

ACT UP NEW YORK

a catalog by
Martabel Wasserman

ACTIVISM

ART

and

THE AIDS
CRISIS

1987-1993



ACT UP New York:

Activism Art, and the AIDS Crisis, 1987–1993

a catalog by
Martabel Wasserman



Credits

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It's 9 a.m. on a Thursday morning in October 2009. I am skipping class to wheat paste posters in a women's bathroom at Harvard University. As I pour the paste mix into a bucket, I catch glimpses of myself in the bathroom mirror. Behind me, a wallpaper of lesbian pride made up of Xeroxed posters begins to emerge. My reflection framed by the the posters that read:

"I AM A/ mannish/ muffdiver/ amazon/ feminist / queer / lesbian/ femme AND PROUD!"

"I AM A / stone butch/ androgyne/ femme/ tomboy/ girlfriend/ sapphic/ deviant/ AND PROUD!"

"I AM A/ lezzie/ butch/ pervert/ girlfriend/ bulldagger/ sister/ dyke AND PROUD."

The spectrum of non-normative gender identifications behind me reconstructs "the women's room," a site I associate with gender policing. The "I" in the posters that claims pride in the fluidity of gender and sexuality overpowers the anxiety of self-labeling or being labeled by these words. In this moment I am proud.



When I walk outside the bathroom and enter a gallery space, I remember that I am not taking over the bathroom with my own contemporary protest. The Do-It-Yourself aesthetic of the posters is not the patina of a vintage-inspired trend. It is a reflection of the technology and resources that were available to fierce pussy, a collective of women who made these images for the streets of New York City between 1991 and 1995. Today I am helping the collective wheat paste the bathrooms at Harvard's Carpenter Center for their artist residency during the exhibition *ACT UP New York: Art, Activism and the AIDS Crisis 1987–1993*.

I am now on the ground floor gallery of the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts looking at an installation of fourteen video monitors displaying interviews from the ACT UP Oral History Project. Each monitor emits the sound of muffled voices that whisper through the two sets of headphones attached to the station. Students walk by on their way to class and people are going about their daily work in the building. I remember that I am one of four people who signed up to help fierce pussy during a two-hour slot this morning through the Harvard College Women's Center. I am the only one who showed up.

Gallery Wall Text

In the spring of 1987 Larry Kramer, a playwright and activist, was scheduled to give a talk at the Lesbian and Gay Community Center in downtown New York. By then the AIDS crisis had reached extraordinary proportions in the United States, though it was as yet unknown how many people had died from HIV/AIDS-related causes and how many others were infected. Any drugs available were experimental, there was no hope for a cure, and both the medical establishment and the government had been painfully slow—even negligent—in their response to the increasing devastation being caused by the disease. Many people felt that the government inaction was due to homophobia and racism, as the disease had disproportionately affected gay men and IV-drug users, many of whom were people of color. Kramer asked those assembled if they were interested in forming a group dedicated to direct political action to help end the crisis. Two days later approximately 300 people met and formed the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP).

ACT UP defined itself as “a diverse, non-partisan group of individuals united in anger and committed to direct action to end the AIDS crisis.” Its members came from all walks of New York life, but unlike many other movements for social justice, ACT UP drew numerous artists, filmmakers and graphic designers. In addition to its commitment to direct action—evidenced by its massive and well-coordinated acts of civil disobedience—the group mounted a vibrant visual campaign of posters, stickers, and T-shirts, and organized media-savvy street demonstrations aimed at capturing the attention of the evening news as much as that of everyday pedestrians.

This exhibition is a retrospective look at a brief period in human history when individuals citizens demanded that their government address their needs regardless of race, sexuality, gender, or class. As such, it offers us an opportunity to reconsider the powerful convergence of visual art and direct political action in a movement for social justice. The exhibition is divided into two parts: the Sert Gallery highlights the work of artist collectives such as Gran Fury, DIVA TV, and the Silence = Death Project, while the main gallery features the world premiere of the ACT UP Oral History Project, a living record of the people who helped to effect this change.

ACT UP has many legacies: it was instrumental in opening up participation in experimental-drug trials; it helped to place the patient, not the medical establishment, at the center of the healthcare debate; it was at the forefront of our country's discussion of universal healthcare. ACT UP helped give rise to the new queer cinema and queer theory in the academy, and it can now be seen as the beginning of the second wave of the gay and lesbian liberation movement, a movement that continues to this day in its struggle for equal rights for all persons.

Helen Molesworth

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Harvard University

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Introduction

"The defining political movement of my generation was not known at all by people 15 years younger than myself, and that absence of knowledge seemed quite horrible to me,"¹ said Helen Molesworth, co-curator, describing her curatorial intention behind the exhibition. At the opening night of *ACT UP New York: Art, Activism and the AIDS Crisis 1987-1993* (hereafter referred to as *ACT UP New York*), Molesworth framed the story of ACT UP as a "generational tale," going on to describe the exhibition as a cross-generational effort. She situated herself as approximately a generation older than her co-curator, Claire Grace, PhD candidate in the History of Art and Architecture. In producing this post-catalog for the show, I have entered into the project of this exhibition in the last year of my undergraduate education, which places me approximately one academic generation behind Grace.

Molesworth continued her opening remarks by recounting her "political awakening around 1987" to find ACT UP "already wide awake." She explained her personal revelation: "ACT UP offered a crucial sense of what was possible in the world: what was possible in terms of politics, what was possible in terms of culture, what was possible in terms of theory and what was possible in terms of love."² Framing these possibilities through the lens of a generational tale signals the ambitious yet complex aspirations involved in making the history of ACT UP visible. As Molesworth stated in the press release, "By highlighting the efficacy of political organizing and activist graphics at the height of the 1980s AIDS crisis, this exhibition opens questions about the possibilities for social and political change today."³

The exhibition filled various spaces on the campus with multimedia representations of a historical moment: the ground floor gallery of the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts (CCVA) featured the ACT UP Oral History Project; a light box by artist Donald Moffit and a reproduction of the neon *Silence = Death* sign that was originally in the window of the New Museum in 1987. The Sert Gallery, on the third floor of the same building, was described in the press release as displaying "over 70 politically charged-posters, stickers and other media that emerged during a pivotal moment of AIDS activism in New York City."⁴ In addition, fierce pussy created four site-specific installations during their week long artist-in-residency that corresponded with the exhibition: the women's restroom in the CCVA, parallel men's and women's restrooms in the Arthur M. Sackler Museum and an installation

1. Trebary, Guy. "Lost to AIDS, but Still Friended." *The New York Times*. 11 Dec. 2009.

2. "Collective Action: Calling All Artists." Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, Cambridge, MA. 15 Oct. 2009. Harvard Art Museum, Online Exhibitions. Web.

3. Harvard Exhibition of Visual Media in AIDS Activism Marks 20 Year Anniversary of the Formation of ACT UP New York. Harvard Art Museum. 2 July 2009.

4. Harvard Exhibition of Visual Media in AIDS Activism Marks 20 Year Anniversary of the Formation of ACT UP New York.

entitled “Gutter” at the Graduate School of Design. The exhibition’s use of space allowed art to become an anchoring point in a cross-campus discussion about the legacy of ACT UP in an ongoing epidemic.

“AIDS intersects with and requires a critical rethinking of all culture: of language and representation, science and medicine, health and illness, sex and death, the public and private realms,”⁵ wrote Douglas Crimp in his 1987 essay “Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism.” For many, the stakes of rethinking the boundaries of these categories were life and death. From the perspective of learning about ACT UP as history, I propose adding past and present to the list of culturally constructed categories Crimp offers up for re-evaluation. The exhibition was most successful in its goals of cross-generational dialogue when it performed the very questioning of categories and collapsing of boundaries and that were central to ACT UP’s ethos.

When I refer to the exhibition as a “performance,” I am invoking the academic lens of performance studies: the study of actions that “repeat with a difference.” Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett explains how performance studies relates to exhibitions, arguing that they are “fundamentally theatrical, for they are how museums perform the knowledge they create.”⁶ This lens enables a vocabulary for discussing how *ACT UP New York* not only represented a history but also performed it. As Doug Sadownick described the performative nature of ACT UP’s cultural production: “The distinction between the ‘inside’ of the art world and the ‘outside’ of the streets is specious because it presumes distinctions between life and art that ACT UP’s unorthodox performance contexts have challenged over the years.”⁷ Through enacting a complex understanding of the public and private spheres, the exhibition continued the legacy of ACT UP’s performative protest.

To lay the foundation of this argument, I will define what I mean by a “cross-generational queer dialogue.” Then I will discuss how the challenges to writing a cohesive and self-contained narrative about ACT UP and the history of AIDS in the United States have been theorized. I will look at how *ACT UP New York* interrogated three aspects of the traditional academic practices of writing history as it pertains to the use of the institutional space of the academy, the archive, and narrative. These categories function primarily as analytical tools, for they are intertwined in practice. In fact, my argument hinges on the importance of the decompartmentalizing of categories. I argue that the places where the exhibition tried to contain the history of ACT UP were the weakest aspects of its attempt to engage and implicate a younger generation. Ultimately I will describe how my project—the book you are reading—seeks to engage in a political and methodological lineage and what I am aiming for it to achieve.

5. Crimp, Douglas. *Melancholia and Moralism : Essays on AIDS and Queer Politics*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002.

6. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara. *Destination Culture : Tourism, Museums, and Heritage*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.

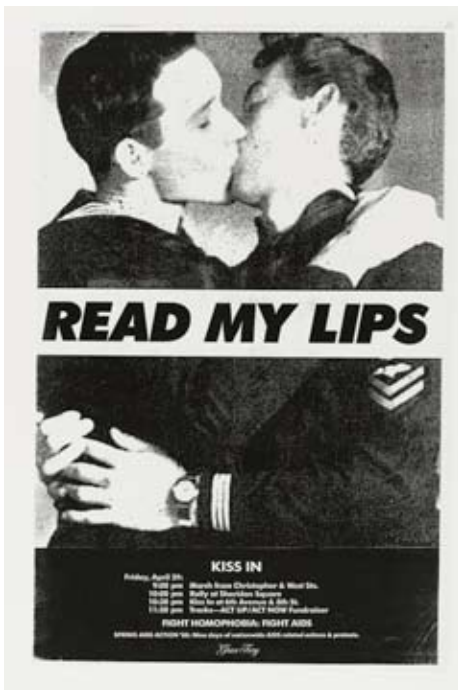
7. Sadownick, Doug. “ACT UP Makes a Spectacle of AIDS.” *High Performance*, Spring 13.49 (1990): 247–52.

READ MY LIPS



BEFORE THEY'RE SEALED

**REVERSE THE SUPREME COURT'S BAN ON
ABORTION INFORMATION. PHONE YOUR SENATORS
AND CONGRESSIONAL REPRESENTATIVES AND TELL
THEM TO OVERTURN THE TITLE X GAG ORDER NOW!
CALL SENATOR MOYNIHAN AT 661-5150
CALL SENATOR D'AMATO AT 947-7390
CALL FOR INFORMATION AT 807-0721**



READ MY LIPS (BOYS)

Gran Fury, 1988

Poster, original photocopy

Courtesy of Avram Finkelstein



READ MY LIPS (GIRLS)

Gran Fury, 1988

Poster, original photocopy

Courtesy of Avram Finkelstein



READ MY LIPS (GIRLS)

Gran Fury, 1988

Black-and-white photograph

Courtesy of Gran Fury

READ MY LIPS

GANG, n.d.

Poster

From the Stonewall Generation to Generation Stonewall 2.0?

"We owe it to ourselves to be open to the possibility of cross-generational queer dialog. I think that's one of the things that art and archives and shows like this one can do." —Richard Meyer⁸

"How was it that AIDS and ACT UP fostered distinctive coalitions between lesbians and gay men—coalitions that brought new understandings to the word *queer*?"⁹ asks queer theorist Ann Cvetkovich. ACT UP was unprecedented in the extent of collaboration between gay men, lesbians, bisexuals and heterosexuals. Central to ACT UP was addressing how the social response to AIDS reinforced and recreated homophobia. This coalition enabled *queerness* to collapse into its performative disruption to the status quo.

Queer theorist David Halperin demonstrates how the intersections of theory, lived sexual practices and politics in ACT UP can be understood in part through the lens of Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality Volume I*. David Halperin traces the text's prominence and relevance to ACT UP in his book *Saint Foucault*, showing how it allowed ACT UP to connect discourses of sexuality and power to other systems of oppression. He writes:

[ACT UP] draws members of all constituencies affected by the AIDS catastrophe, creating a political movement that is genuinely *queer* insofar as it is broadly oppositional; AIDS activism links gay resistance and sexual politics with social mobilization around issues of race, gender, poverty, incarceration, intravenous drug use, prostitution, sex phobia, media representation, health care reform, immigration law, medical research and the power and accountability of "experts."¹⁰

Halperin's analysis demonstrates how the conceptualization of *queerness* expanded the reach of gay and lesbian politics within ACT UP. In the political context of the 2009 exhibition, *queerness* in Halperin's sense of the word was a focal point in the cross-generational dialogue it sought to create.

In contemporary politics, *queer* is often used as a synonym for LGBT (the common acronym for lesbian, bisexual, gay and transsexual). In this essay, I make a clear distinction between these two uses of the word *queer*. LGBT will refer to a set of sexual identities, whereas *queer* is used to describe a sexual and political ethics.

8. Meyer, Richard. "Stonewall and Other Summer Palaces: 1969/1989/2009." Symposium: ACT UP 20 Years Later. Cambridge, MA. 17 Oct. 2009. Lecture.

9. Cvetkovich, Ann. *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003.

10. Halperin, David M. *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.

Queer is an ahistorical categorization for social movements such as the Gay Liberation Movement and the radical lesbian faction of the Women's Liberation movement, both of which I seek to invoke in this "generational tale." However I will be using queer to signify what Judith Butler described in *Bodies That Matter* as "a site of collective contestation, the point of departure for a set of historical reflections and futural imaginings."¹¹ Butler enables queerness to be a dynamic site that straddles the past, present and future of a politics.

'How do you reproduce a community that does not reproduce itself?' goes the great conundrum of queer visibility. While this question is an essentialist oversimplification of queerness and the family, it addresses the process by which coming out corresponds with coming into a cultural identity distinct from that provided by the heterosexual nuclear family. Definitions for the word "generation" provided in Oxford English Dictionary provide a point of entry for thinking about how queerness complicates the linear relationship between family and generation. Definitions include: "the action of generating;" "manner of descent: genealogy, pedigree, production by natural or artificial processes;" "the whole body of individuals born about the same period;" as well as listing the obsolete definition: "family, breed, race; class, kind, or 'set' of persons."¹² Given the inherent fluidity of queer, queer generationality disrupts conventional notions of identity and community formation, traditional modes of reproducing the family unit and the ways in which sex can be generative outside of a reproductive function.

Forming community around non-procreative sex creates an alternative to the traditional heterosexual family unit as the site typically central to an individual's understanding of her cultural and political contexts. Coming out is met with the challenges of coming into a politics and culture that is rooted in a collective history but that is temporally, spatially and individually specific. Each individual performance of queer politics is a generative site. The formation of queer community multiplies each site's potential for resistance. However, like a traditional family unit, queer community offers and sometimes insists on a set of values that an individual may feel does not suit her self-definition.

Timothy Patrick McCarthy stresses the importance of the generational model to queer history in his 2009 Nicholas Papadopoulos Lecture, "Stonewall's Children: Life, Loss and Love after Liberation": "The Stonewall Generation thinks the Marriage Generation should get over itself and the Marriage Generation thinks the Stonewall Generation should get off its high horse. We still don't know what to do with the AIDS Generation. And we still have AIDS."¹³ The role of AIDS in queer politics has changed drastically since the moment in time represented by the exhibition, and as Molesworth stated in her conceptualization of the ACT UP exhibition, this change can be understood through a generational paradigm.

11. Butler, Judith. *Bodies that Matter : On the Discursive Limits of "Sex."* New York: Routledge, 1993.

12. "Generation." Oxford English Dictionary. 1989 ed.

13. McCarthy, Timothy Patrick. "Stonewall's Children: Life, Loss, and Love after Liberation." 2009 Nicholas Papadopoulos Lecture. Starr Auditorium, Harvard Kennedy School, Cambridge, MA. 29 Apr. 2009. Lecture.

In a *New York Times* article covering the 2009 National Equality March on Washington, what McCarthy labeled the “Marriage Generation” was referred to as both Stonewall 2.0 and the Prop 8 Generation.¹⁴ When art historian Richard Meyer discussed this article in his lecture corresponding with the exhibition, he pointed out that it did not include a single mention of AIDS. As he observed, the Stonewall Generation had passed the baton over the AIDS Generation straight to Stonewall 2.0.¹⁵

Jim Hubbard, filmmaker/former member of ACT UP/co-founder of the ACT UP Oral History Project has created a video-based archive documenting trends that McCarthy and Meyer describe. Hubbard has filmed every March on Washington related to queer rights since 1979 with the exception of the one in 2009. He explored this change in his 1990 video *Two Marches*, a combination of footage from marches in 1979 and 1987. A review explains:



In Hubbard’s roving footage we follow the shifts in spirit, age and racial composition of the demonstrators and witness the growing organization of the protest spectacle, as ragtag bunches of rebellious marchers give way to marching bands and the unfurling of the Names Project AIDS Quilt.¹⁶

Hubbard reflects that since the unfurling of the Names Quilt on the National Mall during the 1987 National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights, the marches have become increasingly commodified and visibly less angry.

On the last march he attended in 2001 and the one he missed 2009 he recalled:

It was really awful. You had to pay to get into the rally, not into the rally but there was this section like this fair that you had to pay to get into. People wouldn’t pay so I think they eventually let everyone in for free. The 2009 one was really badly organized. There was no outreach to 50 year olds. As a young friend of mine said, the outreach was on Facebook and Twitter. I think the experience of the outreach was

14. Peters, Jeremy W. “Gay Rights Marchers Press Cause in Washington.” *New York Times*. 11 Oct. 2009.

15. Meyer, “Stonewall and Other Summer Palaces: 1969/1989/2009.”

16. Kotz, Liz. “Two Marches.” Afterimage. [Http://www.canyoncinema.com/H/Hubbard.html](http://www.canyoncinema.com/H/Hubbard.html). Web.



RIOT
Gran Fury, 1989
Printed stickers
Courtesy of Avram Finkelstein

very different for people your age than it was for my age. I suspect that the people of my generation who went are the ones who are really supportive of gay marriage and that's how they read equality.¹⁷

Hubbard's generational standpoint demonstrates an unwillingness among the ACT UP generation to accept the politics and tactics of the present moment on its own terms. Hubbard's quotation provides insight into the ever-widening gap between queer generations. This essay seeks to demonstrate why a cross-generational queer dialogue is worth the effort for both sides of this disconnect.

The struggle and the tactics of the ACT UP generation have been replaced by an LGBT politics where state-by-state campaigns for marriage and adoption rights are the most visible agenda items. While this LGBT visibility has certainly enabled a commodification of a queer liberatory discourse, it does not serve either side of the generational disconnect to equate this to an entire generation selling out. The type of cross-generational dialogue I investigate in this project allows individuals to conceptualize themselves within lineage that enables new political possibilities. The fierce pussy bathrooms provided me with examples of queer identity and direct action that I had been longing for. I believe a cross-generational dialogue is crucial to ACT UP becoming inscribed in the dominant narrative of United States history.

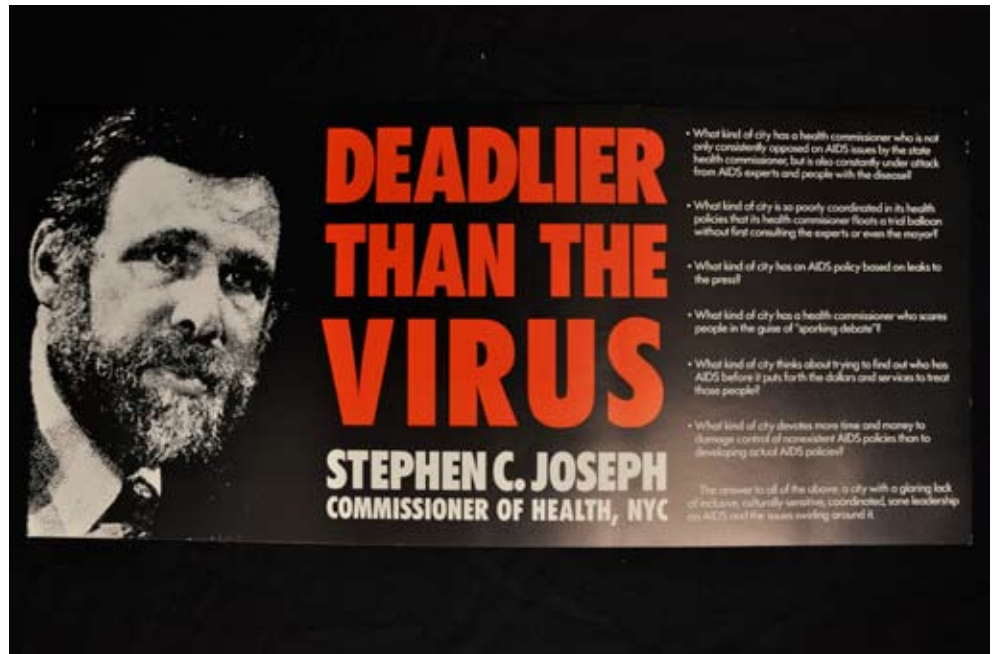
17. "Jim Hubbard." Personal interview. 16 Oct. 2009.

DEADLIER THAN THE VIRUS

Richard Deagle, v1989

Subway advertising poster

Courtesy of Aldo Hernandez

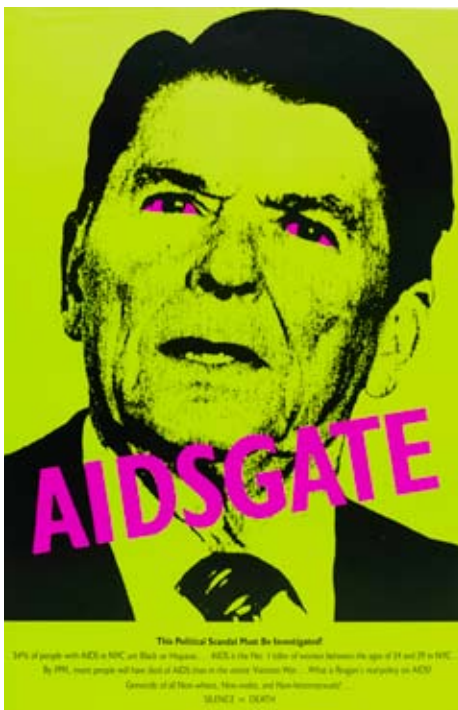


HE KILLS ME

Donald Moffett, 1987

Poster, offset lithography

Courtesy of the artist



AIDSGATE

Silence=Death Project, 1987

Poster, offset lithography

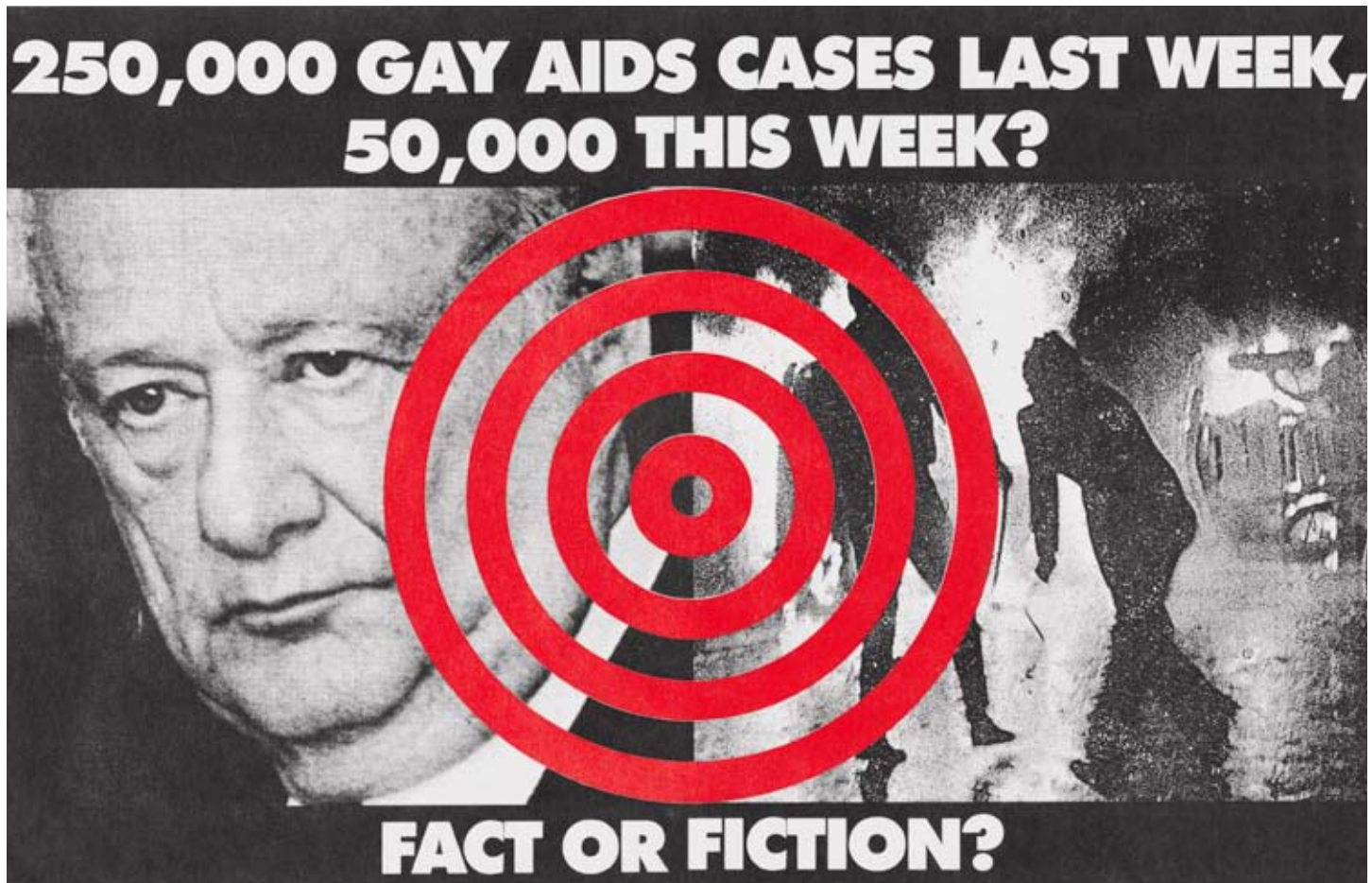
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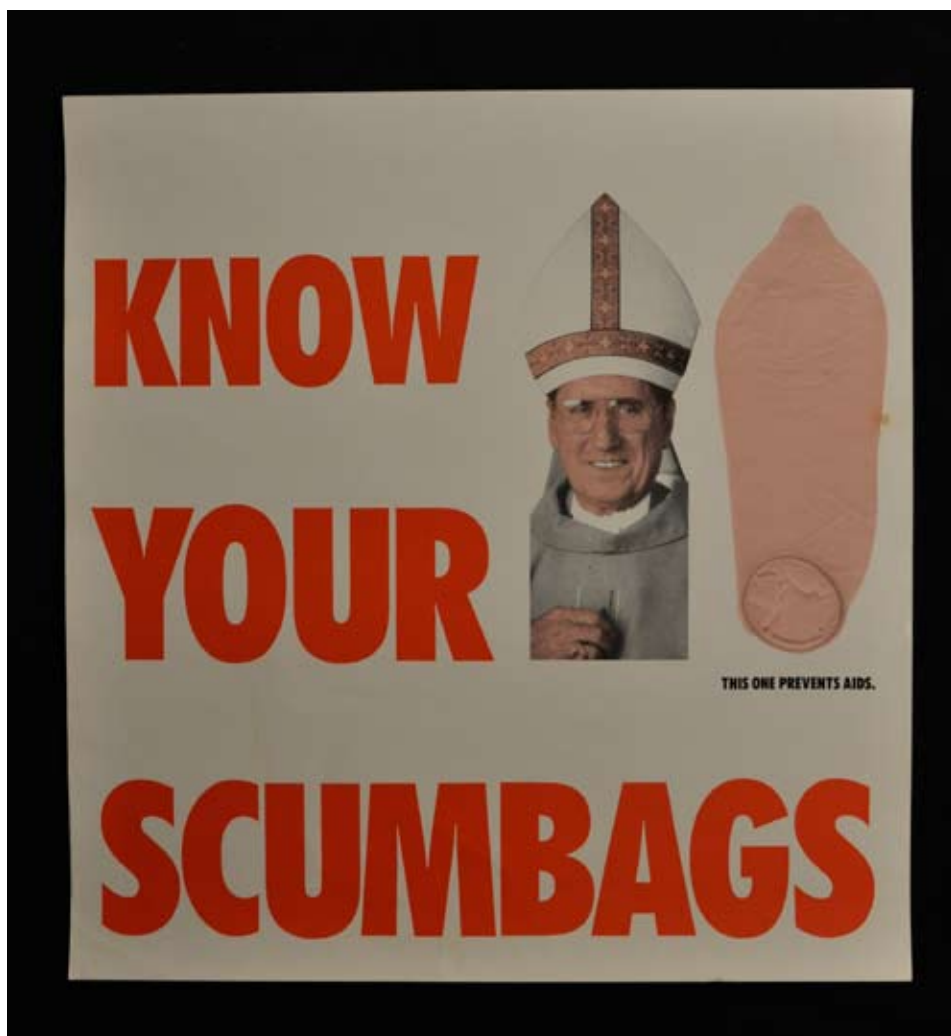
250,000 GAY AIDS CASES LAST WEEK, 50,000 THIS WEEK? FACT OR FICTION?

Gran Fury, 1989

Poster

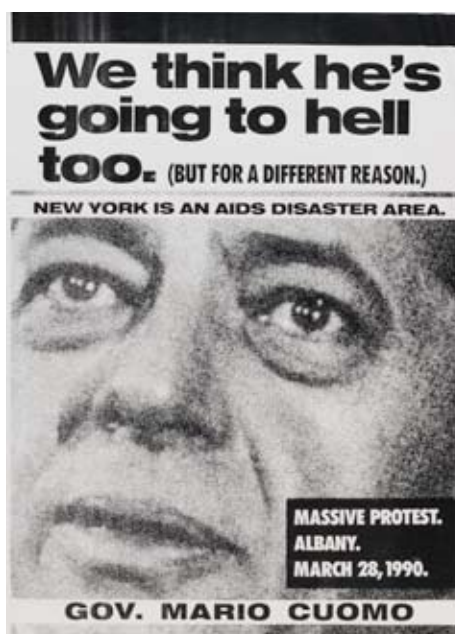
Courtesy of Avram Finkelstein





KNOW YOUR SCUMBAGS

Richard Deagle and Victor Mendolia,
1989
Subway advertising poster, offset lithography
Courtesy of Aldo Hernandez



WHEN A GOVERNMENT TURNS ITS BACK ON ITS PEOPLE

Gran Fury, 1989
Back cover, exhibition catalogue, AIDS: The Artist's Response, University Gallery, Ohio State University, 1989.
Courtesy of Robert Vazquez Pacheco

WE THINK HE'S GOING TO HELL TOO

ACT UP, 1990
Poster, original photocopy
Courtesy of Avram Finkelstein

AIDS PROFITEER

ACT UP (Outreach Committee), 1989
Offset lithography on a sheet of Avery stick-on labels
Courtesy of Avram Finkelstein

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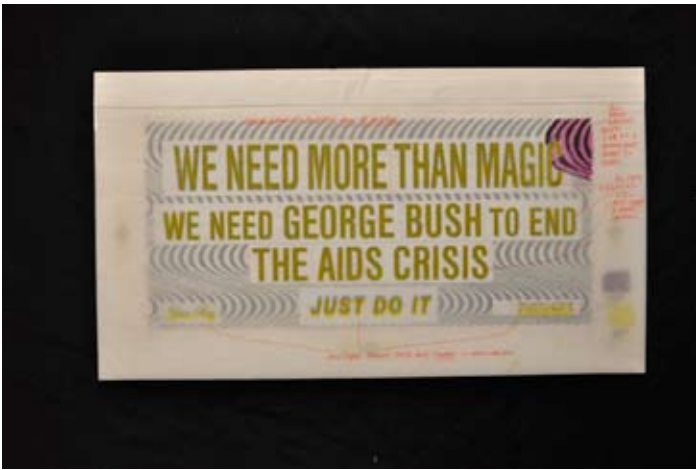
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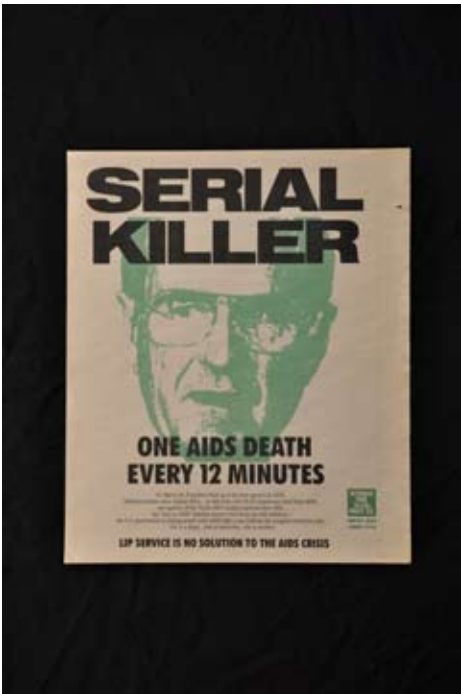


WE NEED MORE THAN MAGIC

Gran Fury, 1991
 Pasteup on board with Pantone chips
 Courtesy of Gran Fury

WALL STREET MONEY

Gran Fury, 1988
 Original photocopies, recto/verso (three versions)
 Courtesy of Avram Finkelstein



SERIAL KILLER

Avram Finkelstein and Vincent Gagliostro, 1990
 Poster, offset lithography
 Courtesy of Avram Finkelstein

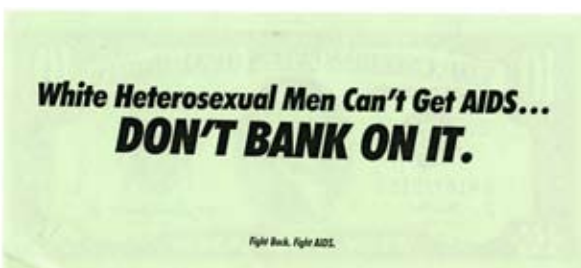


FOLDED DOLLAR

Avram Finkelstein and Vincent Gagliostro, 1991

Flyer, offset lithography

Courtesy of Avram Finkelstein



The Challenges of Writing AIDS Activist History

A complex combination of psychic, cultural, political and historical conditions contributed to the obscuring of ACT UP's legacy. To illustrate this, I will first discuss the role of trauma in the formation of narrative. Then I will demonstrate how the radical politics of ACT UP pose another challenge to the visibility of its history. I will describe how the radicality of ACT UP was commodified, enabling a neutralization of its politics. This commodification led to the increasing normalization of queer politics and the emergence of "homonationalism" that came to define LGBT rights during the Clinton Era. With the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, the conservatism brought on by the Supreme Court's appointment of George W. Bush became further solidified in political and cultural discourses. As the terrorization of the "other" was perpetuated, the trend of conformist LGBT politics gained further ground as a defense mechanism. This trend coincided with policies that rendered AIDS as an issue solely in Africa, further ignoring the ongoing epidemic in the United States. I posit that these conditions made the legacy of ACT UP all but invisible for my generation.

At the heart of the story and its barriers to articulation is the loss of tens of thousand of lives.¹⁸ Contraction rates continue to rise and the death toll increases each year. As Marita Sturken writes, "The politics of remembering the AIDS epidemic can never be detached from the fact that the epidemic is still killing people."¹⁹ The challenge posed to *ACT UP New York* was how to represent a distinct historical moment in the beginning of the epidemic known as the "Plague Years," without rendering the epidemic or activist responses to it as over.

Trauma studies investigates how physical and psychic trauma impact language and memory: the tools with which history is constructed.²⁰ The traumatic aspects of AIDS are often made invisible because marginalized communities represent the largest demographics impacted by the virus: gay men, people of color and drug users. The late Vito Russo, a member of ACT UP New York, described the ways in which the crisis was like a war in his 1988 speech "Why We Fight":

Living with AIDS is like living through a war, which is happening only for those people who happen to be in the trenches. Every time a shell explodes, you look around and you discover that you've lost more of your friends, but nobody else notices. It isn't happening to them. They're walking the streets as though we weren't living through some sort of nightmare. And only you can hear the screams of the



WASHINGTON, DC OCTOBER 11, 1992 POLITICAL FUNERAL DEMO POSTER

ACT UP, 1992

Poster, offset lithography

Courtesy of Avram Finkelstein

18. The CDC estimated in 2007 that the cumulative number of AIDS related deaths in the US was 583,289 people. <http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/topics/surveillance/basic.htm#ddaids>.

19. Sturken, Marita. *Tangled Memories : The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.

20. For more on trauma see E. Ann Kaplan, *Trauma Culture*. Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, and Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain*. See also Cathy Caruth's chapter on AIDS in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*.

SILENCE=DEATH: VOTE

Silence=Death Project, 1988

Poster, offset lithography

Courtesy of Avram Finkelstein



people who are dying and their cries for help. No one else seems to be noticing.²¹

The parallels between living through war and the AIDS crisis abound. Many who fight in wars and survive endure post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). PTSD has similarly impacted those who lived through the AIDS crisis.²² As former ACT UP member/writer/artist Gregg Bordowitz explained, for those who lived through it the survivor's "relationship to the trauma of AIDS crisis is not necessarily within our

21. Russo, Vito. "Why We Fight." Speech. ACT UP Demonstration at the Department of Health and Human Services. Washington, DC. 10 Oct. 1988. Actupny.org.

22. "Helen Molesworth." Personal Interview. 17 Dec. 2009.



**IF YOU FUCK WITHOUT A
CONDOM YOU RISK HIV
INFECTION AND CAN GET AIDS**

ACT UP, n.d.

Poster

Courtesy of Avram Finkelstein

control to “get on or get over it.”²³

“I have this bottomless ache about what can’t be known about the people who are gone, about the lack of possibility for certain kinds of ideas, and certain art practice or politics,” Molesworth reflected.²⁴ The trauma faced after losing immeasurable individual potential profoundly impacted the legacy of a collectively generated radical queer politics. Ann Cvetkovich writes, “AIDS activism was the catalyst for what has now become mainstream gay politics and consumer visibility. Something got lost along the way, and I am mourning that loss along with the loss of so many lives.”²⁵ As Cvetkovich illustrated the shared loss of friends, community and cultural production reshaped queer politics. However, the trauma of surviving has been experienced and theorized differently among lesbians and gay men. Gay men are faced with the guilt of surviving an epidemic that claimed so many of their friends and lovers. Lesbians were often their caretakers. In order to demonstrate this, I will be referencing Cvetkovich’s *An Archive of Feelings* for an analysis of trauma in lesbian culture and Crimp’s *Melancholia and Moralism* for insight into the impact of AIDS on gay male culture.

In his 1987 essay ‘How To Have Promiscuity in an Epidemic’ Crimp writes that the gay male community generated “theory and practice [that] made it possible to meet the epidemic’s most urgent requirement: the development of safe sex practices.”²⁶ In 1987, the gay male community was fighting to save their lives and prevent a sexually transmitted disease from altering sex from a site of collective joy into one of collective shame. As AIDS took tens of thousands of lives, the inability to speak this trauma impacted the community’s commitment to safe sex practices. In his introduction to the 2002 text *Melancholia and Moralism: Essays on AIDS and Queer Politics*,²⁷ Crimp writes that if the entirety of the collection of essays, spanning temporally from 1987-2003, results in a narrative arc, it insists that

There has been a drastic change [in the time that has elapsed], but it is a psychic change, a change in the way we think about AIDS, or rather a change that consists in our inability to continue thinking about AIDS.²⁸

23. Gregg Bordowitz. “Personal Interview. 16 Oct. 2009.

24. “Helen Molesworth.” Personal Interview. 17 Dec. 2009.

25. Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings*, 157.

26. Crimp, Douglas. *Melancholia and Moralism : Essays on AIDS and Queer Politics*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002.

27. This title is an intentional echo (18) of the essay “Mourning and Militancy.” First presented at the “Gay Men in Criticism” session of the English Institute, Harvard

This inability to remember and speak the trauma of a community has contributed to lack of awareness amongst younger gay men about the virus. As one such example, the trend of unprotected sex, or barebacking, has recently been on the rise in gay-male communities in the United States.²⁹ This lack of conversation around the spread of the disease demonstrates how the trauma of HIV/AIDS has ultimately quieted a conversation vital not only to ACT UP’s tactics but also to the lives of gay men today.

University, Cambridge, MA, 27, Aug. 1989, published in October 51 (winter 1989). This seminal essay explored AIDS activism, loss of lives, and loss of sexual culture from a Freudian framework.

28. Crimp, *Melancholia and Moralism*, 17.

29. Wolitski, Richard J. “The Emergence of Barebacking among Gay and Bisexual Men in the United States, a Public Health Perspective.” in *Barebacking: Psycho-social and Public Health Perspectives*. Perry N. Halkitis, Leo Wilton, and Jack Drescher, eds. Binghamton, NY: The Haworth Medical Press, 2005.



**AIDS IS KILLING ARTISTS, NOW
HOMOPHOBIA IS KILLING ART**

Art+Positive, 1990

Sticker

Courtesy of Avram Finkelstein

Cvetkovich writes that ACT UP “is a story of activism structured around the intensity of friendship—a friendship that combines romance and collective work. These are intimacies shot through with longing and loss.”³⁰ This is a queer network of affect, both in the sense of queer sexuality and non-normative relationality. For example, she writes, the butch lesbian caregiver queered the gendering of caregiving as feminine. Cvetkovich writes, “The ways in which queers have reconfigured the body in sexual intercourse also transforms the relation between bodies and caretaking procedures.”³¹ The dying queer body was often met with a familial homophobia that led to new forms of friendship, intimacy and caregiving to emerge between gay men and lesbians.

In order to represent this queer relationality, Cvetkovich calls for a reconstitution of the archive to encompass affective responses to suppressed histories of trauma. She writes:

My claim that trauma raises questions about what counts as archive is thus connected to a further claim that trauma also raises questions about what counts as public culture. My goal is to suggest how affect, including the affects associated with trauma, serves as the foundation for the formation of public cultures.³²

30. Cvetkovich, 208.

31. Cvetkovich, 226.

32. Cvetkovich, 9.



GIVE ME YOUR TIRED, YOUR POOR, YOUR HIV NEGATIVE

Gran Fury, 1988

Poster, original photocopy

Courtesy of Avram Finkelstein

Inscribing affect into the archive offers one way of making history accessible when the historio-political and cultural contexts of trauma are beyond imagining for a younger generation. Cvetkovich's discussion of a public culture provides a framework for understanding how histories of queer trauma can become part of a cross-generational dialogue.

The importance of collectivity and community that both Crimp and Cvetkovich discuss in their work is another way in which ACT UP poses a challenge to conventional constructions of history of AIDS activism. As Molesworth explained:

There was no one charismatic leader, it was a group of individuals united in anger to form a true collective, which you see in the ACT UP Oral History Project and in the gallery; unauthored with a proper name but authored with a group name. There is an incredible struggle between a kind of anonymity and visibility that happens that doesn't fit neatly into the ways we tell history. It behooves us to try and articulate new, different models for how we are going to tell history. Can we not only put the anonymous collective within this historical story but can we let force of an anonymous democratic collective disturb the very stories we tell?³³

The process of disruption that Molesworth described highlights the difficulty of representing the politics of ACT UP. Writing ACT UP's history can be conceptualized as dynamic political action that challenges the privileging of the individual and celebrates the collective.

The non-hierarchical model of a coalition enabled a range of issues to be addressed. Sarah Schulman, author/activist/former ACT UP member/co-founder of the ACT UP Oral History Project, writes of ACT UP's success:

I think it's safe to say that most of the substantial progress that has been made in this country on behalf of people with AIDS can be traced to ACT UP. For implementation of needle exchange programs, condoms in schools, fast mechanisms for releasing new drugs, development of alternative treatments, standards of care for pediatric cases, insurance reform, changing the official definition of the disease so more women can receive benefits, etc etc.³⁴

ACT UP used an affinity group model in which smaller groups formed to address issues that pertained specifically to their concerns. Examples included the Women's Caucus, the Treatment and Data Committee and the Majority Action Committee.³⁵

The successes of this structure that Schulman describes had a paradoxical impact on the momentum of ACT UP. Former ACT UP/Gran Fury member Avram

33. "Collective Action: Calling All Artists."

34. Schulman, Sarah. *My American History: Lesbian and Gay Life during the Reagan/Bush Years*. New York: Routledge, 1994.

35. The Majority Action Committee, which formed to address the issues pertaining specifically to people of color, used their name to challenge the notion that they are a minority in the United States.

The Challenges of Writing AIDS Activist History

Finklestein argued that the visibility that resulted in the success of the movement diluted its politics: "American capitalism neutralizes dissent by giving you a seat at the table, and that's kind of what happened."³⁶ Finklestein's point can be demonstrated through the prevalence of commodified AIDS activism today.

Arguably the most visible example of HIV/AIDS in popular culture is Product (RED). Product (RED) is a marketing strategy in which companies, such as American Express, Apple, Starbucks, Converse, Motorola, Gap, Armani, Hallmark, Microsoft, and Dell give a percentage of their profits (often lower than sales tax) to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.³⁷ Professor of Women, Gender, and Sexuality at Harvard Caroline Light writes:

Product (RED) and many other contemporary appeals to the compassionate side of neoliberal consumption have made a powerful impact on collective memory, creating for those too young to remember what happened in the 1980s an alternative genealogy of AIDS, one that simultaneously obscures the state's complicity in the epidemic's spread among gay men as it distracts us from the disease's continued effects locally.³⁸

As Light articulates, this represents a cultural shift in what constitutes activism. While wearing a red ribbon during the height of the epidemic in the United States



AIDS CRISIS

GANG, c. 1992

Offset printed poster

Courtesy of the artist

36. "Avram Finklestein." Personal Interview. 16 Oct. 2009.

37. See "Better RED Than Dead?" by Lisa Ann Richey and Stefano Ponte, and "Rethinking (Product) RED." Collen Manique and Ronald Labonte.

38. Light, Caroline, "Alterity Chic: Selling Difference, Saving Africa." Unpublished. 2010.

signified that one was either in solidarity with or part of a socially ostracized demographic, purchasing something from Product (RED) is fashionable. Light adds, "While AIDS activism in the United States was once characterized by noise, visibility, and risk-taking, a public staging of one's outrage, today, by contrast, Product (RED) holds out the promise of eradicating AIDS one [Starbucks] latte at a time."

Media representations are another site in which the commodification obscures history. Crimp observed, "My undergraduate students often cite HBO films as their most important source of information about AIDS."³⁹ Dr. Ian Lekus observed that a majority of his students knew the lyrics to "Rent," a musical about artists struggling in Manhattan's Lower East Side at the epicenter of the AIDS epidemic.⁴⁰ Yet Lekus, who taught a Harvard undergraduate course in the spring of 2009 about AIDS in America, noted that there was no historical resonance when his students sang along, "ACT UP—Fight AIDS!"⁴¹

The example of Jonathan Larson's "Rent" as a source of information about AIDS was addressed extensively by Sarah Schulman in her 1998 book *Stagestruck: Theater, AIDS and the Marketing of Gay America*. Schulman puts forth an argument that the narrative structure of "Rent" and certain specific cultural references were taken from her novel 1990 *People in Trouble*. Whether or not one accepts what I think is a convincing argument by Schulman, the implications of a straight man (Larson) commodifying the work of a lesbian speaks to broader trends of queer visibility. Schulman writes:

Today we face a "tolerance" defined by the diminishment of the minority and the heroization of the majority, a "tolerance" that simply acknowledges that the minority exists and that claims that acknowledgement as an act of generosity. The fact that this minor recognition is the result of the suffering and insistence of millions of gay and lesbian people over centuries is completely erased.⁴²

While there has been increased visibility of queer people in culture since the time of ACT UP, Schulman observes that the majority of this visibility has been a commodification by straight people.

In his 1990 book *The Trouble with Normal*, queer theorist Michael Warner writes:

Over the past decade, [queer] movement politics on the national scale have been dramatically transformed. Its public face is now dominated by a small group of national organizations, an equally small group of media celebrities, connected to a network of big-money politics that revolves around publicity consultants and campaign

39. Crimp, *Melancholia and Moralism*, 125.

40. "RENT" debuted on Broadway in 1996 and became a major motion picture in 2005.

41. "Ian Lekus." Personal Conversation. 16 Feb., 2010.

42. Schulman, Sarah. *Stagestruck : Theater, AIDS, and the Marketing of Gay America*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1998.

professionals and litigators.⁴³

Lisa Duggan named this phenomenon “homonationalism,” a term which she describes as a “demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption...that does not contest dominant heteronormative forms but upholds and sustains them.”⁴⁴ Despite the fact that the trend of homonationalism gained traction during the Clinton Era, ACT UP’s legacy lived on during this time. *From ACT UP to the WTO: Urban Protest and Community Building in the Era of Globalization*, edited by Benjamin Shepard and Ronald Hayduk, is a 2002 collection of essays that examines the explicit influence of ACT UP’s tactics in 1999 protests at the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Seattle.

Gregg Bordowitz, artist/author/former member of ACT UP, commented on the lack of radical direct action today:

There are moments where direct action is opportune and you have to be able to sense the moment when it is. You sense that moment because there’s a bunch of people milling about metaphorically who are wanting something and sensing it. At the moment, it might seem like the opportunity for direct action has been foreclosed, but we just came off this period post-Seattle where all those tactics were being deployed again and deployed in interesting ways.⁴⁵

This decrease in direct action today is a product of what Molesworth describes as “a psychic formation joined by a prohibition on certain kinds of speech that happened under the Bush administration.”^{46 47} Given these conditions of censorship and self-censorship, it is easy to see how ACT UP’s legacy became marginalized in the 1990’s and 2000’s. The erasure of ACT UP’s history has had the most impact on those who came of age under the Bush Administration, for whom September 11, 2001 has been the defining political moment. This has profoundly impacted perceptions of AIDS, queerness and direct-action politics.

Schulman provides an analysis of how 9/11 directly eclipsed the localized aspects of AIDS-related trauma in New York City. She writes:

The deaths of 81,542 people who were despised, abandoned and who did not have rights or representation, who died of neglect of their government and families has been ignored. This gaping hole of silence has been filled by the deaths of 3,000 people [on 9/11], murdered by outside forces. This disallowed grief of twenty years of AIDS deaths was replaced by ritualized and institutionalized mourning of the

43. Warner, Michael. *The Trouble with Normal : Sex, Politics and the Ethics of Queer Life*. New York, NY: Free Press, 1999.

44. Duggan, Lisa. “The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism” in *Materializing Democracy: Toward a Revitalized Cultural Politics*. Eds. Russ

Castronovo and Dana D. Nelson, Durham: Duke University Press, 2002.

45. Gregg Bordowitz.” Personal Interview. 16 Oct. 2009.

46. “Helen Molesworth.” Personal Interview. 17 Dec. 2009.

47. This was also a time of increased regulation of queer visibility in New York City (see Michael Warner, *The Trouble with Normal* and Samuel Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*).

acceptable dead. In this way 9/11 is the Gentrification of AIDS.^{48 49}

Schulman demonstrates how the displacement of the object of national mourning on 9/11 played a crucial role in the obscuring of ACT UP's legacy.

Jasbir K. Puar's *Terrorist Assemblages, Homonationalism in Queer Times*, explores how homonationalism became the dominant model of non-normative sexuality after the cultural paradigm shift that occurred post-9/11. Puar provides insight into 9/11's discursive impact on queer bodies. Puar writes that there was queering of the terrorist body that formed "a collusion between homosexuality and American nationalism that is generated both by national rhetorics of patriotic inclusion and by gay and queer subjects themselves; homonationalism."⁵⁰ She writes that this discursive formation found its roots in the same rhetoric that the Bush administration invoked to justify the war in Iraq. While the government reiterated heterosexuality as the *American* norm, they reproduced the longstanding stereotype that Arabs are hyper-sexualized and homosexual in dress and nature.⁵¹ This discourse was a re-boosting of American patriotism in its affirmation of a U.S masculine dominance over a feminized orient.

During this time, AIDS became conceptualized as a foreign issue. Instead of creating a domestic policy, efforts to combat the pandemic took the form of moral imperialism with the 2003 Congressional passing of George W. Bush's President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). In addition to promoting abstinence-only education, "PEPFAR has funded overtly homophobic organizations, while deliberately downplaying the prevention and treatment needs of same-sex practicing individuals in Africa."^{52 53} The 2000's was a time of silencing AIDS-related trauma, normalizing of LGBT politics, and a re-rendering of AIDS as a non-issue in the United States.

48. The number of people who have died of AIDS in New York City as of August 16, 2008.

49. Schulman, Sarah. *Gentrification of the Mind: Witness to a Lost Imagination*, Forthcoming Publication.

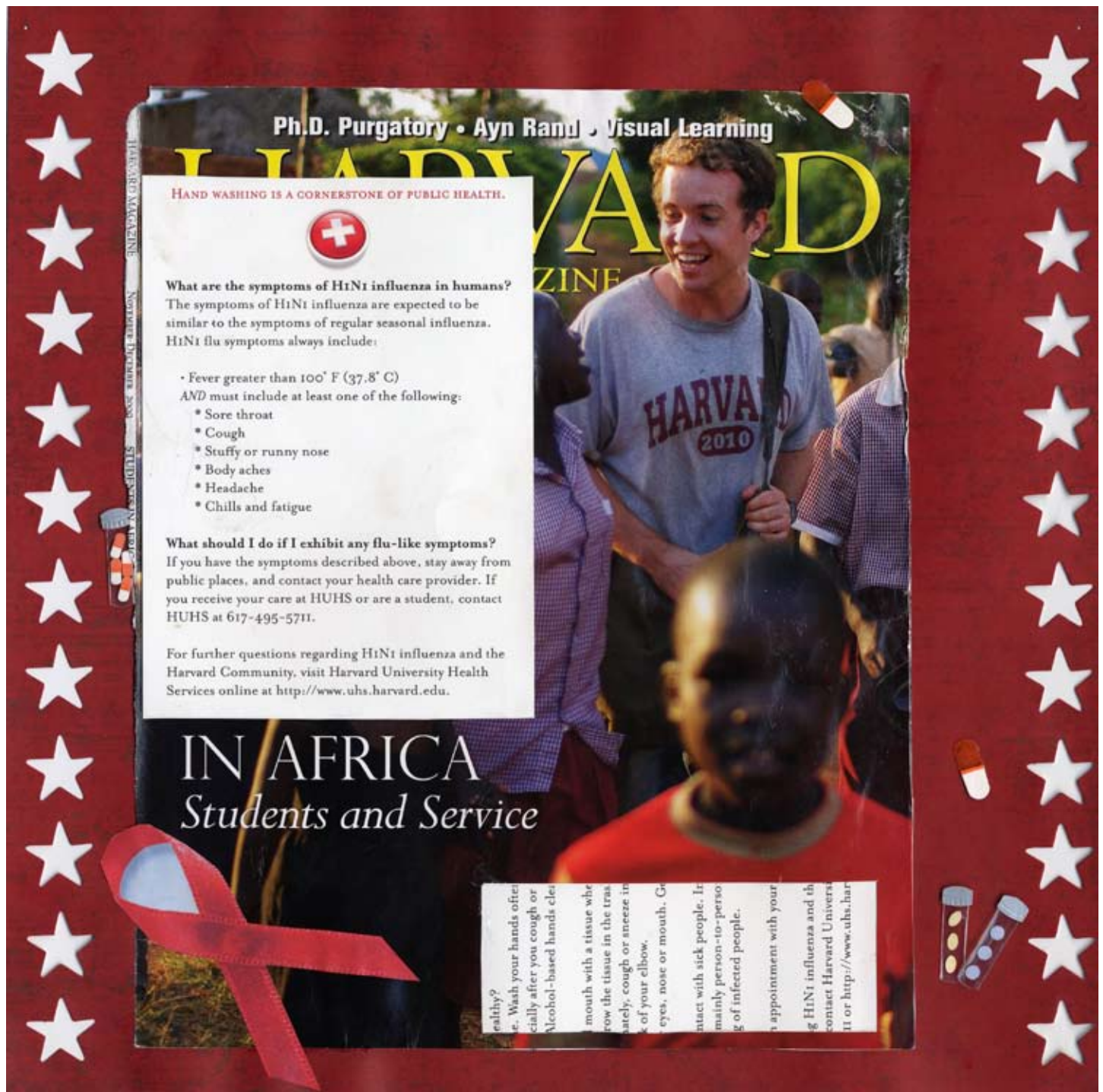
50. Puar, Jasbir K. *Terrorist Assemblages : Homonationalism in Queer Times*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2007.

51. The emphasis on traditional gender roles and the heterosexual family unit post-9/11 is discussed extensively in Susan

Faludi's *The Terror Dream*.

52. Herzog, Dagmar. *Sex in Crisis : The New Sexual Revolution and the Future of American Politics*. New York: Basic Books, 2008, 133.

53. Herzog cites Cary Alan Johnson's 2007 commission for the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission, *Off the Map: How HIV/AIDS Programming is Failing Same-Sex Practicing people in Africa*.



UNTITLED
Martabel Wasserman, 2009
Collage

ALL PEOPLE WITH AIDS ARE INNOCENT



SPRING AIDS ACTION '88: Nine days of nationwide AIDS related actions & protests.

Gran Fury

ALL PEOPLE WITH AIDS ARE INNOCENT

Gran Fury, 1988

Poster, offset lithography


Courtesy of Avram Finkelstein

TARGET CITY HALL: REASON #5 TO ACT UP ON MARCH 28TH

Ken Woodward, 1989

Poster, offset lithography

Courtesy of Aldo Hernandez

REASON #5 TO **ACT UP** ON MARCH 28TH
7:30AM PROTEST AT CITY HALL. CALL ACT UP
AT 212-533-8888 FOR MORE INFO. 
ACT UP. THERE'S NO REASON NOT TO.

SINCE THE
CITY CUT
AIDS
EDUCATION,
MORE KIDS
GET TO LEAVE
SCHOOL
EARLY.

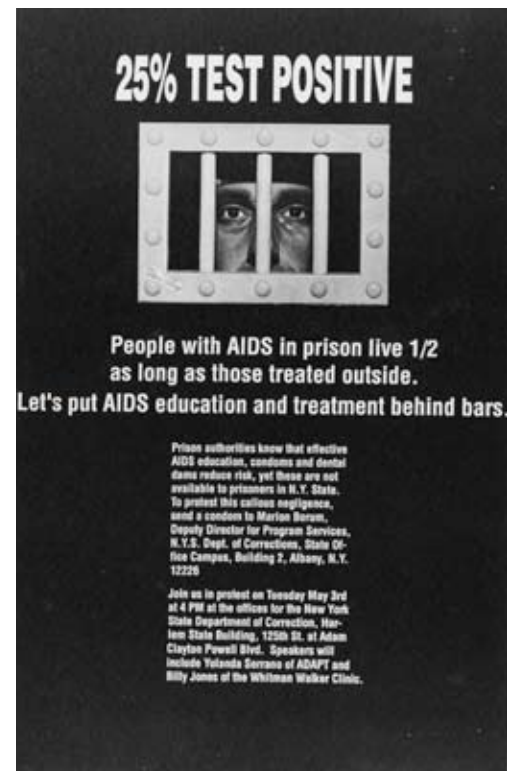


AIDS BEHIND BARS

Gran Fury, 1988

Poster, original photocopy

Courtesy of Avram Finkelstein

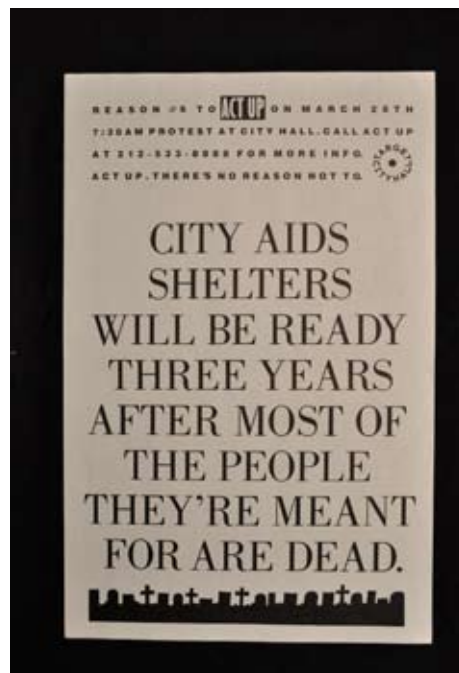
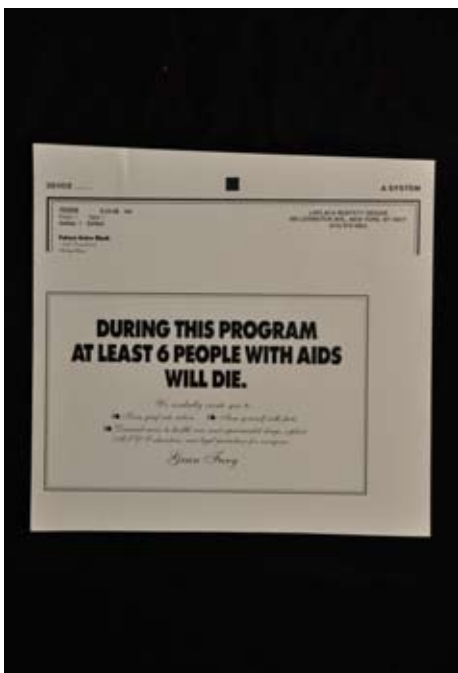


DURING THIS PROGRAM AT LEAST 6 PEOPLE WITH AIDS WILL DIE

Gran Fury, 1988

Original ad in the Bessie's Award program

Courtesy of Avram Finkelstein



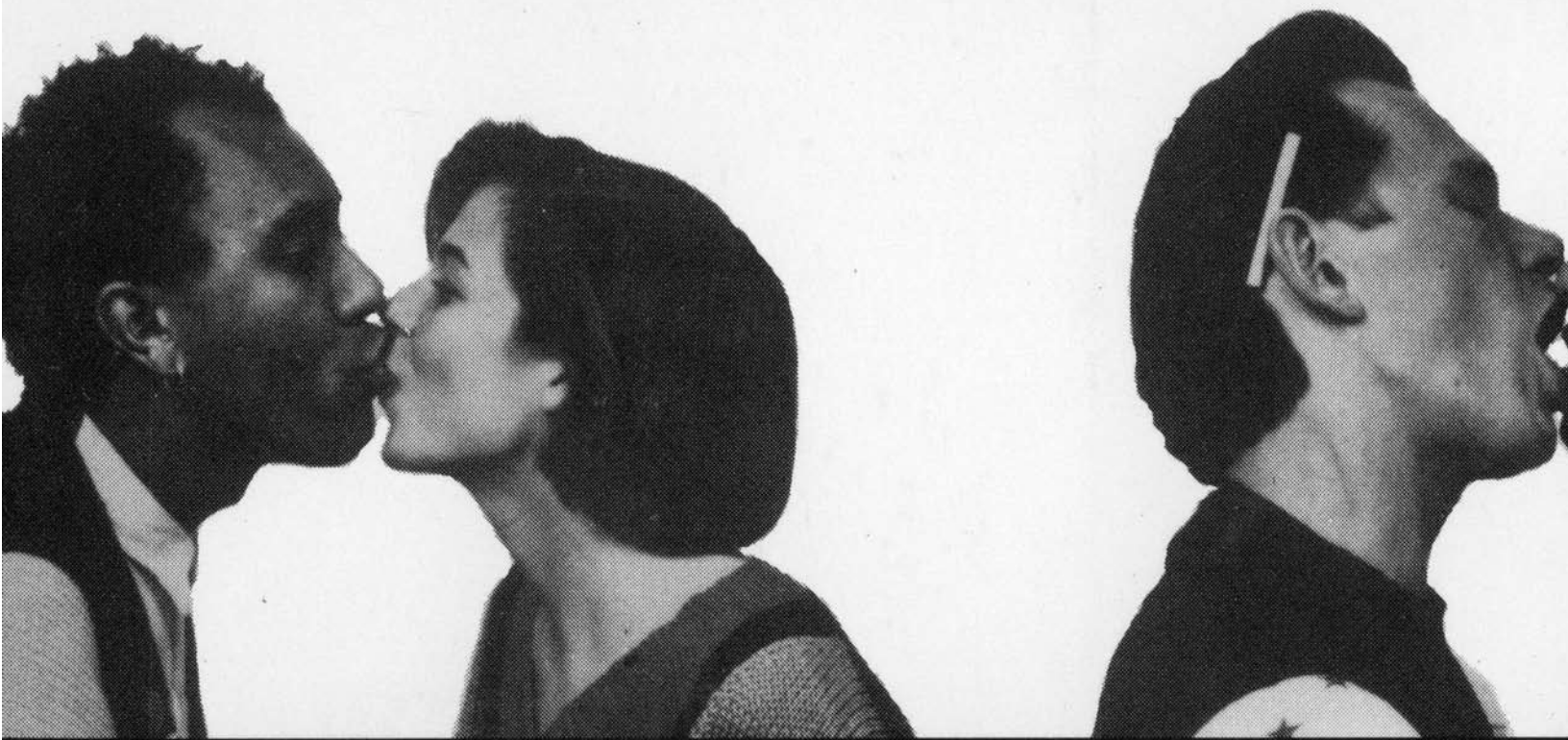
TARGET CITY HALL: REASON #6 TO ACT UP ON MARCH 28TH

Ken Woodward, 1989

Poster, offset lithography

Courtesy of Aldo Hernandez

KISSING DOESN'T KILL: GRAN FURY



KISSING DOESN'T KILL

Gran Fury, 1989

Postcard, two copies

Courtesy of Avram Finkelstein



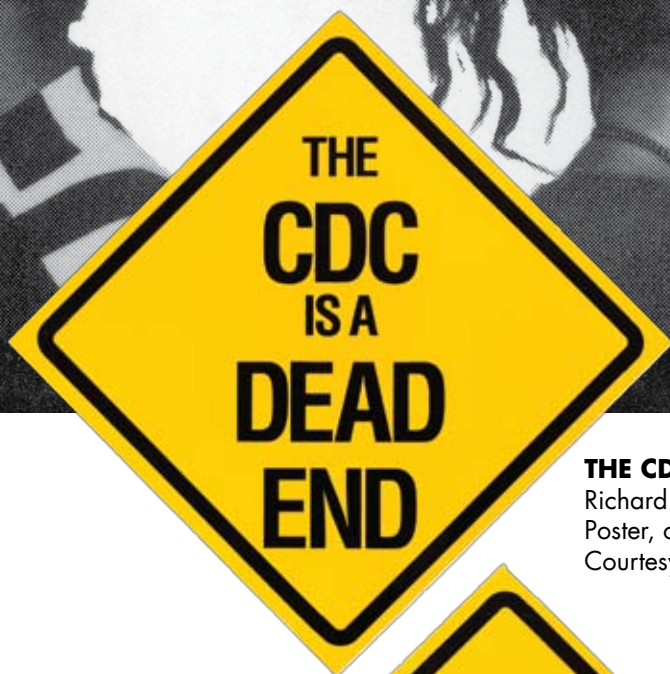
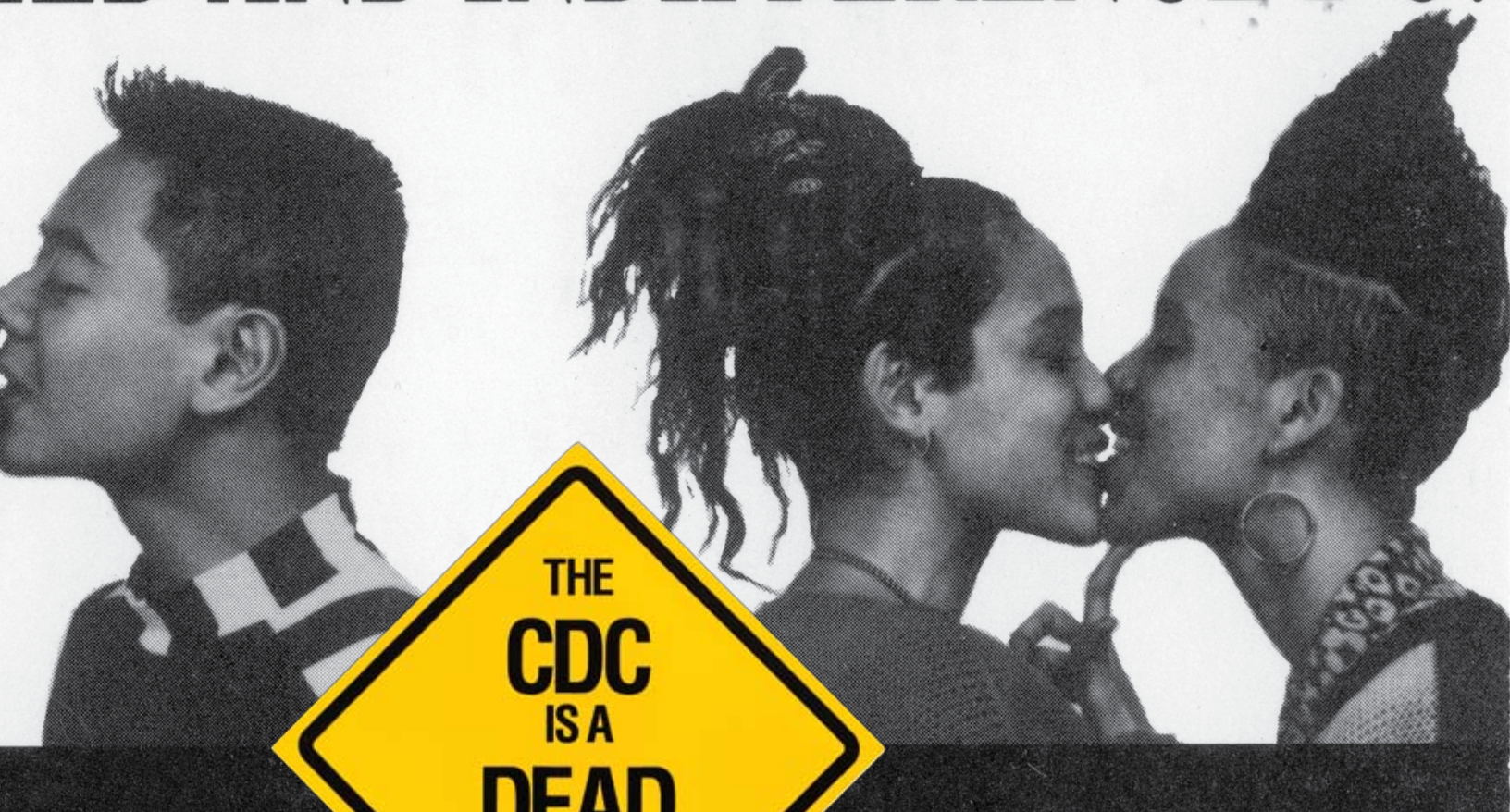
AIDS: 1 IN 61

Gran Fury, 1988

Poster, offset lithography

Courtesy of Avram Finkelstein

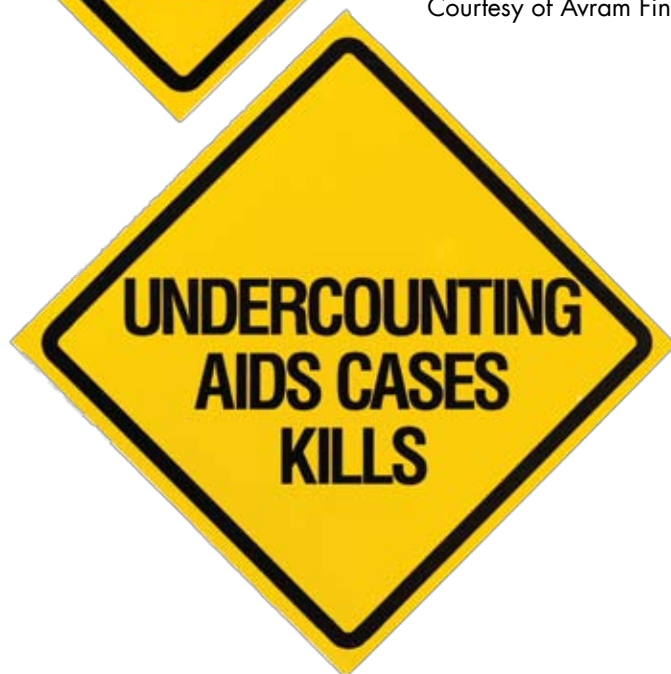
FEARED AND INDIFFERENCE DO.



THE CDC IS A DEAD END

Richard Deagle, n.d.

Poster, offset lithography mounted on foam core
Courtesy of Avram Finkelstein





STORM THE N.I.H.

Avram Finkelstein and Vincent
Gagliostro, 1990
Sticker
Courtesy of Avram Finkelstein



DECLARE WAR: STORM THE N.I.H.

ACT UP New York, May 21, 1990
Poster
Courtesy of Aldo Hernandez



MASSIVE AIDS DEMONSTRATION AND CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

ACT UP, March 28, Target City Hall,
1989
Poster
Courtesy of Aldo Hernandez

ART IS NOT ENOUGH [WITH 42,000 DEAD...]

Gran Fury, 1988
December-January 1989 calendar of
The Kitchen (recto/verso)
Offset lithography
Courtesy of Avram Finkelstein

WITH 42,000 DEAD

ART
IS NOT ENOUGH

TAKE
COLLECTIVE
DIRECT
ACTION
TO END
THE AIDS
CRISIS

The Kitchen

December

122 West 48th Street, New York, NY 10019

January

*Karen Finley
Two In Twenty
Stephen Petronio*

*11/30-12/3
12/6-23
12/18-18*

*Wolfgang Stahe
Robert Longo
Blueblack Collective
Spin Doctors*

*1/3-28
1/7
1/13-14
1/18-2/18*

Reservations 212-675-1111

Gran Fury

Performing History

Taking place at Harvard University, *ACT UP New York* could not help but explore what it means to represent a radical, anarchic, queer coalition within an institutionalized academic space. In response to the tension between the institutional and the radical, the exhibition used space as a medium for performing aspects of ACT UP's politics. In using institutional access as a platform for radical politics, the exhibition simultaneously acknowledged its limitations while trying to extend its reach as far as possible. Providing an extensive roster of public programming as well as offering all the lecture videos online enacted this self-reflexive use of institutional privilege. In addition, the fierce pussy bathrooms queered the institutional. As performance studies scholar Diane Taylor writes, "Every performance enacts a theory, and every theory performs in the public sphere."⁵⁴ The exhibition performed the queer theories of ACT UP within the space of the university.

The "art world," by which I am referring to museums and galleries, was historically one of the first communities to respond to HIV/AIDS. As Ann Philbin, curator/former member of ACT UP, reflected:

We were losing people in droves. And it was so clearly epidemic in proportions for the art world. It was just—it was such a time of huge grief, whether you were a dealer or a curator, no matter who you were, it was very clear that this was—that the world was changing right in front of us because of this. The whole art world, the trajectory of the art world, the marketplace—everything. It was really frightening.⁵⁵

The art world was one of the few cultural spheres in which queer people held prominent positions. Philbin and others were able to use their status as queers in the art world to mobilize a response to the AIDS crisis, such as Art Against AIDS's numerous benefit auctions. In her ACT UP Oral History Project interview, Philbin adds that the AIDS epidemic led to more people coming out of the closet, which "paved the way for different kinds of artists to have voices."⁵⁶

Schulman noted that *ACT UP New York* taking place at Harvard University provided a platform for visibility and a moment of wider recognition for herself and her peers who have worked tirelessly on issues related to AIDS since the beginning of the epidemic. She compared the experience of spending a week talking about her work at Harvard to winning a vacation in Hawaii, reflecting:

54. Taylor, Diana. *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*. Durham: Duke UP, 2003. Print.

55. "Ann Philbin." Interview by Sarah Schulman. ACT UP Oral History Project. 21, Jan. 2003.

56. "Ann Philbin." ACT UP Oral History Project.

It is like my entire life has been queer people and people with AIDS calling me, emailing me, stopping me on the street, now Facebooking me, for 25 years saying 'Oh my God. You changed my life. This thing was so important to me. Thank you so much.' Then straight people treating me like garbage under their shoe. That is basically what every single day of my life is like. Now there are some gay people in power here [at Harvard] so we got to have this trip to Hawaii, which is really great but it is a paradox.⁵⁷

Molesworth, an out lesbian, conceived of *ACT UP* New York for Harvard University not just because of its intellectual appeal, but because, as she said at the exhibition's opening night lecture, it changed her life. She reflected on her

curatorial process for the exhibition: "I mean, you gather archival material; you use the power of a cultural institution to ... suck the power to bestow value, and you make a public site that people can come to."⁵⁸

Access to the art world inspired fierce debates about the politics of using access to institutional spaces to promote a radical agenda. These debates are particularly relevant in the Silence = Death Project and Gran Fury. The Silence = Death Project preceded the formation of ACT UP, their work was in fact an mobilizing factor in ACT UP's formation. Gran Fury formed within ACT UP. Their work existed within galleries and museums and on buttons, t-shirts and as demonstration props for in public gathering places. The collectives are significant in contextualizing *ACT UP* New York because they recognized the complexities of access to public and private space.



THE GOVERNMENT HAS BLOOD ON ITS HANDS

Gran Fury, 1988
Poster, offset lithography
Courtesy of Avram Finkelstein

In 1986 the Silence = Death Project wheat pasted a now famous poster on the streets of New York City. Crimp and Rolston write that the Silence = Death image "came to signify AIDS activism."⁵⁹ The poster features a pink triangle pointing up, a reappropriation of the downward facing pink triangle that was used to mark homosexuals during WWII. Crimp writes that this gesture "declares that silence about the oppression and annihilation of gay people, *then and now*, must be broken as a matter of our survival."⁶⁰ This poster used the intervention of an

57. "Sarah Schulman" Personal Interview. 18 Oct. 2009.

58. "Helen Molesworth." Personal Interview. 17 Dec. 2009.

59. Crimp, Douglas, and Adam Rolston. *AIDS Demo Graphics*. Seattle: Bay Press, 1990.

60. Crimp and Rolston, 15.



SILENCE=DEATH

ACT UP, n.d.

Printed T-shirt

Courtesy of Avram Finkelstein



AIDSGATE

ACT UP, n.d.

Printed T-shirt

Courtesy of Avram Finkelstein

image into the public sphere as a way of catalyzing a crucial part of what later became ACT UP's image and activist practices.

While use of the public sphere was crucial to success of the Silence = Death Project, it recognized that there were limitations in gaining access to it. For its initial postering, the project decided to hire a professional wheat-paste crew that also handled advertisements. This action was to ensure that the poster would not be immediately replaced by a fashion or movie advertisement.⁶¹ Not only did the Silence = Death Project recognize the need to engage with the tools of consumer culture in order to gain access to the public sphere, but it also preempted its own commodification. A lawyer advised the collective to acquire a copyright for the graphic in order to prevent another party from pursuing it and regulating access to it. The copyright did not limit the image's use as open source; it has never been exercised. The Silence = Death Project thus used the tools of advertising to raise awareness about AIDS, signaling an early example of the media sophistication that came to characterize ACT UP's graphics.

After the formation of ACT UP in 1987, the Silence = Death Project changed membership slightly and formed Gran Fury, defining themselves as a "band of individuals united in anger and dedicated to exploiting the power of art to end the AIDS crisis."⁶² Crimp describes the collective as "ACT UP's unofficial propaganda ministry and guerilla graphic designers."⁶³ In addition to creating graphics for ACT UP's purposes, Gran Fury received considerable attention from galleries and museums. Examples of venues they showed include a 1987 window display at the New Museum titled *Let the Record Show*. In 1990 their *Kissing Doesn't Kill* bus advertisement was displayed in the window of the Whitney Museum and in 1990, the collective participated in the Venice Biennale. But as Gran Fury member Richard Elovitch explained during the time of their activity, "We try not to be *inside* museums, but to occupy public spaces."⁶⁴ Gran Fury used access to billboards and buses afforded by the non-profit organizations Art Against AIDS on the Road and Creative Time. This non-conventional use of museum spaces demonstrates Gran Fury's complex understanding of the public/private dichotomy. Their choice to utilize this access to the art world was met with some resistance, evident in both the theory and practice of ACT UP. As Avram Finkelstein recalled, "When the art world anointed Gran Fury as a voice, it was an opportunity that we couldn't turn away from. It would be more vile to turn your back on access than to use access." He added, "We were chastened by that, and felt uncomfortable, and as a consequence we did projects with Prostitutes of New York, a group that's organized around sex issues."⁶⁵ At the time Douglas Crimp was generating theory about the elitism of museums. He stated that one impetus for writing his book *On the Museum's Ruins* was that in "confronting [an] aesthetic response to AIDS, it is impossible to stay within the museum."⁶⁶

⁶¹. "Collective Action: Calling All Artists."

⁶⁴. Sadownick, 250.

⁶². Crimp and Rolston, 15.

⁶⁵. "Avram Finkelstein." Personal Interview. 16 Oct. 2009.

⁶³. Crimp and Rolston, 16.

⁶⁶. Crimp, *On the Museum's Ruins*, 23.



When asked about whether there were tensions specific to hosting an exhibit on ACT UP taking place at Harvard University, Finkelstein responded:

I mean, without a doubt I'm a Marxist, there's no way out of it, but I am also an American kid, and I completely believe in pop culture as an avenue for communication. So I don't see tension and likewise, because I'm so Machiavellian, I don't actually care which institution is exploring it. I think every avenue of exploration is valid, every conversation is valid.⁶⁷

This answer was echoed in comments made by Gregg Bordowitz:

I want the academy to be a more radical place. I want the academy to challenge itself as an institution. Many radical things come out of the academy... I think it has a lot to do with class. There's a friend of mine who is from Harvard and I was talking to him about [this issue] and he said, "I wanted to get away from it so fast." I said, "Harvard is where I always wanted to be." I don't have a college degree. I did go to college but I dropped out to do AIDS activism full time. My younger sister became the first person in the family to have a college degree. I come from a place in class position where actually I really would have liked to have had the opportunity to go to a place like Harvard. I am not preoccupied with these questions [about access] and I don't think it hurts the work or it kills the work. I like museums too.⁶⁸

Robert Vazquez Pacheco, artist/poet/former member of ACT UP/Gran Fury noted:

There's always tension between the activists and the institution, so I like the fact that Harvard can do a show like this, and that can, for example, invite fierce pussy to come do an installation and artist in residency here. That's great, because that tells me that no matter what people say, the institution is not as hidebound or as rigid as folks think it is. There are spaces where one can work creatively, and that one can do interventions even here.⁶⁹

The curatorial act of bestowing historical significance on fierce pussy did not take the traditional form of museum enshrinement. Instead, the posters were able to enact their original function—to protest. In this instance it was through an interrogation of how institutional spaces uphold heteronormative constructions. Their text performed the collapsing of labels that signify sexual and gendered identities—an action that was of great political import in the effort to combat a sexually transmitted disease.

The word *queer* has been critiqued as a label that ignores the variety of the experiences in a group with multiple genders and sexual practice. As Butler explains,

67. "Avram Finkelstein." Personal Interview. 16 Oct. 2009.

68. "Gregg Bordowitz." Personal Interview. 16 Oct. 2009.

69. "Robert Vazquez Pacheco." Personal Interview. 16 Oct. 2009.

[T]he genealogical critique of the queer subject will be central to queer politics to the extent that it constitutes a self-critical dimension within activism, a persistent reminder to take the time to consider the exclusionary force of one of activism's most treasured contemporary premises.⁷⁰

Instead of trying to create coalitions by generalizing experiences, the fierce pussy bathroom installations challenge the non-female or non-lesbian subject to experience the space of lesbian pride as a coalition-building experience. Lesbian subjectivity becomes a specific experience as a site for coalition building.⁷¹

In the Sackler Museum signs were put up against the wishes of the artists and curators on the outside of the bathroom doors. They read:

This restroom contains a site-specific artwork dealing with gender and sexuality that is part of the exhibition *ACT UP New York: Activism, Art and the AIDS Crisis, 1987-1993*, on view at the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts. Parents and guardians of school-age children might want to preview the work. Alternative restrooms can be found on the 2nd and 3rd floors of this building.

The signs represent a moment in which the exhibition was in conflict with the institution. The museum tried to contain the queer content. By posting a warning specifically addressed to parents or guardians, the museum enacted the homophobic discourse in which queerness is seen as a threat to children. This institutionalized homophobia is another reason why the formation of a cross-generational queer dialogue is important; it can provide an alternative notion of family.

fierce pussy's wheat pasting workshops through the Harvard College Women's Center purposefully facilitated a cross-generational queer dialogue. Approximately a dozen students participated over the course of their three-day installation period. Zoe Leonard of fierce pussy reflected on this experience:

We're here not just because we are interested in looking back and talking nostalgically about what we did then. What's interesting to us, what's exciting here about what you and all the students that we've worked with are saying, is that this is a conversation now, and a conversation into the future. What can we do together now? It's good to talk about our history. It's good to talk about it first so that everyone can understand what happened during those years. To have an intergenerational conversation is really exciting. It's great to share ideas and energy towards your future. It's very exciting.⁷²

ACT UP New York used institutional space to make a radical history visible and in

70. Butler, 227.

71. Transgender activists have also focused on the bathroom as a site for maintaining a gender binary. See Erin Calhoun Davis, "Situating 'Fluidity': (Trans) Gender Identification and the Regulation

of Gender Diversity." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 15.1 (2008): 97-130. Project MUSE. For more on this specifically in the university see Spade, Dean, and Wahng, Sel. "Transecting the Academy." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 10.2 (2004): 240-253. Project MUSE.

72. "fierce pussy." Personal Interview. 16 Oct, 2009.

doing so continued a political legacy of ACT UP. Using gallery space to display poster designed for the street continued the questioning the boundaries between public/private spaces that was central to the practices of the Silence = Death Project and Gran Fury. The fierce pussy bathrooms actively interrogated and disrupted the space, illustrating heteronormative assumptions are still upheld by museums and universities. In asking "Are you a boy or a girl?" the bathrooms signaled to the fact that there were no gender-neutral bathrooms in the buildings they inhabited. *ACT UP New York's* performance created a site for teaching the history of ACT UP to a younger generation without rendering its politics obsolete.

This restroom contains a site-specific artwork dealing with gender and sexuality that is part of the exhibition *ACT UP New York: Activism, Art, and the AIDS Crisis, 1987–1993*, on view at the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts. Parents and guardians of school-age children might want to preview the work. Alternative restrooms can be found on the 2nd and 3rd floors of this building.



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WHY IS TEXT ABOUT LESBIAN PRIDE

INAPPROPRIATE FOR CHILDREN?



MEN USE CONDOMS OR BEAT IT

Gran Fury, 1988

Crack-and-peel sticker

Courtesy of Robert Vazquez Pacheco

SEXISM REARS ITS UNPROTECTED HEAD

Gran Fury, 1988

Design test, original photocopy

Courtesy of Gran Fury

SEXISM REARS ITS UNPROTECTED HEAD

Gran Fury, 1988

Photocopied pasteup on board

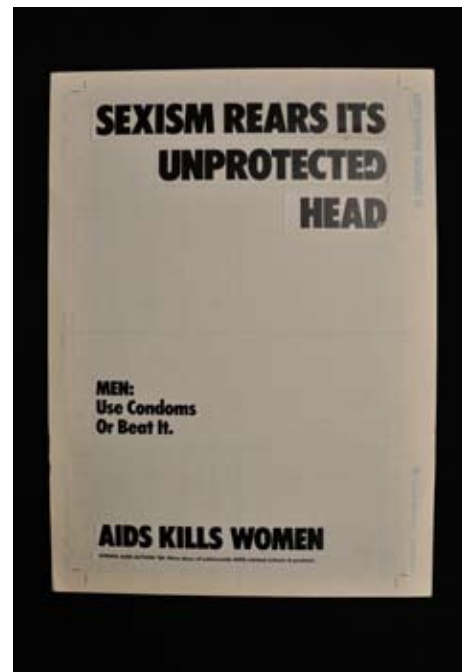
Courtesy of Gran Fury

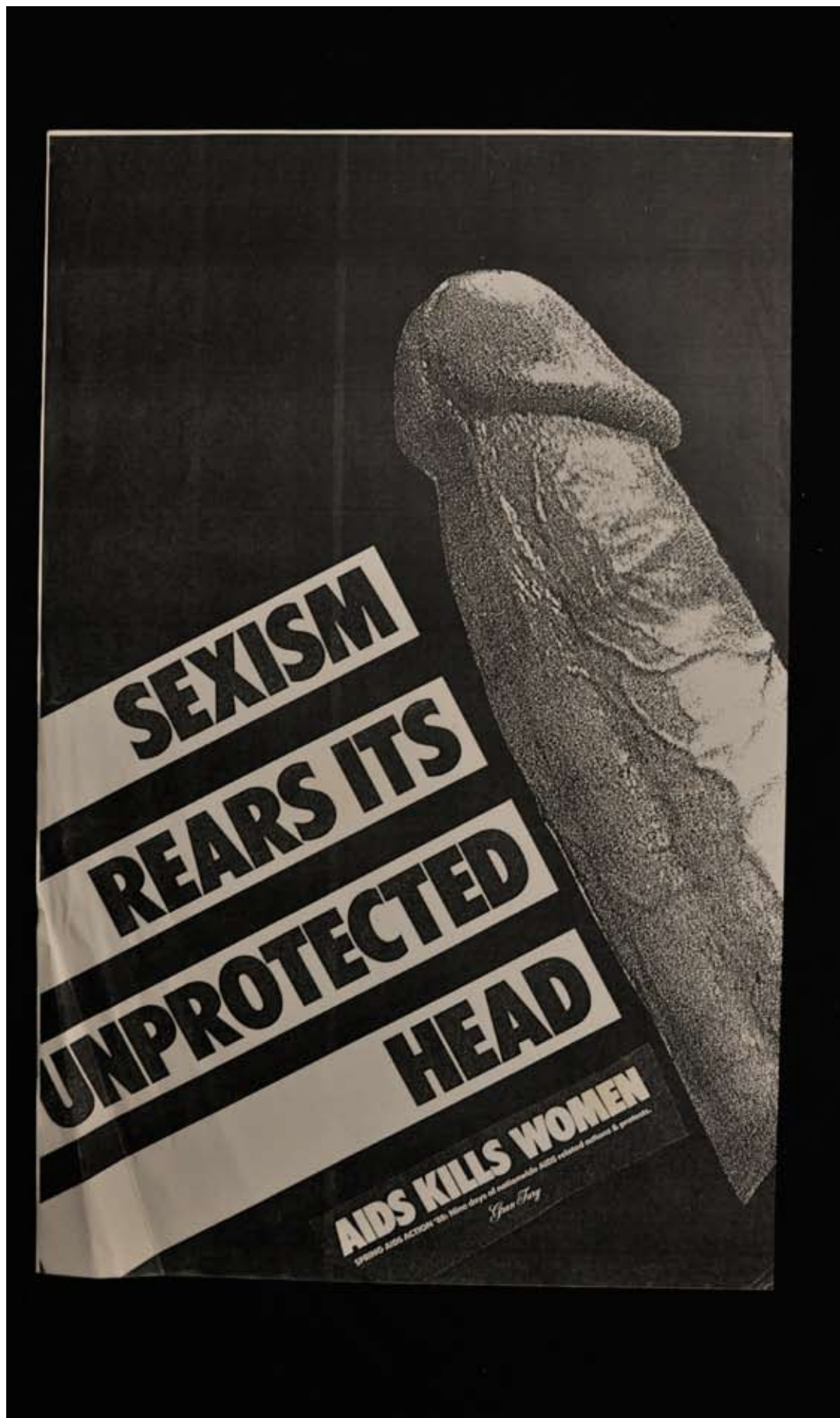
SEXISM REARS ITS UNPROTECTED HEAD

Gran Fury, 1988

Original photocopy

Courtesy of Gran Fury





SEXISM REARS ITS UNPROTECTED HEAD

Gran Fury, 1988
Design test, original photocopy
Courtesy of Gran Fury

Animating the Archive





CALL THE WHITE HOUSE

Donald Moffit, 1990
Backlit transparency
Courtesy of the artist

In one of the exhibition's keynote addresses, Richard Meyer described reacting to the Donald Moffit *Call the White House: Tell Bush We Are Not All Dead Yet* light box piece by reaching for his cell phone to dial the phone number in the middle of the piece. During this momentary slip, he realized that not only was George W. Bush newly out of office but that the sign referred to his father. This reaction to the work speaks to the continued relevance of what is represented in the exhibition. In calling the viewer to perform a political action, the agit-prop is not instantly legible as ahistorical. As Robert Vasquez Pacheco recalled in the exhibition's opening night lecture, most of Gran Fury's work is unfortunately still relevant. He cited the poster that continues to challenge social constructions of people living with HIV/AIDS that declared *All People With AIDS Are Innocent*, and their billboard *Welcome to America: The Only Industrialized Nation Without Healthcare Besides South Africa*.

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett discusses the role of curating in ethnographic museums as a form of generating collective identity. "Display is an interface that mediates and thereby transforms what is shown into heritage."⁷³ While *ACT UP New York* is a different sort of ethnography than the process of defining an 'other' that Kirshenblatt-Gimblett describes, it is an ethnography staged with the input of the people represented. I will establish how the archival content of *ACT UP New York* lent itself to reading the exhibition as both an ethnographic and an art exhibition. The curatorial strategies of staging the archival objects in the exhibition worked to create a queer usable past.⁷⁴ A queer usable past sits at the intersections of the



WELCOME TO AMERICA

Gran Fury, n.d.
T-shirt, made from billboard design
Courtesy of actupnewyork.org

⁷³. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 7.

⁷⁴. 'Usable past' is a term first used in 1915 in Van Wyck Brooks's *America's Coming-of-Age*.



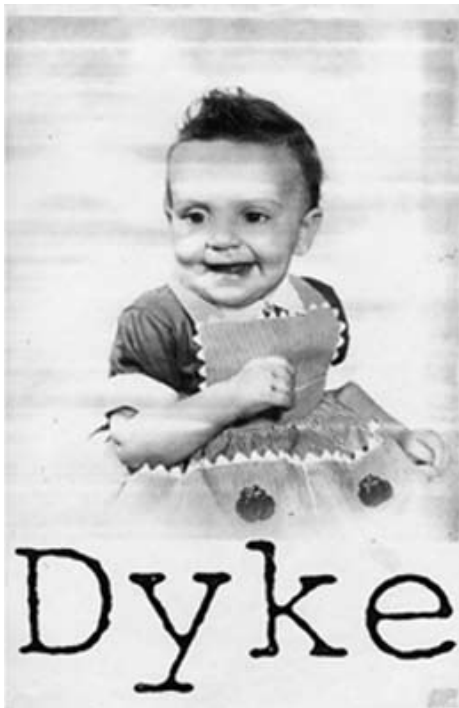
personal and political: it gives individuals a collective history and enables the continuation of a lineage of political activism. McCarthy explains the need for a queer usable past:

By not knowing our history, we facilitate our own rootlessness, or worse—our erasure. We also rob ourselves of full membership in the human community, the full capacity to be part of the broader historical struggle for human rights.⁷⁵

As I discuss throughout this essay, making the history AIDS visible requires representations that highlight the ongoing epidemic and activist responses to it. This is relevant to the formation of a queer usable past that encompasses the defining moment of queer activism during the AIDS crisis. Looking at the display of three sets of objects, I will demonstrate how they challenge the traditional norms of museum display to enact a collapsing of boundaries that weaves the political lineage of ACT UP through the present. These objects are the poster give-aways, demonstration footage and The ACT UP Oral History Project.

Upon entering the Sert Gallery one became immersed in a multimedia space animating the history of ACT UP in New York City. On the wall of the entrance was a rotating projection of protest footage by DIVA TV and a short documentary by Jim Hubbard. On one long wall of the gallery space there was a textual timeline beginning in 1983 and ending in 1996. Parallel to it there was a wall of non-chronological posters, pamphlets and t-shirts. In the middle of the floor a wall had been erected to contain the same explanatory text for the exhibition that is on the ground floor. On the opposite side of this wall was the Gran Fury image *Kissing Doesn't Kill*, which faced two glass archival cases that contained more ephemera and graphic design mock-ups illustrating the technical and creative aspects of producing the images on the wall. The back wall featured two projections: one of still images of posters and billboards by collectives in their original street context, the other a video of outtakes from the "Kissing Doesn't Kill" photo shoot. Throughout the gallery, there were four cardboard boxes with reproductions of posters designed as give-aways. The examples I will be discussing are the poster giveaways, video footage and the ACT UP Oral History Project on the ground floor.

75. McCarthy, "Stonewall's Children: Life, Loss, and Love after Liberation."



DYKE
fierce pussy, n.d.
Poster
Courtesy of fierce pussy



Robin Bernstein described seeing the roll of *Silence = Death* stickers in the gallery's archival case and experiencing it not only as an ethnographic display but a display of *her* ethnography.⁷⁶ Bernstein, Professor of Women, Gender and Sexuality and History and Literature at Harvard University, recalled having countless rolls of stickers just like the ones in the case and placing them all over the streets of New York City. Any archival impulse was overridden by her political agenda in that moment. For a younger generation who did not have this experience, the objects were at risk of becoming abstract through the display. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett describes this trajectory of an object, "Though once multiple, many ethnographic objects become singular, and the more singular they become, the more readily are they reclassified and exhibited as art."⁷⁷ Taking the stickers that were intended to be inexpensive and mass-produced and putting them under an archival glass case makes them an ethnographic object.

76. "Robin Bernstein." Personal Conversation. 3 Mar. 2010.

77. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 25.

The sealing off of the original artifacts takes on the status of an art object that exists outside the reach of the general public. The poster giveaways counteract this by making the historical content accessible to a present day audience. Reproductions of two posters on display, *Silence = Death*, the male version of the Gran Fury *Read My Lips* image, and two posters by fierce pussy, were available for anyone who entered the gallery. Each poster interacted with the historical moment in a different way. *Read My Lips* by Gran Fury advertised a series of Kiss-In protests that took place in 1987. *Silence = Death* on the other hand, while heavily inscribed with historical status, is less specific. fierce pussy's posters, made during the height of their initial activity, still speak to the status of lesbian invisibility.

Cvetkovich poses a question as a point of entry into thinking about how slogans and graphics acquire layers of historical meaning. She writes:

What is the current meaning of the slogan "the AIDS crisis is not over" in the context of treatment with protease inhibitors and an ever widening gap, of transnational proportions, between medical possibility and political and economic reality that has significantly shifted the early associations of AIDS with gay men? Like activism itself, the slogan's meaning is constantly shifting.⁷⁸

Silence = Death is still relevant to the AIDS epidemic in America, although it is no longer worn on buttons by the majority of a political subculture.

Reproducing these images in 2009 lends itself to a variety of possibilities. The posters could serve as a supplement to someone's personal historical archive given the urgency with which the posters were originally wheat pasted across New York City. These posters could serve as a stand-in for the original. Another category of possibility is to use the posters to fulfill their historical function: to protest. However, it is more likely that posters ended up in dorm rooms and office cubicles. The potential to protest or decorate are not inherently in opposition to each other.

These posters are then lived with, a constant reminder of queer history.

This gesture was complimented by an aural disruption of the gallery space. The vociferous noise emanating from the protest video viscerally struck me each time I visited the Sert Gallery. The grainy 16mm footage being shown (served as a form of activism in ACT UP) functioned to document resistance and oftentimes the police brutality it was met with. Within the gallery, it was testament to



78. Cvetkovich, 156

the possibilities of protest. The soundtrack of protestors in the background filled the space with an audio-visual representation of the emotions of posters on the wall.

Helen Molesworth explained her experience of this work:

I've been really amazed in looking at the demo footage, over and over again, in the sense that I have a sense, and perhaps it's generational, or nostalgic, and could be really problematic in that way, but I have a sense of much diminished horizon for protest, and for a certain kind of really what I would call scathingly critical speech in this country, and so I'm simply blown away every time I see the footage.⁷⁹

This representation of direct-action protest is one of the ways in which the exhibition addresses generational disconnects. It functions as a resource for tactics and challenges the ways in which the protest has been rendered as ineffective in the political landscape of the past decade.

Mark Harrington, former member of ACT UP/founder of the Treatment Action Group, commented on some of the key differences between the current moment and the historical period of ACT UP:

With the public option you don't see people marching. Why aren't unions out in the streets? Unions can mobilize people; they did it very well for the Democratic Party in the last few elections. We're not seeing a lot of that, and I think that's creating a tilt in the news, but you can't just blame the system. I mean, everybody is responsible for what happens or doesn't happen in our country, and I think we [ACT UP] seized what we felt were our rights as citizens, but we had to seize them. They were not given to us without a struggle, and we have to hold on to them, and a lot of people were educated, and middle class people that hadn't been used to thinking of themselves as being disenfranchised, so I think they haven't been upset enough about what's going on to get out of their comfort zone.⁸⁰

The video footage represents the crucial role documentation played in AIDS activism. As Gregg Bordowitz explained,

In the beginning, we would do the demonstrations and there would be no news coverage. We would also run around and offer our footage to CNN and NBC and local channels and often they would take the footage and often they would use it. They wouldn't pay us, we never asked for money and they would often even use it without credit but we didn't care. That was part of what it meant to be a video activist.⁸¹

79. "Helen Molesworth." Personal Interview. 17 Dec. 2009.

80. "Mark Harrington," Personal Interview. 24 Nov. 2009.

81. Gregg Bordowitz." Personal Interview. 16 Oct. 2009.

When I asked Bordowitz what his concerns were about historicizing AIDS activism, he replied: "I am not afraid of the historicization of AIDS. I've participated in it and a long time ago, I recognized that that was necessary and important and like I said, I participated in it as a documentarian." The video footage in the Sert Gallery speaks to the importance of alternative media in ACT UP.

The ACT UP Oral History Project is another example of the intersections of documentation and activism. Co-founders Jim Hubbard and Sarah Schulman articulate the goal of the project as follows:

The purpose of this project is to present comprehensive, complex, human, collective, and individual pictures of the people who have made up ACT UP/New York. These men and women of all races and classes have transformed entrenched cultural ideas about homosexuality, sexuality, illness, health care, civil rights, art, media, and the rights of patients. They have achieved concrete changes in medical and scientific research, insurance, law, health care delivery, graphic design, and introduced new and effective methods for political organizing. These interviews reveal what has motivated them to action and how they have organized complex endeavors. We hope that this information will de-mystify the process of making social change, remind us that change can be made, and help us understand how to do it.⁸²

Hubbard and Schulman have been using grassroots strategies to begin the historicization of a grassroots non-hierarchical organization by setting up a format that encouraged anyone involved in ACT UP New York to narrate their own experience. The presence of the ACT UP Oral History Project in the exhibition, which has previously only existed as an online archive, fills the space with the faces of individuals who made up the movement. Presented in the context of an art space, it does not function as a searchable archive for research but a performative representation of how a political coalition was constituted.

Each interview takes place in the home of the interviewee. Being able to see these interviews simultaneously within a gallery space allows for private sites to become public and enter into visual dialogue with each other. While this dialogue is media-mediated and far from the experience of sitting in a jam-packed ACT UP meeting for hours, it creates a coalition of narratives in the present.

Schulman described her observations from the perspective of having conducted all the interviews. Stating that the interviewees:

...don't describe the same events. They don't describe them in the same ways. They don't repeat each other. They are so individual. That is very unusual. Usually people get into a cult mentality and they all use the same phrases and everything, yes. The

82. The ACT UP Oral History Project. Web. 14 Mar. 2010. <<http://www.actuporal-history.org/about/index.html>>.

other thing that is interesting is nobody ever refused to answer a question that I asked them.⁸³

Perhaps it is the same willingness of ACT UP's members to acknowledge the intertwining importance of the personal and political that made each interview unique and that also allowed people to answer every question for the archive.

Displaying the project spatially allowed for a representation of ACT UP's diversity. As Jim Hubbard recounted, this was one of his inspirations for creating the project,

If [ACT UP is] perceived at all [in a dominant historical narrative], people see it as a monolith; it's this problem that I was thinking about while watching it downstairs [in the CCVA]. ACT UP is perceived like there were these cute white boys who wouldn't have been doing any political action had it not been for AIDS and very little of that is true actually because it was more diverse. A good many of the women had a great deal more political expertise and experience than the guys.⁸⁴

Hubbard was able to experience his work differently through this presentation of the project, as he explained,

Walking into the Carpenter Center yesterday afternoon was a revelation. It was so wonderful. I was overjoyed literally. First of all it looks so beautiful and secondly it's the first time that I have appreciated the work that we've done. There's a certain weight and also an expansiveness that is evident in the lobby that really captures the nature of the project.⁸⁵

Bernstein described this spatialization of narratives in a different way that demonstrates the wide range of affect the project invoked. She experienced seeing survivors of the "Plague Years" as a representation of PTSD, that the television sets created graveyard of the living. Each individual television was a tombstone that functioned to separate the individual from the collective. The curatorial decision to display the project in an installation created an affective experience that represented both the joy and trauma of ACT UP. This interactive display allowed viewers to spatially experience aspects of this history. Representing close to two hundred hours of archival video in this way collapsed the boundaries of art and archive, past and present.⁸⁶

83. "Sarah Schulman" Personal Interview. 18 Oct. 2009.

84. "Jim Hubbard." Personal Interview. 16 Oct. 2009.

85. "Jim Hubbard." Personal Interview. 16 Oct. 2009.

86. "Jim Hubbard." Personal Interview. 16 Oct. 2009.

87. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 30.

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, like Cvetkovich, suggests that one of the challenges museums and archives face is how to represent the affective aspects of a community: "What happens to the intangible, the ephemeral, the immovable, and the animate? The intangible which includes such classic ethnographic subjects as kinship, worldview, cosmology, values and attitudes can not be carried away."⁸⁷ The display of the ACT UP Oral History Project in the exhibition offered one response to this challenge. It allowed for individuals to narrate the experience of community, creating a collective archive of memory and affect. The techniques of display discussed make the history of ACT UP tangible, providing a resource for the formation of a queer usable past.

Creating the Narrative

Timeline

1981 June 5: The United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports five cases of a rare pneumonia in young gay men in Los Angeles. Additional cases are subsequently reported in New York, San Francisco, and other cities. In July the CDC also reports the occurrence of a highly unusual skin cancer (Kaposi's sarcoma) in young gay men. Both conditions would later be identified as AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome).

July 3: The New York Times publishes its first news story on Kaposi's sarcoma. Through 1982, the terms "gay cancer" and "GRID" (gay-related immune deficiency) continue to be used by the media and healthcare professionals, mistakenly suggesting an inherent link between homosexuality and the syndrome. The CDC declares the new disease an epidemic.

128 HIV/AIDS-related deaths reported in the US in 1981.

Do you resent people with AIDS?

Do you trust HIV-negatives?

Have you given up hope for a cure?

When was the last time you cried?

Where *ACT UP* New York attempted to contain the history of ACT UP within the binary of past and present, it was arguably least successful in its attempts to convey to a younger generation that the trauma of the crisis in the United States is ongoing. The primary example of this was the timeline on the wall of the Sert Gallery that ended in 1996, creating a false endpoint to the epidemic. However, this choice was counteracted when the gallery became the setting for a lecture series that explicitly called into questions the limitations of the narrative being put forth by the exhibition. The impact of trauma was rendered visible by disrupting conventions of the Academy: through the collapsing of disciplinary boundaries and by creating a public site for PTSD to be expressed.

Grace wrote, "without hierarchy the story of ACT UP can be conveyed only by a multitude of conflicting voice."⁸⁸ The exhibition used an interdisciplinary approach as one response to this challenge. The roster of corresponding events ranged from a poetry reading by Eileen Myles to the symposium "HIV Denialism, Mistrust and Stigma" sponsored by the Harvard University Center for AIDS Research and Harvard Initiative for Global Health. A variety of disciplinary perspectives offered individuals numerous points of entry into the history of ACT UP as well as demonstrating the breadth of its legacy. However, as I will discuss in the example of the art history symposium "ACT UP 20 Years Later," traditional methodologies for constructing narrative ultimately needed to break down in order to create a space for narrating trauma.

88. ACT UP New York: Activism, Art and the AIDS Crisis, 1987-1993, Exhibition Brochure. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Art Museum, 2009. Print.

THE FOUR QUESTIONS

Gran Fury, 1992

Poster, offset lithography

Courtesy of Avram Finkelstein

The timeline on the wall of the Sert Gallery was the most contested aspect of the exhibition. It was a useful representation of facts that demonstrated the government inaction and delayed media response which provoked the graphics on the wall. The number of HIV-related deaths in America that occurred to that date punctuates each year. Molesworth explained how it emerged as a curatorial strategy:

It got kind of complicated and muddy, because there was a lot of apertures for trying on the one hand to give young people the “facts,” and the timeline was a way of saying, “This is what happened, and this is why these people behaved the way they did.” But on the other hand, the show was also trying to mark a historical trajectory—to say this marriage debate that we’re having isn’t happening in a vacuum. It is 20 years after this other moment, which is 20 years after this other moment, so what is it about this 20-year cycle that we’re in: where gay people kind of like rise up, and rattle the cage? And so, there is a lot packed into this tiny little show in that way.⁸⁹

While it provided useful information, the way it accepted the span of the wall as an ending point without signaling to the continuously rising death count made it a problematic narrative gesture. It did not explicitly draw connections between past queer and AIDS activists and the struggles of today.

The end of the timeline illustrates the problem facing AIDS activists in the United States today: while infection rates continue to grow at an alarming rate, visible activism has continued to decline. As Mark Harrington explained:

It was unfortunate that it stopped in '96. Because there was just a new UN AIDS report today [November 24, 2009], and it estimated about 32 million people living with AIDS, last year 2.7 million got infected 2 million died. Even in our own country the numbers are still significant. What happened was a demobilization of activism, because a lot of people that were ACT UP were able to go back to regular life, and that was what they'd been struggling for anyway, and there's nothing wrong with that, and then some people went to NGOs for services, and then people expected Clinton was going to provide national health care.⁹⁰

One of the ways the display in the gallery did resist a narrative that compartmentalized the movement was through the curation of the posters, which defied being read as a linear narrative of ACT UP New York's history. Gran Fury's final poster *Four Questions* hung at the end farthest from the entrance, which could be read to signify an ending point to ACT UP's peak agitprop production. However, the poster's open-ended questions challenge this simplified periodization. The poster uses blank white paper with four questions typed in non-descript font in the middle reading: “Do you resent people with AIDS? / Do you trust HIV-negatives?”

89. “Helen Molesworth.” Personal Interview. 17 Dec. 2009.

90. “Mark Harrington,” Personal Interview. 24 Nov. 2009.

1982 The CDC formally establishes the term “AIDS” and refers to four “identified risk factors”: male homosexuality, intravenous drug use, Haitian origin, hemophilia A. The cause of AIDS is still unknown. Gay Men’s Health Crisis, founded in New York City, is the first community-based AIDS service center in the US.

463 HIV/AIDS-related deaths reported in the US in 1982.

1983 Dr. Luc Montagnier in France isolates lymphadenopathy-associated virus (LAV), later to become known as human immunodeficiency virus, or HIV. The CDC adds female sexual partners of men with AIDS as a fifth risk group.

1,508 HIV/AIDS-related deaths reported in the US in 1983.

1984 Dr. Robert Gallo in the US identifies HIV as the cause of AIDS. November: San Francisco officials order bathhouses closed; major public controversy ensues in Los Angeles, New York, and other cities.

3,505 HIV/AIDS-related deaths reported in the US in 1984.

1985 The Normal Heart, by Larry Kramer, opens in New York: the first major play about the early years of the AIDS epidemic. First HIV test is licensed by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

October 2: Actor Rock Hudson announces that he has AIDS and dies later in 1985.

6,972 HIV/AIDS-related deaths reported in the US in 1985.

1986 After six years in office, President Reagan mentions the term “AIDS” in public for the first time.

September: AZT, the first drug used to treat AIDS, begins clinical trials.

12,110 HIV/AIDS-related deaths reported in the US in 1986.

1987 AZT, manufactured by Burroughs Wellcome, becomes the first AIDS drug treatment approved by the FDA. Its cost, \$10,000 for a year’s supply, makes it one of the most expensive drugs ever sold. The recommended dose is one capsule every four hours around the clock — a regimen later shown to be excessive and extremely toxic. The US Congress adopts the Helms Amendment banning use of federal funds for AIDS education materials that “promote or encourage, directly or indirectly, homosexual activities.” The amendment passes by an overwhelming margin: 94 – 2 in the Senate and 368 – 47 in the House.

February–March: The Silence = Death poster first appears on the streets of New York City.

March: In response to the government’s mismanagement of the AIDS crisis, the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power forms at the Gay and Lesbian Community Center in New York. Its first meeting draws around 300 participants.

March 24: ACT UP’s first demonstration floods Wall Street to protest profiteering by pharmaceutical companies. Seventeen people are arrested. Soon after the demonstration, the FDA announces it will shorten its drug approval process by two years.

April: President Reagan appears before the College of Physicians in Philadelphia to deliver his first substantive speech on AIDS.

October 11: The Second National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights draws 500,000 demonstrators.

16,412 HIV/AIDS-related deaths reported in the US in 1987.

1988 January 15: ACT UP New York’s Women’s Caucus organizes the first ACT UP action focused on women and HIV. Five hundred people protest an article published in Cosmopolitan magazine informing heterosexual women that unprotected vaginal intercourse with an HIV-positive man is safe.

May 1 – 9: ACT UP chapters around the country mount nine days of protests focusing on specific, unattended aspects of the epidemic, such as IV-drug use, homophobia, people of color, women, testing programs, prison programs, and children with AIDS. More than 50 cities participate.

October 11: ACT UP, joined by the national ACT NOW coalition, closes down the FDA. Demonstrations drawing more than 1,000 protest the slow pace of the drug-approval process. The event, which results in almost 180 arrests, receives international press coverage.

21,119 HIV/AIDS-related deaths reported in the US in 1988.

1989 March 28: ACT UP’s second-anniversary protest, “Target City Hall,” draws 3,000 activists in New York.

June 4 – 9: ACT UP demonstrates at the Fifth International Conference on AIDS in Montreal. ACT UP presents the revolutionary concept of parallel-track drug testing, in which drugs found to be nontoxic are simultaneously placed in clinical trials and released to patients who do not qualify for the trials. The next week, ACT UP members are invited to discuss parallel track with Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (part of the National Institutes of Health). Days later, Fauci announces the official

establishment of parallel-track testing. The panel appointed to write procedural standards includes one member of ACT UP.

September 14: Seven ACT UP members infiltrate the New York Stock Exchange and chain themselves to the VIP balcony. Their bullhorns drown out the opening bell as a banner unfurls above the trading floor demanding “SELL WELLCOME.” Four days later, Burroughs Wellcome drops the price of AZT by 20 percent.

December 10: ACT UP and WHAM! (Women’s Health Action and Mobilization) co-sponsor the first “Stop the Church” demonstration: 4,500 protesters gather outside St. Patrick’s Cathedral in New York to decry the Catholic Church’s homophobia, opposition to safer-sex education, and attempts to block access to safe and legal abortions. Arrests: 111. Anniversary demonstrations held in 1990 and 1991 draw hundreds of protesters.

December – January: ACT UP sends New York Times AIDS reporter Gina Kolata a Christmas card “zap” (multiple phone calls and faxes to tie up the line) to protest her inadequate AIDS coverage. Shortly thereafter, Kolata requests information from ACT UP about the effectiveness of lower doses of AZT. A major article appears in the Times, and within weeks the FDA cuts the standard dose of AZT in half.

27,791 HIV/AIDS-related deaths reported in the US in 1989.

1990 January: Ronald Reagan apologizes for his neglect of the epidemic while he was president.

March 28: More than 2,500 ACT UP demonstrators descend on the New

York State Capitol in Albany to protest the inadequacy of state AIDS funding. A banner dropped over the front of the building insists, “The Death of People with AIDS Is a Capitol Crime.” The governor’s mansion is literally wrapped in red tape.

January 8 – 9: ACT UP NY joins ACT UP Atlanta in two days of demonstrations in Georgia. Sixty-three people are arrested lying down in the street at the state capitol to protest Georgia’s sodomy laws. The following day, hundreds besiege CDC headquarters to protest its narrow definition of AIDS (which excludes gynecological illnesses and illnesses more common among people of color and children).

March 6: ACT UP’s Needle Exchange Committee is formed, dedicated to decriminalizing needle possession, promoting safer-injection education, and expanding drug-treatment programs. ACT UP members assemble on a Lower East Side streetcorner to distribute educational materials and exchange clean needles for used ones.

May 21: ACT UP NY organizes a national action at the National Institutes of Health in Maryland, “Storm the NIH.” One thousand protesters demand more AIDS treatments, especially for the opportunistic infections that kill People with AIDS (PWA), an end to the underrepresentation of women and people of color in clinical trials, and the formation of a Women’s Health Committee in the AIDS Clinical Trial System at the NIH.

July: Publication of *Women, AIDS & Activism*, originally developed by ACT UP’s Women’s Caucus in 1989. It is the first book to chart the history of AIDS in women.

November: New York Governor Mario

Cuomo cuts state AIDS funding by 40 percent just four days before his reelection. One hundred AIDS activists pack his victory party and interrupt his acceptance speech with cries of “Shame!” and “Cuomo balances the budget with people’s lives!” The film *Longtime Companion*, the first major feature film to deal with the subject of AIDS, is released in theaters.

31,538 HIV/AIDS-related deaths reported in the US in 1990.

1991 January 16: Led by the ACT UP YELL Committee (Youth Education Life Line), formed in 1989, activists and high-school students demand immediate approval of the condom distribution plan proposed by New York City Schools Chancellor Joseph A. Fernandez. The next month, ACT UP celebrates one of its most concrete victories against the AIDS virus as the Board of Education votes 4 – 3 in favor of a plan to distribute condoms to students in the public high schools.

January 23: ACT UP NY declares a “Day of Desperation,” a day-long action designed to target all aspects of city life. On the night of January 22 coalition members invade CBS Evening News broadcasts. The following morning 2,000 demonstrators march on Wall Street. Coffins are delivered to city, state, and federal officials responsible for perpetuating the epidemic. ACT UP housing committee joins Stand Up Harlem, Emmaus House, and Harlem religious leaders at the state office building in Harlem to protest the lack of housing and services for people with HIV. The Latino/a Caucus invades the Bronx borough president’s office. At 5:07pm ACT UP takes over Grand Central Station in a spectacular and massive act of civil disobedience. A banner announcing “One AIDS Death Every Eight Minutes”



Zoe Leonard

is unfurled over the arrivals board. As the group attempts to march to the United Nations, 263 activists are arrested.

May 3: ACT UP, Stand Up Harlem, and Emmaus House travel to Albany to “Hit the DOCS” (Department of Correctional Services). They demand medical treatment for prisoners with AIDS, declaring that “Living with AIDS in prison is cruel and unusual punishment.” In July ACT UP returns to the DOCS to demand an end to the exclusion of HIV-positive prisoners from the family reunion program. The next day, a class action suit is filed on the prisoners’ behalf by Prisoners’ Legal Services. Within a month, the policy is changed.

May 31: ACT UP descends on the National Insurance Association in Washington, DC, to protest health profiteering. The march continues to the Capitol, where demonstrators demand comprehensive national healthcare from the US Congress. August: The CDC revises its definition of AIDS to include anyone with a T-cell count of 200 or less. It also adds two gynecological opportunistic infections to the classification.

/ Have you given up hope for a cure? / When was the last time you cried?” The questions asked demonstrate the evolving state of the crisis the collective formed to address. It raises another question: how will AIDS activism evolve to address activist burnout and collective trauma?

This question was taken up in the space of the Sert Gallery during the five-part lecture series, “ACT-ing Up: The Living Legacy of AIDS Protest,” sponsored by the Kennedy School’s Carr Center for Human Rights Policy. The speakers included Harvard Law Professor William Rubenstein; Christopher Capozzola, Associate Professor of History at MIT; activist and author Amber Hollibaugh; Evelyn Hammonds, Dean of Harvard College and Professor of History of Science and of African and African American Studies; and Jarrett T. Barrios, President, Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD).⁹¹

The gallery space became a literal site for evaluating the historical significance and contemporary political value of ACT UP while simultaneously illustrating aspects of the epidemic that were absent from the walls. Everyone disclosed where they were situated politically and personally at the beginning of their talks, allowing the audience to know what they had at stake in their analysis. Each talk in the series dynamically engaged with the space in a different way, navigating the tension between the personal and the collective, the past and the present. For example Chris Capozola engaged Grace in a conversation about why he thought the timeline was problematic. Jarrett Barrios recalled what the act of wheat pasting felt like.

The talk which spoke to the most significant absence in the exhibition’s representation of AIDS activism was Evelyn Hammonds’s “HIV/AIDS Activism in African American Communities: The Limits of Self Help.” She explained:

The biggest issue for me when I saw the exhibition was the absence of people of color and I think that it was very clear during the time that we were doing that work that so many of us, particularly—I was going to say particularly lesbians, but its not true. There were a lot of gay men of color as well. We were in many respects, locked in battle with some of the leaders of ACT UP in different places like New York and Boston and San Francisco and everywhere about it being a more sort of more multicultural organization both in its leadership its practices because what you want to do to challenge “the system” or the state had different implications for people of color and communities of color where AIDS was increasing at extraordinary rates but there was still a lot more silence and denial about what was going on. So we were in constant battle about the fact—constant battles about the need to have an emphasis on people of color. So when I saw the exhibition, I was—I said, “Ugh, there we go again.” That was such a key piece, certainly for my involvement, for Amber

91. The lectures will be compiled in a forthcoming book, *The New Press* 2011 and are now available online http://www.hks.harvard.edu/cchrp/hrsm/programs/lect_speech.php



Robert Vazquez Pacheco



[Hollibaugh]’s involvement, for—that it saddened me that there would be kind of an official—if this exhibition becomes a representation—a representation of some kind of official record then it had missed the boat.⁹²

Similarly Mark Harrington described how this issue manifested itself the context of discussions of mother-to-infant transmission during a 1991 drug trial titled ‘076’, explaining:

Unlike other ACT UP events, there were other people from the community in the room. There were people from the African-American and Latino community, women’s groups that were women that had HIV, and women that lived in communities where maternal-child transmission was a big issue. It wasn’t really a big issue for a lot of ACT UP women, because a lot of them were lesbians.⁹³

Despite the fact that it wasn’t a central issue to lesbians in ACT UP, they dominated the meeting with theoretical discussions about treating “women as a vector for transmitting the virus, and how it wasn’t being done in the interests of the women’s health, but in that of the baby.” This demonstrates a prioritization

92. “Evelynn Hammonds.” Personal Interview. 5 Feb. 2010.

93. “Mark Harrington,” Personal Interview. 24 Nov. 2009.

Timeline

September 1: Two thousand five hundred AIDS activists march on President Bush's vacation home in Kennebunkport, Maine. After a die-in on the road to the Bush house, activists unroll a 50-foot-long banner that outlines a 32-point plan to end the AIDS crisis. Later that month, ACT UP targets President Bush at the White House, declaring that, with over 120,000 Americans dead from AIDS, the president is getting away with murder. Eighty-four people are arrested in acts of civil disobedience that include chaining themselves to the gates of the White House and to each other. Bush spends the day at Disney World.

September: The "Doctors in Chains" action at Beekman Hospital in New York City protests legislation proposed by Senator Jesse Helms calling for mandatory testing of healthcare workers. The bill is defeated.

November 7: Professional basketball player Magic Johnson announces that he is HIV-positive.

35,616 HIV/AIDS-related deaths reported in the US in 1991.

1992 AIDS becomes the number one cause of death for US men ages 25 to 44.

April 4: ACT UP organizes a meeting with presidential candidate Bill Clinton and UAA (United for AIDS Action) to discuss his AIDS policies. Clinton agrees to make a major AIDS policy speech and to have people with HIV speak at the Democratic Convention.

April 6: One thousand people march in midtown Manhattan to make AIDS an election issue. Activists take over Madison Avenue and declare: "No more politics as usual." Fifty-four people are arrested during acts of civil disobedience.

ence.

October 11: ACT UP NY holds its first political funeral in Washington, DC, on the weekend of the final exhibition of the AIDS Quilt, begun in San Francisco in 1987 and made up of individual squares hand-sewn by friends, lovers, and family members to commemorate lives lost to AIDS. In a procession starting at the Capitol, 11 people from both coasts carry ashes of loved ones. Met at the White House lawn by police in riot gear, the procession—by then some 8,000 strong—breaks through police lines and scatters the ashes on the White House lawn. Bill Clinton is the first president elected on a campaign platform that includes HIV and AIDS issues.

41,094 HIV/AIDS-related deaths reported in the US in 1992.

1993 **January 5:** DIVA TV (Damned Interfering Video Activists) inaugurates AIDS Community Television, a weekly series and media network for AIDS activism.

April 24 – 25: ACT UP joins a million lesbians and gay men at the March on Washington. ACT UP NY stages a demonstration at the headquarters of the Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association, accusing the pharmaceutical industry of letting people die while companies pursue profits. During the demonstration, activists scale the building and hang effigies representing people with AIDS killed by drug company policies.

July 1: ACT UP NY affinity group, the Marys, travels to Washington, DC, with 200 demonstrators to fulfill 35-year-old Marys member Tim Bailey's final wish for a political funeral in front of the White House. Plans are thwarted when, in front of the Capitol Building, police attempt to wrestle away the casket containing Bailey's body.

July 16: The Marys carry the coffin of Jon Greenberg, 37, through New York City streets from the East Village to Tompkins Square Park, where eulogies are heard by more than 200 activists, friends, and family members. The CDC expands the definition of AIDS to include four new conditions, some of them specific to women. The film *Philadelphia* is released nationwide. It was inspired by the story of Geoffrey Bowers, an attorney who, in one of the first AIDS discrimination cases, sued the law firm Baker & McKenzie for unfair dismissal. Tony Kushner's seven-hour play *Angels in America*, set in New York City in the mid-1980s, premieres on Broadway. In 2003 the play is adapted for television in an award-winning HBO miniseries.

45,850 HIV/AIDS-related deaths reported in the US in 1993.

1994 **January 3:** ACT UP NY, along with a coalition of more than 500 activists, descends on City Hall at 7:30am to tell Rudolph Giuliani that the AIDS crisis will be Job One on his first day as mayor.

March 22: More than 1,500 activists from groups including ACT UP NY, the Harlem Group, Mothers' Voices, and AIDS Service Providers march across the Brooklyn Bridge from Brooklyn to City Hall to focus media attention on drastic cuts proposed in New York City's Division of AIDS Services. Forty-seven are arrested.

50,842 HIV/AIDS-related deaths reported in the US in 1994.

1995 For the second year, AIDS is the leading cause of death for all Americans ages 25 to 44.

54,670 HIV/AIDS-related deaths reported in the US in 1995.

of queer identity in ACT UP's coalition politics.

Without taking on the ways in which ACT UP New York fell short of its utopian aspirations of community, the exhibition omitted a critical perspective that could have provided further insight into the current state of the epidemic in the United States. Hammonds added:

What I would have wanted to see more of was contextualization and representation of the disputes and conflicts and tensions in practices that were actually going on in that time. And I think those would have been very important to try to—try to find interesting representations of those things.

Raising the question of how to represent these tensions suggests that visual content of the exhibition could have been expanded to incorporate more contextual ephemera, such as print media or meeting notes.

Hubbard commented that the tendency to put ACT UP in the past overlooks the work being done by other chapters today, such as ACT UP Philadelphia, ACT UP New York and ACT UP Paris. Hubbard believes that Philadelphia is the most successful active chapter, stating it “maintains its robustness because it was able to change with the epidemic. African Americans came to dominate the group and more specifically African American women.”⁹⁴ Constructing this exhibition around the peak activity of ACT UP New York misrepresents the diversity of chapters and therefore the diversity of the movement that mobilized in response to the epidemic.

The exhibition created a space for a reunion for members of ACT UP New York during its peak activity through the venue “ACT UP 20 Years Later,” which took place in the form of an annual art history symposium. It was a reunion of a group of friends, a testimony of surviving and an academic conference. While speakers maintained their sharp analytical perspective about the AIDS crisis, it was a site for collective grieving. Grace reflected on the experience of the symposium, “I was not expecting to sob and I was not expecting other people to be brought to that kind of emotional point either.”⁹⁵

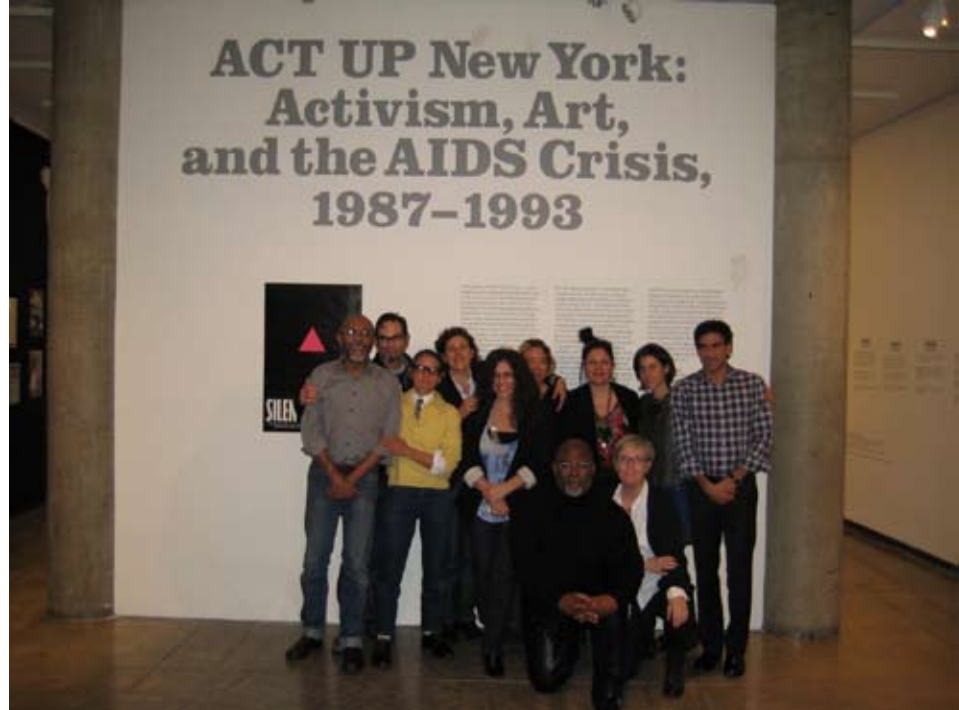
As former ACT UP member and Harvard alumni Garance Franke-Ruta recalled after the symposium:

It was just good to be with a group of people who had all experienced the same thing in that moment in time, and so for me it was much more about seeing people who I hadn't seen in a long time again, and in context it was explicitly about remembering that time and that allowed us in some ways a kind of shared public

94. “Jim Hubbard.” Personal Interview. 16 Oct. 2009.

95. “Claire Grace.” Personal Interview. 10 Nov. 2009.

1996 March: After its initial approval by the FDA, highly active antiretroviral therapy (HAART) becomes widely available. Also known as the AIDS “cocktail” or combination therapy, HAART involves the simultaneous use of three or more drugs. HAART has helped reduce new AIDS illnesses, hospitalizations, and deaths, and has greatly increased the quality of life and life expectancy for many people with HIV/ AIDS. HAART is a treatment, not a cure, however, and access remains limited in some parts of the country and around the world.



38,296 HIV/AIDS-related deaths reported in the US in 1996.

Compiled from:
ACT UP, Capsule History: www.actupny.org/documents/capsule-home.html
AIDS Education Global Information Service, So Little Time . . . An AIDS History: www.aegis.com/topics/timeline
Kaiser Family Foundation, The Global HIV/ AIDS Timeline: www.kff.org/hivaids/timeline/hivtimeline.cfm
Gay Men's Health Crisis, HIV/AIDS Timeline: www.gmhc.org/about/timeline.html
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, HIV/AIDS Surveillance Reports: www.cdc.gov/hiv/topics/surveillance/resources/reports/past.htm#surveillance
Gerald J. Stine, *AIDS Update 2008: An Annual Overview of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome*. Boston: McGraw Hill, 2008.

grieving for the first time.

This process proved to be extremely painful for many of the participants. As she went on to describe:

I was just talking to Zoe [Leonard] last night and I was like as draining as this weekend has been, this used to be our lives. I was just trying to remember if this is what it used to feel like all the time, and I think it did but even worse.⁹⁶

When I asked Gregg Bordowitz if he had any personal hopes in attending the exhibition and symposium he responded:

The anticipation of coming to do the show and knowing ahead of time that I would see people who I love but who I haven't seen in 10, 15 years alive and also see a great many images of people who I knew and who are no longer alive fills me with a tremendous amount of anxiety. Largely because there are some things I don't want to do in public like fall apart. So, no, I don't know what hopes I have. If pressed and asked, I know that I am grateful and happy in hope that the show will have a future and it become a reference point for another generation.⁹⁷

As Molesworth commented, “I think a lot of what we saw was a lot of PTSD, and it's not named, and it has no public space, and so when it emerged in an academic

96. “Garance Franke-Ruta.” Personal Interview. 18 Oct. 2009.

97. “Gregg Bordowitz.” Personal Interview. 16 Oct. 2009.



Robert Vasquez Pacheco, Avram Finklestein, Nancy Brooks Brody, Zoe Leonard, Garance Franke-Ruta, Carrie Yamaeoka, Kendall Thomas, Jay Episalla, Helen Molesworth, Claire Grace, Gregg Bordowitz

setting, it just seemed really, really shocking.”⁹⁸

While the symposium and lectures created a space for collective remembering by surviving members of ACT UP New York, there were unfortunately no more than three undergraduates at any one panel or lecture. The opening night lecture was the exception to this. Faculty continually expressed confusion to me about why this was and I didn’t have an answer. One way ACT UP New York anticipated this was through the creation of an online archive of all of the lectures. The amazing generosity of those who spoke and the lack of attendance by students demonstrates the challenges of cross-generational queer dialogue.

While the exhibition created a site that I argue was mostly successful in overcoming the political, methodological and psychic challenges inherent in constructing ACT UP’s history, to achieve its goal of creating a cross-generational dialogue this site needs to be expanded and re-performed, others like it need to be created, and ultimately my generation must take up the challenge of writing a more complete history. As Douglas Crimp said, “One day in the future, when a far more complete history will be written, we hope ACT UP will have just been an episode—the episode compelled by the AIDS crisis—in the formation of a new mass movement for radical democratic change.”⁹⁹

⁹⁸. Helen Molesworth.” Personal Interview. 17 Dec. 2009.

⁹⁹. Crimp and Rolston, 22.



Afterward: A Methodological and Political Lineage

This history can create a link between the agendas that have been characterized as dividing queer generations. As Molesworth described:

The marriage debate is very contentious, because as you know from a lot of the activists and people who are here, the most radical aspect of ACT UP remains wildly disenchanted by the marriage debate. Though as many other people argue, and I would argue, the marriage debate comes out of AIDS, precisely, because for people invested in marriage rights the first thing they will tell you is that it's about making sure you're able to take care of people when they're sick. In the '80s and early '90s, people got kicked out of their houses, and weren't allowed to visit their partners—horror stories. Marriage is a way out of that.¹⁰⁰

Generational categorizations such as that by the *New York Times* in 2009 ignore the overlap of issues Molesworth points to, and mask the inadequacy of group identities for describing the experience of countless individuals. The act of labeling my generation as being focused solely on marriage short-circuits a collective imagining of what is possible.

This retrospective event sheds light on how the material realities of the AIDS crisis led to the need for state-by-state rights. At the end of ACT UP, Crimp reflected:

Our political unity has been badly shaken by our consistently increasing knowledge of both the depth and breadth of the crisis—breadth, in the sense of many different kinds of people affected by HIV disease; depth in the sense of the extent of social change that will be required to improve all of these different people's chance of survival.¹⁰¹

Given these conditions the need for state-by-state marriage and adoption rights needs to be conceptualized as part of the larger agenda for radical reform that requires a cross-generational effort. The work of social movements is never contained. It is the task of each proceeding generation to build upon what has been done before them.

This catalog is the product of numerous cross-generational conversations. I was able to interview the majority of the members from ACT UP New York who came to campus and I ended up generating over 70 hours of interviews. These

100. Helen Molesworth." Personal Interview. 17 Dec. 2009.

101. Crimp, *Melancholia and Moralism*, 188.

conversations allowed me to investigate personal, political and emotional questions I had about art, activism, and the AIDS crisis. While the conversations cannot be contained in the scope of this project, I draw upon them to demonstrate another way in which the exhibition generously facilitated a cross-generational dialogue.

In the introduction of *AIDS Demo Graphics*, Crimp writes:

This book is intended as a demonstration, in both senses of the word. It is meant as direct action, putting the power of representation in the hands of as many people as possible. And it is presented as a do-it-yourself manual showing how to make propaganda in the fight against AIDS.¹⁰²

Examples of making this history visible, like the ACT UP Oral History Project and *ACT UP New York*, are also demonstrations in the sense of Crimp's laboration. The idea of gathering and distributing information as a demonstration serves as the guiding principal for this project as well. In addition, it responds to Crimp and Rolston's *AIDS Demo Graphics* in seeking to expand on the archive of ACT UP they created in 1990.

This catalog seeks to be a performance that creates a political intervention into the discourse of queer politics today. ACT UP needs to be written into the dominant historical narrative of the United States and this documentation is my initial contribution to that process. My artistic representation of the exhibition seeks to demonstrate how the tactics of ACT UP can be employed in this process and signals the personal and political potential of a cross-generational queer dialogue. Lastly, I hope to highlight the ongoing relevance of a political practice that was central to ACT UP by enacting a methodological lineage that explores intersections of critical theory, art making, and direct action.

102. Crimp and Rolston, 13.

Appendix A: Interviews conducted by Author

Bordowitz, Gregg, 16 Oct. 2009.

Filmmaker, Writer, former member of ACT UP New York, associate professor of film, video and new media, School of the Art Institute of Chicago

fierce pussy, 16 Oct, 2009

fierce pussy is currently artists Nancy Brooks Brody, Joy Episalla, Zoe Leonard and Carrie Yamaeoka

Finklestein, Avram. 16 Oct. 2009.

Artist, writer, former member of Gran Fury, Silence = Death Project and ACT UP New York

Franke-Ruta, Garance. 18 Oct. 2009

National web politics editor, Washington Post, former member of ACT UP New York, Harvard Class of 1983

Grace, Claire, 10 Nov. 2009

PhD candidate in History of Art and Architecture, Harvard University; former Agnes Mongan Curatorial Intern at the Harvard Art Museum/ Fogg Museum

Hammonds, Evelyn, 5 Feb. 2010

Dean of Harvard College and Professor of History of Science and of African and African American Studies

Harrington, Mark, 24 Nov. 2009

Executive Director, Treatment Action Group, former member of ACT UP New York, Harvard Class of 1983

Hubbard, Jim, 16 Oct. 2009.

Co-director ACT UP Oral History Project, filmmaker, former member of ACT UP New York

Killen, Jack, 17 Oct. 2009

Deputy Directory, National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine, National Institutes of Health

Lentz, Tom, 20, Nov. 2009. Phone.

Director of Harvard Art Museum

Lloyd, Ed, 10 Nov. 2009

Exhibitions Manager, Harvard University, Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts

Molesworth, Helen, 17 Dec. 2009.

Chief Curator at The Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston; Former Maisie K. and James R. Houghton Curator of Contemporary Art at the Harvard Art Museum,

Pacheco, Robert Vasquez, 16 Oct. 2009.

Artist and Writer, former member of Gran Fury and ACT UP New York

Sarah Schulman with **Timothy Patrick McCarthy**, 18 Oct. 2009

Schulman is co-director of the ACT UP Oral History Project, novelist, historian, playwright and professor of English, City University of New York

McCarthy is director of the Human Rights and Social Movements Program Carr Center for Human Rights Policy, Harvard Kennedy School

Yenawine, Philip, 1 Dec. 2009

Co-founding director of Visual Understanding in Education, author and curator

ACT UP New York: Activism, Art, and the AIDS Crisis, 1987–1993

The AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) was pivotal for AIDS activism in New York City in the late 1980s. Tracing the history of the movement, this exhibition examines the printed graphics and other visual media created by artist collectives that populated it, including Gran Fury, Silence=Death Project, Gang, DIVA TV, and Fierce Pussy. The exhibition also premieres the ACT UP Oral History Project, a suite of over 100 video interviews with surviving members of ACT UP New York that offer a portal to a decisive moment in the history of the gay-rights movement, twentieth-century visual art, our nation's discussion of universal healthcare, and the continuing HIV/AIDS epidemic.

October 15 –
December 23, 2009

Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts,
24 Quincy Street, Cambridge, MA [FREE ADMISSION](#)

Main Gallery (ground floor)

Monday – Friday, 10am – 11pm

Saturday – Sunday, 1–5pm

Sert Gallery (second floor)

Tuesday – Sunday, 1–5pm

Extended hours: October 15–17, 19–20, 10am – 11pm

A collaboration by the **Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts** and the **Harvard Art Museum**. Organized by Helen Molesworth, *Houghton Curator of Contemporary Art, Harvard Art Museum*, and Claire Grace, *Agnes Mongan Curatorial Intern, Harvard Art Museum*, and doctoral candidate, *History of Art and Architecture, Harvard University*.

ACT UP New York: Activism, Art, and the AIDS Crisis, 1987–1993 has been made possible by support from the Office of the Provost at Harvard University and the following endowment funds at the Harvard Art Museum: The Agnes Gund Fund for Modern and Contemporary Art; the Alexander S., Robert L., and Bruce A. Bass Exhibition Fund; the M. Victor Leventritt Lecture Fund; and the Charlotte F. and Irving W. Rabo Exhibition Fund. Gifts and grants have also been provided by the Barbara Lee Family Foundation Fund at the Boston Foundation, The Open Gate: a Fund for Gay and Lesbian Life at Harvard University, Fred P. Hochberg and Tom Hooley, Kevin Jennings, the Harvard College Women's Center, the Office for the Arts at Harvard, and Harvard Technology Services with special support from Apple Inc.

Thursday October 15

Exhibition Opening Lecture and Celebration

Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts,
24 Quincy Street, Cambridge, MA [FREE ADMISSION](#)

6pm

Collective Action: Calling All Artists
Carpenter Center Lecture

Robert Vazquez Pacheco, *artist and writer, member of Gran Fury / Avram Finkelstein, artist and writer, member of Gran Fury and Silence=Death Project / Sarah Schulman, co-director, ACT UP Oral History Project; novelist, historian, and playwright; professor of English, City University of New York / Jim Hubbard, co-director, ACT UP Oral History Project; filmmaker*

7pm

Reception and Opening of the Exhibition

Join curators Helen Molesworth and Claire Grace as well as exhibitors Robert Vazquez Pacheco, Avram Finkelstein, Sarah Schulman, Jim Hubbard, and members of Fierce Pussy.

Friday – Saturday
October 16 – 17

Symposium: **ACT UP** **20 Years Later**

M. Victor Leventritt Symposium*
Lecture hall, Arthur M. Sackler Museum,
485 Broadway, Cambridge, MA [FREE ADMISSION](#)

Friday 5–6:30pm

Illegitimacy

Leo Bersani, *professor emeritus of French, University of California, Berkeley*

Saturday 10am–noon

ACT UP New York

Three former members of ACT UP address how and why ACT UP started and what it achieved.

Gregg Bordowitz, *filmmaker; associate professor of film, video, and new media, School of the Art Institute of Chicago / Joy Episalla, artist, member of Fierce Pussy / Kendall Thomas, Nash Professor of Law and director, Center for the Study of Law and Culture, Columbia University*

1:30–3:30pm

Storm the NIH

Activists and a National Institutes of Health professional address one of ACT UP's most famous actions, its 1990 attempt to seize control of the NIH.

Garance Franke-Ruta, *national web politics editor, Washington Post (Harvard Class of 1997) / Mark Harrington, executive director, Treatment Action Group (Harvard Class of 1983) / Jack Killen, deputy director, National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine, National Institutes of Health*

4:30–6pm

Stonewall and Other Summer Palaces:
1969/1983/2009

Richard Meyer, *associate professor of art history and fine arts, University of Southern California*

*The M. Victor Leventritt Lecture Fund was established through the generosity of the wife, children, and friends of the late M. Victor Leventritt, Harvard Class of 1935. The purpose of the fund is to present outstanding scholars of the history and theory of art to the Harvard and Greater Boston communities.

October 12–17

Artists in Residence: Fierce Pussy

Nancy Brooks Brody, Joy Episalla, Zoe Leonard, and Carrie Yamaoka of Fierce Pussy will create site-specific wall installations at the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, the Arthur M. Sackler Museum, and the Graduate School of Design, and conduct a workshop in activism and print media with Harvard students. For information: Harvard College Women's Center, 617-495-4292, hcwc@fas.harvard.edu, or hcwc.fas.harvard.edu/events.html.

Friday October 16, 8pm
Saturday October 17, 8pm

Screenings: AIDS Activist Shorts and the Emergence of Queer Cinema

Harvard Film Archive, Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, 24 Quincy Street, Cambridge, MA

The **Harvard Film Archive** presents films and videos that document the political struggles around AIDS and demonstrate through their formal experiments that the epidemic was a crisis of signification. Artists include Gregg Bordowitz, Jean Carlomusto, the Gran Fury collective, John Greyson, Barbara Hammer, Isaac Julien, Tom Kalin, Carol Leigh, Nino Rodriguez, Rosa von Praunheim, and David Wojanowicz. For ticket prices and other information: hcl.harvard.edu/hfa.

Monday October 19, 1–7pm

Symposium: HIV Denialism, Mistrust, and Stigma

Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, 24 Quincy Street, Cambridge, MA [FREE ADMISSION](#)

Organized by the **Harvard University Center for AIDS Research** and the **Harvard Initiative for Global Health**. For more information: cfar.globalhealth.harvard.edu.

HIV Conspiracy Beliefs as Barriers to HIV Prevention and Treatment Laura Bogart, *associate professor of pediatrics, Harvard Medical School; Division of General Pediatrics, Children's Hospital Boston*

"HIV Does Not Cause AIDS" and the Dangers of AIDS Denialism Seth Kalichman, *professor of psychology, Center for Health, Intervention, and Prevention, University of Connecticut*

HIV Denialism and HIV Conspiracies in South Africa Nicolai Nattras, *professor, School of Economics, and director, AIDS and Society Research Unit, University of Cape Town*

Discrimination and Conspiracy Beliefs Are Associated with HIV Vaccines Acceptability and Access to Care: Results from LA VOICES William E. Cunningham, *faculty associate, UCLA Center for Health Policy Research; professor, UCLA School of Medicine*

HIV Denialism and Human Rights Sofia Gruskin, *associate professor of health and human rights; director, Program on International Health and Human Rights, Harvard School of Public Health*

Community Panel Moderated by Rhoda Johnson Tuckett, *education and outreach manager, Infectious Disease Bureau, Boston Public Health Commission* / Iris Rivera, *community AIDS activist* / Ben Perkins, *director, Project Saving Ourselves (SOS), The Fenway Institute* / Nancy Galloway, *Boston Pediatric and Family AIDS Project, The Dimock Center* / Reverend Franklin Hobbs, *executive director, Healing Our Land, Inc.*

Tuesday October 20, 7:30pm

Reading: *The Lady Hamlet*, a play by Sarah Schulman

Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, 24 Quincy Street, Cambridge, MA [FREE ADMISSION](#)

A discussion with the playwright follows a reading by members of the **American Repertory Theater**, including actress Kate Burton. Part of the A.R.T.'s *Shakespeare Exploded!* series. More information: www.amrep.org.

Lecture Series: ACT-ing UP: The Living Legacy of AIDS Protest

Sert Gallery, Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, 24 Quincy Street, Cambridge, MA [FREE ADMISSION](#)

Sponsored by the **Human Rights and Social Movements Program, Carr Center for Human Rights Policy, Harvard Kennedy School**. Lectures will be introduced by Timothy Patrick McCarthy, program director.

Thursday October 22, 5–6:30pm
AIDS and Remembrance: Days of 1983 William Rubenstein, *professor of law, Harvard Law School*

Thursday October 23, 4–5:30pm
Is ACT UP History?: A Movement That's Over, a Crisis That Isn't Christopher Capozzola, *associate professor of history, MIT*

Thursday November 12, 4–5:30pm
The Power of AIDS Activism: Defying the Convergence of the Forbidden and the Disenfranchised Amber Hollibaugh, *queer activist and author, My Dangerous Desires*

Thursday November 19, 4–5:30pm
HIV/AIDS Activism in African American Communities: The Limits of Self-Help Evelyn M. Hammonds, *Barbara Gutmann Rosenkrantz Professor of the History of Science and of African and African American Studies, and Dean of Harvard College*

Thursday December 3, 4–5:30pm
Full Equality and How We Get There Jarrett T. Barrios, *president, Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD)*

Friday, October 23, 5pm
Friday, November 13, 5pm
Thursday, December 3, 6pm

Workshops: Sexual Health

The Art of Prevention: Workshops with Harvard College Peer Contraceptive Counselors Main Gallery, Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, 24 Quincy Street, Cambridge, MA [FREE ADMISSION](#)

Open, interactive demonstrations of contraceptive and STI-preventive methods, followed by conversation with counselors on any and all topics. For information about **Peer Contraceptive Counselors (PCC)**: www.hcs.harvard.edu/~pcc/.

Gallery Talks: ACT UP New York: Activism, Art, and the AIDS Crisis, 1987–1993

Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, 24 Quincy Street, Cambridge, MA [FREE ADMISSION](#)

Saturday October 31, 11am
Claire Grace, *exhibition co-curator, Agnes Mongan Curatorial Intern, Harvard Art Museum*

Thursday November 12, 1pm
Helen Molesworth, *exhibition co-curator, Houghton Curator of Contemporary Art, Harvard Art Museum*

Thursday November 12, 8pm

Student Performance: Who Wants to Live Forever?

Main Gallery, Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, 24 Quincy Street, Cambridge, MA [FREE ADMISSION](#)

Choreography and direction by Trevor Martin '10.

Tuesday November 24, 6pm

Poetry Reading: Mark Doty, Eileen Myles, and an AIDS Poetic Retrospective

Thompson Room, Barker Center, 12 Quincy Street, Cambridge, MA. Reception to follow at the Sert Gallery, Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, 24 Quincy Street [FREE ADMISSION](#)

Doty is the author of *My Alexandria* and winner of a 2008 National Book Award. Myles, hailed as "the rock star of modern poetry," is the author of over 20 volumes of poetry, most recently *Sorry, Tree*. They will be joined by Harvard undergraduate poets reciting works by writers—Tory Dent, Melvin Dixon, Thom Gunn, Tony Kushner, James Merrill, and others—whose words have compelled attention to the AIDS crisis.

Introduction by Christina Davis, curator of the Woodberry Poetry Room. Co-sponsored by the **Woodberry Poetry Room, Houghton Library**.

Tuesday December 1, 6pm

Lecture: Seeing AIDS

M. Victor Leventritt Lecture* WORLD AIDS DAY
Lecture hall, Arthur M. Sackler Museum, 485 Broadway, Cambridge, MA [FREE ADMISSION](#)

Philip Yenawine, co-founding director of Visual Understanding in Education. As director of education at the Museum of Modern Art from 1983 to 1993, Yenawine was engaged with activist artists. He will reflect on the impact of AIDS on the cultural sector, artists' responses to the crisis, and December 1 as "A Day without Art."

Student Exhibition: Students ACT UP

The **Harvard College Art Society (H-Art)** is collaborating with student artists and organizations inspired by ACT UP to present a student exhibition at Adams House Art Space in the spring of 2010. H-Art is accepting submissions until December 3, 2009, and will hold workshops for review. For information, contact Trevor Martin '10: tmartin@fas.harvard.edu.

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