

**SPEAKING OUT FROM THE FRONTLINE:
QUEER AIDS MEDIA ACTIVISM IN THE UNITED STATES
(1987-1996)**

Axelle DEMUS



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and Dr. Nolwenn MINGANT

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ACT UP	AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
CPB	Corporation for Public Broadcasting
CDC	Centers for Disease Control
DIVA TV	Damn Interfering Video Activist Television
DPN	Diseased Pariah News
GMHC	Gay Men's Health Crisis
HAART	Highly Active Antiretroviral Therapy
FDA	Food and Drug Administration
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HIV+	HIV-positive
IFP	Infected Faggot Perspectives
KS	Kaposi's Sarcoma
LAPIT	Lesbian Activists Producing Innovative Television
NIH	National Institutes of Health
NEA	National Endowment for the Arts
PBS	Public Broadcasting Service
PTTV	Paper Tiger Television
PWAs	People with AIDS
TTL	Testing the Limits (Collective)
WAVE	Women Activists Video Enterprise

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INTRODUCTION

AIDS is a war, not only of politics and medicine, but also of representations. While the mass media's response to the health crisis has been anything but uniform, the results have nevertheless (...) been lethal. In stark contrast, a subculture of alternate media is fighting back. From the front lines of the battlefield, artists, community activists, and cable producers have launched a counteroffensive against such deadly discourses.

Greyson, John. "Strategic Compromises: AIDS and Video Practices."

Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS)¹ was officially detected in the United States in 1981. It was first noticed among gay men, as stated in the *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* published by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC).² This finding informed the enduring perception that AIDS was a "gay disease," despite the fact that behavior rather than identity puts one at risk of being infected with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. As the epidemic continued to spread, it was framed*³ in a variety of ways and became "an epidemic of signification."⁴ Rival sets of images mobilized rival explanations of the crisis,⁵ which meant that AIDS was more than just a health issue: it was a discursive battle as well as a war of images.

Politicians in power, President Ronald Reagan and President George Bush, disregarded the seriousness of the epidemic⁶ and echoed the moralistic discourses voiced by the Religious Right.⁷ The mass media, which was silent on the issue until the mid-1980s, represented the epidemic in ambivalent ways. AIDS was at once a "gay disease" and a threat to the "general population,"* that divided its "victims" between "guilty" and "innocent" ones.⁸ Consequently, the gay community* and what subsequently became the AIDS activist movement mobilized

¹ A disease of the immune system due to infection with the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). HIV is transmitted through direct contact with HIV-infected body fluids, such as blood, semen, and genital secretions, or from an HIV-infected mother to her child during pregnancy, delivery, or breastfeeding. "Glossary of HIV/AIDS-Related Terms." *AIDSinfo*, October 2011.

<http://aidsinfo.nih.gov/contentfiles/glossaryhivrelatedterms_english.pdf> (Accessed on January 17, 2015)

² The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) is a federal agency of the U.S Public Health Service. Centers for Disease Control. "Pneumocystis Pneumonia - Los Angeles." *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, June 5, 1981. <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/june_5.htm> (Accessed on September 21, 2014)

³ All phrases or words followed by an asterisk are defined in the glossary at the end of this dissertation.

⁴ Treichler, Paula. *How to Have Theory in an Epidemic*. Duke University Press, 1999, p.11.

⁵ Watney, Simon. *Imagining Hope (Social Aspects of AIDS)*. Routledge, 2000, p.193.

⁶ Ronald Reagan did not address the AIDS epidemic until September 17, 1985, when he was asked about it during a press conference. See: Demus, Axelle. "Framing the AIDS Crisis During the Conservative Ascendancy (1981-1997)." Université de Nantes, 2015, pp.60-63.

⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 63-65; 137-138.

⁸ *Ibid.* pp.118-119.

in order to respond to the crisis. From articles published in gay newspapers such as *The New York Native*, to the appearance of the SILENCE=DEATH posters on the streets of New York City in 1986,⁹ voices arose to counter and transform the dominant discourses on HIV/AIDS. Culture became a privileged site of confrontation and activism, thereby challenging the assumption that issues of discourse* and representations* were secondary to changing government policies.¹⁰ Cultural activism enabled people with AIDS (PWAs) to respond to and replace prevailing representations of HIV/AIDS. Jennifer Verson defines cultural activism as follows:

Cultural activism is where art, activism, performance, and politics meet, mingle and interact (...) [It] is (...) direct action that seeks to take back control of how our webs of meaning (...) are created and disseminated. It is an important way to question the dominant ways of seeing things and present alternative views of the world.¹¹

The crisis was therefore instrumental in stimulating the growth of alternative media,¹² which stood in opposition to the mainstream media both in content and in modes of production. Chris Atton uses the term “alternative media” to mean “a range of media projects, interventions and networks that work against, or seek to develop different forms of, the dominant, expected (and broadly accepted) ways of ‘doing’ media.”¹³ According to Atton, alternative media encompass all cultural forms of independent production and should display the following characteristics: radical content, be it political or cultural, as well as strong aesthetic form. They should also take full advantage of available and cutting-edge technology, use alternative means of distribution, promote an anti-copyrights ethos, transform social roles and relations into collective organizations, and de-professionalize and alter communication

⁹ Created by the Silence=Death Project in 1986, the logo featured a pink triangle on a black background and a white caption that read “Silence=Death.” The pink triangle was the marker of gay men in Nazi concentration camps. Its appropriation by the gay movement was meant to remember their history of oppression, both before and during the AIDS epidemic. The triangle, which was pointed up instead of down, became an emblem of resistance, calling on gay people and people with HIV/AIDS to break the silence on the epidemic as a means of survival. The logo and its slogan became the emblem of the AIDS activist movement. See: Crimp, Douglas, Rolston, Adam. *AIDS Demo Graphics*. Seattle: Bay Press, 1990, p.14.

¹⁰ Cvetkovich, Ann. “Video, AIDS, and Activism.” *Art, Activism, and Oppositionality: Essays from Afterimage*. Ed. Grant Kester. Duke University Press, 1998, p.182.

¹¹ Verson, Jennifer. “Why We Need Cultural Activism.” *Do it Yourself: A Handbook for Changing the World*. Ed. The Trapeze Collective. London: Pluto Press, 2007, pp.171-173.

<http://trapeze.clearerchannel.org/chapters/HandbookForChangingOurWorld_chap11.pdf> (Accessed on December 2, 2016)

¹² It is important to note by “alternative media” we mean “progressive” media. Indeed, at that point in time, right-wing conservatives and the Religious Right had also developed alternative ways of communicating with the public, such as radio or television shows. However, we will focus solely on alternative productions that are situated on the left of the political spectrum. For a recent discussion of the right-wing media’s response to AIDS, see: Mort, Sébastien. “Culture Wars, crise du SIDA et médias conservateurs: de Rush Limbaugh comme culture warrior opportuniste (1988-1994).” *Les guerres culturelles aux Etats-Unis*. Ed. Nathalie Massip. Revue Cynos, Volume 32, n°2, L’Harmattan, 2016, pp.49-67.

¹³ Atton, Chris. *Alternative Media*. London: Sage, 2004, p.ix.

processes.¹⁴ In other words, alternative media are media forms that operate on a smaller scale and are more accessible. They are more democratic and participatory, organized horizontally rather than hierarchically. The mass media, on the other hand, are constrained by commercial interests. They rely on information provided by the government, business, and “experts” to address large audiences.¹⁵ Moreover, alternative media are often political by nature, irrespective of content. Their political stance is located in the act of producing, especially given the fact that alternative media are produced by the socially, culturally, and politically excluded.¹⁶ As such, they constitute counter-hegemonic* responses to the dominant culture.

While some academics prefer the terms “activist,”¹⁷ “radical,”¹⁸ or “citizens”¹⁹ media to “alternative media,” the term “queer AIDS media,” coined by professor of LGBT studies and visual culture Roger Hallas, seems better suited for the purpose of this study.²⁰ Indeed, most of the works selected reflect what activist videomaker Gregg Bordowitz has come to call “a queer structure of feeling:”

A queer structure of feeling can be described as an articulation of presence forged through resistance to heterosexist society. Cultural work can be considered within a queer structure of feeling if self-identified queers produce the work, if these producers identify the work as queer, if queers claim the work has significance to queers, if the work is censored or criticized for being queer. A particular work is queer if it is viewed as queer, either by queers or bigots.²¹

¹⁴ Atton, Chris. *Op.cit.* p.27.

¹⁵ Herman, Edward S., Chomsky, Noam. *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*. Pantheon Books: New York. 1988, p.2.

¹⁶ Coyer, Kate, Dowmunt, Tony, Fountain, Alan. *The Alternative Media Handbook*. Routledge, 2008, pp.4-5.

¹⁷ Mitzi Waltz insists that activist media encourage readers to be actively involved in social change. Waltz does not assume this change needs be progressive. Activist media could “advocate absolutely mainstream actions, such as voting for the politician of your choice or volunteering for charity.” Alternative media, by implication, does not have the same relationship with the mainstream. Waltz, Mitzi. *Alternative and Activist Media*. Edinburgh University Press, 2005, pp.3-4.

¹⁸ John Downing explains: “Alternative media is almost oxymoronic. Everything is, at some point, alternative to something else.” He considers media as radical to the extent that they explicitly shape political consciousness through collective endeavors: “By radical media, I refer to media, generally small-scale and in many different forms, that express an alternative vision to hegemonic policies, priorities, and perspectives.” Downing, John. *Radical Media: Rebellious Communication and Social Movements*. London: Sage, 2001, p.v.

¹⁹ Clemencia Rodriguez’s term “citizens’ media” emerged from the need to overcome oppositional frameworks and binary categories traditionally used to analyze alternative media. Rodriguez uses Chantal Mouffe’s recasting of the concept of citizen, which she proposed should be defined by daily political action and engagement rather than being a status granted by the state. Citizens’ media “implies first that a collectivity is *enacting* its citizenship by actively intervening and transforming the established mediascape; second, that these media are contesting social codes, legitimized identities, and institutionalized social relations; and third, that these community practices are empowering the community involved, to the point where these transformations and changes are possible.” Coyer, Kate, et al. *Op.cit.* p.8 and Downing, John. *Encyclopedia of Social Movement Media*. London: Sage, 2011, p.11.

²⁰ Hallas, Roger. *Reframing Bodies: AIDS, Bearing Witness, and the Queer Moving Image*. Duke University Press, 2009.

²¹ Bordowitz, Gregg. “The AIDS Crisis is Ridiculous.” *Queer Looks: Perspective on Lesbian and Gay Film and Video*. Eds. Martha Gever, John Greyson, Pratibha Parmar. Between the Lines, 1993, p.211.

The term “queer”^{*} also refers to the context in which these pieces were created. Indeed, while the epidemic did not only affect the gay community, it did claim a number of lives within a community that was already politicized and organized. Therefore, this community had the means to respond to the neglected crisis accordingly. At the time when queer AIDS media was produced, the lesbian and gay movement was turning into the queer movement, marked by a move from an assimilationist stance to more radical forms of politics. This epistemic shift and revision of lesbian and gay politics were partly motivated by the pressing need to resist dominant constructions of HIV/AIDS, the same need that drove activists to make their own media.²²

Queer AIDS media were, in the words of video activist Jean Carlomusto, “committed to showing the personal, political, and cultural aspects of the HIV/AIDS crisis, through the eyes of people on the frontline.”²³ This thesis will therefore analyze the extent to which the creation of their own media enable these voices from the frontline of the AIDS fight to speak out and respond to the urgency of the epidemic while articulating a critique of the United States’ handling of the AIDS crisis and of American society at large. We will put special emphasis on the ways AIDS activists mobilized using media such as video, graphics, and zines^{*} to depict underrepresented experiences of the crisis and offer alternatives that had the potential to create radical change.

This dissertation focuses on a period of almost ten years, from 1987 to 1996, although it is also necessary to pay attention to the precedents and legacy of queer AIDS media to fully comprehend its impact. Several factors converged in the mid- and late 1980s that paved the way for the development of queer AIDS media. As Richard Dyer notes,

A major legacy of the social political movements of the Sixties and Seventies has been the realization of the importance of representation. The political chances of different groups in society – powerful or weak, central or marginal – are crucially affected by how they are represented (...). How a particular group is represented determines in a very real sense what it can do in society.²⁴

The most important factor was perhaps the creation of the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) in 1987, which marked a radical turn in AIDS activism.^{*} The organization built on the legacy of various movements and its membership included mediamakers, artists, and scholars, who understood the importance of cultural initiatives.²⁵ Activist Ray Navarro went

²² Jagose, Annemarie. *Queer Theory: An Introduction*. Melbourne University Press, 1996, pp.94-95.

²³ Carlomusto, Jean. Interview with the author. January 18, 2017, p.5.

²⁴ Dyer, Richard. Quoted in Watney, Simon. *Policing Desire*. Third edition, University of Minnesota Press, 1996, pp.8-9.

²⁵ Juhasz, Alexandra. Interview with the author. February 10, 2017, p.10.

as far as calling ACT UP “a media organization,” as they not only created their own media but also knew how to use the mainstream media to their advantage.²⁶ ACT UP counted dozens of chapters in several U.S. cities,²⁷ but ACT UP New York was its biggest and most visible chapter. Hence, most of this dissertation will focus on media productions emerging from New York, although it would be incorrect to claim that AIDS cultural work only came out of this location.²⁸ In conjunction with the creation of ACT UP, video and art collectives – such as Testing the Limits and Gran Fury – started documenting the movement and empowering PWAs through counter-representations of the epidemic. Yet, it must be noted that the appearance of alternative AIDS videos can be traced as far back as 1984, when British videomaker Stuart Marshall released *Bright Eyes*, considered to be the first important AIDS alternative documentary.²⁹

Additional factors made 1987 a watershed year in the history of AIDS in the United States, among which one can cite the first major presidential speech about AIDS, in which Ronald Reagan called for mandatory HIV testing and non-“value neutral” education,³⁰ and Senator Jesse Helms’ amendment which prohibited federal funding for AIDS programs that “promote[d], encourage[d] or condone[d] homosexual activities.”³¹ Queer AIDS media

²⁶ As Bordowitz explains, “some people used their connections in show business, advertising, or the art world to publicize our cause. Other activists (...) labored to establish a vibrant alternative media. In established left politics these two tactics-using the media or creating your own-were considered mutually exclusive. In ACT UP, if we thought something would help people with AIDS, we did it.” Yet, he also underlines that within ACT UP, media activists were “initially regarded as hobbyists, just as we are by the mainstream media (...). One of our tasks was therefore to educate the group about the importance of alternative media. We had to introduce and reintroduce ourselves as independent documentarians within the group. We arranged screenings to show people what we were doing. We had constantly to announce our intentions and explain our activities.” See: Bordowitz, Gregg. “My Postmodernism.” *Artforum International*, Volume 41, Issue 7, March 2003, p.274; Bordowitz, Gregg. “Picture a Coalition.” *October*, Vol. 43, *AIDS: Cultural Analysis / Cultural Activism*. Ed. Douglas Crimp. MIT Press, 1987, p.186.

²⁷ In fact, throughout its history, there have been over 140 chapters of ACT UP and thousands of members worldwide. <<http://actupny.com/actions/index.php/the-community>> (Accessed on March 9, 2017)

²⁸ While Jim Hubbard declared that there was “almost no activist video coming out of San Francisco,” Alexandra Juhasz actually contradicted this statement, by affirming that there was video work coming out of San Francisco, Toronto, Paris, London, Africa, and Latin America. She explained: “ACT UP being in New York and because of New York being a kind of center of cultural production and intellectual production that was liberal or leftist enough to support us, it was certainly a hotbed of production and we were a very coherent group. But there were hotbeds of production elsewhere.” Indeed, when one looks at the programs of queer film festivals, cultural productions did come from other cities, including San Francisco. See: Hubbard, Jim. Interview with the author. December 20, 2016, p.3 and Juhasz, Alexandra. Interview with the author. February 10, 2017, p.3.

²⁹ Gever, Martha. “Pictures of Sickness: Stuart Marshall’s Bright Eyes.” *Queer Looks: Perspective on Lesbian and Gay Film and Video*. Eds. Martha Gever, John Greyson, Pratibha Parmar. Between the Lines, 1993, pp.186-204.

³⁰ Reagan, Ronald. “Remarks at the AmFAR Dinner.” May 31, 1987.

<<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1987/053187a.htm>> (Accessed on October 25, 2014)

³¹ Helms, Jesse. “Debate on Amendment No. 956.” *Congressional Record*, Senate, 100th Congress, First Session, October 14, 1987, pp. 27752-27762.

<<https://ia601700.us.archive.org/18/items/congressionalrec13320unit/congressionalrec13320unit.pdf>> (Accessed on November 27, 2014)

continued to be produced in the late 1980s, slowly declining in the mid- and late 1990s along with the waning of AIDS activism, the election of Bill Clinton, a Democrat who was willing to acknowledge the crisis, and the emergence of new treatments after the Eleventh International Conference on AIDS held in Vancouver in 1996.³²

Studying queer AIDS media thus invites us to reflect on the period during which it was produced and the cultural and social changes that American society underwent at the time. AIDS activists and PWAs produced works from the margins in an era characterized by conservatism which manifested itself through increasing artistic and media censorship and budget cuts, initiated by Reagan's efforts to decrease public funding for culture.³³ Hence, the AIDS crisis was part of what was called the "culture wars."³⁴ The epidemic symbolized the problems posed by the dramatic challenges to traditional values that began in the late 1960s, developed during the 1970s and 1980s, and polarized American society in the 1990s.³⁵ As Daniel Brouwer explains:

The nexus of challenging issues – sexuality and sexual practices, drug usage, death, and so on – constellated around 'AIDS,' [gave] rise to, not surprisingly, numerous and often passionate invocations of norms of representation and presentation about what should and should not be said, presented, and represented.³⁶

The following questions will therefore be raised: What room does American society leave for the voices of marginalized populations, and who controls the representation of minority groups? How do "the margins" negotiate their relationship with the hegemonic center? Can dominant regimes of representation be challenged and altered? What are the counter-strategies that can subvert the traditional representation process? At the same time, the mere fact that there was such a prolific production of alternative AIDS media raises questions about fundamental principles such as freedom of speech and democracy, as well as about the role of

³² In 1996, the first combination of antiretroviral drugs, HAART (Highly Active Antiretroviral Therapy), was licensed and made available to people with HIV/AIDS. This cocktail of drugs turned HIV/AIDS into a manageable chronic disease. See: Demus, Axelle. "Framing the AIDS Crisis (...)" *Op.cit.* p.9 and pp.172-175.

³³ Zimmermann, Patricia R. *Visible Evidence: States of Emergency: Documentaries, Wars, Democracies.* University of Minnesota Press, 2000, p.71.

³⁴ The controversy surrounding Robert Mapplethorpe's depictions of homoerotic themes is the most notorious case of the culture wars. Mapplethorpe's work had received a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) to organize an exhibition, *The Perfect Moment*. The exhibit opened in the fall of 1988. However, shortly before it was supposed to open at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. in June 1989, conservative Republican Senator Jesse Helms obtained a catalog of the exhibit. Already concerned over NEA support for an exhibit featuring Andres Serrano's *Piss Christ* – which depicted a crucifix submerged in a jar of urine –, he convinced the Senate to pass legislation that banned federal funding for works of art considered "obscene." For more on the culture wars, see: Chapman, Roger. *The Culture Wars: An Encyclopedia of Issues, Viewpoints, and Voices.* M.E Sharpe, 2010.

³⁵ Nelkin, Dorothy, Willis, David P., Parris, Scott V. *A Disease of Society: Cultural and Institutional Responses to AIDS.* Cambridge University Press, 1991, p.4.

³⁶ Brouwer, Daniel. "Representations of Gay Men with HIV/AIDS Across Scenes of Social Controversy: A Contribution to Studies in the Public Sphere." Ph.D. dissertation, Northwestern University, 2000, p.3.

the Fourth Estate in American society. This study will thus link all these elements together to provide the reader with an analysis which is relevant in today's sociopolitical context, marked by a return to conservative politics with the election of the Republican Donald Trump to the White House, a return which is felt as a threat to minority rights, social protections, and federal funding for culture in the U.S.

This research project draws from diverse academic fields. Since most queer AIDS media productions are alternative by essence, it is crucial to study the writings of leading alternative media theorists such as Chris Atton, John Downing, or DeeDee Halleck. Academic volumes and articles focusing specifically on the question of HIV/AIDS and cultural activism in the United States, such as the works of Douglas Crimp and Simon Watney, are valuable reads to acquire the essential background on queer culture and on the AIDS epidemic. The secondary sources used in this dissertation also consist of theoretical works on the media and visual culture, such as theories by Marshall McLuhan and Stuart Hall. Post-structuralist and postmodernist theories,* such as the work of Michel Foucault, are enlightening when it comes to analyzing the relationships between discourse, power, and knowledge, especially given the fact that many ACT UP members and AIDS media makers were influenced by Foucault's writings.³⁷ Marxist and post-Marxist theories regarding ideology* put forward by writers such as Louis Althusser were also extremely useful to understand the ideological impetus behind AIDS media.

In terms of primary sources, this study centers on a wide variety of moving image productions. Indeed, if AIDS activists drew from an already existing tradition of alternative media production in the United States, the increasing availability and affordability of video recording technology that came about during the 1980s facilitated AIDS video activism's inception. Therefore, AIDS activist videos constitute the bulk of this research, as there were hundreds of video productions created by videomakers who worked outside commercial broadcast television. Video activist John Greyson lists at least nine types of alternative AIDS videos/films: Cable access shows, documents of performances and plays addressing AIDS, documentary (memorial) portraits of PWAs, experimental works by artists deconstructing mass media hysteria, lies, and omissions, educational tapes on transmission of and protection against HIV, documentaries portraying the vast range of AIDS service organizations, safer-sex tapes, activist tapes, and tapes for PWAs outlining issues of alternate treatments.³⁸ Yet,

³⁷ Halperin, David. *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography*. Oxford University Press, 1997, p.15.

³⁸ Greyson, John. "Strategic Compromises: AIDS and Alternative Video Practices." *Reimagining America*. Ed. Mark O'Brien, Craig Little. Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1990, p.61.

these categories are porous and do not fully reflect the complexity of the various tapes. For instance, a work can both seek to educate its audience on HIV/AIDS while deconstructing mass media hysteria at the same time. In this study, we chose to study the following documents: AIDS activist videos and documentaries, personal/autobiographical works, semi-documentaries, recording of performances, AIDS television, experimental films, short movies, and public service announcements. Each sheds a different light on the way AIDS was represented, both by individuals and collectives.

Several art collectives dealt with the AIDS epidemic, but we will devote our attention to the most emblematic one, Gran Fury, whose graphics were used as political tools by the AIDS movement and was defined as “ACT UP’s unofficial propaganda ministry and guerilla graphic designers.”³⁹ They produced provocative counter-images, mostly by appropriating already-existing images and techniques such as those of mass advertisement. As one member of the collective, Loring McAlpin, explained: “We are trying to fight for attention as hard as Coca-Cola fights for attention.”⁴⁰

Our third main primary media source is zines, such as *Infected Faggot Perspectives*, *YELL*, and *Diseased Pariah News*, on which we will focus specifically. Other zines circulated at the time, all of them bearing evocative titles: *Piss Elegant*, *Death Camp*, *The Daily Plague* and *AIDS Kills Fags Dead*.⁴¹ Studying zines allows for an analysis of the communication strategies of small-circulation publications that had seemingly no intention of addressing the general public. Yet, at the same time, such publications directly responded to the general public’s treatment of HIV/AIDS through subversion and humor.

Although communication theorist Marshall McLuhan asserted in 1968 that “the medium [was] the message,”⁴² the fact that these productions correspond to different types of media – namely, electronic and print media⁴³ – does not mean that they have to be thought of

³⁹ Other important collectives were Group Material, a New York-based collective active from 1979 to 1996, and General Idea, a Canadian collective founded in 1967 whose works dealt with the epidemic prominently during the 1980s and 1990s. Felshin, Nina. *But Is This Art? The Spirit of Art as Activism*. Bay Seattle Press, 1995; 12ème Session de l’Ecole du Magasin. *AIDS Riot: Collectifs d’artistes face au Sida / Activist Collectives against AIDS, New York 1987-1994*. Grenoble: Magasin, 2003; Crimp, Douglas, Rolston, Adam. *Op.cit.* p.16.

⁴⁰ Quoted in Lampert, Nicolas. *A People’s Art History of the United States: 250 Years of Activist Art and Artists Working in Social Justice Movements*. The New Press, 2013, p.259.

⁴¹ However I have not been able to have access to these zines. Long, Thomas L. “AIDS and the Paradigms of Dissent.” *The Meaning of Management Challenge: Making Sense of Health, Illness and Disease*. Ed. Zhenyi Li, Thomas L Long. Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2010, p.153 and Long, Thomas L. “Plague of Pariahs: AIDS ‘Zines and the Rhetoric of Transgression.” *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 2000, p.403.

⁴² McLuhan, Marshall. *Understanding Media: The Extension of Man*. CA Gingko Press, [1968], 2003, p.19.

⁴³ Electronic media refers to all media that require electronics or electro-mechanical energy to access the content of the communication. The primary electronic media sources include radio, telephone, television, fax, DVDs, CD-ROMs, the Internet, and kiosks. The term excludes printed, paper-based media (such as books, newspapers, magazines, catalogues, letters, or outdoor billboards), which may be produced electronically but do not need

separately. Rather, one can notice several instances of cross-fertilization and intermediality.* For example, Gran Fury graphics often appear in AIDS activist videos. Another striking example is the addition of a “Fanzine” section in the 1992 edition of the New York Gay and Lesbian Experimental Film Festival, which “showcase[d] the work of those who artfully transport[ed] the zine aesthetic, often raw, uncontrolled and subversively sexy, from the page to the screen.”⁴⁴ Additionally, studying these different productions together instead of separately is useful to measure the overlaps and ruptures between these types of media, especially in terms of what is represented and what is not, and what communicative styles are seen as preferable.

A variety of other primary sources have been drawn on. Essays written by AIDS media makers that circulated in alternative media magazines and in queer publications have been used, in order to better understand the motivations behind the various works selected.⁴⁵ Flyers and press clippings that advertised queer AIDS media as well as queer film festivals programs were also useful to analyze the distribution of the videos/films. Festivals both connected queer media makers and fostered a sense of community and identity. Indeed, as Martha Gever points out, “our identities are constituted as much in the event as in the images we watch.”⁴⁶ Interviews were also extremely valuable to delve into certain aspects of the production of queer AIDS media. Interviews were conducted with Jim Hubbard, an experimental filmmaker, former ACT UP member, and co-founder of the New York MIX festival, formerly known as the New York Gay and Lesbian Experimental Film Festival. Hubbard also co-founded the ACT UP Oral History Project in June 2001 and the New York Public Library AIDS Activist Videotape Collection in 1998. Jean Carlomusto, a prominent New York filmmaker who was part of both DIVA TV (Damn Interfering Video Activist Television) as well as of the Testing the Limits Collective, and who produced a cable show for the Gay Men’s Health Crisis (GMHC) called “Living with AIDS,” was also interviewed. She continues making media about AIDS today, her last film being the Emmy-nominated

electricity to be accessed, as well as oral, visual, and performance media that involve sounds, images, gestures, or hand tools (such as the human voice, theatre, painting, or photography). See: Danesi, Marcel. *Encyclopedia of Media and Communication*. University of Toronto Press, 2013, p.258.

⁴⁴ New York Gay and Lesbian Experimental Film Festival, Program Notes, 1992. Courtesy of Jim Hubbard.

⁴⁵ Among these publications, one could find the American magazine *The Independent*, as well as *Video Guide*, a Canadian magazine. *The Independent* was founded in 1976 and has been the leading source of information for independent, grassroots, and activist media-makers, providing information about their films and video projects. *Video Guide*, published by the Satellite Video Exchange Society between 1978 and 1992, chronicled the convergence of the Canadian west coast alternative video scene and its national and international counterparts. Information retrieved here: <<http://www.vivomediaarts.com/category/video-guide>> and here <<http://independent-magazine.org/about/>> (Accessed on December 18, 2016)

⁴⁶ Gever, Martha. “The Names We Give Ourselves.” *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*. Ed. Russell Ferguson et al. MIT Press, 1990, p.201.

2015 HBO documentary, *Larry Kramer in Love and Anger*. Lastly, I interviewed Alexandra Juhasz, a feminist writer and theorist of media production. In addition to her book on AIDS alternative video, *AIDS TV* (1995), she has written numerous articles on the topic. She was a member of ACT UP and founded collective video groups such as the WAVE Project. The ACT UP Oral History Project, a collection of online interviews with surviving members of ACT UP / New York also constitutes an important resource.⁴⁷

This dissertation is not a comprehensive history of queer AIDS media. It is not representative of the whole range of AIDS media that existed, nor is it necessarily representative of all the populations affected by HIV/AIDS, as I did not have access to a large part of this material, and because it would not have fitted the purpose of this study. For instance, since the crisis focused the attention of a large number of lesbians and gays who turned to activism, this study centers specifically on responses by queer activists rather than drug users or hemophiliacs, although this does not mean that these are mutually exclusive identities.

Yet, this research project explores a topic that has not been fully exploited. While AIDS media activists published numerous articles in the 1990s about alternative AIDS media, only two books are specifically devoted to that question: Alexandra Juhasz's *AIDS TV: Identity, Community and Alternative Video* (1995) and Roger Hallas, *Reframing Bodies: AIDS, Bearing Witness, and the Queer Moving Image* (2009). Juhasz focuses solely on activist video and television, while our definition of "queer AIDS media" is situated on a broader spectrum. If Hallas's study provides his readers with solid analytic and conceptual tools to tackle the topic of queer AIDS media, his focus differs significantly from this study's. Indeed, Roger Hallas "focuses [his] critical attention to queer films and videos that explicitly structure themselves as mediated acts of bearing witness through the development of a testimonial address to the viewer."⁴⁸ The leading references on HIV/AIDS cultural activism, such as *AIDS Cultural Activism / Cultural Analysis* (1987) or *AIDS Demo Graphics* (1990) edited by Douglas Crimp, date back from the heyday of cultural activism. Hence, by combining the study of AIDS activist graphics and zines to that of videos, this research project aims to provide a larger and renewed perspective on the epidemic, AIDS activism, the queer movement, and the media in the United States.

In order to analyze these voices from the frontline, this study will fall into four main chapters. The first part will be devoted to analyzing the constellation of voices and works that

⁴⁷ ACT UP Oral History Project Website: <<http://www.actuporalhistory.org/>> (Accessed on March 17, 2017)

⁴⁸ Hallas, Roger. *Op.cit.* p.10.

made up the core of queer AIDS media. It will outline the several factors that led to queer AIDS media's development in that specific time and context, as well as the goals they wanted to achieve. In order to get an accurate picture of queer AIDS media and of its effectiveness, one needs to follow feminist film scholar B. Ruby Rich's recommendations for analyzing minority productions:

It's time that [the] process of production and reception be inscribed within the critical text. How was the film made? With what intention? With what kind of crew? With what relation to the subject? How was it produced? Who is distributing it? Where is it being shown? For what audience is it constructed? How is it being received?⁴⁹

We will thus see who the key AIDS media makers were, the main means of production, distribution, and exhibition that they used, as well as the audience(s) that they had in mind.

The second part will focus on the ways these works subverted the mass media's modes of representation of HIV/AIDS, as activists were keenly aware that television was at the time the dominant medium of social discourse and representation in American society.⁵⁰ Various reframing strategies – such as deconstruction and appropriation – were used to interfere with and contest the mechanisms of the mainstream media, and shatter notions of media objectivity. Throughout the epidemic, the mass media wished to show “the face of AIDS,” a discursive framework which kept people in ideologically predetermined roles. By contrast, queer AIDS media constructed a space in which the PWA was not subjected to the disciplinary and/or humanistic gaze of the mass media, which either wanted to identify the deviance of abject infected bodies or create identification with the general public. PWAs and AIDS activists presented themselves as primary definers of the epidemic to avoid being spoken of by the dominant discursive regime. They also wished to re-balance media coverage by re-eroticizing and re-glamorizing the AIDS body and using radical discursive and representational modes, such as camp humor,* the grotesque, and the sacrilegious.* We will show that, by paying close attention to the discourse of mainstream media, AIDS activists attempted to redefine the role of the media in American society.

The third part will analyze the reversal process at work in the production of counter-discourses on HIV/AIDS. Offering new viewpoints on the epidemic, activists turned the pathologizing gaze of society on itself: HIV/AIDS appeared as a reflection of a “diseased society.”⁵¹ As Douglas Crimp points out, “AIDS intersects with and requires a critical

⁴⁹ Rich, B. Ruby. “In the Name of Feminist Film Criticism.” *Issues in Feminist Film Criticism*. Ed. Patricia Erens. University of Indiana Press, p.285.

⁵⁰ Juhasz, Alexandra. *AIDS TV: Identity, Community, and Alternative Video (Console-ing Passions)*. Duke University Press, 1995, p.1.

⁵¹ Wojnarowicz, David. “Postcards from America: X-Rays from Hell.” 1989.

rethinking of all of culture: of language and representation, science and medicine, health and illness, sex and death, the public and private realms.”⁵² Queer AIDS media was therefore used as a political tool that would bring about social change and address the United States’ democratic deficit.* Cultural activists looked at HIV/AIDS issues through an intersectional lens. Intersectionality is a term that was originally applied to feminism, coined by black feminist Kimberlé Crenshaw.⁵³ According to Kathy Davis, it refers to “the interactions between gender, race, sexuality, and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power.”⁵⁴ In other words, an intersectional analysis entails looking at the interconnections between different forms of subordination. Queer AIDS media makers understood that disempowered people were silenced as much through complex systems of oppression – racism, homophobia, sexism – as through lack of access to the tools of cultural production.⁵⁵ Additionally, AIDS cultural activists saw the epidemic as magnifying already-existing societal problems such as lack of access to health care, poverty, war, topics which they tried to address in their works. Yet, while some activists used HIV/AIDS as a prism to tackle issues that went beyond HIV/AIDS and aimed at reforming society at large, divisions started to appear within the movement.

This will therefore lead us to discuss the reasons behind queer AIDS media’s decline in the mid-1990s and analyze the movement’s legacy, focusing on the value of these productions today. We will interrogate the potentials that they hold for a renewal of activism, by elaborating on the notion of “queer archive activism”⁵⁶ and exploring the function of digital spaces. Indeed, more than simply being a record of loss, as Jean Carlomusto called it in Bordowitz’s piece *Fast Trip Long Drop* (1993), this material now constitutes a way to fight omission regarding the fight around HIV/AIDS in the U.S. as well as a model for present struggles.

<<http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/docs/icb.topic868236.files/Wojnarowicz.pdf>> (Accessed on December 11, 2014)

⁵² Crimp, Douglas. “AIDS: Cultural Analysis / Cultural Activism.” *October*, Vol. 43, *AIDS: Cultural Analysis / Cultural Activism*. Ed. Douglas Crimp. MIT Press, 1987, p.15.

⁵³ Crenshaw, Kimberlé Williams. “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color.” *Stanford Law Review*, Vol. 43, No. 6, July 1991, pp.1241-1299.

⁵⁴ Davis, Kathy. “Intersectionality as Buzzword: A Sociology of Science Perspective on What Makes A Feminist Theory Successful.” *Feminist Theory*, Volume 9, Issue No. 1, 2008, p.68.

<http://kathydavis.info/articles/Intersectionality_as_buzzword.pdf> (Accessed on June 7, 2017).

⁵⁵ Juhasz, Alexandra. “Camcorder politics.” *Cinematograph*, Vol.4, 1991, p.137.

⁵⁶ Juhasz, Alexandra. “Video Remains: Nostalgia, Technology, and Queer Archive Activism.” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, Volume 12, Number 2, 2006, pp. 319-328.

PART I

FROM VIDEOS TO ZINES: AN OVERVIEW OF QUEER AIDS MEDIA

I.1. Queer AIDS Media: A Constellation

Queer AIDS media makers did not form a homogeneous group. A constellation of works were produced in specific circumstances, which defined their conditions of production and circulation: what format and/or medium to use, whether or not to work collaboratively, how to fund, how to distribute. To fully grasp the complexities of queer AIDS media, it is thus imperative to analyze the context in which these works were made.

I.1.1. Fighting with a Video Camera: The Alternative AIDS Video Movement

Video emerged as a particularly rich medium to challenge and reconfigure dominant AIDS representations. The use of video as a tool for HIV/AIDS activism went hand in hand with the “camcorder revolution”⁵⁷ and the various evolutions in the media landscape that occurred in the 1980s.

I.1.1.A. Media Evolution and Video Revolution

One of the main impetuses behind the use of video was the increasing accessibility of video equipment, which became widely available for a consumer market. In 1965, the Sony Corporation launched the Portapak,⁵⁸ the “videotape recorder that goes anywhere you go.”⁵⁹ (Appendix 1) It was marketed on the premise that “anyone [could] operate [the] Sony Videocorder.”⁶⁰ The commercialization of the Portapak was followed by the introduction of the Video Cassette Recorder (VCR) in the mid-1970s, which enabled the dissemination of video into private spaces and gave people more control over their viewing practices.⁶¹ When the camcorder was launched in 1985, it further increased access to the means of visual media making. Lighter than Portapaks, camcorders “brought television production to the neighborhoods: the playgrounds and garages, the town councils and the local dumps.”⁶² The camcorder was marketed as a domestic product. Ads for the Sony Video8 Handycam featured

⁵⁷ Hallas, Roger. *Op.cit.* p.86.

⁵⁸ Boyle, Deirdre “From Portapak to Camcorder: A Brief History of Guerilla Television.” *Journal of Film and Video*, Vol. 44, No. ½, International Issues, Summer 1992, p.67.

⁵⁹ Ad for the Sony Portable Video Recorder, 1968.

https://c1.staticflickr.com/9/8035/7905966454_4465465803_b.jpg (Accessed on February 20, 2017)

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* Part of its accessibility was also the price, as the videocorder cost “only \$1,250.”

⁶¹ Zimmermann, Patricia R. *Op.cit.* p.99.

⁶² Halleck, DeeDee. *Hand-Held Visions: The Uses of Community Media*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2002, p.7.

family gatherings and celebrations of weddings and of holidays such as Halloween and Christmas.⁶³ (Appendix 2) Yet, it outflanked its marketing agenda and became a tool for activists and artists alike.⁶⁴ The camcorder revolution challenged the passive consumption model of electronic communication and therefore held the promise of realizing Marshall McLuhan's utopian ideal of a "global village:"

The electronic age (...) suddenly releases men from the mechanical and specialist servitude of the preceding machine age (...). The instantaneous world of electronic media involves all of us all at once. Ours is a brand new world of all at oneness (...) we now live in a global village of our own.⁶⁵

Handheld consumer technology was made available at a time when the mainstream media's AIDS moral panic reached an all-time high.⁶⁶ Indeed, there was an increase in AIDS reporting in 1985, marked by movie star Rock Hudson's disclosure of his AIDS status and the Ryan White Story.⁶⁷ As "the scary reality [was] that gays [were] no longer the only ones getting it,"⁶⁸ the media hysteria continued throughout 1986 and 1987. Hence, by videotaping events in which they participated and then playing back these images to the community thanks to VCRs, PWAs and AIDS activists used the tools made available by mainstream society to fight misrepresentations. As Ellen Spiro notes, "in the face of a seemingly monolithic power structure (...), a little machine like the Video 8 camcorder is capable of subverting the oppressive voice of authority by amplifying the image and voices of those people and ideas generally deemed unimportant."⁶⁹ Additionally, when used in demonstrations, camcorders could capture the immediacy of actions because of their lightweight and portability. Video activists were able to shoot situations that were not easily accessible to a

⁶³ Ad for the Sony Video8 Handycam, 1985. <<http://www.originalmagazineads.com/2007/05/1985-sony-camcorder-ad-print-photo.html>> (Accessed on March 2, 2017); Ad for the Sony Video8 Handycam, 1988. <<http://www.originalmagazineads.com/2011/03/1988-sony-handycam-magazine-ad.html>> (Accessed on March 2, 2017) ; Ad for the Sony Video8 Handycam, 1989. <<http://www.originalmagazineads.com/2011/07/1989-sony-camcorder-magazine-ad-print.html>> (Accessed on March 2, 2017)

⁶⁴ Halleck, DeeDee. "Deep Dish TV: Community Video from Geostationary Orbit." *Leonardo*, Vol. 26, No. 5, 1993, p.415.

⁶⁵ McLuhan, Marshall. Quoted in Halleck, DeeDee. *Hand-Held Visions. Op.cit.* p.16.

⁶⁶ According to Jeffrey Weeks, who worked extensively on the AIDS moral panic, the mechanisms of a moral panic are: "the definition of a threat in a particular event, the stereotyping of the main characters in the mass media as particular species of monsters, a spiraling escalation of the perceived threat, leading to the taking up of absolutist positions and the manning of the moral barricades, the emergence of an imaginary solution – in tougher laws, moral isolation, a symbolic court action; followed by the subsidence of the anxiety, with its victims left to endure the new proscriptions, social climate or legal penalties." See: Weeks, Jeffrey. *Sexuality and Its Discontents*. London: Routledge, 1995, p.45.

⁶⁷ Demus, Axelle. "Framing the AIDS Crisis (...)." *Op.cit.* pp.97-127.

⁶⁸ In a CBS News Special titled "AIDS Hit Home" broadcast on October 22, 1986, Dan Rather declared "The scary reality is that gays are no longer the one getting it." Landers, Timothy. "Bodies and Anti-Bodies: A Crisis in Representation." *The Independent*, Volume 11, n°1, 1988, p.18. <<http://independent-magazine.org/files/2014/09/independent11four.pdf>> (Accessed on August 20, 2016).

⁶⁹ Spiro, Ellen. Quoted in Juhasz, Alexandra. *AIDS TV. Op.cit.* p.33.

mainstream news crew.⁷⁰ Finally, the camcorder facilitated the editing and distribution process.⁷¹ The AIDS activist video movement was thus part of a larger shift in society, as the tools of media production were no longer reserved to an elite.

The creation of television channels such as MTV (Music Television) was also part of the transformations that the “mediascape”⁷² underwent at the time. This mediascape became increasingly fragmented, as cable and satellite technologies gave the viewers more options to choose from.⁷³ This could benefit queer AIDS videomakers since cable TV offered new venues to air their works. On the other hand, although the proliferation of programs seemed to provide alternatives to the dominating “Big Three” networks, namely NBC, ABC, and CBS,⁷⁴ deregulation laws passed under Ronald Reagan consolidated media industries. They created media conglomerates and placed control of programming more firmly in the hands of the corporate world.⁷⁵ Do-It-Yourself (DIY) videomaking, with its constellation of media makers, consequently diverged from hegemonic media practices.

Additionally, television programs such as MTV embodied theoretical concerns that took hold in the 1980s and inspired some HIV/AIDS media makers. As cultural critic Jon Pareles writes, “music video is quintessentially post-modern, drawing indiscriminately from high and low culture and past and present styles to create an all-encompassing, dizzying self-conscious pastiche.”⁷⁶ Indeed, the upsurge in media activity about HIV/AIDS emerged at the same time as there was a heightened interest in cultural and mass media criticism.⁷⁷ Although not all activist videomakers were well read in cultural theory, queer AIDS media was nonetheless a body of work that was informed by theories that focused on image saturation in an increasingly mediatized society. The AIDS movement’s struggle around representation

⁷⁰ Spiro, Ellen. “What to Wear on Your Video Activist Outing (Because the Whole World is Watching): A Camcorder’s Manifesto.” *The Independent*, Volume 14, May 1991, p.23.

<<http://independent-magazine.org/files/2014/09/independent14foun.pdf>> (Accessed on August 5, 2016)

⁷¹ Carlomusto, Jean. Interview with the author. January 18, 2017, p.5.

⁷² Coyer, Kate et al. *Op.cit.* p.5.

⁷³ Sturken, Marita, Cartwright, Lisa. *Practice of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture*. Oxford University Press, 2009, p.233.

⁷⁴ By the mid 1950s, NBC, CBS, and ABC came to be known as the “Big Three,” dominating American network television. Only in the mid-1980s did this monopoly of the airwaves start to change with the emergence of a fourth network, Fox, owned by Rupert Murdoch. At the same time, cable television entered the broadcasting arena. Danesi, Marcel. *Op.cit.* p.92.

⁷⁵ Gomery Douglas. “The Reagan Record.” *Screen*, Vol. 30, Issue 1-2, 1989, pp.92-93 and Sturken, Marita, Cartwright, Lisa. *Op.cit.* p.236.

⁷⁶ Pareles, Jon. “After Music Videos, All the World Has Become a Screen.” *New York Times*, December 10, 1989. <<http://www.nytimes.com/1989/12/10/weekinreview/ideas-trends-after-music-videos-all-the-world-has-become-a-screen.html?pagewanted=all>> (Accessed on: October 15, 2016)

⁷⁷ Drew, Jesse. “The Collective Camcorder in Art and Activism.” *Collectivism After Modernism: The Art of Social Imagination After 1945*. Ed. Blake Stimson, Gregory, Sholette. University of Minnesota Press, 2007, p.102.

was thus a *collage* that fed from postmodern, poststructuralist, and Situationist theories, which interrogated the relationship between art, culture, and society, the role and efficacy of images in society, and the production of meaning through discourses and representations.⁷⁸

The use of video by social movements was not new, as activists had been appropriating film and video tools for their own ends ever since they had been available.⁷⁹ Queer AIDS videomaking was aligned with film movements such as Third Cinema, which developed in the late 1960s and 1970s and was a revolutionary response by Latin American filmmakers to global poverty and oppressive structures. It was a call for guerrilla filmmaking,* using “the camera as our rifle (...) a gun that can shoot 24 frames a second.”⁸⁰ Such films would use the minimal resources available to them and were not trying to match the West’s technical standards. The production, distribution, and exhibition of Third Cinema films were also organized differently. Filmmakers Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino stressed the need to work collectively, to operate underground, to embrace very small screening locations, and to organize screenings that included pauses for audience discussion.⁸¹ Soviet Cinema, notably the work of filmmaker Dziga Vertov, who sought to use the camera to show “the truth,” also inspired queer AIDS media makers, notably Gregg Bordowitz, who often compared his work to Vertov’s:

The whole notion that you could be this revolutionary filmmaker, like Dziga Vertov – Vertov made the film *Man With the Movie Camera*. We were like folks with video cameras. We just had this idea that we could go out and be these revolutionary filmmakers of the people and just document the everyday, and provide this valuable service to the growing AIDS activist movement.⁸²

Finally, the underground and guerrilla video groups that mushroomed in the U.S. in the 1960s and 1970s were a direct influence on queer AIDS media activists. Indeed, in the late 1960s, countercultural practices of video emerged simultaneously in collectives on both coasts. People’s Video Theater, Videofreex, Raintance, and Global Village were all founded on a

⁷⁸ Juhasz, Alexandra. Interview with the author. February 10, 2017, p.3.

⁷⁹ Spiro, Ellen. *Op.cit.* p.22.

⁸⁰ The term *Third Cinema* was coined in 1969 in an article by Argentinean political activist filmmakers Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino. Cuban filmmaker Julio García Espinosa’s 1969 essay “For an imperfect cinema” also contributed to the theoretical makeup of Third Cinema. Solanas and Getino used the adjective “Third” to distinguish the type of filmmaking that they argued was urgently needed from both Hollywood (First Cinema) and art films, stamped by a particular movie director’s personal vision (Second Cinema). The fundamental mission of this Third Cinema was to decolonize culture and to strip out U.S. and Western cultural dominance and consumerist ideology in the third world. See: Downing, John. “Third Cinema.” *Encyclopedia of Social Movement Media. Op.cit.* pp.522-523.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² ACT UP Oral History Project. Interview of Gregg Bordowitz. December 17, 2002. <<http://www.actuporalhistory.org/interviews/images/bordowitz.pdf>> (Accessed on May 2, 2015). Vertov also influenced other genres such as *cinéma vérité* and direct cinema in the 1950s and 1960s.

belief in “liberation via the democratic pluralism of television.”⁸³ They asserted that anyone could control the means of production. These groups also felt empowered by the availability of consumer video equipment, which they saw as an opportunity to express themselves more freely and offer revolutionary alternatives that would change the structure of information in the United States.⁸⁴ Groups such as Top Value Television (T VTV), informed by Marshall McLuhan’s works and Marxist theories of media production, made it their goal to free the media, as they stated in their review *Radical Software*:

The Media must be liberated. Must be removed from private ownership and commercial sponsorship, must be placed in the service of all humanity. We must make the media believable. We must assume conscious control over the videosphere. We must wrench the intermedia network free from the archaic and corrupt intelligence that now dominates it.⁸⁵

Armed with cheap means of communication, guerrilla media activists were making propaganda.

Finally, “Person With AIDS” was seen as being a political identity that had been created with the advent of AIDS.⁸⁶ PWAs thus drew from several identity-based theories to question the ways they were subjugated within the dominant culture. Their models were the civil rights, feminist, and gay and lesbian movements, all of which articulated concerns with the way the media depicted them.⁸⁷ In the wake of gay liberation, lesbians and gay people felt that there was an increasing need for media representation. They began producing their own films in unprecedented numbers, which constituted cinematic extensions of the coming-out strategy.⁸⁸ AIDS activists were also indebted to the nascent “queer theory,” which they contributed to inform in return. Indeed, AIDS activism rethought identity in terms of affinity rather than essence, as the movement included not only lesbians and gay men, but also bisexuals, transgender people, sex workers, PWAs, as well as parents and friends of queer people.⁸⁹ “Queer,” Roger Hallas writes, “offers the opportunity to conceptualize community, politics, and cultural production across different identities.”⁹⁰

⁸³ Mellencamp, Patricia. “Video and the Counterculture.” *Global Television*. Ed. Cynthia Schneider and Brian Wallis. New York: Wedge Press, 1988, p.200.

⁸⁴ Boyle, Deirdre. *Subject to Change: Guerrilla Television Revisited*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, p.xiv.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* p.26

⁸⁶ Juhasz, Alexandra, Mohammed, Juanita. “Knowing Each Other Through AIDS Video: A Dialogue Between AIDS Activist Videomakers.” *Connected: Engagement with Media*. Ed. George E. Marcus. University of Chicago Press, 1996, p.197.

⁸⁷ Juhasz, Alexandra. Interview with the author. February 10, 2017, p.3.

⁸⁸ Benschhoff, Harry M., Griffin, Sean. *Queer Images: A History of Lesbian and Gay Film in America*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2006, p.154.

⁸⁹ Jagose, Annemarie. *Op.cit.* p.94.

⁹⁰ Hallas, Roger. *Op.cit.* p.25.

1.1.1.B. Combating AIDS Collectively: Affinity Groups and Video Collectives

It is in the context of a changing media landscape where “television [was] falling into the hands of the people”⁹¹ that the most prolific form of queer AIDS media, AIDS activist video, emerged. Activist videos were created by people who did not necessarily consider themselves primarily media makers but who did so in service of grassroots political activity.⁹² AIDS activists mainly formed video collectives, following the steps of groups that came before them and working alongside others who dealt with issues such as the nuclear freeze, U.S. foreign policy in Central America, or labor relations.⁹³ As ACT UP’s structure was anti-hierarchical and decentralized, the organization comprised various caucuses and affinity groups. Affinity groups come from the tradition of Left organizing, and consist of small associations of people within activist movements whose mutual trust and shared interests allow them to function autonomously, arrive at decisions by consensus, protect one another at demonstrations, and participate as units in coordinated acts of civil disobedience.⁹⁴ Some of these groups worked specifically with video. Other video collectives formed were not affinity groups but still worked closely with ACT UP.

The first video activist group that was created by members of ACT UP was the Testing the Limits collective (TTL).⁹⁵ Founded shortly after ACT UP in 1987 but working independently from it,⁹⁶ it was a collective of queer and heterosexual people formed to document people’s responses to AIDS. The collective was committed to the production of alternative media which supported the efforts of all people affected by AIDS.⁹⁷ Its strategy was documentation through participation.⁹⁸ TTL’s founding members were David Meieran, Gregg Bordowitz, Hilery Joy Kipnis, Sandra Elgear, Robyn Hutt, and, later on, Jean Carlomusto. Except for Hilery Joy Kipnis and Jean Carlomusto, all of TTL’s members were

⁹¹ The Koppel Report. “Television: Revolution in a Box, an ABC’s special.” *ABC*, September 13, 1989. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=epQPEbiw-b4>> (Accessed on March 3, 2017)

⁹² Hubbard, Jim. Interview with the author. December 20, 2016, p.1.

⁹³ Drew, Jesse. *Op. cit.* p.105.

⁹⁴ Crimp, Douglas, Rolston, Adam. *Op. cit.* p.20.

⁹⁵ According to Sandra Elgear, the name was chosen because the collective was formed “at a time when (...) testing for HIV was a big issue. So that was how the word “testing” seemed appropriate. Then (...) because that’s what was happening to all of us. Our limits were being tested.” ACT UP Oral History Project. Interview of Sandra Elgear. July 22, 2008, p.22. <<http://www.actuporalhistory.org/interviews/images/elgear.pdf>> (Accessed on September 10, 2016)

⁹⁶ Robé, Chris. “Anarchist Aesthetics and U.S Video Activism.” *Jump Cut Review*, 2011. <<https://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc56.2014-2015/RobeAnarchists/index.html>> (Accessed on March 17, 2017)

⁹⁷ 1989 Ad for Testing the Limits. December 11, 1986-November 30, 1994 and undated. MS Lesbian Herstory Archives: Subject Files: Part 6. Folder No.: 14910. Lesbian Herstory Archives. Archives of Sexuality & Gender. <tinyurl.galegroup.com/tinyurl/4PpX3X> (Accessed on February 20, 2017)

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

alumni from the Whitney Museum Independent Study program.⁹⁹ Ray Navarro, Catherine Gund (formerly Catherine Saalfield), and Ellen Spiro, members of DIVA TV, a video collective which formed later on, also participated in the program. In the words of Catherine Gund-Saalfield, the program was “a one-year Marxist-indoctrination studio-art program in downtown Manhattan” which touched on theories of psychoanalysis, Marxism, anthropology, and film, among others.¹⁰⁰ The program thus informed these video collectives’ practices. As Gregg Bordowitz remarks: “We were reading Foucault (...) and all these texts that spoke directly to the epidemic (...) and Marx (...) and Gramsci. There was a lot of stuff about media politics that we had in our head.”¹⁰¹

TTL produced six documentaries but their most renowned works are *Testing the Limits: NYC* (1987) and *Voices from the Front* (1991). TTL ultimately wanted to achieve institutionalization by becoming a grant-funded nonprofit organization that would have its documentaries broadcast on public television.¹⁰² The collective, which became a formal group of three producers, adopted more professional modes of production over time. This is visible when comparing the tone of *Testing the Limits* and that of *Voices from the Front*. At the end of the first tape, one can read that they were “a collective of lesbians, gays and straights formed to document emerging forms of activism that are arising out of people’s response to government inaction regarding the global epidemic of AIDS.”¹⁰³ As the collective became more conventional – for instance editing with the help of professionals rather than collectively and producing works that would fit in with television’s documentary aesthetics – it is only after the rolling credits of their feature-length documentary *Voices From The Front* that their credentials appear. Much less importance is given to the collective’s activist stance, as their

⁹⁹ The Independent Study Program (ISP) consists of three interrelated parts: Studio Program, Curatorial Program, and Critical Studies Program. The ISP provides a setting within which students pursuing art practice, curatorial work, art historical scholarship, and critical writing engage in ongoing discussions and debates that examine the historical, social, and intellectual conditions of artistic production. The program encourages the theoretical and critical study of the practices, institutions, and discourses that constitute the field of culture. <<http://whitney.org/Research/ISP>> (Accessed on March 2, 2017)

¹⁰⁰ ACT UP Oral History Project. Interview of Catherine Gund. April 20, 2007, pp.24-25.

<<http://www.actuporalhistory.org/interviews/images/gund.pdf>> (Accessed on September 10, 2016)

¹⁰¹ ACT UP Oral History Project. Interview of Gregg Bordowitz. *Op.cit.* p.14. In his essay entitled “My Postmodernism,” Bordowitz elaborates on the program, explaining that they were “assigned readings by Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Luce Irigaray, Laura Mulvey, Jacques Lacan, and Louis Althusser. Reading Althusser opened our eyes to the notion that ideology is a worldview constructed through language itself, the very medium of social life. We speak language and it speaks us. Ideology works from the core of identity, mediating our relations with others. Change is not simply a matter of developing better ideas and convincing others of their validity. Radical change is a matter of altering the entire culture’s view of reality.” Bordowitz, Gregg. “My Postmodernism.” *Op.cit.* p.227.

¹⁰² Juhasz, Alexandra. *AIDS TV. Op.cit.* p.62.

¹⁰³ Testing The Limits Collective. *Testing the Limits*. 1987, AIDS Activist Videotape Collection. Manuscripts and Archives Division. The New York Public Library. Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundation.

stated mission is “to document AIDS, lesbian/gay and women’s issues.”¹⁰⁴ Yet, the desire to become more professional did not mean that they failed to provide a valuable service to their community. They compiled hundreds of hours of material comprised of forums, protests, community outreach, testimonies and interviews, which constitute a history of the AIDS movement which would have, in their own words, “otherwise gone undocumented.”¹⁰⁵

DIVA TV – Damn Interfering/Intervening Video Activist Television – ¹⁰⁶ was created in 1989 as an affinity group within ACT UP, partly to counter TTL’s professionalization. Although they called themselves a collective, they resented “the constraints of the word” and claimed they functioned more like a guerilla video team.¹⁰⁷ Throughout its existence, DIVA TV remained a grassroots video group with a “quick-and-dirty” approach to videomaking “made on location with activists, by activists, and for activists.”¹⁰⁸ At the beginning of each DIVA TV tape, the viewer is informed that the collective seeks to achieve “propaganda on every level [which] includes questions about lifestyle, fashion, collectivity, reversal, and empowerment.”¹⁰⁹ While a small screen on the left shows footage of demonstrations, a caption on the right of the screen reads:

We are committed to making media which directly counters and interferes with dominant media assumptions about AIDS & governmental negligence in dealing with the AIDS crisis. We are committed to challenging a racist, sexist, and heterosexist dominant media which is complicit with our repressive government. (Appendix 3)

Within DIVA TV, a task group called “Lesbian Activists Producing Innovative Television” (LAPIT), contributed to their tapes. During its lifetime, DIVA TV produced three significant tapes: *Target City Hall* (1989), *Pride* (1989), and *Like a Prayer* (1990).¹¹⁰ DIVA TV was

¹⁰⁴ Testing The Limits Collective, *Voices from the Front*, 1991. Alexander Street Video Streaming. (Accessed on September 2, 2016)

¹⁰⁵ Elgear, Sandra, Hutt, Robyn. “Some Notes on Collective Productions.” *Video Guide*, Volume 10, World AIDS Days Special Issue, Issues 48, November 1989, p.20. <<http://www.vivomediaarts.com/video-guide-volume-10-issues-48-49/>> (Accessed on November 20, 2016)

¹⁰⁶ Most of the times the “I” in DIVA stood for “Interfering,” but it would sometimes stand for “Damn Intervening Video Activists.” See “DIVA Mailing List.” Committees, DIVA TV. 1992. MS ACT UP: The AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power: Series VII. Committees Box 29, Folder 15. New York Public Library. Archives of Sexuality & Gender. <tinyurl.galegroup.com/tinyurl/4AkAs4> (Accessed on December 29, 2016)

¹⁰⁷ Saalfeld, Catherine, Navarro, Ray. “Shocking Pink Praxis: Race and Gender on the ACT UP Frontlines.” *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*. Ed. Diana Fuss. New York: Routledge, 1991, p.363.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ DIVA TV. *Target City Hall*. 1989, AIDS Activist Videotape Collection. Manuscripts and Archives Division. The New York Public Library. Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations. The tape deals with ACT UP’s action targeting New York City Mayor Ed Koch’s administration policy on AIDS; DIVA TV. *Pride 69-89*. 1989, AIDS Activist Videotape Collection. Manuscripts and Archives Division. The New York Public Library. Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations. *Pride* celebrates the twentieth anniversary of the gay and lesbian movement in New York while underlining the challenges faced by the community at the time the tape was made; DIVA TV. *Like a Prayer*. 1990, AIDS Activist Videotape Collection. Manuscripts and Archives Division. The New York Public

composed of nine founding members, some of whom were or had been part of TTL, as TTL members were immediately considered members of DIVA TV: Gregg Bordowitz, Catherine Saalfeld, Jean Carlomusto, Costa Pappas, Ray Navarro, Ellen Spiro, George Plagianos, Rob Kurrilla, and Bob Beck.¹¹¹ Yet, the group had a looser participatory structure than TTL, as it functioned on an open-membership basis. In 1992, for instance, DIVA was composed of 21 members, including the original members.¹¹² Their commitment to remain open to everyone who wanted to join at any given time was meant to counterbalance TTL's institutionalization:¹¹³

We invite anyone at any level of experience film or video production to join (...). We work in all formats of audio-visual reproduction (...) DIVA encourages participation, ideas and forms of experimentation on all levels. We're a "hands-on" group. We share equipment, ideas, editing decks etc.¹¹⁴

The impulse to share resources was inherent to the collective effort, as we will see later. As such, AIDS videomakers' primary interest was serving the HIV/AIDS community, instead of being driven by commercial goals. Yet, although DIVA TV and TTL ultimately used different strategies to publicize HIV/AIDS issues, one was not more efficient than the other. Rather, as Bordowitz's assessment of the situation shows, these were "legitimate and absolutely necessary responses to the needs of that moment. Neither one was right or wrong."¹¹⁵

Other collective projects were more loosely connected to ACT UP, as some activists saw the organization as being at odds with their own concerns. House of Color was a closed membership group composed of lesbians and gay men of color. It was formed by activist Robert Garcia and joined by Robert Mignott, Jeff Nunokawa, Pamela Sneed, Jocelyn Taylor,

Library. Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations. The tape chronicles and comments on ACT UP and WHAM's (Women's Health Action and Mobilization) "Stop the Church" demonstration that was held at St. Patrick's Cathedral to protest the Catholic Church's policy on AIDS and abortion rights. DIVA TV's tapes are also available here: <<http://www.aubinpictures.com/diva-tv/>> (Accessed on June 7, 2017)

¹¹¹ Saalfeld, Catherine. "On the Make: Activist Video Collectives." *Queer Looks: Perspective on Lesbian and Gay Film and Video*. Eds. Martha Gever, John Greyson, Pratibha Parmar. Between the Lines, 1993, p.26.

¹¹² Patty Ackerman, Bob Beck, Gregg Bordowitz, Peter Bowen, Sarah Cawley, Jean Carlomusto, Rob Curillo, Bob Huff, Ino Jackson, Zoe Leonard, Jennie Livingston, Kimberly Miller, Ray Navarro, Costa Pappas, George Plagianos, Nolan Poole, Catherine Saalfeld, Jason Simon, Kimberly Smith, Ellen Spiro, Richard Volo. See: "DIVA Mailing List." *Op.cit.* In an interview for *Artery*, Gregg Bordowitz explains that sometimes, the collective would be made up of 40 to 50 members. "Fast Trip, Long View: Talking to Gregg Bordowitz." *Artery: The AIDS-Arts Forum*, 1999. <<http://www.robertatkins.net/beta/witness/artists/moves/bordowitz.html>> (Accessed on June 7, 2017)

¹¹³ Saalfeld, Catherine. "On the Make." *Op.cit.* p.31.

¹¹⁴ "DIVA TV." Ephemera, Flyers, Handbills by ACT UP, Committee Descriptions. 1989. MS ACT UP: The AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power: Series XI. Ephemera, Flyers, Handbills by Act Up Box 199, Folder 14. New York Public Library. Archives of Sexuality & Gender. <[tinyurl.galegroup.com/tinyurl/4JEonX](http://tinyurl.com/tinyurl/4JEonX)> (Accessed on February 1, 2017)

¹¹⁵ "Fast Trip, Long View: Talking to Gregg Bordowitz." *Op.cit.*

July Tolentino and Wellington Love.¹¹⁶ Their work went beyond HIV/AIDS however, as they dealt with the intersection of being queer and a person of color, and explored the empowering impacts of making one's own media. The members of the WAVE – Women's AIDS Video Enterprise – project, a video support group dedicated to dealing with the issues of women of color during the epidemic, also felt alienated from ACT UP's predominantly white membership. Alexandra Juhasz, the founder of WAVE, indeed explains:

The women involved in the WAVE project, certainly committed to AIDS "activism," [felt] distanced from many ACT UP tapes, either because the demonstrators reflect the largely young, white, gay, and male constituency of ACT UP, or because the privilege implicit in the time commitment of direct action is unimaginable for workingwomen with children, or because civil disobedience is not a form of activism with which everyone feels entirely comfortable.¹¹⁷

Although collectives formed the backbone of the AIDS activist video movement, many individual trajectories contributed to the constellation of alternative AIDS-related video works.

1.1.1.C. Individual Trajectories

Some videomakers only produced a couple of works about AIDS activism, while others were extremely prolific. Robert Hilferty, a journalist who decided to tackle HIV/AIDS issues through video work after the death of his lover, film scholar Tom Hopkins, made two documentaries about HIV/AIDS.¹¹⁸ His controversial piece *Stop the Church* (1991) covers the same action as DIVA's *Like a Prayer* (1990), offering a somewhat different perspective on the demonstration.¹¹⁹ On the contrary, James Wentzy, who joined ACT UP and DIVA TV in 1990, went on to produce hundreds of tapes about HIV/AIDS activism that were broadcast on his show, *AIDS Community Television*.¹²⁰

Members of video collectives also had sides project. Jean Carlomusto and Gregg Bordowitz were both involved in the Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC) where they ran a weekly cable show called "Living with AIDS" (1988-1994). They also produced GMHC's safer-sex shorts, educational pornographic movies that promoted safe sex practices, as well as

¹¹⁶ Saalfield, Catherine. "On the Make." *Op.cit.* p.23.

¹¹⁷ Juhasz, Alexandra. "Camcorder Politics." *Op.cit.* p.79 and Juhasz, Alexandra. *AIDS TV. Op.cit.* p.16.

¹¹⁸ Zonana, Victor F. "AIDS Activist Finds Creative Outlet in 'Church Documentary.'" *Los Angeles Times*, September 6, 1991. <http://articles.latimes.com/1991-09-06/entertainment/ca-1921_1_aids-crisis> (Accessed on March 5, 2017)

¹¹⁹ Hilferty, Robert. *Stop the Church*. 1991. AIDS Activist Videotape Collection. Manuscripts and Archives Division. The New York Public Library. Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations. Hilferty, Robert. *Tag Helms*. 1991. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TS-w4Pqvkuw>> (Accessed on March 5, 2017)

¹²⁰ Hubbard, Jim. "Report to Media Network on Video Archiving." Courtesy of the author, 1996.

brief public service announcements.¹²¹ Carlomusto combined her interest in feminism and media by making tapes about women and HIV/AIDS.¹²² Bordowitz's work was already informed by the HIV/AIDS crisis before joining collectives, as the first videotape he ever produced, *some aspect of a shared lifestyle* (1986), centered on the epidemic.¹²³ His work reflected his own experience of being a HIV-positive bisexual man as well as an activist. This combination of autobiography and activism is best exemplified by *Fast Trip, Long Drop* (1993).¹²⁴

Some activists were already videomakers or had studied media before producing works about HIV/AIDS. Carlomusto came to New York with a master's degree in film studies and was teaching community media at New York University (NYU) before working for GMHC.¹²⁵ Alexandra Juhasz also became involved in AIDS media through her studies in filmmaking and the GMHC's audiovisual department. She combined her interests in media making and community organization when she founded the WAVE project, which she calls an "activist intervention that was highly informed by [her] academic training."¹²⁶

Other works were not video activism *per se* but nonetheless dealt with AIDS crisis. One can cite the work of experimental filmmaker Jim Hubbard. His interest in AIDS sparked from his work on the gay community, as he had been filming the New York Gay Pride each year since 1978.¹²⁷ After recording the 1987 Pride March in which ACT UP was involved, his work started focusing more on the epidemic, at the same time as his partner, Roger Jacoby, fell ill and eventually succumbed to the epidemic. This forms the bulk of *Elegy in the Streets* (1987), a silent exploration of AIDS activism and his partner's disease. The work of Barbara Hammer, the most prolific lesbian feminist filmmaker of the era, eventually came to be informed by HIV/AIDS as well.¹²⁸ She moved from solely lesbian feminist concerns when

¹²¹ Carlomusto, Jean. Interview with the author. January 18, 2017, p.12.

¹²² See for instance: *Women and AIDS* (1988) in collaboration with Alexandra Juhasz, or *Doctors, Liars, and Women* (1988) produced with AIDS activist and filmmaker Maria Maggenti: Carlomusto, Jean, Maggenti, Maria. *Doctors, Liars, and Women: AIDS Activists Say No To Cosmo*. 1988. AIDS Activist Videotape Collection. Manuscripts and Archives Division. The New York Public Library. Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations. <<https://vimeo.com/55793020>> (Accessed on June 7, 2017)

¹²³ Bordowitz, Gregg. *some aspect of a shared lifestyle*. 1986.
<http://www.greggbordowitz.com/motion_pictures.html> (Accessed on June 7, 2017).

¹²⁴ Bordowitz, Gregg. *Fast Trip, Long Drop*. 1993.
<http://www.ubu.com/film/bordowitz_fast.html> (Accessed on September 25, 2016)

¹²⁵ Carlomusto, Jean. Interview with the author. January 18, 2017, p.3.

¹²⁶ Juhasz, Alexandra. Interview with the author, February 10, 2017, p.2.

¹²⁷ Hubbard, Jim. Interview with the author. March 18, 2015, p.1.

¹²⁸ Benschoff, Harry M., Griffin, Sean. *Op.cit.* p.164.

she made *Snow Job: The Media Hysteria of AIDS* (1986).¹²⁹ Marlon Riggs, an HIV-positive African American filmmaker whose films focused mostly on the black gay experience in the United States, weaved HIV/AIDS into his work. The pieces that best exemplify his approach to HIV/AIDS in the black community are *Tongues Untied* (1989) and *Non Je Ne Regrette Rien (No Regret)* (1992).

This interweaving of concerns crossed media fields as well. Tom Kalin, a film and video artist who started making video about HIV/AIDS in 1985 and went on to be one of the leading figures of New Queer Cinema, was also part of ACT UP's agitprop art collective, Gran Fury.

I.1.2. Angry Graphics and Underground Publications

Video was only one of the means used by activists and PWAs to tackle the issues surrounding the AIDS epidemic. Art collectives and zines also made significant contributions to queer AIDS media.

I.1.2.A. Gran Fury: ACT UP's "Unofficial Propaganda Ministry"¹³⁰

In the same way as the AIDS activist video movement did not appear *ex-nihilo*, precedents had already been set for the creation of activist art collectives dealing with HIV/AIDS. In the 1960s, inexpensive offset lithography and Xerox technology facilitated the production of political posters.¹³¹ In the 1980s, activists took advantage of new communication technologies, such as personal computers, portable copiers, and fax.¹³² Besides, collectivization of art was not new.¹³³ The 1970s paved the way for the type of cultural analysis put forth in response to the AIDS crisis through collective art. As was the case for the video component of AIDS cultural activism, there was a desire to democratize

¹²⁹ Hammer, Barbara. *Snow Job: The Media Hysteria of AIDS*. 1986, AIDS Activist Videotape Collection. Manuscripts and Archives Division. The New York Public Library. Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

¹³⁰ Crimp, Douglas, Rolston, Adam. *Op.cit.* p.16.

¹³¹ Jacobs, Karrie, Heller, Stephen. *Angry Graphics: Protests Posters from the Reagan/Bush Era*. Gibbs Smith, 1992, p.5.

¹³² *Ibid.* p.7.

¹³³ See for instance the futurists, the Dadaists, the surrealists, the productivists or the muralists. As Blake Simson and Gregory Sholette underline, "From the Situationists to Group Material to the Yes Men, postwar cultural politics was most clearly realized within informally networked communities of artists." *Ibid.* p.xi and p.10.

culture through art practices, which often took the shape of group projects.¹³⁴ Collective artistic production was for instance a feature of the feminist movement, as women sought, like PWAs, to visually translate personal experiences into political ones.¹³⁵ The decision to produce work collectively was seen as a mode of action against society and the art world's cult of the individual.¹³⁶ Gran Fury's political graphics also inscribed themselves within the tradition of leftist protest art and guerilla graphics.¹³⁷ At the same time, they were part of the groundswell of art activism that took place in New York in the 1980s and 1990s, epitomized by artists and groups such as Barbara Kruger, Robbie Conal, or The Guerrilla Girls.¹³⁸

Gran Fury was founded after a request from the curator of the New York New Museum of Contemporary Art, Bill Olander, for a piece on AIDS that would appear in the front window of the museum in 1987. Dozens of activists mobilized, which resulted in *Let the Record Show*, a collective installation that indicted politicians for their failure to address the crisis and condemned moralistic discourses.¹³⁹ Gran Fury was then created in January 1988 as an independent group from ACT UP, "united in anger and dedicated to exploiting the power of art to end the AIDS crisis."¹⁴⁰ At first operating through an open structure but faced with the difficulties linked with a fluctuating membership, the group stopped accepting new members at the end of 1989. The fixed membership included Richard Elovich, Avram Finkelstein, Amy Heard, Tom Kalin, John Lindell, Loring McAlpin, Marlene McCarty, Donald Moffett, Michael Nesline, Mark Simpson, and Robert Vazquez.¹⁴¹ The group was composed of graphic designers, performing artists, a psychiatric nurse, and art amateurs.¹⁴² Gran Fury's artwork took the form of posters, stickers, printed ads, billboards and bus signs.

¹³⁴ "Introduction." *AIDS Riot: Collectifs d'artistes face au Sida / Activist Collectives against AIDS, New York 1987-1994*. Ed. 12^e Session de L'Ecole du Magasin. Grenoble: Magasin, 2003, p.182.

¹³⁵ See for instance the Women Artists in Revolution, the Ad hoc Committee of Women Artists, Where We At, Women in the Art, and the activities of the Women's Building founded by Judy Chicago in Los Angeles. For more information, see: Dumont, Fabienne. *La rébellion du Deuxième Sexe: L'histoire de l'art au crible des théories féministes anglo-américaines (1970-2000)*. Les presses du réel, 2011.

¹³⁶ Drew, Jesse. *Op.cit.* p.98.

¹³⁷ Jacobs, Karrie, Heller, Stephen. *Op.cit.* pp.4-7.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.* pp.12-13.

¹³⁹ Sember, Robert, Gere, David. "'Let the Record Show...': Art Activism and the AIDS Epidemic." *American Journal of Public Health*, Vol. 96, No. 6, June 2006, pp.967-969.

¹⁴⁰ Crimp, Douglas, Rolston, Adam. *Op.cit.* p.16.

¹⁴¹ Gran Fury. *Gran Fury: Read My Lips*. 80WSE Press, 2011, p.4.

¹⁴² Ball, Edward. "Publicists to the Epidemic." *New York Magazine*, January 8, 1990.

I.1.2.B. HIV/AIDS Zines: “Diseased Pariahs” and “Infected Faggots” Speaking

Zines were another form of guerrilla publication used by people with HIV/AIDS, which also embodied a democratization of cultural production at a time marked by the rapid centralization of corporate media.¹⁴³ Zines were shaped by the history of alternative press in the U.S., and its origins lied in the science fiction and punk rock communities. The medium was subsequently adopted by marginalized groups and individuals whose voices were not heard in the mainstream media.¹⁴⁴ Queer zines emerged in the late 1980s and sought to represent queer subjectivities to resist what Ian Barnard has termed “*het-gemony*,” that is, the universality of heterosexuality assumed by most establishment media.¹⁴⁵ This challenge to exclusionary discursive practices is expressed in the zine *Queer Read This!* published in the 1990s:

Straight people have a privilege that allows them to do whatever they please and fuck without fear (...) they flaunt their freedom in my face. Their images are on my TV, in the magazines (...) I want there to be a moratorium (...) on media images that promote heterosexuality (...) They are your enemy when they don't acknowledge your invisibility and (...) contribute to a culture that kills you.¹⁴⁶

As counter-hegemonic sites of cultural production, HIV/AIDS zines came out of this tradition of Do-It-Yourself publishing and sought to generate alternative knowledge to communicate, inform, and act.¹⁴⁷ Three zines in particular emerged within the HIV/AIDS community in the 1990s. Two originated in the California area, *Diseased Pariah News (DPN)* and *Infected Faggot Perspectives (IFP)* while the other one, *YELL*, was published in New York. First published in September 1991, *IFP* was “dedicated to keeping the Realities of Faggots Living with AIDS and HIV Disease IN YOUR FACE Until the Plague is Over!!!”¹⁴⁸ (Appendix 4) It was edited by W. Wayne Karr, an “INFECTED FAGGOT Living With AIDS since 1986.”¹⁴⁹ The zine published fourteen issues over a span of two years, and stopped publishing in 1993.¹⁵⁰ *Diseased Pariah News*¹⁵¹ published eleven issues from 1990 to 1999 and envisioned itself as a

¹⁴³ Barnard, Ian. “Queer Zines and the Fragmentation of Art, Community, Identity, and Politics.” *Socialist Review*, 26.1-2, 1996, p.72 and Duncombe, Stephen. *Op.cit.* p.7.

¹⁴⁴ Duncombe, Stephen. *Op.cit.* p.11.

¹⁴⁵ Barnard, Ian. *Op.cit.* p.71.

¹⁴⁶ *Queers, Read This!* 1990. <http://archive.qzap.org/index.php/Detail/Object/Show/object_id/184> (Accessed on March 3, 2017)

¹⁴⁷ Licona, Adela C. *Zines in Third Space*. State University of New York Press, 2012, p.3.

¹⁴⁸ Long, Thomas L. “Plague of Pariahs (...).” *Op.cit.* p.403.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ Brouwer, Daniel. “Representations of Gay Men (...).” *Op.cit.* p.118.

¹⁵¹ The name of the zine came from a cartoon made after an airline had refused passage to a person with AIDS. The cartoon showed a man at an airline counter, with the clerk saying “And would you like the smoking, non-smoking, or diseased pariah section?” See: *Diseased Pariah News*. Issue n°1, 1990, p.2.

“quarterly publication of, by, and for people with HIV disease,” that provided “a forum for infected people to share their thoughts, feelings, art, writing (...) in an atmosphere free of teddy bears, magic rocks, and seronegative guilt.”¹⁵² Although other publications written by PWAs for other PWAs existed at the time,¹⁵³ what distinguished *DPN* from these publications was its tone. Its first editorial, *DPN* announced that it was:

Something Different. Not something completely different, ‘cos (sic) many publications address the HIV epidemic (...) but we are certainly breaking new ground approaching the plague of the century from the angle of *humor*.¹⁵⁴

DPN was the brainchild of “cranky editor & irresistible (sic) force” Beowulf Thorne and “serene editor & Voice of reason,” Tom Shearer, both HIV-positive gay men.¹⁵⁵ Shearer died after the publication of the second issue,¹⁵⁶ leaving Wolfe in charge of the third one. Later on, Tom Ace, Bob Smith,¹⁵⁷ and Michael Botkin¹⁵⁸ joined the *DPN* team. The zine was between thirty and fifty pages long depending on the issue. It was divided into different sections, among which one could find personal pieces – essays, short stories, poems – about HIV/AIDS, a safer sex comic called “Captain Condom” as well as a safe sex segment, “Condom Corner,” a recipe column entitled “Get Fat Don’t Die,” a centerfold with erotic images of HIV-positive men, as well as a dating section, the “DPN meat market.” The zine’s last pages typically contained a resource guide with the addresses and phone numbers of various organizations that dealt with HIV/AIDS issues. (Appendix 5)

YELL (Youth Education Life Line) was created in 1994 and slightly differed from these two zines. It was published by an affinity group of the same name within ACT UP. The group was formed in 1989 to work on AIDS issues facing young people, especially regarding AIDS education.¹⁵⁹ The zine was made by students, teachers, and AIDS activists, dedicated to educate the youth at a time when the government’s policy on AIDS education was abstinence only and condemned the circulation of images which depicted homosexual activities. (Appendix 6)

¹⁵² *Diseased Pariah News*. Issue n°1, 1990, p.2.

¹⁵³ One can cite *POZ Magazine*, which was founded in 1994 and is still in circulation, which “provides a platform for the HIV community to speak to one another, and the world at large.” See: <<https://www.poz.com/page/about-us>> (Accessed on March 12, 2017)

¹⁵⁴ Original emphasis. *Diseased Pariah News*. Issue n°1, 1990, p.3.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.* p.2.

¹⁵⁶ “Darn, one of our editors is dead! Can DPN withstand the test of fire?” *Diseased Pariah News*. Issue n°3, 1991, p.3.

¹⁵⁷ *Diseased Pariah News*. Issue n°4, 1991, p.1.

¹⁵⁸ *Diseased Pariah News*. Issue n°5, 1992, p.1.

¹⁵⁹ *YELL!* Archives. <http://archive.qzap.org/index.php/Detail/Entity/Show/entity_id/135> (Accessed on March 3, 2017)

Zines, like other forms of queer AIDS media, embodied the AIDS activist slogan “Silence=Death.” They saw themselves as “vehicle[s] for Fags with AIDS and HIV (...) to express exactly what they think and feel because (...) no one wants to hear it!”¹⁶⁰ As *YELL* puts it:

Why does a zine like this HAVE to exist? Why do young people have to learn about a deadly disease from an underground publication as if we were living in a police state?! Because (...) TV isn't telling you about it. NO ONE is telling you about it, even though it could kill you!¹⁶¹

The technological boom that occurred in the second half of the 20th century and the precedents set by other movements meant that the media environment in which people with AIDS found themselves in was particularly conducive to the creation of queer AIDS media. Videomakers, artists, and zinesters thus took the tools of media production available to them into their own hands.

I.2. “Stop Looking at Us, Start Listening to Us!” Taking The Tools of Media Production Into Their Own Hands

Faye Ginsburg has labeled the distinction between mainstream and alternative media the profit/prophet motive. By placing no emphasis on profit, alternative media put more weight on the urgency of getting a specific message out.¹⁶² Yet, even though queer AIDS media producers challenged the modes of mass production, they needed funds to produce, distribute, and exhibit their work. This constellation of queer AIDS media works varied in content, form, as well as production and distribution strategies.

I.2.1. Producing and Funding Queer AIDS Media

A lot of these productions were actually self-funded. In the beginnings, most of those involved in AIDS activism were white middle-class gay men who had access to capital, which explains in part why these works could be self-funded.¹⁶³ Zines are perhaps the best example, as they have always operated on an anti-capitalist basis. *DPN*'s editor writes in the zine's fourth issue:

¹⁶⁰ Brouwer, Daniel “Representation of Gay Men (...).” *Op.cit.* p.198.

¹⁶¹ “Why YELL Exists.” ACT UP New York. 1994. <<http://www.actupny.org/YELL/zine/why.html>>(Accessed on March 3, 2017)

¹⁶² Juhasz, Alexandra. *AIDS TV*. *Op.cit.* p.8.

¹⁶³ Juhasz, Alexandra. Interview with the author. February 10, 2017, p.5; Duncombe, Stephen. *Op.cit.* p.12.

The paper for the first copies of DPN and the photocopier time were stolen, paid for by a major Western university, and thus at taxpayer expense. Our scanner time is stolen, our imagesetter galleys are stolen, our film is developed outside laboratory regulations, and we mooch off of our friends for software. About the only things that aren't stolen are [our] Macintosh, and our material and artwork, which we are proud to say are 100% original.¹⁶⁴

As it cost almost no money to produce a zine, this resulted in low distribution fees. *YELL* was free of charge, and *IFP* issues were \$2 but “free to the infected.”¹⁶⁵ *DPN* also started at \$2 but after consulting with its readers, raised the price up to \$3 to keep the zine afloat.¹⁶⁶ As the audience for the zine expanded, “rampant commercialism,”¹⁶⁷ as the editors called it, took hold of the zine. Advertising appeared in the pages of *DPN*, and they began selling postcards and then T-shirts, buttons, and condoms.¹⁶⁸ In its early stages, Gran Fury was also a largely self-funded group which pirated its equipment.¹⁶⁹ The collective earned money from selling their graphics on merchandise at ACT UP meetings.¹⁷⁰ Video works were often funded in a similar way. As Carlomusto recalls, video activists were frequently pulling from personal resources.¹⁷¹ Hence, collective work enabled videomakers to share these resources. As GMHC possessed an audiovisual department to produce the “Living with AIDS” weekly cable show, their video and editing equipment was regularly used by DIVA TV and TTL.¹⁷² If people could not buy their own camera, they would borrow one from people who had one. For instance, DIVA TV had a mailing list that contained the names of everyone who had access to a camera.¹⁷³ Video activist tapes would also be sold at ACT UP meetings¹⁷⁴ and one could

¹⁶⁴ *Diseased Pariah News*. Issue n°2, 1990, p.4.

¹⁶⁵ *Infected Faggot Perspective*. Issue n°8, 1992. <<http://one.usc.edu/queers-print/infected-faggot-perspectives/>> (Accessed on March 3, 2017)

¹⁶⁶ *Diseased Pariah News*. Issue n°4, 1991, p.5.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ Most ads in *DPN* were ads for the zine's merchandise. Yet, other ads were to be found, in particular for insurance companies and networks such as Positive Image “a communications network for men who are HIV+ or have AIDS-related concerns.” See: *Diseased Pariah News*, Issue n°2, 1990, p.11, and *Diseased Pariah News*, Issue n°4, 1991, p.10.

¹⁶⁹ According to Avram Finkelstein, “a lot of it [was] begged, borrowed, and stolen.” In another interview, Gran Fury members explain: “In the beginning, we thought that the NEA would give us money to do these group projects. They haven't (...). We thought established institutions would give us large sums of money, that we wouldn't have to go and demand it. We have had to demand it.” See: Deitcher, David. “Gran Fury: An Interview.” *AIDS Riot: Collectifs d'artistes face au Sida / Activist Collectives against AIDS, New York 1987-1994*. Ed. 12è Session de L'Ecole du Magasin. Grenoble: Magasin, 2003, pp.222-224 and Gober, Robert. “Gran Fury: An Interview.” *AIDS Riot: Collectifs d'artistes face au Sida / Activist Collectives against AIDS, New York 1987-1994*. Ed. 12è Session de L'Ecole du Magasin. Grenoble: Magasin, 2003, p.237.

¹⁷⁰ ACT UP Oral History Project. Interview of Tom Kalin. February 4, 2014, pp.58-59. <<http://www.actuporalhistory.org/interviews/images/kalin.pdf>> (Accessed on September 10, 2016)

¹⁷¹ Carlomusto, Jean. Interview with the author. January 20, 2017, p.7.

¹⁷² Juhasz, Alexandra. *AIDS TV. Op.cit.* pp.51-55.

¹⁷³ “DIVA Mailing List.” *Op.cit.*

¹⁷⁴ They were sold for \$12 apiece. See: Saalfield, Catherine. “On the Make.” *Op.cit.* p.35.

purchase them through GMHC's catalogue of educational resources.¹⁷⁵ Finally, ACT UP organized video nights at a very low entrance fee in order to help fund future productions.¹⁷⁶ (Appendix 7) Within ACT UP, video activists would also put up proposals for funding. When DIVA TV decided to create a television public access weekly series, they obtained donations from private foundations but were still running short of money. They therefore asked the organization for help with the remaining expenses. (Appendix 8)

Another way to obtain money was through fundraising and organized screenings outside of ACT UP meetings. On the flyer advertising Testing the Limits' *Voices from the Front* premiere in New York, the collective asked for contributions to help with post-production and distribution costs.¹⁷⁷ Upon releasing *Like a Prayer*, DIVA TV organized a party on St. Patrick's Day, the proceeds from which would be used to "put AIDS activis (sic) and ACT UP in televisions across the country."¹⁷⁸ The first screening of Marlon Riggs' *Non, Je Ne Regrette Rien* (No Regret) helped subsidize its distribution to black gay community-based organizations engaged in AIDS education throughout the United States.¹⁷⁹

Various private foundations also funded cultural activists' efforts, such as the Jerome Foundation,¹⁸⁰ the Astraea Foundation,¹⁸¹ the North Star Foundation, or the David Geffen Foundation.¹⁸² Some of these foundations were created after people with AIDS passed away,

¹⁷⁵ GMHC sold them for \$20 apiece. GMHC, Catalogue of AIDS Educational Resources, Ephemera, Flyers, Handbills by ACT UP, GMHC (Gay Men's Health Crisis). February 7, 1992-March 16, 1995. MS ACT UP: The AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power: Series XI. Ephemera, Flyers, Handbills by Act Up Box 197, Folder 2. New York Public Library. Archives of Sexuality & Gender. <tinyurl.galegroup.com/tinyurl/4JEx31> (Accessed on February 1, 2017)

¹⁷⁶ ACT UP, Video Night Flyer, Ephemera, Flyers, Handbills by ACT UP, Miscellaneous, 1988-1991. MS ACT UP: The AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power: Series XI, Box 195, Folder 24. New York Public Library. Archives of Sexuality & Gender. <tinyurl.galegroup.com/tinyurl/4JEvz2> (Accessed on February 1, 2017)

¹⁷⁷"News from Testing the Limits." Ephemera, Flyers, Handbills by ACT UP, Dec. 1992. MS ACT UP: The AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power: Series XI. Ephemera, Flyers, Handbills by Act Up Box 198, Folder 14. New York Public Library. Archives of Sexuality & Gender. <tinyurl.galegroup.com/tinyurl/4JExJ5> (Accessed on February 1, 2017)

¹⁷⁸ Entrance fee was set at \$5-10. DIVA TV, Flyer for St. Patrick's Day Benefit, 1989-1990. Actions / Demonstrations / Zaps, St. Patrick's Cathedral - Stop the Church, NY (3 of 4), November 8, 1989 - December 7, 1990. Series IV, Box 15, Folder 3. New York Public Library. Archives of Sexuality & Gender. <tinyurl.galegroup.com/tinyurl/4Ak6n1> (Accessed on December 29, 2016)

¹⁷⁹ Flyer for *Non Je Ne Regrette Rien (No Regret)* Premiere. Video, December 11, 1986-November 30, 1994 and undated. MS Lesbian Herstory Archives: Subject Files: Part 6, Folder No.: 14910. Lesbian Herstory Archives. Archives of Sexuality & Gender. <tinyurl.galegroup.com/tinyurl/4PpX3X> (Accessed on February 20, 2017)

¹⁸⁰ Hubbard, Jim. Interview with the author. December 20, 2016, p.3.

¹⁸¹ Testing the Limits, *Voices from the Front* (1991). Rolling credits.

¹⁸² ACT UP, Vote to Establish a Television Public Access Weekly Series and a Media Network for AIDS Activism. Published and near Print Material, Media (4 of 12), August 21-October 15, 1992. MS ACT UP: The AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power: Series X. Published and near Print Material Box 148, Folder 4. New York Public Library. Archives of Sexuality & Gender. <tinyurl.galegroup.com/tinyurl/4JEzR4> (Accessed on February 1, 2017)

like the Paul Rapoport foundation.¹⁸³ Private donations from concerned individuals were another source of funding. For instance, HIV/AIDS activist Larry Kramer and gay playwright Craig Lucas participated in funding the Fear of Disclosure Project, a not-for-profit project dedicated to producing and distributing a series of videos to communities affected by AIDS.¹⁸⁴

Grants were also allocated to finance queer AIDS media. State funding was made available to activists based in New York through the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA) and the New York State Council for the Humanities.¹⁸⁵ GMHC also received a grant from the New York City Department of Health to run “Living with AIDS.”¹⁸⁶ While TTL and DIVA never obtained funding from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA),¹⁸⁷ some venues that exhibited AIDS cultural work benefited from the State organization’s support, despite the cuts in federal art funding that occurred in the 1980s and 1990s. This was the case of the Artists Space, a non-profit art gallery and arts organization, which organized a video program entitled “The AIDS Crisis is Not Over” and curated by Gregg Bordowitz between November 17, 1988 and January 7, 1989.¹⁸⁸ Testing the Limits and Gran Fury were ultimately more funded than DIVA TV as they became more entrenched in the institutional world.¹⁸⁹ In time, the bulk of Gran Fury funding came from art museums and foundations, such as the New Museum of Contemporary Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, Los Angeles’ MOCA or Creative Time.¹⁹⁰ All of the money went directly into funding the production and distribution of projects, and no one received a salary.¹⁹¹

The contradiction in receiving institutional funding to produce alternative media that was explicit in its critique of mainstream society and its institutions was not lost on queer AIDS media makers. Yet, as one Gran Fury member stated:

¹⁸³ Paul Rapoport was a co-founder of both Gay Men’s Health Crisis and the New York City Lesbian and Gay Community Center, now known as the LGBT Community Services Center.

¹⁸⁴ “The Fear of Disclosure Project.” Ephemera, Flyers, Handbills by ACT UP. 8 May 1992. MS ACT UP: The AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power: Series XI. Ephemera, Flyers, Handbills by Act Up Box 196, Folder 45. New York Public Library. Archives of Sexuality & Gender. <tinyurl.galegroup.com/tinyurl/4JEnb5> (Accessed on February 1, 2017)

¹⁸⁵ Juhasz, Alexandra. Interview with the author. February 10, 2017, p.5, and Carlomusto, Jean. Interview with the author. January 18, 2017, p.8.

¹⁸⁶ Juhasz, Alexandra. *AIDS TV. Op.cit.* p.53.

¹⁸⁷ ACT UP Oral History Project. Interview of Sandra Elgear. *Op.cit.* p.15.

¹⁸⁸ “The AIDS Crisis is Not Over,” Artists Space. Ephemera, Flyers, Handbills by ACT UP, Miscellaneous (7 of 8), 1987-1993. Series XI, Box 198, Folder 29. New York Public Library. Archives of Sexuality & Gender. <tinyurl.galegroup.com/tinyurl/4AkFU2> (Accessed on December 29, 2016)

¹⁸⁹ Carlomusto, Jean. Interview with the author. January 18, 2017, p.7.

¹⁹⁰ Gran Fury. “Good Luck...Miss You.” *AIDS Riot: Collectifs d’artistes face au Sida / Activist Collectives against AIDS, New York 1987-1994*. Ed. 12è Session de L’Ecole du Magasin. Grenoble: Magasin, 2003, p.303.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.* Only GMHC’s “Living with AIDS” show eventually hired full time employees. See: Juhasz, Alexandra. *AIDS TV. Op.cit.* p.50.

I feel like it's okay to make money in capitalism if you use some of that money against it (...). And there's nothing wrong with participating in it so long as you know you're doing that and have negotiated what the consequences might be.¹⁹²

1.2.2. Distributing and Circulating Queer AIDS Media: Alternative Networks and Counterpublics

The different funding strategies give us an inkling of the various audiences that AIDS activists had in mind. Their audience goals oscillated between a desire to address a general public and a wish to create alternative networks on the local level to address specific communities. Additionally, because AIDS is a multifaceted problem, queer AIDS media makers did not assume that their work would serve every audience.

1.2.2.A. Local Enclaves of Resistance

Nancy Fraser coined the term “subaltern counterpublics” to design the parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups formulate and circulate counterdiscourses, which “in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs.”¹⁹³ Counterpublics typically emerge in response to exclusions within dominant publics.¹⁹⁴ When dealing with HIV/AIDS, mainstream television addressed a “general population” that was presumed to be uninfected, somehow immune to the epidemic.¹⁹⁵ As Timothy Landers explains,

One of the shortcomings of commercial television's AIDS coverage lies in its insistence on speaking to one audience – the *you* addressed is presumed to be white, middle-class, heterosexual, and healthy, grouped in cozy, stabled families. Those responsible for these television programs completely ignore the possibility that many of those watching may be struggling with AIDS on a more immediate level.¹⁹⁶

On the contrary, cultural activists implicated their audiences. In the process, audiences were no longer “Othered.”¹⁹⁷ Jean Carlomusto makes this point clear: “activist [media] (...) doesn't speak to a “general public” that is presumed to be white, heterosexual, middle-class male. [It]

¹⁹² ACT UP Oral History Project. Interview of Avram Finkelstein. January 23, 2010, p.57.

<<http://www.actuporalhistory.org/interviews/images/finkelstein.pdf>> (Accessed on May 2, 2015)

¹⁹³ Fraser, Nancy. “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Crisis of Democracy.” *Social Text*, No. 25/26, 1990, p.67.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁵ Goldstein, Richard. “The Implicated and the Immune: Cultural Responses to AIDS.” *The Milbank Quarterly*, Vol. 68, 1990, p.298.

¹⁹⁶ Landers, Timothy. *Op.cit.* p.18.

¹⁹⁷ Goldstein, Richard. *Op.cit.* pp. 298-99.

doesn't homogenize material."¹⁹⁸ As such, alternative AIDS media addressed counterpublics, and most specifically, a queer counterpublic. Michael Warner, reworking Fraser's notion, claims that:

A counterpublic maintains (...) an awareness of its subordinate status. The cultural horizon against which it marks itself off is not just a general or wider public, but a dominant one (...). The discourse that constitutes it is not merely a different or alternative idiom, but one that in other contexts would be regarded with hostility or with a sense of indecorousness.¹⁹⁹

HIV/AIDS zines did more than being aware of their subordinate status; they reclaimed it. *DPN*'s audience was pariahs like themselves, which they defined as "any person despised and rejected by others"²⁰⁰ which in this particular case meant "any 'guilty' victim of HIV."²⁰¹ Zines, by specifically catering to this community and because of their small circuit circulation, formed what Jan Mansbridge has called "enclaves of resistance."²⁰² This is confirmed by one of Wayne Karr's statements: "I realise that FAGGOTS are not the only persons on this planet living with HIV Disease (...), but then this ain't PEOPLE magazine or LOOK or LIFE or TV."²⁰³ The zine thus avoided mainstream media conventions that mandated that the media provide multiple perspectives on an issue, and forged a self-exclusionary space for gay PWAs. This was further exemplified by the wrap-around bands of paper that sealed shut some issues of *DPN*, which read: "Not Sanitized for Your Protection."²⁰⁴ This was an explicit warning that the zine was not for everyone.

Video screenings, easier to set up thanks to VCRs, were also for the most part local and community-based. Jim Hubbard recalls "seeing an unfinished version of *Testing the Limits* at the Lesbian and Gay Center on 13th street (...) sitting next to David Meieran and Gregg Bordowitz watching it. There was maybe thirty people in the audience."²⁰⁵ They screened works in places such as the Lesbian and Gay Center but also at local queer bars and clubs.²⁰⁶ DIVA also targeted ACT UP members as its primary audience and made "videos by, about, and, most importantly, for the movement."²⁰⁷ This direct address to the movement is visible

¹⁹⁸ Carlomusto, Jean. "Making It: AIDS Activist Television." *Video Guide*, Volume 10, World AIDS Days Special Issue, Issue 48, November 1989. p.18.

¹⁹⁹ Warner, Michael. *Publics and Counterpublics*. New York Zone Books, 2002, p.119.

²⁰⁰ *Diseased Pariah News*. Issue n°1, 1990, p.8.

²⁰¹ *Diseased Pariah News*. Issue n°5, 1992, p.4.

²⁰² Mansbridge, Jane. "Using Power/Fighting Power." *Constellations: An International Journal of Critical and Democracy Theory*, Volume 1, Issue 1, December 1994, p.53.

²⁰³ Brouwer, Daniel C. "Counterpublicity and Corporeality in HIV/AIDS Zines." *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, Vol. 22, No.5, December 2005, p.355.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.* p.365.

²⁰⁵ Hubbard, Jim. Interview with the author. December 20, 2016, p.3.

²⁰⁶ For example, the Mars club in New York screened video activist works during its "Gay Sunday" nights. See: Saalfeld, Catherine, Navarro, Ray. *Op.cit.* p.363.

²⁰⁷ Saalfeld, Catherine. "On the Make." *Op.cit.* p.26.

when watching video activists' work. Much of footage captures activists addressing other activists during ACT UP meetings or actions, and activists sometimes speak directly to the camera to attract viewers who could become potential activists. Similarly, although Gran Fury's audience was oscillating between a general public and counterpublics, the primary audience for their graphics was "the movement itself."²⁰⁸

Advertising for queer AIDS media was to be found in local communities. (Appendix 9) In New York, publications such as *New York Magazine* and *The Village Voice* regularly advertised HIV/AIDS media screenings and exhibitions.²⁰⁹ Queer newspapers and magazines like *Outweek*, an influential gay and lesbian weekly news magazine published in New York from 1989 to 1991 that was closely associated with ACT UP,²¹⁰ also played a role in advertising queer AIDS media. In addition to informing readers about upcoming events, some *Outweek* columns were written by queer AIDS media makers. They also wrote in publications dedicated to alternative media productions, like *The Independent* magazine. Indeed, other local places dedicated to showing alternative and community media – such as the Downtown Community Television Center or The Kitchen in New York – regularly screened AIDS video works.²¹¹

1.2.2.B. Beyond the Local Level: Expanding the Enclaves

Queer AIDS media however did not only circulate at the local level. It was distributed all around the country, and sometimes beyond the frontiers of the United States. Yet, if they managed to spread geographically, most works still remained within the boundaries of queer and HIV/AIDS communities. Therefore, they were merely expanding the enclaves rather than breaking beyond their boundaries and into dominant structures. Queer AIDS media makers nonetheless had to the potential to reach out to other communities affected by HIV/AIDS outside of their area and to individuals who were not necessarily politicized at that point. Indeed, being queer or a member of any other minority group particularly affected by

²⁰⁸ Crimp, Douglas, Rolston, Adam. *Op.cit.* p.20.

²⁰⁹ Juhasz, Alexandra. Interview with the author. pp.6-7. See also *New York Magazine* archives.

²¹⁰ *Outweek* Magazine Archives. <<http://www.outweek.net/archive.html>> (Accessed on February 27, 2017)

²¹¹ For instance DCTV held a "Grassroots video festival" in which video works about AIDS were shown. DCTV's \$1 Tuesday Screening Series had one series called "Awareness Video Screening: Political Overview" and showed works by Testing the Limits and Jean Carlomusto, and another one entitled "Activism and Documentation" included *The ADS Epidemic* (1987, dir. by John Greyson); *Testing the Limits Guide to Safer Sex*, (dir. by The Testing the Limits Collective); and *Doctors, Liars and Women, AIDS Activists Say No To Cosmo*, (1988, dir. by Jean Carlomusto and Maria Maggenti). The Kitchen in New York also held screenings, such as "AIDS: VCR Activism and Documentation." See *New York Magazine*, June 27, 1988 and April 11, 1988.

HIV/AIDS did not automatically mean that you would be involved in HIV/AIDS activism, or even well informed about AIDS.

AIDS activists would send their tapes directly through the mail to other HIV/AIDS organizations all over the United States.²¹² Their works also circulated through alternative distribution places, such as Video Data Bank, which was based in Chicago, the Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI) and Third World Newsreel.²¹³ At the time queer AIDS media was being produced, there was more than twenty queer film distributors in the United States.²¹⁴ Zinesters would distribute their publications through queer and alternative bookstores.²¹⁵ Upon publishing its third issue, *DPN* was available in nine bookstores.²¹⁶ By its eighth issue, forty-three bookstores distributed the zine, including four in Canada, one in Berlin and one in Holland.²¹⁷ In January 1989, Media Network, an organization which produced guides to political media dealing with issues such as reproductive rights, nuclear disarmament etc., created an educational guide to AIDS-related films and videotapes, which listed over two hundred AIDS-related works. Every tape featured in the guide had been assessed by a series of community screenings. Participants included people with HIV/AIDS, AIDS educators, healthcare professionals, activists, community organizers, and independent producers. This guide was designed as a resource for individuals and groups who wished to develop programs about AIDS as well as to “inform, provoke, enlighten, enrage, and engage audiences.”²¹⁸ In addition to the guide, Media Network set up the “Seeing Through AIDS” program, a mobile teaching event that used alternative and activist video as a stimulus for training and trigger discussions about AIDS in many different workplaces.²¹⁹

Queer film festivals were also very important outlets to connect the queer community and circulate HIV/AIDS-related material.²²⁰ These festivals were founded on the same

²¹² Alexandra Juhasz recalls, “I (...) read lists of AIDS Service Organizations on pieces of paper and I put videotapes in the mail or wrote that information and sent it to them. It was a tiny bit slower but you’d send a letter like “I have this video, would you like to see it?” Juhasz, Alexandra. Interview with the author. February 10, 2017, p.7.

²¹³ Hubbard, Jim. Interview with the author. December 2016, p.4.

²¹⁴ Queer Film Distributors Video, December 11, 1986–November 30, 1994 and undated. MS Lesbian Herstory Archives: Subject Files: Part 6: Spinsters-Youth Folder No.: 14910. Lesbian Herstory Archives. Archives of Sexuality & Gender. <tinyurl.galegroup.com/tinyurl/4PpX3X> (Accessed on February 20, 2017)

²¹⁵ *DPN* also offered international subscriptions for \$20.

²¹⁶ *Diseased Pariah News*. Issue n°3, 1991.

²¹⁷ *Diseased Pariah News*. Issue n°8, 1993.

²¹⁸ Elgear, Sandra, Hutt, Robyn, Maggenti, Maria. “Media Network: An Educational Guide on AIDS Video / Film.” *Video Guide*, Volume 10, World AIDS Days Special Issue, Issue 48, November 1989, p.19.

²¹⁹ Bordowitz, Gregg. “Operative Assumptions.” *Resolutions: Contemporary Video Practices*. Ed. Michael Renov, Erika Sudeburg. University of Minnesota Press, 1996, p.177.

²²⁰ By the end of 1989, there were 15 existing queer film festivals in the U.S. In the 1990s, 18 more were created. See: <<http://www.blog.filmfestivallife.com/2011/10/25/lgbt-film-festival-list/>> (Accessed on March 3, 2017)

premise as queer AIDS media, that of a lack of representation of queer people in “a world that insists on a homogenous sexuality (...) enforced through a stiflingly limited media.”²²¹ They were not only committed to showing works from within the U.S. but also screened films/videos from other countries. U.S. AIDS activist videos circulated in foreign film festivals as well. *Voices from the Front* (1991) was for instance shown in the Panorama section of the Berlin International Film Festival, otherwise known as the Berlinale. Panorama was ran at the time by Manfred Salzgeber, a gay man with AIDS who died in 1994 and who was committed to showing queer and AIDS-related material in international cultural circles.²²² Film festivals thus shaped a transnational queer counterpublic.²²³ They had the potential to politicize other queer people to lead them to take action against HIV/AIDS. Hence, these festivals provided forums to start discussions about AIDS and, in turn, queer AIDS video transformed festivals into activist events.²²⁴

Yet, festivals did not immediately take the issue of HIV/AIDS into account.²²⁵ Works about HIV started to be shown in the San Francisco International Lesbian and Gay Film Festival from 1985 onwards.²²⁶ In 1987, the festival, which was the largest of its kind in the U.S., began to include video and showcased works by people “who [had] dared to take TV into their own hands and who have counteracted the image of ourselves we get from without by giving us a view of our lives from within.”²²⁷ From then on, the festival consistently screened a wide variety of works about HIV/AIDS until the mid-1990s.

²²¹ “A Queer Kind Of Film; The First New York City Lesbian And Gay Experimental Film Festival Millennium September 15-20, 1987.” MIX Program Notes, 1987. Courtesy of Jim Hubbard.

²²² Hubbard, Jim. Interview with the author. December 20, 2016, pp. 5-6.

²²³ They were mostly films and videos from Great Britain and West Germany. See: San Francisco International Lesbian and Gay Film Festival Archives. <<https://www.frameline.org/festival/program-guide-archive>> (Accessed on December 26, 2016)

²²⁴ ACT UP Oral History Project. Interview of Sandra Elgear. *Op.cit.* p.18.

²²⁵ Hubbard, Jim. Interview with the author. December 20, 2016, p.6.

²²⁶ The festival, which is the oldest queer film festival in the U.S., was founded in 1977 as a series of four exhibitions taking place throughout 1977. Beginning in 1979, Frameline started sponsoring the festival, which subsequently became the Frameline film festival. In its first and second years (1977 and 1978) Frameline was referred to as “The Gay Film Festival” or “Persistence of Vision.” See: 1st Annual San Francisco International Lesbian and Gay Film Festival Program Guide (Frameline 1977). <<https://issuu.com/frameline/docs/1st-sanfrancisco-international-lgbt-film-festival>> (Accessed on June 7, 2017)

²²⁷ 11th San Francisco International Lesbian & Gay Film Festival Program Guide (Frameline 1987) <<https://issuu.com/frameline/docs/11th-sanfrancisco-international-lgbt-film-festival>> (Accessed on June 7, 2017). The 1988 edition of the festival contained an AIDS video symposium. See: 12th Annual San Francisco International Lesbian and Gay Film Festival Program Guide (Frameline 1988) <<https://issuu.com/frameline/docs/12th-sanfrancisco-international-lgbt-film-festival>> (Accessed on June 7, 2017)

In New York, the Gay and Lesbian Experimental Film Festival (now MIX),²²⁸ the New Festival,²²⁹ and DCTV's Lookout Film Festival²³⁰ were also gradually committed to showing pieces about HIV/AIDS. Some these festivals had close links with ACT UP. MIX was founded by Jim Hubbard and Sarah Schulman, both ACT UP members, and became more political over time, as the organizers progressively recognized the urgent need to feature more films about AIDS and eventually dedicated the whole festival to the crisis.²³¹ It is indeed because of the HIV/AIDS crisis and the refusal from the mainstream to broadcast works about the epidemic that the festival slightly moved away from a commitment to showing strictly "experimental" works:²³²

As the parameters of what is allowed to be seen become narrower and narrower, we have had to adjust our understanding of 'experimental' film to include the wide variety of media and genres that are increasingly excluded from the mainstream. This constriction reinforces our belief that experimental film can only be defined by a highly-aware, politicized and emotionally-engaged community of interests.²³³

Lookout!, on the other hand, was curated by DIVA TV member Catherine Gund-Saalfield, and was politically-oriented from the start. The festival consisted of "six days of videos about fags and dykes, you and your friends, about people you've never met and others you've fucked, about people you couldn't agree with less and people you wish you were!"²³⁴ The number of people who attended these festivals varied, but they still managed to reach sizeable portions of the queer community. In 1990, the San Francisco International Lesbian and Gay

²²⁸ The Experimental Festival (now MIX) was founded in 1987 by Jim Hubbard and Sarah Schulman with the goal of exhibiting primarily short film and experimental video works.

²²⁹ Formerly known as the New York Lesbian and Gay Film Festival, the New Festival was created in 1988 and exhibited primarily feature-length narrative and documentary works. It is the biggest queer film festival in New York. In 1990, the New Festival curated an "AIDS series" called "Strength of Survival," as the festival organized video projections for the first time. In addition to feature films such as *A Death in the Family*, the series contained safe sex education tapes, AIDS activist tapes, a section on women and AIDS, gay short films, as well as another program of shorts "Fun Video Mix," which featured artist-made tapes and music videos about AIDS. See: <<http://newfest.org/1990-program/>> (Accessed on June 7, 2017)

²³⁰ Lookout! focused primarily on activist documentary video. In 1994, it joined the MIX festival. See: Gamson, Joshua. "The Organizational Shaping of Collective Identity: The Case of Lesbian and Gay Film Festivals in New York." *Sociological Forum*, Vol. 11, No. 2, June 1996, p.239.

²³¹ In 1989, the foreword of the program read: "In 1987, one film was about AIDS. This year the entire Festival is informed by the AIDS crisis." MIX Program Notes, 1989. Courtesy of Jim Hubbard.

²³² In the words of the organizers, *experimental* or *avant-garde* films meant films that "viewed film as a philosophical and aesthetic medium and not merely as entertainment." Thus, they added, "film remains an essentially and primarily visual art form that does not enforce a simple story or narrative line, and explores light, chemistry, the lens, the splice, and the whole physical substructure of the medium. As a result of our experience, we now believe that by concentrating on the personal aspect of cinema we present a truer, more complex, more interesting, and more diverse view of gay and lesbian lives than do the few examples of commercial movies that contain gay characters." See MIX Program Notes. 1987. Courtesy of Jim Hubbard.

²³³ MIX Program Notes. 1991. Courtesy of Jim Hubbard.

²³⁴ Lookout: DCTV Lesbian and Gay Video Festival, Program, 1990. Video, December 11, 1986-November 30, 1994 and undated. MS Lesbian Herstory Archives: Subject Files: Part 6: Spinsters-Youth Folder No.: 14910. Lesbian Herstory Archives. Archives of Sexuality & Gender. <tinyurl.galegroup.com/tinyurl/4PpX3X> (Accessed on February 20, 2017)

Film Festival attracted an audience of over 25,000 men and women.²³⁵ The MIX festival attracted approximately 3,000 people each year.²³⁶

Reaching constituencies situated outside the cluster of ACT UP activists was also made possible thanks to the development of cable and satellite television, which provided video activists with alternative means of circulation.²³⁷ In 1972, the Federal Communication Commission (FCC)²³⁸ issued the “Cable Television Report and Order,” which mandated that cable operators provide public, educational, and governmental access channels, equipment, and facilities to the communities they served.²³⁹ This opened the door for the creation of local community-based television, thanks to which people could narrowcast to other under-represented communities confronting HIV.²⁴⁰ The first notable activist endeavor on public access television was Paper Tiger Television (PTTV), a low-end media collective which produced a series on media, culture, and politics on Manhattan public access TV since 1981.²⁴¹ In 1986, PTTV launched Deep Dish TV, the first-public access television series to be distributed by satellite in the United States.²⁴² The series circulated works by video activists and tackled a wide range of issues, including AIDS.

Lesbian and gay cable channels also set a precedent for the circulation of HIV/AIDS related material. In San Francisco, Channel 25 was dedicated to showing gay and lesbian video, and in New York, the Gay Cable Network (GCN) progressively took on board HIV/AIDS issues. GMHC indeed paid GCN to produce and air a five-minute talk show, “Outreach,” which featured AIDS issues.²⁴³ Channel L and Out in the ‘90s screened completed DIVA productions and used unedited demonstration footage for their weekly

²³⁵ 15th San Francisco International Lesbian & Gay Film Festival Program Guide (Frameline 1991) <<https://issuu.com/frameline/docs/15th-sanfrancisco-international-lgbt-film-festival>> (Accessed on June 7, 2017)

²³⁶ MIX Program Notes. 1991. Courtesy of Jim Hubbard.

²³⁷ Although cable technology had been present in the United States since the 1940s, it boomed in the mid-1970s. See: Downing, John. *Radical Media. Op.cit.* pp.300-301.

²³⁸ The FCC is a federal agency that regulates interstate and international communications by radio, television, wire, satellite, and cable in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and U.S. territories. An independent U.S. government agency overseen by Congress, the commission is the United States’ primary authority for communications laws, regulation, and technological innovation. See: <<https://www.fcc.gov/about/overview>> (Accessed on March 3, 2017)

²³⁹ Downing, John. *Radical Media. Op.cit.* p.301.

²⁴⁰ Narrowcasting refers to broadcasting that is aimed at specific – or niche – audiences, in contrast to general broadcasting. Broadcasting transmissions can be received by anyone with standard reception equipment, whereas narrowcasting transmissions are received by someone with special equipment (a cable system equipped to carry them, a satellite dish etc.) See: Danesi, Marcel. *Op.cit.* p.486.

²⁴¹ Downing, John. *Encyclopedia of Social Movement Media. Op.cit.* p.162.

²⁴² With the spread of satellite cablecasting in the 1980s, the opportunity arose to create an informal network of access stations to receive simultaneous transmissions. PTTV rented time on a commercial satellite and made the programming available free of charge to access centers, educational channels, and home dish owners. *Ibid.*

²⁴³ Carlomusto, Jean. Interview with the author. January 18, 2017, p.9.

cablecasts in Manhattan.²⁴⁴ Knowing that there was already an audience for their works drove video activists to create their own weekly cable show specifically devoted to HIV/AIDS: GMHC's "Living with AIDS," which ran from 1988 to 1994. They produced their own material but they also curated the works from other community-based organizations, collectively produced works such as TTL and DIVA's works as well as work that was done by individuals.²⁴⁵ On January 5th 1993, DIVA TV launched *AIDS Community Television*, a "weekly series and media network for AIDS activism" on Manhattan Public Access. Its programming was distributed to ACT UP and other AIDS activists worldwide for "their use in local television programming, public screening, outreach, and fundraising."²⁴⁶ Its aim was "greater advocacy, coalition building, and greater public awareness."²⁴⁷

1.2.2.C. Oscillating Between Counterpublics and the General Public: The (Impossible) Leap to the Mainstream

Subaltern counterpublics have a dual character. On the one hand, they function as spaces of withdrawal. On the other hand, they are training grounds for agitational activities directed towards wider publics.²⁴⁸ This is what Jan Mansbridge refers to as "oscillation:"

For participation to help people understand their interests better, participants need, among other things, to oscillate between protected enclaves, in which they can explore their ideas in an environment of mutual encouragement, and more hostile but also broader surroundings in which they can test those ideas against the reigning reality.²⁴⁹

Many queer AIDS media makers therefore attempted to gain access to mainstream institution, and in, doing so, queered the public sphere.²⁵⁰

This was visible through their legitimization in the academic world. Activists were invited to speak about their works and the politics of representation at various panels, where

²⁴⁴ Juhasz, Alexandra. *AIDS TV*. *Op.cit.* p.52; Saalfield, Catherine. "On the Make." *Op.cit.* p.34.

²⁴⁵ For instance, they aired works by the Brooklyn AIDS Task Force and LUCES, a coalition of Latino community activists. See: Carlomusto, Jean. "Making It: AIDS Activist Television." *Op.cit.* p.18.

²⁴⁶ ACT UP, Vote to Establish a Television Public Access Weekly Series and a Media Network for AIDS Activism. Published and near Print Material, Media (4 of 12), August 21-October 15, 1992. MS ACT UP: The AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power: Series X. Published and near Print Material Box 148, Folder 4. New York Public Library. Archives of Sexuality & Gender. <tinyurl.galegroup.com/tinyurl/4JEzR4> (Accessed on February 1, 2017)

²⁴⁷ DIVA TV, Report. Published and near Print Material, Media (6 of 7), April 22, 1993-June 6, 1993. MS ACT UP: The AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power: Series X. Published and near Print Material Box 153, Folder 6. New York Public Library. Archives of Sexuality & Gender. <tinyurl.galegroup.com/tinyurl/4JEvs5> (Accessed February 1, 2017)

²⁴⁸ Fraser, Nancy. *Op.cit.* p.68.

²⁴⁹ Mansbridge, Jane. *Op.cit.* p.63.

²⁵⁰ White, Patricia. "Queer Publicity: A Dossier on Lesbian and Gay Film Festivals." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, Volume 5, Number 1, 1999, p.78.

their works were exhibited and discussed.²⁵¹ Articles were published by academics such as Douglas Crimp, an art historian and member of ACT UP, who dedicated the 1987 issue of his art journal, *October*, to “AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism.”²⁵² Talking to Douglas Crimp, Gran Fury member Michael Nesline told him that “one of the things that really made a big difference in the legitimization of Gran Fury is the article that [he] published in the AIDS issue of *October*.”²⁵³ Left-oriented magazines also showed interest in alternative AIDS media. For instance, *The Progressive* and *The New Republic* both ran articles about DPN.²⁵⁴

Gran Fury and other cultural activists were ultimately accepted by the art world, and exhibited their work at venues like the Whitney Museum of American Art,²⁵⁵ the Museum of Modern Art,²⁵⁶ the American Museum of the Moving Image,²⁵⁷ Artists Space,²⁵⁸ etc. Gran Fury was eventually invited to the Venice Biennale, one of the most prestigious international art events.²⁵⁹ Yet, the art collective was still critical of the art world, as demonstrated by their

²⁵¹ See for instance: “The Fifth Annual Lesbian and Gay Studies Conference.” Ephemera, Flyers, Handbills by ACT UP, September 19 - October 9, 1991. MS ACT UP: The AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power: Series XI. Ephemera, Flyers, Handbills by Act Up Box 197, Folder 11. New York Public Library. Archives of Sexuality & Gender. <[tinyurl.galegroup.com/tinyurl/4JEoN2](http://tinyurl.com/tinyurl/4JEoN2)> (Accessed on February 1, 2017)

²⁵² *October* was at the forefront of art criticism and theory. It focuses critical attention on the contemporary arts – film, painting, music, media, photography, performance, sculpture, and literature – and their various contexts of interpretation. For more information about *October*: <<http://www.mitpressjournals.org/toc/octo/-/132>> (Accessed on March 3, 2017)

²⁵³ Gran Fury Talks to Douglas Crimp.” *Artforum*, April 2003. <<http://www.artforum.com/inprint/id=4466>> (Accessed on April 12, 2015)

²⁵⁴ Sullivan, Andrew. “Relentless.” *The New Republic*, Vol. 211, Issue 15, October 10, 1994 and “Diseased Pariahs Unite.” *The Progressive*, August 1, 1994, p.12.

²⁵⁵ For instance as part of its “New American film and Video Series,” the Whitney Museum organized a session called “AIDS Media: Counter-Representations. Film and video screening included *Fighting For Our Lives* (1987 dir. by Ellen Seidler and Patrick DuNah); *Testing the Limits* (1987, dir. by Testing the Limits Collective); *AIDS News: A Demonstration* (1988, dir. by Robert Huff). The entrance was free with museum admission. See: “Museum and Societies.” *New York Magazine*, January 16, 1989, p.86.

²⁵⁶ The museum dedicated numerous series to video activism. In December 1992, the museum screened a series entitled “Speaking Out: Film and Video about AIDS.” The works shown were *Gabriel: Needles and Nightmares* (1991, dir. by Phil Zwickler); *The Dance* (1992, dir. by Jim Hubbard); *Non, Je Ne Regrette Rien* (1991 dir. by Marlon Riggs); *Ray Navarro Memorial Tape* (1991, dir. by Gregg Bordowitz, Jean Carlomusto, John Greyson, and Catherine Saalfeld); *Parting Glances* (1986, dir. by Bill Sherwood); *AIDS in the Barrio / Eso No Me Pasa a Mi* (1990, dir. by Peter Biella and Frances Negron); *Another Love Story: Women and AIDS* (1990, dir. by Gabrielle Micalles and Debbie Douglas). The entrance was free with museum admission. “Museums and Societies.” *New York Magazine*, December 19, 1992, p.106.

²⁵⁷ They screened *Testing the Limits* multiple times with a \$4 admission fee. See “Museum and Societies.” *New York Magazine*, February 19 and 26, 1990, p.80 and p.138.

²⁵⁸ In January 1989, Artists Space organized “The AIDS Crisis is Not Over,” a selection of videotapes, organized by Gregg Bordowitz. Screenings included: *AIDS News: A Demonstration* (1988, dir. Bob Huff); *Ain't no Justice* (1988, dir. Carol Leigh); *The Helms Amendment* (1988, dir. Jean Carlomusto); *Just Say No* (1988, dir. Carol Leigh); and *Pope Don't Preach* (1988 dir. Carol Leigh). *New York Magazine*, January 8, 1989, p.66. “The AIDS Crisis is Not Over,” Artists Space. Ephemera, Flyers, Handbills by ACT UP, Miscellaneous (7 of 8), 1987-1993. *Op.cit.*

²⁵⁹ Meyer, Richard. “This Is to Enrage You: Gran Fury and the Graphics of AIDS Activism.” *But Is This Art? The Spirit of Art as Activism*. Ed. Nina Felshin. Bay Seattle Press, 1995, p.56.

piece that read: “WITH 42,000 DEAD, ART IS NOT ENOUGH (...) WE URGE YOU TO TAKE COLLECTIVE DIRECT ACTION TO END THE AIDS CRISIS.”²⁶⁰ (Appendix 10)

The leap to the mainstream was also characterized by a desire to be seen and heard by mass audiences. Gran Fury wanted to put “political information into environments where people are unaccustomed to finding it” in order to reach a large audience.²⁶¹ Their public art project, *Kissing Doesn't Kill*, which depicted queer interracial couples kissing to dispel the stigma of being HIV-positive (Appendix 11), appeared on buses and subway platforms in San Francisco, Chicago, New York, and Washington, D.C.²⁶² Yet, threats of censorship sometimes forced AIDS activists to redefine their audience goals. As Gran Fury explained:

There's a sacrifice involved in using the (...) museum art system. We only get to talk to that world. We wanted to use billboards to speak to a broader audience but were censored (...) because of the character of our work. We were also censored monetarily because we need thousands of dollars to rent those billboards. By choosing to use the gallery setting (...) we can say anything we want, but we say it to fewer people.²⁶³

The context in which these pieces were produced was characterized by attacks from conservative political and religious figures that restrained the circulation of queer material. In this regard, Michael Warner's remark about queer counterpublics is relevant:

Within a (...) queer counterpublic (...) no one is in the closet: the presumptive heterosexuality that constitutes the closet for individuals in ordinary speech is suspended. But this circulatory space, freed from heteronormative speech protocols, is itself marked by that very suspension: speech that addresses any participant as queer will circulate up to a point, at which it is certain to meet intense resistance.²⁶⁴

Budget cuts were the main obstacle, as battles over federal funding of art and public television unfolded throughout the 1980s and 1990s, which created a form of ideological and financial quarantine for independent works.²⁶⁵ The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB)²⁶⁶ were particularly targeted for funding and/or circulating work that contained (homo)sexual content. In 1989, Jesse Helms amended the

²⁶⁰ Gran Fury. “Art is Not Enough.” Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library. *The New York Public Library Digital Collections*. <<http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47e3-5385-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>> (Accessed on March 16, 2017)

²⁶¹ Deitcher, David. “Gran Fury: An Interview.” *Op.cit.* p.222.

²⁶² “Gran Fury Talks to Douglas Crimp.” *Op.cit.*

²⁶³ Deitcher, David. “Gran Fury: An Interview.” *Op.cit.* p.231.

²⁶⁴ Warner, Michael. *Op.cit.* p.120.

²⁶⁵ Zimmermann, Patricia R. *Op.cit.* p.3.

²⁶⁶ The NEA and the CPB were both created under Lyndon B. Johnson's presidency, in 1965 and 1967 respectively. The NEA is an independent federal agency that offers funding for artistic projects. The CPB is a non-profit private corporation which serves as the steward of the federal government's investment in public broadcasting and the largest single source of funding for public radio and television services. See: <<http://www.cpb.org/aboutcpb>> (Accessed on March 12, 2017) and <<https://www.arts.gov/about-nea>> (Accessed on March 12, 2017)

NEA Appropriations Bill so that: “None of the funds authorized to be appropriated for the National Endowment for the Art may be used to promote, disseminate, or produce materials which may be considered obscene, including depictions of (...) homoeroticism, (...) or individuals engaged in sex act.”²⁶⁷ Therefore, the content of the works would be targeted as well as the structures that made their circulation possible. Queer film festivals suffered from budget cuts. Frameline, which had been partly funded by the NEA since its inception, saw its budget threatened in the early 1990s, and, in 1992, it ran its first edition without the NEA’s financial support after attacks from conservative religious groups.²⁶⁸ Because of increasing pressure on the content of the works, institutions and events that were not funded by the NEA nonetheless experienced budget cuts. MIX, which was partly self-funded and also received grants from the New York State Council on the Arts, and, later on, from the Department of Culture Affairs of the City of New York,²⁶⁹ suffered from a 47% budget cut in 1991, which the festival saw as one more “calculated assault on our right to depict our own lives.”²⁷⁰

Zines were relatively sheltered from controversy because of their small-circulation base. Yet, some issues of *DPN* were seized at customs when the editors tried to send the zine to other countries. Printers refused to print *DPN* issues, and an organization in Texas told *DPN* to stop sending them issues on the grounds that the zine promoted the “kind of freewheeling lifestyle that helped cause the whole epidemic.”²⁷¹ A bookstore demanded that they publicly apologize and pull all their issues from distribution.²⁷² Despite these attempts to control the circulation of the zine, Gran Fury and video activists were the ones who suffered the most virulent cases of censorship, as queer AIDS media were met with the most resistance when they tried to occupy public space. After displaying *Kissing Doesn’t Kill* on Chicago buses, the Illinois Senate barred the Chicago Transit Authority from displaying any poster showing physical intimacy between same-sex couples where persons under twenty one could view it.²⁷³

As mentioned earlier, some videomakers ultimately wanted to have their work broadcast on public television, which had been regarded as an alternative to commercial

²⁶⁷ Cited in Walker Wingfield, Michael. “Artistic Freedom v. Censorship: The Aftermath of the NEA’s New Funding Restrictions.” *Washington University Law Review*, January 1993, p.943.

²⁶⁸ 16th San Francisco International Lesbian & Gay Film Festival Program Guide (Frameline 1992). <<https://issuu.com/frameline/docs/16th-sanfrancisco-international-lgbt-film-festival>> (Accessed on June 7, 2017); Zimmerman, Patricia R. *Op.cit.* p.32.

²⁶⁹ Hubbard, Jim. Interview with the author. December 20, 2016, p.8.

²⁷⁰ MIX Program Notes. 1991. Courtesy of Jim Hubbard.

²⁷¹ Allen, Mark. “That’s Not Funny, Or Is It?” *Vice*. December 31, 2010. <https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/that-s-not-funny-663-v18n1> (Accessed on March 3, 2017)

²⁷² *Ibid.*

²⁷³ Gran Fury. *Read My Lips*. *Op.cit.* p.49.

broadcasting that would “enrich [people’s] homes, educate (...) families and provide assistance in (...) classrooms.”²⁷⁴ By producing works from communities situated outside the dominant media frames, independent producers wanted to use television to present perspectives from the margins. Yet, the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS)²⁷⁵ – notably its *Frontline* and *P.O.V* programs²⁷⁶ – became a target of right-wing conservatives, who denounced the program distributor’s “liberal bias.”²⁷⁷ Works about the queer community and HIV/AIDS particularly fueled the ongoing debates over government support for public broadcasting, which had begun in the early 1980s when Reagan came to power and wished to defund public television.²⁷⁸ PBS’s programming of Marlon Riggs’s film on the black gay experience, *Tongues Untied* (1989), triggered reactions from state and national politicians, who threatened to cut all funding for public broadcasting. Some stations refused to air it for fear of alienating their audience. Those who chose to show the film decided to schedule it late at night.²⁷⁹ Additionally, the work had received funds from NEA-sponsored organizations.²⁸⁰ Conservative figures such as Reverend Donald Wildmon, head of the American Family Association, Senator Jesse Helms, and right-wing political columnist and 1992 presidential

²⁷⁴ The Public Broadcasting Act of 1967 was a piece of President Johnson’s “Great society” puzzle. In his 1967 State of the Union address, Johnson declared, “We should develop educational television into a vital public resource to enrich our homes, educate our families, and to provide assistance in our classrooms. We should insist that the public interest be fully served through the nation’s airwaves.” He believed noncommercial broadcasting should “appeal to the minds and hearts” of the viewing public, providing cultural, informational programming, in addition to offering public affairs coverage and analysis “which will lead to a better informed and enlightened public.” Bullert, B.J. *Public Television: Politics and the Battle over Documentary Film*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997, p.204.

²⁷⁵ PBS is a program distribution service founded in 1969 to provide for the national programming needs of the 346-member affiliate stations that make up the public television system in the United States, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, Guam, and American Samoa. It is a private, nonprofit corporation funded by member stations with other income from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), educational institutions, and other sources. Bullert, B.J. *Op.cit.* pp.14-15.

²⁷⁶ *Frontline*’s inception dates back to 1983 and is a long-format, public affairs documentary series. Founded in 1988, one of *P.O.V*’s stated missions was to provide a platform for voices not present elsewhere on television and in society. Bullert, B.J. *Op.cit.* p.25; pp.31-32.

²⁷⁷ The attempt by Reagan to shut down public broadcasting was not the first time a president used financial pressure to control the system. Since its inception in 1967, public broadcasting was marked by financial uncertainty and efforts to influence the content of its programming. Bullert, B.J. *Op.cit.* p.10 and p.17.

²⁷⁸ This effort was not entirely successful, but significant cuts in government support of public broadcasting and the prospects of more cuts in the future led stations to embrace programming that would appeal to middle-class viewers to bring in more donations and subscriptions. Bullert, B.J. *Op.cit.* p.17.

²⁷⁹ Grundmann, Roy. “New Agenda in Black Filmmaking: An Interview With Marlon Riggs.” *Cineaste*, Issue 2/3, Vol.19, December 1992, p.5. Indeed, the project was made possible by funds from the Film Arts Foundation Grants Program and Grants for the Arts of the San Francisco Hotel Tax Fund and a Western States Regional Media Arts Fellowship awarded by the Rocky Mountain Film Center, in a program sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts and the American Film Institute with additional funds from the California Arts Council. See: Riggs, Marlon. *Tongues Untied*. 1989. Alexander Street Video Streaming. (Accessed on January 17, 2017)

²⁸⁰ Bullert, B.J. *Op.cit.* p.106.

candidate Pat Buchanan,²⁸¹ condemned the film as pornographic and obscene. Although none of them had seen it, they used it as a weapon in their battle against the NEA and public television. Wildmon denounced the documentary for its “sexual street language rarely heard on television, as well as full frontal nudity and drawings of male genitals.”²⁸² On the Senate floor, Helms claimed:

CPB gave a grant to a group called ‘Point Of View’ which in turn bought a program called ‘Tongues UNITED (sic).’ Now this program, without any question whatsoever, blatantly promoted homosexuality as an acceptable lifestyle. It showed...what to call...I’ll be kind. It showed homosexual men dancing around naked. And put that out on this public television.²⁸³

Controversies over funding converged with controversies around works that explicitly condemned the Catholic Church’s policy on HIV/AIDS. As Robert Hilferty, the director of *Stop the Church: A Robert Hilferty Inquisition* (1991) stated, “If the Catholic Church is an easy target, it’s certainly not a permissible one.”²⁸⁴ The documentary was prompted by a desire to depict ACT UP’s most radical action against the Catholic Church and the discussions that went into the process of planning the demonstration.²⁸⁵ It was also deliberately intended to be broadcast it on public television. Hilferty declared:

I was reacting to video activism. The bulk of what I saw were home movies made primarily for activists to kind of giggle and pat themselves on the back. In other words, there was no effort to communicate to an audience larger than it (...). I wanted to make a work that was not compromised, and that also had an ability to communicate.²⁸⁶

Even though the video was mostly self-funded,²⁸⁷ it was cancelled by *POV*, months only after the *Tongues Untied* controversy. Hilferty denounced it as an act of self-censorship on the part of PBS, who in turn defended its decision on the grounds that the video did not fit PBS’s standards as it “ridiculed” the Catholic Church.²⁸⁸ Similarly, when *Gran Fury* was invited at the Venice Biennale in 1990, they saw it as an opportunity to “confront the Catholic Church

²⁸¹ While running for the 1992 election, Pat Buchanan made a television ad accusing George Bush of using taxpayers’ money to fund “pornographic and blasphemous art too shocking to show.” The ad featured a brief clip from *Tongues Untied* to prove its point. See: Quinn, Michelle. “Buchanan TV Ad Angers Filmmaker.” *Los Angeles Times*, February 20 1992. <http://articles.latimes.com/1992-02-29/entertainment/ca-2625_1_campaign-ad> (Accessed on March 29, 2017)

²⁸² Bullert, B.J. *Op.cit.* p.106.

²⁸³ Helms, Jesse quoted in *The Question of Equality*, “Part 2: Culture Wars,” PBS, 1995. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pI5WUU7Ck84>> (Accessed on March 12, 2017)

²⁸⁴ Bullert, B.J. *Op.cit.* p.123.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.* p.127.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁷ The video was made with \$4,000 of his own money. *Ibid.* p.128.

²⁸⁸ Blau, Eleanor. “PBS Cancel Act-Up Film.” *New York Times*, August 13, 1991.

<<http://www.nytimes.com/1991/08/13/movies/pbs-cancels-act-up-film.html>> (Accessed on March 12, 2017)

in its home territory.”²⁸⁹ Gran Fury created a site-specific work entitled “The Pope and the Penis,” which juxtaposed two billboards. The first one, “Sexism Rears Its Unprotected Head,” featured an erect penis and captions that urged men to use condoms. The second billboard was organized as a triptych, a traditional format for Roman Catholic altarpieces,²⁹⁰ and presented an image of the Pope with a quotation by Cardinal O’Connor reflecting the Church’s stance on the AIDS crisis: “The truth is not in condoms or clean needles, these are lies ... good morality is good medicine.”²⁹¹ (Appendix 12) Ultimately, because of this “blasphemous”²⁹² attack on the Catholic Church, the president of the Biennale refused to have their installation exhibited, and their work was seized at customs.²⁹³ Yet, as the scandal triggered press coverage, their work was eventually displayed.

The threat of censorship often generated the interest of the press, a reaction which was met with ambivalence by the queer/AIDS community. While some saw it as a way to publicize their work and bring attention to the epidemic,²⁹⁴ others deplored the fact that attacks from the right wing were needed to get exposure. They saw it as deflecting attention from “the real censorship of invisibility.”²⁹⁵ Additionally, controversies often displaced issues by shifting focus from the concerns evoked in the works to the question of censorship and public funding of works that depicted (homo)sexuality. Therefore, when their pieces were presented in different contexts and under different conditions, media activists lost control over their images. At the same time, these attacks mobilized the community. After *Stop the Church* was canceled, ACT UP circulated a flyer that called for a zap²⁹⁶ of what they renamed the “Catholic Broadcast System (Formerly known as PBS)”:

²⁸⁹ “Gran Fury Talks to Douglas Crimp.” *Op.cit.*

²⁹⁰ Meyer, Richard. “This Is to Enrage You.” *Op.cit.* p.75.

²⁹¹ The other part of the triptych read: “The Catholic Church has long taught men and women to loathe their bodies and to fear their sexual natures. This particular vision of good and evil continues to bring suffering and even death. By holding medicine hostage to Catholic morality and withholding information which allows people to protect themselves and each other from acquiring the Human Immunodeficiency Virus, the Church seeks to punish all who do not share in its peculiar version of human experience and makes clear its preference for living saints and dead sinners. It is immoral to practice bad medicine. It is bad medicine to deny people information that can help end the AIDS crisis. Condoms and clean needles save lives as surely as the earth revolves around the sun. AIDS is caused by a virus and a virus has no morals.”

See: <<http://www.ecoledumagasin.com/session12/images/visuels/fury11.jpg>> (Accessed on March 12, 2017)

²⁹² Gran Fury. “Conversation: Venice, May 11, 2010.” *Gran Fury: Read My Lips*. 80WSE Press, 2011, p.65.

²⁹³ *Ibid.* p.63.

²⁹⁴ As Marlene McCarty explains, “we cannot forget how much press came out of that piece, which was far more public than a billboard would have been. That work got AIDS on the cover of *Express*.” See: “Gran Fury Talks to Douglas Crimp.” *Op.cit.* Ads advertising *Stop the Church* for instance would contain headlines such as “BANNED BY PBS!” See ad in 16th San Francisco International Lesbian & Gay Film Festival (Frameline 1992), *Op.cit.*

²⁹⁵ MIX Festival Program. 1991. Courtesy of Jim Hubbard.

²⁹⁶ Zaps were designed to address AIDS issues needing immediate action by ACT UP and were a method for activist to register their disapproval of and anger toward the zap target. ACT UP zapped individuals or

PBS says *Stop the Church* ‘ridicules the Catholic Church.’ What is this in comparison to the centuries of torture, hatred, and ridicule the Catholic Church has aimed against us? Every concerned individual must write, call or fax the executives of PBS. Demand the broadcast of *Stop the Church* and other new gay, lesbian, pro-choice and AIDS activist works (...). Remind them that ‘viewers like you’ can decide for themselves what to watch.²⁹⁷

Despite the many strategies of production, distribution, and exhibition and the difficulties cultural activists encountered, a sense of community grew out of HIV/AIDS media making. As Alexandra Juhasz underlines, “there was coherence and conversation inside the group of people who were making it (...) It was a life or death issue and we were talking to each other about what we were making, across a spectrum of goals.”²⁹⁸

I.3. Speaking Out Before We Are Dead: Queer AIDS Media’s Goals

The goals and targets of queer AIDS media were multiple. PWAs and activists had to deal with the urgency of the epidemic by delivering vital information to communities that lacked access to it and correcting the mass media’s misrepresentations. They also had practical goals for the movement itself in mind: recruiting new members and providing counter-surveillance to protect activists from police brutality. As far as long-term goals were concerned, by making their own media, they also bore witness to the trauma of AIDS for future generations.

I.3.1. Dealing with the Urgency of the AIDS Crisis

Queer AIDS media’s primary aim was to respond to the urgency of the epidemic by educating communities. Indeed, the principles that governed the creation of media work about AIDS were urgency and effectiveness. As Douglas Crimp writes:

Art does have the power to save lives and it is this very power that must be recognized, fostered and supported in every way possible. We don’t need a cultural renaissance; we need cultural

organizations by “sending postcards or letters, invading offices and distributing fact sheets; sending (lots and lots of) faxes, picketing, outraged (and sometimes outrageous) phone calls.” See: “Action and Zaps.” <<http://www.actupny.org/documents/newmem2.html>> (Accessed on March 5, 2017)

²⁹⁷ “Zap CBS.” Ephemera, Flyers, Handbills by ACT UP, Miscellaneous, 1990. MS ACT UP: The AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power: Series XI. Ephemera, Flyers, Handbills by Act Up Box 195, Folder 23. New York Public Library. Archives of Sexuality & Gender. <tinyurl.galegroup.com/tinyurl/4JEu57> (Accessed on February 1, 2017)

²⁹⁸ Juhasz, Alexandra. Interview with the author. February 10, 2017, p.6.

practices actively participating in the struggle against AIDS. We don't need to transcend the epidemic, we need to end it.²⁹⁹

Hence, queer AIDS media sought to raise awareness about the epidemic, in the hope that it would stem the issues of AIDS and urge people to take action, while simultaneously empowering PWAs, who became their own voice of authority using alternative forums to present information.

1.3.1.A. "AIDS Won't Wait!": Raising Awareness About HIV/AIDS

In the absence of a cure for AIDS, the quick and efficient dissemination of information was key. Queer activists operated out of an urgent necessity to fight against regime of silence and misrepresentations in order to save lives. Their work therefore drew attention to the inadequacies of government and medical policies, identifying the problems and proposing solutions. They educated people about prevention and possible treatments. Robyn Hutt underlines that the images that they created were produced with a tremendous commitment to tell the story of AIDS from the inside and were meant to be disseminated immediately.³⁰⁰

As their work circulated in various spheres, they were able to communicate to different parts of the population. Thanks to public service announcements and explicit stories, images, and videos about safer sex practices, PWAs and activists could reach constituencies that did not have access to detailed education about HIV/AIDS. By using their graphics during demonstrations and occupying public space – billboards, bus ads etc. –, Gran Fury meant to inform a broad public and provoke action. As Marlene McCarthy remarks, in New York at the time it was “impossible to walk more than two blocks in the city without coming across some remnant of their work.”³⁰¹ The use of easily understandable slogans such as “Kissing Doesn't Kill – Greed and Corporate Indifference Do,” to counter the perception that HIV was transmitted to casual contact, or “The Government Has Blood on Its Hands – One AIDS Death Every Half Hour” (Appendix 13) not only communicated facts about HIV/AIDS to the public, but was also a way to capture media attention. Yet, their objective was not to achieve “token inclusion”³⁰² in the media, but to radically effect change and empower communities with HIV/AIDS, according to the principles of the PWA empowerment movement.

²⁹⁹ Crimp, Douglas. “AIDS: Cultural Analysis / Cultural Activism.” *Op.cit.* p.7.

³⁰⁰ ACT UP Oral History Project. Interview of Robyn Hutt. June 25, 2008, p.16 and p.22.
<<http://www.actuporalhistory.org/interviews/images/finkelstein.pdf>> (Accessed on September 10, 2016)

³⁰¹ Elgear, Sandra, Hutt, Robyn. *Op.cit.* p.21.

³⁰² *Ibid.* p.20.

1.3.1.B. Revolutionary and Empowering Media Practices

The creation of media by activists for other activists made them feel empowered and strengthened their movement. Maxine Wolfe, a member of ACT UP, articulated this feeling: “For the first time, rather than feeling that I am reading from exclusion and responding from the margins, I feel that I am acting from my center but not from the mainstream.”³⁰³ More than just being a tool to document the movement, creating images was seen as being a form of direct action.³⁰⁴ As Gregg Bordowitz notes, “video production is a means to end government inaction on AIDS. The documentation of protests is one form of direct action; distribution of these tapes are demonstrations.”³⁰⁵ This is exemplified by the videotape, *Doctors, Liars and Women: AIDS Activists Say No To Cosmo* (1988). The video/action was made after the publication of an article in *Cosmopolitan* magazine by Robert E. Gould, in which “A Doctor Tells Why Most Women Are Safe From AIDS.” At the same time as women from ACT UP staged a protest in front of the magazine offices, they decided to document the action and record an interview with Gould in which the women were directly confronting him about women and AIDS issues. As such, the video was also part of the action, something which Jean Carlomusto herself explains in the video:

I saw this as the perfect opportunity for me to really open up the documentation process. It gave me the chance to show what would go into putting together a protest (...) I began thinking of ways to make it apparent to the viewer that what the issues were and to do that I felt like we really needed to confront Gould.³⁰⁶

Grassroots media production was therefore part of the process of constantly defining and presenting their movement, which was highly self-reflexive. Queer AIDS media was also a means to recruit new members.³⁰⁷ As Jim Hubbard remarks,

They [the videos] served as information disseminators (...) it was information about the latest drugs, or just that “oh that looks like a really good way to organize a demonstration, let’s do that here!” and “we need to pressure our state governments and our city governments to do something.” So that information led to [and] disseminated political action.³⁰⁸

These tapes imbricated spectators into what Chantal Mouffe has termed “the creation of new social subjects.”³⁰⁹ By bringing viewers into the midst of the action, queer AIDS media moved its viewers to take action and achieve the cross over from spectator to participant. For

³⁰³ Elgear, Sandra, Hutt, Robyn. *Op.cit.* p.21.

³⁰⁴ Saalfeld, Catherine, Navarro, Ray. *Op.cit.* p.365.

³⁰⁵ Bordowitz, Gregg. “The AIDS Crisis is Ridiculous.” *Op.cit.* p.213.

³⁰⁶ Carlomusto, Jean, Maggenti, Maria. *Doctors, Liars, and Women: AIDS Activists Say No To Cosmo*. 1988.

³⁰⁷ Hubbard, Jim. Interview with the author. March 18, 2015, p.10.

³⁰⁸ Hubbard, Jim. Interview with the author. December 20, 2016, p.10.

³⁰⁹ Zimmerman, Patricia R. *Op.cit.* p.100.

instance, in DIVA TV's *Target City Hall*, we follow CHER, an ACT UP affinity group, in the midst of committing civil disobedience. The camera is positioned in the center of the circle of activists, spinning around to show each person entering the discussion. Roger Hallas notes: "the momentum to act is viscerally felt through the embodied immediacy of the camera at that moment."³¹⁰ Thus, viewing a tape was equally important as the information that it contained. Screenings, as they allowed for diverse groups of people to come together, could further provoke participation.³¹¹ Additionally, video activism performed a function of counter-surveillance for the movement.

1.3.1.C. "The Whole World is Watching": Video Vigilantes³¹²

Being a video activist involved more than just doing media coverage of issues and events that were not reported on in the mainstream media. They also did police *sousveillance* during demonstrations,³¹³ at a time when cases like that of Rodney King brought national attention to the issue of police brutality.³¹⁴ While the police had been relying on the video medium for a long time, the camcorder allowed for a democratization of counter-surveillance.³¹⁵ As Ray Navarro puts it, video activists have "assumed the responsibility of providing an archive with which to counter the oppressive potential of images compiled by the eyes of the state."³¹⁶ In *Doctors, Liars, and Women*, Maxine Wolfe, speaking over footage of herself arguing with a police officer, recalls taking this latter's badge number multiple times, as he kept pushing the peaceful protesters. By having cameras present, AIDS activists

³¹⁰ Hallas, Roger. *Op.cit.* p.91.

³¹¹ Elgear, Sandra, Hutt, Robyn. "Some Notes on Collective Productions." *Op.cit.* p.20.

³¹² "The Whole World is Watching" is a chant that was first popularized by anti-Vietnam war demonstrators and regularly used by ACT UP during its demonstrations. The term "video vigilantes" was used in a *Newsweek* article published in 191 about video activism in the 1990s. See: "Video Vigilantes." *Newsweek*, July 21, 1991. <<http://www.newsweek.com/video-vigilantes-204960>> (Accessed on June 18, 2017)

³¹³ *Sousveillance*, a term coined by Canadian Steve Mann in 2004, can be described as "inverse surveillance." It is based on the word surveillance (from the French *sur*, "from above," and *veiller*, "to watch"), substituting the prefix *sous*, "from below." While "surveillance" describes situations where persons of higher authority (e.g. the police) watch over citizens "from above," *sousveillance* refers to the "capture, processing, storage, recall, and transmission of an activity by a participant in the activity" typically by way of small portable or wearable recording device. Videotaping the police is an example of *sousveillance*. See: Mann, Steve. "'Sousveillance: Inverse Surveillance In Multimedia Imaging.'" *Proceeding*, 2004, pp.620-627.

³¹⁴ In 1991, Rodney King, an African American motorist, was pulled from his vehicle and severely beaten by four white police officers. The event was videotaped by amateurs and received widespread publicity. When the officers were acquitted of all but one of eleven counts of assaults, the city of Los Angeles erupted into riots in the spring of 1992. See: Faragher, John Mack, Buhl, Mari Jo, Czitrom, Daniel, Armitage, Susan H. *Out of Many: A History of the American People*. Upper Saddle River: NJ Prentice Hall, 2012, p.841.

³¹⁵ Hays, Constance L. "Home Videos Turn Lenses On the Police." *New York Times*, August 15, 1988. <<http://www.nytimes.com/1988/08/15/nyregion/home-videos-turn-lenses-on-the-police.html>> (Accessed on March 12, 2017)

³¹⁶ Saalfeld, Catherine, Navarro, Ray. *Op.cit.* p.365.

wished to minimize the threat of police brutality. They also provided counter-evidence. An entire section of DIVA TV's *Target City Hall* is devoted to the illegal strip search conducted by the police when women from ACT UP were arrested. The women's complaints recorded by DIVA TV were widely publicized and they managed to win a lawsuit against the police precinct that had arrested them.³¹⁷

Some of the footage shot by activists was actually used in court cases.³¹⁸ When a demonstrator, Chris Hennelly, was arrested and beaten during the Stop the Church demonstration, videotapes were shown in court to contradict the police officer's version that Hennelly had incited the violence. The judge subsequently declared: "The video tapes make it perfectly clear that the defendant did absolutely nothing before he was clubbed to the ground."³¹⁹ In addition to being a means for PWAs bear witness in court to testify against police brutality, queer AIDS media was also a means to bear witness to the epidemic by reflecting PWA's personal experiences and preserving their image for posterity.

I.3.2. Bearing Witness to the Epidemic

The medium that stresses the most the importance of personal experience is zines, as the emphasis on the personal is a central ethic of all zines. Zines personalize politics and position political issues alongside more intimate matters.³²⁰ Additionally, several autobiographical video works emerged, as PWAs exploited the economy of home video technology by documenting their experience with a camcorder in the form of video diaries or first-person narratives. Such is the case of Peter Friedman's *Silverlake Life: The View from Here* (1993), Gregg Bordowitz's *Fast Trip Long Drop* (1993) or James Wentzy's *Holding Steady Without Screaming* (1995), in which gay men bear witness before the camera to their experience of living with and dying of HIV/AIDS. When activists died, some were remembered through memorial tapes.³²¹

³¹⁷ ACT UP Oral History Project. Interview of Debra Levine. December 21, 2010, pp.14-15. <<http://www.actuporalhistory.org/interviews/images/levine.pdf>> (Accessed on June 7, 2017)

³¹⁸ ACT UP Oral History Project. Interview of Catherine Gund. *Op.cit.* p.17.

³¹⁹ Barron, James. "Judge Denounces 'Lawless' Beating by Police at Rally." *New York Times*, October 1, 1991. <<http://www.nytimes.com/1991/10/01/nyregion/judge-denounces-lawless-beating-by-police-at-rally.html>> (Accessed on March 12, 2017)

³²⁰ Duncombe, Stephen. *Op.cit.* pp.33-36.

³²¹ See for instance Bordowitz, Gregg, Carlomusto, Jean Greyson, John, Saalfield, Catherine. *Ray Navarro Memorial Tape*. 1991. <<https://vimeo.com/185873135>> (Accessed on March 12, 2017)

Yet, mourning was not detached from militancy.³²² Writing about her collaboration with Gregg Bordowitz, John Greyson, and Jean Carlomusto on Ray Navarro's memorial tape, Catherine Gund-Saalfeld explained: "Faced with Ray's death, the four of us found ourselves conceptualizing a reservoir for our friend, a reservoir which turned out to be the power of collective action."³²³ These tapes circulated during memorial services, bringing activism into unlikely spaces like ACT UP's "Ashes Action"³²⁴ or political funerals did.³²⁵ They consisted, perhaps more than any other type of queer AIDS media, of a form of survival after death. The videos were also sometimes dedicated to activists who had died. *Like a Prayer* ends with a moving homage to Costa Pappas, a DIVA TV member and AIDS activist who died during the making of the video. *Target City Hall* is dedicated to Steve Zabel, a photographer and AIDS activist.³²⁶ At the end of *Voices from the Front*, a segment entitled "In memoriam," shows images of twelve of the people we just saw in the video, who died before the tape was completed.

There was not a homogeneous response to the AIDS crisis; a myriad of tactics were deployed in order to address variety of communities and individuals. Yet, queer AIDS media activists were united around the fact that they all unanimously indicted the structure and content of the mainstream media. As one DIVA TV member puts it:

The dominant media does not reflect your lives and your world, is not responding accurately to the AIDS crisis, does not imagine you as a part of the audience which it addresses every night, and does not provide the information and issues that will empower you in order to take control of your lives.³²⁷

Alternative AIDS productions thus sought to shatter the silence around HIV/AIDS while forming counter-discursive sites that imagined themselves as potentially transformative. Video, graphics, and zines all wished to interrupt and dismantle the subordinating, silencing,

³²² Douglas Crimp explains: "The violence of silence and omission is almost impossible to endure as the violence of unleashed hatred and outright murder. Because this violence also desecrates the memories of our dead, we rise in anger to vindicate them. For many of us, mourning *becomes* militancy." Crimp, Douglas. "Mourning and Militancy." *Melancholia and Moralism*. Ed. Douglas Crimp. MIT Press, 2002, pp. 125-147.

³²³ Saalfeld, Catherine. "On the Make." *Op.cit.* p.33.

³²⁴ The Ashes Action consisted in throwing the ashes of people who had died of AIDS onto the White House lawn. See: Wentzy, James. *The Ashes Action*. AIDS Community Television Weekly Series, telecast on September 16, 1996. <<https://vimeo.com/158801570>> (Accessed on December 28, 2016)

³²⁵ Political funerals were public processions held by ACT UP. See: Wentzy, James. Political Funerals. AIDS Community Television Weekly Series, January 31, 1995. <<https://vimeo.com/158806271>> (Accessed March 17, 2017)

³²⁶ Saalfeld, Catherine. "On the Make." *Op.cit.* p.33.

³²⁷ DIVA TV. "Be a DIVA (ACT UP Diva Down)." Deep Dish Television, 1990. AIDS Activist Videotape Collection. Manuscripts and Archives Division. The New York Public Library. Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations. <https://archive.org/details/ddtv_34_be_a_diva> (Accessed on June 7, 2017)

and homogenizing effects of mainstream culture.³²⁸ Strategies for queer AIDS media activism went beyond providing information and talking about personal experiences. They included the critique of the representations that were produced and paid attention to the form in which information was presented. Queer AIDS media makers insisted upon representing the stories that were left out of mainstream coverage, contending that the communities affected by AIDS were the most qualified experts on the epidemic and using modes of representation that subverted those of the mainstream media.

³²⁸ Licona, Adela C. *Op.cit.* p.78.

PART II

SUBVERTING THE MASS MEDIA'S REPRESENTATIONS OF HIV/AIDS

If I'm dying from anything, I'm dying from the sensationalism of newspapers and magazines and television shows, which are interested in me, as a human interest story – only as long as I'm willing to be a helpless victim, but not if I'm fighting for my life (...). The media tells *them* that they don't have to care, because the people who really matter are not in danger.

Russo, Vito. "Why We Fight," 1988.

II.1. Contesting the Voices of Authority: AIDS Activists and the News Media

AIDS activists actively contested the discourse of the mainstream news media. Thus, they decided to subvert it and become their own voices of authority. They wanted to make the representations of AIDS more complex, while claiming the authority of the dominant culture by usurping and deconstructing mainstream media forms and techniques.

II.1.1. Seeing is (Not) Believing: Smashing the Myth of Media Objectivity

One of the guiding principles of the news media in the United States is objectivity. Yet, people with AIDS and queer activists disputed this notion. Michael Callen, one of the first PWAs to come out publicly on national television, recalls how he became aware of the ways the media constructed reality for the viewers:

Most people who view video are not aware of the video editor's tremendous power to manipulate context and content – of (...) constructing reality. When I began my bizarre career as a publicly identified person with AIDS, I was a typical, trusting child of the late 50's. Raised on a steady diet of TV (...). Like most Americans, I actually *believed* what I saw on television because, well, seeing was believing, right?³²⁹

Queer AIDS media effectively banished the myth of unbiased reporting, according to which the media would speak from an "outside" position. Sean Cubitt writes of activist video: "these are voices raised in anger, seeking not to describe reality but to change it. They do not pretend to objectivity."³³⁰

³²⁹ Callen, Michael. "Pinned and Wriggling: How Shall I Presume?" *Video Guide*, Volume 10, Issue 48, 1989, p.17.

³³⁰ Cubitt, Sean. *Timeshift: On Video Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1991, p.140.

II.1.1.A. “The Supreme Deity of American Journalism:” Objectivity in the News Media

In the United States, objectivity in journalism emerged in the 19th century and became a central tenet of the practice in the 20th century, especially after Walter Lippmann’s publication, *Liberty and the News* (1920), which contained the blueprint for objective reporting.³³¹ A number of factors explain the rise of objectivity as a journalistic ideal after the First World War. Among these factors, one could cite a loss of faith in democracy as well as the increasing availability of advertising revenue, which created an incentive to be objective and reduce partisanship.³³² Objectivity as an ethical value then became the “supreme deity” of American journalism and a general expectation of the public.³³³ One leading editor called objectivity the “highest original moral concept ever developed in America and given to the world.”³³⁴ The U.S. news media became a Fourth Estate, supposedly removed from the government and interest groups.

According to the principle of objectivity, the news is required to adopt a position of truthfulness, detachment, and neutrality towards the object of reporting.³³⁵ While truthfulness means that the news is committed to reporting factually accurate information, neutrality implies a sense of fairness and balance, meaning that the news is supposed to be impartial and unbiased in the process of reporting. This effort to avoid partisanship is often achieved by showing different points of view on the issues journalists report on, especially if these are issues in which a conflict is at stake.³³⁶ Finally, according to the principles of objectivity, the news should adopt a position of emotional detachment, so that the audience can make up their own mind about events rather than being offered a journalist’s own response.³³⁷

³³¹ Scholars dispute the timing of the entrenchment of “objectivity” as a guiding principle. Yet, it is generally understood that it really became a mandatory ethical value to adopt after the First World War. See: Streckfuss, Richard. “Objectivity in Journalism: A Search and a Reassessment.” *Journalism Quarterly*, Vol. 67, Issue 4, December 1, 1990; “The Lost Meaning of Objectivity.” *American Press Institute*. <<https://www.americanpressinstitute.org/journalism-essentials/bias-objectivity/lost-meaning-objectivity/>> (Accessed on May 8, 2017); Schudson, Michael. *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers*. Basic Books, Inc. 1981, pp.121-194.

³³² Schudson, Michael. *Op.cit.* p.122 and Baker, Edwin C. *Advertising and a Democratic Press*. Princeton University Press, 1995, p.30.

³³³ Mindich, David T.Z. *Just the Facts: How “Objectivity” Came to Define American Journalism*. New York University Press, 1998, p.1.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*

³³⁵ Calcutt, Andrew, Hammond, Philip. *Journalism Studies: A Critical Introduction*. Routledge, 2011, p.98.

³³⁶ McQuail, Denis. *Mass Communication Theory: An Introduction*. 6th edition, London: Sage, 1994 (2010) pp.200-201.

³³⁷ Calcutt, Andrew, Hammond, Philip. *Op.cit.* p.98.

Yet, from the 1960s onwards, challenges to objectivity emerged, and some critics – from the Left and from the Right – saw the media as being biased.³³⁸ According to the leftist critique, because the mass media are owned by conglomerates with political interests, dependency on markets and government support make it difficult for them to play the role of a watchdog.³³⁹ Additionally, Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman explain that since the mass media also get their revenue from advertising, programming and news content is dependent on the advertisers’ control.³⁴⁰ The mass media are thus seeking to attract audiences with buying power. Television stations and networks are concerned to maintain audience “flow” levels, meaning that they have to keep people watching from program to program, in order to sustain advertising ratings and revenue.³⁴¹ Therefore, as Todd Gitlin writes, “the mass media [are] core systems for the distribution of ideology.”³⁴² According to this line of reasoning, the media enforce values that are supportive of and even sustain the status quo.

Indeed, the regime of objectivity³⁴³ came under scrutiny especially by media critics who saw the news as maintaining the current distribution of power in society by marginalizing certain groups in relationship to sexuality, race, gender, and other distinctions.³⁴⁴ Black gay filmmaker Marlon Riggs expressed the sense of marginalization that he felt when looking at mass media images:

The media systematically balanced and checked, all right – or more accurately, squelched and negated – voices and visions like mine which threatened society’s established Voices of Authority – those smooth, polished “broadcast quality” voices (in media, law, government, science, business, advertising) which privileged, without the slightest twinge of self-consciousness, or self-interrogation a construct of America – of American Power and Authority – that was rigidly, monolithically, white, male, and unquestionably heterosexual.³⁴⁵

Queer AIDS media makers thus regarded the mainstream media – especially the news – as a lapdog instead of being a watchdog that would function as a check on American institutions. They denounced the mass media’s role as an ideological state apparatus.* To them, the

³³⁸ Schudson, Michael. *Op.cit.* p.160.

³³⁹ Sturken, Marita, Cartwright, Lisa. *Op.cit.* p.255.

³⁴⁰ Herman, Edward S., Chomsky, Noam. *Op.cit.* p.16.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.* p.17.

³⁴² Gitlin, Todd. *The Whole World is Watching: Mass Media and the Making and Unmaking of the New Left.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003, p.2.

³⁴³ Hackett, Robert A. *Sustaining Democracy: Journalism and the Politics of Objectivity.* Toronto: Garamond Press, 1998.

³⁴⁴ Mindich, David T.Z. *Op.cit.* p.4 and Cogan, Brian, Kelso, Tony. *Encyclopedia of Politics, The Media, and Popular Culture.* Greenwood Press, 2009, p.81.

³⁴⁵ Riggs, Marlon. Quoted in Juhasz, Alexandra. “WAVE in the Media Environment: Camcorder Activism and the Making of HIV TV.” *Camera Obscura*, 28, “Imaging Technologies, Inscripting Science,” Special Issue, January 1993, p.148.

mainstream media were a vehicle for the government's conservative ideas as well as instruments of cultural dominance, which meant that they were far from being objective.³⁴⁶

II.1.1.B. The Failure of Objectivity: Stereotypes and Sensationalism

AIDS activists believed that instead of reporting on AIDS in a transparent manner, the mainstream media reproduced already operating discourses separating the “socially ill” from the “socially healthy”³⁴⁷ by resorting to stereotypes and sensationalism. In that sense, activists saw the mass media as being inherently biased towards people with AIDS and accused the news of tending to side with those who were presumed to be unaffected by the epidemic. By meticulously unpacking media representations, AIDS activists aimed to offer an oppositional and critical reading of the images that circulated about HIV/AIDS in order to collapse the authority of the dominant media. Activists interpreted the messages of these images in a way that ran contrary to their intended meanings, which were rejected in favor of an alternative ideological message or “code.”³⁴⁸ Hence, queer AIDS media makers used their skills as manipulators of images to practice what Umberto Eco calls “semiological guerrilla warfare.”

The receiver of the message seems to have a residual freedom: the freedom to read it in a different way (...) I am proposing an action to urge the audience to control the message and its multiple possibilities of interpretation (...). The universe of Technological Communication would then be patrolled by groups of communication guerrillas, who would restore a critical dimension to passive reception.³⁴⁹

In order to critically deconstruct the mainstream media's discourse on HIV/AIDS and expose their impartiality, queer AIDS videomakers actively made use of network television images. They regularly inserted newspaper headlines and extracts from the mainstream news within their videos. In a sequence of DIVA TV's *Like a Prayer* (1990), footage from various news reports is shown in succession in order to explain how, in the aftermath of the demonstration at St. Patrick's Cathedral, the media distorted the goal of the protest. DIVA TV

³⁴⁶ Gitlin, Todd. *Op.cit.* p.8.

³⁴⁷ Juhasz, Alexandra. *AIDS TV. Op.cit.* p.87.

³⁴⁸ Stuart Hall argues that the viewers whose social situation aligns them with the dominant ideology produce dominant readings of a text. Other viewers, whose social situation places them in opposition to the dominant ideology, oppose its meanings and thus produce oppositional readings. Umberto Eco's theory of “aberrant reading” is similar. Eco argues that whenever there are significant social differences between the encoders and decoders of a text, then decoding will necessarily be “aberrant.” See: Hall, Stuart. “Encoding/Decoding.” *The Cultural Studies Reader*. Ed. Simon During. Second Edition, Routledge, 1999 p.517; Eco, Umberto. “Towards a Semiotic Inquiry into the Television Message.” Translated by Paola Splendore. *Television: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies, Volume 2*. Ed. Toby Miller. Taylor and Francis, 2003, p.4; Fiske, John. *Television Culture*. London: Routledge, 1987, p.68.

³⁴⁹ DeLaure, Marilyn, Fink, Moritz, Dery, Mark. *Culture Jamming: Activism and the Art of Cultural Resistance*. New York University Press, 2017, p.46.

added text to these images to directly question the discourse of the news. Showing footage of a news report from ABC7 Eyewitness News about ACT UP's action, the collective deconstructs the reporters' assumption that "the premise of ACT UP implies that they have nothing to lose." The image is paused, and the audio is played on repeat. Words appear successively on the screen, eventually asking the viewer: "What about our lives?" The reporter continues, explaining that the epidemic affects mostly "people whose lifestyles Americans by and large frown upon," to which DIVA TV replies: "Lifestyles? Americans? Frown upon?" (Appendix 14)

Queer AIDS media denounced the mechanisms put in place by the mainstream media that constantly marked the PWA as "Other." Indeed, cultural studies theorists have concluded that the mass media tend to create and relay images of social order, by relying on classifications and hierarchies.³⁵⁰ According to Stuart Hall, these images are mostly enforced through stereotyping practices that essentialize difference, separating the "normal" from the "deviant."³⁵¹ Richard Dyer clarifies this:

A system of social- and stereo- types refers to what is (...) within and beyond the pale of normalcy (...). Types are instances which indicate those who live by the rules of society (...) and those who the rules are designed to exclude (...). Boundaries (...) must be clearly delineated, and so stereotypes (...) are characteristically fixed, clear-cut, unalterable.³⁵²

During the 1980s and 1990s, the news media participated in constructing stereotypes about PWAs, which they regularly invoked in their reports. These stereotypes resulted in reductive "us vs. them" dichotomies that were meant to separate their intended audience – as well as the news reporters – from PWAs. Timothy Landers coined the "Body/Anti-Body" paradigm to explain how commercial media's representations of AIDS were informed by a variation on the "normal/abnormal" paradigm. The Body – white, middle-class, and heterosexual – was constructed in contrast to the Other, the Anti-Body: gay men, lesbians, racial and ethnic minorities, workers, foreigners, which, Landers noted, typically "threaten[ed] middle-class values."³⁵³ Landers added that, applied to the subject of AIDS, "oppositions revolve[d] around the nexus of health. The Body [was], above all healthy. The Anti-Body [became] (...) sick."³⁵⁴ The name of Gregg Bordowitz's fictional counterpart in *Fast Trip Long Drop* (1993), "Alter Allesman," illustrates the position assigned to the PWA by the media. While

³⁵⁰ Gitlin, Todd. *Op.cit.* p.11.

³⁵¹ Hall, Stuart. *Representations: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. Sage Publications, 1997, p.258.

³⁵² *Ibid.*

³⁵³ Landers, Timothy. *Op.cit.* p.19.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

“Allesman” is Yiddish for “everyman,” his first name, “Alter,” signals otherness.³⁵⁵ The news viewer was indeed asked to identify with the PWA in order to feel concerned by the report, while this latter was also continually presented as Other.

AIDS cultural activists did away with the us/them dichotomy separating the PWA from the audience. They also rejected the innocent/guilty dichotomy that divided PWAs between those worthy of the public’s sympathy and those who had, according to the media paradigm, brought AIDS on themselves.³⁵⁶ Queer AIDS media indeed regularly condemned the “innocent” voices that were given prime of place in the news media. The cover of *DPN*’s fifth issue featured U.S. attorney Roy Cohn, who died from AIDS in 1986, holding Kimberly Bergalis, a young woman who was purportedly infected with HIV by her dentist and died in 1991, at the age of twenty-three. In the eyes of *DPN*, they had both been traitors to the AIDS community. Cohn was bestowed the “Golden Pariah Award,”³⁵⁷ while Bergalis, “[the] nation’s favorite innocent victim,” received the “Silver Sniveller” award for claiming that she had not done “anything wrong,” an “inexcusable” statement which *DPN* accused the media of relaying to perpetuate the “guilty vs. innocent victim fallacy.”³⁵⁸ Similarly, Gregg Bordowitz indicted the discourse of Mary Fisher,³⁵⁹ parodied in *FTLD* through a character called Charity Hope Tolerance, who tells the audience: “I’m straight, white, rich. I have privilege, and I have AIDS. Feel sorry for me. I’m placing my privilege at risk so that an audience of people can feel bad for a few minutes.”³⁶⁰ Queer AIDS media saw these interventions as catering specifically to the general public, as they eschewed the reality of AIDS being a disease of the disenfranchised and the marginalized, while implicitly blaming these communities for having AIDS.

³⁵⁵ Hallas, Roger. *Op.cit.* p.140.

³⁵⁶ As cases of HIV/AIDS started to be noticed among people who did not fit into the “high-risk group” category, a sharp dichotomy emerged between “innocent” and “guilty victims” of AIDS. The innocent victims were typically children, hemophiliacs, and white (heterosexual) female partners of bisexual men or of IV drug users. Gay men, IV drug users, and sex workers were placed in the “guilty victim” category, as they had “allowed” themselves to catch HIV/AIDS.

³⁵⁷ The Golden Pariah Award was designed for people who had been “traitorous to the community.” Roy Cohn, a closeted gay man, had been a key figure in the red scare of the 1950s and worked alongside Joseph McCarthy.

³⁵⁸ *Diseased Pariah News*. Issue n°5, 1992, p.14.

³⁵⁹ Mary Fisher was an HIV-positive white upper middle-class heterosexual woman who spoke at the National Republican Convention of 1992, asking the Republican Party to create compassionate policies for people with HIV/AIDS. See: Demus Axelle, “Framing the AIDS Crisis (...)” *Op.cit.* p.166.

³⁶⁰ Bordowitz, Gregg. *Fast Trip, Long Drop*. 1993.

Activists thus operated from the assumption that, as one of Gran Fury's graphics stated, "all people with AIDS [were] innocent."³⁶¹ (Appendix 15) *DPN* made this clear in its first issue:

We should warn you that our editorial policy does not include the concept that AIDS is (...) a punishment for our Previous Badness. Nor are we much interested in being icons of noble tragedy, brave and true, stiff upper lips gleaming under our oxygen hoses...We are not saints nor devils, just a couple-o-guys who (...) caught something we don't like very much.³⁶²

Furthermore, queer AIDS media makers denounced the fact that, contrary to the "innocent" victims of AIDS who deserved sympathy, the media portrayed AIDS activists as irrational radicals in order to further remove them from the viewer. The stock figure of "the angry activist," who had become a regular stereotyped persona "accorded a right to parade quickly through the pageant of the news" after the 1960s,³⁶³ was parodied in the video *Rockville is Burning* (1989).³⁶⁴ When the mock news correspondent present at an AIDS demonstration declares: "They came from all over the country (...) to gather in front of this building to say they're *angry* about AIDS," his statement is followed by a medium close-up on one of the protesters, enacting his assigned role of "angry activist." Looking straight into the camera, he shouts: "The government is killing us, you fuckers!" (Appendix 16)

AIDS was also constructed by the news media through the use of stereotypical shots. Timothy Landers explains:

In addition to the standard lab shot, the conventional intro-to-AIDS (...) contains one or more of the following: (...) interview with people living with AIDS (PWAs): an IV drug user and gay man (...), a scene of drug users shooting up, usually in a Lower East Side vacant lot; (...) shots of two men, often wearing jeans and flannel shirts, walking arm-in-arm down Castro Street to illustrate "homosexual liberation," which we're told resulted in the "promiscuity" of the seventies and that is the source of AIDS.³⁶⁵

In *Rockville is Burning*, the "angry activist's" comment is immediately followed by an image of a hand manipulating vials of blood, a standard "AIDS shot" which typically positioned the epidemic as something happening in laboratories, far away from the audience. The reporter in voiceover then explains: "Since it was first discovered in 1981, AIDS has claimed the lives of

³⁶¹ Gran Fury. "All People with AIDS Are Innocent (Poster)." Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library. *The New York Public Library Digital Collections*.

<<http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47e3-539d-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>> (Accessed on June 7, 2017)

³⁶² *Diseased Pariah News*. Issue n° 1, 1990, p.3.

³⁶³ Gitlin, Todd. *Op.cit.* p.284.

³⁶⁴ *Rockville is Burning* is a mock television report that was performed live by an ACT UP affinity group called "Wave 3" and recorded by Bob Huff. It dealt with the recent ACT UP protest at the Food and Drug Administration and staged an AIDS activist takeover of the television set. Huff, Bob, Wave 3. *Rockville is Burning*. 1989. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oNVI4TrK4g0>> (Accessed on October 1, 2016)

³⁶⁵ Landers, Timothy. *Op.cit.* p.19.

over 50,000 homosexuals and drug addicts.” After the mention of “homosexuals,” one can see footage of a march in which gay men are holding hands. The stock images of AIDS are turned into ridicule however, as exemplified by the footage accompanying the phrase “drug addicts.” A close up on the arm of someone shooting drugs follows the utterance, but instead of using a hypodermic needle, the “addict” uses a knitting needle. Finally, the mock report takes us back to the lab where a scientist is working. Over close up shots on scientific instruments and pills, the reporter’s off-screen voice explains: “The government has spent tens of millions of dollars to find a cure, but so far only one promising drug, AZT, has been discovered.” Stock footage of laboratory science at work – e.g. images of test tubes, microscopes, etc. – was also a staple of the mainstream media and suggested that science was perfecting a cure as the anchorperson was speaking.³⁶⁶ By deconstructing the stereotypical images circulating in the mainstream news, queer AIDS media makers denounced the way dominant messages were constructed and sold to a public that was presumed uninfected.

Furthermore, activists also accused the media of relying on sensationalism to maintain the general public at a distance with the disease. This sensationalistic discourse created panic in the audience in order to sustain their interest in the story. Yet, the general public was also swiftly reassured, as the media implicitly told them they were not at risk of getting HIV if they were not homosexuals or drug users. Barbara Hammer’s *Snow Job* (1986) relies on sensationalistic sound bites and headlines from news reports which are shown in succession on screen in order to condemn what Hammer calls in her video “The Other Epidemic: The Media’s Campaign Against Gay People.”³⁶⁷ *Fast Trip Long Drop* (1993) and *Rockville is Burning* (1989) explicitly expose the ways the mass media consciously used sensationalism to both appeal to and frighten their audience. *FTLD* opens with a mock newscast report, in which Henry Roth, the news anchor, announces:

The World Health Organization estimates there are forty million people infected with HIV, the virus thought to cause AIDS. If you are one of them, panic. That’s right, panic. There’s not a thing to be done for you (...). I’m the news guy. I’m supposed to bring you to the edge of worry and not beyond, give you just enough anxiety to keep you coming back for more. So don’t touch that channel, it’s a delicate balance we try to strike. If you don’t have AIDS, don’t worry about it (...). I’m reporting on behalf of the uninfected. And we know who we are.³⁶⁸

Rockville is Burning opens with the anchorperson, Dan, being prepped for his upcoming news report about a demonstration at the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).³⁶⁹ The whole

³⁶⁶ Landers, Timothy. *Op.cit.* p.19.

³⁶⁷ Hammer, Barbara. *Snow Job: The Media Hysteria of AIDS*. 1986, *Op.cit.*

³⁶⁸ Bordowitz, Gregg. *Fast Trip, Long Drop*. 1993.

³⁶⁹ The name “Dan” evokes Dan Rather, a popular CBS anchor in the 1980s.

segment examines the language used by the media to talk about AIDS activism. Dan starts: “Today in Rockville, Maryland, an AIDS commando... no...angry AIDS protesters, today, burnt...set fire to the Food and Drug Admin...” and is then interrupted by the director of the show. The following dialogue ensues:

Director: Dan, we don't wanna alarm people with this AIDS thing. Now, I know people with AIDS. So I know there are responsible AIDS victims out there who shouldn't be lumped in with this violent mob.

Dan: FACT: They burned down a building. People don't just burn down buildings without good cause, gotta be terrorists.

Director: I agree, but what...what we mean is that we don't wanna alarm people. We don't want to say that these people ... that we don't agree with their tactics...they do represent an undercurrent of frustration in the country. Listen, their friends have died. They might die. They have families...Their families watch television. These are significant demographics!

Dan: Oh. Well, if you think people really feel that way then how about: “angry AIDS protesters today seize control of a federal office building?”

Director: Okay, ten seconds.

When the newscast finally starts, however, Dan declares:

Today in Washington, a group of homosexual protesters seized control of a Federal office building and before the siege was ended, the building was in flames.³⁷⁰

The use of the term “AIDS *victims*” instead of “person with AIDS” and the assimilation of protesters to “terrorists” clearly underline the sensationalistic discourse of the media. The final choice to reduce AIDS activists to “*homosexual* protesters” expresses the refusal of the mainstream media to use the preferred term “gay” and re-inscribes the associations “AIDS equals gay disease” and “homosexuality equals illness” in the minds of the viewers, instead of presenting AIDS as a disease that could potentially affect everyone.

Sensationalism was also linked to financial constraints. Because they need to generate revenues, television networks can financially profit from not alienating their viewers. For instance, instead of expressing genuine concern for people with AIDS, the director in *Rockville is Burning* argues that the families of PWAs constitute “significant demographics,” by which he means large audiences with buying power. Additionally, Postman and Powers point out that, since television news has an imperative to constantly boost ratings caused by advertising, stories are presented quickly and then segued into other stories until commercials

³⁷⁰ Huff, Bob, Wave 3. *Rockville is Burning*. 1989.

come, in order to avoid associating a negative story with the product being advertised.³⁷¹ The end of the report in *Rockville is Burning* mirrors the structural imperative of the broadcast news:

Dan: More AIDS news tonight. The government announced today new guidelines designed to speed up the approval of potentially effective drugs to combat AIDS (...). National AIDS experts called the new guidelines “a major breakthrough.” When we come back, we’ll have more on *the story of that puppy trapped sixty feet down a well shaft in Texas, and on the outpouring of manpower, money and, yes, love, that has descended on that tiny town tonight.*³⁷²

The report ends on a reassuring note: a major breakthrough in AIDS research. Consequently, there is no need for the audience to worry about the supposedly dangerous protesters, or about AIDS. The transition to the story about the trapped puppy is significant in many regards. Teasing the viewer with a piece of news that has no connection to the last one is a way to keep the audience watching after the commercial break, which is likely to make the viewers forget about the AIDS story.³⁷³ Additionally, *Rockville is Burning* denounces the fact that the mainstream news and its audience are more inclined to care about a puppy than about PWAs, since this puppy has received an “outpouring of manpower and money,” contrary to AIDS. Thus, as AIDS media activists exposed clichéd and sensationalistic AIDS narratives, the mainstream media’s claim to objectivity was proved wrong. In addition to denouncing the tropes of the mass media, AIDS activists also critiqued the techniques used to maintain the illusion of neutrality.

II.1.2. Appropriation and Deconstruction of The News Media’s Techniques

According to Margaret Morse, “objectivity is produced by a set of techniques that are meant to render the news utterance as transparent as possible, so as to show the world ‘out there’ in the most accurate and unbiased manner.”³⁷⁴ In order to take control of their representation, queer AIDS media makers, who were aware of how these practices functioned, manufactured their own images of HIV/AIDS by appropriating and deconstructing these techniques. In other words, queer AIDS media activists applied what art critic Lucy Lippard has termed the “Trojan Horse” tactic. They infiltrated the cultural arena

³⁷¹ Postman, Neil, Powers, Steve. *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. Quoted in Cogan, Brian, Kelso, Tony. *Op.cit.* p.113.

³⁷² My emphasis. Huff, Bob, Wave 3. *Rockville is Burning*. 1989.

³⁷³ Postman, Neil, Powers, Steve. *Op.cit.* p.113.

³⁷⁴ Morse, Margaret. “The Television News Personality and Credibility: Reflections on the News in Transition.” *Studies in Entertainment: Critical Approaches to Mass Culture*. Ed. Tania Modleski. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986, p.65.

through a reappropriation of the strategies that fed and structured the dominant modes of representation and discourse.³⁷⁵

Queer AIDS media wished to provide a broader analysis of the crisis by adding new voices to the AIDS conversation, rather than relying on what video activist Ellen Spiro condemned as “the same old authoritative experts giving their same old scripted rags.”³⁷⁶ Indeed, mass media traditionally rely on “experts” – institutional sources such as the government, the medical establishment, the law, the Church etc. – to guarantee the objectivity of their news reports. These voices of authority invoked by the mass media are what cultural theorist Stuart Hall calls “primary definers,” who “orientate the media in their definitions of social reality.”³⁷⁷ This hierarchical organization of information reproduces existing structures of power: the mainstream media tend to over-represent official sources, while dissenting voices are kept on the margins.³⁷⁸ As they did not see their reality reflected on screen, PWAs rejected the mass media’s reliance on institutional sources, whom they judged too distanced from the disease to accurately convey the facts about HIV/AIDS. Against a regime of silence and pathologization, queer AIDS media credentialed the disempowered who began to speak on their own behalf, thereby acknowledging that power was not a top-down process.³⁷⁹ Indeed, Michel Foucault explains,

Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere (...). We must not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between the dominant discourse and the dominated one; but as a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies (...). Where there is power, there is resistance.³⁸⁰

The communities most affected by AIDS became primary definers in their own right, challenging the socially sanctioned roles of media consumer, activist, patient, and expert. In Deep Dish TV’s *Be a DIVA! (Act Up, Diva Down)* (1990), DIVA TV member Jocelyn Taylor is at once a videomaker, an AIDS activist, a news anchor, and a street reporter, encouraging the viewers to do the same: “I’m sure you’re wondering how someone like me, an everyday

³⁷⁵ “Introduction.” *AIDS Riot: Collectifs d’artistes face au Sida / Activist Collectives against AIDS*, New York 1987-1994. *Op.cit.* p.182.

³⁷⁶ Spiro, Ellen. *Op.cit.* p.22.

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁸ Hall, Stuart. “The Social Production of News.” *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order*. Ed. Stuart Hall. London: Macmillan, 1978, pp.53-60; Herman, Edward S., Chomsky, Noam. *Op.cit.* p.xu.

³⁷⁹ Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*. Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2012, p.101.

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.* pp.93-100.

activist on the streets of New York, could become something as exhausting and infamous as a DIVA (...). Being a DIVA is as easy as grabbing a video camera.”³⁸¹

When queer AIDS media makers wanted to introduce other viewpoints than those of PWAs or AIDS activists – like that of the mainstream media, politicians, religious figures, etc. – they did so in order to explicitly critique them, rather than presenting their audience with balanced reporting. For instance, Adam Hassuk and Bob Huff’s *We Are Not Republicans* (1988) takes the viewers behind the scenes of the 1988 Republican convention in order to provide perspectives not included in mainstream television reports.³⁸² Showing footage of demonstrations taking place outside and inside the convention and interviewing the attendees, the video, shot from the point of view of activists, denounces the homophobic violence that people with AIDS were confronted with at the convention, which they relate to the larger homophobic climate around the country.

AIDS activists and PWAs also directly confronted the so-called “experts” on camera in order to prove them wrong and deflate their authority. The publication of a misleading *Cosmopolitan* article on HIV transmission in 1988 led a group of women within ACT UP to interview the writer, a psychiatrist named Robert E. Gould.³⁸³ During the interview, recorded and shown in the videotape *Doctors, Liars and Women* (1988), the women repeatedly lectured Gould on the facts that they had gathered through their own experience with HIV-positive women and called him out for using inaccurate data. Yet, when the protesters went to a mainstream talk show where Gould was invited, the women’s authority on HIV/AIDS was challenged as they kept being interrupted. When one activist contested the fact that no women were invited on a panel about women and AIDS, the male host repeatedly asked her: “Are you a medical doctor? I can see you’re a propagandist. Are you a medical doctor?” before the women were eventually forced to leave the set. As Carlomusto remarks in the film, “When we were in control, things went well (...). When the media got control of the event (...) we lost our representation.”

In *Rockville is Burning*, AIDS activists also directly challenge the media’s reliance on experts when they physically take over the mock TV set in order to make their demands. As the anchor question their expertise, the activists try to demonstrate that what they have to say

³⁸¹ DIVA TV. “Be a DIVA (ACT UP Diva Down).” Deep Dish Television, 1990.

³⁸² This tape is reminiscent of TVTV’s 1972 film, *Four More Years*. TVTV took their Portapak video equipment to the Republican National Convention to get a view of the convention from many perspectives that were not included in network television coverage, such as that of anti-Nixon protestors. The film gave a sense of the maneuverings of the press and of the protests that were taking place in the streets outside the convention hall. Sturken, Marita, Cartwright, Lisa. *Op.cit.* p.245.

³⁸³ Carlomusto, Jean, Maggenti, Maria. *Doctors, Liars, and Women: AIDS Activists Say No To Cosmo*. 1988.

is in fact more relevant than the experts' opinions by interviewing an anonymous "Washington expert," whose face is hidden as he speaks:

Washington expert: Yes I'm the official at NIAID³⁸⁴ in charge of processing trial results. No I'm sorry I can't give you my name (...). Can you imagine what my life would be like if I had to answer every petty question, from every civilian who thought he had a right to know what was in our pills?! There ARE pills! It's not our job to make people better (...). It's a big business. There are billions at stake here. (Appendix 17)

The medical establishment, traditionally regarded as a voice of authority by the mainstream media, therefore stands accused of being a business whose primary objective is making money rather than saving lives. Moreover, the fact that the "expert" is shown in silhouette is a reminder of the fact that people with HIV/AIDS were often concealed in the first television reports about AIDS.³⁸⁵ By reversing the convention, which highlighted the shame of having AIDS, the video in turn shames the medical profession. The same technique is used and subverted in one of the "Living with AIDS" public service announcements featuring Scott Jordan, a member of GMHC's Operation Speak Out.³⁸⁶ First shown in silhouette when he is expressing the fears that he had when he first found out about his AIDS diagnosis, the screen progressively brightens up to empower Jordan as he realizes that he should no longer hide nor let people "punish [him] for having an illness."³⁸⁷ (Appendix 17) Adopting conventional forms and techniques enabled queer AIDS media makers to both claim and challenge the authority of the dominant media, while further foregrounding their expertise. As Alexandra Juhasz explains, "The mimetic representation of an alternative reality becomes a self-conscious or deconstructive act which challenges the "naturalness" of the dominant reality."³⁸⁸

AIDS activist videos, such as *Voices from the Front*, regularly made use of the talking head shot, in which the speaker is speaking directly to the camera/audience, with only their upper body visible through a medium close up. (Appendix 18) Widely used by the mainstream news media, the talking head shot traditionally imparts the "experts" the authority to speak.³⁸⁹ Queer AIDS media makers thus transferred authority away from the scientist or the politician to the PWA and/or the AIDS activist, which now physically and symbolically

³⁸⁴ National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases.

³⁸⁵ Waugh, Thomas. "Lesbian and Gay Documentary: Minority Self-Imaging, Oppositional Film Practice, and the Question of Image Ethics." *Image Ethics: The Moral Rights of Subjects in Photographs, Film, and Television*. Ed. Larry Gross. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988, p.266. This device was used even before the advent of AIDS to represent queer people on television. See for instance *CBS Reports'* documentary *The Homosexuals*, 1967. <<https://vimeo.com/75068047>> (Accessed on April 7, 2017)

³⁸⁶ Operation Speak Out was a group of PWAs who regularly spoke publicly about living with AIDS.

³⁸⁷ Carlomusto, Jean. "PSA featuring Scott Jordan." *Living with AIDS* Cable Show, 1987. <<https://vimeo.com/119779491>> (Accessed on December 28, 2016)

³⁸⁸ Juhasz, Alexandra. *AIDS TV*. *Op.cit.* p.76.

³⁸⁹ Hallas, Roger. *Op.cit.* pp.35-37.

occupied a space usually denied to them in the mainstream media. In *Non Je Ne Regrette Rien (No Regret)* (1992) – which consists of interviews of five African American gay men living with HIV/AIDS –³⁹⁰ Marlon Riggs challenges the viewers by subverting the technique through the use of mattes, showing only parts of the interviewees’ face, the insertion of text, as well as the insertion of family photographs in the space reserved for insert photo windows.³⁹¹ (Appendix 19) By reworking the convention of the talking head, Riggs undermined the viewers’ ability to read the interviews the way they were used to reading dominant representations.

The figures of the news reporter and the news anchor also contribute to the sense of objectivity that the mainstream media try to convey. Most often white and male, they perform a specific authoritative and discursive role in the delivery of information by supposedly reporting on the issues in an emotionally detached manner. In *Like a Prayer* (1990) activist Ray Navarro is dressed up as Jesus Christ, reporting on behalf of FBN (Fire and Brimstone Network). With his microphone, he is positioned in front of the crowd outside the cathedral, parodically invoking the authority of the news reporter:³⁹² “This is Jesus Christ. I’m in front of St. Patrick’s on Sunday. We’re reporting on a major AIDS activist and abortion rights demonstration.” (Appendix 20) Not only does the tape show the AIDS activist, usually situated outside of the field of expertise invoked on television, guiding the viewer through the report, it also affirms that anyone could embody the position of the news reporter. *Rockville is Burning, some aspects of a shared lifestyle* and *Fast Trip Long Drop* all make use of the figure of the news anchor, who, according to Roger Hallas, “sit[s] at the apex of a discursive hierarchy.”³⁹³ In a sequence of *some aspects of a shared lifestyle* (1986), Bordowitz-as-news-anchor reads reports on AIDS in front of the camera. As he speaks, insert photo windows appear on screen, with the caption “image of:”

Epidemic Baffles U.S Experts (image of a terrorist). The mysterious new often fatal illness (image of a new brand of diet soda) popularly (image of a riot) called “the gay disease” (image of a president) is moving into the general population (image of a person of color) and researchers believe it to be far more (image of a third world country) deadly than first imagined. Next, the homosexuals (image of a plane crash) (image of a terrorist).³⁹⁴ (Appendix 21)

³⁹⁰ Riggs, Marlon. *Je ne regrette rien (No Regret)*. 1992. Kanopy Streaming Video. (Accessed on September 12, 2016)

³⁹¹ The insert photo window was a staple feature of broadcast news programs. News photo and visual symbols were meant to cue the viewer’s attention to a recognizable public issue. As Roger Hallas underlines, such photographs need to be instantly recognizable, either as identifiable signs (such as the caduceus) or iconic photographs (the U.S capitol). See: Hallas, Roger. *Op.cit.* p.57.

³⁹² *Ibid.* p.93.

³⁹³ *Ibid.* pp.80-81.

³⁹⁴ Bordowitz, Gregg. *some aspects of a shared lifestyle*. 1986.

<http://www.greggbordowitz.com/motion_pictures.html> (Accessed on April 11, 2017)

More than being a critique of the invasion of images in society and of the sensationalism of the mainstream media, Bordowitz's account is an exaggeration of the techniques used by the news to make their reports look objective by relying on the visual presentation of an event, accompanied by a voice-over narration.³⁹⁵ Indeed, as Margaret Morse notes, the visual coverage of events seems to add credibility to the report based on "looking like" and "being there" in a coherent reference world.³⁹⁶ On the other hand, the "voice of God" that accompanies the images betrays a sense of alienation and separation between the audience and the subject of the news report or documentary.³⁹⁷ Therefore, for the most part, queer AIDS video eschewed the voice-over convention in order to let their subjects express themselves as they saw fit.³⁹⁸

Yet, when they did use the voice-over, PWAs subverted it for their own ends. In a sequence of *Voices from the Front*, PWA and activist Aldyn McKean revisits his experience of being part of the *ABC Nightline* television program after the 1990 International Conference on AIDS. He was invited along with Louis Sullivan, the then Secretary of Health and Human Services, and Anthony Fauci, then head of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), to discuss the conference. While viewers are faced with images of the broadcast, McKean's off-screen voice comments on the images: "Louis Sullivan would appear on that program only under the condition that my microphone not be on while he was speaking." The fact that his microphone was not on when others were speaking reduced his intervention to a pre-conceived role, again, that of the angry activist: "So what does America get? The impression that is created is that here's Louis Sullivan saving the world and here's this frustrated angry activist. Basically I was allowed to speak three times." While we see that Fauci and Sullivan are talking, we never completely hear what they have to say. In fact, for the most part, McKean rephrases their words in order to share his experience with the viewer. The subversion of the voice-over convention thus enables McKean to talk both for and instead of the people whom the media traditionally regards as experts, therefore reversing the roles and positioning himself as an authority on HIV/AIDS.

³⁹⁵ Morse, Margaret. *Op.cit.* p.57.

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.* p.70.

³⁹⁷ Nichols, Bill. *Introduction to Documentary*. Indiana University Press, 2001, pp.16-17.

³⁹⁸ In her interview for the ACT UP Oral History Project, Sandra Elgear explains why queer AIDS media eschewed this convention: "Our philosophy was all similar because we all were, in a way, products of a certain school of thought, which was to eschew traditional documentary style. As part of deconstructive theory, you don't have a truth. You don't have one side of the story. It's not just one presentation. So we didn't want to have the voiceover telling you, "This is what is happening. This is the truth. This is the story." We wanted to say, "There it is. You tell us what it means to you." ACT UP Oral History Project. Interview of Sandra Elgear. *Op.cit.* pp.19-20.

II.2. Mimicking the Forms of Pseudo-Subversive Media

In addition to subverting the media's objectivity techniques, activists favored the strategy of *détournement* – or “culture jamming”³⁹⁹ – of familiar mass media images, popular culture, and consumer advertising. They aimed at disrupting the invisible mechanisms at play in the production of consumer media and provoke political action. Zack Malitz notes: “subversive and marginalized ideas can spread contagiously by reappropriating artifacts drawn from popular media and injecting them with radical connotations.”³⁹⁹ In particular, queer AIDS media makers mimicked the forms of pseudo-subversive media such as advertising and new television channels like MTV. While these innovative media forms gave themselves an appearance of subversion in order to sell their products, activists gave themselves an air of popular culture to better denounce mainstream representations.

II.2.1. Spreading Radical Ideas Through Subvertising

Since the dominant culture is essentially commercial, queer AIDS media activists produced “subvertisements”⁴⁰⁰ to bring attention to HIV/AIDS issues. Gran Fury embraced popular culture and advertising techniques to demand that queer people and PWAs be included into American society and that the discourse and policies on HIV/AIDS be changed. In doing so, they developed their own form of activist branding.⁴⁰⁰ Their poster, *Kissing Doesn't Kill*, subverted United Colors of Benetton's style of advertising, which often featured a multiracial cast. *Kissing* was therefore designed to confuse and attract the viewers, who might wonder whether or not this was a real Benetton ad.⁴⁰¹ (Appendix 22) At the same time, the piece opposed Benetton's “cool marketing”⁴⁰² strategy and the company's controversial ads about HIV/AIDS. Part of Benetton's 1991 *Shock of Reality* campaign conceived by Oliviero Toscani, the company's Creative Director, the ad “Dying of AIDS” featured PWA David Kirby on his deathbed surrounded by his grieving family. (Appendix 22) This ad triggered the ire of AIDS activists, as some regarded it as exploiting the image of dying

³⁹⁹ Malitz, Zack. “Tactic: *Détournement* / Culture Jamming.” *Beautiful Trouble: A Toolbox for Revolution*. Ed. Andrew Boyd. OR Books, 2012, p.28.

⁴⁰⁰ Lampert, Nicolas. *A People's Art History of the United States: 250 Years of Activist Art and Artists Working in Social Justice Movements*. The New Press, 2013, p.259.

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰² Selling social awareness is a strategy of “cool marketing.” As Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright explain, “the marketing of social awareness involves creation of signs that equate social awareness with coolness and the attachment of social ideals to particular products (...) selling the idea that certain kinds of purchases can be both philanthropic and pleasurable.” Sturken, Marita, Cartwright, Lisa. *Op.cit.* p.297.

PWAs in order to sell consumer goods. They responded to it by drawing a condom beneath the ad and writing: “There’s only one pullover this photograph should be used to sell.” Below this they inserted their own logo, “Silence=Death.”⁴⁰³ Another of Benetton’s “AIDS ad” appeared on the cover of its *Colors Magazine* in June 1994, featuring a doctored photograph of Ronald Reagan. Reagan’s face, deeply emaciated, was covered with Kaposi Sarcoma (KS) lesions.⁴⁰⁴ (Appendix 23) The ad was a faux obituary designed to denounce Reagan’s ineffective response to AIDS. At the same time, it emphasized the fact that AIDS could happen to anyone. Yet, as Simon Watney points out:

[The ad] employed specific signs of physical deformation in order to demonize Reagan in precisely the same way that others have used the same signs to demonize people with AIDS in general. In either case, AIDS is held to be intrinsically disgusting – supposed ‘evidence’ of depravity and immorality, or, as in the Benetton ad, of government neglect and hypocrisy.⁴⁰⁵

Thus, by putting positive images of PWAs and queer people on display, Gran Fury’s anti-ads both asserted PWA’s right to be included in the public space while talking back to current ads. One of its posters evoked advertising developed by Coca-Cola. The Coke advertisement featured a white slogan on a red background with a white swirl separating “Enjoy” from “Coca Cola.” Gran Fury appropriated the image, which now read: “Enjoy AZT.” Additional text at the bottom of the poster stated:

The U.S. government has spent one billion dollars over the past 10 years to research new AIDS drugs. The result: 1 drug, AZT. It makes half of the people who try it sick and for the other half it stops working after a year. Is AZT the last, best hope for people with AIDS, or is it a shortcut to the killing Burroughs Wellcome is making in the AIDS marketplace? Scores of drugs languish in government pipelines, while fortunes are made on this monopoly.⁴⁰⁶ (Appendix 24)

After the text, Gran Fury added one more statement, in all capitals, which asked, “IS THIS HEALTH CARE OR WEALTH CARE?” Relying on the audience’s familiarity with the design, the collective denounced the fact that marketing AIDS drugs was a business-oriented

⁴⁰³ Cooter, Roger, Stein, Claudia. “Positioning the Image of AIDS.” *Endeavour*, Vol.34, No.1, 2010, p.13.

⁴⁰⁴ Interestingly, as Gran Fury points out, their strategies were incorporated into advertising. They cite Benetton’s *Colors* magazine as an example of this appropriation: “Many of the strategies they used were borrowed from projects we had done; we had been contacted by a researcher from Benetton who asked for examples of our work, saying they would be considered for inclusion in the magazine; instead, they reworked our strategies, skewing them in a surreal direction with little or no context in which to interpret the images or statistics.” See: Gran Fury. “Good Luck, Miss You...” *AIDS Riot: Collectifs d’artistes face au Sida / Activist Collectives against AIDS, New York 1987-1994*. Ed. 12è Session de l’Ecole du Magasin. Grenoble: Magasin, 2003, p.304.

⁴⁰⁵ Watney, Simon. *Imagine Hope (Social Aspects of AIDS)*. Routledge, 2000 p.194.

⁴⁰⁶ Gran Fury. “Enjoy AZT.” Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library. *The New York Public Library Digital Collections*. <<http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47e3-4dc2-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>> (Accessed on June 7, 2017)

venture, just as marketing Coke was. Indeed, AZT cost \$12,000 per year when it was first marketed in 1987, which made the drug inaccessible for a majority of people with AIDS.⁴⁰⁷

Zines employed similar aesthetic strategies of *détournement* and their anti-ads were as biting as Gran Fury's. The cover of *DPN*'s first issue was in fact reminiscent of Gran Fury's appropriative style. Parodying Palmolive commercials featuring Madge-the-Manicurist, the picture contained a close up of two hands above a fingerbowl and a caption indicting George Bush for his lack of action on HIV/AIDS: "The blood of over 100,000 Americans who have died of AIDS, Mr. President? You're soaking in it!" The back cover featured the same two hands, with one stating, "But...But it's not my fault! I inherited this problem from the previous administration" while the other hand replies "An administration in which you were Vice President for EIGHT YEARS! Now put your fingers back in that bowl and deal with it!"⁴⁰⁸ (Appendix 25) The zine's anti-ads also vividly condemned pharmaceutical companies. *DPN*'s Barbie subvertisement recognized that, if Barbie was a "trademark of Mattel, Inc.," AIDS was a trademark of "Burroughs Wellcome, Inc. All Rights Reserved."⁴⁰⁹ In the same way as the "Enjoy AZT" campaign and *Rockville is Burning* did, *DPN* reminded its readers that large pharmaceutical companies like Burroughs Wellcome put profit over availability and access to AIDS treatments. The back cover of *DPN*'s final issue was a scathing attack on pharmaceutical greed, advertising "AZT Lite." The language of the ad ridiculed consumer notions of "fitting in" by purchasing certain products: "I realized that I wasn't like all of the other boys, that I somehow didn't fit in... I was the only one not taking AZT."⁴¹⁰ This was accompanied by *DPN*'s critique of HIV/AIDS medication prices: "to make you stand even closer in solidarity with all of your friends, you'll pay the same outrageous price as for the regular full-strength capsules! (...) The recommended oral dose is \$25 every four hours."⁴¹¹

While Gran Fury's subvertisements were meant to invade public space, *DPN*'s remained within the confines of their queer counterpublic, which granted them relative freedom. Their ads were thus a mix of grotesque, humoristic, and political subversion. The zine targeted pop culture icon, Barbie, who became AIDS Barbie. The *DPN* ad featured in its eighth issue promoted three naked smiling AIDS Barbie dolls: AIDS Barbie with Kaposi's

⁴⁰⁷ The price was brought down to \$10,000 after demos against Burroughs Wellcome. France, David. *How to Survive a Plague*. Deckle Hedge, 2016, pp.381-382.

⁴⁰⁸ *Diseased Pariah News*. Issue n°1, 1990.

⁴⁰⁹ *Diseased Pariah News*. Issue n°8, 1993, p.1.

⁴¹⁰ *Diseased Pariah News*. Issue n°10, 1999, p. 39. Quoted in De Moor, Katrien. "Diseased Pariahs and Difficult Patients." *Cultural Studies*, 19:6, 2005, p.741.

⁴¹¹ *Ibid.* pp.741-42.

Sarcoma and shingles, who was missing her right hand and whose legs were disfigured, AIDS Barbie with gynecological complications and malignant lymphoma – manifesting itself through lumps around her throat and armpits –, and AIDS Barbie with Wasting Syndrome and CMV Retinitis – an opportunistic infection that can lead to blindness – who appeared to be blind as her eyes had been whited-out and “X”s had been placed over them.⁴¹² (Appendix 26) While Barbie is the embodiment of white, heterosexual, middle-class feminine ideals, the fact that she was infected with HIV and dying of AIDS, something that was supposed to happen far away from her Malibu dream house, was a direct indictment of the discourse of the mainstream media which claimed white heterosexual women were unaffected by the epidemic. The caption read: “Nice girls don’t use condoms. Nice girls can’t say ‘NO!’ Now, for all of those nice girls, there’s...AIDS Barbie! And she thought math class was tough!”⁴¹³ In other words, *DPN*’s subvertisement denounced society’s double standards when it comes to women and sex: because girls are taught to act “nice,” they both should not engage in sexual relationships nor should they say “no” to sexual advances, which means that they cannot negotiate safer sex. Yet, now that she had AIDS, Barbie could be “complimented on her slim, trim new figure.” Her Malibu house became her “dream hospice,” consisting of a single bed and an IV rack – although there was still “room for Ken and Barbie’s younger sister Skipper too!” –:

Don’t let AIDS™ Barbie© waste away in an empty shoebox...Let her spend her final days languishing in her very own new Malibu Dream Hospice! And while its true that all the opulence in the world won’t save AIDS™ Barbie© from her final demise, it will leave you feeling better – and that’s what really matters, doesn’t it? ⁴¹⁴ (Appendix 27)

Queer AIDS media therefore had an ambivalent relationship with mainstream culture. Although the dominant culture did not or barely acknowledge them, queer people and PWAs still saw themselves as comprising part of its audience. As Bordowitz remarks,

The queer theft of straight culture must not be viewed merely as oppositional (...). It is possible to feel both admiration and contempt for dominant culture, and queers may easily have contradictory feelings about the culture that ignores and ridicules us.⁴¹⁵

⁴¹² “AIDS Barbie.” *Diseased Pariah News*, Issue n°8, 1993, p.1.

⁴¹³ The phrase “And she thought math class was tough” was a reference to the talking Barbie sold by the Mattel Corporation in 1992. The doll spoke one of over fifty different phrases each time the string in her back was pulled. Two of these phrases were “Math class is tough!” and “Let’s go shopping!” These statements drew the ire of many who thought that such phrases perpetuated sexist stereotypes, and a group of artists and activists, the “Barbie Liberation Organization” (BLO), formed in New York. They purchased several Barbie and G.I. Joe dolls, and exchanged Barbie voice chips for GI Joe ones. BLO members returned all of the reprogrammed dolls back to the stores and later claimed responsibility for the action. Brouwer, Daniel. “Representations of Gay Men.” *Op.cit.* p.155.

⁴¹⁴ “AIDS Barbie’s New Malibu Dream Hospice.” *Diseased Pariah News*. Issue n°9, 1994.

⁴¹⁵ Bordowitz, Gregg. “The AIDS Crisis is Ridiculous.” *Op.cit.* p.217.

One of the ways in which this contradiction played out was through the use of popular music in queer AIDS videos. Music served as similar purpose as the references to newspapers and footage of network television that were inserted within the tapes, or the production of subvertisements. They situated the issues in relation to the public discussion of AIDS and “ground[ed] the tape[s] in genuinely popular cultural production.”⁴¹⁶

II.2.2. MTV Activism: Songs as Agit P(r)op

Queer AIDS media’s videomaking and editing style resembled that of MTV. In the 1980s and 1990s, the music channel’s favored visual effects – quick cuts, sharp editing, cutaways, flash dissolves, slow motion – became common in both advertising and the movies, as well as in alternative videotapes.⁴¹⁷ Although “MTV filmmaking” might be a pejorative way of referring to their style, queer AIDS media makers embraced and transcoded⁴¹⁸ a phrase originally used by more “traditional” radicals to undermine their work.⁴¹⁹ Just as people who referred to themselves as “queer,” video activists gave new meaning to a once demeaning term. As Ray Navarro explained: “We tried to seize upon that term, “MTV activism,” and turn it around, calling it “More Than a Virus” activism. Yes, it’s MTV activism. It’s more than a virus that’s killing us.”⁴²⁰ Queer AIDS videos did not use songs in an innocuous manner: they were an integral part of the message they were trying to convey. Bordowitz describes TTL’s efforts as “an attempt to use the music television form – a commodity form – as a form of truly popular culture. We appropriated some of the tropes of MTV to deploy them as agit-prop.”⁴²¹ Some queer AIDS videomakers thought it could make some of their tapes more watchable for the general public, as songs could render complex concerns in ways that were accessible.⁴²² At once seductive and instructive, their tapes worked as a kind of advertisement for activism.⁴²³

⁴¹⁶ Bordowitz, Gregg. “Picture a Coalition.” *Op.cit.* p.192.

⁴¹⁷ Collins, Robert M. *Transforming America: Politics and Culture in the Reagan Years*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007, p.167.

⁴¹⁸ Transcoding, a term coined by Stuart Hall, consists in “taking an existing meaning and re-appropriating it for new meanings.” In other words, it is a process of language appropriation for political empowerment. Social movements sometimes take terms that are derogatory and reuse them in empowering ways. Hall, Stuart. *Representation Practices*. *Op.cit.* p.270.

⁴¹⁹ Solomon, Alisa. “AIDS Crusaders Act Up a Storm.” 1989. Reprinted in *Radical Street Performance: An International Anthology*. Ed. Jan Cohen-Cruz. Routledge, 2013. p.49.

⁴²⁰ Quoted in Watney, Simon. *Imagine Hope*. *Op.cit.* p.97. See also *Ray Navarro Memorial Tape*.

⁴²¹ Bordowitz, Gregg. “Picture a Coalition.” *Op.cit.* p.188.

⁴²² Watney, Simon. *Imagine Hope*. *Op.cit.* p.97.

⁴²³ Cvetkovich, Ann. “Video, AIDS, and Activism.” *Op.cit.* p.189.

DIVA TV's 1991 tape's title, *Like a Prayer*, is a reference to pop singer Madonna's song of the same name, which functions as a leitmotiv in the video and holds the various sections of the tape together.⁴²⁴ The decision to use this song is significant, given its subversive dual meaning. The lyrics are based on sexual and religious innuendos, which led to calls for boycott from the Catholic Church and the American Family Association.⁴²⁵ Therefore, this song connected the issues put forward in the "Stop the Church" protest – namely the Catholic Church's staunch condemnation of safe sex and abortion – to the general moral and artistic climate of the culture wars in the United States. Other sequences in DIVA TV's tapes function almost as self-contained video clips. In *Target City Hall*, Lou Reed's song "There is no time" (1989)⁴²⁶ and Melanie's "Lay down (Candles in the rain)" (1969)⁴²⁷ were edited over footage of protests to illustrate the urgency of the crisis. The lyrics echoed PWAs' situation and demonstrated the need to put one's body on the line through nonviolent direct action: Melanie's song declares that they "had all caught the same disease," and, as Lou Reed's chorus makes it clear, PWAs had "no time;" therefore, they should "lay down" in the streets to make their voices heard. Evoking civil disobedience, these songs empowered the protagonists, as people with a disease became the main characters, heroes even, in a music video clip that did not show them alone on their deathbed but trying to implement change and being arrested by the police, surrounded by their community. Other original songs that dealt directly with the epidemic had a clear political stance as well, such as "Living in Wartime," written by PWA and activist Michael Callen.⁴²⁸ Bordowitz explains TTL's motives in choosing the song for *Testing the Limits: NYC*:

This song was used as a vehicle to organize information and propel the viewer through the material (...). Both lyrics and melody are used as a formal, rhetorical structure that narrativizes the roughly compiled material within the tape. The song functions to organize the dense arrangement of information, shaping it into a work of propaganda.⁴²⁹

⁴²⁴ Madonna. "Like a Prayer." 1989. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=79fzeNUqQbQ>> (Accessed on April, 14, 2017)

⁴²⁵ Holden, Stephen. "Madonna Re-Creates Herself." *New York Times*, March 19, 1989. <<http://www.nytimes.com/1989/03/19/arts/madonna-re-creates-herself-again.html?pagewanted=all>> (Accessed on April 12, 2017)

⁴²⁶ Reed, Lou. "There is no time." 1989. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ygNAnIG8g_E> (Accessed on April 12, 2017)

⁴²⁷ Melanie. "Lay Down (Candles in the Rain)." 1970. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hlp3wme4bbI>> (Accessed on April 12, 2017)

⁴²⁸ The Flirtations. "Living in Wartime." 1988. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sLaz9tJf1P8>> (Accessed on April 11, 2017)

⁴²⁹ Bordowitz, Gregg. "Picture a Coalition." *Op.cit.* p.188.

Hip-hop music, a genre popular in the 1980s, was omnipresent in queer AIDS videos.⁴³⁰ The collectives would either use pre-existing songs, such as “Expression” by the female hip-hop trio Salt-N-Pepa featured in *Like a Prayer*, or activists would write their own rap songs about AIDS issues.⁴³¹ In *Voices from the Front*, there are many instances of activists singing rap songs, such as “Final Hour,” “Is That Right 2 U,” “Cop A Plea,” and “You, Me, Us” sung and performed by ACT UP activist Tony Malliaris. In *Testing the Limits: NYC* (1987), a section of the rap called “Respect Yourself,” produced by the Philadelphia AIDS Task Force, is used in a transition between a section on civil liberties and one on education. The transition is quick paced, and urban images are contrasted with images of protest.⁴³² Here again, the songs were inserted with a wish to empower PWAs and AIDS activists. The lyrics of “Final Hour,” written before ACT UP’s “Storm the NIH” action, are a good example of how PWAs decided to use rap music to express their concerns:

Two kinds of positive. One ain't so good. The other kind gets me do the first like I knew it could. Talking about HIV: I own it and A-C-T-U-P: you've shown it works, in any way or form, we target, we seize, tomorrow we storm. Hey, am I gettin' through to you? Because all of this, it ain't nothin' new. This is the story of a coalition, my interpretation, my rendition of ACT UP, the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, the NIH and its final hour. Can you say it with me? Storm the NIH. Let's go. Storm the NIH. This is war.

Videomakers made use of a genre that had historical and cultural significance. Hip-hop music, which emerged in the 1970s and experienced a second wave in the 1980s, was a means of expression for minority voices. Therefore, hip-hop music and rap aesthetics traditionally function as a counter-hegemonic discourse. As Kylo Patrick Hart writes, “rap music and videos (...) regularly destabilize hegemonic discourses (...) by critiquing the various forms of social oppression they enable.”⁴³³ Like queer AIDS media, hip-hop also exploited linguistic and cultural taboos. The use of rap in queer AIDS media is all the more relevant since hip-hop music has a history of homophobia.⁴³⁴ Activists were therefore reclaiming a discourse that had traditionally been perceived as excluding queer people.

Some songs used also had a queer undertone. Jimmy Somerville’s “Read my lips” (1989), heard in *Voices from the Front* (1991), was a clear reference to ACT UP, as it bore the

⁴³⁰ MTV’s most popular program at the time was *Yo, MTV Raps*. See: Collins, Robert C. *Op.cit.* p.166.

⁴³¹ Salt-N-Pepa. “Expression.” 1990. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ej6pQFfA_fo> (Accessed on April 12, 2017).

⁴³² Bordowitz, Gregg. “Picture a Coalition.” *Op.cit.* p.192.

⁴³³ Hart, Kylo-Patrick R. “When Style Becomes Substance: The Form and Function of a Rap Aesthetic in the AIDS Movie *Chocolate Babies*.” *Interdisciplinary Humanities*, Fall 2011, Vol. 28, Issue 2, p.39.

⁴³⁴ Summers, Claude J. “R&B, Hip-Hop and Reggae.” *The Queer Encyclopedia of Music, Dance, and Musical Theater*. San Francisco: Cleis Press, 2004, p.205.

same name as a poster designed by Gran Fury.⁴³⁵ Similarly, the title of PPTV's *Transformer AIDS* program can be read as an allusion to Lou Reed's 1972 album, "Transformer."⁴³⁶ In actual fact, Lou Reed's song, "Make Up" – which encourages people to come "out of our closets, out in the streets" – frames the video.⁴³⁷ The program also uses songs by Erasure, another popular band of the 1980s. As Jimmy Somerville and Erasure's singer were seen as gay icons and Lou Reed was openly bisexual, they were all considered to be emblems of queer culture,⁴³⁸ just like Madonna was.⁴³⁹ Thus, these music references would have been spotted by people who belonged to the queer community. Queer AIDS videos were therefore directed both at a mainstream audience, who could understand the "propaganda" message more easily thanks to music, but also at an audience that had the keys to decipher such references, which confirms the idea of a queer counterpublic developed in our first part.

The idea of talking back to, appropriating, or re-reading the dominant culture was not a new phenomenon for queer people. As Corey Creekmur writes: "Historically (...) gays and lesbians have (...) related to mass culture *differently*, through an alternative or negotiated, if not always fully subversive, reception of the products and messages of popular culture."⁴⁴⁰ This distinctive relationship with the mainstream led queer AIDS media makers to use excess as the ultimate weapon of subversion against the dominant culture. In order to balance – or even counterbalance – what they saw as being unbalanced reporting, they provided their viewers with images and discursive modes nowhere to be found in the mainstream media.

⁴³⁵ In fact, Somerville's song is an example artistic/activist cross-fertilization, as he is sporting an ACT UP T-shirt in his music video and his album was dedicated to Larry Kramer. Jimmy Somerville. "Read my Lips." (1990). <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=US0siTh5BeU>> (Accessed on April 11, 2017)

⁴³⁶ *Transformer AIDS: Bob Kinney Looks at Media and Governmental Response to AIDS*. Paper Tiger TV/Southwest San Diego, 1989. <https://archive.org/details/ddtv_94_transformer_aids> (Accessed on September 3, 2016)

⁴³⁷ Lou Reed. "Make Up." 1972. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6TFb03PmScY>> (Accessed on April 12, 2017)

⁴³⁸ See: Summers, Claude J. "Somerville, Jimmy," "Reed, Lou," and "Bell, Andy." *The Queer Encyclopedia of Music, Dance, and Musical Theater*. San Francisco: Cleis Press, 2004, pp.240; 215-216; 20-21.

⁴³⁹ In his essay on the cultural role played by Madonna in the queer community, Michael Musto writes: "By now, we finally seem willing to release Judy Garland from her afterlife responsibility of being our quintessential icon. And in the land of the living, career stagnation has robbed Diana, Liza, and Barbra of their chances, while Donna thumped the Bible on our heads in a way that made it bounce back into her face. That leaves Madonna as Queer Queen, and she merits the title as someone who isn't afraid to offend straight America, if it does the rest of us some good." See: Musto, Michael. "Immaculate Connection." *Out in Culture: Gay, Lesbian and Queer Essays on Popular Culture*. Eds. Corey K. Creekmur, Alexander Doty. Duke University Press, 1995, p.428.

⁴⁴⁰ Creekmur, Corey K, Doty, Alexander. "Introduction." *Out in Culture: Gay, Lesbian and Queer Essays on Popular Culture*. Eds. Corey K. Creekmur, Alexander Doty. Duke University Press, 1995, p.1.

II.3. Re-Balancing Media Coverage Through Excess

The mass media traditionally follow a number of “protective considerations” which exist to protect their viewers, the most important one being “taste.”⁴⁴¹ This consideration is applied by taboos, mainly against nudity, profanity, sacrilege, which exist to protect both the audience from being upset and the news media from negative audience reactions.⁴⁴² Queer AIDS media bypassed these rules, by explicitly showing and talking about specific sexual acts and openly making fun of disease and death. They subverted the authority of sanctioned discourses and crossed the boundaries of the acceptable and the authorized. In the world of queer AIDS media, the comic replaced the tragic, the proper was improper, and the outrageous became the norm.

II.3.1. Making the Invisible Visible: Re-eroticizing and Re-glamorizing the AIDS Body

When the networks started to cover AIDS, they did not use clear language to explain how the disease was spread and instead referred to abstract medical language such as the transmission of “bodily fluids.” Similarly, because of the AIDS scare of the media and the position of the Reagan administration regarding condoms, one rarely saw depictions of safer-sex on television. Finally, homosexuality was still frowned upon by many, and the media avoided depicting same-sex couples being intimate on screen. John Greyson, in his music video *ADS: Acquired Dread of Sex* (1987), claimed that what was actually sweeping the nation was the media’s “ADS epidemic,” instilling fear of sex in the whole population.⁴⁴³ Queer activists and PWAs responded to attacks on their rights to be positively represented and explicitly educated about AIDS by providing their audience with sex-positive imagery. They encouraged and engaged in frank discussions of safer-sex practices, in order to inform people about the ways of transmission of the virus and to reclaim their right to sexual freedom. As *IFP* states:

THE answer isn't MONOGAMY or VANILLA [sex] or CELIBACY (...) We did it all and we can, will and are doing it all again (...) But know [sic] we know HOW TO DO IT SAFELY! STOP TELLING PEOPLE WHAT WE DID WRONG!⁴⁴⁴

⁴⁴¹ Gans, Herbert J. *Deciding What's News: A Study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek, and Time*. New York: Vintage, 1980, p.243.

⁴⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴⁴³ Greyson, John. “The ADS Epidemic.” 1987. <<https://vimeo.com/39506044>> (Accessed on June 4, 2017)

⁴⁴⁴ Long, Thomas L. “Plague of Pariahs.” *Op.cit.* p.404.

Queer AIDS media displayed counter-hegemonic images of the AIDS and queer body, which was re-erotized and re-sexualized. *YELL*'s pages were full of explicit safe sex advice, and *DPN* explicitly repudiated the assumption that PWAs should not be sexual. "We're all still sexual creatures, no matter how much our ever-so-concerned sero-negative caregivers would like us to live in a saintly abstinence, so there's no reason why we shouldn't find ourselves and others like us attractive," was the justification the editors gave for the proliferation of erotic AIDS bodies in their zine, which mostly took the form of sexually explicit photographs and a safe-sex comic book.⁴⁴⁵ Speaking about *Tongues Untied*, Marlon Riggs remarked:

The tendency when talking about homosexuality in majority culture is to deal with us politically or culturally, but [when] (...) the physicality of our identity (...) gets let out, (...) [that] is the most threatening. (...) It was essential (...) that (...) I not make this work easy for straights to consume by erasing our sexuality as physical people (...). The affirmation of sensuality, physicality, sexual love, particularly in the age of AIDS [is] implicit throughout the piece.⁴⁴⁶

Additionally, the mainstream media tended to present PWAs as lonely and emaciated, the implicit result of their "deviance." Queer AIDS media makers tried to show positive images of queer sexuality that took an explicit stance against passive, isolated, and de-sexualized representations of PWAs. *Kissing Doesn't Kill*, Gran Fury's poster which depicted interracial couples kissing, stressed the necessity to render queer HIV-positive bodies visible in the public sphere. In addition to billboards, they produced thirty-second PSAs that also featured a multiracial cast and aired on public access television. The ad ended with the captions: "Kissing Doesn't Kill. Corporate Greed, Government Inaction and Public Indifference Make AIDS a Political Crisis."⁴⁴⁷ Gran Fury later went on to produce the *Read My Lips* posters, which showed vintage images of same-sex couples embracing (Appendix 28).⁴⁴⁸ In producing affirmative counter-images representing queer desires, they insisted that sexual liberation should be at the core of AIDS activism. As Cindy Patton argued, "AIDS must not be viewed as proof that sexual exploration and the elaboration of sexual community were mistakes. (...) Lesbians and gay men (...) must maintain that vision of sexual

⁴⁴⁵ *Diseased Pariah News*. Issue n°4, 1991, p.16.

⁴⁴⁶ Vaucher, Andrea, *Muses from Chaos and Ash: AIDS, Artists and Art*. Grove Press, 1993, p.136.

⁴⁴⁷ Kalin, Tom. "Kissing Doesn't Kill." Public Service Announcement, 1989.

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mcr4CZs5Ciw>> (Accessed on January 17, 2016)

⁴⁴⁸ From May 1 to 9, 1988, ACT UP chapters around the country mounted nine days of protests – called the Nine Days of Rage – focusing specific aspects of the epidemic, such as IV drug use, homophobia, AIDS and people of color, women, and children, testing programs, and prison programs. For the day of protest against homophobia, Gran Fury combined the phrase "Read my lips" with historical images of same-sex couples: a World War II shot of kissing sailors and a 1920s photograph of two women gazing into each other's eyes. "Read my lips" acquired an extra layer of significance a few months later when George Bush made the following remark: "Read my lips: no new taxes," during his acceptance speech at the Republican national convention. Meyer, Richard. "This Is to Enrage You." *Op.cit.* p.68.

liberation.”⁴⁴⁹ Furthermore, by using recovered homoerotic imagery, *Gran Fury* tied the act of same-sex kissing to a larger legacy of queer visibility and self-representation.⁴⁵⁰

In addition to re-sexualizing the AIDS body, queer AIDS media re-glamorized it. While there is nothing glamorous about a deadly epidemic, what emerges from some queer AIDS media works is also the importance of glamour and excess as vital attitudes towards AIDS.⁴⁵¹ The profusion of images transmitted through advertising and television’s programming in the 1980s – with shows such as *Dallas* or *Dynasty* – conveyed an obsession with wealth and glamour.⁴⁵² Embracing glamorous attitudes in the face of disease was thus another means for PWAs to respond to a culture that neglected and victimized them, while adopting an active and positive stance. If one had AIDS, they should, in the words of *DPN*’s columnist “Aunt Kaposi,” embrace “stigma with style.”⁴⁵³ The AIDS Barbie ad showed that PWAs could become “AIDS Divas” by camping it up with fancy hospital accessories. The editors indeed reminded the potential buyers of the AIDS Barbie:

Don’t forget to accessorize AIDS Barbie® with her own elegant Estée Lauder “European Mystique” oxygen gurney, Krups HI-FLO automated IV rack, and glamorous Bob Mackie designed bedpan with rhinestone accents!⁴⁵⁴

In a similar fashion, in *Silverlake Life: The View From Here*, Mark Massi uses glamour and camp* to alleviate the tension of his visit to the doctor when a nurse takes photographs of his KS lesions. Posing in front of the nurse’s camera, he exclaims, parodying Gloria Swanson’s iconic scene in the 1950 film noir *Sunset Boulevard*: “I’m ready for my close up now Mr. DeMille!”⁴⁵⁵ (Appendix 29) *DIVA* TV as well as some other affinity groups within ACT UP that featured within their tapes – such as *CHER*⁴⁵⁶ – bore names that clearly evoked diva

⁴⁴⁹ Patton, Cindy. *Sex and Germs: The Politics of AIDS*. Black Rose Books Ltd, 1986, p.142.

⁴⁵⁰ Meyer, Richard. “This Is to Enrage You.” *Op.cit.* p.68.

⁴⁵¹ Brouwer, Daniel. “Representations of Gay Men.” *Op.cit.* p.144.

⁴⁵² Although glamour was already present in Hollywood the 1930s and 1940s, years traditionally considered to mark the Golden Age of glamour, what changed in the 1980s was the quantity of glamorous images, “the sheer number of people that to different degrees conveyed them and the wide variety of places, media, and media outlets that transmitted them.” See: Gundle, Stephen. *Glamour: A History*. Oxford University Press, 2008, p.356 and Collins, Robert C. *Op. cit.* p.162.

⁴⁵³ “Advice for the Loveworn: Ask Aunt Kaposi.” *Diseased Pariah News*, Issue n°5, 1992, p.14.

⁴⁵⁴ “AIDS Barbie.” *Op.cit.*

⁴⁵⁵ Friedman, Peter. *Silverlake Life: The View From Here*. 1993.

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YjGVT4BUG-w>> (Accessed on January 17, 2017). The scene from *Sunset Boulevard* is available here: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zlcC8YJrevQ>> (Accessed on May 12, 2017)

⁴⁵⁶ The acronym *CHER* suggested the artist of the same name, as evidenced by the T-shirts worn by its members in *Target City Hall*, which featured a black and white photograph of the diva. The acronym also stood for “Cathy Has Extra Rollers,” “Crater Homosexuals Expounding Resolutions,” “Cute Hunks Establishing Realities” or even “Commie Homos Engaged in Revolution.” *DIVA* TV. *Target City Hall*. 1989.

culture.⁴⁵⁷ *DPN* used the term “Judy,” a name derived from Judy Garland’s sometimes used by gay men to refer to each other, in order to get its readers to subscribe to the zine. Underneath a small black and white picture of Judy Garland, the text read:

That’s right, Judy, your life would have been a whole lot easier with a *DPN* subscription. Don’t make Judy’s mistake, lurking around tawdry places like bookstores, foraging through piles of inferior publications only to discover that the last copy of *DPN* was sold hours ago!⁴⁵⁸

Indeed, Judy Garland was herself a glamorous icon of camp culture, especially after starring in *The Wizard of Oz* (1939). MGM’s classic motion picture was a common frame of reference for queer people. When read through a queer lens, the film presents a story in which everyone lives in two different worlds, and in which its characters live double lives. Dorothy, the teenage heroine, longs for a world in which she can express her inner desires. She finds this world in a Technicolor land “over the rainbow,” inhabited by a cowardly/sissy lion, an artificial man who cannot stop crying, and a butch-femme couple of witches.⁴⁵⁹ According to Corey Creekmur, this reading of the film sees its fantastic excesses – color, costume, song, performance – as expressing the hidden lives of many of its gay viewers, who identified themselves as “friends of Dorothy.”⁴⁶⁰ Excerpts from the movie were edited into footage of pride demonstrations in DIVA TV’s videotape, *Pride 69 – 89* (1989). For instance, during the 1989 pride march, a DIVA cameraperson asks a French bystander: “Have you ever seen anything like this before?” to which he answers: “No, we don’t have things like that (...) in France, or anywhere else in Europe.” To express the fact that he finds himself in unknown and uncomfortable surroundings, the videomakers inserted footage of *The Wizard of Oz* in which Dorothy arrives in the land of Oz and declares: “I have a feeling we’re not in Kansas anymore.”⁴⁶¹ DIVA TV’s use of images from *The Wizard of Oz* throughout the tape not only underlines the need for unity within the queer community at a time of crisis, but also shows that there is still room for playfulness during an epidemic.

The importance of performance and glamour as well as of excess and “bad taste” is perhaps best exemplified by *Stiff Sheets* (1989), a video record of a mock fashion show staged

⁴⁵⁷ For an account of gay men’s relationship to divas see: Dyer, Richard. “Judy Garland and Gay Men.” *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society*. Ed. Richard Dyer. British Film Institute, 1986, pp.137-200 and Harris, Daniel. “The Death of Camp: Gay Men and Hollywood Diva Worship, from Reverence to Ridicule.” *Salmagundi*, n°112, 1996, pp.166-191.

⁴⁵⁸ *Diseased Pariah News*. Issue n°1, 1990, p.4.

⁴⁵⁹ Creekmur, Corey K., Doty, Alexander. “Introduction.” *Op.cit.* p.3.

⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.* Garland’s *Wizard of Oz* character became a code word within the gay subcultures before Gay Liberation. One could know whether another man was gay by euphemistically asking: “Are you friend of Dorothy’s?” Benshoff, Harry M., Griffin, Sean. *Op.cit.* pp.67-68 and p.101.

⁴⁶¹ DIVA TV. *Pride 69-89*. 1989.

by the Stiff Sheet collective from ACT UP Los Angeles.⁴⁶² The disclaimer at the beginning of the show warns the viewer that, like many other works about AIDS, the performance is addressed to a queer counterpublic: “And now for a little polite disclaimer, this fashion show is brought to you in the worst taste imaginable. And you are the most sensitized of audiences imaginable, so if you are offended, we are too.” While the show adopted the aesthetics of televised fashion shows, its outrageousness enabled AIDS activists to turn current AIDS policies into ridicule. As a protester wearing a hospital gown adorned with a pink triangle and identification number walks on the red carpet, the master of ceremony’s (MC) comments indict legislative proposals which aimed to quarantine PWAs – such as California Proposition 64 – that were given considerable attention in the media: “Personalized identification number and standard pink triangle take this outfit out of the hospital and into the relocation center. This trend is infectious and is spreading into the heterosexual community, so be sure to order now before Auschwitz next spring.”⁴⁶³ In order to condemn government inaction regarding treatments, the “active sportswear” segment features a man walking down the runway wearing sweatpants and a sweatshirt. The MC then announces:

Can’t get those new drug protocols? Tired of standing in those long lines? Night sweats are just what the doctors ordered! More than a fashion, it’s a condition. More than a style, it’s a symptom. These sweats attract little to no attention at all. It took eight years of federal inaction to perfect this outfit, and they’ll last a lifetime.

Stiff Sheets also passes humorous self-reflexive comments on their campy performance: “And what to wear in the new AIDS quarantine camps? Never underestimate your hoop skirts! Malvena used to work as a successful consultant for security pacific bank before he was tested and deported. But since arriving at camp, he’s emerged as the leading campy camp drag queen!” Humor therefore appeared to be a fundamental discursive mode of resistance for PWAs, as it was another way for them to rebalance mass media coverage on HIV/AIDS. If the mass media tended to present AIDS as a tragedy, queer AIDS media makers thought that, in the words of Gregg Bordowitz, the AIDS crisis was actually “ridiculous.”

⁴⁶² Goss, John C. *Stiff Sheets*. 1989. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GJ7CT7D92Yo>> (Accessed on April 11, 2017). From January 21 to 28, 1989, ACT UP / LA set up a vigil at LA County/University of Southern California Medical Center to protest the slow response to AIDS. They demanded the immediate creation of AIDS service and facilities. On the sixth evening of the vigil, an anonymous collective of gay artists, using the pseudonym Stiff Sheets, presented a fashion show to entertain the demonstrators. Bordowitz, Gregg. “The AIDS Crisis is Ridiculous.” *Op.cit.* p.213.

⁴⁶³ For more on quarantine policies, see: Demus, Axelle. “Framing the AIDS Crisis (...).” *Op.cit.* pp. 131-32.

II.3.2. Turning Hierarchies Upside Down: Pushing the Boundaries of Acceptable AIDS Discourse

Humor was not a new feature of social movements. First and Second Wave feminists used humor to defy sexist ideologies and challenge stereotypes of feminists as humorless.⁴⁶⁴ In David Feinberg's words, humor was used by PWAs as "a way of lessening the horror,"⁴⁶⁵ as laughter typically demolishes fear before an object.⁴⁶⁶ It was also a strategy to "attain a certain amount of control."⁴⁶⁷ In first issue of *DPN*, the editors justify their decision to approach AIDS from the angle of humor as follows:

So what is this? A bunch of AIDS jokes? What's so damn funny about a pandemic devastating the world? Well, *we* have it and sometimes we find it amusing. After all, life itself kills everybody, and there's much about life that is purty darn funny, if you like humor. Besides, who wants to be serious all the time, even about fatal illness? So what we're hoping to do here is bring some much-needed levity to the experience of HIV infection.⁴⁶⁸

By opting for a discursive mode that was completely at odds with that of the mainstream media, PWAs performed a critical stance against hegemony in an attempt to disrupt and demystify oppressive and artificial structures.⁴⁶⁹ Queer AIDS media's humor was therefore fundamentally carnivalesque in the Bakhtinian sense of the term: "Carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order, it marked the suspensions of all hierarchies, ranks, privileges, norms, and prohibition."⁴⁷⁰ Activists directly interfered with dominant discourses which insisted that AIDS was inevitably a tragic death sentence and which represented the person with AIDS as a suffering victim who could not escape their fate. According to the discourse of the media, gay men's "deviancy" made their disease and death from AIDS both inevitable and acceptable.⁴⁷¹ The tragic frame indeed requires a sacrificial scapegoat – in this case, the PWA – who dies and/or is banished by society in a symbolic attempt to rid itself of impurity and sickness.⁴⁷² As Adrienne E.

⁴⁶⁴ Guenther, Katja M., Radojic, Natasha, Mulligan, Kerry. "Humor, Collective Identity, and Framing in the New Atheist Movement." *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts, and Change*. Ed. Patrick G. Coy. Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 2015, p.207.

⁴⁶⁵ Feinberg, David. "AIDS and Humor." Quoted in De Moor, Katrien. *Op.cit.* p.741.

⁴⁶⁶ Bakhtin, Mikhail. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Edited by Michael Holquist, University of Texas Press, 1981, p.23.

⁴⁶⁷ Feinberg, David. *Op.cit.* p.741.

⁴⁶⁸ *Diseased Pariah News*. Issue n° 1, 1990, p.2.

⁴⁶⁹ Dyer, Richard. "It's Being so Camp as Keeps us Going." *Body Politic*, September 1977, p.12.

⁴⁷⁰ Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Rabelais and His World*. Translated by Helene Isowlsky, Indiana University Press, 1984, p.10.

⁴⁷¹ Christiansen, Adrienne E., Hanson, Jeremy J. "Comedy As Cure For Tragedy: ACT UP and the Rhetoric of AIDS." *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, Vol. 82, 1996, p.161.

⁴⁷² *Ibid.*, p.159.

Christiansen and Jeremy J. Hanson explain, “Gay men had to be symbolically scapegoated in order to reify social hierarchies and to maintain social order.”⁴⁷³

Therefore, queer AIDS media shifted the tragic discourse to a comic frame. In particular, PWAs used camp and gallows humor, that is, humor that makes fun of unpleasant subjects such as death and illness.⁴⁷⁴ While it is usually seen as inappropriate to laugh in the face of death, this did not deter *DPN*'s editors from running pieces such as “signs of death,” a checklist meant to “tell the difference between a dead PWA and a living HIVer.” In addition to “Death rattle. (Never a good sign)” and “No response to shaking or shouting,” among the items on the list were “Confusion about time and place and identity of close and familiar people. (Both of these sound like Ronald Reagan to me)” and “abrupt cessation of sarcasm.”⁴⁷⁵

More than laughing openly in the face of death and disease, queer AIDS media often intentionally distorted mainstream images to render them, as well as the epidemic itself, grotesque. Mikhail Bakhtin defines the grotesque as “the exaggeration of the improper.”⁴⁷⁶ It relies on the material level of the body and focuses on genitals and specific body parts such as the mouth or the anus.⁴⁷⁷ The grotesque thus emphasizes “eating, drinking, defecation” and elimination such as sweating as well as other acts such as copulation.⁴⁷⁸ Like the carnivalesque, the grotesque implies a reversal of hierarchies, as “the essential topographical element of the bodily hierarchy [is] turned upside down; the lower stratum replaces the upper stratum.”⁴⁷⁹ Thus, the grotesque is part of the unofficial speech of the people. As Bakhtin explains:

The body that figures in all the expressions of the unofficial speech of the people is the body that (...) is sick and dying (...). Wherever men laugh (...), particularly in a familiar environment, their speech is filled with bodily images. The body copulates, defecates, (...), and men's speech is flooded with genitals, (...) defecations, urine, disease (...).⁴⁸⁰

⁴⁷³ Christiansen, Adrienne E., Hanson, Jeremy J. *Op.cit.* p.161.

⁴⁷⁴ “Gallows Humor.” Cambridge Dictionary Website.

<<http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/gallows-humour>> (Accessed on May 8, 2017). Camp humor is similar to gallows humor. Esther Newton explains: “Camp humor is a system of laughing at one's incongruous position instead of crying. That is, the humor does not cover up, it transforms.” Newton, Esther. “Role Models.” *Camp Grounds: Style and Homosexuality*. Ed. David Bergman. Amherst University of Massachusetts Press, 1993, p.49.

⁴⁷⁵ “Signs of Death.” *Diseased Pariah News*. Issue n°8, 1993, p.24.

⁴⁷⁶ Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Rabelais and His World*. *Op.cit.* p.30.

⁴⁷⁷ *Ibid.* p.317.

⁴⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁹ *Ibid.* p.309.

⁴⁸⁰ *Ibid.* p.319.

Zines in particular regarded the AIDS body as an exceptionally grotesque site. *DPN*'s parodic and derisive depictions of mainstream iconography and well-known figures are a case in point. The AIDS Barbie dolls, with their lesions, blindness, and wasting syndrome, represented a mainstream icon of beauty physically disfigured by the disease. More grotesque even are the zine's depictions of Republican Senator Jesse Helms. The cover of *DPN*'s second issue entitled "Piss Jesse," a clear reference to Andres Serrano's highly controversial photograph "Piss Christ" (1987), depicts the senator's head submerged in a jar of urine. (Appendix 30) Helms was also portrayed in *DPN*'s tenth issue, whose cover features a grotesque depiction of the senator squatting, wearing nothing but cowboy boots and a hat. Smoldering cigarettes are protruding out of his anus, and the caption underneath the senator reads: "deliberate, disgusting, revolting conduct!" (Appendix 30) This picture also alludes to the culture wars, as it recalls Robert Mapplethorpe's photograph, "Self-Portrait with Whip."⁴⁸¹ The cigarettes evoke both "fags," a derogatory slang for gay people, as well as Helms's ties to the tobacco industry, which he strongly supported.⁴⁸² The caption suggests the senator's continuous determination to reduce AIDS funding in 1995, when he declared in Congress that "deliberate, disgusting, revolting conduct" was responsible for the disease.⁴⁸³ By presenting Helms in such a grotesque position, *he* becomes the abject face of AIDS standing accused of "deliberate, disgusting, and revolting conduct" for his stance against AIDS education funding.

Contrary to the bodiless, hidden PWA of the mainstream media, zines did not shy away from showing the bodily reality of HIV/AIDS, often in a humorous manner. *DPN* advertised their nudie centerfold as "sick," playing on the double meaning of the word,⁴⁸⁴ when they claimed: "Darn! Our Centerfold is Sick!"⁴⁸⁵ In addition to these nude pictures and the graphic depictions of genitals that circulated throughout their issues, zinesters also wrote extensively and explicitly about bodily symptoms such as nausea, diarrhea, oral thrush, as well as secretions such as semen. Similarly, *Stiff Sheet*'s bridal wear section introduced the grotesque "unsafe" bridal gown, "featuring last decade's look." It was "a well worn (...), tired bridal

⁴⁸¹ Mapplethorpe, Robert. *Self-Portrait with Whip*. 1978. <<https://www.artsy.net/artwork/robert-mapplethorpe-self-portrait-with-whip>> (Accessed on April 7, 2017)

⁴⁸² Pinsky, Mark I. "Helms Exhorts Tobacco Bloc to Fight Budget Cuts." *New York Times*, March 21, 1981. <<http://www.nytimes.com/1981/03/21/us/helms-exhorts-tobacco-bloc-to-fight-budget-cuts.html>> (Accessed on April 8, 2017)

⁴⁸³ Seelye, Katharine Q. "Helms Puts the Brakes to a Bill Financing AIDS Treatment." *New York Times*, July 5, 1995. <<http://www.nytimes.com/1995/07/05/us/helms-puts-the-brakes-to-a-bill-financing-aids-treatment.html>> (Accessed on April 12, 2017)

⁴⁸⁴ The Oxford Dictionary defines "sick" as follows: "affected by physical or mental illness." Informal (especially of humor): "having something unpleasant such as death, illness, or misfortune as its subject and dealing with it in an offensive way: 'This was someone's idea of a sick joke.'" Informal: "excellent." See: "Sick." *Oxford American Dictionary*, Third Edition, 2010.

⁴⁸⁵ *Diseased Pariah News*. Issue n°2, 1990, p.9.

gown for this more than one time per night bride” whose tattered appearance had been “accented by chunky spunk layers of sperm (...) for a bride that [was] ready to go around the world, again.” These depictions of the AIDS body and bodily functions thus ran contrary to the traditionally accepted images of bodies in society, which tends to hide and eliminate everything that comes out of the body.⁴⁸⁶

The worship of the outrageous could not only be seen in queer AIDS media’s taste for the incongruous and the transgressive, but also through their defiant subversion of religion.⁴⁸⁷ Following the principles of the carnivalesque, activists brought to together “the sacred with the profane, the lofty with the low, the great with the insignificant, the wise with the stupid.”⁴⁸⁸ The sacrilegiousness of queer AIDS media essentially relied on “carnivalistic obscenities” linked with the reproductive power of the body and “carnivalistic parodies” on sacred texts and sayings.⁴⁸⁹ The Public Service Announcement featuring gay PWA Ray Navarro impersonating Jesus Christ and telling the audience to “be sure your Second Coming is a safe one, use a condom, every time” as he takes out a condom from the pages of the Bible he is holding, was thus deeply subversive. (Appendix 31)

This combination of profane and sacred is omnipresent in Robert Hilferty’s *Stop the Church*, as for instance when sacred music – Handel’s Messiah, “Hallelujah Chorus,” and the “Dies Irae” section of Hector Berlioz’s “Symphonie fantastique” – as well as montages of paintings by Masaccio and Caravaggio are superimposed on footage of the protest and calls for safer sex. Similarly, *Like a Prayer* tells the story of the genesis of ACT UP’s protest against the Catholic Church in a campy and fairy-tale like manner. While Edvar Grieg’s “Peer Gynt – Morning Mood” is playing in the background, the voice over tells the viewer:

In the beginning there was an evil sorcerer, who wanted everyone to be unhappy. This evil sorcerer had great power. He was so powerful that even the highest kings knelt before him. Instead of using his power for the good of the people, he cast a spell over them by blinding them with ignorance and feeding with them with lies. He tried to enslave all the women and shackle them to their wombs. He tried to decree that love could only beget (...). And some of the people were really pissed (...).⁴⁹⁰

Footage comes to illustrate the story as the woman speaks: Cardinal O’Connor conducting mass, supposedly casting a spell over the churchgoers, while protesters are shown carrying

⁴⁸⁶ Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Rabelais and His World*. *Op.cit.* pp.320-321.

⁴⁸⁷ Newton, Esther. “Role Models.” *Op.cit.* p.47.

⁴⁸⁸ Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*. Edited and Translated by Caryl Emerson. University of Minnesota Press, 1984, p.123.

⁴⁸⁹ Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*. *Op.cit.* p.123.

⁴⁹⁰ DIVA TV. *Like a Prayer*. 1990.

signs such as “pregnant for God and country,” and “Cardinal O’Connor, the only true defender of AIDS victims and homosexuals. Promoters of safe sex are lying.”

Additionally, queer protesters in both *Stop the Church* and *Like a Prayer* wore religious drag attire and costumes, which further highlighted the reversal of hierarchies at play during the action. While Ray Navarro became Jesus Christ, other protesters impersonated Cardinal O’Connor, priests, etc. (Appendix 31) Cardinal O’Connor was even given his very own drag name: Cardinal O’Condom. The presence of people from the group Operation Ridiculous dressed like clowns followed Bakhtin’s carnivalesque principle, as clowns typically represent the transfer of every high ceremonial gesture or ritual to the material sphere.⁴⁹¹ The banners and placards carried by the protesters also featured campy and sacrilegious slogans. Gran Fury’s poster designed for the occasion depicted Cardinal O’Connor wearing a miter on his head. Right next to his face was an unrolled condom, which evoked the shape of the cardinal’s headpiece. In big capital letters, Gran Fury wrote: “KNOW YOUR SCUMBAGS,” and the caption under the condom read: “this one prevents AIDS.”⁴⁹² (Appendix 32)

As they appropriated hegemonic images and deconstructed them to sometimes turn them into ridicule, queer AIDS media turned the powers that be upside down. Through their media and protests, AIDS activists provided alternative images of what they saw as being a more just society. By elevating the bottom of the social hierarchy while debasing the top, they wished to disrupt business as usual.⁴⁹³ Indeed, queer AIDS media reversed the gaze of the media. No longer were people with AIDS under society’s scrutiny; what was under scrutiny, however, was a diseased society.

⁴⁹¹ Operation Ridiculous was a group of people dressed up as clowns to protest the “ridiculous” anti-abortion policies of the Catholic Church. Their name was a parodic take on the name of the anti-abortion group “Operation Rescue.”

⁴⁹² Gran Fury. “Know Your Scumbags.” 1989. Reprinted in Crimp, Douglas, Rolston, Adam. *Op.cit.* p.135.

⁴⁹³ Shepard, Benjamin. “The Use of Joyfulness as a Community Organizing Strategy.” *Peace and Change*, October 2005, p.446.

PART III

**REVERSING THE GAZE: A DISEASED
SOCIETY UNDER SCRUTINY**

Mainstream media and society scrutinized the epidemic and people infected with HIV/AIDS in a way that was defined by some activists as voyeuristic. In his short video essay, *Look Harder* (1996), Stuart Gaffney actually assimilated audiences gazing at the spectacle of AIDS to porn viewers:⁴⁹⁴ “The porn viewer is left looking, hoping for a real life drama to emerge from an obviously staged one. Fictions are sold to us as reality, we try to (...) look through the fiction in the hope that we will find something real: the virus.”⁴⁹⁵ However, queer AIDS media were committed to return the pathologizing and voyeuristic gaze onto society to diagnose larger social ills that were, according to them, responsible for the AIDS epidemic. This stance is perhaps best embodied in David Wojnarowicz’s statement: “My rage is really about the fact that WHEN I WAS TOLD THAT I’D CONTRACTED THIS VIRUS IT DIDN’T TAKE ME LONG TO REALIZE THAT I’D CONTRACTED A DISEASED SOCIETY AS WELL.”⁴⁹⁶ AIDS activism and queer AIDS media fought against society’s “deadly sins”⁴⁹⁷ and actively tried to put an end to the conditions and institutional “isms” that sustained the epidemic. In their content and structure, queer AIDS media presented themselves as leftist alternatives⁴⁹⁸ that offered more democratic and inclusive ways of participating in and engaging with society, while trying to cure its ills.

III.1. Participatory Media Activism: Protesting The U.S. Media’s Democratic Deficit

In the eyes of AIDS activists, the profit-oriented structure of the mass media led television news to privilege a journalistic style that resembled infotainment* instead of providing their audiences with accurate information about AIDS.⁴⁹⁹ Activists argued that, by not furnishing the public with relevant information – what James Winter calls “democracy’s

⁴⁹⁴ Watney, Simon. “The Spectacle of AIDS.” *October*, Vol. 43, *AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism*. Ed. Douglas Crimp. MIT Press, 1987, pp. 71-86.

⁴⁹⁵ Gaffney, Stuart. *Look Harder*. 1996, AIDS Activist Videotape Collection. Manuscripts and Archives Division. The New York Public Library. Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

⁴⁹⁶ Emphasis in original. Wojnarowicz, David. “Postcards from America: X-Rays from Hell.” 1989.

⁴⁹⁷ DIVA TV. *Like a Prayer*. 1990.

⁴⁹⁸ As Cathy Cohen explains, the Statement of Purpose from the first Dialogue on the Lesbian and Gay Left comments specifically on the role of interlocking systems of oppression in the lives of gays and lesbians: “By leftist we mean people who understand the struggle for lesbian and gay liberation to be integrally tied to struggles against class oppression, racism and sexism. While we might use different political labels, we share a commitment to a fundamental transformation of the economic, political and social structures of society.” See: Cohen, Cathy. “Punks, Bulldaggers and Welfare Queens.” *GLQ: A Journal of Gay and Lesbian Studies*, Volume 3, Number 4, 1997, p.442.

⁴⁹⁹ Hackett, Robert A., Carroll, William K. *Remaking Media: The Struggle to Democratize Public Communication*. New York: Routledge, 2006, p.3.

oxygen”— the mainstream media failed at being fully democratic institutions.⁵⁰⁰ The fact that access to the structures of media production was restricted to an elite also contributed to feeding the mass media’s democratic deficit.⁵⁰¹ Thus, not only did queer AIDS media subvert the mass media’s images and techniques, they also subverted prescribed consumption and production practices.⁵⁰² Adela C. Licona understands this process as fundamentally queer. She writes: “Queering (...) unsettle[s] assumptions and prescriptive practices about consumption and production (...). Consuming and producing in a queer way means questioning practices of production.”⁵⁰³ Hence, queer AIDS media gave people with AIDS and activists the authority to speak about their own lives, and attempted to overcome the deficit by making their media more participatory and egalitarian. Queer AIDS media also saw the media’s deficit as being the product of a larger democratic failure in the U.S.⁵⁰⁴ Challenging the traditional structures of the media meant challenging society. Gregg Bordowitz explains: “In order to tear down the structures that house the ‘public discussion’ of AIDS, we have to build alternative structures, structures that can generate and foster an affirmative culture for people living with AIDS.”⁵⁰⁵

III.1.1. Democratizing Media Production and Consumption

Before the increasing availability of media equipment, disenfranchised populations had had limited access to the means of media production. The director of *Reframing AIDS* (1987), Pratibha Parmar, expresses how she felt that making media was neither available nor accessible to her: “I became interested in filmmaking quite a long time ago, but I never felt that, as a Black woman, I had access to the process or production of filmmaking. It was very much as a consumer that I took part in film.”⁵⁰⁶ In addition to a new access to relatively cheap portable cameras, the creation of collectives and resource pools enabled people with AIDS and groups affected by the crisis to address the media’s democratic deficit.⁵⁰⁷ DIVA TV member Peter Bowen explains how the affinity group made the media more democratic:

Rather than having a fixed membership, a bank account, a solid identity, DIVA floats freely (...). I learned firsthand the political effects of such a democratic production schedule.

⁵⁰⁰ Hackett, Robert A., Carroll, William K. *Op.cit.* p.2.

⁵⁰¹ *Ibid.* p.6.

⁵⁰² Licona, Adela C. *Op.cit.* p.7.

⁵⁰³ *Ibid.* pp.101-122.

⁵⁰⁴ *Ibid.* p.14.

⁵⁰⁵ Bordowitz, Gregg. “Picture a Coalition.” *Op.cit.* p.187.

⁵⁰⁶ “In Conversation with Isaac Julien and Pratibha Parmar.” *Video Guide*, Volume 10, World AIDS Days Special Issue, Issues 48, November 1989.

⁵⁰⁷ Bordowitz, Gregg. “Operative Assumptions.” *The AIDS Crisis is Ridiculous and Other Writings: 1986-2003*. Ed. Gregg Bordowitz. MIT Press, p.177.

Borrowing a camera for one ACT UP demo, I learned to shoot video. Abandoned in the editing room one afternoon, I learned to edit it.⁵⁰⁸

Participatory media practices ran against the individualistic ethos promoted during the Reagan-Bush era. Simon Watney noted at the time that the collective response to AIDS was threatening “the ruthless individualism of much contemporary conservative culture, which lacks any vision of community beyond the impoverished ideals of ‘family’ and ‘nation.’”⁵⁰⁹ Activists saw the failure of the government to provide adequate AIDS education and health care provision as exemplifying the consequences of this over-arching individualism.⁵¹⁰ As a response, queer AIDS media developed practices that called for democratic, non-hierarchical modes of communication. The collaborative form was seen as a mode of action, an alternative to individualism, and a remedy to the dominant discourses.

Queer AIDS media encouraged anyone wishing to do so to participate and contribute, therefore turning media consumers into producers and collaborators. As early as 1934, philosopher and cultural critic Walter Benjamin advocated the creation of a politically progressive culture that would replace or at least supplement the limitations of what he called “bourgeois culture.” In “The Author As Producer,” Benjamin writes that a progressive culture must “transcend the specialization in the process of production” that characterizes bourgeois culture and society, adding that culture “is better the more consumers it is able to turn into producers – that is, readers or spectators into collaborators.”⁵¹¹ Collaboration was, from the beginning, particularly at the center of the zines’ DIY ethos. *Diseased Pariah News* thus regularly encouraged its readers to “enlist”⁵¹² and “contribute,”⁵¹³ using cartoons reminiscent of war propaganda:

DPN does not exist in a vacuum, you know (...) we need your ideas, stories, essays, research articles, cartoons, artwork, advertisements, personals, and recipes. The editorial guidelines are pretty broad: whatever you as a Diseased Pariah would like to share with other afflicted creatures.⁵¹⁴ (Appendix 33)

In addition to their own work, *DPN*’s editors published about 70 different pieces by about 40 different authors.⁵¹⁵ This Do-It-Yourself ethos – present in zines, videos, and graphics –

⁵⁰⁸ Saalfield, Catherine. “On the Make.” *Op.cit.* p.27.

⁵⁰⁹ Watney, Simon. *Policing Desire.* *Op.cit.* p.xii.

⁵¹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹¹ Walter, Benjamin. “The Author As Producer.” Address at the Institute for the Study of Fascism, Paris, April 27, 1934. <https://monoskop.org/images/9/93/Benjamin_Walter_1934_1999_The_Author_as_Producer.pdf>

⁵¹² *Diseased Pariah News.* Issue n°2, 1990.

⁵¹³ *Diseased Pariah News.* Issue n°1, 1990.

⁵¹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵¹⁵ Brouwer, Daniel C. “Counterpublicity and Corporeality in HIV/AIDS Zines.” *Op.cit.* p.353.

empowered the movement's constituents, who were no longer excluded from the process of media making. In the words of Hans Magnus Enzensberger, a revolutionary use of media "must make everyone a manipulator."⁵¹⁶

Unlike television, which is based on limited interaction with a universalized viewership,⁵¹⁷ queer AIDS media sought to create and engage in a direct dialogue about the issues at stake. Catherine Gund-Saalfeld defines this process as "amongness" between producers, subjects, and audience.⁵¹⁸ This feeling of "amongness" was particularly strong during screenings of AIDS videos. While members of the audience could be featured in the works, the videomakers would also be in the audience watching the tape. Jim Hubbard recalls watching a preview of *Testing the Limits* sitting next to the members of the video collective.⁵¹⁹ In an interview, Jean Carlomusto explains: "I had gone through so many different events. It was the same modality: performer/audience. Here all the boundaries were erased (...) It was powerful."⁵²⁰ Queer AIDS media therefore differed from and redefined the typical interactions between producers and audiences, producers and participants, as well as between participants and audiences, in an effort to correct what activists saw as a power imbalance in traditional media production. They wished to transform the top-to-bottom paradigm of hegemonic media – and by extension of society – to promote horizontal structures of communication and knowledge.

Sharing resources was also part of the collaborative mindset. Video activists shared their footage freely with other videomakers who reused it in their own productions. They adopted a nonproprietary relationship to their material instead of focusing on issues of copyrights, which they saw as limiting the circulation of information about AIDS.⁵²¹ Jean Carlomusto contends that:

One of the things I always felt really good about at that time was that people were sharing footage. It wasn't about "this is my footage and that's your footage." It didn't matter. And that was truly reflective of doing work within a movement. It didn't matter about the personal authorship, in most cases. It was just about getting the work done, getting it out there, and making it as reflective of us, of our voice, of what was really happening, making it as honest as

⁵¹⁶ Enzensberger, Hans Magnus. "Constituents of a Theory of Media." *New Left Review*, November-December 1970, p.20.

⁵¹⁷ Juhasz, Alexandra. "Make a Video For Me." *Gendered Epidemic: Representations of Women in the Age of AIDS*. Eds. Nancy L. Roth and Katie Hogan. Routledge, 1998, p.215.

⁵¹⁸ Saalfeld, Catherine. "On the Make." *Op.cit.* p.34.

⁵¹⁹ Hubbard, Jim. Interview with the author. December 20, 2016, p.4.

⁵²⁰ ACT UP Oral History Project. Interview of Jean Carlomusto. December 19, 2002, p.11.

<<http://www.actuporalhistory.org/interviews/images/carlomusto.pdf>> (Accessed on May 2, 2015)

⁵²¹ However Jean Carlomusto later recalled arguments that developed over how to address the question of who owned the rights to the archive of *Testing The Limits* after it had disbanded. ACT UP Oral History Project. Interview of Jean Carlomusto. *Op.cit.* pp.14-15.

possible.⁵²²

TTL set up a “Tape Library” which provided footage to other producers – independent, cable, and network – as well as community organizers.⁵²³ Given the fact that this was mostly media created by people with a deadly disease, upon becoming a DIVA member one had to sign a “Rights of Survivorship” document which stated:

Whereas, there is concern that the video equipment and programming accumulated (...) will always be utilized the reflect the needs, actions, and states of mind of people living with AIDS and HIV; Be it Resolved, that upon death, personnel incapacitation, or any cause leading to organizational (...) dissolution, all assets, equipment, and programming of DIVA TV / AIDS COMMUNITY TELEVISION reverts to the sole ownership and discretion of ACT UP.⁵²⁴

In a similar fashion, everyone was free to use Gran Fury’s images, which were not copyrighted.⁵²⁵ Queer AIDS media also freely borrowed popular images to insert them into their work. Although *DPN*’s editors were worried about getting sued for using Barbie’s image without permission, they realized that companies probably would not want to sue “a magazine put out by people who are dying.”⁵²⁶ Hence, by repudiating capitalist notions of ownership and intellectual property, queer AIDS media activists promoted a model of society in which cultural goods would be available to all.

In addition to sharing resources and encouraging members to join, consensus decision-making concerning the content of their video, zine, or poster was a staple of queer AIDS media.⁵²⁷ Gregg Bordowitz recalls the process of editing *Testing the Limits*:

All six members of the collective would be in the editing room and we would argue about every cut (...). We got a huge roll of white paper (...). We had marked all these kind of time-code numbers down on index cards, and we sectioned the huge piece of paper up into three sections. (...) It was (...) painstaking—I think it went on for like a week, and then we finally had this huge piece of paper with all these time code numbers arranged. Then we all went into the studio and then edited it.⁵²⁸

As for DIVA TV, parts of their tapes would be made by different members of the collective and subsequently edited together. For instance, the seven separate sections of *Like a Prayer* were each edited by a different member of the collective and addressed a different “deadly sin” committed during the AIDS crisis. This decentering of authority reflected ACT UP’s

⁵²² Carlomusto, Jean. Interview with the author. January 18, 2017, p.6.

⁵²³ Elgear, Sandra, Hutt, Robyn. *Op.cit.* p.20.

⁵²⁴ “Rights of Survivorship.” Committees, DIVA TV. 1992. MS ACT UP: The AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power: Series VII. Committees Box 29, Folder 15. New York Public Library. Archives of Sexuality & Gender. <tinyurl.galegroup.com/tinyurl/4AkAs4> (Accessed on December 29, 2016)

⁵²⁵ Crimp, Douglas, Rolston, Adam. *Op.cit.* p.13.

⁵²⁶ Allen, Mark. “That’s Not Funny, Or Is It?” *Op.cit.*

⁵²⁷ Saalfeld, Catherine. “On the Make.” *Op.cit.* p.27.

⁵²⁸ ACT UP Oral History Project. Interview of Gregg Bordowitz. *Op.cit.* pp.12-13.

radical democratic and anarchic philosophy. Consensus decision-making was thus also found at the heart of the protests documented by AIDS activist videotapes, such as in DIVA TV's *Target City Hall* (1989). A sequence devoted to an action led by CHER – Commie Homos Engaged in Revolution⁵²⁹ – plunges the viewer in the midst of a debate between the activists who are about to commit civil disobedience. The camera circles around a member of the affinity group who asks the other members “if [they] want to do it in the street now or wait.” The cameraperson then films the activists around him, who take turn in debating whether or not they want to block the street in order to stop traffic. When the facilitator tells them, “If you don’t want to go, say no. Don’t feel frightened about it,” one activist voices concerns about the risk of being subjected to police brutality and asks the group if they could wait for more cameras to cover the action in order to protect them. After more people confirm their support for the action, the facilitator eventually requests that someone get more media so that the activist who had objected to committing civil disobedience “feels more comfortable.” They all agree to start their action and begin blocking traffic, chanting: “Health Care is a Right.”⁵³⁰ The sequence thus offers the viewers an image of democracy in action. These egalitarian practices used by the movement and queer AIDS media attest to the non-hierarchical alternative society that AIDS activists wanted to build.

Queer AIDS media makers were nevertheless conscious that the collective approach could become an obstacle to the quick and efficient dissemination of information, and that the open-membership structure adopted by some groups could be problematic. Talking about the positive advantages and the energetic atmosphere that came with being in a collective like DIVA TV, Catherine Gund-Saalfield admitted:

The saying “too many cooks spoil the broth” comes to mind. We can’t continue to have one group initiate and outline a given show, and then have three newcomers responsible for editing the segments together. Our last tape wallowed a year in postproduction for this reason, even though each week we renewed our collective commitment to get the piece out.⁵³¹

Ultimately, DIVA TV had to institute a policy stating that only the same group that begins a tape could work on it until completion, which could be seen as undermining their democratic and participatory stance.⁵³² Additionally, queer AIDS media makers were aware that the means of media making were still not available to all. Indeed, the price of the camcorder could make it difficult for those without cultural and financial capital to purchase it. Jim

⁵²⁹ See the previous chapter for more information about the affinity group’s acronym, p.86.

⁵³⁰ DIVA TV. *Target City Hall*. 1989.

⁵³¹ Saalfield, Catherine. “On the Make.” *Op.cit.*p.2.

⁵³² Robé, Chris. *Op.cit.*

Hubbard's observation is telling: "My memory is that it cost about \$1,000 to buy a camera, which was something that a middle-class person could scrape together, right?"⁵³³ This could thus potentially re-inscribe degrees of gender, racial, and class privileges and hierarchies into practices that were conceived as egalitarian.⁵³⁴ As TTL member Sandra Elgear points out, collective strategies were put in place precisely to avoid reproducing such inequalities: "We must not delude ourselves, thinking that what is affordable or accessible to one group is similarly affordable or accessible to all groups. However, creative, often collective, strategies are being tried all the time: victories may be hard won but change is imminent."⁵³⁵ Hence, queer AIDS media makers created inclusive coalitions that were seen as a means to transcend exclusionary divisions.⁵³⁶

III.1.2. Queer Coalitions and Community Building Through Media Making

Robert A. Hackett and William K. Carroll note that the "Wal-Martization" of the media, that is, the ways in which the mass media undermine a sense of community, is part of the democratic deficit.⁵³⁷ Russell Ferguson underlines how important coalition building is when it comes to cultural production:

Too often the alternatives to dominant cultural power have been successfully segregated, so that many different bodies of marginalized creative production exist in uneasy isolation. Such isolation can only contribute to the security of a *political* power which implicitly defines itself as representative of a stable center around which everyone else must be arranged.⁵³⁸

One could argue that attempts at what Cathy Cohen calls "progressive transformative coalition work"⁵³⁹ were rather limited and that the people making and featuring in queer AIDS media were still mostly white gay men. For instance, while *DPN* promoted itself as an inclusive space where "girlie pariahs"⁵⁴⁰ were welcome, women were for the most part not featured in the zine. Similarly, men of color were infrequently present in the zine's erotic imagery. Even if this infrequency could be explained by the paucity of images submitted by HIV-positive gay men of color, Daniel Brouwer notes that this is indicative of what sees as

⁵³³ Hubbard, Jim. Interview with the author. December 20, 2016, p.3.

⁵³⁴ Robé, Chris. *Op.cit.*

⁵³⁵ Elgear, Sandra, Hutt, Robyn. "Some Notes on Collective Production." *Op.cit.* p.21.

⁵³⁶ Bordowitz, Gregg. "Operative Assumptions." *Op.cit.* p.78.

⁵³⁷ Hackett, Robert, A, Carroll, William K. *Op.cit.* p.7.

⁵³⁸ Ferguson, Russell. "Introduction: Invisible Center." *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*. Eds. Ferguson, Russell et al. MIT Press, 1990, p.9.

⁵³⁹ Cohen, Cathy. "Punks, Bulldaggers and Welfare Queens." *Op.cit.* p.438.

⁵⁴⁰ *Diseased Pariah News*. Issue n°5, 1992, p.4.

the “racialized constitution of this counterpublic.”⁵⁴¹ However, while queer AIDS media might be accused of being dominated by white gay men,⁵⁴² as they were perhaps the most visible participants in AIDS activism, Alexandra Juhasz actually explains:

Just because people are less seen doesn’t mean that they weren’t (...) making work. So, I really consistently say that there were lots of us making work about women and AIDS, there were lots of people of color making work.⁵⁴³

There were indeed efforts at coalition building. As suggested by the very name of the main radical AIDS activist organization, “the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power,” the crisis brought people affected by the epidemic together to form coalitions that wished to cut across barriers of sexuality, class, race, and gender, recognizing differences while generating unity.

Videos produced by collectives affiliated with ACT UP testify to the need for coalitional organizing. More than half of the Testing the Limits members were women, and a large number of women were part of DIVA TV as well. More than just providing a forum from which women could address women’s AIDS-related issues, these alliances between women – in particular lesbians – and gay men mended the fractures of the 1970s, which had led lesbian and gay communities to develop separately.⁵⁴⁴ For women, but also for people of color who had been active in the women’s liberation movement and the civil rights movement, ACT UP and queer AIDS media also provided a space to coalesce after the infighting and splits these political communities had experienced.⁵⁴⁵

As the face of ACT UP was changing since more and more African Americans and Latinos and Latinas started getting involved, already-existing groups had to start addressing issues that they had not directly experienced. Instead of speaking for these communities, collectives like Gran Fury – whose membership was mostly white and male – tried to work alongside them: “If we want to do (...) projects that will reach a specific non-white and/or non-English-speaking community (...), we have to go to the community and try to work with something that already exists in terms of concern and voice.”⁵⁴⁶ In *(In)Visible Women* (1991), a video produced by Latina community activist Marina Alvarez which weaves together the experiences of black and Latina women with AIDS, Alvarez admits being thrilled with how

⁵⁴¹ Brouwer, Daniel C. “Counterpublicity and Corporeality in HIV/AIDS Zines.” *Op.cit.* p.360.

⁵⁴² Ann Cvetkovitch’s article is very useful when it comes to assessing the movement’s inclusiveness. While some women interviewed see ACT UP as a very inclusive space, others are more critical of ACT UP’s gender, race, and class politics. See: Cvetkovitch, Ann. “AIDS Activism and Public Feelings: Documenting ACT UP’s Lesbians.” *The Routledge Queer Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge, 2013, pp.373-391.

⁵⁴³ Juhasz, Alexandra. Interview with the author. February 10, 2017, p.5.

⁵⁴⁴ Stein, Marc. *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement*, New York: Routledge, 2012, p.95 and p.154.

⁵⁴⁵ Cvetkovitch, Ann. “AIDS Activism and Public Feelings: Documenting ACT UP’s Lesbians.” *Op.cit.* p.64.

⁵⁴⁶ Deitcher, David. “Gran Fury: An Interview.” *Op.cit.* p.336.

welcome she felt in ACT UP, as one of the only HIV-positive women of color. She later said in an interview:

ACT UP made it easy for women of color to be involved in demonstrations. They provided child care, lodging, food, and transportation. They facilitated participation. By giving financial support, they set the stage for connections to be made and they provided a forum for people who wouldn't otherwise speak. It was my first opportunity to meet other women with AIDS from around the country, to experience the camaraderie and fellowship of activism.⁵⁴⁷

She considered the alliance with a predominantly white organization with political clout as a means to help her community's cause. Indeed, she goes on to say: "A Bronx-based or Latina/o ACT UP would not be as protected (...) ACT UP helped to empower the community, it didn't overwhelm it."⁵⁴⁸

People from marginalized communities who were not part of ACT UP were also led to enter coalitions to create AIDS-related media. Juanita Mohammed – now Imran –, a black working-class mother, became involved in AIDS videomaking when she was invited by Alexandra Juhasz to join her AIDS activist video collective, the Women's AIDS Video Enterprise (WAVE). Feeling isolated during her one year at the School of Visual Arts because of her status as a poor black woman from Brooklyn, she felt similarly alienated from ACT UP and was frustrated by the response of her community to the epidemic.⁵⁴⁹ She found her voice thanks to the WAVE project, which involved women from all walks of life.⁵⁵⁰

In our group were six women of color and one white woman; working women, housewives, and the unemployed, women with a great deal of education and some with very little; women who had a variety of relations to HIV, through infected spouses, relatives, or friends, or through political or religious commitments to the crisis. The seven of us held in common only two readily apparent traits: our gender and our commitment to making a contribution toward abating the affects of the AIDS crisis. From these similarities, and across all our other differences, we formed a temporary community and collectively produced three videos.⁵⁵¹

⁵⁴⁷ Alvarez, Marina, Candelario, Ginetta. "(Re)visions: A Dialogue Through the Eyes of AIDS, Activism, and Empowerment." *Talking Visions: Multicultural Feminism in a Transnational Age*. Ed. Ella Shohat. MIT Press, 2001, p.247.

⁵⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴⁹ As Juanita Mohammed explains: "After attending an activity or funeral, I had to come home to my community and hear "Why you hanging out with those white people?" "Why don't you stay home with your kids? Are you Gay? Do you have that disease?" My community did not think the issues referred to them. Blacks, Puerto Ricans, Women were never going to get AIDS, it was a white disease or a Gay disease. They thought it was either disgusting or funny that ACT UP put a condom over Jesse Helms' house; they did not see that it accomplished anything. They were shocked and appalled about many of the things ACT UP did. They did not realize that ACT UP got even them talking and thinking. I wanted very much to join ACT UP, but in the end it was my own insecurities of being the other that kept me out." Juhasz, Alexandra. "Forgetting ACT UP." *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, Vol. 98, No.1, February 2012, p.71-72.

⁵⁵⁰ Juhasz, Alexandra. *Women of Vision: Histories in Feminist Film and Video*. University of Minnesota Press, 2001, p.214.

⁵⁵¹ *Ibid.* p.211.

Mohammed thereafter became an activist videomaker, working for GMHC and producing dozens of works that dealt with and addressed women, people of color, drug users, and gay men.

As the AIDS community was also dispersed into smaller communities, many media projects targeted these specific groups – such as lesbians, Latinas, sex workers etc. – to answer particular and immediate needs, which did not necessarily call for coalition building. The fact that these works were made by and directed towards specific communities does not imply that they could not reach other audiences. These localized productions did contribute to undermining the logic of the mainstream media as well. While communities affected by AIDS found it hard to relate to the content of the mainstream news media, Alexandra Juhasz notes:

A most significant way in which alternative videomaking (...) counters and alters mainstream media is that it localizes the production and reception of [a] usually universalizing mode of discourse. This is not to suggest that a black lesbian activist cannot watch or learn from a video for an Asian-American straight social worker, but that she *can*.⁵⁵²

Similarly, Marlon Riggs admitted that while *Tongues Untied* dealt with being a black, gay, HIV-positive man, he also realized his work spoke to different kinds of experiences of marginalization.⁵⁵³ Hence, instead of being on the margins, the voice of the person with AIDS found itself at the center and viewers were asked to adopt the subjectivity of the community or individuals on screen. Therefore, although these works were not produced by coalitions, they still operated on the basis of shared experiences.

While the mass media paradigm tried to convey images of social cohesion and order for a general public by giving voice to the majority, queer AIDS media offered images of social struggle(s) by enfranchising and empowering minorities. Activists tried to amplify the voices of people who identified with multiple marginalized groups and were committed to end the AIDS crisis.⁵⁵⁴ Cultural activists were therefore engaged in what Cornel West has called the “new cultural politics of difference,” which called for the “trash[ing] of the monolithic and homogenous in the name of diversity [and] multiplicity.”⁵⁵⁵ Their aim was to “enlist collective insurgency for the expansion of freedom [and] democracy.”⁵⁵⁶

⁵⁵² Juhasz, Alexandra. “Make a Video For Me.” *Op.cit.* p.206.

⁵⁵³ Anbian, Robert. “Tongues Untied Lets Loose Angry, Loving Words: An Interview with Marlon Riggs.” *Release Print*, March 1990, p.6.

⁵⁵⁴ Licona, Adela C. *Op.cit.* p.11.

⁵⁵⁵ West, Cornel. “The New Politics of Difference.” *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*. Ed. Russell Ferguson et al. MIT Press, 1990, p.19.

⁵⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

III.2. Looking at Society Through The Intersectional Lens of The Epidemic

In 1993, when the CDC definition of AIDS was changed, a total of 38,544 (66%) cases were reported among Blacks, 18,888 (32%) among Hispanics, 767 (1%) among Asians/Pacific Islanders, and 339 (1%) among American Indians/Alaskan Natives. These cases represented 55% of the 106,949 AIDS cases reported in the United States.⁵⁵⁷ In the light of these growing numbers of AIDS cases among minority populations, many more situations became important topics that needed to be articulated. Queer AIDS media makers had to look at AIDS through a lens that was not only queer, but had to become intersectional. In addition to the problem of homophobia in relation to the AIDS crisis, activists explored the interactions between gender, sexuality, race, and class, and the interlocking systems of oppression that these interactions produced.⁵⁵⁸ Queer theorist Michael Warner explains:

Every person who comes to a queer self-understanding knows in one way or another that her stigmatization is connected with gender, the family, notions of individual freedom, the state, public speech, consumption and desire, nature and culture, maturation, reproductive politics, racial and national fantasy, class identity, truth and trust, censorship, intimate life and social display, terror and violence, health care, and deep cultural norms about the bearing of the body. Being queer means fighting about these issues all the time (...).⁵⁵⁹

In fact, media activism was part of a much broader struggle against social inequalities that were exacerbated by the epidemic and which media activists tried to address in their work.

One could argue that there was not one “AIDS crisis” but, rather, that the epidemic was made up of a multitude of crises that were silenced by the mass media and rendered visible by queer AIDS media. From the stories of gay black men with HIV to the concerns of sex workers, media activists tackled a myriad of complex and pressing concerns. They presented counter-hegemonic versions of the realities of AIDS that addressed larger economic and social issues.

⁵⁵⁷ Following the 1993 expansion of the AIDS surveillance case definition, which now included women’s symptoms, the number of AIDS cases reported among racial/ethnic minorities in 1993 increased 135% over that in 1992, while the number among whites increased 114%. See: Centers for Disease Control. “AIDS Among Racial/Ethnic Minorities - United States, 1993.” *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, September 09, 1994. <<https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/00032522.htm>> (Accessed on May 27, 2017)

⁵⁵⁸ The phrase “interlocking system of oppression” was coined by black feminist Patricia Hill Collins in 1990 when she wrote about the interactions between gender, race, and class in the experience of black women. Collins, Hill Patricia. “Black Feminist Thought in the Matrix of Domination.” *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990, pp. 221-238.

⁵⁵⁹ Warner, Michael. *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*. University of Minnesota Press, 1993, p.xiii.

III.2.1. “Black Men Loving Black Men is a Revolutionary Act:” AIDS and Queer Men of Color

If AIDS was a crisis for white middle-class gay men, who, despite their sexual orientation, had managed to maintain a privileged position in society up until the advent of the epidemic, for people of color, the virus became part of what Marlon Riggs has termed a “mosaic of struggles” that were affecting their daily lives.⁵⁶⁰ This is what led Riggs to mediate his experience as an HIV-positive black gay man through video in the controversial *Tongues Untied* (1989). The very format of his documentary, which is deeply hybrid and mixes fiction with personal facts, highlights the impracticality of representing the impact of AIDS on communities of color in a traditional way. In fact, although it was the catalyst, AIDS does not function as the main topic of the film:⁵⁶¹

I did not want to make it seem like (...) AIDS is the totality of black gay life, because it is not (...). I wanted to really look at how HIV is part of a larger picture (...). We’ve long had a history that preceded AIDS and we’ll have a legacy that far outlives AIDS (...). There are other areas of identity and identity politics that enmesh with AIDS (...).⁵⁶²

His documentary is articulated around the theme of silence, “the deadliest weapon,” which he seeks to put an end to. Suffering from multiple marginalizations, Riggs’s invisible black queer body finds itself in an exiled space, as he is both stigmatized by mainstream society and white gay communities for being black, while shunned for being gay by an historically oppressed black community. Throughout the movie, Riggs tries to reconcile his numerous identities as he is at once a “faggot,” a “punk,” a “nigger,” and an “uncle Tom,” identities which he “never wanted to claim.”

Three years after *Tongues Untied* (1989), Riggs produced a video for the Fear of Disclosure Project, which the artist and AIDS activist Phil Zwickler had initiated in 1989 to explore the issue of HIV disclosure in different communities. *No Regret* (1992) portrays the experience of five black gay men living with AIDS and aims to explore the complex dynamics at work in the African American community around the disclosure of their HIV/AIDS status, first to themselves, then to their families and communities. Like *Tongues Untied*, the movie explores the stigma of being an HIV-positive black gay man and the silence of the African American community on the issue.⁵⁶³

⁵⁶⁰ Vaucher, Andrea. *Muses from Chaos and Ash: AIDS, Artists and Art*. Grove Press, 1993, p.161.

⁵⁶¹ Riggs decided to make a film about his experience as a black gay man when, in December 1988, he spent several months in the hospital battling kidney failure after learning he was HIV-positive.

⁵⁶² Vaucher, Andrea. *Op.cit.* p.161.

⁵⁶³ Riggs, Marlon. *Je ne regrette rien (No Regret)*. 1992.

Yet, Riggs shows that, despite the various stigmas, a black gay community does exist, with its own subcultural codes of “snapping” and “voguing.”⁵⁶⁴ An entire sequence of *Tongues Untied* is devoted to the snap – brought to the viewers by the “Institute of Snap!thology”⁵⁶⁵ – which parodies the discourse of ethnographic documentary and explores the dynamic of “snapping” within the community. Marcos Becker writes that this sequence “depicts the snap precisely in its ability to overcome the discursive mechanisms which position black gays beneath both black heterosexuals and white gays.”⁵⁶⁶ However, as Riggs explains, a “time bomb” is ticking in Riggs’s and other black gay men’s blood. Dozens of obituaries appear in quick succession on screen, all black gay men who died of AIDS, attesting to the devastating impact AIDS has had in that community. The last obituary to appear on screen is Riggs’s, staring into the camera, anticipating his own death. Telling the viewer that he is listening for his “own, quiet implosion,” he adds that, “while I wait, older, stronger rhythms resonate within me, sustain my spirit, silence the clock.” Indeed, through his works, Riggs’ goal was to show how the experience of black HIV positive gay men was not only embedded in issues of sexuality but was also situated at complex intersections within the communal and historical struggle of the African American community.⁵⁶⁷ Including Negro Spirituals in his work as well as spoken poetry and civil rights protest songs, Riggs shows there is continuity between slavery and anti-slavery discourse, the rhetoric of the civil rights movement, and the situation of HIV positive black gay men. Therefore, he contends, AIDS activism and black activism should not be dealt with separately if one wishes to end the silence surrounding black gay lives.

The final images of *Tongues Untied* appeal to the viewers’ historical consciousness and call for the black gay community to build on the struggles of their forefathers in order to overcome the burdens of AIDS. While the Civil Rights era anthem “Ain’t Gonna Let Nobody Turn me Around” plays in the background, images of Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, Bayard Rustin, and of Martin Luther King leading the Civil Rights March on Selma in 1965 are shown on screen. These images eventually lead up to footage of a contemporary march of black gay men from the Minority Task Force on AIDS, holding up a

⁵⁶⁴ Voguing is a dance style developed within urban black gay communities that animates the fashion photography of glossy magazines. It was subsequently appropriated by mainstream culture, notably by Madonna. The acclaimed queer documentary *Paris is Burning* (1990) is the most extensive video record of the New York Voguing and ballroom scene of the 1980s and 1990s. *Paris is Burning* is available here: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hedJer7I1vI>> (Accessed on May 28, 2017)

⁵⁶⁵ Watch the sequence here: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bX9reaHLwhk>> (Accessed on May 28, 2017)

⁵⁶⁶ Becquer, Marcos, “Snap!thology and Other Discursive Practices.” Quoted in Nelson, Emmanuel Sampath. *Critical Essays: Gay and Lesbian Writers of Color*. Psychology Press, 1993, p.224.

⁵⁶⁷ Vaucher, Andrea. *Op.cit.* p.20.

banner that reads “Black Men Loving Black Men is a Revolutionary Act.” This footage is superimposed on images of protesters during the Civil Rights Movement holding up their own sign: “We Shall Overcome.” Staring into the camera, Riggs then declares: “I was mute, tongue-tied, burdened by shadows and silence. Now I speak, and my burden is lightened, lifted, free.” (Appendix 34)

Other works dealing with AIDS and minorities produced by Juanita Mohammed explore different facets of black gay life and AIDS. Her short documentary, *Two Men and a Baby* (1992) focuses on a underprivileged black gay couple in the process of adopting the HIV-positive son of the sister of one of the two men, who passed away from AIDS.⁵⁶⁸ One of them also happens to be a drug user, while the other one suffers from various health issues. As Juanita Mohammed explains,

I wanted to make a video to show how (...) dealing with an HIV-positive baby made them grow and brought them into a community that they had been on the fringes of (...). The biggest thing that video did was getting them incorporated into the gay community.⁵⁶⁹

There was therefore not one way of representing the black gay experience. Other queer men of color expressed their struggles through video. For instance, Richard Fung’s *Fighting Chance* (1990) was a group portrait of Asian gay men living with AIDS in North America, while *Native Americans, Two Spirits & HIV* (1991) documented the AIDS-related struggles of two-spirit people among Native American communities.⁵⁷⁰ Queer AIDS media therefore provided a systemic and intersectional understanding of how a disproportionate number of people of color contracted AIDS. Since intersectionality originates in feminist thought, feminist concerns were weaved within queer AIDS media productions, which gave prime of place to women’s voices.

⁵⁶⁸ Mohammed, Juanita. *Two Men and a Baby*. 1992. <<https://vimeo.com/201224444>> (Accessed on May 28, 2017)

⁵⁶⁹ Juhasz, Alexandra. *Women of Vision*. *Op.cit.* p.219.

⁵⁷⁰ “Two-spirit” is an umbrella term used by Native Americans to describe spiritual LGBT people in their communities. American Indian Community House. *Native Americans, Two Spirits & HIV*. 1991. <<https://vimeo.com/203286850>> (Accessed on May 28, 2017)

III.2.2. (In)Visible Women with HIV/AIDS

In the 1990s, women constituted the fastest-growing group of people with HIV/AIDS in the U.S., and women of color made up around three quarters of those infected.⁵⁷¹ Yet, lesbians and women of color were invisible in the stories of the mass media, which favored the narratives of “innocent” middle-class white heterosexual women. Queer AIDS media thus performed a vital role to counter the mainstream – or *malestream* –⁵⁷² media’s misinformation. As early as 1988, Alexandra Juhasz and Jean Carlomusto produced *Women and AIDS*, one of the first documentaries that filled the gap in material by, for, and about women with AIDS. It countered the inaccuracies of the media about HIV-infected women in the U.S. Similarly, a safe-sex tape targeting lesbians such as Jean Carlomusto’s *Current Flow* (1990) both guaranteed the visibility of lesbian sexuality while providing information on woman-to-woman transmission as well as on ways to protect oneself that differed from the gay or heterosexual model of safe sex.⁵⁷³ Women making AIDS-related media were also filling a gap within the activist movement itself. In *Doctors, Liars, and Women*, Rebecca Cole indeed explains:

The whole movement has very much addressed a lot of men’s issues and that’s been great, but I think there needs to be some leadership now (...) addressing the fact that women are at risk. We’re not invisible in all this.⁵⁷⁴

As was the case for African American gay men, the situation of women with AIDS was rendered more complex by their position in society. Women entered the epidemic with fewer resources than men – for instance women’s inferior economic status meant that they would have less access to health insurance –⁵⁷⁵, and activists identified sexism and the patriarchal system as the main reasons for their invisibility in the AIDS epidemic:

Sexist attitudes have had an enormous impact on the treatment of women in the AIDS crisis by the medical profession, public policy officials, and even some AIDS activists. Even more important than sexism (...) has been the institution of patriarchy, which perpetuates male control over women’s (...) sexuality and reproductive capacities.⁵⁷⁶

⁵⁷¹ Centers for Disease Control. “Update: AIDS Among Women – United States, 1994.” *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, February 10, 1995. <<https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/00035899.htm>> (Accessed on May 28, 2017)

⁵⁷² Wilton, Tasmin. *EnGendering AIDS: Deconstructing Sex, Text and Epidemic*. SAGE publications, 1997, p.71.

⁵⁷³ Carlomusto, Jean. “Focusing on Women: Video as Activism.” *Women, AIDS and Activism*. Ed. ACT UP / NY Women and AIDS Handbook Group. Boston, MA: South End Press, 1990, p.216.

⁵⁷⁴ Carlomusto, Jean, Maggenti, Maria. *Doctors, Liars, and Women: AIDS Activists Say No To Cosmo*. 1988.

⁵⁷⁵ Christensen, Kim. “How Do Women Live?” *Women, AIDS and Activism*. Ed. ACT UP/NY Women and AIDS Handbook Group. Boston, MA: South End Press, 1990, p.7.

⁵⁷⁶ *Ibid.* p.6.

Dealing with AIDS issues concerning women and the discrimination that they faced thus entailed analyzing the social and economic conditions that made women particularly susceptible to HIV/AIDS. Women with AIDS drew from the 1970s women's liberation movement to fight sexism and empower women by asserting that they were the experts on their own health and had a right to contribute to decision-making about their own bodies, principles which we find in AIDS activism as well.⁵⁷⁷

DIVA TV's *Target City Hall* has a segment focusing on illegal police strip-searches imposed on women who were arrested during the demonstration, whereas the men who were arrested were not subjected to such treatment. The tape then documents the media's response to the illegal searches, focusing on the women's appearance on a local talk show, "People are Talking," in which they are confronted to sexism. The male host voyeuristically insists that the women describe in detail the procedure, asking repeatedly "So you had to stand naked in front of them?" and insisting that the women admit it was "humiliating," instead of letting the activists frame their experience.⁵⁷⁸ Similarly, Carlomusto establishes connections between the women's health movement and the issues facing women during the AIDS epidemic in *Doctors, Liars, and Women* (1988), which documents ACT UP's women-led protest of the Cosmopolitan headquarters after the magazine published an article which told heterosexual women they were not at risk of getting infected. The tape shows the women asserting that they are the experts on their own health and repeatedly accusing Dr. Robert E. Gould, the author of the article, of using sexist and racist language in his article. This latter affirmed for instance that the rate of heterosexual HIV infection was higher in Africa than in the U.S. because "too many men in Africa take their women in a brutal way so that some heterosexual activity regarded as normal by them would be closer to rape by our standards." Here is the exchange that ensued:

Maxine Wolfe: I do happen to think that the statement about men in Africa "taking their women in a brutal way" implies that men in the United States do not do that...

Robert E. Gould: In a lesser number.

⁵⁷⁷ In *Voices From The Front*, Marion Banzhaf, who contributed to edit the *Women and AIDS Handbook*, explains: "Women didn't trust doctors and couldn't trust getting good health care because a visit to the doctor was humiliating, degrading and uninformative. The women's liberation movement provided the context for us to change this. We felt that we couldn't control our lives until we could control our bodies. The parallel to the AIDS movement here is pretty clear. The system won't provide good health care for PWAs unless we fight for it."

⁵⁷⁸ DIVA TV. *Target City Hall*. 1989.

Maxine Wolfe: Excuse me, we don't know that since 1/3 of women will be raped in their lifetime and we don't know what happens to the other two third.⁵⁷⁹

Women were indeed statistically more vulnerable than men to rape, battering, and other forms of sexual violence that increased their chances of getting HIV and placed women in what Kim Christensen calls an "inferior bargaining position" when asking for safe sex.⁵⁸⁰ At the same time, society's double standard regarding male and female sexuality meant that women were also seen as responsible for both birth control and safer-sex negotiations.⁵⁸¹ Gran Fury's poster, "Sexism Rears Its Unprotected Head," encouraged men to "wear a condom or beat it," putting the responsibility of safer sex on men rather than on women, since these latter were often unable to negotiate safer practices.⁵⁸²

Not only were HIV positive women ignored by the mass media but they were also disregarded by the medical establishment, which meant that women with AIDS lacked access to proper care. The medical establishment's view of men as "the norm" complicated HIV prevention, detection, and treatment for women.⁵⁸³ It was not until 1993 that the Centers for Disease Control, after protests from ACT UP and women's organizations, included illnesses that were specific to women, such as invasive cervical cancer, in its definition of AIDS.⁵⁸⁴ Hence, another poster produced by Gran Fury addressed the general state of denial about HIV infection in women and read: "Women Don't Get AIDS. They Just Die From It." (Appendix 35) It further read: "65% of HIV positive women get sick and die from chronic infections that don't fit the centers for disease control's definition of AIDS. Without that recognition women are denied access to what little healthcare exists. The CDC must expand the definition of AIDS."⁵⁸⁵ The poster's purple background contained an image of three women who appeared to be beauty pageant contestants wearing bathing suits and sashes that proclaim their home states. Since beauty pageants had long been considered by feminists to be emblems of a sexist

⁵⁷⁹ Carlomusto, Jean, Maggenti, Maria. *Doctors, Liars, and Women: AIDS Activists Say No To Cosmo*. 1988.

⁵⁸⁰ Christensen, Kim. *Op.cit.* p.5.

⁵⁸¹ *Ibid.* p.8.

⁵⁸² Gran Fury. "Sexism Rears Its Unprotected Head (Poster)." Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library. *The New York Public Library Digital Collections*.

<<http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47e3-5379-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>> (Accessed on June 7, 2017)

⁵⁸³ Christensen, Kim. *Op.cit.* p.5.

⁵⁸⁴ Centers for Disease Control. "1993 Revised Classification System for HIV Infection and Expanded Surveillance Case Definition for AIDS Among Adolescents and Adults." *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, December 18, 1992. <<https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/00018871.htm>> (Accessed on May 27, 2017)

⁵⁸⁵ Gran Fury. "Women Don't Get AIDS. They Just Die from It (Poster)." Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library. *The New York Public Library Digital Collections*.

<<http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47e3-5399-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>> (Accessed on June 7, 2017)

society,⁵⁸⁶ the photograph of faceless contestants captured what AIDS activists saw as the underlying causes of the spread of AIDS in women: institutionalized sexism.

Tackling women's concerns related to AIDS thus also entailed dealing with reproductive rights and women's rights to bodily autonomy. *Voices From the Front* focuses at length on the issue of AIDS clinical trials. Women with AIDS were usually excluded from drug trials because it was felt that these drugs could endanger potential fetuses.⁵⁸⁷ As one woman from ACT UP put it in the video: "They are very concerned with the possibility of a fetus and not with the woman's life itself. It's as if she were more important as a baby carriage rather than a human in her own rights."⁵⁸⁸ This resulted in a model for AIDS drugs based on research done on men, ignoring the different metabolisms between men and women and the effects the drugs could have on women's bodies. Additionally, if they were to enter drug trials, some women were forced to undergo sterilization.⁵⁸⁹ Hence, ACT UP's main goal of getting "drugs into bodies" was actually embedded in other issues. Maxine Wolfe explains in *Voices from the Front*: "It's about the people whose bodies these drugs could eventually get into. The entire spectrum of issues that ACT UP deals has just mushroomed."⁵⁹⁰

DIVA TV's *Like a Prayer* and Robert Hilferly's *Stop the Church* confronted the Catholic Church, denounced as a patriarchal institution that they saw as responsible for putting PWAs' and women's lives in danger. For the protest documented in the tapes, ACT UP joined forces with WHAM! – Women's Health Action and Mobilization – an anti-abortion group, creating a new alliance: Operation Ridiculous. Their mission was "to defuse the negative energy of the flag-waving, fetus-loving, Bible-thumping biggots."⁵⁹¹ ACT UP had actually been active in the struggle to keep abortion legal and accessible for some time by joining counter-demonstrations when the anti-abortion group Operation Rescue attacked New York clinics, as they saw overlaps between their cause and the pro-choice movement.⁵⁹² For instance, in addition to the problem of clinical trials, HIV-positive pregnant women were often coerced into having abortions against their will.⁵⁹³

The number of HIV positive babies was indeed growing. During the 1988 protest against *Cosmopolitan Magazine's* article which explained that "there [was] almost no danger

⁵⁸⁶ In 1968, the U.S. Women's Liberation Movement famously protested the Miss America contest, which they saw as oppressing women.

⁵⁸⁷ Christensen, Kim. *Op.cit.* p.5.

⁵⁸⁸ *Testing the Limits. Voices from the Front.* 1991.

⁵⁸⁹ Crimp, Douglas, Rolston, Adam. *Op.cit.* p.135.

⁵⁹⁰ *Testing the Limits. Voices from the Front.* 1991.

⁵⁹¹ DIVA TV. *Like a Prayer.* 1990.

⁵⁹² Crimp, Douglas, Rolston, Adam. *Op.cit.* p.135.

⁵⁹³ *Ibid.*

of contracting AIDS through ordinary sexual intercourse,” Dr. Mathilde Krim, the chair of AmFAR, wrote an open letter to *Cosmopolitan* magazine: “the ‘You’ to whom Dr. Gould addresses his article are obviously not – in his mind – any of those young minority-group women who give birth to HIV-antibody-positive babies at the rate, now, of 1 out of every 61 births occurring in New York City.”⁵⁹⁴ This statistic led Gran Fury to produce their first poster: AIDS: 1 in 61.⁵⁹⁵ (Appendix 36) Through their poster, the collective conveyed two facts about HIV/AIDS: that women did have to worry about HIV transmission through sex, contrary to what the mass media said, and that one out of sixty-one babies being born in New York were HIV positive.⁵⁹⁶ The poster, which featured a disarticulated naked baby doll, also tackled race concerns embedded in women’s issues. Written both in Spanish and in English, it read:

AIDS: 1 in every 61 babies born in New York City is born with AIDS or born HIV-antibody positive. So why is the media telling us that heterosexuals aren’t at risk? Because these babies are black. These babies are Hispanic. Ignoring color ignores the facts of AIDS. STOP RACISM: FIGHT AIDS.

Women of color were indeed “the forgotten majority,”⁵⁹⁷ but various media makers – especially women – addressed their issues in their own ways. In a conversation with filmmaker and Latina AIDS activist Marina Alvarez, Ginetta Candelario explains:

Instead of trying to make a community fit into some predetermined model of what constitutes activism, for that matter feminism, notions of activism and feminism should be culturally attuned. Traditionally, when we think of activism we envision protest marches, sit-ins, and more formal lobbying activities. If we limit ourselves to that definition, we fail to recognize the kind of quiet, often familial activism that takes place in Latina/o communities. Resistance to oppression and oppressive conditions occurs in many forms.

For these communities, the mere fact of videotaping their concerns was in itself activism.

Education was an important part of activism within minority communities, as shown in *(In)Visible Women* (1991). AIDS education was indeed proved to be more effective when it came from the communities whose needs it was urgent to address.⁵⁹⁸ Jose Guiterres-Gomez and Jose Vergelin, producers of one of the earliest telenovela-style educational AIDS videos, *Ojos Que No Ven* (1987), explain:

Effective AIDS education directed at minorities requires a show and tell medium that can also role model positive behavior change while reflecting the language, culture, values, and lifestyle

⁵⁹⁴ Crimp, Douglas, Rolston, Adam. *Op.cit.* p.41.

⁵⁹⁵ Gran Fury. “AIDS: 1 in 61.” Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library. *The New York Public Library Digital Collections*.

<<http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47e3-539c-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>> (Accessed on June 7, 2017)

⁵⁹⁶ “Gran Fury – David Deitcher, an Interview.” *Op.cit.* p.225.

⁵⁹⁷ Testing the Limits. *Voices from the Front*. 1991.

⁵⁹⁸ Juhasz, Alexandra. “Make a Video For Me.” *Op.cit.* p.215.

of the target audience (...) [if] people simply cannot relate what they are being taught (to their lives), and the educational message falls on deaf ears.⁵⁹⁹

Thus, as was the case for black HIV positive gay men, the formats used to present their concerns differed from what was produced by DIVA TV or Testing the Limits. Jim Hubbard recognized he had too narrow a definition of media activism in mind when he was doing research for the AIDS Activist Video Collection, and observed: “What Latinos were primarily doing is that they were making things based on telenovelas – Spanish language soap-operas⁶⁰⁰ – and that didn’t seem like activist work to me. But that’s because I was outside the culture.”⁶⁰¹ Telenovelas in Latin America have traditionally been regarded as a genre that occupies an important place in feminine spaces, as they supposedly constitute self-referential texts in which women can see “their own lives” on screen.⁶⁰² Hence, this format was regarded as an effective tool to educate Latina women about issues of HIV/AIDS.

Queer AIDS media makers dealt with pressing but disregarded issues regarding minority communities, such as the problems HIV-positive women of color faced in prison. This was explored in tapes such as *I am You, You’re Me: Surviving AIDS In Prison*⁶⁰³ and *Blind Eye to Justice: HIV+ Women Incarcerated in California*.⁶⁰⁴ HIV-positive men also faced harsh conditions inside the prison industrial complex,⁶⁰⁵ but the treatment of HIV-positive women of color in prison entailed different problems and solutions. If women of color were the fastest growing cases of HIV/AIDS in the 1990s, they were also the fastest growing population in prisons. Between 1980 and 1993, the growth rate for the female prison population increased approximately 313%, compared to 182% for men in the same period. At the end of 1993, women accounted for 5.8% of the total prison population and 9.3% of the jail population nationwide. Women prisoners were disproportionately women of color, with African American women comprising at the time 46% of the population, white women

⁵⁹⁹ Juhasz, Alexandra. “Make a Video For Me.” *Op.cit.* p.216.

⁶⁰⁰ The soap-opera form was also used in works targeted at other disenfranchised communities, such as African Americans or Haitians. Examples of such works include *AIDS Is About Secrets* (1989, dir. By Sandra Elkin), *AIDS: Me and My Baby* (1988, dir. by Sandra Elkin), *Se Met Ko* (1989, dir. by Patricia Benoit and the Haitian Women’s Program).

⁶⁰¹ Hubbard, Jim. Interview with the author. December 20, 2016, p.13.

⁶⁰² Subero, Gustavo. *Representations of HIV/AIDS in Contemporary Hispano-American and Caribbean Culture*. Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2016, p.55.

⁶⁰³ Saalfield, Catherine, Levine, Debra. *I am You, You’re Me: Surviving AIDS In Prison*. 1992. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_4Sik7sxRPQ> (Accessed on May 28, 2017)

⁶⁰⁴ Leigh, Carol. *Blind Eye to Justice: HIV+ Women Incarcerated in California*. 1998. <<https://vimeo.com/98788340>> (Accessed on May 28, 2017)

⁶⁰⁵ *DPN* regularly tackled the problem of HIV testing in prisons, notably in its Captain Condom cartoon and the piece featured in the zine’s first issue, “HIV Testing in Federal Prisons.”

comprising 36%, and Hispanic women comprising 14%.⁶⁰⁶ After being tested for HIV following their incarceration, women with HIV/AIDS were often segregated within the prisons. As the definition of AIDS symptoms was limited, women in prison would not obtain the adequate care they needed and many would often die. This was added to an already deficient health care available to women in prison, since prison health care systems were created for men; therefore, routine gynecological care was extremely rare for example.⁶⁰⁷

Queer AIDS media makers also addressed the ways AIDS affected sex workers. This group was particularly subjected to silence, as speaking their concerns regarding AIDS also exposed them to prosecution due to the illegality of their work.⁶⁰⁸ The same year they released *Women and AIDS*, Carlomusto and Juhasz made *Prostitutes, Risk, and AIDS* (1988), which examined the scapegoating of sex workers for supposedly spreading HIV/AIDS among the general public, while again analyzing the media's distortion of the image of who was really at risk for HIV infection. The crisis was also a catalyst for Scarlot Harlot – aka Carol Leigh – a sex worker, AIDS and health care activist, and video artist. Calling herself a “propagandist for various subcultures,”⁶⁰⁹ she produced over 75 videos that were funded by what she had earned through sex work. She directed and starred in her own short music video, *Safe Sex Slut* (1988) in which she advocated for sex workers' rights and safer sex.⁶¹⁰ She also produced several works against mandatory HIV testing of prostitutes, arguing that it would particularly hit poor women and women of color.⁶¹¹ Opponents to bills aimed at enforcing mandatory testing claimed that what was needed instead were drug recovery programs, free needle exchanges, education, and better health care services.

Systemic critiques of racist, sexist, and homophobic practices all underlined the lack of access to health care in the United States. As Gran Fury aptly pointed out in one of its posters, the U.S. is “the only industrialized country besides South Africa without national

⁶⁰⁶ “Women in Prison.” National Women's Law Center, Washington D.C., and Chicago Legal Aid to Incarcerated Mothers. <<http://people.umass.edu/~kastor/walking-steel-95/ws-women-in-prison.html>> (Accessed on May 27, 2017)

⁶⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰⁸ Juhasz, Alexandra. “Constructing Authority: Documentary Form and AIDS.” *Video Guide*, Volume 10, World AIDS Days Special Issue, Issues 48, November 1989, p.10.

⁶⁰⁹ Juhasz, Alexandra. *Women of Vision*. *Op.cit.* p.201.

⁶¹⁰ Leigh, Carol. *Safe Sex Slut*. 1988. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TuO4CybkUUs>> (Accessed on May 28, 2017)

⁶¹¹ Leigh, Carol. *Just Say No To Mandatory Testing of Prostitutes*. 1988. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lghbZCoz8gs>> (Accessed on May 28, 2017); Leigh, Carol. *Support Your Local Hooker- Sex Workers & Friends Protest Mandatory HIV Testing*, 1989. <<https://vimeo.com/120436060>> (Accessed on May 28, 2017)

healthcare.”⁶¹² (Appendix 37) In the fourth issue of *DPN*, Beowulf Thorne’s “Cranky Words” sarcastically painted a grim picture of the U.S. health care system, specifically attacking decisions made on a purely financial basis:

When the triage nurse makes a decision as to who will get the one remaining oxygen tent, the withered clone with Pneumocystis or the sixteen-year-old virgin with a sprained ankle, it goes to the virgin, of course. After all, she has so many more productive years ahead of her making babies, and she was probably an innocent victim of that cheerleading accident anyway.⁶¹³

AIDS activists were convinced however that the crisis would trigger health care reform and bring about free and universal coverage in the United States, something which was conveyed by queer AIDS media’s messages.⁶¹⁴ What these videos, zines, and posters therefore tried to demonstrate was that the United States was violating the human rights of disenfranchised minority groups instead of protecting them. *Infected Faggot’s Perspectives’* eighth issue represented the Statue of Liberty covered with KS lesions, an emblem of a sick democracy.⁶¹⁵ (Appendix 4) Similarly, Gran Fury pictured the Statue holding up her middle-finger, parodying Emma Lazarus’ poem, “The New Colossus”: “Give me your tired, your poor, your HIV negative.”⁶¹⁶ (Appendix 38)

Queer AIDS media makers and AIDS activists advocated for a sweeping change in American society. As ACT UP activist Ann Northrop puts it in *Target City Hall*: “There is no issue that is not tied to AIDS. Therefore, it seems to me a great opportunity for radicalism, change, whatever it is you’re interested in.”⁶¹⁷ Even the Persian Gulf War eventually became a target. During ACT UP’s “Day of Desperation” on January 23, 1991, AIDS activists protested the Gulf War’s Operation Desert Storm asking “Money for AIDS, Not for War.” They temporarily actualized *Rockville is Burning’s* activist television takeover by disrupting CBS *Evening News* and chanting “Fight AIDS, Not Arabs” on live television. This action was recorded and subsequently aired on *AIDS Community Television*.⁶¹⁸

Yet, in trying to address such a wide range of concerns, AIDS activism and queer AIDS media were in danger of spreading themselves too thin, calling into question the very

⁶¹² Gran Fury. “Welcome to America: The Only Industrialized Country Besides South Africa Without National Healthcare.” Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library. *The New York Public Library Digital Collections*. 1989.

<<http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/a9b4ba7f-c7b7-81b5-e040-e00a18062a4e>> (Accessed on June 7, 2017)

⁶¹³ *Diseased Pariah News*. Issue n°4, 1991, p.19.

⁶¹⁴ Carlomusto, Jean. “Making It: AIDS Activist Television.” *Op.cit.* p.18.

⁶¹⁵ *Infected Faggot Perspective*. Issue n°8, 1992.

⁶¹⁶ Gran Fury. “Give Me Your Tired, Your Poor, Your HIV Negative.” Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library. *The New York Public Library Digital Collections*.

<<http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47e3-5375-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>> (Accessed on June 7, 2017)

⁶¹⁷ DIVA TV. *Target City Hall*. 1989.

⁶¹⁸ Wentzy, James. *Day of Desperation*. AIDS Community Television Weekly Series, telecast on January 25, 1994. <<https://vimeo.com/158810081>> (Accessed on December 28, 2016)

purpose of queer AIDS media. Was it educating the public and communities at risk, ending the AIDS crisis, or eliminating social injustice? These questions reflect the deeper structural shift that was occurring within ACT UP by the 1990s. In 1992, treatment activists, who were committed to putting “drugs into bodies” and working alongside researchers, split from ACT UP to form the Treatment Action Group (TAG). This split was motivated by divisions between this group and activists who saw AIDS as the gateway to achieving social justice in the United States.⁶¹⁹ These divisions, added to questions about the efficacy of AIDS activism led to the progressive decline of queer AIDS media in the mid-1990s.

⁶¹⁹ Andriote, John Manuel. *Victory Deferred: How AIDS Changed Gay Life in America*. University of Chicago Press, 1999, pp.202-210.

PART IV

**QUEER AIDS MEDIA'S LEGACY: A
RECORD OF LOSS?**

IV.1. The Decline of Queer AIDS Media and HIV/AIDS Activism

As the AIDS epidemic continued well into the 1990s, AIDS activism began to move away from single-focus issues and started addressing systemic patterns of inequality that were deeply embedded in issues of class, race, and gender. Yet, while treatment activists made considerable inroads in the war to end the spread of AIDS, battles to rebuild American society were far from being won. Internal splits appeared within the movement between those who wished to continue to focus solely on pushing for a cure for AIDS and those who wanted AIDS activism to be an instrument to initiate broader social change.⁶²⁰ These divisions were accompanied by other factors, which led both to the waning of AIDS activism as well as to a steady decline in the production of queer AIDS media from 1993 onwards.⁶²¹

IV.1.1. Revolution Turned Eulogy: Is Mourning Militancy?

Despite the activists' efforts to disseminate information about AIDS and fight for a cure, by 1993, twelve years after the appearance of the epidemic, the number of new reported AIDS cases in the United States reached its highest level.⁶²² AIDS had become the leading cause of death in men and women aged 25 to 44. Furthermore, since 1981, there had been 234,225 deaths in the United States alone.⁶²³ This seemed to indicate that AIDS activism had only achieved, at best, moderate successes. Many activists consequently suffered from burn-out.⁶²⁴ David Deitcher explains that "the many deaths among ACT UP members and the ensuing dissension, exhaustion and frustration among survivors – characteristic signs of the 'burnout' that would only intensify as the years passed without any prospect of an end to the

⁶²⁰ Andriote, John Manuel. *Op.cit.* p.250.

⁶²¹ Hubbard, Jim. Interview with the author. December 20, 2016, p.10.

⁶²² 1993 was year when the CDC changed its definition of AIDS to include new opportunistic infections, cervical cancer, and HIV-positive people with T-cell counts under 200. It resulted in a 111% increase in the number of U.S. AIDS cases. Many of these new cases were women. Information retrieved from <<http://www.amfar.org/thirty-years-of-hiv/aids-snapshots-of-an-epidemic/>> (Accessed on May 4, 2017)

⁶²³ Hariri, Susan, McKenna, Matthew T. "Epidemiology of Human Immunodeficiency Virus in the United States." *Clinical Microbiology Reviews*, 20 (3), July 2007, pp.478-488.

<<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1932758/>> (Accessed on June 2, 2017)

⁶²⁴ The term "burn-out" was coined by the American psychologist Herbert J. Freudenberger in 1974. In his article "Staff Burn-Out," Freudenberger defines the burn-out phenomenon as emotional and physical exhaustion due to disillusionment and frustration with one's work. He explains that "the dedicated and the committed," that is, people working for organizations such as "gay centers, women's clinics, crisis intervention centers etc." whom he defines as "people who are seeking to respond to the recognized needs of people," are particularly prone to burn-out. Freudenberger, Herbert J. "Staff Burn-Out." *Journal of Social issues*, Volume 30, Number 1, 1974.

crisis” led to changes within ACT UP.⁶²⁵ In the face of increasing loss, debates around which representations of HIV/AIDS were needed were re-opened in the 1990s.

IV.1.1.A. Demoralized Representations of HIV/AIDS

The rhetoric employed by shows such as GMHC’s “Living with AIDS” (1988-1994) and by most queer AIDS media until then had insisted on the fact that images had the power to actually save lives. Additionally, with the exception of zines, there had been a concerted effort on the part of PWAs to show almost exclusively positive images of the disease by representing people with HIV/AIDS as heroes fighting for their lives. The protest against photographer Nicholas Nixon’s series “People with AIDS,” which depicted the silent and individual experience of PWAs through black and white photographs showing the progressive deterioration of their bodies, is a case in point. Accusing the photographs of focusing on the private rather than the public dimension of the crisis, AIDS activists published a flyer demanding “No more pictures without context:”

In portraying PWAs as people to be pitied or feared, as people alone and lonely, we believe that this show perpetuates general misconceptions about AIDS without addressing the realities of those of us living every day with this crisis (...). We demand the visibility of PWAs who are vibrant, angry, loving, sexy, beautiful, acting up and fighting back.⁶²⁶

However, such assertions presented risks. Marita Sturken asks: “What does it mean to require the ‘positive’ in the context of an epidemic in which the reality is that people are dying, often quite painfully?”⁶²⁷ The movement’s effort to police AIDS representations, by insisting that the only valid depiction of AIDS was a positive one, could be viewed as a form of censorship. Simon Watney posits that, in a way, these positive images were no more representative of the reality of AIDS than “the morbid excesses” of the mass media, arguing that they also represented a form of denial about the reality of the disease.⁶²⁸ While positive images of surviving PWAs might have seemed to be a legitimate way to respond to the negative dominant representations of HIV/AIDS, some activists in the 1990s expressed an increasing need to take into account the complexities and diversity of AIDS representations. As Douglas Crimp explains:

⁶²⁵ Deitcher, David. “What Does Silence Equal Now?” *Art Matters: How the Culture Wars Changed America*. Ed. Julie Ault, Brian Wallis. New York University Press, 1999, p.111.

⁶²⁶ Crimp, Douglas. “Portraits of People with AIDS.” *Melancholia and Moralism*. Ed. Douglas Crimp. MIT Press, 2002, p.118.

⁶²⁷ Sturken, Marita. *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997, p.155.

⁶²⁸ *Ibid.*

What portrait of a gay person, or of a PWA (...) would be representative? (...) Do we want to find ourselves in the position of denying the horrible suffering of people with AIDS, the fact that very many PWAs become disfigured and helpless, and that they die? (...) We must continue to demand and create our own counterimages (...). But we must also recognize that every image of a PWA is a *representation*.⁶²⁹

The rhetoric of heroism could actually barely be sustained, despite videomakers' efforts to prove otherwise. *Voices from the Front* (1991) indeed insisted on presenting PWAs as heroes fighting for their lives, a stance perhaps best embodied in the film in the figure of Jim Jensen demonstrating at the NIH in his hospital gown while being still attached to an IV rack. (Appendix 39) Therefore, *Voices* could be seen as contributing to a form of mythologizing of AIDS activism.⁶³⁰ The tape ends with footage of PWA Vito Russo's giving a speech at the 1988 FDA demonstration, in which he declares: "After we kick the shit out of this illness, we're all going to be alive to kick the shit out of this system so that this never happens again."⁶³¹ His words are followed by a montage of images of ACT UP demonstrations set to a song by Jimmy Somerville, "Read My Lips," exalting people to take action. Yet, shortly after, the phrase "In memoriam" appears on the screen and the viewer is confronted with images of people who died before the tape's completion. One of them is Vito Russo. There was therefore an inherent contradiction between what the tape was trying to promote and the reality of the epidemic.⁶³² Vito's death demonstrated to many AIDS activists that the rhetoric of "living with AIDS," in which AIDS was a manageable illness and not "a death sentence," was becoming difficult to uphold. Crimp explains: "I think many of us had a special investment in Vito's survival, not only because he was so beloved, but because, as a long term survivor, as a resolute believer in his own survival, and as a highly visible and articulate fighter for his and others' survival, he fully embodied that hope."⁶³³ Similarly, *DPN's* existence could not transcend the death of its co-editor and the zine ceased publication upon the death of Beowulf Thorne in 1999 as the remaining editor, Tom Ace, suffered from burn-out.⁶³⁴

⁶²⁹ Crimp, Douglas. "Portraits of People with AIDS." *Melancholia and Moralism*. Ed. Douglas Crimp. MIT Press, 2002, p.100.

⁶³⁰ Crimp, Douglas. "An Introduction." *Melancholia and Moralism*. Ed. Douglas Crimp. MIT Press, 2002, p.21.

⁶³¹ Russo, Vito. "Why We Fight." 1988. <<http://www.actupny.org/documents/whfight.html>> (Accessed on May 4, 2017)

⁶³² Crimp, Douglas. "De-moralizing Representations of AIDS." *Melancholia and Moralism*. Ed. Douglas Crimp. MIT Press, 2002, p.296.

⁶³³ Crimp, Douglas. "Right on Girlfriend!" *Melancholia and Moralism*. Ed. Douglas Crimp. MIT Press, 2002, p.173.

⁶³⁴ Ace, Tom. "Thorne on Our Side." *POZ Magazine*, August 1, 1999.

<<https://www.poz.com/article/Thorne-on-Our-Side-11311-5003>> (Accessed on February 8, 2017); Brouwer, Daniel C. "Counterpublicity and Corporeality in HIV/AIDS Zines." *Op.cit.* p.366.

By the early nineties, militancy and its representations became inseparable from mourning.⁶³⁵ The optimistic rhetoric of surviving and thriving had to be modified to take into account the continued reality of illness. Some PWAs felt the need to openly confront the growing sense of exhaustion and hopelessness that many activists were experiencing,⁶³⁶ following Crimp's recommendations outlined in his 1994 essay: "What is necessary now is the self-representation of our *demoralization*."⁶³⁷ As early as 1989, Emjay Wilson's experimental video *A Plague Has Swept My City* ran against the dominant activist discourse of mandatory hopefulness. In a chorus-like manner, voices read over the images on screen:

A plague has swept my city (...), they die without warning, they die without hope (...) condemned by those outside the city's wall (...). People speak of segregation, newscasters flaunt their homophobic heckles, and tomorrow holds a desperate doom. A plague has swept my city, and the healthy have little pity (...). The plague will not always be selective. A plague has swept my city, and we gamble for tomorrow (...).⁶³⁸

Gregg Bordowitz's *Fast Trip Long Drop* (1993), a montage of staged and documentary footage, provided a platform for the voices of the ill, the dying, the "burnt out," "the broken-hearted," and the "profoundly confused." Whereas it was Bordowitz himself who ended his 1988 landmark essay, "Picture a coalition," on the following words: "Picture a coalition of people who *will* end this epidemic,"⁶³⁹ five years later, the videomaker's discourse had considerably changed, as he declared in his film:

The knowledge of my infection coupled with the careful monitoring of the state of my immune system forces me to face a simple fact: I will die (...). I guess what's unique about my pain is that it's mine, mine to feel and mine to represent, mine to overcome, mine to resign to, mine. At first, owning it, acknowledging it, seemed like a revolutionary act. Now, accepting the fact of my own mortality has become the hardest thing I'm facing, and I have to do it. The task has appeared to me with great force, with urgency.⁶⁴⁰

1993, the year when *FLTD* was made, heralded a period of hopelessness for AIDS activists. The Berlin International AIDS conference had recently taken place, during which doctors announced that there was no foreseeable cure for AIDS. The results of the Concorde Study challenged the presumed effectiveness of AZT, which at that time was the only AIDS drug on

⁶³⁵ Crimp, Douglas. "Mourning and Militancy." *Op.cit.* pp.125-147.

⁶³⁶ Bordowitz, Gregg. "Interview with the 12th Ecole du Magasin." *AIDS Riot: Collectifs d'artistes face au Sida / Activist Collectives against AIDS, New York 1987-1994*. Ed. 12^e Session de l'Ecole du Magasin. Grenoble: Magasin, 2003, p.307 and Bordowitz, Gregg. "More Operative Assumptions." *The AIDS Crisis is Ridiculous and Other Writings: 1986-2003*. Ed. Gregg Bordowitz. MIT Press, p.249.

⁶³⁷ Crimp, Douglas. "De-moralizing Representations of AIDS." *Op.cit.* p.261.

⁶³⁸ Wilson, Emjay. *A Plague Has Swept My City*. 1989. Extracted from Greyson, John. *Angry Initiatives, Defiant Strategies*. Deep Dish Television, 1988.

<https://archive.org/details/ddtv_16_angry_initiatives_defiant_strategies> (Accessed on September 24, 2016)

⁶³⁹ Bordowitz, Gregg. "Picture a Coalition." *Op.cit.* p.196.

⁶⁴⁰ Bordowitz, Gregg. *Fast Trip, Long Drop*. 1993.

the market.⁶⁴¹ Tired of “pretending for the sake of others that [he] would survive,”⁶⁴² Bordowitz used his film to confront activism’s limits. On camera, he confessed his despair as well as his fear of mortality – his own as well as his friends’ – either in monologues or during interactions with his PWA support group, his parents, and his friend Yvonne Rainer, a New York-based artist suffering from breast cancer. His anguish expresses the inability of the movement to save the lives of its members. In the same way, *IFP* co-editor W. Wayne Karr explained in the final issue in 1993 that, despite enjoying relatively good health during the two previous years, he had completely lost faith in the possibility of social change. Karr asked the question: “When even direct actions in the form of marches and demonstrations seem laughably ineffective, what could the production of a zine possibly do to effect social change?”⁶⁴³ The exhaustion felt by queer AIDS media makers led them to question the validity of their work as they sometimes failed to see any tangible results. In 1997, Alexandra Juhasz, still one of the most vocal proponents of AIDS alternative media today, admitted being “tired to death of AIDS activist video.”⁶⁴⁴ In *FTLD*, Carlomusto explains that, as time went on, AIDS videos took on new meanings:

It became more and more sad to sit in an editing room with this material, because as you would look at the material, you’d start to think, “Oh well, he’s gone” and “he’s gone,” and it became almost your only chance to see people whom you hadn’t seen in a long time. Or a chance to see someone who looked healthier at that particular time. It really became more and more a record of loss. In that way, the material that once had been so energizing starts to become almost a burden, difficult to watch. Because of that, it completely changed its meaning.⁶⁴⁵

While acknowledging that they had been successful in changing meanings by engaging in activist practices of “naming, visibility, imaging, and speaking”⁶⁴⁶ that empowered PWAs, queer AIDS media activists also came to the realization that the politics of representation could not forestall death from AIDS.⁶⁴⁷ Alexandra Juhasz put this feeling of defeat into words when she commented on her personal failure to maintain her best friend Jim alive through other means than the images that feature in her tape *Video Remains*: “We changed meanings

⁶⁴¹ Hallas, Roger. *Op.cit.* p.134.

⁶⁴² Bordowitz, Gregg. “More Operative Assumptions.” *Op.cit.* p.249.

⁶⁴³ Brouwer, Daniel C. “Counterpublicity and Corporeality in HIV/AIDS Zines.” *Op.cit.* p.366.

⁶⁴⁴ Juhasz, Alexandra. “Making AIDS Video as Radical Pedagogy.” *The Radical Teacher*, n°50, Spring 1997, p.23.

⁶⁴⁵ Bordowitz, Gregg. *Fast Trip, Long Drop*. 1993.

⁶⁴⁶ Juhasz, Alexandra. “The Failures of the Flesh and the Revival of AIDS Activism.” *Failure! Experiments in Aesthetic and Social Practices*. Eds. Nicole Antebi, Colin Dickey, and Robby Herbst. Los Angeles: The Journal of Aesthetics and Protest Press, 2006, p.135.

⁶⁴⁷ *Ibid.* p.136.

but we didn't save lives. The bodies around us failed and our representations failed these bodies."⁶⁴⁸

Hence, throughout *FTLD*, Bordowitz denounces the rhetoric of living and thriving by parodying his own GMHC show, "Living with AIDS," and appearing as "Alter Allesman," a long-term survivor, on the set of "Thriving With AIDS." The host, Henry Roth, praises him for being a "powerful model of a person surviving and thriving with AIDS." Yet, instead of accepting his pre-conceived role, Allesman retorts: "Fuck you. I don't wanna be yours or anyone else's fucking model. I'm not a hero, I'm not a revolutionary body, I'm not an angel. I'm just trying to reconcile the fact that I am going to die with the daily monotony of my life." To Bordowitz, the figure of the AIDS hero contributed to feeding already existing reductive dichotomies that represented the PWA as Other, as it spoke to "the uncertainty and fears of the uninfected."⁶⁴⁹ Questioning why he is constantly asked to be brave, Alter Allesman directly asks the viewer:

How do YOU live with AIDS? I wanna speak to people with AIDS (...) Aren't you sick of this shit? And people who are healthy, people who presume themselves negative, (...) how do YOU live with AIDS? (...) Why is it my responsibility to survive and thrive? (...). Aren't we all *living with AIDS*? Isn't this a crisis for *all* of us? I used to think so once. Now, I think that some of us are *living with AIDS* and some of us are *dying from AIDS*. Why didn't you ask me how it feels to *die* from AIDS?⁶⁵⁰

Some PWAs saw themselves as living embodiments of the disease. Alter Allesman went as far as stating that he *was* AIDS, while James Wentzy, in his autobiographical tape *Holding Steady Without Screaming*, asked: "Am I more than a virus? I guess not (...). I am not dead yet. But (...) I can imagine myself a collection of infections – emaciated, grey skin, feeble, blind and incontinent."⁶⁵¹ Videomakers thus tried to represent the medical reality and the complexities of the disease on screen by choosing to depict, instead of the AIDS hero, the everyday life of PWAs, as well as their foreseeable death.

⁶⁴⁸ Juhasz, Alexandra. "The Failures of the Flesh and the Revival of AIDS Activism." *Op.cit.* p.140. Yet, in the interview that I conducted with her, she came back on what she had written in the article: "If you have a long view of this epidemic, a long view of 25 years, we did end up saving lives, right? I just didn't know that when I wrote that. Eventually, we got to now, which is where – for people who have access to medication – HIV is a livable, manageable disease (...). So changing discourse and keeping pressure on the many places where decisions on AIDS were made – yes, there was a huge impact." See: Juhasz, Alexandra. Interview with the author. February 10, 2017, p.8.

⁶⁴⁹ Bordowitz, Gregg. "Boat Trip." *American Imago*, 51, 1994, pp.106-107.

⁶⁵⁰ Bordowitz, Gregg. *Fast Trip, Long Drop*. 1993.

⁶⁵¹ Wentzy, James. *Holding Steady Without Screaming*. 1995.
<<https://vimeo.com/200372606>> (Accessed on June 7, 2017)

IV.1.1.B. From Public and Collective Concern to Private Experience

By mostly relying on first-person media,⁶⁵² PWAs who decided to represent themselves as ill and dying were still in control of their image and therefore eschewed mainstream media's modes of representation. The opening sequence of *Fast Trip Long Drop* features Bordowitz sick in bed, taking his temperature, wearing only white briefs and a Silence=Death T-shirt. (Appendix 40) Looking into the camera and anxious for the doctor to call, he explains that he is suffering from fevers and night sweats, hoping it is simply the flu or a reaction to experimental drugs.⁶⁵³ His self-representation is thus at odds with the principles which guided queer AIDS media production in the 1980s. Similarly, Marlon Riggs's last documentary feature, *Black Is... Black Ain't* (1994), has Riggs addressing the camera from his hospital bed during his final days. (Appendix 40) Although AIDS is not the main topic of the movie, which looks at the experience of being black in America through an intersectional lens, Riggs's disease is ever present, as he died during the making of the movie on April 5, 1994. In fact, his imminent death drove him to make his movie.⁶⁵⁴ Like *FTLD*, Riggs's film is pervaded by a sense of hopelessness, as he ponders in front of the camera the fact that there will come a time when he will not be able to get out of his hospital bed or open his eyes, and will die from AIDS.

Silverlake Life: The View from Here (1993) takes the representation of illness a step further.⁶⁵⁵ The movie is a self-reflexive video diary by and about filmmakers and couple Tom Joslin and Mark Massi. Tom Joslin began the project, but Mark Massi took over when Joslin began feeling increasingly ill. The film was ultimately completed by Joslin's friend and colleague, Peter Friedman, when Massi also succumbed to the disease. This "politicized home movie"⁶⁵⁶ captures the intimate experience of living with and dying from the epidemic. The couple takes their camera with them everywhere: on vacation, to family events, etc. As viewers, we are privy to their conversations and monologues about their disease, but also to simple moments of their lives such as Mark Massi dancing to a new record in their living room. We follow their trips to their doctors and visits to alternative healers. We witness the

⁶⁵² First person media designate subjective, autobiographical and confessional modes of expression that have proliferated during the 1990s such as talk shows, video diaries, Webcams, and reality television. See: Dovey, John. *Freakshow: First Person Media and Factual Television*. Pluto Press, 2000.

⁶⁵³ Bordowitz, Gregg. *Fast Trip, Long Drop*. 1993.

⁶⁵⁴ Riggs, Marlon. *Black Is Black Ain't*. 1994. Alexander Street Video Streaming. (Accessed on January 17, 2016)

⁶⁵⁵ Friedman, Peter. *Silverlake Life: The View From Here*. 1993.

⁶⁵⁶ Juhasz, Alexandra, Kerr, Ted. "Home Video Returns: Media Ecologies of the Past of HIV/AIDS (Web Exclusive)." *Cineaste*, Summer 2014. <<https://www.cineaste.com/summer2014/home-video-returns-media-ecologies-of-the-past-of-hiv-aids/>> (Accessed on May 4, 2017)

devastating impact of AIDS on their bodies, from their KS lesions to Tom's progressive inability to accomplish mundane tasks such as grocery shopping, walking, eating, and seeing. (Appendix 41) An hour into the movie, Joslin's dead body appears on camera only minutes after his passing. Massi, filming while mourning Joslin's death, promises that he will finish the documentary. In the next sequence, Massi lifts the sheet to uncover Joslin's skeleton-like body, revealing the dehumanizing consequences of AIDS as his corpse is placed in a body bag. *Silverlake* offers its viewers an extreme picture of the daily reality of AIDS, which Peggy Phelan has called a "thanatography, a study in dying."⁶⁵⁷

Gran Fury, which disbanded in 1995 after the publication of its dissolution manifesto "Good Luck...Miss You,"⁶⁵⁸ similarly moved away from their in-your-face approach to the epidemic. The collective's last poster reflected the inability of their former communication strategies to deal with the new intricacies and complexities of the AIDS epidemic.⁶⁵⁹ Rather than trying to catch the viewer's attention, the piece was, like the other works mentioned above, rather intimate. "The Four Questions," created in 1993, was entirely textual. Written in small black letters set on a simple white background, a succession of questions read: "Do you resent people with AIDS? Do you trust HIV-negatives? Have you given up for a cure? When was the last time you cried?"⁶⁶⁰ (Appendix 42) In addition to addressing the emotional toll that AIDS had taken on activists, the piece also tackled the divisions between people who were HIV-positive and those who were negative.

IV.1.2. Dealing with Loss as a (Divided) Community

The very notion of "community" – more specifically the queer/AIDS community – came to be questioned in the mid-1990s. As Riggs puts it in *Black Is... Black Ain't*, "How do we keep ourselves together as a people in the face of all of our differences? Who's in the community and who's not?" Dissentions and tensions within the community were palpable in the works of queer AIDS media makers. Bordowitz not only condemned the discourse of well-known HIV positive people such as Mary Fisher or Magic Johnson, but he did not

⁶⁵⁷ Phelan, Peggy. "Infected Eyes. Dying Man With A Movie Camera, Silverlake Life: The View From Here." *Mourning Sex: Performing Public Memories*. Psychology Press, 1997, p.254.

⁶⁵⁸ Gran Fury. "Good Luck...Miss You." *Op.cit.* pp.301-305.

⁶⁵⁹ McCarty, Marlene, Moffett, Donald. "Interview with 12th Session of the Ecole du magasin." *AIDS Riot: Collectifs d'artistes face au Sida / Activist Collectives against AIDS, New York 1987-1994*. Ed. 12^e Session de l'Ecole du Magasin. Grenoble: Magasin, 2003, p.241.

⁶⁶⁰ Gran Fury. "The Four Questions." Manuscripts and Archives Division. The New York Public Library. *The New York Public Library Digital Collections*. <<http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47e4-1cec-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>> (Accessed on May 4, 2017)

hesitate to attack fellow AIDS activists, such as Larry Kramer. In *FTLD*, Kramer became Harry Blamer, a self-serving PWA screaming at his audience: “WHAT ABOUT MY NEEDS? YOU’RE ALL USELESS WASTE OF HUMAN FLESH IF YOU CAN’T FIND A CURE FOR ME.”⁶⁶¹ James Wentzy appeared to be the most disillusioned about the effectiveness of the queer AIDS community in the mid-1990s. His work, notably *...by any means necessary* (1994) and *Holding Steady Without Screaming* (1995), became extremely pessimistic:

Is anyone out there fighting AIDS? (...) We are in worse shape than we have ever been, and things are getting worse. Instead of “silence equals death,” the lesbian and gay community took “pride” this year with the theme “From Silence to Celebration.” This is what we are left with. ACT UP is dead in the water. Film festivals have AIDS “retrospectives” as if the fight against AIDS is over. I can’t celebrate. And I don’t feel part of any community.⁶⁶²

Indeed, at the time his work was produced, a number of AIDS activists had given up radical action to join community-based organizations and governmental agencies. Many joined institutions they had previously been excluded from. Since these activists started working within the system, they stood accused of having sold out and being complicit in the death of people with AIDS. In Wentzy’s video *...by any means necessary*, a manifesto written by activist Kiki Mason is read by a person with AIDS standing in front of the camera. His half-hidden face is superimposed on footage of bulldozers plowing mounds of corpses into mass graves after the Second World War, visually connecting AIDS to the Holocaust:⁶⁶³

I am being murdered. Just as surely as if my body was being tossed into a gas chamber, I am being sold down the river by people within this community who claim to be helping people with AIDS (...). ‘Activists’ now negotiate with drug companies just as the Jewish councils in the Warsaw ghettos of World War II negotiated with the Nazis. (...) AIDS careerists (...) have exchanged their anger for an invitation to the White House (...) while we’re left to die on the streets.⁶⁶⁴

While Bordowitz ironically advocated the creation of a new political platform, seeking a “candidacy of the burnt-out,” Wentzy supported taking more radical steps to fight AIDS “by any means necessary.” He pictured himself “pouring a can of gasoline and lighting [himself] on fire in front of some government building, cathedral or bureaucrat’s house,” and encouraged PWAs to commit acts of terror, such as holding the president of a drug company hostage, splattering their blood across the desk of a politician, trashing an AIDS researcher’s

⁶⁶¹ Bordowitz, Gregg. *Fast Trip, Long Drop*. 1993.

⁶⁶² Wentzy, James. *Holding Steady Without Screaming*. 1995.

⁶⁶³ The Holocaust was a frame of reference that was regularly used by people with AIDS in the U.S. to refer to the AIDS crisis and make sense of what they perceived as a general indifference to the epidemic. For more on how AIDS cultural productions compared AIDS to the Holocaust, see: Conrad, Ryan. “Revisiting AIDS and Its Metaphors.” *Drain Magazine*, 2017. <<http://drainmag.com/revisiting-aids-and-its-metaphors/>> (Accessed on May 11, 2017)

⁶⁶⁴ Wentzy, James. *...by any means necessary*. 1994. <<https://vimeo.com/200367945>> (Accessed on May 4, 2017)

home or spitting in the face of TV reporters. Similarly, the use of archival footage of riots in *Rockville is Burning*, along with the takeover of the television set and fake assassinations of people working for greedy pharmaceutical companies staged in the performance, can be seen as representing the frustration with ongoing debates within the movement about whether nonviolent direct action was sufficient to achieve their ends.⁶⁶⁵ This frustration is further expressed in Stephen Winter's 1996 *debut* feature *Chocolate Babies*, in which a group of self-proclaimed "raging, atheist, meat-eating, HIV-positive colored terrorists" repeatedly attack conservative politicians to get them to do something about AIDS, notably by smearing their infected blood on the individuals they target.⁶⁶⁶ In a similar fashion, Gran Fury's painting "RIOT," both a commemoration of the Stonewall Riots and a critique of the AIDS art collective General Idea's piece "AIDS,"⁶⁶⁷ could be read as a call to arms. (Appendix 43)

The sense of exhaustion and frustration with the community was also conveyed through a feeling of nostalgia for a bygone era. Jim Hubbard's *Elegy in the Streets*, as its name indicates, deals with the politics of nostalgia. The film juxtaposes images of political marches in the 1980s and visits to the AIDS Memorial quilt with personal memories shown in black and white of his dead lover Roger Jacoby.⁶⁶⁸ Hubbard mixes militancy with mourning, personal and collective memory/ies, exploring the complex relationship between these elements. The feeling of nostalgia was further intensified by the fact that a new generation of queer people was emerging. This created a generational gap within the community, which was divided between the Stonewall and the post-Stonewall generation who progressively took over AIDS activism and queer politics.⁶⁶⁹ As Crimp wrote in 1989, the new generation's losses "differ[ed] in significant respect from ours."⁶⁷⁰ By "losses," Crimp referred to the multiple losses the queer community had to deal with in the 1990s: the deaths of many in the community as well as the loss of a sexual culture that emerged after gay liberation and before the epidemic. These multiple losses are best expressed in Mark Christopher's short fictional movie *The Dead Boys Club* (1993), a precursor of the New Queer Cinema trend that

⁶⁶⁵ Bordowitz, Gregg. "The AIDS Crisis is Ridiculous." *Op.cit.* p. 216.

⁶⁶⁶ Winter, Stephen. *Chocolate Babies*, 1996. <<https://vimeo.com/62632619>> (Accessed on May 11, 2017)

⁶⁶⁷ General Idea's "AIDS" was itself an appropriation of Robert Indiana's iconic "LOVE" painting. Gran Fury. "RIOT [Stonewall '69 ...AIDS Crisis '89]." Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library. *The New York Public Library Digital Collections*. <<http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47e3-535b-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>> (Accessed on June 7, 2017)

⁶⁶⁸ Hubbard, Jim. *Elegy in the Streets*. 1989, AIDS Activist Videotape Collection. Manuscripts and Archives Division. The New York Public Library. Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations. <<https://vimeo.com/104752436>> (Accessed on June 7, 2017)

⁶⁶⁹ Crimp, Douglas. "Mourning and Militancy." *Op.cit.* p.139.

⁶⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

succeeded queer AIDS media.⁶⁷¹ The short movie raises questions about the state of the gay community in the 1990s compared to the 1970s and the early 1980s, capturing the anxiety felt by many at the time. Toby, visiting his older cousin Packard in New York whose friend John has just died from AIDS, is visibly insecure in his identity as a gay man. While sexuality was brazenly explored in the 1970s, it took on a different meaning in the 1990s. In the first sequence of the film, Toby throws an unnamed man's number away, probably for fear of casual sexual encounters, which many had accused in the 1980s of being the cause of HIV. Toby's antiseptic asexual world represents the internalized guilt felt by many gay men of his generation.⁶⁷² Additionally, Toby is haunted by the absence of an entire generation that disappeared because of AIDS, which triggered the disappearance of a community culture. When the older gay men in the film – namely Packard and his friend Charles – interact, they share cultural references that Toby cannot relate to. He does not belong to a community, whereas Packard proudly claims that “he knows everybody.” When Toby admits not knowing who Donna Summer is, Charles laments, “your generation will never know what it missed,” while Packard gravely responds, “I think they do.” The movie therefore exemplifies a form of what Jacques Derrida has termed “hauntology,” as the specter of AIDS seems to haunt gay men's identity on both sides of the generational divide.⁶⁷³ Yet, Toby finds a way to explore life in the pre-AIDS gay community, when Packard gives him John's “slut shoes” which magically transport him to a world of sexual liberation and disco. The shoes constitute an embodiment of the concept of postmemory, defined by Marianne Hirsch as:

The relationship that the “generation after” bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before, to experiences they “remember” only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right.⁶⁷⁴

⁶⁷¹ Christopher, Mark. *The Dead Boys' Club*. 1993.

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zBpCjIIQ79Q>> (Accessed on September 20, 2016)

⁶⁷² Guilt is a common psychological reaction among HIV negatives and survivors. See: Nord, David. *Multiple AIDS-Related Loss: A Handbook for Understanding and Surviving a Perpetual Fall*. Taylor & Francis, 1997, pp.118-126.

⁶⁷³ Hauntology is a concept coined by French philosopher Jacques Derrida in his book *Specters of Marx* (1993). It can be defined as the figure of the ghost which is neither present, nor absent, neither dead, nor alive. As Derrida suggests, it means learning to live with ghosts. In his attempt to examine the haunted queer spaces of AIDS, Julian Gill-Peterson explains that: “Learning to live with ghosts confronts the impulse to conjure them away out of the fear of self that stems from being haunted by the specter of one's own death. Hauntology is a way to come to understand that life and death, being and nonbeing, are not opposites. It enables a reckoning with responsibility to the past and future. Haunting occurs as the effect of the stubborn remainder of the work of mourning after a trauma.” See: Gill-Peterson, Julian. “Haunting the Queer Spaces of AIDS: Remembering ACT UP/New York and an Ethic for an Endemic.” *GLQ: Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, Volume 19, Number 3, 2013, p.281.

⁶⁷⁴ Definition retrieved from Marianne Hirsch's website: <<http://www.postmemory.net/>> (Accessed on May 4, 2017)

In this case, Toby is able to physically experience the sexual underworld of a pre-traumatic era, a world described in the 1978 book he is reading in the first sequence of the movie, *Dancer from the Dance* by Andrew Holleran.⁶⁷⁵ Flash-back scenes consist of a succession of images of gay men laughing, cruising, embracing and dancing, set to Thelma Houston's disco tune "Don't leave me this way."⁶⁷⁶ Yet, the specter of AIDS keeps bringing the characters back to the present, symbolized by Toby's constant desire to get rid of the shoes, the upcoming funeral of Packard's friend, and Toby's fear of having contracted HIV after realizing he might have had unprotected sex. As the final images of the film make it clear, in which one of the gay men from the fantasy of the 1970s smiles at the viewer before exiting the scene, the new generation now had to renegotiate their gay identity while being careful not to negate the memory of the generation that came before them.

As the movement dissipated and the community began to fracture, so did the impulse to produce works collectively.⁶⁷⁷ Some of its members wanted grow as independent artists, exploring different forms of media. Queer AIDS media thus constituted the blueprint for the emergence of a new cinematic genre, which became known as New Queer Cinema (NQC) and flourished in mid-1990s.⁶⁷⁸ As B. Ruby Rich, the leading theorist of NQC, explains, "as urgency and rage began to collapse into despair and frustration for the ACT UP generation, the New Queer Cinema created a space of reflection, nourishment, and renewed engagement."⁶⁷⁹ The style of NQC favored pastiche and appropriation and was influenced by art, avant-garde cinema, AIDS activist video, and music video. They eschewed positive images and happy endings in favor of reflections on the nature of gender and sexuality, which they did not hesitate to depict frankly.⁶⁸⁰ Monica B. Pearl suggests that the same concerns motivated both AIDS activist videos and New Queer Cinema. According to her, NQC "provides another way of making sense out of the virus (...). It is a way of providing meaning that does not change or sanitize the experience."⁶⁸¹ Among the leading figures of NQC one can cite members of ACT UP and queer AIDS media makers Tom Kalin, Todd Haynes, Jennie Livingston, or Maria Maggenti. Although Gregg Araki was not involved with ACT UP, his 1993 long-feature, *The Living End*, was clearly influenced by the organization and

⁶⁷⁵ *Dancers from the Dance* is a 1978 novel about gay men in New York City and Fire Island in the 1970s.

⁶⁷⁶ Houston, Thelma. "Don't leave me this way." 1976. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FLzbKm56dLI>> (Accessed on May 4, 2017)

⁶⁷⁷ Carlomusto, Jean. Interview with the author. January 18, 2017, p.6.

⁶⁷⁸ Rich, Ruby. *New Queer Cinema*. Duke University Press, 2013, p.xix.

⁶⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸⁰ Benschhoff, Harry M., Griffin, Sean. *Op.cit.* p.220.

⁶⁸¹ Pearl, Monica. "AIDS and New Queer Cinema." *New Queer Cinema: A Critical Reader*. Ed. Michele Aaron. Rutgers University Press, 2004, p.33.

reflected the nihilistic mood that prevailed in the 1990s. The movie told the story of two gay men who, after finding out they are HIV positive, decide to hit the road and “fuck the world.” The dedication that ends the film indeed reads: “To Craig Lee (1954-1991) and to the hundreds of thousands who have died and the hundreds of thousands more who will die because of a big white house full of republican fuckheads.”⁶⁸²

The disillusion with both the community and the effectiveness of their work combined with the dissolution of the larger activist movement precipitated the decline of queer AIDS media, a decline which was further facilitated by the fact that AIDS became normalized in the United States in the 1990s.

IV.1.3. The Second Silence: The Progressive Normalization of HIV/AIDS

The epidemic gradually became a permanent feature of American society. As the program of the 1994 MIX Festival stated: “AIDS is treated as one of the many unchanging facts of life, a subject that no one can do anything about.”⁶⁸³ Douglas Crimp identified this process as early as 1992, stating that AIDS had become simply one item on the list of social problems, along with poverty, crime, drugs, or homelessness.⁶⁸⁴ Some queer AIDS media makers explored the fact that AIDS was now a “permanent disaster”⁶⁸⁵ by investigating the theme of risk in their work. Bordowitz reminded his viewers in *Fast Trip Long Drop* that, “like everyone else, I could get hit by a bus, be murdered, or kill myself.”⁶⁸⁶ Similarly, James Wentzy claimed that he could also be “run over by bicycle, or dead by a heart attack, or stabbed to death by any random violence against queers” instead of dying of HIV/AIDS.⁶⁸⁷ This phenomenon of normalization resulted from the combination of numerous factors: the progressive inclusion of HIV/AIDS images in mainstream culture, the end of the Reagan-Bush era, and the release of new life-prolonging medications in 1996.

Even though a certain amount of attention was paid to activist practices in mainstream culture, notably within art institutions, that attention was limited. The art world mostly

⁶⁸² Araki, Gregg. *The Living End*, 1992.

⁶⁸³ “AIDS: Expression and States of Mind.” Mix 94: The 8th New York Lesbian & Gay Experimental Film/Video Festival. Published and near Print Material, Media (1 of 2), October 17 1994-November 28 1994. ACT UP: The AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power: Series X. Published and near Print Material Box 159, Folder 1. New York Public Library. Archives of Sexuality & Gender. <tinyurl.galegroup.com/tinyurl/4JEzS2> (Accessed on February 1, 2017)

⁶⁸⁴ Crimp, Douglas. “Right On Girlfriend!” *Op.cit.* p.175.

⁶⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸⁶ Bordowitz, Gregg. *Fast Trip, Long Drop*. 1993.

⁶⁸⁷ Wentzy, James. *Holding Steady Without Screaming*. 1995.

focused on Gran Fury, seemingly designated as the AIDS activist group that was representative of *all* cultural activist practice.⁶⁸⁸ In fact, symbols of remembrance and acceptance of AIDS – such as the red ribbon⁶⁸⁹ or the AIDS Memorial Quilt⁶⁹⁰ – were favored over more radical representations of the crisis. Hence, only certain versions of AIDS reached the national public sphere and activists failed to radically impact the mainstream discursive space.⁶⁹¹ When asked about the limits of queer AIDS media, Jim Hubbard indeed replied: “Why wasn’t this stuff shown on television? Why do we get to have one more sitcom or one more so-called ‘reality’ program? (...) It’s not of the interest of the power structure to show work that challenges the power structure. So it doesn’t get shown on TV.”⁶⁹² Indeed, while U.S. television and Hollywood did take on the subject, the political implications of the epidemic were still mostly ignored.⁶⁹³ Hollywood’s first movie about AIDS, *Philadelphia* (1993, dir. by Jonathan Demme) resorted to “sentimental pedagogy” to bring to light the issue of AIDS and AIDS-related discrimination for a mainstream audience.⁶⁹⁴ Choosing popular yet straight actors to play the main gay roles, Tom Hanks and Antonio Banderas, the movie de-gayed, de-sexualized, and de-politicized AIDS in order to normalize the disease and those who had it.⁶⁹⁵

Additionally, it became harder to attack government policies. In 1992, Bill Clinton, a Democrat, was elected president. His campaign already promised a new level of governmental responsiveness, as he praised the queer community’s efforts in the fight against AIDS: “When no one was offering a helping hand (...) you did not withdraw but instead you reached out to others. And this whole nation has benefitted already in ways most people cannot even imagine from the courage and commitment and sense of community which you practice.”⁶⁹⁶ Clinton was the first president to acknowledge AIDS in his inaugural address on January 20, 1993.⁶⁹⁷ Although his AIDS policies were still contested by AIDS activists, he

⁶⁸⁸ Crimp, Douglas. “A Day Without Gertrude.” *Melancholia and Moralism*. Ed. Douglas Crimp. MIT Press, 2002, p.166.

⁶⁸⁹ Created by Visual AIDS in 1991, the red ribbon is now the universal symbol of awareness and support for those living with HIV.

⁶⁹⁰ The Names Project AIDS Memorial Quilt was created by San Francisco-based gay activist Cleve Jones in 1987. The Quilt was conceived as a giant patchwork composed of three by six feet panels stitched together to commemorate those who had died of AIDS.

⁶⁹¹ Cvetkovich, Ann. “AIDS Activism And Public Feelings: Documenting ACT UP’S Lesbians.” *Op.cit.* p.376.

⁶⁹² Hubbard, Jim. Interview with the author. December 20, 2016, p.12.

⁶⁹³ *Ibid.* p.302.

⁶⁹⁴ Corber, Robert J. “Nationalizing the Gay Body: AIDS and Sentimental Pedagogy in ‘Philadelphia.’” *American Literary History*, Vol. 15, No. 1, 2003, pp. 107-133.

⁶⁹⁵ Demus Axelle, “Framing the AIDS Crisis (...)” *Op.cit.* pp. 167-169.

⁶⁹⁶ Andriote, John Manuel. *Op.cit.* pp.236-237.

⁶⁹⁷ Clinton, William J. “Inaugural Address.” January 20, 1993. <<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=46366>> (Accessed on June 6, 2015)

nonetheless publicly expressed compassion for people with AIDS. When ACT UP activist and PWA Bob Rafsky disrupted one of Clinton's speeches, he answered: "I feel your pain."⁶⁹⁸ The new administration, being more willing to acknowledge the seriousness of the epidemic than their Republican predecessors, constituted a "soft target" for queer AIDS media makers.⁶⁹⁹ As Gran Fury notes in "Good Luck...Miss You:"

Bill Clinton, while not providing strong leadership for the AIDS crisis, is not easily demonized, and does not make openly hostile or stupidly misinformed remarks about AIDS. Reagan's blatant ignorance and hostility, and to a lesser degree Bush's as well, were easy targets for activism.⁷⁰⁰

At the same time, AIDS treatments were also becoming more effective and enabled people with AIDS to live longer. When the AIDS cocktail, HAART, was released in 1996, people's health status became more manageable. Gregg Bordowitz explains, "living much longer than he expected, the videomaker must ponder his own situation: the normal pains and anxieties that accompany aging and adulthood; the continued uncertainty regarding mortality; the many losses suffered and the continued mourning."⁷⁰¹ As PWAs needed to consider their future prospects, some of them became less interested in making work about AIDS. The release of life prolonging medications in 1996 consequently prompted a decline in media production and in the space HIV/AIDS took up in the public sphere, even while there were still many new cases of HIV infections. One of the few productions that emerged after the release of treatments was Gregg Bordowitz's *Habit* (2001), a sequel to *Fast Trip Long Drop*. The structure of *Habit* is based around the filmmaker's daily routine, of which taking twenty pills a day was now a fundamental part.⁷⁰² (Appendix 44)

These evolutions triggered what Ted Kerr termed the "Second Silence."⁷⁰³ As discussions of AIDS-related issues in U.S. politics and culture subsided, the U.S. entered a state of "Not-About-AIDS," and an "End-of-AIDS" discourse came to replace the "AIDS-as-Crisis" discourse.⁷⁰⁴ The few posters produced by ACT UP New York read: "Nobody Talks about AIDS Anymore (...) Too exhausted to fight and too hurt to hope, we've turned the lives

⁶⁹⁸ "The 1992 Campaign: Verbatim; Heckler Stirs Clinton Anger: Excerpts From the Exchange." *New York Times*, March 28, 1992. <<http://www.nytimes.com/1992/03/28/us/1992-campaign-verbatim-heckler-stirs-clinton-anger-excerpts-exchange.html>> (Accessed on January 12, 2015)

⁶⁹⁹ Hubbard, Jim. Interview with the author. December 20, 2016, p.11.

⁷⁰⁰ Gran Fury. "Good Luck...Miss You." *Op.cit.* p.304.

⁷⁰¹ Bordowitz Gregg. "12th Session of the Ecole du Magasin: An interview." *Op.cit.* p.310.

⁷⁰² Bordowitz, Gregg. *Habit*. 2001. <http://www.greggbordowitz.com/motion_pictures.html> (Accessed on May 4, 2017)

⁷⁰³ Ted Kerr explains that the "First Silence" is the five years between 1981 to 1985 when President Ronald Reagan did not say the word "AIDS." See: Kerr, Ted. "AIDS 1969: HIV, History, and Race." *Drain Magazine*, 2016. <<http://drainmag.com/aids-1969-hiv-history-and-race/>> (Accessed on May 4, 2017)

⁷⁰⁴ Roman, David. "Not-About-AIDS." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, Volume 6, Number 1, 2000, pp.1-28.

of our missing friends and lovers into pieces of a quilt and our anger and activism into red ribbons”⁷⁰⁵ (Appendix 45) Yet, despite this different context marked by a move toward the normalization of HIV/AIDS and the visible decline in production, a small number of queer AIDS media makers maintained their practice. James Wentzy went on to create over 150 hours of cable access programs about AIDS for AIDS Community Television and the ACT UP live program between 1993 and 1996. Jean Carlomusto kept making media about HIV/AIDS, and so did Jim Hubbard. Both are still actively using the medium of video to deal with AIDS today. Additionally, although at one point it seemed that death trumped the life of the images, queer AIDS media now constitute a way to keep the history of AIDS activism and its participants alive.

IV.2. “History Will Recall:” Lessons for Present and Future Struggles

As the visibility of the movement faded, surviving members became increasingly preoccupied with the question of preserving the memory of the movement and its members for posterity. It became necessary for them to engage in politics of remembrance. The body of counter-images produced in the 1980s took on a new role in the 1990s and 2000s: they became counter-memories.

IV.2.1. Historicizing the AIDS Movement to Fight Erasure

While the primary concern for making AIDS videos was saving people’s lives in the present, the drive to make activist media during the crisis was also to claim a place in what would become history for future generations.⁷⁰⁶ The tension between present urgency and future memory rendered queer activists’ relationship to history ambivalent. During an interview conducted in 1989, one Gran Fury member refused to put the collective’s work in historical perspective until the end of the crisis, arguing that the emphasis on analyzing AIDS and their work historically distanced them from the fact that AIDS was “a living, breathing

⁷⁰⁵ The poster also denounced the community’s shift away from AIDS politics to focus on concerns such as the status of queer people in the military or same-sex marriage, as the text at the bottom of the image read: “You can’t serve in the military if you’re dead. You can’t march in the St. Patrick’s Day parade if you’re dead. You can’t register as domestic partners if you’re dead.”
<https://c1.staticflickr.com/9/8209/8232607651_a1257d8f8e_b.jpg> (Accessed on May 11, 2017)

⁷⁰⁶ Kerr, Ted, Juhasz, Alexandra. “Stacked on Her Office Shelf: Stewardship and AIDS Archives.” *The Center for the Humanities*, January 13, 2017. <<http://www.centerforthehumanities.org/blog/stacked-on-her-office-shelf-stewardship-and-aids-archives>> (Accessed on May 4, 2017)

crisis in which lives [were] at stake right at this moment.”⁷⁰⁷ Twenty-one years later, in 2010, Avram Finkelstein explained:

You remember what it was like. Care teams; hospital visits; funerals; finding places for people’s possessions; fighting with people’s families over what they wanted; people’s boyfriends who were thrown out on the street. It was a war, and I felt (...) like creating history while you’re living it is a way that we neutralize what’s happening. You’re creating an arm’s distance at the same time that it’s happening. It’s like a man living his life as a life remembered. You’re not actually living it; you’re remembering it while you’re living it.⁷⁰⁸

Video works perhaps best articulated this tension. Queer AIDS media’s sense of immediacy and instantaneity was constructed through the use of present-tense narration and handheld camera footage.⁷⁰⁹ Yet the images recorded also evoked history in the making by documenting protests and life stories which would have gone unrecorded otherwise.

Queer AIDS media was historicizing the movement as it was being created.⁷¹⁰ Activists wanted to make sure that their struggle would be remembered on their own terms. Recording one’s own history took on additional meaning for the AIDS movement, since it was a movement whose core impulse was based on fighting a deadly epidemic. Queer AIDS media thus generated testimony and evidence dedicated to future collective memory: their makers anticipated that these videos, images, and texts would last after the deaths of the people whose lives they recorded. The quest for physical survival of the 1980s shifted to become a quest aimed at finding ways to maintain a form of survival after death through media making. Marlon Riggs explained that, having reconciling himself with death, his work was about “living beyond death and in a way that continues to move people.”⁷¹¹ During a couples therapy session that Massi and Joslin attend in *Silverlake Life*, Massi seems determined to live by whatever medical means he can find, while Joslin on the other hand expresses his desire to live for the project, which he sees as being a form of survival. Peggy Phelan writes: “Transferring his life to film, Joslin renders his body a body of film.”⁷¹²

Bearing witness to the epidemic in front of the camera was all the more important for queer people and people with AIDS as they lacked a voice in society. There was therefore a fear that history would replicate this systemic pattern of erasure. As Alexandra Juhasz

⁷⁰⁷ Gober, Robert. “Gran Fury, An Interview.” *Op.cit.* p.234.

⁷⁰⁸ ACT UP Oral History Project. Interview of Avram Finkelstein. *Op.cit.* p.42.

⁷⁰⁹ Sturken, Marita. “The Politics of Video Memory: Electronic Erasures and Inscriptions.” *Resolutions: Contemporary Video Practices*. Ed. Michal Renov, Erika Sudeburg. University of Minnesota Press, 1996. p.3.

⁷¹⁰ Yet, some media makers contend that this was not necessarily a primary goal of the movement. Carlomusto explains: “I think the idea that we were saving our history for prosperity grew over time, but wasn’t necessarily on the front burner in the beginning.” Carlomusto, Jean. Interview with the author. January 18, 2017, p.2.

⁷¹¹ Gerstner, David A. *Queer Pollen: White Seduction, Black Male Homosexuality, and The Cinematic*. University of Illinois Press, 2011, p.138.

⁷¹² Phelan, Peggy. *Op.cit.* p.155.

explains, “Our historical memory replicates the same systems of power that allows some people to be more seen and some people to be less seen.”⁷¹³ ACT UP’s popular chant, which can be heard in many queer AIDS videos, “History will recall, Reagan and Bush did nothing at all,” demonstrated this wish to ensure that history would not forget their actions in favor of accounts that privilege “official” voices. Queer AIDS media thus effectively created counter-histories to official narratives, as they were acutely aware of the importance of images in the construction of historical memory.⁷¹⁴

These questions of historical perennity were present in the productions created by AIDS activists from the beginning. The insertion of footage from previous historical periods marked by significant social changes in the U.S. tied queer AIDS media to a contemporary history of social movements representation. DIVA TV’s *Pride 69-89* documents the celebration of the 20th anniversary of Stonewall Riots in New York, linking AIDS activism to the larger historical frame of gay rights in the U.S. Similarly, *Silverlake Life* incorporated two sections from Tom Joslin’s 1976 coming-out film: *Blackstar: Autobiography of a Close Friend* into the video. In those scenes, we see a younger and healthier Joslin describing his early sexual experiences, interrogating his parents’ attitudes to his homosexuality, explaining how he began his relationship with Mark Massi, and filming this latter reading a gay liberation manifesto. While the crisis of AIDS reframed *Blackstar* as an irretrievable historical moment of sexual liberation, Roger Hallas points out that the footage from *Blackstar* also places *Silverlake Life* in a long-standing queer politics of visibility.⁷¹⁵ Other videos connected the fight against AIDS to earlier social movements. Within *Rockville is Burning*, Bob Huff inserts easily identifiable images of the U.S. Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s: footage of the 1963 Birmingham protest in which the police used fire hoses and dogs against children and adults who were attending the march,⁷¹⁶ images which were at the time widely broadcast on national television and triggered public outrage.⁷¹⁷ By using such images, filmmakers not only showed a continuity between social movements in America but they also raised questions as to why the broadcast media did not deal with the AIDS crisis in the same way they had dealt with other significant social movements. As Marcel Danesi notes:

⁷¹³ Juhasz, Alexandra. Interview with the author. February 10, 2017, p.5.

⁷¹⁴ In fact, producing counter-histories was a staple of alternative media making. For instance, in the 1970s, the first video collectives such as Videofreex and Raindance were interested in compiling databanks of alternative images and in gathering an alternative visual history to the nationalist history produced by broadcast television. See: Sturken, Marita. “The Politics of Video Memory.” *Op.cit.* p.3.

⁷¹⁵ Hallas, Roger. *Op.cit.* p.120.

⁷¹⁶ Footage of the Birmingham 1963 protest is available here: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hPrHwmiUMH0>> (Accessed on May 11, 2017)

⁷¹⁷ Faragher, John Mack et al., *Out of Many. Op.cit.* p.123.

TV has set the agenda for social change since it entered the scene as a mass communications medium in the early 1950s, forcing changes on several occasions. For example: without TV coverage of the demonstrations against racism in the 1950s, the civil rights legislation that followed might never have been implemented; without TV's everyday coverage of the Vietnam protests, that war might not have come to an end as early as it did; without TV coverage of the Watergate scandal, President Richard Nixon would probably not have resigned from office.⁷¹⁸

In the 1980s, because of the democratization of the video medium and the growing presence of television, an increasing number of historical incidents were recorded on television: the explosion of the Challenger space shuttle, the lone Chinese student halting a tank in Tiananmen Square, the people climbing on top of the Berlin Wall. These images have now become distinct images of history.⁷¹⁹ Thus, as television did not fulfill its function of agenda setter or memory recorder, queer AIDS media took on the role of historicizing the AIDS activist movement. Since national identity is partly constructed through the remembrance of certain historical events as well as through the forgetting and rescripting of certain events, Testing the Limits wished to integrate the history of the AIDS crisis within the narrative that makes up the American nation.⁷²⁰ The complete title of Testing the Limits' long-feature documentary reads: *Voices From the Front: America 1988-1991*. By periodicizing the film to document the state of "America" at a particular time in history, the collective wished to ensure that their vision of American society at the time would not be erased.

Queer AIDS media also presented AIDS activism as a complex movement, with its own past and its own legacy. *Voices From the Front* shows the pre-ACT UP history of AIDS as well as the work of other organizations that were active within the AIDS movement, such as the People with AIDS Coalition, Body Positive, or the PWA Health Group. The film also uses past-tense narration as activists reflect on how certain actions were particularly important within the movement's history. In a similar fashion, *Doctors, Liars and Women* (1988) historicizes the process of videomaking and demonstrating, notably by having the women in charge of the protest narrating the group's actions in the past tense in talking head mode. DIVA TV's made-for-TV program, "Be a DIVA", which aired in the spring of 1990 – only a year after the creation of the collective – historicized their own actions as well as those of ACT UP. The tape presents a history of the organization and the video collective by compiling works documenting the political activities of ACT UP, namely DIVA TV's three main tapes: *Target City Hall*, *Like a Prayer*, and *Pride 69-89*. Using their own images as a testament of DIVA TV and ACT UP's recent past thus heralded the role that queer AIDS

⁷¹⁸ Danesi, Marcel. *Op.cit.* p.23.

⁷¹⁹ Sturken, Marita. "The Politics of Video Memory." *Op.cit.* p.3.

⁷²⁰ *Ibid.* p.10.

media was going to play in the future. As Roger Hallas writes, “an AIDS activist video made in the late 1980s as a mobilizing tool would become a memento mori by the mid-1990s and an archival object by the end of the millennium.”⁷²¹

IV.2.2. Keeping the AIDS Crisis Alive in the 21st Century

In the face of the decline of queer AIDS media, the subsequent failure to put AIDS activism in history books and the failure to acknowledge that AIDS is still in many ways a crisis, the struggle of AIDS activism shifted to the need for preservation in the face of the increasing threat of oblivion.⁷²² The following exchange between Sarah Schulman and Adam Rolston in 2008 underlines the importance of remembering the AIDS movement to confront historical failure:

SS: One of the things that you said to me before we turned on the camera was that you never have a chance to talk about any of this, and actually it’s almost like it never happened.

AR: Yeah, it feels that way sometimes.

SS: In some ways, it’s like AIDS never happened.

AR: Sure. Sure.

SS: What is the problem? All of us were there, we did all of these amazing things, we changed the world. How come it’s not known or seen?

AR: Yeah. I don’t know. [...]

SS: But how do you feel when they’ve [the younger generation] never heard of ACT UP?

AR: It’s a little sad. It makes me sad.⁷²³

IV.2.2.A. Academic Writings as Testimonies

One way to keep their material and efforts alive was through academic writing and teaching. The theorization and the historicization of the movement’s cultural work by people who were both academics and activists occurred in parallel to the creation of queer AIDS media.⁷²⁴ A number of queer AIDS media makers kept on teaching after the movement waned. Jean Carlomusto is now a professor of Media Arts and Director of the Television Center at LIU Post in New York, while Alex Juhasz taught Media Studies at Pitzer College

⁷²¹ Hallas, Roger. *Op.cit.* pp.26-27.

⁷²² *Ibid.* p.5.

⁷²³ ACT UP Oral History Project. Interview of Adam Rolston. August 27, 2008, p.39.

<<http://www.actuporalhistory.org/interviews/images/rolston.pdf>> (Accessed on September 10, 2016)

⁷²⁴ Juhasz, Alexandra. Interview with the author. February 10, 2017, p.10.

from 1995 to 2016 and is now the Chairperson of the Film Department at Brooklyn College. Gregg Bordowitz is currently a professor in the Video, New Media and Animation department at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and part of the faculty of the Whitney Museum Independent Study Program. He began teaching in the eighties and throughout the nineties, describing the imperative to educate people as “a consistent feature of [his] efforts.”⁷²⁵ Landmark publications composed of personal and political recollections as well as reproductions and analyses of queer AIDS media works – such as Douglas Crimp’s *Melancholia and Moralism* (2002) and Gregg Bordowitz’s *The AIDS Crisis is Ridiculous* (2004) – constitute memories of queer AIDS media activism in their own rights. Alexandra Juhasz’s book *AIDS TV: Identity, Community, and Alternative Video*, which was based off of her Ph.D. thesis, was published in 1995, exactly when queer AIDS media was declining, and now constitutes a comprehensive written history of AIDS alternative video practices. The annotated videography put together by Catherine Gund-Saalfield at the end of the book is a valuable record of hundreds of video productions. Similarly, Crimp and Rolston’s *AIDS Demo Graphics* (1990) was the first major publication to record and re-print Gran Fury’s work. The book itself was conceived as direct action, “putting the power of representation in the hands of as many people as possible.”⁷²⁶ As the writers make it clear, it was motivated by a desire to show how to make propaganda work in the fight against AIDS but also for future generations. It was therefore important for queer AIDS media activists to preserve their materials.

IV.2.2.B. Queer Archive Activism

The archiving of queer AIDS media started in the mid-1990s when Patrick Moore, head of the Estate Project for Artists with AIDS, a nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving the works of artists with AIDS across different media, decided to set up a video collection with the help of Jim Hubbard. The process of creating this collection began with interviewing videomakers to determine the amount of material that existed and the conditions under which this material was stored. Hubbard also talked with representatives of institutions in order to evaluate their interest in caring for AIDS video as well as the state of their storage facilities.⁷²⁷ Indeed, maintenance of collective memory could be difficult, as videotapes are material objects that can physically erode. Additionally, the fact that these were tapes produced during

⁷²⁵ Bordowitz, Gregg. “More Operative Assumptions.” *Op.cit.* pp.289-290.

⁷²⁶ Crimp, Douglas, Rolston, Adam. *Op.cit.* p.13.

⁷²⁷ Hubbard, Jim. “Report to Media Network on Video Archiving.” *Op.cit.*

an epidemic complicated the task of archiving them. The location of large amounts of this material was and is still unknown, as many activists died and their works were passed on to friends or to family members. There were also issues of copyrights, use, and access rights. As Jim Hubbard writes, “much of this material was shot under collectivist and anarchist principles further muddying rights issues.”⁷²⁸ Formerly known as the Royal S. Marks collection of AIDS activist video,⁷²⁹ the AIDS activist videotape collection of the New York Public Library (NYPL) now contains a total of 630 VHS tapes.⁷³⁰ Similarly zines like *Diseased Pariah News* are now archived at the NYPL and available online,⁷³¹ as are Gran Fury’s posters.⁷³² Other media activists have kept their own archive or care for the archives of media makers who passed away.⁷³³ Carlomusto explained: “I don’t have control of all the videotapes that are out there right now, but I feel a responsibility to continuously go back to that material and keep it from becoming just dust. I don’t want an erasure of our history.”⁷³⁴ In another interview, she commented on the personal and collective value of her archive:

My dearest friends who are dead are in my archive. So you kind of feel an obligation to this material on so many levels. It is the only real record of them moving with speech on their lips. It’s one of the most distinctive things about the moving image right? The thing about keeping the dead alive.⁷³⁵

One now has easier access to these materials, thanks to the development of technologies that allowed for the digitization of queer AIDS media and its dissemination on the Internet. James Wentzy and Jean Carlomusto’s tapes are available on video platforms such as Vimeo, while DIVA TV’s three main tapes can be accessed on the website of Aubin Pictures, a not-for-profit organization in 1996 by former DIVA member Catherine Gund-Saalfeld with a mission to produce and distribute documentary films and videos that promote cultural and

⁷²⁸ Hubbard, Jim. “Report to Media Network on Video Archiving.” *Op.cit.*

⁷²⁹ The Royal S. Marks Estate paid for the collection and the original work on the material, although it never owned any of the tapes. However, the New York Public Library quickly changed the name. Hubbard, Jim. Interview with the author. December 20, 2016, p.15.

⁷³⁰ However these do not correspond to all the tapes produced at the time. In his report on archiving, Hubbard writes: “It would be impossible to estimate the number of tapes, or even the much smaller number of films, produced.” The listing of the current works present in the collection is accessible here: <<http://archives.nypl.org/mss/3622>> (Accessed on May 4, 2017)

⁷³¹ The listing of the zines present in the archive is accessible here: <<https://www.nypl.org/about/divisions/general-research-division/periodicals-room/zines>> (Accessed on May 4, 2017)

⁷³² Gran Fury’s collection is accessible here: <<https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/collections/gran-fury-collection>> (Accessed on May 4, 2017)

⁷³³ See Visual AIDS’s 2016 film on the topic, *Compulsive Practice*. <<https://vimeo.com/192798505>> (Accessed on January 18, 2017)

⁷³⁴ Carlomusto, Jean. Quoted from: “Expression = Life Panel Highlights.” 2014. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r-PBk3PGBTM>> (Accessed on May 4, 2017)

⁷³⁵ Carlomusto, Jean. Interview with the author. January 18, 2017, p.14.

social awareness.⁷³⁶ On other platforms and websites, the possibilities for archiving and circulating queer AIDS media keep expanding. Yet, one can wonder the extent to which these new means of access constitute what Alexandra Juhasz has called “Queer Archive Activism.”⁷³⁷ When asked to develop this concept, she explained:

Until you work that access, it’s not activism. (...) When you engage with those materials with a goal in mind – a world-changing goal, a change that will affect people who are living with HIV/AIDS and all of us (...) *then* that’s queer archival activism. It’s engaging with those materials – that are easier and easier to come to – to produce stated ends in the world (...). It’s a hands-on relationship to the past that we have access to that we mobilize to make change now.⁷³⁸

One could argue that queer AIDS media now constitute a database that has the potential to transmit an activist legacy. By generating their own archive, AIDS videomakers offered new possibilities for communities affected by the epidemic, activists, and academics, who can rely on images other than those provided by the mainstream news media to look at the AIDS crisis of the 1980s and 1990s and the activist response to it. This legacy can teach current and future activists that they do not need the mainstream media to see themselves and their concerns represented. New social justice activists can indeed find in those images guidelines to empower themselves and their movements through media practices. As Carlomusto explains, the cross-fertilization of movements and the idea of leaving a legacy were important features of AIDS activism:

There’s important lessons to be learn from *our* history, because we were also picking in and folding in the civil rights movement, the feminist movement, green peace, all these different movements. We were taking their tactics and doing something new with it, doing something to suit our purpose. So it’s really wonderful to have this history documented in such a loudly way.⁷³⁹

IV.2.2.C. Ending the Second Silence: The AIDS Crisis Revisitation

Although there was a marked decline of production in the mid- and late 1990s, some queer media makers have been engaging with archival material to give it meaning in the present. Starting in 2002 with James Wentzy’s video compilation *Fight Back / Fight AIDS: 15 years of ACT UP*,⁷⁴⁰ a number of works have been revisiting the history of the early years of the epidemic in the United States. Ted Kerr has come to call this phenomenon the “AIDS

⁷³⁶ Aubin Pictures Website. <<http://www.aubinpictures.com/diva-tv/>> (Accessed on May 24, 2017)

⁷³⁷ Alexandra Juhasz first coined the term in her essay “Video Remains: Nostalgia, Technology, and Queer Archive Activism.” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, Volume 12, Number 2, 2006, pp. 319-328.

⁷³⁸ Juhasz, Alexandra. Interview with the author. February 10, 2017, p.10.

⁷³⁹ Carlomusto, Jean. Interview with the author. January 18, 2017, p.13.

⁷⁴⁰ Wentzy, James. *Fight Back / Fight AIDS: 15 Years of ACT UP*. 2002. <<https://vimeo.com/90722188>> (Accessed on May 4, 2017)

Crisis Revisitation.”⁷⁴¹ In the past decade, there has been a proliferation of documentary films about HIV/AIDS such as *Sex Positive* (2008, dir. by Daryl Wein), *Sex in an Epidemic* (2010, dir. by Jean Carlomusto), *Last Address* (2010, dir. by Ira Sachs), *We Were Here* (2011, dir. by Bill Weber and David Weissman), *Vito* (2011, dir. by Jeffrey Schwarz), *How to Survive a Plague* (2012, dir. by David France), *United in Anger* (2012, dir. by Jim Hubbard) and *Larry Kramer: In Love and Anger* (2015, dir. by Jean Carlomusto).⁷⁴² Museum exhibitions, especially in New York, also contribute to this phenomenon. One can cite as examples: “AIDS in New York: The First 5 Years” (2013, New-York Historical Society), “Why We Fight: Remembering AIDS Activism” (2013, New York Public Library), “Gran Fury: Read My Lips.” (2012, NYU's 80WSE Gallery). During the summer of 2016, I had the opportunity to see “In the Power of Your Care” (2016, 8th Floor), an exhibition dedicated to health and health care as a human right featuring works by artists with AIDS such as David Wojnarowicz, while another exhibition, “Art AIDS America,” was displayed from July to October 2016 at the Bronx Museum of the Arts and other venues throughout New York.⁷⁴³

This period of AIDS Crisis Revisitation, which is still ongoing, comes after the “Second Silence” mentioned earlier. These works allow for discussion of a period of American social movement history that is practically absent from mainstream history. The targeted audiences are on the one hand, survivors of HIV/AIDS and former AIDS activists, who can share their experience of crisis of the 1980s and 1990s and see their struggle validated on screen. On the other hand, these works are also directed at people who were not present at that time and who are unaware of the history of AIDS activism in the United States. Jim Hubbard, commenting on the goals of his 2012 documentary, explained that the movie’s twin purposes were “to put ACT UP and AIDS activism into mainstream history where it rightfully belongs, and also to encourage additional progressive grassroots political activism.”⁷⁴⁴ As many of the filmmakers

⁷⁴¹ Kerr, Ted. “AIDS 1969: HIV, History and Race.” *Op.cit.* Kerr actually traces the beginning of the AIDS Revisitation to 2008, which he puts in parallel with the 2008 Swiss Statement, a paper issued by the Swiss Federal Commission for HIV/AIDS, which stated: “An HIV-positive individual not suffering from any other STD and adhering to antiretroviral therapy (ART) with a completely suppressed viremia (...) does not transmit HIV sexually.”

⁷⁴² Mainstream features are also part of the Revisitation phase, such as *Dallas Buyers Club* (2013, dir. by Jean-Marc Vallée) and *The Normal Heart* (2014, dir. by Ryan Murphy).

⁷⁴³ Ted Kerr also notes that the AIDS Crisis Revisitation also contains books such as *Fire in the Belly: The Life and Times of David Wojnarowicz* (2013) by Cynthia Carr and *The AIDS Generation: Stories of Survival and Resilience* (2013) by Perry Halkitis. We can also add David France’s *How to Survive a Plague: The Inside Story of How Citizens and Science Tamed AIDS* (2016). Finally, the Revisitation is also characterized by the re-emergence of AIDS activism through new collectives (such as QUEEROCRACY) and the revitalization of preexisting groups (AIDS ACTION NOW in Toronto, ACT UP in New York and San Francisco). One could also argue that in fact, academic interest in the AIDS crisis such as this dissertation is also part of the Revisitation phase. See: Kerr, Ted. “AIDS 1969: HIV, History, and Race.” *Op.cit.*

⁷⁴⁴ Hubbard, Jim. Interview with the author. March 18, 2015, p.16.

behind these new works are also former members of the movement, there is an ongoing desire on the part of the filmmakers to take the representation of the movement into their own hands. For instance, Carlomusto explains her wish to portray Larry Kramer in a complex way, as she feared that other filmmakers would have misportrayed him as “a saint.”⁷⁴⁵

This AIDS Revisitation phenomenon is built on images of queer AIDS media from the 1980s and 1990s that have been archived over the years. Indeed, some of the footage used can easily be identified as images shot by DIVA and TTL. To a certain extent, these films follow core principles of early queer AIDS media productions. *Fight Back / Fight AIDS*, *United in Anger*, and *How to Survive a Plague*, which focus on ACT UP’s actions, bypass the voice-over convention to historicize the AIDS movement, although they do use titles, text, and figures to contextualize the footage on screen, following a chronological order. Similarly, these representations elide the feelings of burn-out of productions of the late 1990s. They do not show victimizing images of sickness, and privilege a return to the rhetoric of bravery. Talking about her feature on Larry Kramer, Carlomusto describes him as “uniquely qualified to be the *hero* in that moment.”⁷⁴⁶ The only type of funerals depicted is political funerals, which represent moments of resistance rather than defeat.⁷⁴⁷ Yet, one can contend that, if the rhetoric of revolutionary bravery was once used in order to counter dominant media images, it takes on a new meaning in the 2000s. As Lucas Hilderbrand notes, “with the distance of time and mediation, we can see that we have lost not only lives but also queer forms of radicalism; in this way, the memory of AIDS’s impact is not only traumatic but also potentially enlivening for the formation of a radical queer community.”⁷⁴⁸ Thus, at once a record of loss, queer AIDS media also function as “a source text to recapture moments of queer activist fervor.”⁷⁴⁹

However, the recent surge of media interest about the early years of HIV/AIDS could be seen as being a selective representation of AIDS activist history. Many of these images are very New York-centric, and tend to represent AIDS activism as predominantly revolving around white, middle class, gay men. In an essay in *The New Inquiry*, Tyrone Palmer writes that “the plague years” are “now remembered and canonized” and appear in memory as

⁷⁴⁵ Carlomusto, Jean. Interview with the author. January 18, 2017, p.14.

⁷⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴⁷ Hilderbrand, Lucas. “Retroactivism.” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*. Volume 12, Number 2, p.309.

⁷⁴⁸ *Ibid.* p.308.

⁷⁴⁹ *Ibid.* p.310.

“decidedly white and middle-class.”⁷⁵⁰ Already in 1999, Cathy Cohen noted in her book *The Boundary of Blackness: AIDS and the Breakdown of Black Politics* that the AIDS epidemic was increasingly becoming a disease of people of color, but that the literature, images, and general presentation of the disease was predominantly white.⁷⁵¹ Therefore, these new representations have been accused of transmitting a whitewashed, patrimonial version of AIDS history.⁷⁵² As Alexandra Juhasz points out:

The same conditions that allowed some media to be more known and to be circulated more also allowed for some things to be saved and to be remembered. Right now we’re seeing a lot of images of white men on the streets. (...) There never was always white men on the streets.⁷⁵³

In addition to a lack of representation of people of color, Ann Cvetkovich notices a significant absence of the voices of ACT UP’s lesbians.⁷⁵⁴ Women and people of color thus remain marginal voices in the Revisitation of AIDS activism, as there seems to be a lack of representation of constituencies within or outside of ACT UP that served a variety of communities affected by the epidemic and took on board other issues than getting AIDS treatment. Many stories appear to be missing from the Revisitation, such as that of women living with HIV in prison who participated in the fight to change the definition of AIDS in the U.S.,⁷⁵⁵ of collectives of black gay men fighting against AIDS, or of how Native Americans dealt with HIV,⁷⁵⁶ although these stories are available in the archives.⁷⁵⁷ Exhibitions that explored early artistic responses to AIDS were also accused of erasing certain populations from the AIDS conversation by looking at AIDS through the lens of white male heroes. For instance, on December 17, 2015, activists from the Tacoma Action Collective (TAC) staged a die-in to protest the lack of black representation in the exhibition “Art AIDS America” at the Tacoma Art Museum, which they accused of obscuring the reality of HIV/AIDS.⁷⁵⁸

Furthermore, Jean Carlomusto admits that reductive representations could “flatten the complexities” of the AIDS activist movement: “After a while we’ve seen so much footage of demonstrations and people yelling at buildings, and doing ‘die-ins,’ that it’s almost used the

⁷⁵⁰ Palmer, Tyrone. “Under the Rainbow.” *The New Inquiry*, July 28, 2015. <<https://thenewinquiry.com/under-the-rainbow/>> (Accessed on May 4, 2017)

⁷⁵¹ Cohen, Cathy J. *The Boundaries of Blackness: AIDS and the Breakdown of Black Politics*. University of Chicago Press, 1999, p.23.

⁷⁵² Kerr, Ted, Juhasz, Alexandra. “Stacked on Her Office Shelf: Stewardship and AIDS Archives.” *Op.cit.*

⁷⁵³ Juhasz, Alexandra. Interview with the author. February 10, 2017, pp.4-5.

⁷⁵⁴ Cvetkovich, Ann. “AIDS Activism And Public Feelings: Documenting ACT UP’s Lesbians.” *Op.cit.* p.375.

⁷⁵⁵ Saalfeld, Catherine, Levine, Debra. *I’m You, You’re Me*. 1992.

⁷⁵⁶ American Indian Community House. *Native Americans, Two Spirits and HIV*, 1991.

⁷⁵⁷ Kerr, Ted, Juhasz, Alexandra. “Stacked on Her Office Shelf: Stewardship and AIDS Archives.” *Op.cit.*

⁷⁵⁸ Kerr, Ted. “A History of Erasing Black Artists and Bodies from the AIDS Conversation.” December 21, 2015.<<https://hyperallergic.com/264934/a-history-of-erasing-black-artists-and-bodies-from-the-aids-conversation/>> (Accessed on May 4, 2017)

way images of bra burning were used to reduce feminism to a one-note kind of deal.”⁷⁵⁹ Also lost within some works from the Revisitation is the fact that AIDS activism grew out of the traditions of the civil rights, gay rights, and women’s health movements.⁷⁶⁰ Finally, narratives like *How to Survive a Plague*, by presenting the story of a group of mostly white men who survived the crisis by pushing for life-saving treatments fail to recognize that other strategies for survival – for instance using the medium of video – to collectively sustain the living and the dead were explored by activists.⁷⁶¹

These works could also be seen as engaging with AIDS in a nostalgic way. Ted Kerr explains:

Footage of pre/re-gentrified urban centers populated primarily by passionate white twenty-somethings fighting for their lives conjure up memories and trauma for many who were there, a displaced nostalgia for those who were not, and a desire for many to be able to return to such an engaged moment (without the loss).⁷⁶²

This nostalgia poses the risk of forgetting that AIDS is still an epidemic, a topic which was tackled by Canadian artists Vincent Chevalier and Ian Bradley-Perrin in their 2013 poster released for poster/VIRUS, “Your Nostalgia Is Killing Me!”⁷⁶³ (Appendix 46) The idea for the poster emerged after the artists witnessed what they perceived as an increasing nostalgia pervading blogs and other social media platforms. They saw the reproduction of the past of AIDS as foreclosing the possibility of an experience of HIV/AIDS in the present as well as closing the conversation about current struggles for treatment and healthcare access.⁷⁶⁴ And

⁷⁵⁹ Cvetkovich, Ann. “AIDS Activism And Public Feelings: Documenting ACT UP’s Lesbians.” *Op.cit.* p.375.

⁷⁶⁰ Kerr, Ted. Juhasz, Alexandra. “Stacked on Her Office Shelf: Stewardship and AIDS Archives.” *Op.cit.*

⁷⁶¹ Cheng, Jih-Fei. “How to Survive: AIDS and Its Afterlives in Popular Media.” *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly*, Volume 44, Numbers 1 & 2, Spring/Summer 2016, p.74.

⁷⁶² Kerr, Ted. “AIDS – Based on a True Story.” *Dandelion*, Volume 7, Summer 2016, p.2.

⁷⁶³ Toronto-based group AIDS Action Now is behind the *posterVIRUS* campaign, which works with artists and activists across the HIV spectrum to create new work about HIV to paste in urban centers, aimed at generating public conversation. <<http://postervirus.tumblr.com/>> (Accessed on May 11, 2017). Chevalier, Vincent, Bradley-Perrin, Ian. “Your Nostalgia Is Killing Me!” *posterVIRUS*, 2013. <http://68.media.tumblr.com/03770553cd20f70d0c957e3e9c5bd349/tumblr_mwkl8sQMq1r6rt74o1_1280.jpg> (Accessed on May 4, 2017)

⁷⁶⁴ Vincent Chevalier explains: “I first came across the phrase, ‘Your Nostalgia Is Killing Me!’ during a heated Facebook exchange between an activist and artist. The activist was levelling the accusation against a video the artist had produced that uncritically deployed nostalgia in its message and aesthetics. Further down, the activist suggested that the artist take a break from art and engage in more direct action by joining one of the many reemerging chapters of ACT UP. What I found interesting about this exchange was both the artist and the activist were prominent members of organizations developing contemporary cultural and institutional critiques around HIV/AIDS and its related systemic issues. But in this instance both were adhering to nostalgic solutions to art and organizing. These thoughts lingered and I decided to appropriate the phrase “Your Nostalgia Is Killing Me!” as the slogan for my poster. Appropriation seemed to be a key strategy in uncovering the ways that nostalgia has embedded itself into our modes of representation, both of our selves and our movements, on and off the web.” See: Visual AIDS-interview. “As We Canonize Certain Producers of Culture We Are Closing Space for a Complication of Narratives.” December 10, 2013. <<https://www.visualaids.org/blog/detail/as-we-canonize-certain-producers-of-culture-we-are-closing-space-for-a-comp>> (Accessed on May 4, 2017)

indeed, the impact of seeing a Gran Fury poster through a digital lens *now* is different from seeing the poster plastered in the streets of New York *then*, as it might evoke nostalgia, perhaps even “coolness” – due to decontextualization – rather than a continued need for action.⁷⁶⁵

Originally conceived as a Tumblr blog filled with well-known AIDS imagery, the poster depicts a millennial’s teenage bedroom as the setting for nostalgia for the “90s youth.”⁷⁶⁶ The wallpaper on one of the two walls consists of General Idea’s design “AIDS,” while the other wall is covered with Keith Haring drawings. Emblematic AIDS posters cover up these walls: “Silence = Death,” “AIDSGATE,” Gran Fury’s “Riot” and “Read my Lips,” stills from video footage of the 1988 FDA demonstration, as well as Benetton’s “Dying of AIDS,” the poster for the Hollywood AIDS movie *Philadelphia* and a picture of Canadian pop singer Justin Bieber wearing an ACT UP T-shirt. A laptop on the bed is open on a Tumblr post about Gaetan Dugas, better known as “Patient Zero.” On the left wall, a caption in large yellow letters reads: “YOUR NOSTALGIA IS KILLING ME!”⁷⁶⁷ What the piece fundamentally critiques therefore, is the fact that not only does the Revisitation create a “palatable and commodified memory” of AIDS activism,⁷⁶⁸ but also that the recent historiography and historiophoty⁷⁶⁹ of the epidemic sees the turn of the millennium as marking the beginning of what Andrew Sullivan termed the “post-AIDS” era.⁷⁷⁰

The fight to put AIDS activism in the mainstream therefore also takes on the additional task of fighting the canonization of an ongoing epidemic. In 2001, Jim Hubbard and Sarah Schulman began to conduct interviews with activists to create a database that would document the history of AIDS, in order to prevent what they perceived as the activist past being forgotten and misappropriated.⁷⁷¹ Filmed by James Wentzy, the ongoing ACT UP Oral

⁷⁶⁵ Kerr, Ted. “AIDS – Based on a True Story.” *Op.cit.* p.6.

⁷⁶⁶ Visual AIDS-interview. “As We Canonize (...)” *Op.cit.*

⁷⁶⁷ The poster not well met by some in the AIDS community and led to bitter disputes. See: Kerr, Ted. “Within Our Rooms of Nostalgia: AIDS, Communication and Each Other.” February 28, 2014. <<http://www.inthefleshmag.com/internal-politix/within-our-rooms-of-nostalgia-aids-communication-and-each-other/>> (Accessed on May 4, 2017)

⁷⁶⁸ Visual AIDS-interview. “As We Canonize (...)” *Op.cit.*

⁷⁶⁹ Historian Hayden White distinguishes between “historiography,” which he defines as the “representation of history in verbal images and written discourse,” and “historiophoty,” that he sees as “the representation of history and our thought about it in visual images and filmic discourse.” See: White, Hayden. “Historiography and Historiophoty.” *The American Historical Review*. Vol 43, No.5, 1988, pp.1193-1999.

⁷⁷⁰ Sullivan, Andrew. “When Plagues End: Notes on the Twilight of An Epidemic.” *New York Times*, November 10, 1996. For a critique of Sullivan’s essay see Crimp, Douglas. “An Introduction.” *Melancholia and Moralism*, *Op.cit.* pp.7-23.

⁷⁷¹ Schulman recalls listening to National Public Radio’s on the twentieth anniversary of AIDS and hearing the following statement, which she paraphrases: “At first America had trouble with People with AIDS,” the announcer said, “But they then came around.” Schulman reacted to the statement: “That is not what happened. *I know, I was there.*” She and Jim Hubbard then decided “to create a raw database of video interviews with

History Project – which is available online through free and open-access – contains over 180 interviews which chronicle the history of AIDS activism through an intersectional approach. Furthermore, what Ted Kerr has termed the “second wave” of AIDS Revisitation – for instance films emerging from the Visual AIDS commission – seeks to offer diverse depictions of HIV/AIDS by focusing on people of color and people of trans experience, either newly living with HIV or long-term survivors. While the first wave consists in telling the untold story of the AIDS epidemic, the second wave, Kerr writes, seems to be “an exploration of how the past is in conversation with the present and an important coda around how issues including and beyond sexuality impact the AIDS crisis.”⁷⁷² Visual AIDS’s *Compulsive Practice* (2016) exemplifies the type of work that is emerging from these recent trends. A compilation of “compulsive” practices by nine artists and activists who live(d) with their cameras as one way to manage, reflect upon, and change the way they are affected by HIV/AIDS, the video mixes archival footage with contemporary practices, reflecting on the legacy and influence of queer AIDS media on new productions.

Digital spaces allow for further engagement with this material while giving a platform for voices that wish to convey their experience of living with HIV/AIDS in the 21st century, as rates of infection continue to climb and ravage communities. In an era in which images “go viral,” digital media can play an important role in reminding us that HIV/AIDS is still ongoing on in the United States and worldwide.

IV.2.3. Viral Images: Digital AIDS Activism

In his 1996 report on archiving queer AIDS media, Jim Hubbard asked, “Where are the young makers?” as, he wrote, it had been suggested that there were “no longer mechanisms for recognizing younger makers dealing with AIDS because there are no longer any group for them to coalesce around.”⁷⁷³ However, he was hopeful that, “for the foreseeable future, there [would] be pressing issues for makers of AIDS-related media.”⁷⁷⁴ The Digital Revolution⁷⁷⁵ changed the media environment in which queer people and people with AIDS now evolve, in

surviving members of ACT UP New York, so that they can say what they experienced and created and *how they feel about it.*” ACT UP Oral History Project <<http://www.actuporalhistory.org/interviews/index.html>> (Accessed on May 4, 2017)

⁷⁷² Kerr, Ted. “AIDS – Based on a True Story.” *Op.cit.* p.2.

⁷⁷³ Hubbard, Jim. “Report to Media Network on Video Archiving.” *Op.cit.*

⁷⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷⁵ The Digital Revolution refers to the advancement of technology from analog electronic and mechanical devices to the digital technology available today. The era started during the 1980s and is ongoing. The Digital Revolution is sometimes also called the Third Industrial Revolution.

a context where people still get infected with HIV on a daily basis and new medications such as PrEP are available.⁷⁷⁶ This new media ecosystem allows for new types of representations and memorialization. Indeed, not only does the Internet facilitate the circulation of material from the 1980s and 1990s that has been digitized, it also enables new voices to emerge. Apart from *Visual AIDS*'s initiatives mentioned earlier, one can cite the efforts of Mark S. King and his "Fabulous Disease." Testing positive in 1985, Mark S. King started his blog in 2008 to humorously chronicle his life as an HIV-positive gay man in recovery from addiction through writing and video.⁷⁷⁷ Because of their highly personal form, blogs and vlogs could perhaps be seen as being contemporary electronic permutations of the zine.⁷⁷⁸

While Mark S. King's blog bridges the gap between the generation infected in 1980s and today's through technology, media makers from younger generations have also appeared on digital spaces. Linus Ignatus, who tested positive at the age of 22 in 2014, decided to combat the stigma of being HIV-positive by recording his daily experience using a DVCAM,⁷⁷⁹ which resulted in his short documentary, *Positive* (2016, dir. by Linus Ignatus).⁷⁸⁰ He describes the project not only as a "a major move toward healing and recovery" but also "as an inclusive, community-building opportunity," hoping that by making this film he would have "a platform to offer to others who are dying to tell their stories."⁷⁸¹ Being HIV-positive pushed him to get involved in activism, which he decided to weave into his own video art. His next project will focus on an interview series with HIV-positive individuals in and around New York and investigates HIV as it relates to race, insurance and relationships to "lay down a mosaic of diverse perspectives around the virus."⁷⁸²

Both King and Ignatus recognize however that they have the privilege of talking about their status, as they are both white, male, and can afford treatments which make their disease

⁷⁷⁶ Pre-exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) is daily medicine that can reduce one's chances of getting infected with HIV, as it can stop the virus from taking hold and spreading throughout the body. Information retrieved from: <<https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/basics/prep.html>> (Accessed on May 14, 2017)

⁷⁷⁷ His blog, "My Fabulous Disease," is accessible here: <<http://marksking.com/>> (Accessed on May 4, 2017). Yet, while he decided to deal with his disease through humor and levity, long-term survivor Sean McKenna argued that there was nothing "fabulous" about living with HIV/AIDS and the two long-term survivors debated their points of view in the following article that recently appeared on Mark S. King's blog: <<http://marksking.com/my-fabulous-disease/sean-mckenna-life-with-aids-isnt-so-damn-fabulous/>> (Accessed on May 4, 2017)

⁷⁷⁸ Brouwer, Daniel C. "Counterpublicity and Corporeality in HIV/AIDS Zines." *Op.cit.* p.354.

⁷⁷⁹ Digital Video Camera.

⁷⁸⁰ The trailer for his film, *Positive*, is available here: <<https://vimeo.com/104642673>> (Accessed on May 4, 2017)

⁷⁸¹ Ignatus, Linus. "After Testing HIV Positive, I Found Healing By Filming My Life." *Poz Magazine*, March 16, 2017. <<https://www.poz.com/article/testing-hiv-positive-linus-ignatius-found-healing-filming-life-video>> (Accessed on May 4, 2017)

⁷⁸² *Ibid.*

manageable.⁷⁸³ Yet, more diverse voices can also be heard thanks to digital technologies, as, in today's media environment, the means of production and editing are even more available than in the 1980s and 1990s. In reaction to the ongoing crisis, queer people of color with HIV/AIDS make their struggles with the disease visible online, and their works are perhaps more accessible now to a larger public than they were in the 1990s. Among these black queer voices, one can cite Justin B. Terry-Smith, the creator of *Justin's HIV Journal*,⁷⁸⁴ as well as Ken Williams and his YouTube channel *KenLikeBarbie*.⁷⁸⁵ As was already the case in the mid-1990s, black gay men and women are still overrepresented in terms of rates of HIV infection, which makes the need for these emerging voices to be heard all the more urgent. Black people make up 40% of people living with HIV and account for 44% of the new cases in the United States, although they only represent 12% of the total U.S. population.⁷⁸⁶ According to the CDC, out of the 1.2 million of people who lived with HIV in the U.S. in 2016, 498,400 were black, therefore representing the racial/ethnic group most affected by HIV.⁷⁸⁷ Additionally, regional disparities also account for the rates of HIV infection. Nowadays, the epicenter of the HIV epidemic in the United States has shifted from urban centers along the coasts to the South of the nation, which experiences the greatest burden of HIV infection, illness, and deaths of any U.S. region, and lags far behind in providing quality HIV prevention and care. The CDC figures indicate that in 2016, southern states accounted for an estimated 44% of all people living with an HIV diagnosis in the U.S., despite hosting only about 1/3 of the overall U.S. population. And in the South, African Americans accounted for 54% of new HIV diagnosis in 2014.⁷⁸⁸ Drawing its name from the AIDS Memorial Quilt, "The Southern AIDS Living Quilt" is a project that illustrates the growing impact of HIV on women in the southern United States, particularly women of color. Using video testimonials, the Living Quilt shares the personal stories of women living with HIV throughout the region as well as stories from their families and health care providers, whose goals are to "empower, encourage and educate."⁷⁸⁹

⁷⁸³ Ignatus, Linus. *Op.cit.* In a blog entry on the "HIV is not a crime (II)" conference that took place in 2016, Mark S. King also recognizes his privilege: <<http://dev.marksking.com/my-fabulous-disease/video-hiv-not-crime-ii-training-academy/>> (Accessed on May 4, 2017)

⁷⁸⁴ His blog is accessible here: <www.justinbsmith.com> (Accessed on May 4, 2017)

⁷⁸⁵ *KenlikeBarbie* YouTube Channel. <<https://www.youtube.com/user/williamkroberts>> (Accessed on May 10, 2017)

⁷⁸⁶ "Black Americans and HIV/AIDS: The Basics." *The Kaiser Family Foundation*. February 7, 2017. <<http://kff.org/hivaids/fact-sheet/black-americans-and-hivaids-the-basics/>> (Accessed on May 4, 2017)

⁷⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸⁸ Centers for Disease Control. "HIV in the Southern United States." May 2016.

<<https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/pdf/policies/cdc-hiv-in-the-south-issue-brief.pdf>> (Accessed on May 4, 2017)

⁷⁸⁹ The Southern AIDS Living Quilt Project.

Other videomakers seek to give voice to the pandemic, reminding their viewers that HIV/AIDS is a worldwide phenomenon that is currently affecting 36.7 million people.⁷⁹⁰ Thus, AIDS videomakers have expanded their reach compared to what was produced during the height of the AIDS crisis, which mostly focused on the epidemic in the United States. Already in the early 2000s, Bordowitz's *Habit* recorded the efforts of South Africa's leading AIDS activist group, the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC), struggling to gain access to AIDS drugs. Among the most recent works, one can mention Hannelore Williams's YouTube ten-part documentary series, *Dirty 30*.⁷⁹¹ As an HIV-negative black woman,⁷⁹² Williams decided to travel the world thirty years after HIV was discovered, in order to "find the voices of the pandemic today, not rehash the images of the '80s and the '90s."⁷⁹³ The series is filmed in three locations – the U.S., Johannesburg and Paris – and each episode focuses on a specific topic related to the epidemic, such as "Black Women and Single Motherhood," "Drugs and Escapism," "Humor and Coping," "Men: The Straight and the Gay," or "Born +." Mirroring queer AIDS media's style of "MTV activism," the series has been described as "flowing like a magazine"⁷⁹⁴ and "sleek and current as a music video."⁷⁹⁵

While a lot of new work is currently flourishing on social media, blogs, and video platforms, one might argue that there is a lack of coherence between these works, as they are mostly produced individually. They are made outside a larger movement that would enable such images to interact and disrupt the dominant mainstream narratives. The fact that these new versions of queer AIDS media take the form of chronicles, journals, and interviews, further demonstrate that the mediated experience of HIV/AIDS has become individualized after the dissolution of the main collectives. Alexandra Juhasz actually contends that, because they lack the cohesion of the earlier movement, these productions do not constitute activism, but that rather, they are a form of proto-activism.⁷⁹⁶ Yet, because of its ability to connect people on a global scale almost instantaneously, the Internet still holds the potential of

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC3w2nUWqQ0yBHst6v6_cQbA> (Accessed on May 4, 2017)

⁷⁹⁰ Information retrieved from <<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs360/en/>> (Accessed on May 12, 2017)

⁷⁹¹ *Dirty 30* is available here: <<https://www.youtube.com/user/Dirty30HIV/AIDS/videos>> (Accessed on May 11, 2017)

⁷⁹² Williams actually got tested for HIV before starting to direct her documentary series in order to be prepared to tackle the topic. She describes the process of getting tested in a video:

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cTpKOCsAbpk>> (Accessed on May 11, 2017)

⁷⁹³ Trailer for "Dirty 30: Documentary Series about HIV & AIDS." 2013.

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uvq19sCwIt4>> (Accessed on May 11, 2017)

⁷⁹⁴ "Introducing 'Dirty 30:' A Docu-Series about HIV and AIDS 30 years later."

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=312&v=YZhiaA6DrwM> (Accessed on May 11, 2017)

⁷⁹⁵ Straube, Trenton. "This Time, It's Personal." *POZ Magazine*, February 12, 2015. <<https://www.poz.com/article/hannelore-williams-26797-8270>> (Accessed on May 11, 2017)

⁷⁹⁶ Juhasz, Alexandra. Interview with the author. February 10, 2017, p.9.

creating a digital transnational and transgenerational community of people with HIV/AIDS and activists.⁷⁹⁷ One might therefore wonder how best to take advantage of new technologies to deal with current experiences of HIV in a way which could lead to direct action to change the future of people with HIV/AIDS.

What appears to be significant however is that works about HIV/AIDS keep being produced at a time when most people do not think of the epidemic as being a crisis. Although these media makers might not share a common set of goals, they do abide by the principles of visibility and empowerment put forward by queer AIDS media activists in the 1980s and 1990s and seek to give voice to their own experiences. During a screening of *Compulsive Practice*, both Alexandra Juhasz and Jean Carlomusto underlined the need for visibility and conversation now and in the future, in the light of President Trump's 2016 electoral victory.

Carlomusto told the audience:

Many of us starting doing this because we didn't see ourselves reflected in mainstream media, or we saw ourselves distorted in mainstream media and felt the need to give voice to our own lives. And I think that's something that's going to be tremendously important. We really need to make sure that *they* [the media; the new Trump administration] don't get to define reality, because that's what's happening right now. It's really time for us in a way for us to encourage each other [and] get our voices out.⁷⁹⁸

⁷⁹⁷ Juhasz, Alexandra. "Digital AIDS Documentary: Webs, Rooms, Viruses, and Quilts." *A Companion to Contemporary Documentary Film*. Eds. Alexandra Juhasz, Alisa Lebow. Wiley Blackwell, 2015, pp.314-334.

⁷⁹⁸ Visual AIDS. "Watch the Filmmakers of *Compulsive Practice* Discuss their Work and Activism;" February 6, 2017. <<https://www.visualaids.org/blog/detail/post-screening-discussion-videos-from-compulsive-practice-premiere-at-new-m>> (Accessed on May 4, 2017)

CONCLUSION

The constellation of works that were produced during the height of the AIDS epidemic in the United States were meant to answer urgent needs. In the face of political indifference, media misrepresentations, and an increasing number of deaths, AIDS activists were motivated to do everything in their power to raise awareness and stop the epidemic, using the tools that were available to them. As Heidi Dorow, a former member of ACT UP, puts it:

It really did take on an urgency that made you want to do anything. I began to live in this world where you got to know people (...) and they were going to die. In some cases you watched them (...) die. That just seemed so unfair (...). That just made you enraged.⁷⁹⁹

Drawing from previous movements and theories as well as from their own immediate experience, queer AIDS media activism represented an outburst of committed political expression. AIDS activists found themselves in an era which was particularly conducive to media production, as the media environment was changing at a fast pace. For the first time in their lives, marginalized people felt empowered and could finally express their concerns and document their struggles, as they had access to means of communication that had previously been denied to them. Queer AIDS media functioned as necessary and powerful counter-responses to the negative and inaccurate depictions of AIDS in the mainstream media.

The AIDS crisis was not merely a health crisis, but one of authority.⁸⁰⁰ Queer AIDS media challenged the media codes of who gets to speak, how, and to whom. Defying traditionally sanctioned roles of producer, participant, viewer, reader but also expert and consumer, queer AIDS media makers produced images that addressed a variety of communities. Although they had moderate successes when it came to speaking to a mass audience and directly influencing the discursive space of the mainstream media, they did manage to communicate to other counterpublics from their enclaves of resistance. By being, as Jim Hubbard explained, “disseminators of information” and “disseminators of political action,”⁸⁰¹ they enabled people to mobilize and form communities around issues that mattered to them. Oscillating between rage and humor, an energetic and dedicated group of activists offered multiple perspectives on the crisis by exposing its diverse dimensions.

As they made use of familiar forms, queer AIDS media’s representational strategies also had the potential to alter the way people thought of the media’s role. By subverting and

⁷⁹⁹ Cvetkovich, Ann. “AIDS Activism And Public Feelings: Documenting ACT UP’s Lesbians.” *Op.cit.* p.309.

⁸⁰⁰ Juhasz, Alexandra. *AIDS TV. Op.cit.* p.93.

⁸⁰¹ Hubbard, Jim. Interview with the author. December 20, 2016, p.10.

denouncing the dominant media's techniques and creating new structures of production and distribution, queer AIDS media offered a model of media making that differed significantly from the mass media. They democratized the media and made it a space of participation rather than consumption. Therefore, they redefined the relationship between the "margins" and the "center." As Sandra Elgear and Robyn Hutt noted:

It would be naïve to assume that we are revolutionizing the system. We still live in a market economy, pharmaceutical companies continue to make decisions based on profit margins, politicians continue to endorse racist, sexist, and homophobic legislation (...), and mainstream media continue to run stories which reiterate government press releases rather than critiquing their inaction. But we must acknowledge the inroads which are being made and recognize that the distinction between the center and the margins is not as absolute (...). Although we do not have the vast resources or economic stability required to reach a mass audience in a short period of time, marginal groups, directly and indirectly, can affect change.⁸⁰²

Queer AIDS media thus filled a vitally important gap in available resources about the crisis. They also played a fundamental role in the affirmation of community identity and queer visibility. As Alexandra Juhasz explained, "It feels really important that things that define our lives are seen, are visible (...). So part of why you do it is just to produce a space where your reality is visible."⁸⁰³ Offshoots of ACT UP, such as Queer Nation⁸⁰⁴ or The Lesbian Avengers⁸⁰⁵ and art collectives like Fierce Pussy⁸⁰⁶ were all noticeably influenced and inspired by queer AIDS media's politics of visibility in the techniques they used to achieve their ends.

As we have seen, queer AIDS media drew from other movements and collectives that used the media as a guerrilla tool. As movements overlap and influence each other, as evidenced for instance by the cross-fertilization between movements that influenced AIDS activism and the diverse political backgrounds within ACT UP, queer AIDS media thus left a

⁸⁰² Elgear, Sandra, Hutt, Robyn. "Notes on Collective Production." *Op.cit.* p.20.

⁸⁰³ Juhasz, Alexandra. Interview with the author. February 11, 2017, p.8.

⁸⁰⁴ Queer Nation is an LGBT activist organization founded in New York City in March 1990 by AIDS activists from ACT UP New York. The four founders were outraged by the escalation of violence against LGBT people in the streets of New York and the continued existence of anti-gay discrimination in the culture at large. Their mission was to eliminate homophobia and increase LGBT visibility. Information retrieved from <<http://queernationny.org/history>> (Accessed on May 14, 2017)

⁸⁰⁵ The Lesbian Avengers began in New York City in 1992 as a direct action group focused on issues vital to lesbian survival and visibility. They used media-savvy tactics, often creating actions for their visual appeal. The effort to create their own media culminated in the making of the 1993 documentary, *Lesbian Avengers Eat Fire Too* (dir. by Janet Baus and Su Friedrich), available here: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o4o0TZPETAc>> Information retrieved from: <<http://www.lesbianavengers.com/about/history.shtml>> (Accessed on May 14, 2017)

⁸⁰⁶ Fierce Pussy is a collective of queer women artists. Formed in New York City in 1991 by women who had been involved in AIDS activism, Fierce Pussy brought lesbian identity and visibility directly into the streets. Fierce Pussy projects included wheat pasting posters on the street, renaming New York City streets after prominent lesbian heroines, printing and distributing stickers and t-shirts, a video PSA and various installations and exhibitions in galleries and museums. Information retrieved from: <http://www.fiercepussy.org/www.fiercepussy.org/about_us.html> (Accessed on May 14, 2017)

legacy for other movements. Benjamin Shepard, an ACT UP activist and a scholar, affirms that the anti-globalization movement, which began in 1999 with the World Trade Organization protests and eventually led to the Occupy Wall Street protests, was deeply influenced by ACT UP's cultural politics.⁸⁰⁷ Following the steps of AIDS cultural activists before them, anti-globalization activists regularly filmed their actions. Footage shot by over a hundred cameras was compiled in the documentary *This is What Democracy Looks Like* (2000, dir. by Richard Rowley and Jill Friedberg).⁸⁰⁸ The anti-globalization movement also resulted in the creation of Indymedia, the first web-based, open access journalism platform which encourage people to blog, videotape, and photograph protest events by providing immediate distribution.⁸⁰⁹ The platform has become the fastest growing international alternative media network in the world, and fights on a daily basis for a “media revolution to make revolution possible.”⁸¹⁰ As Ana Nogueira notes, “Indymedia has evolved into a hopeful vision that a new media landscape is on the horizon, one that gives voice to the millions of people who can only take to the streets to share knowledge about issues that affect them.”⁸¹¹ Other movements have marshaled the tools of the media in the 21st century, such as the recent Black Lives Matter movement, which uses handheld audiovisual technologies like the smartphone and social media platforms as powerful weapons in the fight against institutional racism and systemic violence towards black people in the United States.⁸¹²

Responding to the urgency of the epidemic, AIDS activists also bore witness to the cultural, political, and social context in which the crisis unfolded. Thus, these works expressed both immediacy and historical consciousness, as AIDS activists explored the testimonial function of the image and the text. We have seen the importance of keeping this body of activist media and its legacies alive for the future, after the decline of queer AIDS media. For instance, remembering and having access to a work like *Tongues Untied* in 2017 is extremely important in the light of the emergence of new productions dealing with the black

⁸⁰⁷ Shepard, Benjamin, Hayduk, Ronald. *From ACT UP To the WTO: Urban Protest and Community Building in the Era of Globalization*. Verso, 2002.

⁸⁰⁸ The documentary is available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yBUZH2vCD_k> (Accessed on June 4, 2017)

⁸⁰⁹ Robé, Chris. *Op.cit.*

⁸¹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹¹ Nogueira, Ana. “The Birth and Promise of the Indymedia Revolution.” *From ACT UP To the WTO*. Eds. Benjamin Shepard, Ronald Hayduk. Verso, 2002, pp.294-296.

⁸¹² Bijan, Stephen. “Social Media Helps Black Lives Matter Fight the Power.” *Wired*, November 2015. <<https://www.wired.com/2015/10/how-black-lives-matter-uses-social-media-to-fight-the-power/>> (Accessed on May 4, 2017)

queer experience. When *Moonlight* (2016, dir. by Barry Jenkins)⁸¹³ won Best Picture at the 2016 Oscar ceremony, the movie was praised as unprecedented and groundbreaking. While it is true that the movie's story is unprecedented, in the sense that it tells the unique story of a black gay man coming of age in Miami's underprivileged neighborhoods, critics also seemed quick to forget about the efforts of other black gay filmmakers from before, such as Marlon Riggs's *Tongues Untied* or British filmmaker Isaac Julien's *Looking for Langston* (1989).⁸¹⁴

However, if we look at the trajectory of progress made since the AIDS crisis in terms of queer and/or AIDS representation, then perhaps *Moonlight*'s victory at a major Hollywood event is truly groundbreaking. Films and documentaries dealing with queer lives and the AIDS crisis of the 1980s and 1990s have been gaining tremendous visibility, as they circulate in bigger circles of distribution and are available to more mainstream audiences. Jean Carlomusto's most recent documentary, *Larry Kramer: In Love and Anger* (2015), was produced by HBO, a premium cable and television network owned by Time Warner that had 49 million subscribers in the United States and 130 million worldwide as of 2016.⁸¹⁵ The movie was nominated for two Emmy awards and for the Grand Jury Prize at the Sundance Film Festival. More recently even, *120 Beats Per Minute* (*120 battements par minute*, 2017, dir. by Robin Campillo),⁸¹⁶ a French movie which documents the actions of ACT UP Paris in the 1990s and is based on the experiences of the director when he was a member of the organization, won both the Queer Palm and the Jury's Prize at the 2017 Cannes film festival. One might wonder therefore whether these stories could have been told without the efforts of the AIDS activist movement to record and preserve these voices.

As mentioned in the final part of this dissertation, not only was queer AIDS media relocated from activist tool to archival material that would be revisited over time, but new dynamics both within the media ecology and the AIDS epidemic have allowed for new types of representation for people currently infected with HIV/AIDS. Yet, these representations might still be too rare or too isolated to be visible and coalesce into a movement. Again, Juhasz's input is insightful:

⁸¹³ Jenkins, Barry. *Moonlight*. 2016. Trailer available here: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5fYFIj16YC0>> (Accessed on June 6, 2017)

⁸¹⁴ *Looking for Langston* revisits the Harlem Renaissance from a black gay perspective.

⁸¹⁵ "Number of HBO subscribers in the United States from 2009 to 2016 (in millions)." Statista website. <<https://www.statista.com/statistics/329288/number-of-hbo-domestic-subscribers>> (Accessed on June 7, 2017); Steel, Emily. "HBO Now Has 800,000 Paid Streaming Subscribers, Time Warner Says." *New York Times*, February 10, 2016. <<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/11/business/media/hbo-now-has-800000-paid-streaming-subscribers-time-warner-says.html>> (Accessed on June 7, 2017)

⁸¹⁶ Trailer available here: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2fhO2A4SL24>> (Accessed on June 1st, 2017)

The fact that there's so little AIDS discourse is extremely disabling to people with HIV, particularly young people but also long-term survivors. When AIDS activism was in its heyday, it was in the air, you talked about it. Whether you had HIV or not, it was something that mattered a lot. You'd refer to it when you describe your world. People don't do that now. People with HIV don't do that right now. It's like this quiet unnamed reality for a lot of people (...). But all human beings do engage with people with HIV.⁸¹⁷

The recent U.S. presidential election has the potential to further impede people's efforts to use culture and the media to bring current HIV/AIDS issues to light. When he unveiled his first federal budget plan in March 2017, Republican President Donald Trump proposed to eliminate the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities as well as the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. While Republicans in the 1980s and 1990s wanted to drastically cut their budget, it is the first time that a president proposes to completely eliminate these agencies.⁸¹⁸

In the end, although queer AIDS media makers faced many obstacles, hundreds if not thousands of productions emerged from the AIDS crisis. While the works that are being made today might differ from what was produced in the 1980s and 1990s when the AIDS activist movement was at its height, what these new works essentially do is reminding us that thirty years after the creation of ACT UP, people with AIDS still need to speak out, and that silence still equals death. As black lesbian feminist Audre Lorde writes:

And when we speak we are afraid / that our words will not be heard / nor welcomed / but when we are silent / we are still afraid / so it is better to speak / remembering / we were never meant to survive.⁸¹⁹

⁸¹⁷ Juhasz, Alexandra. Interview with the author. February 11, 2017, p.8.

⁸¹⁸ Sapan, Deb. "Trump Proposes Eliminating the Arts and Humanities Endowment." *New York Times*, March 15, 2017. <<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/15/arts/nea-neh-endowments-trump.html>> (Accessed on June 1st, 2017)

⁸¹⁹ Lorde, Audre. "A Litany For Survival." *The Black Unicorn*, 1995. <<https://frankroberts.files.wordpress.com/2012/10/audrelordepoems.pdf>> (Accessed on June 1st, 2017)

GLOSSARY

Camp

Camp is a difficult notion to define, as Susan Sontag explained when she declared: “to write about camp is to betray it.” For the purpose of this dissertation, we will define “camp” as a specific discursive mode and aesthetic form characterized by irony and humor, performance and theatricality, as well outrageousness and/or “bad taste.” Camp also tends to reflect a “gay sensibility.” Moe Meyer sees camp as “solely a queer discourse” embodying “a specifically queer cultural critique” and an “activist strategy” that is both political and critical.

Babuscio, Jack. “Camp and the Gay Sensibility.” *Camp Grounds: Style and Homosexuality*. Ed. David Bergman. Amherst University of Massachusetts Press, 1993, pp.20-28

Meyer, Moe. *The Politics and Poetics of Camp*. New York: Routledge, 1994, p.1.

Sontag, Susan. “Notes on Camp.” 1964.

<<http://faculty.georgetown.edu/irvinem/theory/Sontag-NotesOnCamp-1964.html>> (Accessed on October 10, 2016)

Culture Jamming

The practice of culture jamming borrows from the legacy of the Situationist group of artists and writers in France in the 1960s, the most famous of whom was Guy Debord. They advocated for political interventions at the level of daily life to counter the passivity and alienation of modern life and spectacle. The term “culture jam” was coined by the band Negativland in a reference to the citizens’ band radio term for jamming someone’s broadcast. One of the primary strategies of the Situationists, whose work inspires culture jammers, was called “détournement.” *Détournement* appropriates and alters an existing media artifact, one that the audience is already familiar with, in order to give it new meaning.

Malitz, Zack. “Tactic: Détournement / Culture Jamming.” *Beautiful Trouble: A Toolbox for Revolution*. Ed. Andrew Boyd. OR Books, 2012, p.28.

Sturken, Marita, Cartwright, Lisa. *Practice of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture*. Oxford University Press, 2009, pp.301-302.

Democratic Deficit

The phrase “democratic deficit” refers to the lack of access to relevant information as well as the lack of access to media services, which are generally only accessible to the elites. Hence, there is a democratic deficit that prevents full political and economic participation of every citizen and undermines a sense of community. By privileging participatory structures, queer AIDS media therefore contested this democratic deficit as they wished to establish a democratic media system that would provide a locus for all groups in society to be heard, not just the voices of the dominant group.

Hackett, Robert, A, Carroll, William K. *Remaking Media: The Struggle to Democratize Public Communication*. New York: Routledge, 2006, pp.1-7.

Discourse

According to Stuart Hall, discourses are “ways of referring to or constructing knowledge about a particular topic of practice: a cluster (...) of ideas, images and practices, which provide ways of talking about, forms of knowledge and conduct associated with, a particular topic, social activity or institutional site in society.” John Fiske adds that it is a “language or system of representation that has developed socially in order to make and circulate a coherent set of meanings about an important topic area. These meanings serve the interests of that section of society within which the discourse originates and which works ideologically to naturalize those meanings into common sense.” Meanings define what is “normal,” who belongs and who is excluded. Therefore, discourses are inscribed in power relations, as they may promote or oppose the dominant ideology.

Fiske, John. *Television Culture*. London: Routledge, 1987. pp.14-15.

Hall, Stuart. *Representations: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. Sage Publications, 1997, pp. 6-10.

Framing

“Framing” is a concept that comes from media and communication studies. It refers to the process by which a communication source defines and constructs an issue. According to Robert M. Entman, “Framing involves *selection* and *salience*.” He adds: “To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them ore salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item prescribed.” Framing includes using certain words or phrases, making certain contextual references, and/or choosing certain images. Jenny Kitzinger adds that any representation of reality involves framing. She also underlines that frames may be invisible or taken for granted. Finally, framing is also a concept used in the study of social movements, examining the strategies used by specific groups to present their cause and portray themselves as well as how alternative views are represented in the mass media.

Benford, Robert D., Snow, David A. “Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment.” *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 26, 2000, pp.611-639.

Entman, Robert M. “Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm.” *Journal of Communication*, Autumn 1993, pp.51-58.

Gitlin, Todd. *The Whole World Is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left*. University of California Press, 1980.

Kitzinger, Jenny. “Framing and Frame Analysis.” *Media Studies: Key Issues and Debates*. Ed. Eoin Devereux. SAGE, 2007, pp.134-162.

Gay (as a political identity)

In the 1970s and the 1980s, the community would mostly refer to itself as the “gay and lesbian” community. The term “gay” was adopted after the 1969 Stonewall Riots which marked the beginning of the Gay Liberation Movement. The term previously used, “homosexual,” was thought to bear negative pathological connotations.

Stein, Marc. *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement*. Routledge, 2012, p.82.

General population

The “general population” was a construct of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. It was imagined as being white, heterosexual, and middle-class. The phrase presumed this population unaffected by the epidemic while excluding other groups in American society from the “general population.”

Demus, Axelle. “Framing the AIDS Crisis.” Université de Nantes, 2015. p.178; p.181.

Guerrilla Television

The term is used by video activists to describe alternative video practices begun in the late 1960s that used technology to produce and show videotapes that were oppositional to the styles and politics of mainstream television. Guerrilla television was shot by participants in political movements, rather than by industry reporters, and was considered a vital part of direct political action.

Sturken, Marita, Cartwright, Lisa. *Practice of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture*. Oxford University Press, 2009, p.443.

Hegemony

This concept is associated with Italian Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci. There are two central aspects of Gramsci’s definition of hegemony: that dominant ideologies are often offered as common sense and that dominant ideologies are in tension with other forces and hence constantly in flux. The term *hegemony* thus indicates how ideological meaning is an object of struggle rather than an oppressive force that fully dominates subjects from above. Counter-hegemony refers to the forces in a given society that work against dominant meaning and power systems and keep in constant tension and flux those dominant meanings.

Sturken, Marita, Cartwright, Lisa. *Practice of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture*. Oxford University Press, 2009, p.436 and p.444.

Ideology

The shared set of values and beliefs that exist within a given society and through which individuals live out their relations to social institutions and structures. Ideology refers to the way that certain concepts and values are made to seem like natural, inevitable aspects of everyday life. In Marxist theory, the term ideology has undergone several changes in definition: first, by Marx, to imply a social system in which the masses are instilled with the dominant ideology of the ruling class and that constitutes a kind of false consciousness; second, by French Marxist Louis Althusser, who combined psychoanalysis and Marxist theory to postulate that we are unconsciously constituted as subjects by ideology, which gives us a sense of place in the world; third, by Antonio Gramsci, who used the term “hegemony”

to describe how dominant ideologies are always in flux and under contestation from other ideas and values.

Sturken, Marita, Cartwright, Lisa. *Practice of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture*. Oxford University Press, 2009, p.445.

Ideological State Apparatus

Louis Althusser explains that views, values, desires, and preferences are inculcated in individuals by ideological practices, which are imparted unconsciously by what he called “ideological state apparatuses,” such as the family, the media, education, and religious institutions. Identities are thus determined by means of binary notions such as “us” versus “them.” His theories suggest that media practices are reflective of ideological practice, reinforcing one another.

Danesi, Marcel. “Louis Althusser.” *Encyclopedia of Media and Communication*. University of Toronto Press, 2013, p.27.

Infotainment

Infotainment, a mix of the words “Information” and “Entertainment,” is a neologism that appeared in the late 1980s. Infotainment refers to conscious attempts to make information more interesting by including entertainment and sensationalistic elements in order to enhance popularity with audiences.

Gordon, A. David. et al. *Controversies in Media Ethics*. Routledge, 2012, p.434.

Intermediality

Intermediality refers to the mutual influences between media. Klaus Bruhn Jensen defines intermediality as “the interconnectedness of modern media of communication. As means of expression and exchange, the different media depend on and refer to each other, both explicitly and implicitly; they interact as elements of particular communicative strategies; and they are constituents of a wider cultural environment.”

Jensen, Klaus Bruhn. “Intermediality.” *The International Encyclopedia of Communication*. Ed. Wolfgang Donsbach. MA: Blackwell Science 2008.

Medium/Media

“Medium” refers to any means employed for the purpose of transmitting a message. “Mass media” refers to the various ways in which messages may be transmitted to a very large audience. They work in unison to generate specific dominant or popular representations of

events, peoples, and places. The primary mass media are radio, television, the cinema and the press, including newspapers and magazines.

Danesi, Marcel. "Medium." *Encyclopedia of Media and Communication*. University of Toronto Press, 2013, pp.461-462.

Sturken, Marita, Cartwright, Lisa. *Practice of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture*. Oxford University Press, 2009, p.448.

Person with AIDS (as a political identity)

The mainstream media often presented and referred to people with AIDS as "AIDS victims." However, activists condemned the term. In the "Denver Principles" drafted in 1983 by gay men with AIDS, they declared: "We condemn attempts to label us as "victims," a term which implies defeat, and we are only occasionally 'patients,' a term which implies passivity, helplessness, and dependence upon the care of others. We are 'People With AIDS.'" The AIDS crisis saw the creation of a new identity – the person with AIDS – that formed the basis for the creation of a New Social Movement. By asserting their right to determine the conditions of their health care, PWAs organized as a political constituency.

The Advisory Committee of People with AIDS, "The Denver Principles," Second National AIDS Forum at the National Lesbian and Gay Health Conference, Colorado, June 1983.

<http://www.actupny.org/documents/denver_principles.pdf> (Accessed on January 12, 2015)

Post-structuralism and Postmodernism

Post-structuralism refers to different theoretical principles – the most important models being deconstruction, semiotics, and discourse analysis – that critique structuralism and its universalism. Structuralism is rooted in the notion that culture can be understood by means of identifying the universal structures that are reproduced in cultural products such as artworks, verbal language, and other vehicles of communication and culture. New theories then emerged, along with postmodernism, that located force producing difference and inequality not in class or any other structure but in the destabilizing operations of language and representation.

"Post-structuralism." Danesi, Marcel. *Encyclopedia of Media and Communication*. University of Toronto Press, 2013, p.530.

"Cultural theory." *Encyclopedia of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered History in America*. Ed. Marc Stein. Charles Scribner's Sons, 2004, p.278.

For a detailed discussion of postmodernism and post-structuralism theories, also see Sarup, Madan. *An Introductory Guide to Post-Structuralism and Post-Modernism*. Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993 [1988].

Queer

The acronym “LGBT” used nowadays appeared in the 1990s but it followed the model of identity politics, contrary to “queer” politics. While the term “queer” used to be a term of homophobic abuse, it then came to be used differently, sometimes as an umbrella term for a coalition of culturally marginal sexual self-identifications and at other times to describe a theoretical model which developed out of more traditional lesbian and gay studies. Writer Louise Sloan saw the queer community as: “the oxymoronic community of difference.” Queer politics were also more confrontational than identity politics, which overall tended to be assimilationist. Finally, as Lisa Duggan notes, “Queer politics, with its critique of the categories and strategies of liberal gay politics, keeps the possibility of radical change alive at the margins. It also infuses a remarkable efflorescence of off-center cultural production – art, music, dance, theater, film and video, and more.”

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Representation

Representation is a different notion from that of “reflection.” It implies the active work of selecting and presenting, of structuring and shaping. Hall adds that it is “not merely the transmitting of an already-existing meaning, but the more active labor of *making things mean*.”

Hall, Stuart. “The Rediscovery of ‘Ideology:’ Return of the Repressed in Media Studies.” *Culture, Society, and the Media*. Eds. Michael Gurevitch et al. New York: Routledge, 1986 [1982], p.60.

Sacrilegious (and the Carnavalesque)

The sacrilegious is part of the carnivalesque, as defined by Mikhail Bakhtin. The carnival for Bakhtin is an event in which all rules, inhibitions, restrictions and regulations which determine the course of everyday life are suspended, and especially all form of hierarchy in society. Bakhtin offers four categories of what he calls the “carnivalistic sense of the world:” “Free and familiar interaction between people:” in the carnival normally separated people can interact and freely express themselves to one another; “Eccentric behavior:” behavior that was otherwise unacceptable is legitimate in carnival; “Carnivalistic misalliances:” the free and familiar attitude of the carnival enables everything which is normally separated to connect – the sacred with the profane, the new and old, the high and low etc.; “**Sacrilegious:**” the carnival for Bakhtin is a site of blasphemy, profanity and parodies on things that are sacred.

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Subvertisement / Subvertising

As Alexander Barley explains, subvertising is “an attempt to turn the iconography of the advertisers into a noose around their neck. If images can create a brand, they can also destroy one. A subvert is a satirical version or the defacing of an existing advert, a *détournement*, an inversion designed to make us forget consumerism and consider instead social or political issues. It also reclaims graphic design for non-commercial purposes. (...) Subvertising is a reaction against a culture where the individual, rather than being politically engaged, is cast as a spectator in a parade of passive symbols.” Subvertising became popular in the 1970s, notably with the creation of the Billboard Liberation Front in San Francisco, which reworked billboards against their intended messages.

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Zines are “noncommercial, nonprofessional, small-circulation magazines which their creators produce, publish, and distribute by themselves.”

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