

**The New York Public Library  
Manuscripts and Archives Division**

**Arnie Kantrowitz  
Papers, 1958-1995**

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## Summary

**Title:** Arnie Kantrowitz Papers, 1958-1995

**Size:** 14 linear feet  
(29 AB, 4 FB, 3 file boxes)

**Restrictions:** A few incoming letters have been closed until 2056 to protect the privacy of the correspondent. These items have been replaced by photocopies of the original letters with the correspondent's name removed.

**Source:** Gift of Arnie Kantrowitz, 1996

**Biographical Note:** Writer, gay rights activist, and professor of English at the College of Staten Island, City University of New York. Officer of the Gay Activists Alliance (1970), Christopher Street Liberation Day Committee (1976) and cofounder of the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (1985), Kantrowitz is the author of the memoir *Under the Rainbow: Growing Up Gay* (1977) and many essays in the gay press.

**Description:** Personal papers and organizational records chiefly concerning Kantrowitz's activities as a writer and gay rights activist, including correspondence from friends, fellow writers, and readers (1964-1995); diaries and notebooks (1960s-1986); records kept as secretary of the Gay Activists Alliance (1970), Christopher Street Liberation Day Committee (1976), and Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (1985); notes, drafts and manuscripts of his published and unpublished writing (1960s-1990s) and personal memorabilia.

**Related Collections:** Gay Activists Alliance Records ( in the International Gay Information Center Collection); Lawrence Mass Papers; Vito Russo Papers

**Special formats:** Photographs, drawings, audio- and videocassettes, buttons

## Biographical Sketch

Arnie Kantrowitz, writer, educator, and gay activist, was born in Newark, New Jersey in 1940. Having received a bachelor's degree from Rutgers in 1961 and a master's degree from New York University in 1963, he taught English at State University College at Cortlandt (New York) before accepting a position in the English Department at Staten Island Community College (now The College of Staten Island, City University of New York) in 1965.

After many years of struggle with his homosexuality, including psychotherapy and two suicide attempts, Kantrowitz came out in 1970 and quickly became active in the gay liberation movement in New York City. He joined the recently established Gay Activists Alliance (GAA), served as its secretary and, later, its vice-president. In addition to participating in GAA's non-violent protest "zaps," and speaking out for gay rights on national television, Kantrowitz also put his writing talent at the service of the movement. He contributed first to GAA's newsletter *Gay Activist* and then several other gay publications. By 1975 he had become a popular regular contributor to the *Advocate* and *Christopher Street*. Kantrowitz became known to an even wider audience when his autobiography, *Under the Rainbow: Growing Up Gay*, was published by William Morrow and Co. in 1977.

Kantrowitz has been an activist in the classroom for over twenty years. In order to present a positive role-model for gay students and increase the understanding of gay men and lesbians among all students, he made it a policy to formally discuss his homosexuality in each of his classes, and to invite responses from the students.

In 1985 Kantrowitz became a founding member and officer of the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD), an organization devoted to advancing fair and accurate portrayals of gay men and lesbians in the media. He has continued to write frequently about the gay experience for the gay and popular press, and his essays have been widely anthologized, most recently in *Personal Dispatches: Writers Respond to AIDS*, 1990; *Hometowns*, 1991, *Leatherfolk: Radical Sex, People, Politics, and Practice*, 1991; *A Member of the Family: Gay Men Write About Their Families*, 1992; *Friends and Lovers: Gay Men Write About the Families They Create*, 1995; and *Gay and Lesbian Literary Heritage*, 1995. He is also the author of *Walt Whitman*, a biography of the American poet written for the Chelsea House series *Lives of Notable Gay Men and Lesbians*.

Kantrowitz currently (1997) lives in New York City with his life partner, fellow writer and activist Lawrence D. Mass, MD, and is Associate Professor of English at The College of Staten Island.

## Scope and Content Note

The Kantrowitz Papers contain correspondence, diaries, professional and organizational files, published and unpublished writings, and audio and videotapes documenting his career as a writer, teacher, and gay activist. Much of the collection is composed of notes, drafts, and various states of his published and unpublished writing, including student essays, poetry, drafts of a novel about Walt Whitman, as well as copies of his published essays on aspects of the gay experience, 1970s-1990s, and his two full-length works, a biography of Walt Whitman and his autobiography, *Under the Rainbow*.

Gay activism is documented in records he kept as an officer and/or member of the Gay Activists Alliance, Gay Academic Union, Christopher Street Liberation Day Committee and the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, as well as audio and videotapes of his public appearances and GAA “zaps,” notebook and diary entries, buttons, and in clippings of interviews, news stories, and announcements of his public appearances. The responses to his classroom activism can be found in a folder of essays from his students marked “Student reactions to homosexual teacher.” His efforts on behalf of gay rights are also documented by the many letters to the editor written in response to news stories and public statements about gays.

The correspondence in the collection, chiefly incoming letters, highlights his friendships and collegial relations with fellow writers and former students. Included are letters from such prominent gay and lesbian literary figures as John Preston, George Heymont, Douglas Sadownick, Rita Mae Brown, and most notably, his close friend, Vito Russo. There are also numerous letters from his readers among the general public expressing their appreciation for his work, and relating details of their own lives and struggles as gay men.

The collection also contains numerous pocket notebooks, travel diaries, a few photographs, sketches, and personal memorabilia such as cards from his life partner Lawrence Mass and documents of his friends Vito Russo<sup>1</sup> and Jim Owles.

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<sup>1</sup> Most of the materials Kantrowitz collected about Russo can be found in the Posthumous Material section of the Vito Russo Papers (Box 11), which Kantrowitz donated to the Manuscripts and Archives Division, NYPL in 1995).

## Series Descriptions

### Series I. Correspondence, 1964-1995. Boxes 1-6

The correspondence contains letters written and received by Kantrowitz during the years 1964-1995. Among his correspondents are friends, lovers, fellow writers, gay activists, and teaching colleagues, students, and members of the general public who sent him their reactions to his work. The letters are arranged chronologically in three groups: general correspondence, letters regarding his writing, and public statements.

The general correspondence consists of letters Kantrowitz received and about a half dozen of his replies. The letters from friends relate details of their lives and relationships, including discussions of pride parades, gay writing, bashing incidents, and in the eighties, the loss of friends to AIDS. Writers discuss their work and the difficulties involved in writing and finding publishers. Of particular note is the folder of letters from Kantrowitz's closest friend, the film historian and gay activist Vito Russo. The letters, 1972-1988, relate his activities, comment on the gay scene in Washington, DC, San Francisco, and London, and discuss films and theater. The letters are full of intimate detail, humor, and eventually sorrow and rage at the AIDS epidemic and the illness of his lover. Some of Kantrowitz's replies can be found in this file as well.<sup>2</sup> Other correspondents in this series include Daniel Bar-David, Pat Califia, David Doyle, Arthur Evans, Adrienne Gilde, George Heymont, Duff Kretzberg, Herb Liebman, Annie Russo, Douglas Sadownick, and Bob Tavani. The general correspondence is arranged chronologically with the exception of Russo's letters which were kept together and filed at the end of the series.

The correspondence regarding Kantrowitz's writing contains responses of friends, fellow writers, and many members of the general public to his writing, particularly his essays in the *Advocate* and his memoir *Under the Rainbow*. In addition, there is correspondence regarding the publication and editing of his work, including efforts to have *Under the Rainbow* published and reprinted, and correspondence with John Preston and *Advocate* staff members, Boyd McDonald, Robert McQueen, and Mark Thompson about the publication of his essays as well as their comments on his work.

Among the letters are expressions of gratitude from many readers telling how moved they were by his work and inspired by his example as a man with an open and positive gay identity. Kantrowitz seems to have responded to most of these letters (although the responses are not in the collection) provoking additional letters in which the individuals relate their own struggles to come out and their views on gay issues. This section also includes letters of numerous gay writers and activists which range from simple congratulations to extended discussions of issues of importance to the gay community. Included is an exchange of letters with Arthur Evans in 1988 regarding Kantrowitz's

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<sup>2</sup> Additional correspondence between Kantrowitz and Russo can be found in Box 5A of the Vito Russo Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

review of Evans' book *The God of Ecstasy*. Other prominent correspondents include Rita Mae Brown, Pat Califia, Louie Crew, Daniel Bar-David, Bette Davis, Lenny Giteck, George Heymont, Toby Marotta, John Preston, Michael Rumaker, Charles Shively, Donald Vining and Randy Wicker.

Public Statements, 1964-1995 include letters to the press and politicians expressing his opinions on current events. The earliest letters are written to the editors of the student newspapers at the State University College at Cortlandt and Staten Island Community College regarding teaching and university affairs in the 1960s. Letters from the 1970s on are written chiefly to editors of gay and general interest publications regarding stories touching on homosexuality and gay rights, especially responses and corrections to unfair, inaccurate or incomplete portrayals. The files contain clippings of his letters and the articles which provoked his responses as well as typescripts of his remarks which were not published. The letters from 1985-1987 include those he wrote as secretary of GLAAD and letters that he, Darrel Yates Rist, Vito Russo, and the board of GLAAD wrote in response to a story which appeared in the *Philadelphia Gay News* about internal strife among GLAAD board members.

## **II. Professional and Organizational Files, 1970-1995.** Boxes 7-8.

This series contains documents relating to Kantrowitz's activities as a professor of English at the College of Staten Island, as a writer, and as a gay rights activist. The College of Staten Island materials chiefly concern his application for promotions, grants, and fellowships. Included are curriculum vitae, requests for leave, reports on his professional activities, faculty evaluation reports, project reports, grant applications and proposals, and related routine correspondence. A file of letters from students, 1971-1992 contains responses to Kantrowitz's open discussion of his homosexuality in his classes and in presentations to other classes. There is also a small file of publication agreements, 1982-1995.

The organizational materials include files he kept as an officer of the Gay Activists Alliance (GAA)<sup>3</sup>, Christopher Street Liberation Day Committee and the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, and as a panelist at the Gay Academic Union 1974 annual meeting. GAA records include carbon copies of meeting minutes, May - December 1970 and executive committee minutes, September - December, 1970 as well as correspondence, notes, flyers, newsletters, name and address lists and other documents concerning the planning of the GAA 25th reunion in 1994.

The Gay Academic Union materials relate to the 1974 annual meeting keynote session panel on gay and lesbian separatism, including Kantrowitz's notes for his talk, his response to a call for conference papers, two letters from George Whitmore of the Program Committee, and a copy of the conference program.

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<sup>3</sup> Additional records of the Gay Activists Alliance and the Christopher Street Liberation Day Committee can be found in the International Gay Information Center Collection, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

The Christopher Street Liberation Day Committee records concern the plans for the 1976 Gay Pride parade in New York City. Included are copies of Kantrowitz's correspondence as secretary, holograph meeting notes, original typescripts and photocopies of Steering Committee minutes and attachments, attendance sheets, and related documents submitted to the Committee.

Kantrowitz was a founder of the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (originally the Gay and Lesbian Anti-Defamation League) and acted as secretary and member of the Steering Committee. His files, November 1985-June 1986, contain photocopies of Executive and Steering Committee minutes, articles of incorporation, by-laws, and copies of treasurer's reports.

**Series III. Notebooks and diaries, 1960s-1986. Boxes 9-10.**

This series contains forty-three notebooks, chiefly spiral bound pocket memo books, and one typescript covering the 1960s to 1986. The notebooks contain a wide variety of material including lists, addresses and phone numbers, poetry, notes for essays and novels, random reflections on life, teaching, the passing scene, notes from a Gay Male S/M Activists meeting, descriptions of a mescaline trip, and a night at the Continental Baths. The content varies from book to book, from single lines to extended essays. Of particular note are three lengthy travel journals written in 1972 when Kantrowitz traveled to Europe and across the United States.

The European journals (2 vols.) contain his impressions as a tourist in Paris, London, Amsterdam, Vienna, Italy, and Greece as well as remarks on the gay bars and night life, and comparison of social attitudes with those prevalent in the United States. There are also meditations on his feelings of loneliness and varying degrees of self-consciousness as an American, a tourist, a gay man, and a Jew.

The journal documenting his transcontinental trip with his close friend and former GAA president Jim Owles describes visits to Chicago, Madison, Minneapolis, Billings, Seattle, Vancouver, Portland, San Francisco, Los Angeles and Denver. Kantrowitz met with members of other gay organizations in nearly all of those cities and set down his reflections on the prevailing state of gay liberation and activism or social repression in those locales. He also describes the bar scene, gay and/or "hip" nightlife and his own sexual activities. The journal contains his thoughts on GAA and its failings, the Metropolitan Community Church, political action and the counter-culture, natural food, and varying modes of dress and personal expression. Much of the journal is devoted to discussion of his spiritual journey to discover an ideal life and love through which he could express his true identity, and ends with his ultimate disillusion and return to New York City.

**Series IV. Writings, 1958 - 1995. Boxes 11-29.**

This series contains copies of Kantrowitz's writing in all genres from his student years through the mid 1990s. Included are college and graduate school examinations and papers, pieces written for the college newspaper, extensive files of poetry, public service announcements and advertising copy written for WNEW-TV, theater reviews for *Show Business*, and notes for speeches as well as drafts, typescripts, and published copies of his better-known essays and autobiography, *Under the Rainbow*. Also included are an unpublished collection of his essays, *Stonewall's Children*, and many notes, drafts, and revisions for a novel involving Walt Whitman, *The Poet of the Body* (later *Song of Myself*), and the typescript of *Walt Whitman*, a biography written for the Lives of Notable Gay Men and Lesbian Series published by Chelsea House.

The series also contains issues of *Gotham*, a short-lived magazine for which Kantrowitz acted as managing editor, and a few typescripts and photocopies of scholarly articles, and other writing not by Kantrowitz but sent to him by the authors.

**Series V. Personal Papers.** Boxes 30-34.

The personal papers contain clippings, ephemera, photographs, sketches, greeting cards and artifacts saved by Kantrowitz. Included are press clippings and other printed material about Kantrowitz or in which he is mentioned, cards from his life partner Larry Mass, documents and memorabilia of his two closest friends, Jim Owles and Vito Russo, clippings and notes about Cary Yurman, a friend who set off a bomb in Sir Harry's bar in the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, and a box of gay liberation movement buttons.

**Series VI. Audiocassettes and Videotapes.** Boxes 35-36.

Audio and videotapes documenting public appearances or interviews with Kantrowitz, 1971-1994, activities of the Gay Activists Alliance, the creation of the Hetrick-Martin Institute's Harvey Milk School, memorials for Vito Russo and Jim Owles, and twelve segments from *Our Time*, a series focusing on the gay community, written and produced by Vito Russo, which aired on WNYC-TV in 1983.



## Container List

### I. Correspondence

<u>Box</u>	
1	1964-1982
2	1983-1990
3	1991-1994
4	1995; n.d. Vito Russo
5	Letters regarding Kantrowitz's writing, 1975-1995
6	Letters for publication, 1964-1995

### II. Professional and organizational files

7	College of Staten Island Student reactions to homosexual teacher Professional Staff Congress-City University of New York grant proposals Helene Wurlitzer Foundation Publishing agreements
8	Gay Activists Alliance Miscellany Meeting minutes, 1970 May 21- December 17 Executive Committee minutes, 1970 September 20-December 16 Reunion, 1994  Gay Academic Union, 1974 conference  Christopher Street Liberation Day Committee Steering Committee minutes and attachments, 1976 March 15-June 27 Steering Committee minutes, 1976 March 1- June 21 (copies)  Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation Steering Committee minutes, 1985 November 23-1986 June 2

### III. Notebooks and Diaries

9	Five notebooks, 1960s-1971, chiefly poetry Two notebooks/diaries, 1972, including poetry and essays Three travel journals, 1972 Two notebooks, 1980 Two notebooks, 1981 Three notebooks, 1983 Three notebooks, 1984-1986
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- 10 undated notebooks [1970s] (2)  
1973 (2)  
1973; 1975 (1)  
1974 (3)  
1975 (2)  
1976 (2) and "Rough Drafts" - a journal  
1976; 1978 (1)  
1977 (3)  
1978 (1)  
1979 (6)

#### IV. Writings

- 11 College and graduate school exams and papers; pieces for college newspaper, 1958-1969
- 12 Poetry, 1960s
- 13 Poetry, 1960s - 1990s
- 14 Publications containing his poems; letters from poetry magazines regarding his submissions
- 15 Essays, 1960s-1970s (and public service announcements)
- 16 1980s
- 17 1990s
- 18 Miscellaneous unpublished pieces  
"Unfinished Beginnings" - incomplete novels, stories, etc.  
Sex ads and replies  
Notes for speeches, 1978-1994
- 19 *Stonewall's Children* (unpublished essay collection)/ *Walt Whitman* biography
- 20 *Under the Rainbow*  
Notes, outlines, residue
- 21 First and second drafts
- 22 Final draft, afterword, foreword/introduction  
Advance proofs and published volumes, 1977; 1996

- 23 Notes for a biographical novel of Walt Whitman
- 24 *The Poet of the Body*: a novel
- 25 rough draft #1
- 26 draft #2 *Song of Myself*
- 27 draft #3 *Song of Myself*
- 28 *Gotham* and duplicate copies of newspapers and magazines containing his writing
- 29 Writings by others

**V. Personal**

- 30 Press clippings with mentions of Kantrowitz
- 31 Photographs and sketches
- 32 Documents concerning Jim Owles, Vito Russo, and Cary Yurman
- 33 Cards from Lawrence Mass
- 34 Political buttons

**VI. Audio/Video Materials** (unavailable until dubbed - see archivist on duty)

- 35 **Audiotapes (reference by control number only)**
- Control #
- 03205-03206 *Gay and Lesbian Community: Multiple Alliances* (two tapes)  
Panel discussion sponsored by the Columbia University Center for American Cultural Studies, March 24, 1987. Panelists Arnie Kantrowitz, June Chan, Ilda Hidalgo, and moderator Cheryl Clark discuss the importance of forging alliances between gay and ethnic communities. Questions and comments from the audience.
- 03207 Kantrowitz interviews Joyce Hunter and Steve Ashkenazy of the Institute for the Protection of Lesbian and Gay Youth (Hetrick-Martin Institute), 1985.
- 03208 Kantrowitz interviewed on *The Write Stuff*, WBAI-FM, March 7, 1994

- 03209 Creon's lines in Jean Anouilh's *Antigone* spoken by Kantrowitz
- 03210 Poetry recorded for gay and lesbian blind, Kantrowitz and George Whitmore
- 36  
Control #
- Videotapes (order by control number only)**
- 00837 1971 Gay Pride Parade; AT&T protest; GAA members on Jack Paar Show
- 00838 GAA occupies NYC Wedding Bureau; Randy Wicker
- 00839 Tribute to GAA at City Hall, 6/23/92
- 00840 Bill Boggs interviews Kantrowitz on *Midday Live*, 1977
- 00841 Jim Owles Memorial, 9/18/93
- 00842 Vito Russo Memorial (no sound) 12/20/90
- 00843 Gay Cable News, 5/25/89 Stonewall Panel
- 00844 Vito Russo interviews Kantrowitz on *Our Time*, 1983
- 00845-00846 Kantrowitz interviewed by Quan Ngyen (two tapes), June 27, 1994
- 00847 *Our Time* WNYC-TV  
Program 1 (history)  
Program 2 (alcoholism)  
Program 3 (women)  
Program 4 (AIDS)  
Program 5 (parents)  
Program 6 (publishing)
- 00848 *Our Time* WNYC-TV  
Program 7 (gay youth and SAGE)  
Program 8 (mixed bag); 4/17/83;  
Program 9 (drag);  
Program 10 (celebrity closets)  
Program 11 (racism)  
Program 12 (third world)
- 00849-00850 GAA Reunion (two tapes) 6/25/94
- 37 Restricted letters removed from Series I.