

and Scandinavia. Somewhat different was the homosexual pub in Britain, which tended to retain the homey comforts of the national tradition. The tourist trade of the 1960s helped to promote the spread of the gay bar to southern Europe, while Japan continued to evolve its own distinctive variation, which had existed for a number of decades.

Lesbian bars have always been relatively few. This paucity is only partly attributable to the fact that lesbians have less spending money. Historically, the virtual monopoly of homosexual bar culture by men reflects the fact that women were at one time not welcome in most bars in general, or had to be accommodated in special rooms adjacent to the rough-and-tumble of the bar itself. Although feminist pressure has removed the rules that excluded women, the custom of social drinking retains vestiges of male culture in our society.

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### BARTHES, ROLAND (1915–1980)

French literary critic and social commentator. Barthes introduced into the discussion of literature an original interpretation of semiotics based on the work of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure. His work was associated with the Structuralist trend as represented by Claude Lévi-Strauss, Julia Kristeva, Tzvetan Todorov, and others. Attacked by the academic establishment for subjectivism, he formulated a concept of criticism as a creative process on an equal plane with fiction and poetry. Even those favorable to his work conceded that this could amount to a "sensuous manhandling" of the text. The

turning point in his criticism is probably the tour de force *S/Z* (Paris, 1970), analyzing Balzac's novella about an aging castrato, *Sarrasine*. Here Barthes turns away from the linear, goal-oriented procedures of traditional criticism in favor of a new mode that is dispersed, deliberately marginal, and "masturbatory." In literature, he emphasized the factor of *jouissance*, a word which means both "bliss" and "sexual ejaculation." Whether these procedures constitute models for a new feminist/gay critical practice that will erode the power of patriarchy, as some of his admirers have asserted, remains unclear.

Using the concept of dominant ideology of Marxist provenience, Barthes also wrote perceptive analyses of advertising and fashion. Apart from a study of contemporary Japan (*L'Empire des signes*, Paris, 1970), he addressed French literature and culture almost exclusively. Nonetheless, he won many adherents in the English-speaking world, in large measure because his works convey an indomitable verve and infectious relish of the subjects he discussed. These qualities, rather than any finished system, account for his continuing influence.

Barthes, who never married, was actively homosexual during most of his life. Although his books are often personal, in his writing he excluded this major aspect of his experience, even when writing about love. Because of the attacks launched against him for his critical innovations, he was apparently reluctant to give his enemies an additional stick with which to beat him. Barthes' posthumously published *Incidents* (Paris, 1987) does contain some revealing diary entries. The first group stems from visits he made, evidently in part for sexual purposes, to North Africa in 1968–69. The second group of entries records restless evenings in Paris in the autumn of 1979 just before his death. These jottings reveal that, despite his great fame, he frequently experienced rejection and loneliness. Whatever his personal sorrows, Barthes' books remain

to attest a remarkable human being whose activity coincided with an ebullient phase of Western culture.

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## BATHHOUSES

As a result of the general expansion and commercialization of male homosexual life after World War II, the institution of the gay bathhouse became a fixture of major cities of Europe and North America. In these establishments only a small area of the premises is devoted to immersion tubs and sauna rooms; the bulk of the floor space consists of cubicles which are used for resting and for consensual sexual encounters. Other rooms are given over to nonsexual entertainment (television, billiards, music).

*Historical Perspectives.* Today's gay bathhouses stem ultimately from a cultural tradition that can be traced back over two millennia. In every society in which public baths flourished, the institution was shaped not only by its specific characteristics, but also by the values and norms of the larger community.

In ancient Greece the baths formed part of the highly developed practice of physical culture and athletics. Archeologists have uncovered bath buildings adjoining the palaestras or training grounds of athletes. By attaching the bath to the athletic (and to some extent military) function of physical fitness, the Greeks broke with the sacral and ritual tradition of Near Eastern lustration—the religious bath—which nonetheless has a successor in the continuing Jewish custom of the *mikva* or ritual bath.

The Romans attached far more importance to public baths than did the Greeks, creating imposing structures known as *thermae* for the purpose throughout their empire. Originating under the

Roman republic, the bath as an institution reached its height when Rome had extended its dominion throughout the Mediterranean. Amounting almost to secular cathedrals, the baths served a variety of individual and social requirements. *Thermae* fulfilled a need for personal cleanliness in an era when private baths were all but unknown. In addition to care of the skin, they fostered physical culture in the broader sense through exercise and massage facilities. Baths whose waters had a high sulfur content served medicinal purposes, anticipating modern spas. Then the baths were indoor arcades, permitting strolling patrons to meet friends and business associates, exchanging pleasantries and information. Some of the more imposing Roman baths embraced cultural and educational functions by offering public lectures and making libraries available to clients. Finally, Roman baths offered a convenient gathering place for those in quest of sexual release. Initially, such contacts were necessarily homosexual, since only men were admitted to the baths. Later, under the Roman Empire, some baths were open to women, for the most part female attendants who also served as prostitutes. Thus the Roman baths offered a kaleidoscopic variety of disparate, yet related functions.

As part of its inheritance from the Roman empire, the civilization of Islam continued the custom of offering bath facilities for health and pleasure, alongside the ritual baths required by Koranic law. Medieval Islamic sources indicate that baths of the former class were used not only for health reasons, but for socialization and homosexual contacts. Significantly, modern bathhouses of Europe and America have been termed "Turkish Baths," and sometimes boast tiled decor recalling this Muslim institution.

Strongly discouraged by Christian moralism in the early Middle Ages, public baths nonetheless reappeared in medieval cities as an essential aspect of sanitation, beginning in the twelfth cen-