. Now I'm going to Love and Sex Addicts Anonymous because I think it's an addiction." He says, "This is the first time I've heard anything like this, and it all clicks." So as soon as people see it and recognize it, they're free to activate it in themselves.

In Robert Johnson's He, he says a boy has his first grail experience in his teen years. I think it's post-puberty where finally the sexuality flashes through his body. The rest of his life he's searching for that grail experience. Johnson doesn't interpret it as sexual, but I interpret that whole myth from a kinesthetic point of view. He's searching for the wholeness of sexuality. Not a sexual orgasm, but finally where sexuality hits every level of his being. Robert Johnson says it doesn't happen until someone reaches mid-40s or middle age or beyond that, in their 50s. I think it's when sexuality seems to settle a little bit. The expectations of the young man, the ragged sexuality, finally integrates, and he comes to the grail castle, and he has the second grail experience.

What is Quad -S? What is the Institute for the Advanced Study of Human Sexuality?

In San Francisco, there's a professional school that gives a Ph.D. and Master's degrees in sexuality. There's no hands-on stuff. There's some touch, but it's mostly sex counseling. Wardell Pomeroy used to be the dean; he was one of the co-signer of the Kinsey reports. It's prestigious. I've given talks there and
taught my Eastern approaches to Sex. But Pomeroy is a scientist, and he thinks this is bullshit. When I gave my first talk in 1987, I heard the student body was just ecstatic. Several people wanted to do their Ph.D.s on tantra, and he said, "No, no, this is a school. Scientific research! Forget spirituality!" But people go there to get information.

I did teach a class at UCLA on this, in the public health department, for a limit of 20 students. I thought there'd be a lot of gay students. Well, there were ten men and ten women, and only two were gay. I invited the boys to take my two-day class for free. Not one of them came, not even the gay ones. The highest compliment was this sorority girl who was always furiously taking notes. My main perspective is male sexuality, and she's taking furious notes every day. We became friends, and she said, "I want to tell you why I'm taking these notes. Every night at dinner after your class, all the girls want to know the latest techniques. So I give a ten minute talk summarizing what I learned in class today." I thought, "Yea!"