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gay/bisexual/transgendered academics to be out of the closet, long before lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgendered studies was one trajectory a scholarly career could take. And by doing so, Esther Newton helped initiate a critique of more conventional research paradigms that habitually positioned the foundations of gay experience within the confines of arrested psychological development, misplaced and misshaped desires, or impersonal, anonymous sex. *Mother Camp* showed us that gay culture was also about being true to ourselves, whomever “we” identifies and whatever we understand “selfhood” (or “truth”) to mean. Continuing this tradition, “My Best Informant’s Dress” shows us that gay culture is still about transcending who we are, about adding glamour and style to our lives when confronted by adversity and oppression, and about working out our own ways to be fabulous.

Lesbian/gay anthropologists really needed to hear this message in the 1970s. *Mother Camp* predated the institutionalized emergence of lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgendered networking and public credibility making within our profession. It was published several years before the formation of the Anthropological Research Group on Homosexuality, the organization that became today’s Society for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered Anthropologists (SOLGA). At the time, many of us did not understand how to incorporate Esther’s analysis of sexual/gendered differences into our own research interests, or even how to find anthropological colleagues with similar research/personal interests. But *Mother Camp* showed us that ethnographic research could contribute richly to the understanding of homosexuality. Indeed, if Esther could present the lived experiences of female impersonators with such clarity, beauty, and power, maybe some of us could do the same for other areas of lesbian/gay culture.

And thus emerged one of the defining characteristics of anthropological study of same-sex identities, desires, and practices: exploration of these themes in site-specific, people-centered, ethnographic terms. *Mother Camp* was a study of homosexuality “here at home,” at a time when doing fieldwork in exotic, overseas locations was still the anthropological norm. Once again, Esther was being different — and the extent to which her choice of a “different” fieldwork location contributed to the emergence of U.S.-based ethnographic inquiry in the 1970s is also worth exploring. Esther’s work was successful in these regards because she developed and maintained close, respectful relationships with her “research subjects.” For Esther, these “subjects” were people, and their differences mattered. She writes, for example: “The men whom I knew in Kansas City were tough; they knew how to fight and suffer with comic grace. They had the simple dignity of those who have nothing else

but their refusal to be crushed" (1972:xiv). Part of documenting their courage was documenting their antagonistic relationships with theater managers, technicians—and with each other. There is no effort here to idealize or sanitize these conditions of lived experience, and that makes Esther's description all the more believable and appealing.

A similar believability underlies Esther's presentation of Kay, the "best informant" wearing the "best informant's dress." Esther describes how her relationship with Kay gradually evolved from respectful strangers, to friends, to close friends, and almost to the point of physical intimacy. "Someday, I'm going to surprise the hell out of you and really kiss you back" (1996b:224), Kay said to Esther one afternoon. And later in the essay, after describing how Kay commanded the cloudy sky to clear so that the sunshine could pour down on a deserted beach (and, at her words, that's exactly what happened), Esther notes, "In another culture, Kay would have been some kind of priestess" (226).

Today, of course, it is not unusual for anthropologists to develop strong feelings of closeness, intimacy, and respect toward their informants (or for informants to respond in kind). But using such feelings as the centerpiece for data analysis, and integrating those feelings so explicitly into the write-up of the research findings, as Esther did in *Mother Camp*, was most unusual in the anthropology of the early 1970s. Indeed, the ethnographic sensitivity displayed in this monograph predates by several years the emergence of the interpretivist anthropology of James Clifford and associates. And though these interpretive scholars have much to tell us about the value of subjectivity and emotion in ethnographic research settings, they still say very little about the "erotic equation" between researcher and informant. "My Best Informant's Dress" reminds us that such equations often guide researchers and informants as they coconstruct the richness of the ethnographic moment; here again, Esther Newton's ethnographic work remains ahead of her time.

Not so apparent in *Mother Camp* or the Cherry Grove study, but certainly important for these remarks (and this anthropologist) has been Esther Newton's sexuality/gender-related political activism within our profession. Esther was one of the first chairs of the Anthropological Research Group on Homosexuality, and one of the first women to serve in a leadership position within that organization. Her mentoring of younger women anthropologists has been instrumental in bringing greater visibility to SOLGA—and to the work in lesbian/gay anthropology that sustains it. She was one of the original cochairs of the American Anthropological Association's Commission on Lesbian and Gay Issues in Anthropology, and—documenting difference yet again—she

was instrumental in urging commission members to collect life-story narratives from lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered anthropologists and to use that testimony as the focus for COLGIA's write-up of its fact finding.

The incentives for such professional networking can be traced to the isolation that has haunted Esther throughout so much of her academic career and which she describes powerfully in "Too Queer for College," reprinted below. But it also reflects the vision of anthropology that first attracted her to the profession, and which she has helped to build and sustain: "Anarchism, I read once, is an ideology of permanent rebellion. Anthropology, by refuting any one culture's claims to absolute authority, offers a permanent critique" (p. 1, this volume).

It has taken some years for lesbian/gay studies to become a part of anthropology's "permanent critique," and Esther Newton has been one of the vanguard figures in this struggle. The essays in this collection show how effectively she has incorporated this critique into her studies of lesbian/gay experience and how greatly anthropology has been enriched because she never lost sight of that greater vision.