What can old conference and event programs tell us? Conference programs, posters, and event planning materials, are objects that reveal who was presenting what ideas simultaneously and how they were being framed. The materials of the mid-90s in the CLAGS office reveal a Center that was bustling with fundraisers, parties, events, and conferences. The events below are only a few selected happenings from the many that took place over even just a few years.

The Annual CLAGS Party of 1994 took place on Tuesday, November 1st, featuring Tony Kushner and Terrence McNally each reading from new plays of theirs, as well as appearances by performance artists Holly Hughes and Nicky Paraiso. Michael C. P. Ryan, who would be memorialized in a CLAGS conference two years later, was the chair. It started “promptly at 6 pm” due to “the actors’ Broadway commitments.”

The Queer Theatre Conference and Performance Festival was held from April 27-29 in 1995 as a collaboration between CLAGS, New York Theatre Workshop, and The Public Theater.
“Queer Theater will bring scholars and artists from around the country for three days of celebration and investigation of what makes theater queer -- and what makes queer theater. The event will be a lively mix of panel discussions, performances, playreadings, and public interviews of some of our most illustrious theater artists. It will include talks on the latest developments in queer theory, theater history and drama, as well as round-table discussions among theater practitioners at the forefront of lesbian and gay theater-making. In sum: high theory, grand theatrics, dramatic dish.”

In preparing for the 1996 CLAGS spring benefit “Sex Talk” at the Palladium, Stephanie Grant asked Framji Minwalla, “Do you know any gay florists who might be dying to give us a freebie?” and remarked that previous decorations were childish — “a little Romper Room.” (May 23rd, 1996)
A draft in pencil of a poster reveals plans for an hour of reception with an open bar, followed by an hour-long panel discussion, “The Next Generation of Queer Writers Talk About Sex,” and last, but not least, dancing until midnight. The Palladium closed the following summer, in August 1997, after being purchased by NYU (and was demolished in 1998 so a dorm could be built in its place).
Conference Planning: “A blatant case of intolerance and homophobia”

In August of 1994, Dan Shapiro, the Head of Literature at the Americas Society at the time, asked CLAGS (as well as the Instituto Cervantes) to participate in a Conference “Encountering the Other: Marginalized Voices in Latin America.” In September of 1994, the CLAGS board voted to participate in the conference. In November of 1994, the title of the conference was changed to “Margin/Center” (as seen in the conference program draft included). Conference planning moved along, including a letter from the Director of CLAGS at the time (Martin Duberman) stating that “The Program Committee expects that all announcements and posters will be explicit about the co-sponsorship of the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies” (December 22, 1994). In early February of 1996, a draft of the final conference program, listing all sponsors, was approved by the CLAGS board and sent to the printer.

On February 28th, 1996, with less than a month to go before the conference, the CLAGS board members received a call from Dan Shapiro saying that “the worst has happened.” When Shapiro showed the final conference program to the President and Director of Cultural Affairs of the Americas Society, Everett Briggs and Elizabeth Beim, respectively, they refused to hold it at the Americas Society due to CLAGS’s prominence and their cosponsoring of the conference.

Shapiro asked the involved CLAGS board members if they might hold the conference at CUNY (either the Graduate Center or Baruch College), but they refused such a last minute change of venue. The next day, as an attempted compromise, Shapiro produced a copy of the program to send to CLAGS board members with the names of the sponsors on the inside instead of the front. He attached a note, “All sponsors’ names were removed from front and inserted at top of first column. As I said, I’m disappointed, but I also believe that it’s a major accomplishment to have the Conference here.” For most of the next week, the CLAGS board
members were unable to get in touch with Shapiro or anyone at Americas Society to discuss the program changes, then on March 5th, 1996, a third program, omitting any mention of CLAGS’s sponsorship arrived in the mail. On March 6th, Shapiro told CLAGS that all sponsors were removed from the program and explained his lack of communication by saying that the Americas Society’s President and Director, Beim and Briggs, had forbidden him from discussing the program with anyone from CLAGS.

In a letter to the rest of the CLAGS board and other involved parties on March 8th, 1996, Martin Duberman, Elena Martinez, and Oscar Montero described the chain of events and expressed a belief that “at this late date the Conference should go on, but we cannot be tacit accomplices in the cover-up of a blatant case of intolerance and homophobia from Americas Society, an organization whose stated mission is to ‘foster greater understanding in the United States about the societies and cultures of our Western Hemisphere neighbors.’” They notified the board and others that they would be changing the plenary, formerly titled “What/Who is Latino?,” to “What is Homophobia?” and encouraged people to attend it in support.
On March 21st, the conference began as planned, with all participants notified of the ongoing events. Many participants expressed discomfort with these events, but most agreed that the conference should proceed. On March 22nd, in a plenary session at the Americas Society, this chronology of events was presented by one of the CLAGS board members, Oscar Montero. The other board member most involved in the conference collaboration process, Elena Martinez, moderated a discussion of events with conference participants and attendees. Neither Beim nor Briggs were present for this meeting, at which Shapiro maintained that he was following the Americas Society’s policies and that given the conservatism of the Americas Society, any iteration of the conference was “an accomplishment.” In a letter to Everett Briggs of Americas Society dated March 29th, 1996, CLAGS board members explained that in addition to a year of planning and labor, CLAGS contributed $2000 to the conference. They demanded that the money be returned along with a public apology, writing that “[t]he Americas Society’s suggestion -- repeated to the press and to some conference participants -- that CLAGS produced its own program or publicity is false. Moreover, we have evidence in the form of correspondence between CLAGS and the Americas Society to prove it.”
March 29, 1996

Everett Briggs
President
Americas Society
680 Park Avenue
New York, NY 10021

Dear Mr. Briggs:

We regret and condemn the series of events that led to the exclusion of the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies of the City University of New York as a cosponsor of the Margins/Center Conference, held at the Americas Society on March 21-22, 1996.

The printed program that lists on its cover the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies was the result of more than a year of collaboration between the Americas Society and CLAGS. In addition to donating its labor and expertise, CLAGS also contributed $2,000 to its costs. The leaders of the Americas Society, for their part, have consistently supported and publicly professed their belief in the importance of the conference.

After threatening to cancel the conference and subsequently cutting off all dialogue with CLAGS, the Americas Society produced a censored program that CLAGS considers an insult to the work it has been doing. The Americas Society’s suggestion—repeated to CLAGS leaders—that CLAGS produce its own program was intended to put us in a position to which we threatened to agree. The Americas Society also misrepresented the nature of CLAGS’s role in the conference.

The actions of the Americas Society in this matter are unethical and possibly illegal. This is appalling behavior from the leadership of an organization whose stated goal is to “foster greater understanding in the United States about the societies and cultures of our Western Hemisphere neighbors.” What you are fostering is intolerance, exclusion, and mistrust.

We, the undersigned, demand a response. The Americas Society owes CLAGS a public apology. In fact, all conference participants: organizers,
panelists, audience members are due a formal apology. We also demand that
CLAGS’s contribution of $2,000 be returned. The Americas Society has
stolen CLAGS’s expertise, labor, and good faith, and will continue to benefit
from all three indefinitely. The very least it can do is repay CLAGS’s financial
cost.

Enclosed please find the chronology of events that led to the exclusion
of CLAGS and the censoring of the original program.

Sincerely,

Oscar Montero  Elena M. Martinez  Martin Duberman

cc: Elizabeth Beim, Director of Cultural Affairs, Americas Society,
Daniel Shapiro, Head of Literature, Americas Society, Margin/Center
Conference participants, Prof. Daniel Balderston, MLA and LASA lesbian and
gay caucus, Cervantes Institute, Lila Acheson Wallace Theater Fund, Tomás
Ybarra-Frausto, Rockefeller Foundation, PEN American Center, Gay and
Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD)
Emergent Discourses in Latin American and Latino Literature and Culture

Thursday, March 21, 1996
9:00 COFFEE
10:00 WELCOME AND OPENING COMMENTS
Daniel Shapiro
Head of Literature, Americas Society
Martin Duberman
Director, Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies/CUNY
Enrique Camacho
Director, Instituto Cervantes
10:30 AFRO-CARIBBEAN LITERATURE AND CULTURE
Carol A. Beuse, Howard University
"Race and Poetic Voice in Contemporary Caribbean Writing"
Lourdes Martinez Estrada, University of California, Santa Cruz
"The Ideologies of mestizaje: From the Plantation to the 'Black Atlantic'"
José Piedra, Cornell University
"Black Within"
Jacqui Alexander, New School for Social Research
Moderator
12:30 BREAK

2:00 LATIN AMERICAN WOMEN'S WRITING
Licia Fioc-Matta, Barnard College
"Narratives/Nationalism: Regression and Repression in Gabriela Mistral"
Marta Pelaez, New York University
"Remosures de Vampiros: Intertextual Assemblages in the Poetry of Ana Cristina Ceja"
Susana Roitker, Rutgers University
"Distorted Gazes, Impossible Testimonies: The Silence of Rape, Captivity and Miseducation in the Argentine Frontier"
Renigno Sifuentes Jiménez, Wesleyan University
Moderator
4:00 BREAK
4:30 LA PROMESA: The 1993 San Lazaro-Bahai AyAppendage in Cuba
Documentary Presentation (with subtitles in English)
Julio Ramos, University of California, Berkeley
Introduction

This program will be conducted in English.

Please call the Americas Society at (212) 249-8930 ext. 369 to reserve.

Friday, March 22, 1996
9:30 COFFEE
10:30 LATIN AMERICAN GAY AND LESBIAN LITERATURE AND CULTURAL ISSUES
Agnes Lugo Orts, Dartmouth College
"Casts of Colonial Modernity: Homosociality and Symbolic Traffic of Women in Puerto Rico"
Sylvia Molloy, New York University
"Cenon and 'The Chic of Arahí': Dreaming up Desire in Augusto D’Halmar"
José Quiroga, George Washington University
"Strawberry and Chocolate in the Tropics of the Cuban Revolution"
Robes Rios Arvia, University of Puerto Rico
"Caribbean Dilemmas: Avant and Ramos Otero"
Arnulfo Cruz-Malave, Fordham University
Moderator
12:30 BREAK
2:00 "WHAT/WHO IS LATINO?"
Plenary Session
4:00 CLOSING COMMENTS
Daniel Shapiro
Americas Society
Elyse M. Martinez and Oscar Montes
Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies/CUNY
4:30 BREAK
6:00 DIALEMA ELITI: Bilingual Reading
Introduction by José María Canga, Instituto Cervantes
7:30 RECEPTION

Intermediate draft of Margin/Center Emergent Discourses in Latin American and Latino Literature and Culture Conference Program – initially planned as a collaboration between the Americas Society and CLAGS.
In April of 1997, the Seventh Annual Queer Graduate Studies Conference was sponsored by CLAGS, titled *Forms of Desire*, and featuring a neon green program with an image of a bug trapped in a carnivorous plant. In addition to a busy schedule of student papers and performances, conference events included a poetry and fiction reading by Sarah Schulman and Wayne Koestenbaum. Leslie Feinberg gave the keynote address, titled “Theory: The Crystallized Resin of Action.”
In October of 1996, a conference, *Crossing National & Sexual Borders: Queer Sexualities in Latin/o America*, was presented by CLAGS and NYU and held in memory of Michael C. P. Ryan. The purple and white title and introductory pages of the conference program are reproduced here.

The conference organizers write, “It would have been difficult to carry out our plans for this Conference without the generous gift of Michael C. P. Ryan (1956-1995). Mr. Ryan, a law firm partner and gay activist, was also a student of Latin America and of our cultures. He received a graduate degree in Latin American Studies and his law degree from Stanford University in 1982. As we debate issues that concern us Latin American and Latina/o lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgendered people, we realize that our meeting in New York is also a celebration of our accomplishments and our potential. We dedicate this event to the memory of Michael’s passion and his commitment to the rights of gays and lesbians.” More about Ryan’s bequest and subsequent events can be found here and here.