1001 Beds
Johnson, Glen, Miller, Tim

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“Civil Disobedience Weekend” is an “artfag fantasy” based on the March 1, 1990, “Art Attack” protest in Los Angeles, when five hundred artists “arrested” the U.S. Federal Building for crimes against art. Tim Miller and others organized the protest in response to mounting pressure on the arts by the radical Right and their allies within Congress and the Bush administration. Twenty-four protesters were arrested and held for a few hours within the Federal Building, which provides the setting for Tim Miller’s imagining of a fantastical orgy with magical consequences. In reality the protest had a different consequence for Tim Miller, since it is likely that publicity resulting from the Los Angeles action contributed to the decision to target him in the NEA Four affair that began three months later.

The orgy scene in “Civil Disobedience Weekend” may have been suggested by an experience recorded in Miller’s journal for 1988, printed as a coda to this section. The utopian climax, performed to the “Ode to Joy” from Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony, employs the sung-speech technique used earlier in the Liebestod from Buddy Systems and anticipates the Bolero finale of My Queer Body. “Civil Disobedience Weekend” was incorporated in the anthology show Sex/Love/Stories (1990), from which this text is transcribed, and also performed separately.
Although Miller regards it as a Disney-style fantasia, the piece’s sexual explicitness occasionally polarized audiences, as exemplified by a 1991 performance at Sadler’s Wells Theatre in London. As Miller recorded in his journal, the “well-heeled audience reacted like I had just spiked the punch with plutonium. People avoided me at the gala reception afterwards. . . . ‘Too queer for comfort!’ But then, like the happy tapdancing ending in some bad musical, a gaggle of spunky and energized queerboy performance art and dancer types came up to me and told me how great my performance was.”

“You’re all about to be placed under arrest. You are here in violation of federal law. National Endowment for Censorship Penal Code—yes, Penal Code—S-Q-143-W. If you do not disperse immediately you will be placed under arrest. . . . You are now under arrest! The charge is blocking a Federal orifice—I mean office! You are now under arrest!”

We linked arms and chanted furiously: “ACT UP! Fight back! Save art!” And for our bilingual number, “Alto a la censura! Art is not a crime!” (Which would, the next day, be reported in the newspapers as “Hola a la censura.” Oops.) We doffed our art criminal chain gang outfits and blockaded the Federal Building. Shutting that building down in protest of our government’s attacks on the First Amendment and Freedom of Expression. This was the big moment, the time where all our careful training, our split-second organization, our carefully-honed message, no more rehearsing or nursing a part, we were about to enter—CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE WEEKEND!

We stood there: bicep to bicep, ego to ego. One by one, the cops took us away: Les and Adrian and Tom and Guillermo and Jordan and Kathy. . . . Finally it was my turn, and I felt the cold steel of those federal handcuffs so tight, so very tight around my wrists, so deliciously tight. And they lined us up underneath a picture of George Bush, our hands handcuffed behind us, in the perfect position to
grab the crotch of the person behind. And then they marched us off and put the guys in one holding tank and the women in another. It was a largish sort of smallish room. Square, with a bench around the edge and two forlorn open toilets in one corner. The Federal Cop came in and said, “Well, I see we got twenty-four real artfags in here. Well, boys, since you got arrested so late on this Friday, we’re gonna keep you here all weekend!” We protested: “But our dogs! our jobs! our boyfriends!” The Federal Cop just gave us a cold stare and said: “Tough luck, boys! Welcome to civil disobedience weekend!”

I was sitting next to the cute semiotics instructor from Cal Arts who started rubbing something in his pants. It was not a book by Michel Foucault. It was not chopped liver. It was the beginning of civil disobedience weekend!

He said, “Boy, these ACT UP civil disobedience anti-censorship actions sure get me all hot.”
I said, “Yeah. Me too.”
He said, “Hey, I’m really stiff. How about a back rub?”
I said, “Sure, dude.”

All eyes were on us. Hands began to move underneath *Action Equals Life* t-shirts, and that message took on a whole new meaning. One of the boys from Highways reached into the pants of one of the boys from the L.A. County Museum of Art and they began to kiss. Big wet sloppy larger-than-life tongue kissing, like the kind you see on late-night TV. Like the kind I practiced on a towel the night before I took my girlfriend to Disneyland in eighth grade and we made out on the “Journey into Inner Space” ride. Those kinds of kisses.

The semiotics instructor from Cal Arts has now pulled his dick out and is demonstrating the Theory of Signification to the graduate student from the Inland Empire. The pants are dropping . . . shirts are pulled over heads in a practical arabesque . . . generally stroking and soothing and generally fulfilling our foray.

Though the state may chain us, our crazed and juicy bodies and imaginations will not be imprisoned!

*With love’s light wings did I o’erperch these walls,*
*For stony limits cannot hold love out:*
*And what love can do, that dares love attempt.*

And this is our revolt, our disobedience most uncivil, here in the bowels of George Bush’s Federal Building. We will whip ’em out and cum on his Brooks Brothers lapel, wipe it on his CIA dossier, naked together on a burning flag in North Carolina, raising high the roof-beam, the standard, and anything else that’s handy, including the sleeveless t-shirt stretched so tastefully behind the neck of the blonde boy with the lovely butt who comes from the Simi Valley Anti-Censorship and Homophile Auxiliary and is being tended to by the ACT UP outreach coordinator—who is, in fact, reaching out, from behind, pinching his nipples.

I remain distant, observant. My job is to stay aware of what is going on, so it can be written down. It must be saved—this part of
ourselves, the jump-off point, ready to speak truth to Caesar and jerk off on his best toga.

Everyone is in the act now. It is a flurry of safer activist sex! Skin is slapping. Thighs are clenching. Breath is racing. One after another we cum on the face of Jesse Helms, on a banner with the word Guilty burned across his forehead. He is now awash in the semen of twenty-four pissed-off artist fags, deviant even in the slammer, saying NO to anti-sex, anti-life, anti-art nazis.

We fall on each other, spent. But then we hear footsteps. . . . We are being released! What has happened?

Out on the streets, there is a strange music in the air. Thousands of people are dancing in the streets, carrying garlands of flowers and speaking dozens of languages. People of every cultural and community background. They have taken the street in front of the Federal Building. I look up to the sky and see the stars winking as Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony is played impromptu by the L.A. Philharmonic who have gathered on the Civic Center Mall.

Seid umschlungen, Millionen . . . Diesen Kuss der ganzen Welt! Be embraced, you millions . . . this kiss for all the world!

We begin to hear snippets of what has happened. George Bush has been defeated and is in exile in Baghdad? Mmm. The Federal Police have given up and joined ACT UP? Mmmm. President Clinton has appointed Holly Hughes to be Chairwoman of the National Endowment for the Arts? Hmmm. Jesse Helms has given up smoking and come out as a gay person? Yeeechh! Oh please god, anything but that.

There is dancing and music, fireworks in the air. We hear more. A fax from Washington tells us that a special session of Congress has elevated the AIDS crisis to the top national priority. A telegram arrives from Yeltsin. He wants to meet with us immediately to form a world artists’ government to address nuclear disarmament, economic restructuring, global warming. The world has been moved by our deeds! We have triumphed! The day is ours!
I think of the work left to be done and I glance up at the top of the Federal Building, which has now sprouted strange and beautiful vines, tendrilling into the night, testament to the seeds we planted there on this civil disobedience weekend . . . reaching up and rooting deep, growing toward something new.

Toward something that, if we all put in a lot of vision, a lot of imagination, and tons of work. . . .

They’re growing toward what just might . . . what just might be our future.