

TAKE 5

POPPING CULTURE, DRUGS, AND SEX THE LEATHERSEX YEARS¹

Robert Mapplethorpe's cultural biography I know by heart because his profile in American popular culture mirrored my own. We led parallel lives up to the time we met: we knew the same people, places, events, and shared the same interests. My life contained itself in university teaching, writing, photography, the sexual liberation front, and the study of American popular culture.

I participated in the founding of the American Popular Culture Association at Bowling Green University in 1967. In his *Journal of Popular Culture*, Ray Browne published my pop-critical articles on *2001: A Space Odyssey*, and *Hair*, the musical written by then idols Gerome Ragni and James Rado, who also appeared naked with superstar Viva on the very first cover of Warhol's *Interview* magazine.

In 1969, the Popular Culture Press contracted me to write the non-fiction book *Popular Witchcraft: Straight from the Witch's Mouth*, which included the Mapplethorpe icon, Jim Morrison. To Mapplethorpe's undying wonder, I shared with Jim Morrison the "gentleman's grace" of the same Sausalito tailor for black leather trousers. The tailor, a high school classmate of Morrison's, broke in his leather by wearing it first.

Mapplethorpe was about five feet ten inches and 150 pounds, hung about six inches, virtually without body hair, so he was not threatening to women or gay men in a decade in which "threat" meant "sexy." In quite a calculating manner, Robert used the sugar of the camera (to lure gay white boys) and the sound of money (to lure straight black men) to compensate for his venial sex appeal.

Robert's wafer-thin, drug-waif body, adroitly abstracted by black leather, was unimportant, really, compared with his head. More specifically, his face, especially his eyes, and, despite his androgynous inability to grow a real beard, his triumph of black faun-hair and aggressive Pan-teeth captured people's attention.

¹ Transcribed edit of paper prepared for San Francisco Outwrite Convention, April 1990: "Censorship and Art in the Age of Helms and Mapplethorpe."

He knew in a world of great male and female beauties that if anything good was ever to happen to him, he had to conjure it up himself. Actually, when we met, he was quite good-looking. “You knew Robert at his most attractive,” Edward Lucie-Smith told me. By 1982, his recreational drugs had taken their toll. HIV destroyed what remained of his physical appeal.

If God had shorted him on drop-dead looks, he would play the sexy devil to seduce the black-and-white beauties after whom he lusted, knowing money would level the playing field.

Popular Witchcraft also contained a very progressive interview with the neopop High Priest of the Church of Satan, Anton LaVey, who, at the time, was disconcerted because the Manson Family killing of actress Sharon Tate and coffee heiress Abigail Folger had confused the public about his Church of Satan. LaVey was a West Coast pop icon, in many ways similar to Warhol, except he was sexually straight, genuinely intellectual, and interested not in pop art so much as in pop religion.

At the time, LaVey had been rather connected to appropriate blonde Hollywood superstars, all women, some of whom he honored in his dedication to *The Satanic Bible*: Tuesday Weld, Jayne Mansfield (“I told her to stop seeing that man who was driving her car”).

Because he needed to make his position clear, LaVey gave me, at least, according to *Fate* magazine, one of the best interviews of his life. It was midnight, August 16, 1970.

In 1979, Robert Mapplethorpe asked me if I would introduce him to LaVey, because as a former carnival pitchman, lion tamer, and topless bar promoter, LaVey fascinated Robert with his mix of Satanism, celebrity, and self-promotion.

I told Robert that I didn’t think he and LaVey would hit it off, as LaVey, a very cultivated and educated man, was not seeking the kind of notoriety Robert was calculating for him by grabbing his image. (Let’s say I’ve always believed in the Devil as much as I believe in God. Theology is reciprocity. Like Robert, I was raised Catholic. When I finished my New Journalism participatory adventure into the occult, I was very careful to steer wannabe amateurs away from the real auteurs. People raised to be Christian are not equipped to play with pagans.)

In 1965, I met up with Warhol’s touring Velvet Underground and Ingrid Superstar, who was dancing to the Mamas and Papas’ “California Dreamin’” on the tables in the cafeteria of Loyola University’s downtown Chicago campus. At the time I was a teaching assistant, fresh out of ten years in a Catholic seminary—the Pontifical College Josephinum, which

is directly subject to the pope and not to any American bishops who might have controlled its excesses in the fifties and sixties.

Ingrid Superstar pushed me directly toward the Illinois Institute of Technology. Because of *Esquire* magazine's coverage of underground films, I was screening the early 16-mm works of Kenneth Anger, whose *Scorpio Rising* images (1966) were projections of a life I had only lived in secret fantasy and never knew existed outside my head.

In that IIT hall, I came out into the leathersex images. They were the exact same outlaw images that, in the parallel universes we inhabited, kick-started Robert Maplethorpe, who adored the tough leather-blasphemy work of Kenneth Anger.

By 1973 I had met the Godfather of Gay Writing, Sam Steward, who, in the sixties, had secreted away for Anger all his unreleased footage, because the cops (and a certain family) wanted his underground films. In 1974, I received a State of Michigan Grant for the Arts to tape-record interviews with Steward about his life in art from his days with Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas, Thornton Wilder and James Purdy, Kenneth Anger, and James Dean.

My first major interview came in 1966. Tennessee Williams took me, a tender twenty-six (looking sixteen), under his wing during his stay in Chicago for the premiere of his rewrite of *Eccentricities of a Nightingale*. Chicago had been good luck for Williams when *The Glass Menagerie* had premiered.

Eccentricities at the Goodman Theater fared less well, but, in between anxiety attacks (mine) and drunken languors (his), I was able to write down the first of my popular culture interviews, in Chicago, while Maplethorpe was working New York.

Robert was a photographer in search of money.

I was a writer in search of experience.

My fifteen-minute Williams "affair" lasted until the opening-night curtain fell on *Eccentricities* and, literally, on Williams himself, who was so drunk that the proscenium curtain, sweeping out from the wings, knocked him down flat on his butt while the audience turned from yelling "Author! Author!" to simple laughing at the fallen hero. The cast members, groping through the "drape," finally pulled him, still seated, back under the curtain. What comedy! That pop culture night has marked my take on "Fame" ever since. Life is not a cabaret. Life is a slip on a banana peel.

While I was pressing popular flesh from a university base as graduate student and then as associate professor of writing, film, and American

culture, I virtually lived in New York, where Robert, himself a tyro, was busy creating his power base.

We both arrived in Manhattan at about the same time, with a seven-year age difference. He was student. I was professor. I slept in Village hotels, saw movies in the morning, crashed galleries and bought Broadway tickets in the evening, spent the nights at the bars (The Anvil, The Eagle, The Ramrod) and baths (The Everhard and The St. Mark's), and generally cruised as I imagined Thomas Wolfe would have, careening around New York meeting Lindsay Kemp, Derek Jarman, and a few other artists who would eventually become mortal enemies of Mapplethorpe because he cast them as antagonists in the game of cash-and-carry.

British film director Derek Jarman remembered that one night in the 1980s, at a party at Heaven, the disco, he was going down one stairway as Robert Mapplethorpe was climbing up another, and Robert shouted out, "I have everything I want, Derek. Have you got everything you want?"

Whenever I was around Robert Mapplethorpe, I dimmed my own headlights, so I could be the observer and he could be the actor.

After all, in 1970, I wrote in my journals that on a cultural level, what was happening to gays in the streets by day and in the baths by night was going to be one of the most important convergences in urban sexual history. I talked enough in the classroom, on the university lecture circuit, on the radio, and in print. I delighted in explaining popular culture to artists who needed explanation, explication, or introduction.

Tennessee Williams was the pop culture past.

Anyone in my generation was now and happening.

Had I known a plague was going to kill everybody, I'd have shot more super-8 film, more photographs, recorded more interviews, and written even more often in my journals.

This is one of the wonders of the Mapplethorpe leathersex photographs from the seventies: he was able to shoot them, develop them, and print them.

Even if he hadn't been any good as a photographer, what a documentary feat!

Sex in the seventies still suffered from its criminal status in the sixties, so most sexual people were very afraid of cameras and tape recorders, thanks to the CIA and the U.S. military, which figured all gay people were ripe targets for blackmail.

Technology in the seventies was strictly Dark Ages. Everything was clunky and that dismayed me, creating great technophobia. In 1970, the press said the VCR was to debut in 1971. Because of format wars, the

VCR and video camera penetrated to the consumer level at about the very same speed as HIV: 1981-1982.

Happening together, video and AIDS changed American popular culture forever!

Before the high-tech revolution, back during the Sex Wars, while I watched for fun and scholarly review New York underground films like *The Chelsea Girls*, and stood in front of the Chelsea Hotel until I gathered up enough courage to wander through its halls looking for sex and drugs, Robert was actually living at the Chelsea.

I cavorted in 1967 with art critic Mario Amaya, who was shot on June 3, 1968, when Valerie Solanas shot Andy Warhol. Robert and I were standing around Warhol's Factory, but on different afternoons; or, if we were there the same afternoon (as we often laughed later, because we probably were), we never spoke. We both presumed the possibility that we had even had sex together, anonymously, at the Mineshaft (before we met formally in San Francisco in my office at *International Drummer* magazine, where Robert, an ambitious young photographer, sucked up to my role as editor).

While Mario Amaya was my sporting buddy, he was also director of the Chrysler Museum in Norfolk, and one of the first critical professionals to take an early interest in Robert.

As is often the case with museum directors, Mario's real popular culture influence has too often been overlooked. Mario sent Robert to me.

Also, without Mario's urging, Robert may never have attempted his first leathersex photographs that he had tentatively begun when he showed me his portfolio in 1977. I said, "These are great, but they're not strong enough."

I decided to put Robert on the cover of the premier leather magazine of the decade, *Drummer*.

That Amaya-encouraged, Fritscher-designed, Mapplethorpe-shot 1978 *Drummer* cover pioneered "Middle Mapplethorpe: The Leather Years."

Internationally.

In color.

Without the leathersex of "Middle Mapplethorpe," ultimately, Robert Mapplethorpe would never have been able to get arrested.

MAPPLETHORPE'S EVOLUTION

Early Mapplethorpe

1970 —1977 :

BRASH ARTIST AS YOUNG FAUN

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HOW TO LEGALLY QUOTE FROM THIS WORK

- Self-portraits • Manhattan • SoHo • Polaroids
- Collage • Frames • Patti Smith • Sam Wagstaff
- First exhibition • Drugs and music

Middle Mapplethorpe

1977 —1981:

BRIGHT ARTIST IN SEARCH OF PERVERSATILITY

- Self-portraits • The Village and San Francisco • Leather
- Blacks • Bodybuilders • Lisa Lyon
- First book publication • Drugs, S&M, and scatology

Late Mapplethorpe

1982 —1989 :

BRILLIANT ARTIST WITH AIDS

- Self-portraits • New York, Europe, Japan • Blacks
- Fashion • Celebrity portraits • Flowers
- Critical recognition • Drugs and AIDS.

As late as 1982, photography books and gay photography books mention Peter Hujar, Arthur Tress, and George Dureau, but hardly anyone outside the Art Reich and Warhol's *Interview* put the yet-to-be-famous star name *Mapplethorpe* in their pages.

So, in the seventies, I was going out on a limb giving rave reviews to Robert's work, which served my publishing purposes of trying to levitate gay liberation by paying attention to people who were having sex and still functioning as artists and writers.

1978

FRITSCHER INTRODUCTION OF MAPPLETHORPE TO LEATHER ART SOCIETY The Robert Mapplethorpe Gallery

By Jack Fritscher, *Son of Drummer*, originally published January 1978

He likes Cameras, Coke, Kools, and Crisco. He is, in fact, his Hasselblad. His Camera eye peels faces, bodies, and trips. He rearranges reality in his SoHo loft in Manhattan. His studio is his space for living, balling, and shooting. He lunches afternoons at One Fifth Avenue. He maneuvers after midnight at the Mineshaft. He photographs princesses like Margaret, bodybuilders like Arnold, rockstars like his best friend Patti Smith, and night trippers nameless in leather, rubber, and ropes. He's famous for his photographs of faces, flowers, and fetishes.

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HOW TO LEGALLY QUOTE FROM THIS WORK

His name is Robert Mapplethorpe.

Mapplethorpe is no “concerned” photographer smug with social significance. He shoots portraits only of people he likes. He chronicles SM fetishism from the inside out. He’s a man who knows night territory. He likes guys with strong trips and stronger raps on their trips. His take on life and people is open, very sensual, and totally upfront. His frank honesty matches his camera work.

Mapplethorpe sees.

“You can tell,” he says, “who’s interesting, who’s sick by the way they say *uh huh*. You can tell who’s dirty by their eyes. I look for dark circles. Interesting people have dark circles.”

Mapplethorpe provides the lights and the camera. His subjects are the action: sniffing jocks, piercing cocks, wearing locks. Without exploitation of his subject, Mapplethorpe manages to capture essential passion of both a beautifully bored society woman and a two-hundred-pound Village man in baby drag. He can explain to guests at his international gallery openings what they need to know when they ask, “I like your photo of the man in full rubber, but what does it have to do with sex?”

Mapplethorpe knows.

He is a collector of satanic bronzes, Mission furniture, 19th century photography, and 20th century foxes. His latest favorite book is *End Product: The First Taboo*. His latest project, in addition to a show with Patti Smith, is an authentic SM fetish photography book. Any men with suitable trip and heavy enough rap should contact Robert Mapplethorpe through *Drummer*.

Auditions, held nightly, are something else!

Mapplethorpe himself is a transmorph. This is his first reincarnation in 3,000 years. His satyr’s honey-gold eye knows pleasure and excellence as ends in and of themselves.²

I had a large monthly magazine to fill in a sexy decade when notoriously few people wrote, drew, or did photographs.

² Mapplethorpe articles that appeared in the gay press, like Mapplethorpe exhibitions at gay galleries, such as San Francisco’s Fey Way Gallery, have never to this date been included in published Mapplethorpe bibliographies and lists of shows. The not-so-perfect “gay” moments documenting realpolitik Mapplethorpe have been left invisible. He was gay, and if the gay leather world had not welcomed him, there would be no Middle Mapplethorpe of the Leathersex Period—which may reveal a motive for the denial by omission.

The difference between the seventies and the AIDS eighties and nineties is in the seventies, most people were too busy having sex to create art about sex.

The AIDS mortality rate has turned every survivor into an historian, and that's just the women, lesbians mostly, galloping in like thieves on horseback to write and lecture and publish about *White Male Sex in the Gay Seventies*.

The Halloween 1989 writing on the wall of the toilet at the cafe Without Reservation, on Castro Street in San Francisco, read, "0, please, God, make the dykes shut up!"

The gay-male graffiti implied that the exploiting dykes should be shut up the way some dykes would make some men shut up who tried to exploit women.

Actually, I know no one, at least in California, who thought that Robert would be any more talented, famous, or controversial than the thousand other gay photographers.

San Francisco documentary photographer Rink met Warhol at the Factory in 1969, and Robert in the late seventies. Rink said that Robert was always disappointed with the early Mapplethorpe photography books.

"I told Robert," Rink said, "when you publish a book, you can have three things: schedule, time, and quality. You can't have all three. Even with all his money, he couldn't get what he wanted."

When, at New York's famous sex club the Mineshaft, I met John Boundy, Manhattan director of the National Film Board of Canada, Robert was working the Mineshaft, Studio 54, and The Saint.

My tryst with Boundy led to booking Academy Award—winning filmmakers, like Grant Monroe, into the Kalamazoo, Michigan, Institute of the Arts, where as board member in 1968, I created and directed the film program that screened underground and serious films through May 1975. For a week, the National Film Board was the toast of Upper Midwest high society.

This pop culture background sketches out the sexual incest of art, intellect, and influence in the intense Golden Age of Art and Sex Liberation in the 1970s.

Literally, as well as metaphorically, pop culture success depends on who fucks whom.

Period.

Art patronage, reviews, and show bookings can be traced on the same grid as sexual contacts at a VD clinic.

In the seventies, Patty Hearst, everybody's Pop Debutante of the Decade, was Robert's favorite society child.

Deconstructed as a debutante and reconstructed as a revolutionary, Patty Hearst switched identities with an ease Robert envied. He referenced Hearst as Tonya, Queen of the SLA, in his photograph of himself with a machine gun. (The pentacle behind him excused anything he did, because, in the pop phrase of the period, "The devil made me do it.")

Robert loved the pop culture concept of Patty the Deb having her consciousness raised when kidnaped by the Big Black Buck, Cinque, leader of the Symbionese Liberation Army.

Robert, in his sexual encounters with black men, hoped one of them might be his Cinque.

He thought that his interest in satanism, pumped up by sexy black voodoo, might offer him opportunity, when playing with black conjure men, to get everything he wanted by selling his soul to the devil.

He figured the devil, like Robert himself, was always shopping.

Late in Robert's life, Warhol died, as reported by Bob Colacello, in *Holy Terror*, possibly in a voodoo-related death.

Robert was not alone in his magical mystery tour.

He courted my familiarity with the satanic LaVey and the voodoo botanicas as much as my immersion in and my exit from Deep Catholicism.

I was the only truly and actually ordained exorcist he knew. I was a writer, an art critic, a pop culture professor, a magazine editor, and a publisher.

He wanted my voodoo, my sex, my writing, my influence, my body, mind, and soul.

Robert was expert in sucking up other people's lives.

But he was different from those who in the seventies' gaystream were commonly called "Energy Vampires."

He lived through intimates and friends.

He wanted everything a person could give him.

That's one reason we liked each other immediately.

He wanted all my life, art, and analytical experience.

We didn't sideswipe.

We collided head-on.

I wanted to mentor the boy and watch what happened.

I wanted to corrupt him as much as he wanted to corrupt me.

We fucked and mindfucked until "mutual murder" between us made us more dangerous to each other than Robert, who was never very analytical, would believe.

Finally, his drugs and dirty sex outdistanced me.

We stayed good friends at long-distance.

Robert was killing himself.

If Robert had lived, he might have suffered the same final pop culture spin on fame as Patty Hearst, who became a camp icon in Baltimore director John Waters's film canon. Patty Hearst was Robert Mapplethorpe's dream girl: the rich bitch who is kidnaped and through force becomes the white sex slave of a dangerous black revolutionary who makes her betray her family and rob banks.

He wanted Patty to be his wild WASP heiress the way the doomed superstar Edie Sedgwick was Warhol's, so he could shoot his own underground movie, which I dubbed *Citizen Kane II*.

In his black-and-white dreams of race, gender, and money, Robert's fantasy, because of Patty Hearst's mythic pop culture past, was to photograph the rescued heiress as a lacquered Bay Area society matron who had been forced into romance-novel adventures beyond her will to resist.

For instance, the morning after our late-night *pas de Pan*, John Boundy and I exchanged credentials- his job was to book the Canadian Film Board across the United States. I was founding director of the Genevieve and Donald Gilmore Art Center's film program and a member of its board of directors. Through man-to-man sex, art zeroed in on the heartland of the Midwest and presented a graceful week of seminars, screenings, and parties at the four local colleges. Such is the pattern of pop culture. At least in the seventies, before white men became everybody's whipping boys.

Robert's own messy life and formal art, enhanced by drugs and the rags-to-riches mystique of Andy Warhol, defined itself by seesawing, through fashion and society, and from art to commerce. Mapplethorpe threw himself headfirst into this trendy world for his rites of passage.

Fine art and commercial art merged with Warhol's soup can. Artists from Andy to Annie have done "windows." Warhol and Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg showed work in Bonwit Teller windows; Mapplethorpe did shoes and shilled lime juice; Annie Leibovitz does *Vanity Fair* magazine, blurring the lines between art and commerce so shrewdly, shooting editorial photographs and commercial advertisements so seamlessly, that her one voice enunciates the whole issue.

Thoroughly postmodern Mapplethorpe constructed and deconstructed himself and his art, waltzing through the history of art like a pickpocket.

Robert set his goal to make money by selling shoes and perfume to women through the photography of fashion, which is the world's second oldest profession.

Mapplethorpe loved the surfaceness of haute couture.

Women are, in a sense, anesthetized through the lacquer of glamor.

The "feminine" qualities Mapplethorpe shot exist only in magazines and calendars.

His women, except for Patti, reflect little but glitz about the essence of being female. His idea of a princess, such as Gloria von Thurn and Taxis, known on the circuit as "Princess TNT," is a sleeping princess. His actresses fare better, especially Susan Sarandon, who seems to have awakened in the sheets, startled, but fully aware. Sarandon and Kathleen Turner rallied together with Christopher Reeve, Stephen Collins, and Ron Silver to defend Mapplethorpe from Senator Jesse Helms on Phil Donahue's television talk show, September 17, 1990.

Liberals loved the Helms-Mapplethorpe brawl. The subtext of defending Robert was a defense of their own art. Few of these people realized that Mapplethorpe was, in his bigotry, more like Senator Helms than anyone realized. Robert's personal take on gender and race was strictly out of the antebellum South of North Carolina.

Helms and Mapplethorpe seem traditional and tame compared with the politically correct hordes who emerged while Congress did battle with the National Endowment for the Arts.

Robert Mapplethorpe was never ever politically correct.

He was never a "folk" hero, never a name brand, except posthumously.

He was shy, retiring, nice, sexual, cash-driven, obsessive, and HIV-positive until he was capped by a posthumous last tangle in Ohio.

Cincinnati gave *The Mapplethorpe Story* a great third act.

Mapplethorpe achieved more fame dead than alive when he died at forty-two, the same age as Elvis.

Avowed heterosexual Senator Jesse Helms, who never literally destroyed a Mapplethorpe photograph, was preceded by other famous temperaments. Rudolf Nureyev actually tore up Robert's work. Film director John Duffy, better known as porn star J. D. Slater, destroyed Robert's photographs of Slater's then lover, Frank Diaz.

When Slater asked Mapplethorpe to replace the photographs, Robert insisted that J. D. sit for him. Slater refused, saying, "I don't do black-and-white." Mapplethorpe pronounced Slater a philistine. He never spoke to him again, primarily because Slater refused to have sex with Robert to obtain another set of the photographs.

Several gay photographers, angrily reacting to Mapplethorpe's marrying a millionaire, plied the livid slander of queens. There were rumors in the early eighties that Mapplethorpe was a federal agent in the seventies, before and during his relationship with Sam Wagstaff. Sam allegedly provided a convenient cover while Robert was supplying information on artists and gay activists to the government in return for spending money and travel chits.

If this mix of art and state was true, the NEA debacle was small potatoes.

Imagine! Robert Mapplethorpe as a spy!

Robert was capable of almost anything. He worked at being that ambiguous Wolfeian (Tom, not Thomas) social X ray of his times burning in the *bon vanitas*, a decadent sybarite, a follower of Fellini, whose *la dolce vita* camera made urban perversity chic. Robert found the camera an easy power tool in the incestuous air-kiss kiss-ass world of art, publishing, and fashion.

Unlike Warhol, who distanced himself from his work, Mapplethorpe was his own best creation. His self-portraits are always the most dramatic of his work.

Robert was his own greatest object.

His classic narcissism was perfect for the seventies, when disco dictated people dance alone.

Outside his cultural reaction to his Catholicism, using Catholic symbolism, and running off to shoot the Episcopal ("Episcopal" meaning a kind of High Camp Roman Catholicism) archbishop of Canterbury, when he would have preferred to shoot the pope, Robert Mapplethorpe had no spiritual life.

Except as satanic posturing, he never played at direct religiosity as Warhol had in his silly 1966 movie *Imitation of Christ*.

He remained first, last, and always a self-absorbed object of his own desire, lust, and ambition. On the cover of *Creatis*,³ which he autographed

³ *Creatis, La Photographie au Present, No 7, 1978*, was "un magazine bimestriel, vendu dans les galeries, les librairies specialisées," published in Paris by Albert Champeau, publisher, and Mona Rouzies, art director. *Creatis*, No 7 contained, in addition to the playful cover self-portrait (1975) of Robert, smiling, with his arm extended across the frame, twelve 12.5 X 12.5-inch Mapplethorpe photographs running first to last, as an announcement of his complete early accomplishment: *Nick/New York 1977* (tattooed forehead and extended tongue); *Cedric/New York 1977* (shaved head and shoulders as sculpture; an early use of ethic abstraction); *Marci/New York* (leather chaps and penis composed sideways as still life); *Jimmy Douglas/New York 1976* (portrait of male holding face masklike in

for me, his right arm extends across the field of the photograph. Robert looks to be his usual self, mocking the central art object found throughout Western culture, the crucifix with the magnificent, nearly naked, crucified man.

Robert's sole soul-image was his dramatized body.

That's not a condemnation of a soul in the seventies and eighties, when "greed was good."

Actually, if any self-indulgent person had a self worth indulging in ego-driven photographs, no matter how superficial, it was Robert Mapplethorpe.

If Robert objectified himself, imagine how distant in focus he was from the gay men and straight women who populated his life.

The gay men he treated as documentary curios.⁴

The women, excluding the separate category of Patti Smith, he treated in two distinct ways: the society photograph and the fashion photograph.

He liked dropping the names of Tom Wolfe and Joan Didion before he knew them. He posed himself in the late seventies as a New Journalism art photographer who was participant in the story of the leather-art photograph as much as reporter of the leather-art photograph.

Robert flowed with the changing autobiographical opportunities of his voyeuristic life.

MAPPLETHORPE'S SUBJECT THEMES

hands); *Patrice/New York* (close on hand and jockstrap over thigh) and *Patrice* again (close on penis with foreskin next to jockstrap and star tattoo on thigh); *Iris 1977* (three iris with three shadows, all entering frame from left); *Lucinda Childs/New York 1978* (portrait with profile facing frame right); *Bob Wilson/ Phil Glass* (two-shot on two chairs); *Amarillys /1977* (three "amarells" leaves "interrupt" through left frame); *Jim/Sausalito 1977* (that first famous leather photograph with hood and ladder in the World War II bunkers); *Feet/New York 1976* (shrouded feet wrapped in sheet take foreground; face above them, distant and blurred). In *Creatis*, 1978, the whole future sweep of the Mapplethorpe career is in place, technically, esthetically, and in content featuring leather, flowers, portraits, and blacks. Basically, by the time of the American Bicentennial in July, 1976, Robert Mapplethorpe was working at the full height of his powers that time would only enhance.

4 The AIDS Holocaust has turned Mapplethorpe's photographs of leathermen into documentation of unsuspecting victims. Plague has made Mapplethorpe a gay redaction of Russian photographer Roman Vishniac, who photographed from 1935 to 1939 the Jewish life that was about to become extinct in Eastern Europe. *To Give Them Light* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993).

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HOW TO LEGALLY QUOTE FROM THIS WORK

1. Mapplethorpe's early, hungry, implied "sex-drugs-music" photographs of his punk-art time-share with Patti Smith on the town.
2. His Ripley-Believe-It-or-Not leathersex photographs documenting erotic male rituals where women were conspicuously absent.
3. His African-American males as meaty objects of desire.
4. His celebrity and fashion photographs of various women summed up in his 1980s female assemblagist work with Lisa Lyon; his virtual deathbed photographs of a "widowed" Patti Smith.
5. His classic, materialist, still-life photographs of flowers and everything in his collection that, in light of AIDS and his inevitable estate sale at Christie's, could be made more valuable through canonization in his photography.

In every photograph, Robert created a palpable sense of style that always referenced his "self" in terms of the values of his twenty-year career.

He worshipped Warhol, who, Robert said, was not above stealing ideas—the very same accusation painter-photographer George Dureau made about Mapplethorpe stealing Dureau's ideas.

Patti Smith may have been his Mona Lisa odalisque, but San Franciscan Isadora Duncan, who set the Western art world on a classical retrieval, is the woman most inherently the presage of Mapplethorpe.

As Duncan arrived at art by elimination, finally simply standing, rather than dancing, on the stage, Robert did the same: eventually, he eliminated everyone, except Patti and himself, as he, dying of AIDS, photographed the "stuff" he'd leave behind . . . and flowers, *fibres para los muertos*.

Isadora, who was immensely revived in 1968, in Karel Reisz's film *Isadora*, starring Vanessa Redgrave, anticipated Mapplethorpe's legal troubles in the Midwest. For instance, Janet Flanner wrote, "At the Indianapolis Opera House, the Chief of Police watched for sedition in the movement of Isadora's knees."

Robert's self-explanation, which began about the time he first hit San Francisco, was an uphill hike from Manhattan, which hadn't as many whole-grain reference points as California.

West Coast popular culture has a tradition as strong as East Coast.

San Francisco was a whole new game for Robert, and all the New York emigrants who tried to Manhattanize San Francisco in the late seventies.

Homosexual love, all the rage, had become to Robert a distinctive expression of art. He had come a long way from the young man he was in his underground film debut.

He left heterosex behind.

Like Walt Whitman, that other artist from the Manhattan “suburbs,” Mapplethorpe’s homosex puts a spin on women that few people care to address.

Art and sex in the seventies are inextricably linked.

Masculinity, surfacing in the ritualized Mishima-like *Nipple Pierced* movie, was no Mapplethorpe identity issue. Whatever his genetic sexuality, he presumed his definite masculinity. Robert never doubted he was a masculine-identified homosexual from the first erotic experimental movie to last skull-cane “still life” of Lord Mapplethorpe’s self-portrait collection.

Robert investigated the commercial possibilities of femininity and its cultural archetypes and stereotypes; but the answers to the female are not readily present in Robert Mapplethorpe.

If Mapplethorpe addressed androgyny, he looked to see not how men could be like women, but how a woman could be more like a man.

Because of Mapplethorpe, the gender wars have escalated. In March 1994, Yoko Ono’s play, *New York Rock*, opened off Broadway and called for an end to the bashing of males by females. The *Michigan Quarterly Review*, in the fall of 1993, presented a special issue on the male body, featuring a John Updike essay, “The Disposable Rocket.”

“Any accounting of male-female differences must include the male’s superior recklessness, a drive not, I think, toward death, as the darker feminist cosmogonies would have it, but to test the limits, to see what the traffic will bear—a kind of mechanic’s curiosity. The number of men who do lasting damage to their young bodies is striking. . . . Take your body to the edge and see if it flies.”

Robert practiced unsafe sex.

He challenged high-risk behavior and lost.

Even before AIDS, I set him down and told him, in terms of health and hygiene, to clean up his act. Perhaps I was too corny, too Midwest, too “feminine” trying to nurture him in this way. (He had seen what my administration of niacin had done to our friend Jack McNenny the night of our adventure into Sicilian cuisine.)

Finally, when we talked on the phone, and he knew that I knew the gay jungle drums had told everyone he was HIV positive, he was the one who said, “Don’t you say one word to me.”

I bit my tongue.

We rarely spoke after early 1984, because, after Robert's shoot of my bodybuilder lover, Jim Enger, whose head Robert cut off to merchandise Enger's body on a greeting card, all our telephone calls had been initiated by him.

Enger had left San Francisco angry after I had set up the shoot.

Superstar Jim Enger, "The Most Desired Man in America," as the seventies turned into the eighties, had thought it was to be a celebrity shoot.

Mapplethorpe thought the bodybuilding champion was just another gay man.

I was caught in the middle and left holding the photographs from the socially disastrous shoot that Edward De Celle two years later hand-carried from Robert in New York to me in San Francisco.

Thanks to Robert Mapplethorpe, thanks to steroids, thanks to AIDS, I never saw Jim Enger again.

Not pretty.

But this is a survivor's story.

Help! I'm trapped by AIDS and I can't get out!

I told the Chaucerian tale of the seventies once in fiction in my novel *Some Dance to Remember*.

Everyone thought it was fact.

In this memoir, again I fold time back, but through fact, which, no doubt, the truly perverse, especially those with a vested interest, will say is fiction.

Actually, I found I could have sold space to real people who wanted their names to appear, like Robert Mapplethorpe's, in an introductory clause to any sentence in *Some Dance*. In this memoir, even more people, sucked into that Mapplethorpe voodoo no one can resist, want to be included.

Memories of sex, drugs, and the real way we were make some people head straight into the alternative truth of denial.

Robert Mapplethorpe engaged the HIV virus.

Purposely, the twenty-something boys, who have never known a sex life without AIDS, fatalistically expose themselves to HIV as a test of ritual manhood.

In the second decade of the virus, the gay erotic industry still asks gay directors to film actors having unprotected sex for the home video audience.

It's the logic of totally absurdist theater.

It's perfect finale to *The Mapplethorpe Story*.

Actually, each and every time Robert's brilliance attracted me, I flinched from what his New York art life had done to him.

I felt salvation was in California, in San Francisco, where Robert said, quite emphatically, he'd prefer to live.

His predictable disdain of every topic marked him a provincial New York denizen in a New York minute.

Manhattan is a province all to itself. The New York art scene, defined as an island of insecurity by British art critic Edward Lucie-Smith, can be regarded one way as Susan Sontag's High Camp.

Like fashion and bodybuilding, art world bitchiness compares only to backstage at the opera.

Some stereotypes are archetypes, but who dares catch the stereotypes like deer in the headlights?

When New York journalists writing biographies of famous dead people call my number to request biographical information, copies of letters, memorabilia, the best answer, once their story has been heard, is to be "Ver-r-r-y Robert Mapplethorpe" and charge them for what they want for free.

Of course, art and commerce require strategy. However, as a veteran of two worlds (straight and gay), and of five arenas (publishing, university, corporate, museum, and municipal government), I find the political intrigue, which is the same in all of them, to be the very reason I refused Robert's invitation to travel parallel to him when he began to rocket off into celebrity.

The arrival of some women in these arenas was heralded as a way to break the "vicious masculine cycle of power."

Instead, some women have ended up aping the worst things men ever did. Instead, some women in the covens of the art world, who would make Anton LaVey's covens blush, have begun to look an awful lot like Valerie Solanas, the assassin from SCUM (Society to Cut Up Men), who shot Andy Warhol with a gun to control him, because she said he controlled women with his camera.

Of course, Robert's elegance of upward social mobility earned him \$230,000,000 and that made the Mapplethorpe name a signature with power in art and business.

So what about Robert's mortal enemy, Derek Jarman? The progressive Jarman was the most underestimated British film director of the seventies, eighties, and nineties. His talent/time span paralleled Mapplethorpe's. But unlike the nonpolitical Robert, the HIV Jarman was also an upstart AIDS activist purposely tweaking the conscience of the government by

design. Robert was far more conservative, because he ran himself like a department store, and worried about impact on his sales. While Robert shot film and video of Patti and Lisa, he confined himself to controlled studio still photography and he never directed a play or wrote a monograph about his work. Robert purposely kept his private self an enigma.

Derek purposely revealed his self and his art life.

Jarman was the British Mapplethorpe, and then some.

Derek cut a wider swath in the arts than Robert.

His career trajectory and accomplishment when examined will throw light on the terribly reclusive Mapplethorpe. Jarman died of AIDS on February 19, 1994.

However, in the way society abruptly judges some homosexuals ART SAINTS and others AIDS QUEERS, Mapplethorpe became Lucie-Smith's sex-transcendent St. Joan of Arc and Jarman became the plague-society's leper artist.

Fine art and pop culture are degrees of perception achieved through media management.

Mapplethorpe milked the cash-cow artstream.

Jarman demanded the social justice of health care.

The cash-cow straightstream never really saluted the theater, film, photography, and diaries of Jarman, who always had something to say on his prolific mind.

Jarman, another gay artist rising in transit with his female muse, had his own Patti Smith, the actress Tilda Swinton, star of his 1991 masterfilm, *Edward II*, and of director Sally Potter's 1993 adaptation of Virginia Woolf's androgynous hero/ine *Orlando*.

In the battle of Jarman v. Mapplethorpe, was it better to be "cult" than to indulge world-class opportunism?

Director Gus Van Sant shed light on the kind of decisions Robert and Derek made. "It's not about selling out. It's about buying in."

It's about buying in and maintaining personal dignity and artistic integrity.

In the Art World.

"Actually, Jack," Robert once said to straighten me out. "It's not about liking these people."

It was the usual argument between Early Integrity and Late Capitalism.

It was our major debate in the 1970s and early 1980s about straight-streaming gay politics and gay art into the American popular culture.

Then the nightmare.

AIDS re-ghettoized homosexuality.

Everyone straight and gay ran for cover.

AIDS made heterosexuals afraid of homosexuals, AIDS made homosexuals terrified of heterosexuals, because AIDS has long been perceived by homosexuals as a Viral Concentration Camp invented by a heterosexually driven government that cannot afford to set up concentration camps for those who are different by skin color, by sexuality, or by et cetera.

Actually, the scary lesson of the “Bashing of Mapplethorpe” by predatory, redneck government officials who took art to trial, precisely because it was gay, is a study in the national exclusionist psychology that tolerates definition of identity of its self in terms of who and what it defines as the enemy.

Communism collapsed only seven months after Mapplethorpe died. Robert died March 9, 1989; the Berlin Wall came down November 1989. Without the external enemy of Communists to fight, demagogues, seeking hot reelection issues in autumn 1989, needed a fresh, credible foe, because their political campaigns and political identities had always been based on not what they were “for,” but on what and whom they opposed or excluded.

Who’s the villain this time?

This Identity-by-Enemy paradigm has been the xenophobic American psychology since the War of 1812.

Suddenly, in 1989, Communism was no longer the industrial-strength foreign enemy. U.S. politicians lost their defense-budget identity and urgency. So the house-to-house search for enemies turned internal, domestic.

Home-grown homosexuals, especially homosexual artists, were easy targets for demagoguery.

Senator Jesse Helms, Republican of North Carolina, lacking an issue for a reelection campaign, knew what badly translated Old Testament pages he was fanning to flame.

Senator Alfonse D’Amato, Republican of New York, who went on Fag Art Alert, ironically cut his own federally funded throat when he seemed to forget that forty-two cents of every NEA-dollar actually went to a New York resident because the resident was an artist.

Hello?

Mapplethorpe became Public Enemy Number One.

Dead fags are even easier to bash than live fags who snap back.

On the floor of the U.S. Senate, Helms denounced the two men kissing in Mapplethorpe’s *Larry* and *Bobby Kissing*, 1979.

There's the bottom line.

Man-to-man affection and bonding are perceived as homosex by well-known art critic Helms.

If Mapplethorpe hadn't been a fag, his work would never have gotten busted.

Homosexuals in terms of that evolving social experiment, the fabulous U.S. military, are subject to the exact same kind of prejudicial rhetoric that was used fifty years previously against Negroes in the military.

Predictably, within several years, the fags-as-niggers rhetoric will evaporate under the hot light of social inevitability that homosexuality is not only valid, but even of particular merit, because homosexuals do not breed in an overpopulated world whose overpopulation causes violence and pollution. Actually, for not breeding, homosexuals should be paid subsidies the same as farmers who are subsidized for not farming.

Once queers become homosexuals the way niggers became African-Americans, who will be next on the home front victim hit list of prejudice?

American Muslims, who are the fastest-growing religion in the continental United States, had better join the ACLU now.

Before they get Mapplethorped!