

just out

since 1983

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steppin' out



The Lesbian Avengers erected a shrine honoring arson murder victims Brain Mock and Hattie Mae Cohens as part of a vigil held in New York City in October. Thanks to filmmaker Su Freidrich for the photo.

editorial

Lorde's words still transform

To honor the passing of Audre Lorde, we chose an excerpt from one of her essays, written in 1977, entitled "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action" as our editorial. We hope it inspires you as Lorde's work continues to inspire us.

I have come to believe over and over again that what is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood. That the speaking profits me, beyond any other effect. I am standing here as a Black lesbian poet, and the meaning of all that waits upon the fact that I am still alive, and might not have been. Less than two months ago I was told by two doctors, one female and one male, that I would have to have breast surgery, and that there was a 60 to 80 percent chance that the tumor was malignant. Between that telling and the actual surgery, there was a three-week period of the agony of an involuntary reorganization of my entire life. The surgery was completed, and the growth was benign.

But within those three weeks, I was forced to look upon myself and my living with a harsh and urgent clarity that has left me still shaken but much stronger. This is a situation faced by many women, by some of you here today. Some of what I experienced during that time has helped elucidate for me much of what I feel concerning the transformation of silence into language and action.

In becoming forcibly and essentially aware of my mortality, and of what I wished and wanted for my life, however short it might be, priorities and omissions became strongly etched in a merciless light, and what I most regretted were my silences. Of what had I ever been afraid? To question or to speak as I believed could have meant pain, or death. But as we all hurt in so many different ways, all the time, and pain will either change or end. Death, on the other hand, is the final silence. And that might be coming quickly, now, without regard for whether I had ever spoken what needed to be said, or had only betrayed myself into small silences, while I planned someday to speak, or waited for someone else's words. And I began to recognize a source of power within myself that comes from the knowledge that

while it is most desirable not to be afraid, learning to put fear into a perspective gave me great strength.

I was going to die, if not sooner then later, whether or not I had ever spoken myself. My silences had not protected me. Your silence will not protect you. But for every real word spoken, for every attempt I had ever made to speak those truths for which I am still seeking, I had made contact with other women while we examined the words to fit a world in which we all believed, bridging our differences. And it was the concern and caring of all those women which gave me the strength and enabled me to scrutinize the essentials of my living.

The women who sustained me through that period were Black and white, old and young, lesbian, bisexual, and heterosexual, and we all shared a war against the tyrannies of silence. They all gave me a strength and concern without which I could not have survived intact. Within those weeks of acute fear came the knowledge—within the war we are all waging with the forces of death, subtle and otherwise, conscious or not—I am not only a casualty, I am also a warrior.

What are the words you do not yet have? What do you need to say? What are the tyrannies you swallow day by day and attempt to make your own, until you will sicken and die of them, still in silence? Perhaps for some of you here today, I am the face of one of your fears. Because I am woman, because I am Black, because I am lesbian, because I am myself—a Black woman warrior past doing my work—come to ask you, are you doing yours?

Audre Lorde

"The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action," 1977, from *Sister Outsider*, published by *The Crossing Press*.

contents

VOL. 10 NO. 2 DEC. 1, 1992

FEATURES

Real victories

Lawyers, championing lesbian and gay civil liberties, are constitutionally dismantling the right wing's platform by successfully overturning 1988's Ballot Measure 8 along with a similar law in Concord, Calif. (pp. 16-17)

Paying tribute to a courageous leader

Hearts are touched by the passing of Audre Lorde, whose words are still lighting our way. (pp. 12-13)

DEPARTMENTS

World briefs

AIDS crisis looms over South Africa (p. 6)

National news

(pp. 7-9)

Local news

(pp. 13-15)

Profiles

Terry Bean talks about being part of President-elect Bill Clinton's transition team. (p. 24)

Marvin Liebman talks about his Republican ties and his love of groups like *Queer Nation* and *ACT UP*. (p. 25)

COLUMNS

Religion

(p. 11)

ARTS

Music

Dr. Tantalus examines the bad girls of music—Madonna and Sinead O'Connor. (p. 23)