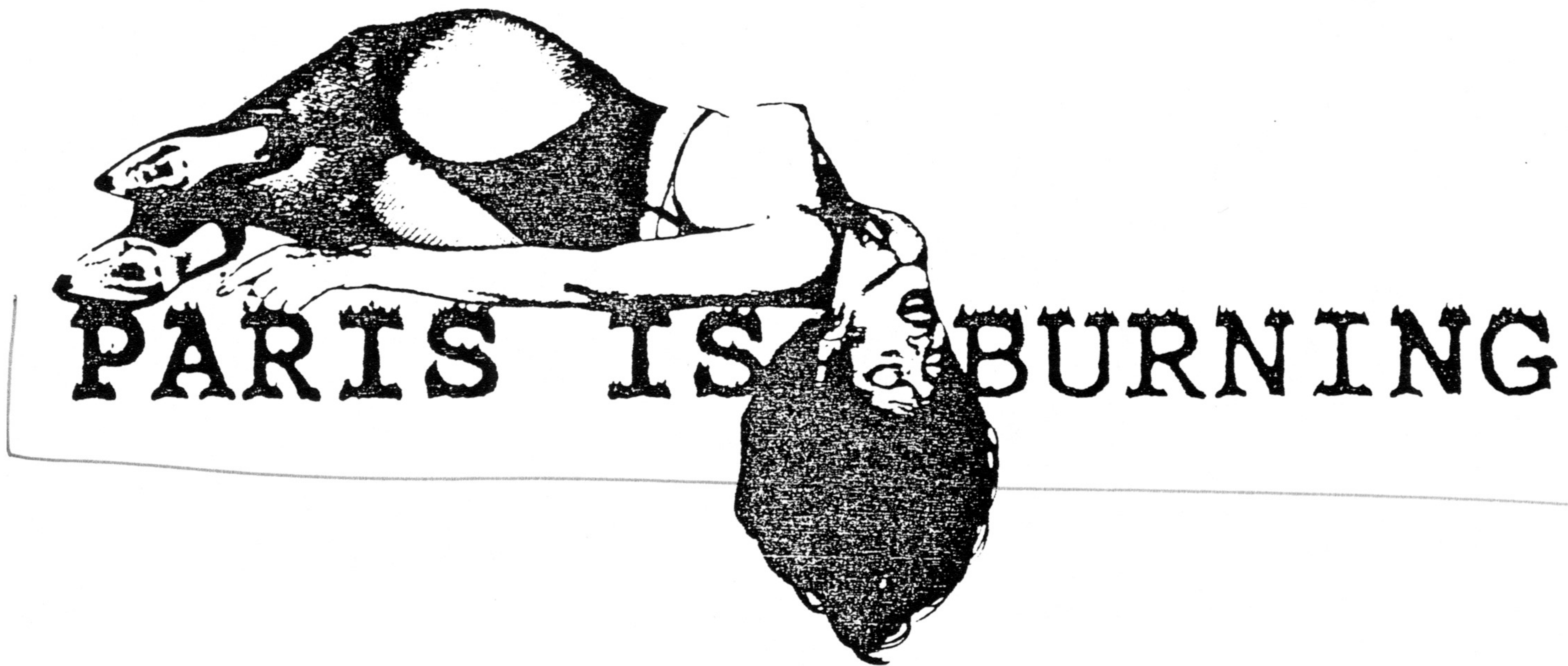


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A DOCUMENTARY ON "VOGUING" AND THE DRAG BALLS OF HARLEM

WINNER:

1990 L.A. FILM CRITICS AWARD FOR BEST DOCUMENTARY

1991 SUNDANCE FESTIVAL GRAND JURY PRIZE FOR BEST DOCUMENTARY

Directed and Produced by Jennie Livingston

Co-produced by Barry Swimar

Edited by Jonathan Oppenheim

Cinematography by Paul Gibson

Press Contact: KAREN LARSEN & ASSOCIATES
(415) 957-1205

Starring

CARMEN AND BROOKE
ANDRE CHRISTIAN
DORIAN COREY
PARIS DUPREE
PEPPER LABEIJIA
JUNIOR LABEIJIA
WILLI NINJA
SANDY NINJA
KIM PENDAVIS
FREDDIE PENDAVIS
SOL PENDAVIS
AVIS PENDAVIS
OCTAVIA SAINT LAURENT
STEVIE SAINT LAURENT
ANGIE XTRAVAGANZA
BIANCA XTRAVAGANZA
DANNY XTRAVAGANZA
DAVID XTRAVAGANZA
DAVID IAN XTRAVAGANZA
DAVID, THE FATHER XTRAVAGANZA
VENUS XTRAVAGANZA

AND ALL OF THE LEGENDARY CHILDREN AND UPCOMING LEGENDS

Produced and Directed by.....JENNIE LIVINGSTON

Edited by.....JONATHAN OPPENHEIM

Cinematography by.....PAUL GIBSON

Co-Produced by.....BARRY SWIMAR

Associate Producers.....CLAIRE GOODMAN
MEG McLAGAN

Executive Producers.....DAVIS LACY
NIGEL FINCH

Sound Recordists.....CATHERINE CALDERON
JUDY KARP

Second Unit Camera.....MAYRSE ALBERTI

Additional Camerawork.....WILLIAM MEGALOS
FRANK PRINZI
ALYSON DENNY
BEN SPETH

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ABOUT "VOGUING" AND THE BALLS

VOGUING is a dance invented by Black and Latino gay men; a voguer combines the poses struck by fashion models with acrobatic spins and dips. There are voguing moves inspired by Egyptian hieroglyphics, and a whole style of voguing called pantomime voguing, where the voguer enacts a little drama or story with his hands and feet.

Voguing began in New York's nightclubs and parks and on the street; rival voguers joined clubs or gangs called HOUSES. House names are taken from fashion designers or media images. The House of Chanel, the House of Saint Laurent and the House of Ninja are among the many Houses that formed in the mid-seventies. House members compete against one another, but unlike gang members who fight out of lust for drugs or money, they compete for trophies.

New York balls take place every month or two. When "Paris is Burning" was shot, most balls took place in Harlem, but with their increased popularity, many have moved downtown. At the balls, House members compete in CATEGORIES, which resemble the divisions of a fashion show (swimwear, eveningwear, sportswear). There are as many categories as there are types of clothing or styles of performing, but some of the more popular categories are Voguing, Town and Country, Executive Realness, Schoolboy/Schoolgirl Realness, Upcoming Pretty Girl, Face, Body (Luscious or Model-type) and Model's Effect.

REALNESS is perhaps the most startling concept of the Ball world. In Femme Queen Realness, men attempt to pass for women; in Executive Realness, competitors wear the clothes of an executive (when all attending know there are few prospects for such employment). In BANGEE Realness, competitors impersonate a "Bangee Boy" or "Bangee Girl" --neighborhood thugs known for drug-dealing, robbery or just plain swagger. Bangee Realness presents a unique challenge, as competing queens are more likely to be robbed by, than ever to be a Bangee. In the Realness categories, ballgoers impersonate straights, the middle class, the upper class; whatever the House members are not, they become for that evening.

MAKING "PARIS IS BURNING" by Jennie Livingston

Washington Square Park, the summer of 1985, I had just moved to New York and I was walking around with my still camera.

"Butch Queen in Drags!" "Pop! Dip! Spin!" "Saks Fifth Avenue Mannequins!"

The boys who were shouting these things contorted their bodies into a graceful imitation of fashion models, Olympic gymnasts and Egyptian hieroglyphic figures.

I learned that this was "voguing" and that if I really wanted to see it, I would have to go to a ball.

My first ball was a small affair, a "mini-ball" at the Gay Community Center in the Village. I graduated to larger fashion events, the majority of which were held at the Elks' Lodge on 129th Street in Harlem. In the course of two years of making still photos of the balls, I attended events at a bingo hall on 125th Street, at the Harlem YMCA, at the Parkway Chateau on Eastern Parkway in Brooklyn, and at the Savoy Manor in the Bronx.

Because traditionally many ball-walkers work in nightclubs, balls would be scheduled for four or five in the morning, finally beginning by nine or ten and often continuing into the evening. Balls are held every month or so, usually on Sundays.

I was taken immediately by the people I met. Here were people who were excluded from the mainstream in every way--by virtue of race, class and sexual orientation, yet their whole subculture was based on imitating the very people who were excluding them--the schoolboys and schoolgirls, the executives, the military men, the models.

There was an intense irony here, that people should express themselves by imitating a world that, if given half a chance, would spit on Black gays or at best ignore them.

I had my own prejudices about what oppression does to people, but my cultural assumptions were overturned when I realized that these men and women had adopted attitudes based on the certainty that they--in the expression of the ball world--were not bothered. They had more style, more fortitude, more wit and more true intelligence than most people with five times their opportunities. The ball people I filmed could have turned out spiteful, angry or downtrodden, but instead they opted for a wildly creative life; the idea was to become as fierce as possible. The balls are a response to homophobia and racism, but one full of optimism and spirit.

I wanted to get to know an array of people to represent the various types of ball-walkers. I met Junior, the brilliant ball

announcer who combines a verbal eloquence, a spirituality straight out of church with a vicious feel for Shade--a form of insult that is essential to the ball's competitive spirit. I began to speak to Venus, Octavia and Carmen--tough, ultra-feminine drag queens who were trying to reconcile their intense ambitions with the realities of their economic and sexual situation. Willi Ninja, Mother of the House of Ninja, was one of the balls' best voguers and planned to make a career in dance and choreography. Freddie and Kim represented the ingenues, the upcoming generation; Venus and Octavia were the young queens, the "ball Children" who imagined that beauty would lead them everywhere; Dorian and Junior and Pepper were the wise sages who could point out the danger--and the necessity--of the House Children's preoccupation with fame.

As Dorian says, the Children walk the balls primarily "to achieve a small fame" and the kind of fame ball people are after is probably unique to twentieth-century America. The "Realness" that is part of ball competition is not limited to the ball world. Most Americans who are barraged by magazine and television and movie images, strive for Realness in one way or another. What woman can look at Vogue models and not feel a bit of envy--or defiance, that this image of womanhood is foisted on her? What man can look at the moguls on "Dynasty" and not wonder what his life would be like if he had inherited millions? Advertising is designed to make middle class people feel they're not sexy enough, rich enough or beautiful enough, by compelling them to buy the things that will make them sexy, rich and beautiful.

If this is true for the middle class, then to economically disadvantaged people who have little hope of acquiring the things they see on television every day, the realm of advertising and the media represents an entry into wholeness, into reality, into a place where they are no longer invisible Blacks, invisible Latinos, invisible gays, but, like the people on television and in magazines -- "Real".

Certainly the people I filmed worked with me in part because I represented a chance to speak out, to be in front of a camera, to show off. Still, I hope I represented more than just a running camera, but an opportunity to begin to erase that invisibility by speaking out. I consider "Paris is Burning" a collaboration on the deepest level. The people who we filmed are articulate, funny and poised; while the editor and I made coherent form of all that we shot, the documentary was truly written by the ball people themselves.

In 1985 I began work with the film's first co-producer Meg McLagan, who had been working in independent film in New York, and who thought as I did that a film must be made on the ball world. I still went to balls alone to photograph, but sometimes Meg would join me. We spent hours with Willi Ninja in particular, watching him practice dancing in the June Laberta

Studio in midtown with a dance group he'd formed called "Breed of Motion".

I sold my car--which I couldn't afford to insure anyway--and borrowed some money, and Meg produced a five-minute trailer which I directed. We shot the piece at the "Paris is Burning" ball, an annual event at the Elks' Lodge in Harlem, in February of 1986. With that trailer, I was able to get two grants totalling \$24,000, one from the New York State Council on the Arts, and one from Minnesota's Jerome Foundation. I shot more balls in 1987 with the grants and conducted over thirty hours of interviews on audio tape with Venus, Dorian, Willi, Junior and with other people in the ball world.

But these two grants would not be enough to cover the scope of people and situations I intended to include in the film. Finally, a public television station decided to co-produce "Paris". Between late July and late September of 1987, I hit the streets with cinematographer Paul Gibson, co-producer Claire Goodman, production manager Natalie Hill, various sound and assistant camera people and several unpaid production assistants. The filming process was completely unpredictable, and never easy (drag queens are not known for their punctuality) and we could offer the people who spoke to us--many of whom worked at very unconventional jobs--little more than the outlet of speaking to our camera.

At festivals and colleges, I have often been asked what it was like as a white woman entering this world. Well, after seeing me at balls, after inviting me into their homes between 1985 and 1987 when we began to film, the ball people saw me less as "that white girl Jennie" than as just plain "Jennie" or in the ball lingo "Miss Jennie". I'm not Black and I'm not male, but even if I looked the part, I'm not nearly witty or stylish enough to pass as a Black queen! This subculture, created by people who are cast out because of sex, color, and class was not about to turn me out because of who I was.

My strangest experiences were not when I was actually at the balls, but in places where people didn't know what to make of me; walking to the subway in a run-down section of Harlem on my way back from an audio interview, a Black man looked me up and down, took note of my class and my age and my sex and said "Are you for real?" meaning people like me didn't walk around in his neighborhood. At "Sally's Hideaway", a bar where Dorian performs, a drag queen looked at my close-fitting striped leggings and long over-shirt and said "You're good, Honey"--meaning I looked like a real girl. Walking into the sunlight out of an all-night ball, I would frequently look at men or women, and wonder, are they real? What is a real woman or a real man? Were we all just playing at gender?

I talked to scholars like Esther Newton, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Vito Russo, among others, who all rounded out my

sense of how gay culture collides with straight, Black with white, subculture with culture-at-large. The ball world was not the first time that Blacks, Latinos, gays and poor people had formed an island against a world that oppresses or ignores them.

I learned that many of the moves of Voguing originate from centuries-old African dance; the back-and-forth insults ("Reading" "throwing Shade") come directly out of an African and Afro-American sensibility of the verbally eloquent insult; while "camp", an ironic stance--both visual and verbal--is as old as gay culture itself. Although little of this historical information finds its way directly into "Paris is Burning", I think that it was essential that I understood what I was seeing in a cultural and historical context before I sought to condense it all into less than eighty minutes. And a few scenes in the film arise directly from this research: Junior made his moving "This is White America!" speech in the course of a conversation he and I had about Malcolm X and his idea of "white devils".

If I could have done anything differently, I would film more intimate scenes of people's lives, of people talking to their parents, of House members talking to their House Mothers and to each other. But, stuck with time limitations and trying to give a broad view of the House world, I took the more direct route--the interview. If there had been more verite, more outright dramatic conflict, "Paris is Burning" might have been a different film, though I don't think that it would have been better.

Ultimately what's strong about "Paris is Burning" is what people have to say for themselves. Although the film has its explanatory moments, and its moments of spectacle, it's always the insights and intellect of the ball people themselves that's truly on parade. We worked hard not to turn ball people into anthropological "subjects", and we strove to avoid voyeurism masquerading as "dramatic conflict".

Frequently the crew and I would work late into the night; once, as we were filming at Dorian's apartment in Harlem, a gun battle erupted on the corner where our van, along with some of the crew, was parked; luckily no one was hurt, but the sound person quit. Since I was following several people, and their schedules always changed, it was impossible to make up a definite shooting schedule; it was always hard to decide whom to film on any given day. Sometimes we would make an appointment with someone, and then that person wouldn't be there. Other days we'd just hang out on the Christopher Street pier and wait for someone we knew to show up. Although most of the people I interviewed I knew from my two years of research, one night we spent in Times Square with Carmen and Brooke, we met two of my favorite people in the film, the teenage boys who have the film's last word.

When the shooting was done--all seventy hours of it---there was little money left from the public television co-production to edit the film. Small grants came in--between \$2,500 and \$6,000--

from organizations like Art Matters, Inc., the Edelman Fund, the Paul Robeson Fund and the New York Foundation for the Arts. I was grateful for these grants, but they were barely enough to cover equipment rental and to pay Kate Davis, the editor. As most documentary filmmakers will tell you, there is currently no structure in America which funds whole films. Filmmakers get a little money from here, a little money from there, and in the process waste time--and frequently, money. This is particularly true when films are political, or when they are about current--and not historical--events. We stopped work in January of 1988, but in May, two private contributions came in and the editing resumed, this time with editor Jonathan Oppenheim who had edited the original five-minute trailer. We worked for a time, and then again ran out of money at the end of 1988.

Late in 1988 I began to work with another co-producer, Barry Swimar, a photographer I knew from Yale. We filed (the second of two) NEA applications, and we wrote to David Byrne of Talking Heads. Byrne referred us to Nigel Finch of the BBC, who runs a weekly documentary program called "Arena". On a trip to New York, Mr. Finch saw our material and expressed interest. As checks began to come in from the NEA, Helms began his rant against Mapplethorpe and against the NEA. We prayed, yes Jessie, we prayed that no one in the far right would find out that the NEA funded our film about minority drag queens! We were lucky, as not only did Jessie not find out, but in August of 1989, the BBC came through with a co-production, enough money to actually finish the film! I still think it's ironic that we finally completed the project with British and not American money. Sadly, the United Kingdom, which has a smaller population and far less media money than does the United States, funds far more experimental, political and gay projects.

We resumed cutting in August, 1989. In editing, whole character portraits ended up on the cutting room floor. We had hours of footage of Carmen and Brooke (the girls on the beach) that didn't make 'it in, and hours of scenes of characters that aren't in the film at all. But I'm not sorry I shot all this extra stuff because I believe that when you shoot, you can't know what you're getting or how it will fit into an eventual structure. When I filmed Dorian and Pepper in their homes, I had no idea how important these interviews would be to the film's structure. "Paris" is the first film of any length I've made, and I was lucky to work with an editor as sensitive, and simultaneously as brutal as Jonathan Oppenheim. He helped me to pare the film down to a piece that's both political and dramatic. Left to my own devices, I would have made a more rambling, arty, overtly political piece.

Jonathan and I, along with sound editor Stacy Thompson and co-producer Barry Swimar--who strove to maintain sanity in the cutting room--worked hard to finish a shorter version of "Paris is Burning" in time for an April 1990 broadcast on "Arena"--a very popular Friday night documentary show on BBC-2 (can you

Within the Black and Latino communities, there is much homophobia; I remember talking to a straight Puerto Rican man who asked why I wanted to "show the bad side of minority life". It never occurred to me that gay people make up the "bad side" of life; and clearly it's perverse to think that prejudiced white people will hate Puerto Ricans less if they think there are no gay Puerto Ricans; you can't stave off racism by adopting homophobia.

Similarly, the mainstream of the gay community is white, and would like to forget that minority gays exist, and drag queens-- forget it! There are gay community leaders who are so obsessed with presenting gay people as "normal" that they completely forget that the whole gay rights movement, officially initiated by the Stonewall riot, was brought about by a bunch of angry drag queens.

I was surprised when a gay funding organization, the Chicago Resource Center, whom many filmmakers and funding professionals thought might fund "Paris", rejected the film twice. I was more than surprised when the director of the organization would not return my phone calls, and when I finally got her on the phone, she told me not to bother to re-apply. When I asked her why, she said that the film "didn't meet the objectives of the organization". I can only assume this is some kind of euphemistic way of saying their organization doesn't want to support a project that makes gays look like drag queens, or makes it clear that not all gay people are white and middle class and gainfully employed. But perhaps I'm jumping to conclusions and they just didn't like the cinematography or the material itself. I'll never know.

One New York humanities funding organization said that our approach was "voyeuristic" because in their opinion not enough of the crew were Black and gay. I don't know why, because in the course of four years of production, both executive producers, and many of the crew were minorities or gay. And some were white, some were straight.

I believe that whether the film works or doesn't work is an issue quite separate from whether or not there are enough Black directors making films on Black subjects. There aren't, plain and simple; nor are there very many gay films at all, nor is the ratio of films telling stories with women characters at all matched by the number of women directors working. Fifty two percent of all humans are female, and what percentage of film directors? Movies are still directed and produced primarily by straight white men, and the world view we see in films reflects this lopsided state. Things are changing slowly, and I intend to be part of that change.

BIOGRAPHIES

JENNIE LIVINGSTON (Producer/Director) is currently working on four new film projects. One is a nineteenth-century circus script based on a true story; one is a comedy about fundraising, witchcraft and sexual assault, set in New York and staged in the wacky style of early Almadovar and early John Waters; one is a short film adapted from a short story by Deborah Eisenberg, and the other is a documentary project on yet another American subculture certain to be as difficult to fund as "PARIS IS BURNING". In the next year, Livingston hopes to complete one or more of these films, and to begin to make a living directing commercial film and video projects.

Jennie was born in 1962 and grew up in Los Angeles, daughter of children's book writer Myra Cohn Livingston and CPA Richard Livingston. In 1983 she graduated from Yale where her drawings and photographs earned her the Sudler Prize, given yearly to one graduating senior in the arts. With the prize money she toured the United States and Europe taking more pictures. Upon her return she was frustrated by the silence of the photographic medium and in May of 1985 she moved to New York to study film.

Since then she has worked as a photographer, studied film at the NYU summer program, worked on Laurie Anderson's film "HOME OF THE BRAVE" and assisted on Alan J. Pakula's feature "ORPHANS". She began work on "PARIS IS BURNING" during the summer of 1985 after she met some boys who were voguing in Washington Square Park.

"As a photographer I was obsessed by images that challenged conventional ideas about gender, race and class; I fell in love with the drag balls in Harlem because their participants played with many of these ideas; I didn't realize until I'd shot the film just how articulate and strong and creative the people in the ball world are. It's ironic that ball people recreate a society that hates them, but perhaps even more ironic that in the end, when Madonna made voguing such a big thing, society imitated the ball people! Ultimately for me, the strength and spirit of the House members far outstripped the pathos of trying to imitate a society that hates them, and that's what I was lucky to learn in directing the film."

BARRY SWIMAR (Co-producer) was born in New Haven, Connecticut; he grew up there and went to college in Boston and in San Francisco, at Harvard and San Francisco State. In school, he acted, directed and designed sets for theatre, and began to photograph, creating a series of portraits of teenage hustlers on San Francisco's Polk Street, which were exhibited at three San Francisco galleries.

Breaking his vow never to return to Connecticut, he left San Francisco to study with Tod Papageorge at the Yale Photography MFA program. While in New Haven he photographed people on the streets of New Haven and New York, influenced by photographers

like Diane Arbus, Robert Frank and Garry Winogrand.

After graduating from Yale, Swimar moved to New York and continued to photograph. In 1988, Swimar--who knew Jennie Livingston from Yale--became the third co-producer on "PARIS IS BURNING", working to raise post-production money at a time when there were no funds to edit. He and Livingston worked as co-producers from then on, and Livingston credits Swimar with "keeping everyone from killing everyone else" during the editing process.

Swimar confides that "Walking 'PARIS IS BURNING' was like making a tightrope." Swimar, previously unable to balance his checkbook, became a businessman during the making of "PARIS IS BURNING", shocking himself and those close to him.

He has a documentary about countertenors up his sleeve and is currently collaborating with playwright Paul Minx on a melodrama for the screen. Swimar and Livingston share more than a producing partnership; they co-parent two dogs, Molly and Lulu, whom Swimar rescued from the ASPCA. Swimar also owns three birds. An avid reader, he has felt a lifetime compulsion to decide between Tolstoy and Dostoevsky.

JONATHAN OPPENHEIM (Editor) was raised in a family of actors, writers and musicians. Before coming to film, he was a serious student of painting. He feels that his years as a painter, as well as his family background have been significant for his work as an editor.

"Documentary film is a visual and musical medium which must be structured to tell a story," Oppenheim says. "The various influences in my life helped me to think on the different levels necessary to edit film." He has worked in features and television on such projects as "STREETWISE", "A MATTER OF TRUST: BILLY JOEL AND THE U.S.S.R.", "ARTHUR", "THE MUPPETS TAKE MANHATTAN", "OMNI" and "THE WORLD OF MOTHER THERESA".

"The thing that was always in front of me while I worked on this film was the way that these ball people, through their need, were transforming some of the dearest and deadliest aspects of our culture into something alive and sustaining for themselves. The challenge was to weave a context that reflected the political realities of their lives while keeping the focus on this aliveness."

Future projects include making a film about the poet Frank O'Hara and continuing to edit documentary and dramatic films.

PAUL GIBSON (Director of Photography) went to NYU graduate film school. He has shot numerous documentary and dramatic features, including "AS SEEN ON TV"--a PBS "Live from Off Center" production featuring performance artist Bill Irwin; "SWEET INSPIRATION"--an AFI-funded film about the gospel singer Cissy

Houston; Steve Ning's "FRECKLED RICE"--an AFI-funded feature and award-winner at the Mannheim Film Festival; "FALLEN ANGEL"--the story of Michael Milken for England's Channel Four; and "THE REFRIGERATOR"--a soon-to-be-released black comedy feature directed by Tony Jacobs.

"Working on "PARIS" made me much more confident of the handheld camera, of its unique ability to respond gracefully to the nuances of any situation. I liked the vibrancy and humor and honesty of the ball world, the way the ball people grab onto whatever part of life they can."

CLAIRE GOODMAN (Associate Producer) has produced numerous radio and television shows for the BBC and for Channel 4 in England, including "TSIAMELO--A PLACE OF GOODNESS", "THE TIME OF YOUR LIFE", "STREET EVANGELISTS" and "BEATLEMANIA". She has lived and worked in New York for six years.

MEG McLAGAN (Associate Producer) is currently working toward her doctorate in the Ethnographic Film and Video Program at New York University's Department of Anthropology. She is currently directing a video project on three Tibetan monks in New York.

NIGEL FINCH (Executive Producer) produced the TV version of "PARIS IS BURNING" for the BBC Television show "ARENA". He has directed ARENA segments about Robert Mapplethorpe, Graham Greene and Kenneth Anger.

DAVIS LACY (Executive Producer) worked for PBS for several years and recently produced the award-winning documentary series "EYES ON THE PRIZE II".

GLOSSARY OF VOGUING TERMINOLOGY

BALL - A type of fashion show originating in Harlem, where minority men and women compete for trophies in a variety of categories.

BANGEE - A street-tough or thug; in ball terminology, a category for competition, as "Bangee Boy Realness".

BUTCH QUEEN - A masculine gay man; in ball terminology, a man who competes in men's clothing.

BUTCH QUEEN, FIRST TIME IN DRAGS AT A BALL - The one cross-over category between Butch Queen and Femme Queen; younger ball-walkers who dress in women's clothes for the first time, primarily for fun; as opposed to Real Femme Queens for whom wearing a dress is no joke.

CATEGORY - The divisions of competition at a ball; categories for both Butch Queens and Femme Queens include: Sportswear, Eveningwear, Schoolboy/Schoolgirl Realness, Executive Realness and Military Realness; other categories include Muscular Body (Butch Queens only) Luscious Body and Model-type Body (Femme Queens only) Best Dressed Butch (for masculine lesbians) and Best Dressed Woman (for feminine women, gay or straight).

CHILDREN - The younger ball-walkers, or members of a House.

EXECUTIVE REALNESS - Category in which walkers wear business suits, carry briefcases and copies of The Wall Street Journal. Detail is important: briefcases may contain real plane tickets and charge cards.

FEMME QUEEN - In ball terminology, a man who competes in women's clothing. Often these men dress as women in their daily lives. Breast implants are not uncommon.

HOUSE - An organization of ball-walkers, a gay street gang. Houses can be named after a designer, as in House of Chanel; after a House founder or Mother, as in House of Labeija; or simply for impact, as in House of Ninja. Houses provide support for the ball-walkers in preparing for competition, and serve as surrogate families for younger members who are orphaned or rejected by their families.

LEGENDARY - Noteworthy in the ball world, winner of many trophies, as "The Legendary Dorian Corey" or "Pepper Labeija, Legendary Mother of the House of Labeija".

LUSCIOUS BODY - A category for fat, curvaceous, sexy Femme Queens; also billed as "Femme Queen -- 300 Pounds and Over", proving that ball standards don't always adhere to conventional ideals of feminine beauty.

MOPPING - Stealing or pilfering; what one does when one is a dirt-poor Black drag queen, with little chance of advancement on the economic and social ladder, who must have a three thousand dollar designer gown for the ball.

MOTHER - A leader, often founder of a House, either Butch or Femme Queens. Mothers must be very talented, popular, hard-working and wise and compassionate. A Mother acts as surrogate parent to her Children both in and out of competition.

PIG LATIN - In ball terminology, a variation on traditional Pig Latin with "ug" or "ugga" replacing the "ay" sound.

READING - The act of verbally abusing, criticizing and humiliating a competitor or rival in a witty and stylish manner; having a "reading session".

REALNESS - In ball categories, the ability to pass as something you are not, as in poor for rich, male for female, gay for straight. In life, Realness can be a matter of survival, as passing for straight to avoid homophobic violence.

SHADE - Verbal abuse, criticism and humiliation of a competitor or rival in vicious, direct terms, also "throwing shade".

TOWN AND COUNTRY - A ball category in which competitors pass as Real Polo players, debutantes etc., named for the magazine.

VOGUING - A ball category in which dancers recreate the poses of models, integrating acrobatic moves and complex expressive gestures. Also named for the magazine.

WALK - In ball terminology, to compete, as to "walk a ball". Walking the balls is to House Children what street fighting is to gangs.

WORK' - In ball terminology, a term of encouragement shouted during competition, as "Work, Miss Pepper, work!"