



T: ÁNGEL PLANA

DAN NICOLETTA

Synchronicity

¿Nunca os ha ocurrido que estáis todo el día pensando en alguien que hace tiempo que no veis y justamente os lo encontráis por la calle? ¿O querer cambiar de trabajo y casualmente conocer a alguien que os puede ayudar? ¿Quizá habéis notado incluso que en alguna ocasión una canción que ya conocíais parece en ese momento que os hable y os indique qué debéis hacer? Pequeños guiños que el universo nos va brindando a lo largo de la vida y que muchos atribuyen a la forma que tiene de comunicarse con nosotros. Él nos los presenta y nosotros debemos ser capaces de descifrarlos. Dan Nicoletta ha sabido desarrollar las habilidades para encontrar esos momentos que para la mayoría de los mortales pasan desapercibidos o los denominan casualidad, destilándolos en su vida y en su arte. Un estilo, el suyo, basado en la espontaneidad y naturalidad de sus fotografías que realiza como si de un diario personal se tratasen. Un registro visual para evocar el sentimiento que le asaltó en el momento de disparar. Por ello, a diferencia del resto, cuando las revisa, sabe encontrarles el sentido, el por qué, la diferencia que las hace tan especiales. La vida le brinda momentos mágicos y él sabe apreciarlos. Para nuestro disfrute, además, es capaz de captarlos. Charlamos con él en el marco de la inauguración de su primera exposición en España (concretamente en Madrid) de la mano de Levi's celebrando los 40 años de lucha LGBTQ. Nadie mejor para dar el pistoletazo de salida a las festividades del World Pride que todo un testigo, y en cierta manera, un voyeur a través de su cámara, de uno de los mayores movimientos sociales de nuestro tiempo.

It has never happened to you that you spend the whole day thinking about someone you haven't seen for a while, and suddenly you ran into him or her on the street? Or wanting to change your job and suddenly meeting someone that can help you? Maybe you noticed a song you already knew, but this time is telling you exactly what to do? Small winks the universe is giving us, throughout our life, cues. It sets them forth and we have to decipher. Dan Nicoletta has learned to develop the required abilities to find those moments that for most of us, mere mortals, pass by unperceived, or are simply catalogued as random, ignoring them. His style is based upon spontaneity and naturalness; his photographs are like a personal diary. A visual archive that evokes the emotions he felt when he captured each picture. That's why, unlike most people, when he goes through them, he finds sense in what he is seeing, making them so special. Life offers magic moments, and he knows how to appreciate them. Luckily for us, he can capture them as well. We talked with him during the opening of his first exhibition in Spain, in Madrid, thanks to Levi's, celebrating the 40 years fighting for the rights of the LGBTQ community. No one better than him to start with all of the activities organized for the World Pride: a witness, a voyeur, using

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Hola Dan. Antes de nada, me gustaría empezar con una anécdota de algo que me pasó hace unos días cuando vine a ver la exposición. Una pareja gay estaba mirando las imágenes, y me pidieron que les hiciera una foto, justo delante de una en la que se veía a un chico enseñando el pene. Los dos se pusieron en lados opuestos de la foto y me pidieron que me asegurase de que saliera el pene, como si fuera algo divertido. ¿Qué piensas de esto? El mundo entero está ahora bailando y celebrando el Orgullo, pero ¿hasta qué punto se ha convertido en una marca y la gente se une solo por la fiesta y la parte divertida y no por el movimiento social detrás? Hemos incluido imaginario explícito porque mucha gente olvida el componente de lucha social y no puede ser anulado, forma parte de nuestra identidad sexual. Hay muy pocas cosas explícitas en este libro, pero sí puedes hacerte una idea en términos generales de lo que forma parte de nuestra identidad como movimiento, como la cultura del cuero. Sin el aspecto sexual, no se hubiera convertido en un movimiento, nuestro movimiento.

Sin embargo, ¿opinas que esta generación no sale a la calle para luchar por el cambio o no valoran que viven el fruto de la lucha de los que vinieron antes que ellos? Creo que hay un momento para todo y la historia evoluciona de manera orgánica. Por supuesto prefiero que la gente luche por lo que cree de forma alternativa y pública. Pero por otro lado, yo también defiendi mi derecho a no pronunciarme, por lo que nunca le diría a alguien, “eh, tienes que estar más involucrado en política”, sería una contradicción. Pero tengo la esperanza de que la gente se implique más y que se den cuenta y valoren el hecho de que disfrutan de ciertos derechos gracias a que algunos se han movido para conseguirlos transformando la sociedad.

¿Cuál crees que ha sido la gran victoria del movimiento LGTB durante estos últimos años? La mayor victoria ha sido, por supuesto, el derecho al matrimonio. No digo que será lo más importante para mí, pero creo que sí lo es a una escala social más grande. Se trata de condición humana, de igualdad, de encontrar un espacio a salvo para que la comunidad LGTB viva su vida con libertad y a su manera. Adoptar es el siguiente paso.

En tu opinión, ¿cómo hemos cambiado como sociedad desde los 70s cuando empezaste a ser testimonio de todo este movimiento? ¿Vamos en la dirección correcta? La verdad es que sí. Nunca hubiera dicho que viviría para ver lo mucho que hemos progresado. Soy afortunado porque puedo comparar y valorar la mejora. La comunidad LGTB de hoy en día no lo ha vivido y no saben lo que fue. Vale, lo pueden leer en libros e intentar hacerse una idea, pero si no lo has sentido en tu piel, no puedes saber lo difícil que fue y todo el trabajo duro que se ha hecho hasta ahora. Por eso, espero que pasen a la acción por lo que defienden. Como decía Grace Paley, “la única característica reconocible de la esperanza es la acción”. Es decir, puedes tener esperanza en mejorar pero hasta que no pasas a la acción esa esperanza no te lleva a nada.

¿Así que el siguiente paso para la comunidad LGTB es pasar más a la acción? Sí, tener una fiesta propia está bien, pero también tienes que involucrarte en el sector sin ánimo de lucro. Hacer algo con tu vida que sea contributivo a la comunidad.

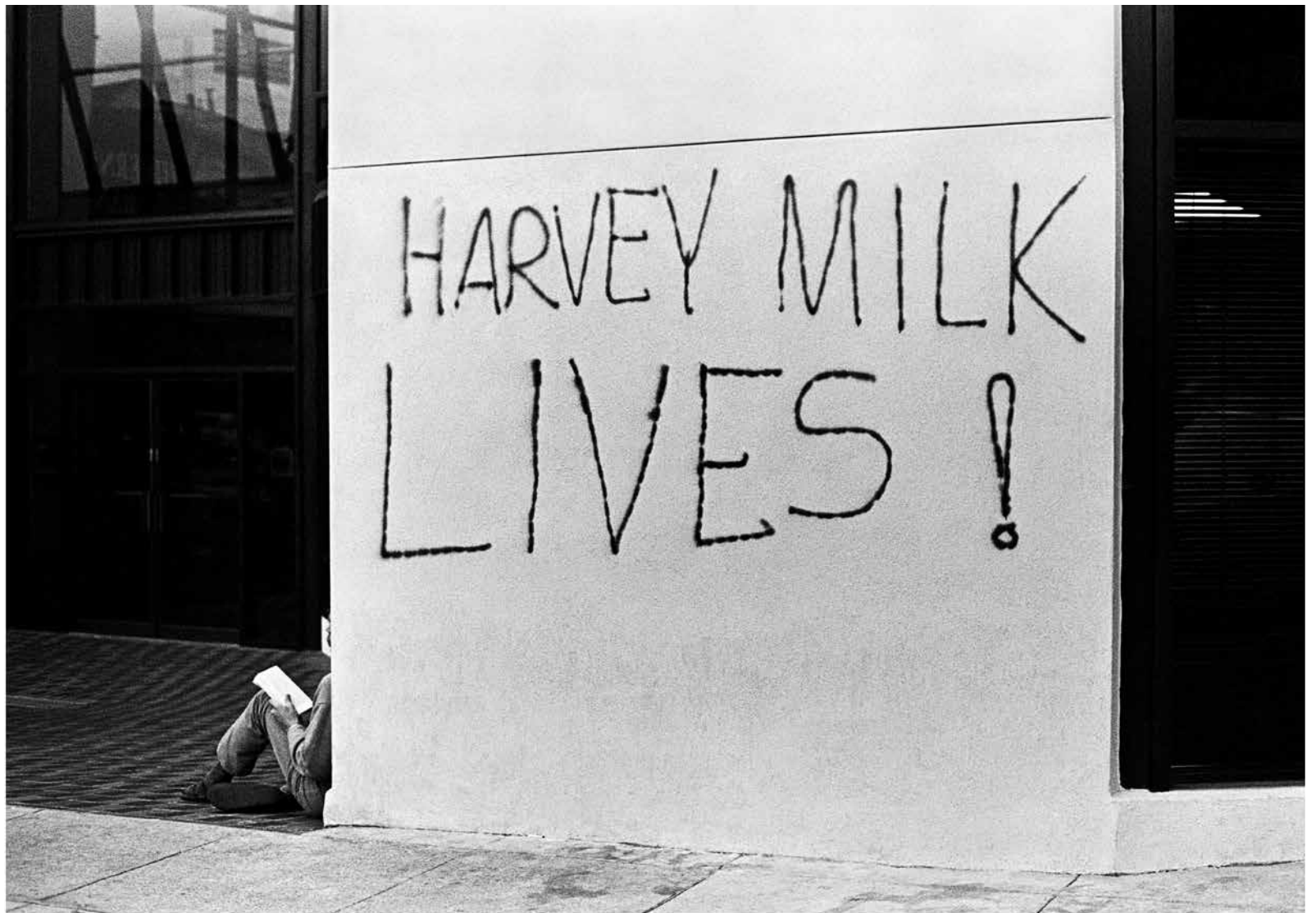
“ **PUEDES TENER ESPERANZA EN MEJORAR PERO HASTA QUE NO PASAS A LA ACCIÓN ESA ESPERANZA NO TE LLEVA A NADA.**”

Y si hablamos de ti como fotógrafo, ¿cuál es tu siguiente paso? Quiero hacer más libros. Quiero recopilar todo mi trabajo de estudio antes de morir. Si lo consigo, tendré 12 años de fotos de la comunidad LGTB que ha pasado por mi estudio, todo un documento histórico. Pero antes, quiero hacer un libro con la gente de la comunidad que fotografió en Oregon (donde vivo), por ejemplo. Lo que me gusta de los libros es que tienen una dimensión democrática y para mí es la mejor manera de dejar huella en la humanidad.

En estos 40 años, ¿cuál es la situación más increíble o inolvidable que has capturado, más allá de Harvey Milk? Tiene que ser Harvey Milk. ¿Otro más allá? Una de las tesis fotográficas que hice retratando a un grupo de teatro llamado “Ángeles de la Luz” que son ejemplo del género fluido, y de hecho son así mucho antes de que se popularizase el concepto.

A principios de los 90s, abriste tu propio estudio y empezaste a fotografiar a los miembros de la comunidad LGTB. ¿Cómo fue para ti el paso de la fotografía documental al contexto de estudio? Fue genial porque siempre tuve el sueño de tener mi propio estudio y que toda la comunidad LGTB pasara por ahí, una persona tras otra. Creo que ha sido bastante consensuado: ellos también querían venir y sentarse ante mi objetivo. Son gente maravillosa. Así que el estudio en sí se convirtió en una subcomunidad y era genial. Entonces, tuve que cerrarlo por otras razones y fue cuando me sentí completo. Era el cierre natural a una época, y no he vuelto a fotografiar así más.

Gus Van Sant dijo sobre tu trabajo: “las fotografías de Dan han sido un medio vital para la creación de Milk [nota del redactor: la película protagonizada por Sean Penn] porque eran ejemplos de gente real y lugares que existieron en la vida de Harvey, y eso ha influido en nuestra visión de mil maneras”, ¿Qué sientes cuando te das cuenta de que tu trabajo ha sido tan importante para la memoria colectiva general? Me siento genial, claro. Creo que mi trabajo materializa lo que la gente se imagina sobre esa época y siento mucho afecto por eso. Siempre he creído que estaba haciendo algo valioso pero cuando obtienes la validación externa, es una sensación tremenda. Es abrumador pensar que sí, que esto significa algo grande. Era lo que tenía que hacer, mi propósito en la vida.



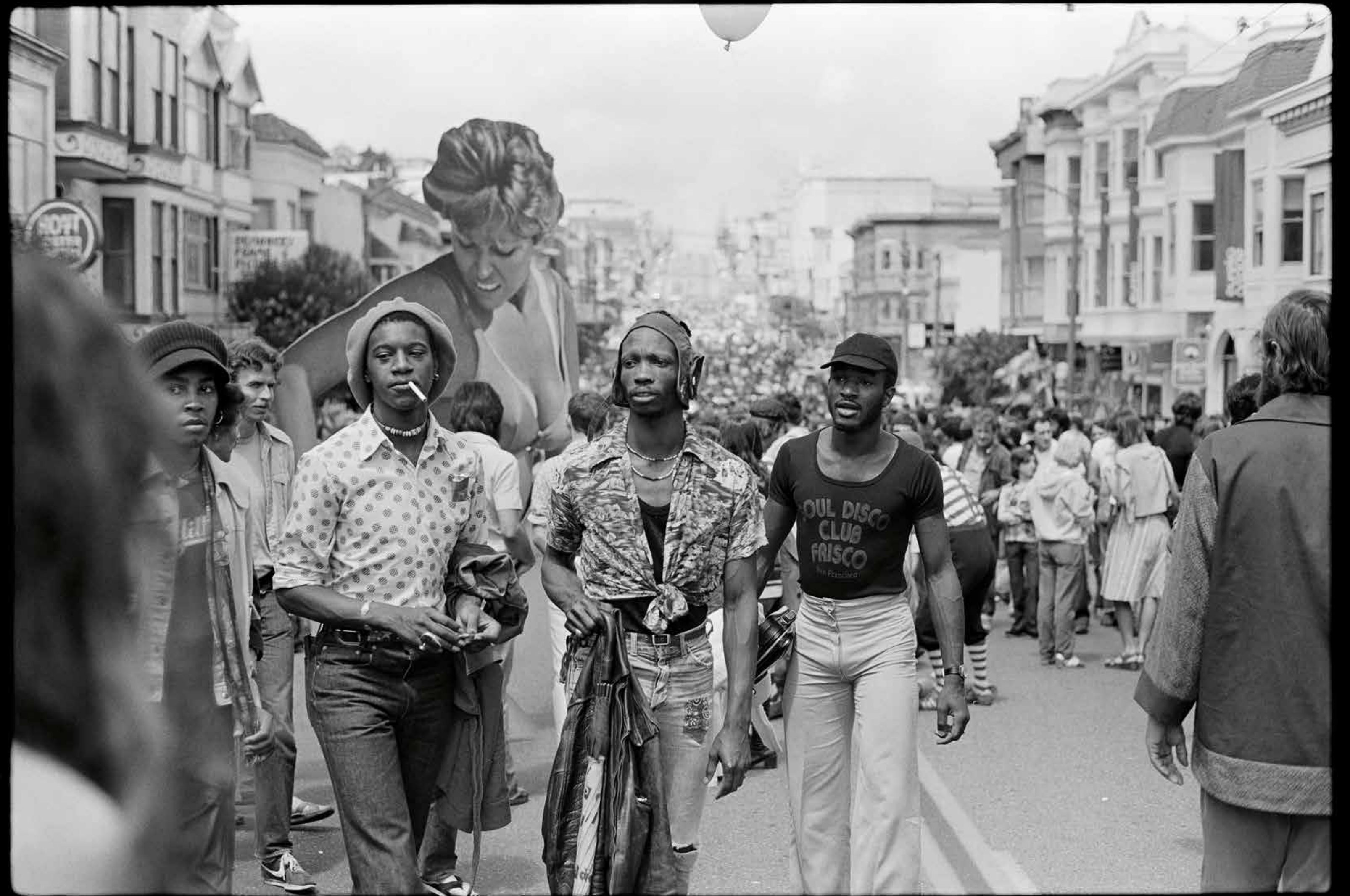
Vamos a hablar un poco de Harvey, es inevitable hacerlo. Él cambió tu vida pero conocerte también cambió la suya. Lo hiciste icónico gracias a tus fotos. Sin ellas, probablemente no le recordaríamos de la misma forma. ¿Qué le hacía tan especial? Él se formó como profesor en la Albany State Teacher’s College, por eso era muy perceptivo, estaba cómodo en ese rol. Y cruzármelo en mi camino, cuando era muy joven y afrontando el hecho de ser gay, fue todo un golpe de suerte. Él y su pareja, Scott, se convirtieron en hermanos mayores para mí. Harvey entendió esa conexión que teníamos y me enseñó mucho sobre creer en la visibilidad y la libertad. Entendió que la fotografía era una gran herramienta para conseguirlo, por eso no solo me tenía a mí como fotógrafo, tenía 4 o 5 aliados muy cerca que lo eran, muchos de los cuales hoy en día ya no están con nosotros. Mi profesor, Crawford Barton fue uno de ellos, y fue importante porque trabajaba para el mayor periódico gay de la época, The Advocate. Scott y Harvey consiguieron que fuera su asistente de laboratorio en su estudio. Scott y Harvey tenían visión, ellos entendieron que solo algunos de nosotros íbamos a sobrevivir y que íbamos a transmitir el mensaje. Sin darse cuenta de lo que iba a venir después, supieron que eso era un detalle esencial: que todos lo compartiéramos todo.

¿Cuál es la mayor lección de vida que has aprendido de él y que aún continúa vigente en ti? Él quería conseguir un espacio seguro para que las personas pudieran vivir abiertamente el amor hacia su mismo sexo. Estaba indignado porque no podía vivir su pasión con normalidad. Era un hombre pasional, se emocionaba con el amor y siempre quería casarse con todos sus novios. Era muy fuerte y luchó

por lo que quería y creía. La mayor lección es: ¿cómo le vas a prohibir a alguien ser quien es?

Por supuesto, Harvey no fue la única persona que se ha dejado la vida por luchar por los derechos de la comunidad LGTB. ¿Qué otros casos extraordinarios recuerdas? También han habido mujeres que se han dejado la vida por luchar contra la homophobia. Por ejemplo Del Martin, que murió con 90 años hace poco. Ella y su pareja, Phyllis Lyon estuvieron al frente de una organización que luchaba por los derechos no solo de las lesbianas, sino de la mujer. Siempre luchó por tener el derecho a casarse, y un año antes de morir lo hizo en San Francisco, en silla de ruedas y todo, y fue todo un acontecimiento. Si Harvey es el padre del movimiento, ella definitivamente es la madre.

Tu trabajo como activista es increíble también. ¿Qué le dirías a alguien que tiene miedo de salir del armario y no puede ser libre de ser quién es? Le diría que su seguridad e integridad es lo primero. Que no tiene por qué buscar visibilidad si eso le va a causar una amenaza a su integridad física. Que tenga fe porque la vida le llevará por el camino adecuado en el que sea seguro para salir y ser visible. Este es nuestro principal objetivo: preservar tu seguridad. Si en un momento se ve amenazada, más tarde podrás disfrutar de tu identidad plenamente. Si sientes que no puedes más y quieres rendirte, por favor, no cometas una locura. Tendrás lo que buscas en algún momento, eso te lo puedo prometer. Solo tienes que ser paciente y cuidar de ti mismo, ponerte a salvo.



Hello Dan. First of all I would like to start with an anecdote that happened to me few days ago, when I first came to see the exhibition. A gay couple was standing there, watching your exhibition and they asked me to take them a picture, just right in front the one with a guy showing his penis. They both stood at the sides and they told me to make sure that the penis appeared. What do you think about this? The whole world is dancing, and partying, and celebrating the World Pride. But, until what point has it become a trademark and some people are only joining to live the festive part of it, but do not support the social movement behind? We included explicit imagery because a lot of time people forget about the social component, and that's not right, since it includes our sexual identity. I think we added a few explicit images on book, but it helps to give an idea about of the LGBT civil rights movement, we must never negate our sexual identity, and that includes the leather culture. Without the sexual aspect it wouldn't have become a movement, our movement.

Somehow you can see that our generation don't fight hard enough or just enjoys of the fruits of the fights of previous generations? I think there's a place for everything, and I prefer it when people are more underground and taking action, and less involved in the rite of passage through hedonism. But in the other hand I had my rite of passage through hedonism, so I would never say to somebody, "no, you should be more political". That's counterproductive. So I think that sometimes people will take longer with their rite of passage into and through hedonism, and hopefully they'll eventually realize that the reason they have this, is because people underground are doing a transformation of society. It's one of those things that some people will never get. We don't expect them to, because 30% of us prefer to just not try to convince them to.

30%? 30%. You know, there was a great LGBT elder called Harry Hay, and he was actually in the first homophile movement in the 1950's. He formed this thing called the Mattachine Society, which ran for so long. They had a group and they were very secretive because their lives will be ruined. He was very prescriptive in his speech, he liked to lecture young gay people, and he looked at me very seriously and said: "You will be part of the 30% that carries the way of the other 70%". He literally said that, to the word. And I sat there with chills down my spine. I was like: "Oh my god!" And he said: "You will do it and you must do it". I think he was talking about gay men versus lesbians, because the lesbians don't have this problem. But I think what it came to was: I had my party, I moved through it, and it almost destroyed me (laughs), but I don't really expect people to change their trajectories, I think it's fine.

Which do you think has been the greatest victory of the LGBT movement during these years? The greatest victory is, of course, marriage equality. Which is not to say that I think that it's important to me personally, but I think in the social fabric of the larger human condition, it's something that people can measure more easily in terms with why we need equality, and why we need a safer space for LGTB people. Somehow the family being able to adopt children and all those things get rolled into it: "Oh ok, of course they should have equality", you know?

In your opinion, how have we changed, as society, since the '70s, when you started to document everything? Are we going in the right direction? Yeah, yeah, I mean, I never dreamed that I would live

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to see the progress that I've seen. So I have the luxury of being able to compare. Today's LGTB people don't really have that luxury, to know what it was like. I mean, sure, they can look at history books and put it together, but I think when you actually organically have been through the harder times, you really appreciate the advances and the hard work that has been accomplished. And I do know that there's a big fight ahead. So I hope that they take action. It's a very simple detail. I think Grace Paley said: "The only recognizable feature of hope is action". So that you might be hopeful, but you won't necessarily manifest the reality of what you hope for, until you take action.

So that's the next step for the LGBT community to take? More action? Yeah, yeah, to have your party, but then also be involved in the non-profit sector. Like do something with your life that is contributive.

And for you, as a photographer, what's your next step? I want to do more books; I want to do a book of all my studio work before I die. That's already in the pipeline. If this book is successful, I'll get a 12-year documentation of the LGBT people in the studio context. We are going to do that book next and we are going to do a couple other theme-specific books. I'd like to do one on the queers that I'm photographing now where I live, in Oregon. So many books. The thing is, books have a sort of democratic dimension and for me that's a way to leave a mark on the cave wall of humanity. That's how I will spend the rest of my years, I don't need to be in demonstrations anymore, I had 40 years... You guys do! (Laughs)

In these 40 years, tell us the most unforgettable situation or person that you had captured (besides Harvey). It has to be Harvey Milk. Another? Another would be one of my thesis subjects, my body of work was the theater group called "The Angels of Light", which is sort of gender fluid... they had the gender fluid idea long before it was popularized; in the book and in the show there are some pictures of them...

In early '90s you opened your own photo studio and started to take pictures of the members of the LGTB community. How was



the change from documental photography on the streets to the studio context? It was great because I always had the dream of having a studio, and then to be able to have the queer community sort-of march through. It was very consensual, they wanted to come and sit for me. It was amazing people. So the studio in itself was like a very small-big community center, and that was very exciting. Then I lost the lease and that is when I kind of felt... I felt complete. Like I didn't have to do studio work anymore. I had fulfilled that dream. That book would be sort of ended by the fact that I stopped doing it that way.

Gus Van Sant said about your work: "Danny's photographs were a vital resource for the formation of Milk (the movie). They were examples of the real people and places that influenced our vision for the film in innumerable ways". What do you feel when you realize that your work is so important for the collective historical memory? I feel great. I feel like the work really captures people's imaginations and I get lots of love. I think I'm doing something right because I would do it anyway, but I think when you have the validation coming from your peers... it's a tremendous feeling. It feels like: "Oh, this really means something". It's what I have to do, my purpose.

Let's talk a bit about Harvey. I think it's inevitable to do it. Harvey changed your life, but you also changed his, you made him iconic thanks to your pictures. Without them, probably nobody would remember him the way they do now. What made him so special? Well, he was trained as a teacher. He went to Albany State Teacher's College and so he was naturally prescriptive. He really enjoyed that role. I think for me as a young gay person, also one who was tempered about being gay, this was a stroke of luck, that couple, Scott and Harvey, they became like gay big brothers to me. So I think that Harvey understood that connection and he loved enrolling people in the idea of visibility and freedom. I think he understood that photography was a great tool for this because he didn't just have me as his photographer. He actually had three or four different very close allies, many who are gone now... My teacher Crawford Barton was a very significant photographer during the time, because he worked for the biggest gay paper at the time,

called "The Advocate". Harvey and Scott arranged for me to end up being the lab intern in Crawford's studio. Both of them, Harvey and Scott, they predicted that some of us would survive and then some of us would carry the message forward. They very much, without knowing how big it would get, knew that was an essential detail.

Was Harvey the only one who could see that? (Yeah) At the time, the idea that an elected official could be openly gay was new, so I think he understood that he need it that sort of visibility to foster that idea. He played the media like a harp. It wasn't just entirely based productivity when he interfaced with the press world, he enjoyed the engagement, he enjoyed capturing their imagination. You can see it in the photos of him and when he would do interviews, he was very jocular about it, he always liked to bring fun into the formula and he made it fun for them. I mean, I keep on meeting in the press who are still working, that they worked with Harvey and they say it was one of the best experiences they've had, because he was funny, you know.

Which of his life lessons are still valid for today that you will never forget? I think that he really wanted to create a safe space for same sex-love. I think that a lot of people don't understand that, all the coalition building that he did was really informed by his indignation about the fact that in society, back then, when he was a young man, was completely against the ability to have same sex-love. He was very passionate about his romances. He almost, inevitably, always wanted to marry the person that he was romantically involved. He literally had that in mind, he wanted same sex marriage. He actually proposed it even before, you know, society said, "yes, you can do that". He was incredibly strong. He just loved the company of men; you can see pictures of him; there's one in here. That's the lesson: "how dare you not allow this?" That was kind of one of his primary goals.

For sure, Harvey was not the only one to die fighting for the LGBT rights, who else do you remember? There were also women who were at the forefront of the homophile movement, and one of them passed away few years ago. She was 90, and her name was Del Martin and she was part of a couple. There was Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin, and they formed the first homophile-lesbian organization, called "Daughters of Bilitis". They also were at the forefront of women's health issues, and they were at the forefront of marriage equality. Right before she died, she got to be married at the mayor's office in San Francisco, right at the point where the supreme court in California said: "No, you cannot take this away from us". It was amazing for her, she was in a wheel chair and the community that she had built was there in support of her marriage, and people were throwing rose petals, it was crazy. The best chef in the city was also lesbian and made their wedding cake, and it was this entire amazing thing. Then a year later she was gone. There is many actually... She is the mother. If Harvey is the father, she is the mother.

Your work as an activist is amazing too. What would you say to someone who is afraid to come out and be free as he or she is? I would say your personal safety must come first. That you shouldn't necessarily come out if it would cause harm to you physically. You might have to be faithful that at some point your life will change where it will be safe for you to come out. That would be a primary goal. Is number one: preserve your safety, so that later in life you will have the reaches of the full experience of your forming identity. If you feel like it's a lost cause, and then you might want to give up, please, do not kill yourself, you will have the full expression of your identity in time. You just have to be patient and stay safe.