

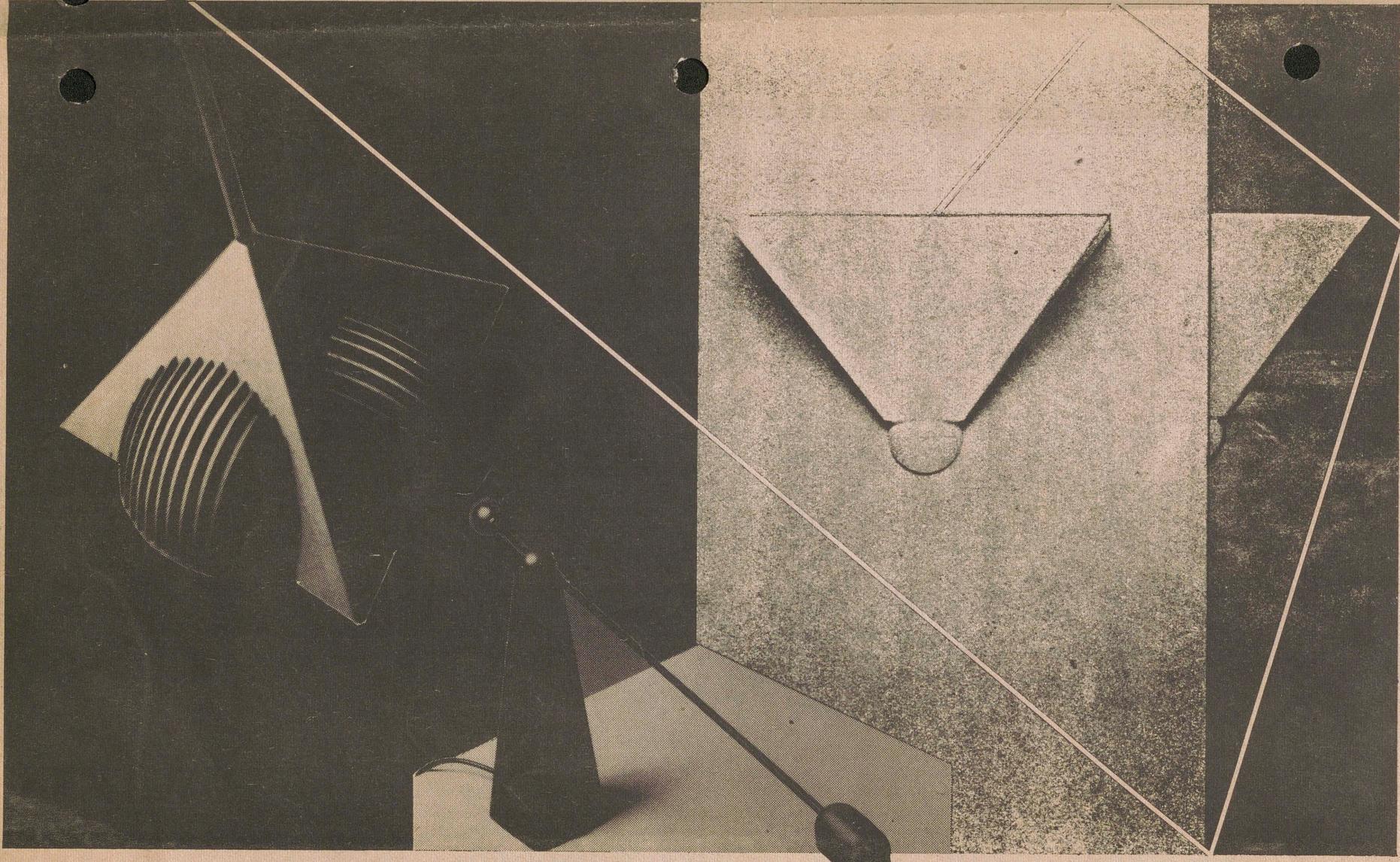
From the Practical to the Phantasmagorical

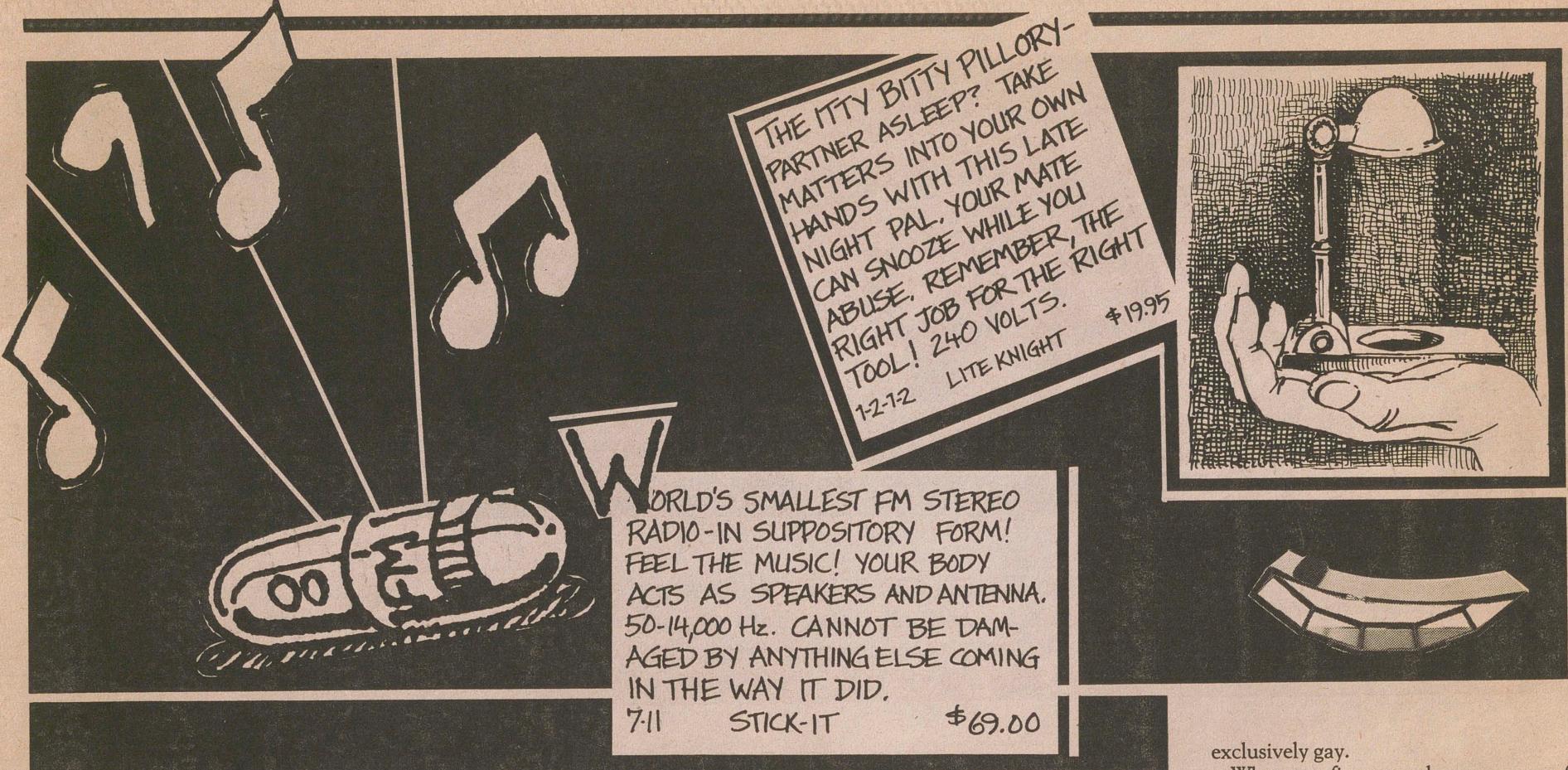
GAY.TECH'

Applying
Technological
Innovations
to Our
Lifestyle

It may seem like the future, but for many gay men and lesbians, the future is now, right now. They own computers and operate or participate in gay computer bulletin boards, or they simply play with other gay computer hackers on commercial computer services. Computer whizzes Arthur Kohn in New York and P. Gregory Springer in Champaign, Ill., introduce you to this "on-line" world. And, just in case you think it takes lots of brains, we introduce you to GAYSIGS, a special-interest group for gay members of Mensa. Andy Nyberg tells that story.

Plus, fashion writer William Franklin looks at how technology has influenced architecture, interior design and fashion, moving from high tech to soft tech to, would you believe, invisible tech. And what might tomorrow bring? Cartoonist Roy Williams offers up a fantastic collection of the phantasmagorical, specifically designed with gay people in mind.





BULLETIN BOARDS

For Gay Computer Hackers

BY ARTHUR KOHN

Are you one of the multitude of gays who keep bemoaning the fact that the only place to meet people is the bars and baths? Do you burn to meet people who are your "intellectual equal" (or just to meet someone in a situation where you can converse long enough to find out if they have a mind)? Do you dream of a way to cruise without ever leaving your apartment or house? Sure, there are always the personal ads. You can sit and write letters till you're blue in the face and then anxiously wait for replies, checking your mailbox every half-hour for weeks.

If you have a home computer with a modem (the little do-hickey that connects your computer to a phone line), or if you have access to your boss's computer, turn it on, load the terminal program and "hack" away at the phone numbers listed here on page 25. In most cases you'll get a busy signal; but if you're lucky, you'll get something on

Arthur Kohn is a New York-based freelance writer and computer hacker.

your screen that looks like this:

```
***** WELCOME! *****
* YOU HAVE REACHED A SEXUALLY *
* EXPLICIT GAY BULLETIN BOARD *
* *
* IF THIS OFFENDS YOU OR *
* YOU ARE NOT OF LEGAL AGE, *
* HANG UP NOW!!!!!! *
*****
```

I'm not too sure about other areas of the country, but here in New York, if you're looking for local information (My god, I'm off to P-Town for the weekend and I must, simply must, get a sitter for my cattleya!), you usually head down to the local supermarket or laundromat and check out all the ads that people have been posting on the wall since time began. Sure enough, there before your very eyes you'll find that plant sitter or poodle trimmer or maybe even that houseboy you've been searching for. The only problem is that someone has probably torn off all the little phone-number slips that were hanging at the bottom of the notice.

A computer bulletin board system (BBS) works basically the same

way, except that on a BBS you use your computer to call into a central computer and post your messages. As other people call in, they may read and (if they wish) respond to your messages. Other facilities are available to most users of the BBS. Some boards allow the users to "download" (copy) public-domain software (programs) for their home computers. Others have text files available for the same purpose. Text files can range from special-interest news articles to hard-core "stroke" material. There are BBSs for doctors, lawyers, you name it. Most parts of the country have at least one computer dating board: You fill out a questionnaire and are matched with the person of your dreams.

The existence of computer bulletin board services has been an extremely well-kept secret. To date, only two newspapers in the entire country have printed articles on BBSs (although they are mentioned periodically in computer magazines). Currently there are over 2,000 free (except for the price of the phone call) BBSs in the United States. An even deeper, darker secret is that of these 2,000, just under two dozen are

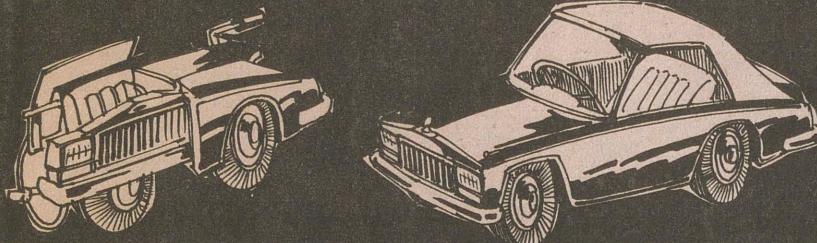
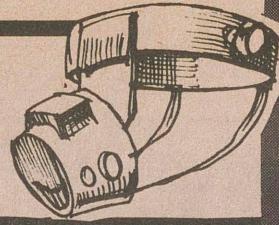
exclusively gay.

When you first try to log-on to one of the gay boards, you may feel the way you felt the first time you went into a "dirty book" store. You can touch and ogle the magazine covers, but you can't look inside because of the plastic shrink wrap. Similarly, access to the gay BBSs is screened.

If you remember the story that appeared in all the newspapers last year, about the kids who broke into the computer at the Sloan Kettering Cancer Research Facility, you will begin to understand the security blanket thrown around gay BBSs. In the case of Sloan Kettering, a few young computer hackers stumbled onto the access number, similar to the way cute little Matthew Broderick did in the film *War Games*. There was really no malice in their entry into the institute's computer. With gay BBSs, on the other hand, the phone numbers are readily available on both gay and nongay BBSs throughout the country. Heterosexual people do periodically stumble upon them, and believe it or not, people into computers may also be homophobic. Some of these homophobic hackers are turned on by the challenge of breaking into gay BBSs in an attempt to "crash" the program (and render it useless to legitimate users). Trying to keep these people out of the message base (and, hopefully, off the board) can be a full-time job for the sysop (system operator).

Most of the free gay BBSs will have some sort of registration procedure. You'll be asked such questions as what handle (remember CB?) you would like to use, what your real name and phone number are, and where you heard about the board. Many of the sysops attempt to verify

MASTURB-ETTE. SMALL SIZE,
SUPER ACTION. FITS UNDER
JUDICIAL ROBES!
3-D TRUSS ME \$129.00



THE WORLD'S SMALLEST FOLDING SEVILLE
COMPLETELY PORTABLE. FOLDS TO 21 x 13 x 28 INCHES,
SMALL ENOUGH TO FIT UNDER AN AIRLINE SEAT OR
IN A GYM BAG - OR IN THE TRUNK OF A MERCEDES!
OPERETTA WINDOWS, CRUISE CONTROL
2-2 SEVILLETTE \$37,950.00



the phone number with telephone information services before granting membership. The intrigue is all part of the fun of gay BBSing.

There are a lot of differences between the gay and nongay BBSs. As you tentatively approach this wonderland, you'll find that (1) most gay users use pseudonyms, (2) that they are normally blunt and to the point, and (3) that the sysops rarely, if ever, censor any of the messages placed on the boards. These bulletin boards are definitely not for the exchange of public-domain software. Whereas the heterosexual BBSs carry such innocuous names as MMM, The Atari Inn or dial-yr-match, the gay boards' names are explosive with innuendo: The Backroom, the Kinky Komputer, The Fountains of Pleasure, Studs-30.

The Backroom (run by "moi") in

(computer graphic) that can be printed on any 80-column printer.

Although most of the gay BBSs are similar to The Backroom in format (a bit of everything for everyone), if you hanker for a dip into the exotic, you might try calling one of the "kink" boards. New kink boards, many dedicated to a single fetish, come on-line regularly. For fantasizing about the creative exchange of bodily fluids, The Fountains of Pleasure is right up your alley. The Download Story Library is full of golden shower and enema stories. The TV/TS-BBS really needs no explanation. The print-outs that I have been supplied with from the Oracle in California are fine examples of electronic imagination. The questionnaire for its kinky matching service is a study

board, for your cover will be blown. If you're interested in getting lots of sexually explicit electronic mail, all you have to do is leave a message saying that you're under 20, that you have blue eyes and blond hair, that you have swimmer's body (of course), and that you're into surfing and subway kink. Your electronic mailbox will fill instantly. I've even known gay guys who log-on to heterosexual boards as women, just so they can get hot mail from horny guys.

But as is to be expected, honesty remains the best policy. The boards in the New York area keep the descriptions honest by offering their users a chance to meet each other every couple of months in a group situation. This allows people to make friends without having overt sexual pressures thrust upon them, as in a bar cruise/meeting. Members of the local boards (The Backroom, The Backroom 2, The Club, Christopher Street, The Dormitory and The Inferno) do their "real-time chat" over beers and burgers at Julius' in Greenwich Village.

So now's the time for you to dig that home computer out of the closet (where you hid it last Christmas because you couldn't figure out what you were ever going to do with it). Forget about the accounting and the word processing for a few hours and join us "on-line."

• • •

The following is a recent compilation of BBSs known to be on-line as of June 1, 1984. Since many boards come and go regularly, only those boards verified as being active are included. To obtain a newer listing, check the "other boards" listings available on most of the BBSs below. The number in parentheses (under the phone number) is for computer

operators and indicates baud rates, or speed of transmission.

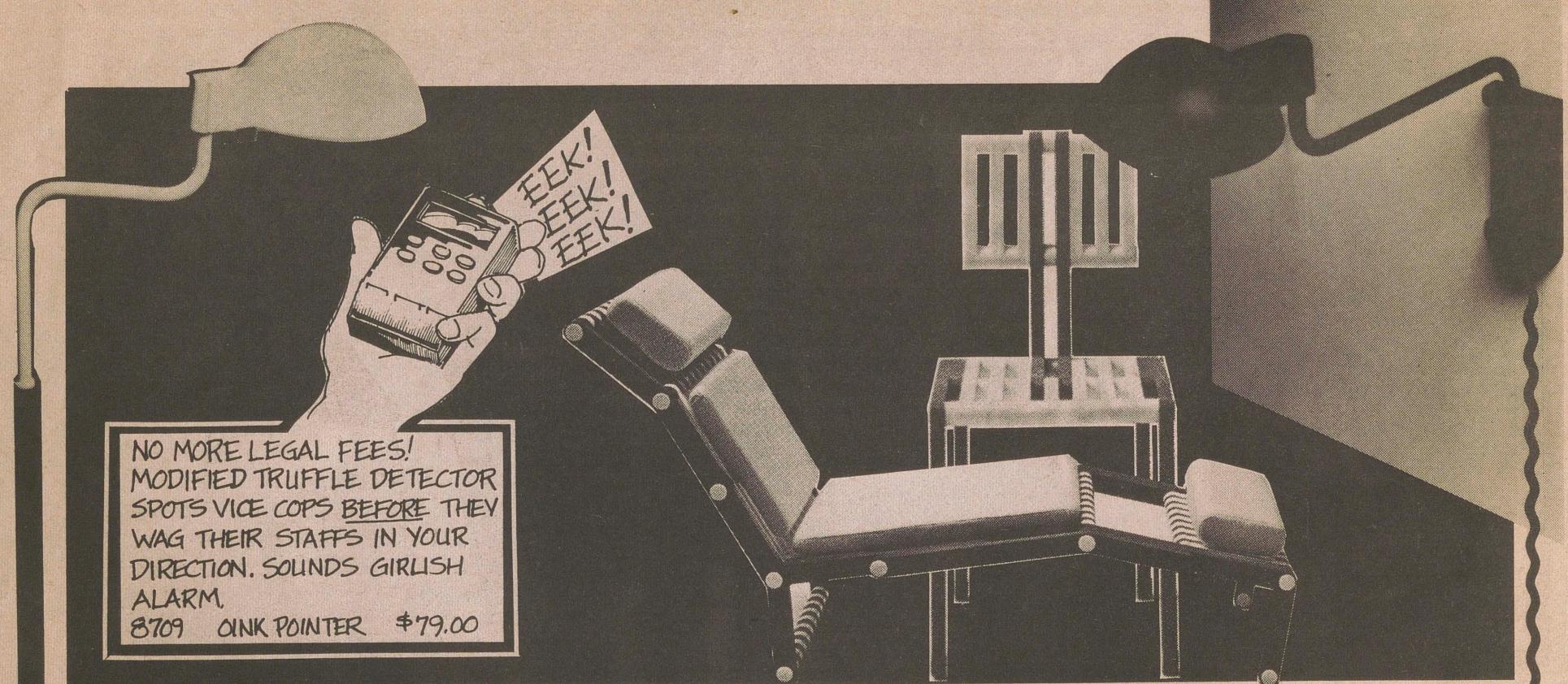
Gay BBSs:

THE BACK ROOM	(212) 849-6699
KEW GARDENS, N.Y.	(300)
THE BACK ROOM II	(201) 431-1216
FREEHOLD, N.J.	(300)
CHRISTOPHER STREET	(201) 992-5660
LIVINGSTON, N.J.	(300/1200)
THE INFERNO	(609) 881-1888
CAPE MAY, N.J.	(300)
THE CLUB	(516) 277-5793
LONG ISLAND, N.Y.	(300/1200)
THE DORMITORY	(201) 923-9521
NEWARK, N.J.	(300)
MICRO SMUT	(415) 469-8111
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIF.	(300)
CBBS LAMBDA	(415) 658-2919
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIF.	(300)
MIDWEST UNDERGRND	(314) 227-4312
ST. LOUIS, MO.	(300)
DIAL-YR-MATCH	(415) 964-3255
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIF.	(300)
ORACLE	(213) 509-0897
LOS ANGELES, CALIF.	(300)
KINKY KOMPUTOR	(415) 552-8268
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIF.	(300)
SWITCHBOARD	(703) 765-2161
ARLINGTON, VA.	(300)
CBBS HMS	(415) 845-2079
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIF.	(300)
OPEN MATCH 80	(404) 972-7947
ATLANTA, GA.	(300)
FOUNTAINS OF PLES.	(313) 996-5531
DETROIT, MICH.	(300)
JOYSTICK	(213) 790-2114
LOS ANGELES, CALIF.	(300)
STUDS-30	(313) 967-2172
OAK PARK, MICH.	(300)
TV/TS-BBS	(408) 734-8727
SAN JOSE, CALIF.	(300)
THE TOWER MACHINE	(213) 467-5997
LOS ANGELES, CALIF.	(300)

New York City, and its brother board, Backroom 2 in Freehold, N.J., are set up in the format of a gay computer magazine. They have the standard message bases for personal ads and inter-user communications, as well as a variety of articles that the members can "download" onto their own machines for future reading. Topics range from AIDS health tips to news on gay computing, to an advice column, to suggestions on where to cruise in the local area. There is also an "XXX" porn section where users find new "stroke" materials weekly (from vanilla to heavy kink). There's even a nude "centerfold"

in original gay humor (my apologies to the sysop if this was supposed to be taken seriously). The Oracle is one of the two pay gay BBSs. Although the board charges a subscription fee, it does have the advantage of being a multiuser board (it can accept more than one phone call at a time). It also allows users to chat with each other on a "real-time" basis.

The fun of BBSing is that you can be whoever you want to be. Hiding behind your handle, you can create any image of yourself you'd like. The only problem is that you may never be able to meet "physically" anyone from the



NO MORE LEGAL FEES!
MODIFIED TRUFFLE DETECTOR
SPOTS VICE COPS BEFORE THEY
WAG THEIR STAFFS IN YOUR
DIRECTION. SOUNDS GIRLISH
ALARM.
8709 OINK POINTER \$79.00

On-Line Graffiti

COMPUTER SEX

And How to Get It

BY P. GREGORY SPRINGER

QUOTES FROM COMPUSEVER'S CITIZEN BAND SIMULATOR, BAND A, CHANNEL 33

(A33,fun boy) Anyone wanna talk?
(A33,Leather) Hi, all!
(A33,BLUE EYES!) Hi, Leather
(A33,Coastie) I live on coast guard base
... and where do you live?
(A33,DAVIDBEAR) BLUE EYES:
YOU WIN THE PRIZE... ME!!
(A33,ORAL FIXATION) Why won't
anyone talk with me tonight?
(A33,BLUE EYES!) Yes, wylbur?
(A33,--- BRONCO) Hey, fun boy,
let's talk. It's too crowded here.
(A33,MANIMAL) LEATHER!!!! Hiya,
guys!

The thought of sex by computer sounds like the worst of science-fiction pulp, but it happens every day. Hundreds of

people use computers for sexual experimentation, dialogue and one-to-one encounters. The largest single contingent may be sexually frisky teenagers, although reliable statistics have yet to be compiled. All that's required is some computer equipment and a phone. The inexperienced—virgins, if you will—have a private, relatively secret outlet for their expressions, questions and experiments.

Some call it "compusex." Compusex allows a user to speak his or her mind, find partners, test attitudes, experiment with sexual feelings and responses—all the while remaining safely within the confines of home.

The immediate problems with the approach are obvious. For one thing, the computer sexual encounter is a variation of masturbation, since one usually does it alone and in private. For teens coming out on computer, compusex rivals the closets of the '50s, a parallel to hiding muscle magazines under the bed. It goes beyond that, however. It's another cul-de-sac in the quest to find safe sex. Compusex

might also be construed as politically conservative, individualistic, isolationist. If so, it may be one of the most counter-revolutionary homosexual activities to emerge in the '80s.

And it is going to be very, very popular.

MATCHMAKER MENU

Name and ID: Bill 767.
Sex: Male
Age: 18
Sexual Preference: Not Sure
Computer: Commodore 64.
Comments: I'm looking for some fun times.

You don't have to be into phone sex. That could even hinder your success on-line. It's the computer screen, not the human voice, that supplies the turn-on.

Computers, when linked through the phone lines, can access information databases, check out books from the library, transmit mail and send articles, and offer opportunities for banking, shopping and work. In other words, any formerly valid excuse for getting out of the house now has stiff competition. Letting your fingers do the walking becomes the rallying cry of computer hermits.

Inevitably, sex reared its ugly head into the growing world of telecommunications. It began with the dating services, the Dial-a-Date numbers and the Matchmaker systems. A computer owner can access one of the "Bulletin Board" systems (BBSs), log on, leave a file of personal information and predilections, and wait for a response from other users. Bulletin board systems—most of them free for the phone call—allow users to survey the credentials of others and then exchange messages.

Romances bloomed, even though most BBSs are one-at-a-time message units, not interactive dialogue. A BBS regular may check in daily, read all the messages left from the last few days, then write a few

new ones before signing off. It's a place to make contact with free on-line personal ads and lengthy messages. But not in "real time."

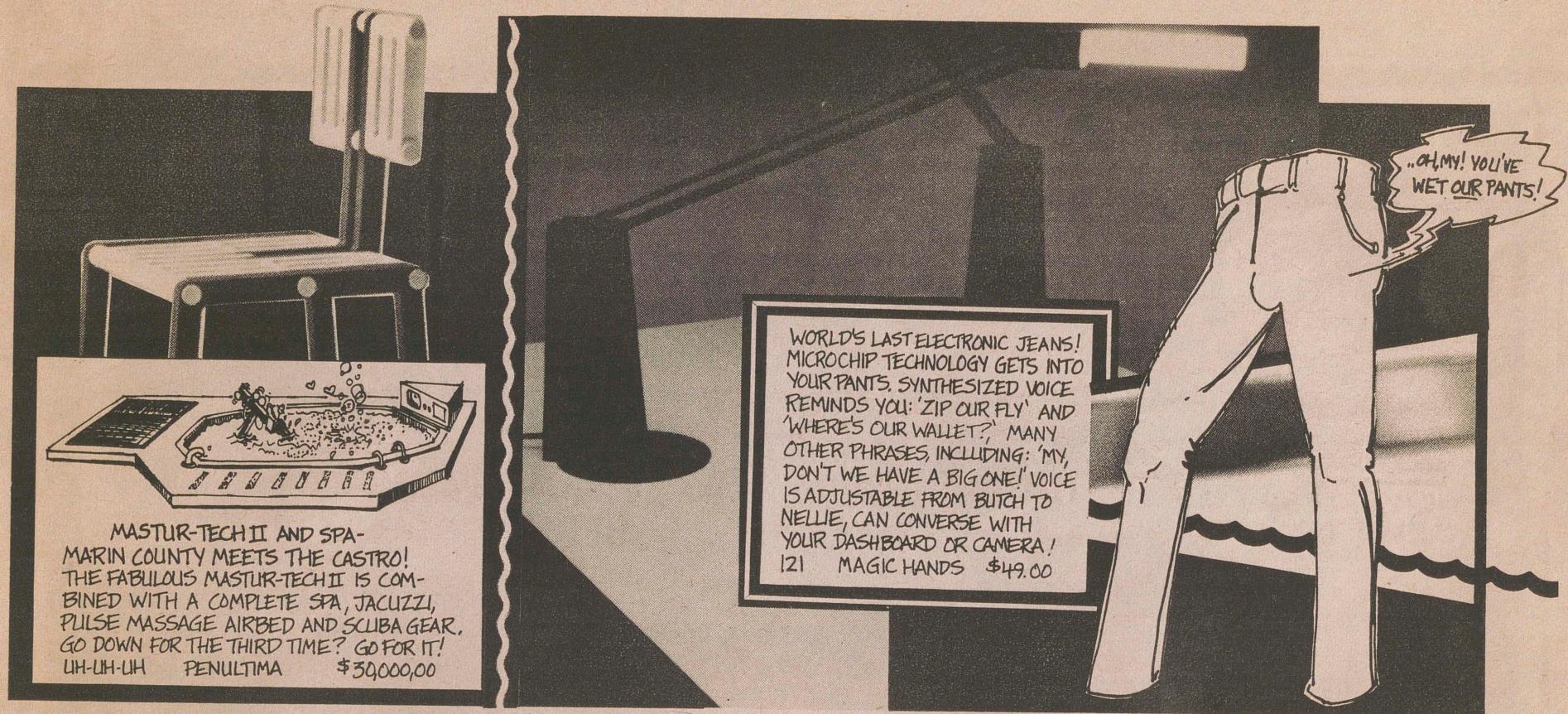
Systems soon became X-rated. Some have been gay-oriented from the start. On the non-gay systems, a surprising number of users describe themselves as "bi." Not Sure" when prompted with the question of their sexual identity.

Bulletin boards might be a throwback to the days of penpals, but with more immediate response, and a broader range of interests and possibilities. Handwriting put personality into the airmail age; telecomputing gives a more tactile experience, receiving messages typed by unseen friends. People reach out and touch, via keyboard.

THE SOURCE GAY "SWITCH-BOARD" ON-LINE DIRECTORY AAAAAA DIRECTORY LAST UP-

DATED 20-JUN-84
ABBI08 ED/CA/NEWPT/9-1-43 /MUSIC/RUN/WORK-OUT/BUSINESS/SINCERITY/CHAT
AAE458 FREDDY/11-15-57/KUWAIT/CHAT/WORLD TRAVEL/TELECOM/BEACH/IBM
BBF682 BRUCE/CO/DENVER/6-19-50/SKIING/SAILING/BLONDS/LAW/HOT CHATS/TRAVEL
BBF233 CHIP/CA/HUNTINGTON BEACH/5-16-44/ROMANCE/SEX/PEOPLE IN GENERAL
BBF792 LEX & BOBBIE/NY/2-7-51 & 12-25-53/INT'L TRADE/TEASE
BBJ007 CHAT/E-CRUISE RICKY/NYC/7-13-47/BLOOMINGDALE'S/BEARDS/DANCING/CATS/IBM/HOT CHATS, ETC.

While many BBSs have a means of



WORLD'S LAST ELECTRONIC JEANS! MICROCHIP TECHNOLOGY GETS INTO YOUR PANTS. SYNTHESIZED VOICE REMINDS YOU: 'ZIP OUR FLY' AND 'WHERE'S OUR WALLET?' MANY OTHER PHRASES, INCLUDING: 'MY, DON'T WE HAVE A BIG ONE!' VOICE IS ADJUSTABLE FROM BUTCH TO NELLIE, CAN CONVERSE WITH YOUR DASHBOARD OR CAMERA! 121 MAGIC HANDS \$49.00



"chat"—on-line exchange of typed dialogue in "real time"—they are often severely limited by the number of callers capable of accessing a BBS at a time, and by the cost of long-distance calls. On the other hand, commercial information services, such as CompuServe and The Source, have established international databases, accessible from almost anywhere with a local phone call.

Mandering through the many menus on The Source, one discovers several forums of information related to gay politics and interest. A "gay switchboard" allows subscribers who have listed their names and interests to contact,

Compusex allows a user to speak his or her mind, to find partners, test attitudes, experiment with sexual feelings and responses—all the while remaining safely within the confines of home.

and correspond with others on the system.

"You may want to turn CHAT OFF before you start working on The Source," a frequent user suggested to me. "It's all too easy to let hours slip past in chat before you realize it."

At up to \$10 per hour, many think the cost is comparable to, or cheaper than, a night at the bars. And the conversation, it's inferred, is infinitely preferable.

With hundreds of users accessing a commercial system simultaneously, the shared, typed conversation with another user—from anywhere around the globe—can become habit-forming. And when private "chats," as they are called, get "hot"...that's compusex.

Recent tests of computer conferencing have been revealing. Minorities and

women, when inputting opinions during an on-line meeting, are not dismissed as they often are during regular board meetings in person. In the absence of visual and auditory clues, everyone's words are granted equal value.

Compusex, someone has said, is like having a fantasy book talk back to you. Imagination supplies details, with a human being responding only to the touch of your fingertips.

(A33,boy girl) Diving in here!! Look out below!!

(A33,LEATHER) I'm stripping down. Everything goes.

(A33,Lifeguard) ===== Stay off the ropes, guys! =====

(A33,KNIGHTRIDER) Hurrah! It's a

commercial database; Channel 33, its unofficial gay channel, throbs with nightly activity. How else can you make love with an Italian stranger, in his Rome apartment, without ever leaving home?

Sign on with a new "handle" and join the conversation. If someone in the group interests you, ask him to enter into private mode for more intimate discussion.

Should you lie about your age? Your attributes? Invariably, users ask each other about their physical dimensions, and there is no way of determining how much is real and how much is wishful typing.

After enticing another user into the private mode, getting put down can be just as great a risk as it was in the bars. One night, my brief attempts to create an atmosphere of sensuality met with instant rejection from GAY DADDY, MUSCLEMAN and CITIZEN KANE. One hung up and went to the open channel, without so much as a gooby. Another was purely interested in discussing his saxophone playing. The third was looking for someone closer to his own age.

But other nights it's a different story. People snuggle up together, saying the things they can't do in actuality.

"Rubbing my hands over your tummy, caressing your broad shoulders and kissing your neck. Do you like it?"

"Ooooh yes, keep on."

"Let me touch your feet awhile, I'll massage them."

"OK. I'll just rest awhile.. Should I take off more clothes?"

"Take off your socks."

When two (or more) CBers click, the possibilities are limitless.

*** Please /TALK with Job 253 (boy/girl)
Job 253 (boy girl) is now in contact
►hi.
►hi. What's up?
►tell me about yourself. i'm 6'1", 23 yrs., and from chicago.

►i'm 5'10", 28. I like weightlifting, and I'm looking for some action tonight. How's your libido tonight?

►i'm afraid to ask, what's that?

►libido is your sex drive.

►well, i'm interested. where do you live?

One older regular on the Compuserve CB spends most of his time on-line counseling young gays who are confused about their sexuality and what to do with it.

Another Source user confessed he stores his hottest dialogues in the memory buffer of his computer, recording them to diskette for later reading. "It's like a library of my own sexual adventures."

What are the sociological aspects—and the psychological dangers—of intimacy through machines? The systems have not been around long enough for any long-term analysis, but there have been warnings about observed addiction to computer programming. From the beginning, Joseph Weizenbaum, the oft-quoted computer science professor from MIT, has expressed concern about habituation to computer processes. His observations had to do with the fascination of computer programming itself, not applications and particularly not sexual stimulation over phone lines.

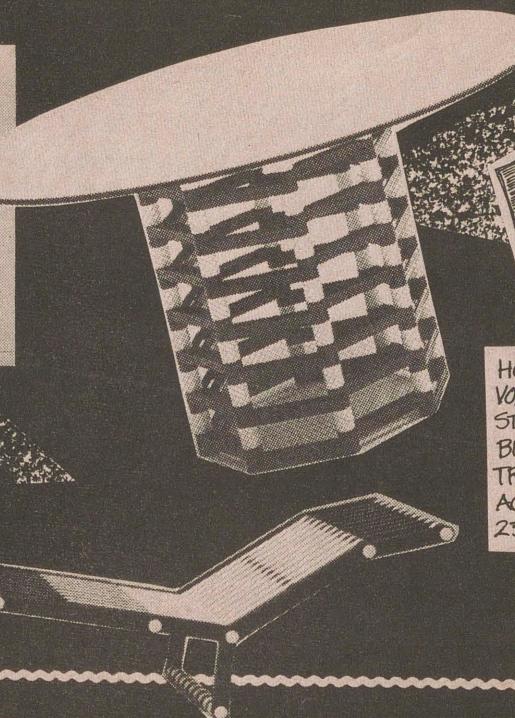
At the very least, compusex is a way of meeting people, true correspondence rather than interaction with games or preprogrammed software. A user may be typing on a machine, but through all the circuits and chips and wires and power lines, there is still a human being responding on the other end.

Commercial Computer Information Services:

Compuserve—(614) 457-8600
The Source—(800) 336-3366



ELECTRONIC 'DIZZY QUEEN' SEARCH AND FIND SYSTEM - FOR THAT FLAKEY FRIEND WHO CAN'T GET HIS ACT TOGETHER! HANDHELD SCEPTRE EMITS SONIC WAVES TO SEARCH OUT MINIATURE RECEIVERS ATTACHED TO THE MISPLACED ARTICLE. 22 WENCH WAND \$89.00



Hologram Tearoom - FLIP THE SWITCH AND VOILA: YOUR OWN TEAROOM, COMPLETE WITH STALL, URINAL, GLORY HOLES, LITTER, BARE BULB LIGHTING AND ODORS! PROVEN IN TRAINING AT THE LOS ANGELES POLICE ACADEMY.

2314 FLUSH WITH SUCCESS \$539.00

For Mensa Members Who Happen to Be GAYSIG Getting High on IQ

BY ANDY NYBERG

Remember the typical brainy kids in your class, those "eggheads"—the girl wearing braids and braces, the boy in bow tie and wingtip shoes, both with black-rimmed glasses, both hopelessly awkward in love, athletics and life in general?

Cruel stereotypes. Society, which seems to worship high intelligence, at the same time puts it down. And people who are extra-intelligent and gay sometimes feel a double prejudice working against them.

Nevertheless, several hundred gay men and lesbians, all with soaring IQs, have united under the umbrella of

Mensa, the famous organization of highly intelligent people.

Chairperson of the gay group is Roger Starr, who lives on the Pacific coast just north of San Francisco. "Our original purpose as a gay group," he says, "was to make Mensa aware of our existence and our worth. Now our main efforts are to form a sense of community, to discuss and resolve our mutual problems, and especially to help those who are still trying to find ways to relate to a paranoid society.... Our having a visible presence throughout Mensa encourages and supports our intent to be a communicative, rather than an exclusionary, part of Mensa."

Mensa is latin for "table"; as the title for an organization, it connotes a round-table society. Two British barristers founded Mensa shortly after World War II, with the idea that extremely intelligent people would combine their intellectual skills to help world leaders preserve world peace. Obviously, this ideal wasn't achieved, but Mensa as a

purely social organization flourished. The American affiliate, founded in 1961, now counts nearly 50,000 members out of the 4 million Americans estimated to be eligible.

And what are the eligibility requirements?

There's only one—a score in the top 2% of the population on IQ tests, that is, somewhere above 132 on most exams.

Critics of Mensa call it an elitist society based on a purely biological factor—people are born either with or without—high intelligence. These critics imagine members of Mensa (or M's, as they call themselves) standing around at their meetings and congratulating each other on how smart they are.

While old-fashioned conversation may indeed be the mainstay of many Mensa gatherings, topics run far beyond Mensa itself. American Mensa, in fact, is broken up into hundreds of special-interest groups, or SIGs—national groups whose devotees communicate primarily by mail. It's here that the tremendous diversity of M's is shown, and where stereotypes about intelligent people often falter.

SIG topics include square-dancing, Oriental cooking, calligraphy, physics, boating, vampires, patriotism and television. Other SIGs specialize in allergies, Paul McCartney, assassinations, Star Trek, bread baking, limericks, the Aquarian Conspiracy, cats, Bach and the ever popular trivia.

There are SIGs for M's who are either over 80, alcoholic, feminist, disabled, into bodybuilding or left-handed. Religion? Mensa includes special-interest groups of priests, Jehovah's Witnesses and Episcopalians. Are highly intelligent people stodgy and serious? Ask the M's involved in the Absurd SIG (de-

scribed as "the first refuge of the lunatic fringe") or the Sheltering Oafs or the Degenerates or the IDRCAF ("I Don't Really Care About Football").

And, of course, there are the more than 300 M's involved in the special-interest group for lesbians and gay men, which is simply called the GAYSIG. The group began in Los Angeles more than a decade ago, explains Waugh Smith, who until recently edited the GAYSIG's monthly newsletter, *Le GAMBIT* (a convoluted acronym for "A Bit about Lesbians and Gays in Mensa").

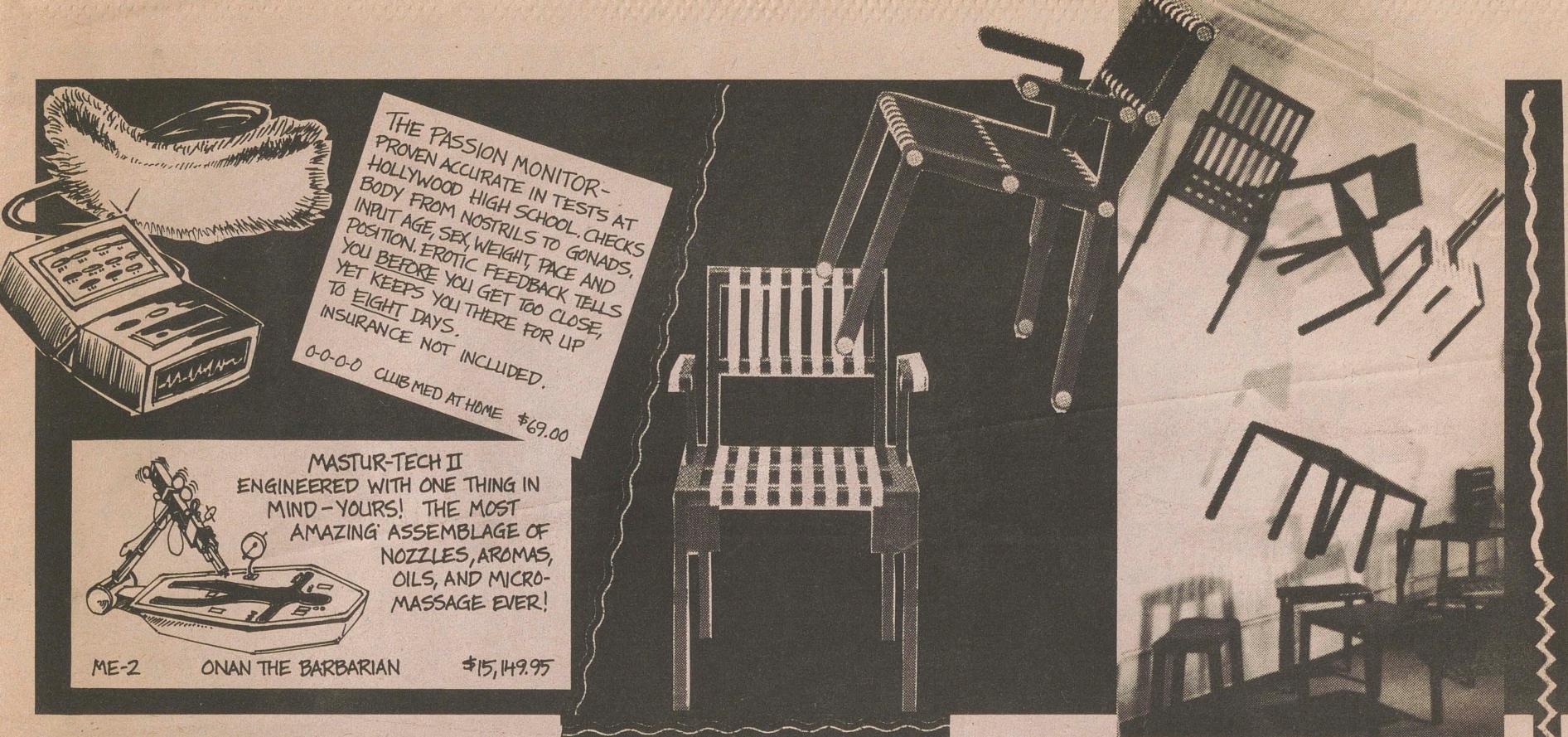
People who feel left out of Mensa may be attracted to the recently formed society for the Diversely Educated but Not Seriously Affected (DENSA). Though the group has yet to establish a gay chapter, its founder points out that many members of Mensa, ironically, also belong to DENSA. "Why be tense when you can be dense?" ask DENSA members, bluntly observing, "Pooh-pooh on IQ!"

To qualify for membership in DENSA, applicants take a "density quotient" test. Questions include:

- Which word doesn't rhyme: *bar, car, far, jar, miscellaneous, star, tar?*
- Define the universe. Give two examples.
- People who eat food will live longer than people who don't eat food; true or false?

For more information about DENSA, write to Box 214338, Dallas, TX 75221.

Andy Nyberg, a free-lance writer based in Northern California, is a frequent contributor to *The ADVOCATE*.



"We began meeting unofficially as GLAD, or Gay Liberation and Development," says Smith. "Then, later, we tried to run a notice of our meetings in the *Mensa Bulletin*, the monthly magazine of American Mensa—and it wasn't put in. We made an issue of it, and Mensa responded by passing a resolution banning any gay mention in the *Bulletin*, claiming it was a 'controversial' topic with 'political overtones' that might damage Mensa's tax-free status as a nonprofit organization. The gay group objected, of course, but in a friendly way, since we did want to remain part of Mensa. And it worked. By the end of the year, American Mensa passed a new resolution saying it wouldn't discriminate against gays, either by action or inaction."

GLAD soon outgrew Los Angeles, and in 1976 the GAYSIG was recognized by the national headquarters. Its hundreds of members, including more than 20 from other nations, correspond through LeGAMBIT and meet in numerous regional groups. GLAD is going strong in Los Angeles; the Homogeniuses meet in New York; GaWsh in Washington, D.C.; Gay M in San Francisco; and countless other subgroups of the subgroup meet in locations around the world—including Phoenix, Seattle, Toronto, Milwaukee, San Antonio, Chicago, and Australia. "We use the usual '10%' figure for counting gays," says Smith, "so our goal is to get 5,000 of the 50,000 M's into the GAYSIG." (Smith admits they're a long way from that goal.)

Elitist? Many M's point out that Mensa has only that single membership requirement—a high IQ—while several other organizations restrict their memberships on the basis of sex, sexual orientation, age, ethnic back-

ground, profession, religion or other factors.

"Everything's elitist in some ways," Smith says. "All the people who get together because they can high-jump six feet are elitist." And far from bragging about their brains, most M's point out that it's not intelligence itself that's really important, but how people use the intelligence they have.

"One of the great things about Mensa," Starr asserts, "is that glorious feeling of going into any group and not having to explain myself—to discuss virtually anything and have people right there with me. I'm not saying that conversations are right out of the Encyclopaedia Britannica, but most M's are

Smith say many GAYSIG members are closeted. "We ran a survey," Smith says, "that showed at least half weren't out at work, although about three-quarters were out to their families."

It doesn't help, Starr adds, that a great many members live in isolated parts of the country, "and for many of them this is their very first contact with other gays. Some say that if it weren't for the GAYSIG, they wouldn't belong to Mensa at all; while some also belong to other SIGs." Incredibly, Starr says he spends 40 to 60 hours a week on the GAYSIG, much of it in simply dealing with correspondence. Now in his third year as chairperson, he receives a flood of mail and tries to answer it all, even

says many are computer programmers and teachers.

More generalizations about ultra-intelligent gays may be revealed by a current project of the GAYSIG that's expected to be completed soon. This is the "personality testing" prepared by the Institute for Personality and Ability Testing at the University of Illinois, Urbana. Interested GAYSIG members answer a battery of 272 questions; the results are poured into a computer that will produce a compilation of the results later this year.

Another GAYSIG project is the Travel Exchange, whose participants correspond through a twice-yearly roster in order to host fellow GAYSIG tourists in their homes, or simply to exchange travel information. The roster has included addresses all across the country, as well as in the Caribbean, the South Pacific and Europe.

Interested in joining Mensa and its GAYSIG? Many M's qualify on the basis of a previously taken test, such as an Army IQ test or an SAT score; the latter must be 1300 if the test was taken before September 1977, or 1250 if taken afterward ("Many people say Mensa is a bunch of people good at taking tests," Starr points out with a laugh. "There's more truth than poetry in that").

Official Mensa qualifying tests must be timed by a proctor, but for a general at-home test just to see if you're in the running, send \$8 to the American Mensa headquarters at 1702 West 3rd Street, Brooklyn, NY 11223; phone (212) 376-1925. The same address may be contacted for referral to the GAYSIG.

Membership in the GAYSIG is a donation of \$10, which includes a subscription to LeGAMBIT; nonmembers may subscribe to the newsletter for \$6.●

Society, which seems to worship high intelligence, at the same time puts it down. And people who are extra-intelligent and gay sometimes feel a double prejudice working against them.

well-educated, good conversationalists. And someone who's not in that category understandably would feel a little left out."

GAYSIG members are of all ages; the youngest is 15, the oldest in her 70s. Between 10% and 15% of the GAYSIG membership is lesbian. "We do have difficulty getting women involved," Starr admits. "Maybe they're not joiners as much as men, maybe they tend to be more self-sufficient, more 'hearth and home' than 'party time.' At least once we started a women's page in the newsletter, but there was very little response."

Can any generalizations be made about highly intelligent gays, or at least about the ones who join Mensa?

Well, for one thing, both Starr and

though, he says wryly, "it builds up."

Special effort protects the privacy of closeted members. No membership information is forwarded to the American Mensa headquarters in New York, and names and addresses are shared with other GAYSIG members only with the permission of the members involved. Even the name of the newsletter, LeGAMBIT, was changed from GaySignificance when postal laws required that the sender's name be placed on envelopes; LeGambit is now sent in such a way that gay never appears on the outside of the envelope ("We argue about this a lot," Smith admits).

GAYSIG members are of numerous professions, although Smith