

back pocket to indicate their fondness for gentle personalized sex as distinct from what they perceived as the mechanical, unloving, sometimes brutal encounters of the time.

In the late 1980s the immense quilt sponsored by the Names Project and carried out by scores of local projects, all commemorating thousands who died of AIDS, produced a fascinating array of visual iconography. The images of the individual panels were chosen and sewn by surviving friends and relatives. Some panels show emblems of favorite places where the person memorialized had lived; another shows an image—of Moscow—that the deceased had wished to visit; still others carry the insignia of the schools from which the deceased had received degrees. Passionate avocations, such as music and dance, are represented by appropriate symbols, such as a clef, a piano keyboard, or the outline of a tapdancer. The use of sequins and bright, glittering colors reflects characteristic aspects of the gay image. Some have quotations alluding to the interests or the character of the individual commemorated. In terms of the world history of funerary iconography, the symbols are usually "retrospective"—referring to joys and accomplishments during life—rather than "prospective"—directed toward a future life.

BIBLIOGRAPHY. Hal Fischer, *Gay Semiotics: A Photographic Study of Visual Coding Among Gay Men*, San Francisco: NFS Press, 1977; Cindy Ruskin, *The Quilt: Stories from The Names Project*, New York: Pocket Books, 1988.

Wayne R. Dynes

SENSIBILITY

In eighteenth-century English, under the stimulus of the proto-Romantic trend, the word "sensibility" acquired the meaning of "sensitive or ready capacity for emotional response, as distinct from intellect or will; acuteness of feeling," overlaying the earlier sense of "physical response

to stimuli." More recently, the word has served to designate dimensions of feeling that are conceived as flourishing in certain groups, such as "feminine sensibility," "artistic sensibility." Although the possibility has often been canvassed, it seems unlikely that there is any single homosexual or lesbian sensibility, or mode of expressing the group's way of looking at the world (which is scarcely unitary among the members of these groups). What may exist, however, are more restricted sensibilities cultivated by certain groups or schools of homosexual writers and artists, as in *Bloomsbury* or lesbian *Paris* in the 1920s.

This problem is related to the question of whether homosexual individuals are endowed with a greater creative potential than other people. It might be thought that over the centuries the very stigmatizing of homosexuals and lesbians has fostered the development of inventive ways of dealing with the world. Thus far, however, such a phenomenon seems to have been shown only for certain types of wit, and then for limited periods of time (as in *camp*). It has not been possible to glean any empirical data supporting the folk belief in special homosexual creativity.

BIBLIOGRAPHY. Jean H. Hagstrum, *Sex and Sensibility*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.

SEPARATISM, LESBIAN

In its strongest form, lesbian separatism means social, cultural, and physical separation from all who are not lesbians. As society is now constituted this option is possible only for a very few. Many lesbians who regard themselves as separatists seek to live and work in circumstances that are as far as possible "women's space," without insisting on the absolute exclusion of men. The term "lesbian separatist" is also sometimes used within the gay/lesbian movement for those who do not wish to work with gay men.