

OCCASION FOR THOUGHT

Number 4, Part 4.2  
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**“FULL DISCLOSURE”**

OR

**A MEMOIR BY REED WHITTEMORE,**

***AGAINST THE GRAIN:  
THE LITERARY LIFE OF A POET***

ADDENDUM 1



AN EXCERPT FROM  
CHAPTER 3 (“CONSUMERISM, VICTIMOLOGY,  
AND THE LOSS OF THE MEANINGFUL SELF”)  
of  
*A NATION GONE BLIND: AMERICAN IN AN AGE  
OF SIMPLIFICATION AND DECEIT*



The groups that demanded and were given academic “inclusion” after Vietnam are well known to all. In order for the claim for inclusion to be made, it was necessary, originally, that the groups be “minorities,” although that word quickly proved inaccurate—as when “women’s studies” came into being, for example, women not being a minority. The true criterion for inclusion, clearly, had in fact nothing to do with any numerical value, but instead with the claim of having been oppressed, of having had things *done* to you—of having *suffered*.

One must tread delicately here, for the piety and righteousness surrounding these issues are nothing if not powerful and rigid. Humor, too, is quite, quite

absent in and from any and all such considerations. A healthy and useful sense of humor, in fact, was one of the earliest victims of the Age of Simplification, and one of the most deeply to be mourned. Even some small bit of it could be of enormous help in cleaning the intellectual stables and getting rid of confused thinking—which is doubtless the real reason for humor’s carefully, even grimly, maintained suppression. Let’s allow for a brief digression on the subject. What normal and intelligent person, for example, if still firing on all eight intellectual cylinders, wouldn’t laugh at the acronym “CLAGS” for the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies in the City University of New York? If “clags” doesn’t sound funny—for a number of reasons, which you won’t find here—what does? Or, in the same academic center, how about something referred to as “LGTBQ,” needing to be spelled out, I presume, since it *appears* to be unpronounceable, though I suppose it could be pronounced “light bulb.” What it—obviously?—stands for is “Lesbian /Gay / Transgender / Bisexual / Queer,” as in the following passage, itself of interest:

“LGTBQ Studies has grown tremendously since Martin Duberman hatched the idea for CLAGS,” she [Alisa Solomon] adds. “The Center is proud to have been a part of shaping and expanding the field. In today’s conservative and economically difficult times, we face tough challenges—which makes our work more important than ever.”<sup>1</sup>

The hilarious “words” that are used, the stream of clichés flowing from the lips of the speaker (“hatched the idea,” “shaping and expanding the field,” “today’s conservative and economically difficult times,” “tough challenges”), the boilerplate vacuity, the politician’s tone and banality—all of these are hilarious indeed, as is also, for example, the idea of “gender studies” being thought of as a “minority” studies field, even though it can and must indeed include every single member of the human race, bar none.

Hilarious, yes. And yet the effect of simplification has been such as to “elevate” the idea of gay studies almost to the point of its being sanctified—so that to laugh at it won’t have the desired and at one time inevitable effect of stripping away its cheap silliness and leaving its more durable bones exposed, but will instead, in the eyes of the simplifieds, show cause that the one who *laughs* is the one to be vilified as being not—well, not a believer; or, worse, not being someone who is concerned about other people’s *feelings* (and *rights*, of course). That rights and feelings aren’t *in the least* what are being laughed at is a fact that the ears of the simplifieds will not or the minds of the simplifieds can not so much as

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<sup>1</sup> *CUNY Matters*, Summer 2003, p. 11. *CUNY Matters* is published by the Office of University Relations, The City University of New York, 535 East 80<sup>th</sup> St., New York, NY 10021.

entertain, with the result that not only is it impossible to discuss politics with them on any significant level, but it's virtually impossible any longer even to *laugh* in any *significant* way.<sup>2</sup> And, then, too, when there's nobody else to laugh *with*, the whole thing can quickly stop being funny, no matter how deserving of ridicule it really is. This is exactly the feeling I've had in many a faculty meeting, department meeting, curriculum-committee meeting—of wanting to laugh, to show where the fallacies are, the strutting banalities, the dread vacuities; wanting to be constructive, to get at the heart of things, to discuss matters at a *meaningful* level. But it doesn't happen, never did, certainly not after 1980 or so. A person gives up after a while, gets worn down by making so great an effort in regard to a development so paltry, so empty, so ruinous, grim, and calamitous, so anti-intellectual, so compromised, depraved, contrived, misconceived, unappealing and hollow, so hypocritical, so *silly*, so foolish, so low-level, so unserious, so *unacademic*.

And so well guarded by near-absolute pieties. Not, in a word, open to debate. Not on the table. Just like penetration, consequence, or deep seriousness in American politics, a notion *not even to be entertained*.

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<sup>2</sup> Vide our discussion of “entertainment” in chapter one.