

Viral Visions: Art, Activism, and Epidemiology in the Global AIDS Pandemic

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Abstract

Most histories of HIV/AIDS, art, and cultural activism pivot around New York and are confined to the American context. Instead, this dissertation maps out a more expansive transnational Anglophone network of individuals, projects, and coalitions that conceived of the virus as a global problem during the 1980s and 1990s. Methodologically combining archival research with oral history interviews, this study proposes and models an epidemiological approach to art history that tracks and theorizes significant patterns of viral propagation, activist response, and visual culture-making across groups in Canada, the United Kingdom, South Africa, and the United States. Each chapter focuses on artists, activists, and critics—many of whom were queer, women, and people of color—as they formed communities in which the virus generated local, national, and global discourses and practices of cultural activism. Structured around four historical case-studies in and across Toronto, London, Cape Town, Johannesburg, and Boston, this dissertation encompasses a diverse cultural archive cutting across media and aesthetic forms: visual artworks, films, exhibitions, texts, protests, workshops, campaigns, festivals, and nightlife. Ultimately, this dissertation argues that transnational AIDS cultural activism, with its viral aesthetic strategies, emergent modes of identification, and bold political interventions in public space, produced new critical understandings of postmodernism, queerness, globalization, and postcoloniality.

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Note on Spelling

This dissertation considers cultural contexts where Canadian, British, South African, and American English are written and spoken. As such, there are minor spelling variations. Though I write in American English, I retain the original spelling of words when quoting them directly. I also preserve the original capitalization of acronyms such as “AIDS,” which is sometimes printed as “Aids.”

Chapter One Towards an Epidemiological Art History

On July 19, 1988, New York City Commissioner of Health Dr. Stephen Joseph cut the official number of local estimated AIDS cases in half so as to channel critical and already lacking funding away from AIDS services. Operating under the banner of the direct-action advocacy group the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP), the artist collective Gran Fury responded to this alarming change with what would become one of the most iconic and immediately recognizable images of the global AIDS activist movement. “YOU’VE GOT BLOOD ON YOUR HANDS, STEPHEN JOSEPH,” the poster bluntly declared, exploiting the catchy visual language of 1980s American advertising. “THE CUT IN AIDS NUMBERS IS A LETHAL LIE” (see **Figure 1.1**). Sandwiched between the two statements was a bold red handprint. Besides wheat-pasting the posters across the city streets, members of Gran Fury and ACT UP produced their own bloody handprints across urban surfaces to further publicize their campaign against Joseph and the local health department (see **Figure 1.2**).

At the time of this intervention, the future looked bleak for activists and those impacted by the disease. During the early years of the AIDS crisis in North America and Western Europe, the populations most statistically affected, and in charge of the activist response, were queer people and people of color—communities already on the fringes of society.¹ In the years since 1981, when biomedical authorities first detected a rare cancer and infections in formerly healthy gay American men, HIV/AIDS had secured a place as one of the most microbiologically exceptional, differentially distributed, and culturally

¹ In this study, “the early years of the AIDS crisis” is roughly defined in temporal terms as between 1981 and 1996—the year that lifesaving anti-retroviral treatment became approved and available to those with access to proper healthcare.

debated diseases in the history of medicine. First dubbed Gay-Related Immune Deficiency, the condition was shortly thereafter named Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS). After a succession of acronyms, by 1984 researchers recognized that the syndrome was caused by a sexually-transmitted virus, officially labeled the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) in 1986. Against the backdrop of the neoconservative administrations such as those under President Ronald Reagan in the United States, Prime Minister Brian Mulroney in Canada, and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom, the rapidly spreading epidemic ignited a vexed moral panic around sex, queer sexuality, race, immigration, and public life. Grassroots activism was the predominant force driving AIDS treatment and cure, and challenging the hegemony of market-based medicine. And, as demonstrated by Gran Fury's bloody handprint, political groups such as ACT UP utilized art as a dynamic tool of expression, mobilization, and intervention.

A few months after their campaign against the New York City Department of Health, Gran Fury repurposed the simple yet effective image for a decisive national ACT UP protest against the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). In view of the growing rates of AIDS mortality, many activists were infuriated by this agency's slow clinical drug testing and strict protocols. Featuring a right, rather than a left, handprint this time, the new poster emphatically proclaimed, "THE GOVERNMENT HAS BLOOD ON ITS HANDS. ONE AIDS DEATH EVERY HALF HOUR" (see **Figure 1.3**). For the demonstration, staged at the FDA's headquarters in the suburbs of Washington, D.C., on October 11, 1988, protesters dressed up as red-handed FDA scientists, shut down the

governmental agency, and issued a set of demands for expediting biomedical research and making available experimental drugs (see **Figure 1.4**).²

Circling around graphics such as this red handprint, most histories of AIDS, art, and activism begin and end in New York, with its tremendously rich and important constellation of cultural outpourings. This dissertation, however, tells a different story—or rather, different stories that together shed light on a more expansive transnational Anglophone network of AIDS cultural activism. AIDS, after all, was nothing less than a pandemic: neither the virus nor the cultural activism it awakened was ever confined to a local or national context. Consider, for example, the migrations of Gran Fury’s bloody handprint to South Africa ten years later as the disease became the vector of a new post-apartheid geopolitical order. It served as a focal image for the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC), a key grassroots organization founded in late 1998 to fight for accessible antiretroviral drugs in South Africa. Preserved in the South African History Archive in Johannesburg, a template for a poster calls attention to the borrowing from and literal reframing of this graphic, now accompanied by a new text to suit the local circumstances: “DRUG COMPANIES HAVE BLOOD ON THEIR HANDS. ONE AIDS DEATH EVERY TEN MINUTES. AFFORDABLE DRUGS NOW” (see **Figure 1.5**).³

The meanings and manifestations of the blood-splattered handprint transformed through its global dialogues with other visual articulations of AIDS activism. Illustrative

² For more on the genesis of the bloody hand graphic, see Avram Finkelstein, *After Silence: A History of AIDS through Its Images* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017), 138–45; Richard Meyer, “This Is to Enrage You: Gran Fury and the Graphics of AIDS Activism,” in *But Is It Art? The Spirit of Art as Activism*, ed. Nina Felshin (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995), 70–72.

³ Template for protest poster, likely 1999, B1.1: TAC formation, Achmat, Lewis, and Treatment Action Campaign Papers, South African History Archive, Johannesburg. For more on the relationship between Gran Fury and nascent AIDS activism in South Africa in the 1990s, see my interview with Gran Fury member Loring McAlpin, who became friends with Zackie Achmat in New York in the early 1990s. Loring McAlpin, interview by Jackson Davidow, May 3, 2018.

of this mingling of local and global cultural forms, strategies, and histories is a photograph of a press conference held by Zackie Achmat and other TAC activists at the XIII International AIDS Conference in Durban, South Africa in 2000—an event of extraordinary importance, and the first of its kind to take place in the global South (see **Figure 1.6**).⁴ We see a complex layering of images, slogans, and signifiers across posters, t-shirts, and programs; this handprint joins in a chaotic web of red ribbons, TAC “H.I.V. Positive” logos, Zulu beadwork, graphics evocative of South African anti-apartheid resistance, and “AIDS PROFITEER” posters (also an appropriation of a Gran Fury project). By adapting to and furthering the transnational agendas of AIDS activism, the bloody handprint at once became more global and more local in its viral reproductions and mutations. In part, these visual migrations and transformations were responsible for turning localized AIDS activism—whether in New York, Toronto, London, Johannesburg, Boston, Cape Town, or Durban—into a diversified global political movement.

This dissertation offers an epidemiological history of artistic and activist responses to the AIDS pandemic during the 1980s and 1990s. Organized around four key historical case-studies in and across Toronto, London, Cape Town, Johannesburg, and Boston, this dissertation maps out an Anglophone network of individuals, projects, and coalitions that conceived of HIV/AIDS as a global problem. Towards the end of the twentieth century, HIV moved from being a latent disease agent to the overwhelming cause of a pandemic to the metaphor *par excellence* for globalization. More than a biological pathogen infecting bodies through fluid exchange, the virus was, and continues to be, a serious

⁴ “TAC Press Conference, Durban AIDS Conference,” July 13, 2000, I-D8 Photos, Zackie Achmat/Jack Lewis Collection AM 2970, Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action Archives, Johannesburg.

public health issue that traversed and renegotiated national borders, imaginaries, populations, and histories. It also gave rise to a robust transnational political movement that raised consciousness, advocated for biomedical research and treatment, combatted social stigma, and worked to change the terms of representation.

From urban queer communities in North America and Europe in the 1980s to post-apartheid South Africa in the 1990s, AIDS activism was forcefully buttressed by influential and imaginative cultural programs. Just as HIV infects essential host cells in the human immune system to multiply, spread, and biologically evolve, many of the cultural approaches and works responding to the pandemic were themselves viral in their techniques of self-propagation and mutation.⁵ Moreover, communities of activists, critics, and artists seized the virus as a strategic model and a contagious metaphor for intervening in public space, and for creating new spaces within the frequently hostile enveloping cultural discourses and practices.⁶ That is, many cultural activists appropriated the virus, politically and aesthetically, just as it appropriated them, in order to fight the many forms of harm it unleashed on local, national, and global scales. This dissertation argues that transnational AIDS cultural activism, with its viral aesthetic strategies, emergent modes

⁵ Media theorist Zach Blas suggests that while a virus and its qualifier, “the viral,” are not one and the same, “[t]o think the virus and the viral is to engage in their continuous states of flux, transformation, and movements toward and between as well as diversions away from one another, attending to the fact that there is some kind of recognition or identification process that binds or links the virus and viral together for the human.” Zach Blas, “Virus, Viral,” *WSQ: Women’s Studies Quarterly* 40, no. 1–2 (2012): 30. This dissertation likewise attends to both the distinction and the linkage between the virus and viral.

⁶ Aesthetically speaking, writers and artists in North America had been looking to and appropriating the virus as an archetype for postmodernism since William Burroughs’ novel *The Ticket That Exploded* (1962). Expanding on Burroughs’ speculation that language is a virus, new media artists such as Nam June Paik, General Idea, and Laurie Anderson explored semiotic and technological metaphors of parasitic proliferation and transformation from the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s. For a history and re-theorization of virality in contemporary art, see, for instance, David Joselit, *Feedback: Television against Democracy* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2007), 44–84. With the advent of HIV/AIDS and its activist responses in the 1980s, cultural understandings of virality changed; no longer confined to the territory of language and theory, virality became more *real*, indivisible from the body’s susceptibility and the seeming incurability of the frightful public health concern.

of identification, and bold political interventions in public space, produced new critical understandings of postmodernism, queerness, globalization, and postcoloniality.

Central to the (re)formulations of these dense and contested cultural concepts, to be explored at length in the ensuing chapters, was an unwavering preoccupation with space. From the personal to the geopolitical, the virus broadly interrogated and redefined a number of spatial relationships. In an age of global interconnectivity and adamant contagion, borders of various kinds—between bodies, subjectivities, nation states, discourses, cultural forms, and between the human and non-human—were tenuous, porous, and vulnerable to rupture and transgression. Just as the virus called into question the boundaries undergirding these categories of difference, the work of many AIDS cultural activists subjected these embattled constructs to radical and sophisticated rethinking. Across a range of sites, publics, and imaginaries, the creative responses to the pandemic were articulated as spatial practices, as networked phenomena that necessitate an epidemiological approach to chart this particular nexus of culture-making, virality, and globality.

Adapting Epidemiology

Just as AIDS cultural activists variously appropriated the virus, this dissertation appropriates epidemiology by proposing and modeling an epidemiological art history. On the one hand, this method alludes to the fact that artistic discourses and practices were inseparable from vital developments in AIDS epidemiology, politics, healthcare, cultural theory, and beyond. After all, from the start of the epidemic, many AIDS activists, journalists, critics, and artists fiercely scrutinized the cultural meanings, political agendas, and exigencies of epidemiology. On the other hand, this approach conceptually takes its

cue from the medical branch of epidemiology, working to track and theorize the significant patterns of AIDS cultural production across communities of activism. Adapting epidemiological notions and considerations to art-historical inquiry, this decentralized, networked approach convenes and explores a catholic cultural archive, one that cuts across media and forms: visual artworks, films, exhibitions, texts, protests, ephemera, workshops, campaigns, festivals, and nightlife. To examine this variegated cultural network in its full complexity, this dissertation methodologically blends archival research with over thirty original oral history interviews with cultural practitioners across Canada, the UK, South Africa, and the US. Rather than concentrating on an individual or even a collective, this study sketches out a much knottier web of relationships between people, pathogens, works, ideas, images, institutions, technologies, and spaces.

Etymologically, “epidemiology” comes from the Greek words *epi* (“upon”), *demos* (“people”), and *logos* (“word”). It thus directly translates to “the study of that which is upon the people,” and “that which is upon the people” became synonymous with the impact of disease. Beyond research into epidemics, epidemiology as a medical and public health practice works to study the distribution and factors of disease in defined human populations, analyzing statistical data to pinpoint patterns.⁷ Intellectually, this branch of medicine has been appropriated and put to use by external fields, particularly anthropological scholarship; the epidemiological framework I plot out in this study is informed by such work. Of particular relevance is the concept of “cultural epidemiology,” which first surfaced in cultural and cognitive anthropology in the 1980s.

⁷ James A. Trostle, *Epidemiology and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 4.

There are two main strands of such literature.⁸ One, introduced by geneticists Luigi Luca Cavalli-Sforza and Marcus W. Feldman, theorizes cultural development as dispersed across populations through specific transmitted traits and patterns.⁹ The other analyzes how cognitive structures activate and make associations between abstract ideas, activities, and things across human populations. This approach is coined by cognitive anthropologist Dan Sperber in his pioneering article “Anthropology and Psychology: Towards an Epidemiology of Representations” (1985). Just as an epidemiology of disease is based on patterns in the body politic, an epidemiology of representations is predicated on patterns in cognitive psychology. “Cultural things,” he contends “are distributions of representations in a human population, ecological patterns of psychological things. To explain cultural phenomena is, then, to develop an epidemiology of representations.”¹⁰ Though Sperber examines representations that are located in an individual’s micro-cognitive structures—that is, hugely different from the types of visual representations typically considered by scholars of art history and visual culture—his work models for me a way to engage epidemiological concepts across disciplinary boundaries.¹¹

Insisting that, more than a branch of medicine, epidemiology is a cultural practice, medical anthropologist James A. Trostle has carved out a markedly different interpretation of cultural epidemiology. For him, the purpose of cultural epidemiology is to reveal how “[v]ariables are defined and measured, results quantified, analyses disseminated, and policies developed, all with specific cultural assumptions behind

⁸ For more on these two schools, see Scott Atran and Douglas L. Medin, *The Native Mind and the Cultural Construction of Nature* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), 283–84.

⁹ Luigi Luca Cavalli-Sforza and Marcus W. Feldman, *Cultural Transmission and Evolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981).

¹⁰ Dan Sperber, “Anthropology and Psychology: Towards an Epidemiology of Representations,” *Man* 20, no. 1 (1985): 73.

¹¹ For more on Sperber’s “cultural epidemiology” as a semiotic procedure, see N. J. Enfield, *Relationship Thinking: Agency, Enchrony, and Human Sociality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 48.

them.”¹² By probing the intersections of epidemiology and anthropology, Trostle also posits that a common characteristic of the two fields is the quest for comprehending trends in health and disease. If epidemiologists focus on the patterns of disease, medical anthropologists monitor the culturally patterned responses to disease, accounting for the variety of overlapping social, environmental, cultural, and biomedical factors that are at play.¹³ Ultimately, Trostle suggests that greater cross-pollination between the epistemic frameworks of these fields could lead to novel understandings of health and disease in relation to the enveloping sociocultural contexts.

Art History as Epidemiology

Energized by the interdisciplinary scholarship of Trostle, Sperber, and others, this dissertation asserts that there are also points of convergence and mutual enrichment for art history and epidemiology. Epidemiological concepts, methods, and metaphors can equip art-historical inquiry with new tools and questions—even without the literal incorporation of statistical analysis—drawing our attention to certain disciplinary tendencies. For the purpose of situating my dissertation in and around art history, let me comment on a couple of discipline-specific methods and texts that have productively influenced my thinking over the course of this project.

¹² Trostle, *Epidemiology and Culture*, 173.

¹³ Trostle, 6. To be sure, the meanings of culture in anthropology are vast and complicated, not to mention divergent from conventional definitions in more humanistic fields such as art history and cultural studies. Trostle relies on the work of anthropologist Clifford Geertz, who postulated, “[b]elieving, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning.” See Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 5; Trostle, *Epidemiology and Culture*, 5.

If epidemiology is an unfamiliar art-historical pursuit, it is well-established that, to some extent, art historians like to play doctor.¹⁴ As historian Carlo Ginzburg has famously shown, Italian art historian and connoisseur Giovanni Morelli, whose work in the 1870s had a major impact on the formation of the discipline, created a system of painting classification and attribution that had diagnostic properties. The crux of his thinking was that studying minor details—earlobes, smiles, toenails—rather than more obvious visual criteria is best for making judgments about the originality and authorship of the work, similar to a detective reviewing clues, or a doctor observing a patient’s symptoms. According to Ginzburg, Morelli’s method strikingly resembled the subsequent interpretative frameworks of psychoanalysis—in fact, Sigmund Freud was aware of Morelli’s work and freely admitted this analogy—as well as the popular detective stories of Arthur Conan Doyle. Indeed, Freud and Doyle were trained as doctors and, along with Morelli, deployed what Ginzburg calls a “model of *medical semiotics*, or symptomatology—the discipline which permits diagnosis, though the disease cannot be directly observed, on the basis of superficial symptoms or signs, often irrelevant to the eye of the layman.”¹⁵ This involved using evidence to decipher, explain, and diagnose. Connecting these medical semiotic operations to historical method, Ginzburg speculates,

[h]istorians cannot help sometimes referring back (explicitly or by implication) to comparable series of phenomena; but their strategy for finding things out, like the volumes in which they present their work, is basically about particular cases, whether concerning individuals, or social groups, or whole societies. In this way history is like medicine, which uses disease classifications to analyse the specific illness of a particular patient.

¹⁴ In her book review of *General Idea: Imagevirus* (2010) by AIDS activist and artist Gregg Bordowitz, performance theorist Miriam Felton-Dansky uses the title “Artistic Epidemiology.” However, she does not unpack what this concept means in general or in Bordowitz’s text in particular. See Miriam Felton-Dansky, “Artistic Epidemiology,” *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 33, no. 2 (2011): 115–19; Gregg Bordowitz, *General Idea: Imagevirus* (London: Afterall, 2010).

¹⁵ Carlo Ginzburg, “Morelli, Freud and Sherlock Holmes: Clues and Scientific Method,” trans. Anna Davin, *History Workshop Journal* 9, no. 1 (1980): 12. Italics used in original text.

And the historian's knowledge, like the doctor's, is indirect, based on signs and scraps of evidence, conjectural.¹⁶

Even as a medical semiotic approach to uncovering historical meaning through details inevitably informs my dissertation, which rests on a few salient case-studies, an epidemiological art history also seeks to comprehend the broader spread of a phenomenon in a population. In this regard, one might look to the notion of an “art history without names (*Kunstgeschichte ohne Namen*)” developed by Swiss art historian Heinrich Wölfflin in his foundational book *Principles of Art History (Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, 1915). Tracing the foremost trends in Western art across the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Wölfflin opts to concentrate on the works themselves, aspiring to narrate the history of art through shifting formal structures and fixed categories he devises.¹⁷

Disinterested in the meanings of the works, the biographical minutiae of their makers, and the societal milieu in which they were produced, Wölfflin is smitten with his own method as a way to pick out patterns, as a proudly “scientific” pursuit, liberated from contextualizing facts and assumptions, and supposedly purged of his own subjectivity.¹⁸ In his view, an “art history without names” “signifies the intention to

¹⁶ Ginzburg, 16.

¹⁷ These categories are linear and painterly; plane and recession; closed and open form; multiplicity and unity; and clearness and unclearness.

¹⁸ Of course, Wölfflin's formula of artistic development did not please everyone. Perhaps its sharpest critic was Arnold Hauser, a Hungarian art historian known for introducing Marxist methods to the field. In a chapter from his book *The Philosophy of Art History* (1958), Hauser contends that an “art history without names” flattens the complexity of artworks to their formal qualities, rigidly locks artistic styles in an epoch, and fails to reckon with highly important external circumstances such as social environments of making and artistic subjectivity and identity. Arnold Hauser, *The Philosophy of Art History* (London: Routledge & Keegan Paul Ltd, 1958), 121–22. For more on Wölfflin's *Principles of Art History* and its discursive legacies, see, for example, Marshall Brown, “The Classic Is the Baroque: On the Principle of Wölfflin's Art History,” *Critical Inquiry* 9, no. 2 (1982): 379–404; Michael Ann Holly, *Panofsky and the Foundations of Art History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 46–68; Martin Warnke, “On Heinrich Wölfflin,” *Representations* 27, no. 1 (1989): 172–87; Caroline A. Jones, “Form and Formless,” in *A Companion to Contemporary Art since 1945*, ed. Amelia Jones (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 131–32.

describe something that lies *below* the level of the individual.”¹⁹ Interestingly, this description is redolent of, or at the very least a curious counterpoint to, the etymology of epidemiology: “the study of that which is upon the people.” While these prepositions—upon and below—take different sides in their spatial orientations, it is possible to see parallels, however crude they may be, between Wölfflin’s philological formalist method of investigation and the project of epidemiology. In both endeavors, it is not simply a matter of tracking a specific work or individual across time and space, but the “scientific” registration and grouping of larger patterns that transcend the identity of the maker, the patient, or the unique case-study.

In this dissertation, formalist inquiry is less of a priority for me, since I am much more interested in presenting a layered and networked history of cultural production, cutting across critical developments and interchanges in art, activism, theory, medicine, and beyond. That being said, my epidemiological method is still stimulated by the decentered framework behind an “art history without names.” This dissertation does, of course, contain names, which primarily help to identify nodes in networks rather than to pinpoint a style or an authorial hand, as in much traditional art-historical scholarship. I am also influenced by more recent unconventional remodelings of formalism, particularly the idea of “eco-formalism” that David Joselit synthetically articulates in his book *Feedback: Television against Democracy* (2007). Instead of examining specific artworks, artists, styles, or media, Joselit advocates for art historians “to organize visual data

¹⁹ Heinrich Wölfflin, *Principles of Art History*, trans. Jonathan Blower (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2015), 76. Originally published as *Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe* in 1915, yet this quotation comes from the preface to the fourth and fifth editions (1920 and 1921), also in German. Italics used in the original text.

differently, tracing images as events within integrated systems.”²⁰ His method draws inspiration from critic Susan Sontag’s proposal that images must be grasped as belonging to an ecological system in her book *On Photography* (1977).²¹ According to Joselit, “the historian’s job is not only to study the production of art, or even to understand how social forces percolate through it, but also to describe the effects of... catalytic events on an entire image ecology.”²² Certainly the advent of HIV/AIDS was one such “catalytic event” in the late twentieth century, and Joselit’s concerns are also central to an epidemiological art history, which attempts to register the ecosystems of pathogens, politics, and visual-cultural forms.

Networking Epidemiology

Besides its ecological disposition, an epidemiological art history attends strictly to the networked nature of culture as it is produced, distributed, and consumed, as it functions on local, national, and global scales. To flesh out epidemiology as a decentered endeavor, one must disentangle it from etiology, the corresponding medical branch that examines the causes of a disease, including its points of emergence. In a nutshell, whereas epidemiology grapples with the incidence and distribution of disease in relation to populations, etiology traces the causation of disease. During the early years of the North American AIDS crisis, a complex of homophobic and racist origin stories testified to the confusion of epidemiology and etiology in much scientific research and popular culture. As many AIDS activists maintained, there is a critical difference between these

²⁰ Joselit, *Feedback*, 45.

²¹ Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977), 180; Joselit, *Feedback*, 45.

²² Joselit, *Feedback*, 48.

two fields.²³ In the pages of the academic art criticism journal *October* in 1987, art historian and AIDS activist Simon Watney pointed out the potent homophobia at the core of many etiologic preoccupations:

[t]his “truth” of AIDS... resolutely insists that the point of emergence of the virus should be identified as its *cause*. Epidemiology is thus replaced by a moral etiology of the disease that can only conceive homosexual desire within a medicalized metaphor of contagion.²⁴

In other words, for Watney and several other AIDS activists, etiology was moralizing and punitive, whereas epidemiology—which they believed to be a necessary critical apparatus for putting an end to the pandemic—was not. As Watney explained in the newsletter of the British AIDS charity the Terrence Higgins Trust, addressing a radically different public, the work of epidemiology was essential for responding to “the changing picture of health in the community,” even if statistic collection and categorizations “strongly reflect social attitudes and beliefs.”²⁵

Though network analysis became a key framework in epidemiology just as the AIDS epidemic was beginning to erupt in the early 1980s, the borderline between epidemiology and etiology became increasingly confused with the development of the notion of Patient Zero—the gay Québécois flight attendant thought to have originated the North American AIDS epidemic.²⁶ Subjected to enraged scrutiny by many activists, the

²³ In his close reading of John Greyson’s film *Zero Patience* (1993), Roger Hallas suggests that Randy Shilts, the popularizer of the Patient Zero story, mixed up epidemiology and etiology. See Roger Hallas, “The Genealogical Pedagogy of John Greyson’s *Zero Patience*,” *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 12, no. 1 (2003): 20.

²⁴ Simon Watney, “The Spectacle of AIDS,” *October* 43 (Winter 1987): 73.

²⁵ Simon Watney, “Fun with Figures: The Presentation of British HIV and AIDS Statistics,” *The Trust Newsletter: The Newsletter of the Terrence Higgins Trust*, January 1990. Terrence Higgins Trust Archive, Bishopsgate Institute, London.

²⁶ For more on networked approaches to (AIDS) epidemiology, see the important article, Alden S. Klodahl, “Social Networks and the Spread of Infectious Diseases: The AIDS Example,” *Social Science & Medicine* 21, no. 11 (1985): 1203–16. For a more historical positioning of network science and epidemiology, see Leon Danon et al., “Networks and the Epidemiology of Infectious Disease,”

construct of Patient Zero depended on a particular network model of AIDS infection and transmission as emerging from a single “node.” In March 1984, *The American Journal of Medicine* introduced this concept to scientific communities in an article called “Cluster of Cases of the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome: Patients Linked by Sexual Contact,” which was based on a 1982 study of gay AIDS patients on the east and west coasts of the US, conducted by the Centers for Disease Control. To visualize their research, the scientists provided a neat diagram mapping out a sexual network that had an emphatic origin (see **Figure 1.7**). As the caption explains, “[e]ach circle represents an AIDS patient. Lines connecting the circles represent sexual exposures. Indicated city or state is place of residence of a patient at the time of a diagnosis. ‘0’ indicates Patient 0.”²⁷ The circles are also shaded in to varying degrees so as to denote the attendant AIDS symptoms: Kaposi sarcoma, pneumocystis carinii pneumonia, other opportunistic infection, or multiple diagnoses. This visual representation and the research it portrayed played a pivotal role in popularizing the fraught idea of Patient Zero, personally identified as Gaétan Dugas in gay journalist Randy Shilts’ controversial book *And the Band Played On: Politics, People, and the AIDS Epidemic* (1987).²⁸

To better understand epidemiology as a networked enterprise, and beyond the false positivism represented in this diagram of “Patient 0,” it is instructive to consider a visualization of network typologies, first laid out by computer scientist Paul Baran. In a 1964 report for the RAND Corporation, Baran theorized three kinds of networks:

Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Infectious Diseases 2011 (2011), <https://www.hindawi.com/journals/ipid/2011/284909/>.

²⁷ David M. Auerbach et al., “Clusters of Cases of the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome: Patients Linked by Sexual Contact,” *The American Journal of Medicine* 76, no. 3 (March 1984): 488.

²⁸ For more on this diagram as it pertained to Shilts’ book, see Richard A. McKay, “‘Patient Zero’: The Absence of a Patient’s View of the Early North American AIDS Epidemic,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 88, no. 1 (2014): 171–73.

centralized, decentralized, and distributed (see **Figure 1.8**).²⁹ As this typology conveniently shows, a centralized network has one distinct origin, a decentralized network has multiple possible origins, and a distributed network lacks any such information. According to Baran’s network classification, the “Patient 0” diagram is decentralized, yet it still, obviously, implies a clear point of origination. Nevertheless, it is important to note what was gravely overlooked in the propagation of the Patient Zero paradigm: the origin could also, in theory, be located at any of the other generative nodes in this diagram. Even as the diagram posits “Patient 0” as the point of origin, it simultaneously reveals that the idea of Patient Zero is inherently flawed.

With epidemiological rather than etiological intents, my dissertation adopts this same networked approach to the history of AIDS cultural activism. The network it conjures up is, in Baran’s terms, decentralized. Though this network type permits the historian to fantasize about tracking causality between nodes, determining clusters of activity, and even proposing points of causation, the origins continue to be impossible to pin down precisely in a decentralized network. Put differently, there is no Patient Zero in an epidemiological art history.

This dissertation activates the term “network” in other ways, too. Despite its cumbersome associations—from postwar network science to communication networks to actor-network-theory—I apprehend the concept, historically and theoretically, in three principal ways: as a self-proclaimed entity with specific political objectives, as a cultural

²⁹ Paul Baran, “On Distributed Communications: I. Introduction to Distributed Communications Networks,” Memorandum (Santa Monica, CA: The RAND Corporation, 1964), 2. The RAND Corporation is an American global policy think tank.

imaginary, and as a hermeneutic architecture.³⁰ Most literally, many transnational clusters of AIDS activism used “network” as a formal and informal organizational designation.³¹ Just like other activists attached to, for example, the anti-apartheid, women’s, and lesbian and gay movements, AIDS activists often operated in self-defined networks. Yet no singular, centralized AIDS activist network or AIDS cultural network existed on local, national, or global levels; more accurately, it was an indistinct multiplicity of nodes and linkages, intersecting and synergizing in myriad ways.

Even if there was no official membership register, mailing list, or other document that guaranteed cohesion and containment, this dissertation makes the case that there was, in fact, an Anglophone transnational network of AIDS cultural activism beginning in the mid-1980s. It built on and intertwined with networks from other adjoining political and cultural movements. In casting this network as principally Anglophone, I do not mean to suggest that it did not operate in and between other languages, or in locations beyond the US, the UK, Canada, and South Africa.³² I am, however, positing that the most pronounced clusters of transnationally-networked AIDS cultural activism transpired in English; the language was the global lingua franca in culture, medicine, economics, and politics, as well as an unassailable vestige of colonialism and structure of the Commonwealth of Nations. There were no comparable AIDS cultural networks in other

³⁰ For a helpful historical overview of the network as material infrastructure and cultural imaginary, see Patrick Jagoda, *Network Aesthetics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 1–29.

³¹ Of course, AIDS cultural practitioners were far from the first activists to embrace the term, which had been in vogue in countercultural movements and televisual media activism since the 1960s. Yet they were, as media scholar Cait McKinney has uncovered, among the first political organizers to take advantage of early computer networking technologies such as Bulletin Board Systems so as to share critical information about treatment, research, and resistance. Cait McKinney, “Printing the Network: AIDS Activism and Online Access in the 1980s,” *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 32, no. 1 (2018): 7–17.

³² Of course, Canada has two official languages (English and French) and many indigenous languages. And in South Africa English is one of eleven official languages. My research indicates that other national contexts that could and should be explored in future study consist of Australia and non-English-speaking countries such as France, Spain, Germany, and Japan, as well as throughout Latin America.

languages. Rather than exhaustively mapping out this perpetually shifting network, with its various sites of interlacing, this dissertation mobilizes an epidemiological method in each chapter to inspect specific case-studies that represent pieces of a larger puzzle. Connections between contexts become clear as characters, projects, and organizations resurface.³³

Through this optic, my dissertation gazes beyond the normative parameters of art history, towards science and technology studies and actor-network-theory, which has been most rigorously theorized since the 1980s by Bruno Latour and Donna Haraway.³⁴ Notwithstanding the linearity of this dissertation, my writing tries to bring out a web of contingencies, dependencies, and entanglements between “nature” and “culture,” between actors, agents, and processes. Resistant to a teleological narrative of progress, this dissertation seeks to capture the mutually-constitutive relationships between people, knowledges, things, pathogens, policies, practices, and institutions. As Latour perceptively notes in the introduction to his polemical book *We Have Never Been Modern* (published in French in 1991 and translated into English in 1993),

[a]ll of culture and all of nature get churned up again every day...
The smallest AIDS virus takes you from sex to the unconscious, then to Africa, tissue cultures, DNA and San Francisco, but the analysts, thinkers, journalists and decision-makers will slice the delicate network traced by the virus for you into tidy compartments where

³³ To give just one example, in Chapter Three, we see British filmmaker Isaac Julien producing works such as *This Is Not an AIDS Advertisement* (1987) in London, and in Chapter Four, we witness his trip to South Africa as a special guest of the inaugural Out-in-Africa Gay & Lesbian Film Festival (1994), where there was a retrospective of his oeuvre.

³⁴ See in particular Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (*Nous n'avons jamais été modernes: Essais d'anthropologie symétrique*, 1991), trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Donna J. Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003). See also Marilyn Strathern, “Cutting the Network,” *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 2, no. 3 (1996): 517–35.

you will find only science, only economy, only social phenomena,
only local news, only sentiment, only sex.³⁵

Though I give special attention to art, my epidemiological approach proceeds from Latour's entreaty to de-compartmentalize the mix of agents and discourses making up this "delicate network," with the hope of advancing interdisciplinary conversations around AIDS, politics, and culture.

Performing Epidemiology

Another fundamental attribute of epidemiology, and therefore epidemiological art history, is its performativity. In a fast-paced essay called "Performativity and Spatial Distinction: The End of AIDS Epidemiology" (1995), sociologist and activist Cindy Patton interprets the medical branch through the prism of performance theory. What she posits is that epidemiology has distinctively performative tendencies in its articulation of bodies, disease, and risk groups, for it functions "within a place in which the constitution and reproduction of citational chains is constitutive of power."³⁶ Compared to other branches of medicine, epidemiology, Patton argues, is an unstable discourse and practice, contingent on the incessant re-pathologization of bodies so that it can exist with purpose, so that it has epidemics to manage. In her words:

[e]pidemiology operates from an apparently simple definition: an epidemic is more cases than expected. Declaring an epidemic depends on an expectation: in its perpetual movement, pathology becomes visible against a background state of health... Bodies are at once subject to and perpetrators of pathology, both "sick" and reservoirs or carriers, linkages in and not distinct from the larger network of disease.³⁷

³⁵ Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, 2.

³⁶ Cindy Patton, "Performativity and Spatial Distinction: The End of AIDS Epidemiology," in *Performativity and Performance*, ed. Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (New York: Routledge, 1995), 183.

³⁷ Patton, 187.

She goes on to argue that epidemiology is tasked with describing the shifting spaces of disease while simultaneously anticipating the people and bodies likely to be carriers and transmitters. “Bereft of a stable *place* of pathology,” she writes, “epidemiology must constantly construct and correlate populations and subpopulations in order to make epidemics visible.”³⁸

Taking to heart and reinterpreting Patton’s provocative exegesis, I intend to mark out and theorize my own subjectivity. That is, I need to acknowledge, foreground, and embrace the performativity of my own epidemiological art-historical method, the ways in which it lacks objectivity, and is imbued with manifold problems and limitations. As art historian and performance theorist Amelia Jones has demonstrated, art history and art criticism are neither disinterested nor objective in their modes of judgment and meaning-making. To challenge discursive authoritative claims to universal and objective interpretation—historically voiced by those occupying Euro-American, masculine, white, cisgender, heterosexual, middle class subject positions—Jones encourages art historians to produce texts that self-consciously work performatively, that perform meaning as a complex processual set of exchanges conditional on their various and ever-shifting identities, desires, and subject positions.³⁹

Especially given the soreness of this undeniably overwhelming history, and the reality that the pandemic is ongoing, I agree that it is absolutely crucial for me to situate myself, to locate and perform meaning in and through my own present identifications

³⁸ Patton, 187. Italics used in original text.

³⁹ Amelia Jones, “Art History/ Art Criticism: Performing Meaning,” in *Performing the Body/ Performing the Text*, ed. Amelia Jones (London: Routledge, 1999), 39–55. For updated versions of this argument, see Amelia Jones, *Seeing Differently: A History and Theory of Identification and the Visual Arts* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

(white, middle-class, queer, gay, HIV-negative, cisgender man, Anglophone, American, from Massachusetts, a doctoral student at a powerful academic institution). It is also highly important to position myself generationally, as someone produced by many if not all of these histories—and as someone who actively and willfully partakes in their remediations. In the apt words of former Gran Fury member Avram Finkelstein, I belong to a “new generation of historians, archivists, artists, and activists, who were born in the midst of HIV/AIDS and are struggling to make sense of the worlds they both inherited and missed.”⁴⁰

I also wish to recognize the infinite ways in which my privilege has seeped into and enabled this research project. This “global” dissertation could only have been written by someone with access to vast institutional resources that have facilitated research across three continents. According to philosopher Zygmunt Bauman, a significant characteristic of globalization is “progressive spatial segregation, separation and exclusion” in which there is a widening divide between the “increasingly global and extraterritorial elites and the ever more ‘localized’ rest.”⁴¹ This tension seems to me painfully accurate and under-theorized not simply in global histories of art and visual culture, but in academia on the whole. In addition to telling a version of this story in my chapters on South Africa in the 1990s—in which globality and transnationality generally (yet not always) hinged on a stringent cultural and political economy of financial privilege and whiteness—my dissertation, as a vehicle of academic globalization, runs the risk of contributing to the deepening of this rift.

⁴⁰ Finkelstein, *After Silence*, 1.

⁴¹ Zygmunt Bauman, *Globalization: The Human Consequences* (Cambridge: Polity, 1998), 3.

Intimately related to this unresolved issue is what art historians Caroline A. Jones and Steven Nelson have framed as the “violence that figures *in and as* the global.”⁴² Just as the AIDS pandemic unleashed countless instantiations of inequity and suffering, it is inevitable that this study participates in the production of epistemic violence through representing and intellectualizing these difficult histories. What I can do, however, is locate myself to the best of my ability. I can also declare freely that the works I analyze, the people I discuss, the conversations I emphasize, the milieus I illuminate, the theorists I cite, the case-studies I highlight—all of this ultimately reflects my own subjectivity, the resources I have access to, the languages I understand, and the narratives and archives I find most compelling as an art historian and, inexorably, as an individual. It is equally critical for me to recognize the networks I find myself in and deliberately cultivate, as well as their hefty effects on my scholarship.⁴³ Epidemiological art history is not a science, but it is methodical about being self-aware and transparent.

⁴² Caroline A. Jones and Steven Nelson, “Global Turns in US Art History,” *Perspective [en ligne]* 2 (2015): 3, <http://perspective.revues.org/5969>.

⁴³ Let me provide but one example. Had I never emailed the important Boston-based white South African artist Paul Stopforth in preparation for my first trip to South Africa in 2016, Kim Berman would possibly not be the nucleus of Chapter Five. He was a former professor of a close friend of mine at Tufts University and the School of the Museum of Fine Arts (SMFA). After a highly political and remarkable art career in Johannesburg, Stopforth, along with his wife Carol, was convinced that the apartheid regime would not fall, and decided it was time to leave South Africa in 1988 for good. They were encouraged to settle in Boston by Kim Berman, a former art student of his at the University of Witwatersrand in the early 1980s who was then pursuing her MFA degree at Tufts and the SMFA. With administrative support and organizational assistance from Pamela Allara, Berman’s professor and an associate dean at Tufts, Stopforth was granted a position as artist-in-residence at the university; the couple relocated and has been living in Boston ever since. After Stopforth and I met for coffee, accompanied by Holly Shepherd, the current director of the Boston-based South Africa Development Fund (an NGO once called the Fund for a Free South Africa, where Berman was a key activist and later fieldworker), he put me in touch with Berman at Artist Proof Studio in Johannesburg. This personal introduction facilitated my preliminary research into her work and *Paper Prayers*, allowing me to interview her a few times, formally and informally, over a couple visits. She also granted me full access to her personal papers, and kindly connected me to a number of people.

Yet aside from her approachability and support, there are other, more subjective reasons why I allocate an entire chapter to Berman’s practice and personal history. Here are some of the ones I am aware of. Her life story and artistic practice effortlessly speak to the political and cultural ties between the transnational anti-apartheid, lesbian and gay, and AIDS activist movements; this narrative about continuities and cross-pollination has obvious appeal, and it invigorated my project from the start. Because

Oral History and Epidemiology

Adjacent to this discussion of performativity is the method of oral history, which this dissertation relies on in addition to more traditional archival research.⁴⁴ Though increasingly common due to the proliferation of histories of contemporary art in the past two decades, the oral history interview is in need of further theorization in the discipline of art history. That said, historians of non-Western art have been making use of the method for decades.⁴⁵ As Linda Sandino, an oral historian of art and design, has pointed out via the work of philosopher Paul Ricoeur, the practice heightens and lays bare the constructedness of art-historical narrative. If the oral narratives are always partial and fragmentary, and oftentimes factually incorrect, they still hold substantial value in their potential to enlarge and nuance the historian's grasp of the past.⁴⁶ Instead of an authoritative document of what happened, oral histories are reconstructed, narrated version of events according to one perspective at one time—and yet this can also be said

I am from Boston, I was also completely engrossed by the materializing cultural pipeline between Boston and Johannesburg, one I never would have imagined before starting my research. Studying cultural history in Johannesburg, then, also became a way for me to learn about what once happened in my own backyard. Moreover, I was seduced by the lateral qualities of this history of cultural exchange, especially the near absence of New York City in its circuitry. Since women are too frequently overlooked in narratives of AIDS cultural activism, focusing on Berman's story was also a necessary political gesture to rectify this historiography. I find the history of Paper Prayers equally inspirational and complicated—and therefore an exciting challenge to write about. To come to the point, I am divulging these banal and impressionistic details to illustrate some of my own priorities, experiences, and viewpoints that have unavoidably colored my relationship to what I present in Chapter Five.

⁴⁴ In January 2017, I was informed by MIT's Committee on the Use of Humans as Experimental Subjects that my interview-based research is classified as "oral history activities." Accordingly, it was not necessary for me to undergo a special training through the Institutional Review Board.

⁴⁵ I am grateful to Steven Nelson for his helpful comments on oral history as method.

⁴⁶ If I have doubts about the veracity of certain claims, or if they conflict with other findings, I am diligent about noting these discrepancies. I also make sure to use language such as "according to X," "as Y remembers it," and "in Z's opinion" so as to accentuate that a claim represents a particular perspective or memory. I do not wish to imply that my interviewees were ever trying to mislead me with false stories; naturally, it can be difficult to remember past events and experiences from decades ago with sharp precision.

about any representation or telling of the past.⁴⁷ Additionally, the method might be likened to (queer) performative modes of storytelling and gossip, introduced to the discourse of art history by Gavin Butt in his exploration of homosexuality and unofficial testimony in the postwar New York art world.⁴⁸

Most of all, I use the oral histories to help embellish and texture the findings, and to note the elisions and open wounds of the archive. For queer theorist Ann Cvetkovich, the method can unearth more hidden and elusive elements of art practices and their contexts that are “embedded in everyday lives and social networks”; this is especially true for queer and feminist practitioners whose lives and oeuvre do not always neatly conform to conventional hermeneutic models of art criticism and history.⁴⁹ In this dissertation, the oral history as a means of knowledge production likewise draws attention to the tendencies and operations of the archive.⁵⁰ At the same time, my collection of interviews speaks volumes about the voices not present. This includes individuals with whom I have not been able to get in touch, who have refused my requests, who stopped corresponding

⁴⁷ Linda Sandino, “Introduction: Oral History in about Art, Craft, and Design,” in *Oral History in the Visual Arts*, ed. Linda Sandino and Matthew Partington (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 10–11.

⁴⁸ Gavin Butt, *Between You and Me: Queer Disclosures in the New York Art World, 1948-1963* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

⁴⁹ Ann Cvetkovich, “The Craft of Conversation: Oral History and Lesbian Feminist Art Practice,” in *Oral History in the Visual Arts*, ed. Linda Sandino and Matthew Partington (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 125. For more on oral history as a method in queer history, see Nan Alamilla Boyd and Horacio N. Roque Ramirez, eds., *Bodies of Evidence: The Practice of Queer Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁵⁰ There is an extensive literature that deconstructs and problematizes the archive as a site of power and desire. To start, see Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Achille Mbembe, “The Power of the Archive and Its Limits,” in *Refiguring the Archive*, ed. Carolyn Hamilton et al., trans. Judith Inggs (Cape Town: David Philip, 2002), 19–26. For a critical consideration of the archives and legacies of AIDS cultural activism in the US, see Jih-Fei Cheng, “How to Survive: AIDS and Its Afterlives in Popular Media,” *Women’s Studies Quarterly* 44, no. 1/2 (2016): 73–92.

with me, who were not on my radar, who were not considered a priority, and, needless to say, who are no longer alive.⁵¹

The oral history interview should be regarded as a collaboration between the historian and the narrator.⁵² Cvetkovich also maintains that intrinsic to the oral history is the relationship that surfaces between the interviewer and interviewee; the conversations that occur are undeniably shaped by the various modes of psychodynamic intimacy. The dozens of hours of audio recordings I have accumulated, as well as their transcriptions, are more than one-sided personal chronicles. Filled with a spectrum of sometimes contradictory feelings, they are also delicate sites of intergenerational dialogue, inquiry, and pedagogy that bear witness to my own intellectual and personal development over the course of this project. Frankly, meeting and interviewing this multitude of remarkable individuals, often in quick succession, has been one of the most rewarding, albeit emotionally charged, experiences of my life. While I write in a more removed manner in the ensuing chapters, my questions about and interpretations of these histories are inextricable from my subjectivity. And for that reason, my epidemiological art history unveils itself as performative—even if it continues to fantasize about practicing a scientific method.

⁵¹ Due to the course of my research process, I have conducted many more interviews than those that are referenced in the pages of this study. This research, however, will surely inform future iterations of this project.

⁵² Though oral history interviews differ substantially from more standard artist interviews in terms of method and purpose, art historian Reva Wolf's scholarship on Andy Warhol and the artist interview is useful in its foregrounding of the interview as a collaborative and performative enterprise. See Reva Wolf, "Through the Looking-Glass," in *I'll Be Your Mirror: The Collected Andy Warhol Interviews*, ed. Kenneth Goldsmith (New York: Carrol & Graf, 2004), xi–xxxii.

Contested Histories

Back in Boston in December 2009 after finishing up my first semester of university in Montreal, I accompanied a friend to see an exhibition at the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts at Harvard University. The show, fortuitously, was *ACT UP New York: Activism, Art, and the AIDS Crisis, 1987-1993*. Curated by Helen Molesworth and Claire Grace, it brought together posters, stickers, and other ephemera and visual media, largely produced by Gran Fury, as well as more than 100 interviews from the ACT UP Oral History Project, and a new commissioned installation by the artist collective fierce pussy (see **Figure 1.9**). Everything about the exhibition captivated and inspired me. It not only laid out a history of queer art and cultural production—one to which I was previously wholly oblivious—but also confirmed that art had the potential to operate in the world, with tremendous meaning, purpose, and force. When I returned to Montreal for the next semester, I started taking classes in art history. Writing a final paper about Gran Fury, I discovered that there were essentially no secondary-source historical studies. A decade later, the breadth of this historiography has thankfully grown appreciably. And of course the dissertation I've written is meant to expose alternative narratives about AIDS cultural activism in order to complement and rethink what was articulated in Molesworth and Grace's show and in several other accounts that have followed.

Since 2009, the academy, the artworld, and popular culture have increasingly acknowledged that the early years of the AIDS crisis in America, specifically in New York, is not just a context of immense art-historical significance, but also one ripe for assessment.⁵³ Writers and activists Theodore Kerr and Alexandra Juhasz have called this

⁵³ Another noteworthy show was *This Will Have Been: Art, Love & Politics in the 1980s*, also curated by Molesworth (The Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago). Key solo retrospectives of American artists

trend “the AIDS crisis revisitation,” defined by the former as “a noticeable increase in the creation, dissemination, and discussion of culture concerned with the early responses to HIV/AIDS.”⁵⁴ After the introduction of antiretrovirals in 1996, which enabled HIV-positive individuals with access to the effective treatment to live much longer lives, there was a silence of approximately twelve years. This period saw an incredible shift in the mainstreaming and increasing conservatism of American gay and lesbian politics, as encapsulated by the fight for marriage equality and the campaign to repeal the “Don’t ask, don’t tell” policy on military service in the 2000s. During this period, HIV/AIDS was positioned as a predicament of the past.⁵⁵ Then came a torrent of films, theatrical productions, dance retrospectives, memorials, and works of literature and cultural criticism that address the aftermath of the virus.⁵⁶ Though Kerr believes that the surfacing of these AIDS cultural works and discourses is generally something affirmative and constructive, he is distrustful of the slenderness of this insurgent archive insofar as it centers so overwhelmingly on white gay cisgender men as the leading protagonists of AIDS activism and historical consciousness.⁵⁷

include, but are not limited to, *Robert Gober: The Heart is Not a Metaphor* (The Museum of Modern Art, 2014), *Martin Wong: Human Instamatic* (The Bronx Museum of the Arts, 2015), *Robert Mapplethorpe: The Perfect Medium* (The J. Paul Getty Museum and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2016), *Felix Gonzalez-Torres* (David Zwirner Gallery, New York, 2017), *Zoe Leonard: Survey* (The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 2018), *David Wojnarowicz: History Keeps Me Awake at Night* (The Whitney Museum of American Art, 2018). Many of these shows traveled to other institutions, and were accompanied by exhibition catalogues.

⁵⁴ Theodore Kerr, “The AIDS Crisis Revisitation,” *Lambda Literary* (blog), January 4, 2018, <https://www.lambdaliterary.org/features/oped/01/04/the-aids-crisis-revisitation/>.

⁵⁵ For more on this development in American queer culture and politics, with a focus on New York, see Sarah Schulman, *The Gentrification of the Mind: Witness to a Lost Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

⁵⁶ Films include *We Were Here* (2010), *United in Anger: A History of ACT UP* (2012), *How to Survive a Plague* (2012), *Dallas Buyers Club* (2013), *The Normal Heart* (2014), and *BPM* (2017). On the stage, there was *Lost and Found* at Danspace in New York (2016) and *The Inheritance* in London (2018). Commemorative projects consist of the New York City AIDS Memorial (2016) and the AIDS Monument in Los Angeles (in the works).

⁵⁷ Kerr, “The AIDS Crisis Revisitation.”

This paradigm of “the AIDS crisis revisitation” extends to the artworld and to the discipline of art history. Little did I know at the time, the 2009 exhibition at the Carpenter Center broke new ground in its display and historicization of AIDS activist art from New York. Once considered marginal or subversive because of the outspokenly queer politics and aesthetics embedded in their work, many visual artists who penetratingly responded to HIV/AIDS such as Felix Gonzalez-Torres, David Wojnarowicz, Robert Gober, Zoe Leonard, Keith Haring, and General Idea are now absorbed into the art-historical canon, regularly featured in prestigious arts institutions and exhibitions, and taught in survey courses.⁵⁸ Characterized by its alluring interplay of heroism and heartbreak, this vista of AIDS cultural activism in late-1980s New York is often reduced to an object lesson or a slogan that expounds “art can change the world!” After all, this history is primed to typify the avant-garde dream to merge art and life, to transform society; it perfects what I have elsewhere called the “victory march narrative of art history.”⁵⁹

This storyline is exactly what I found so irresistible in 2009 at the Carpenter Center—and what predominates in much of the recent art-historical literature about AIDS cultural activism.⁶⁰ A cohort of young art historians is in the process of weaving together fresh histories, as seen in recent dissertations by Tara Burk, Joe Madura, Fiona

⁵⁸ This is not to say that these artists are not disputed and censored in public culture. One simply needs to recall when the National Portrait Gallery at the Smithsonian Institute removed an edited videotape, *A Fire in My Belly* (1986/1987/2010) by Wojnarowicz from *Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture*, an exhibition curated by Jonathan David Katz and David C. Ward in 2010, to great alarm and pushback. For more on this incident, see Karl Schoonover, “David Wojnarowicz’s Graven Image: Cinema, Censorship, and Queers,” *World Picture* 6 (Winter 2011), http://www.worldpicturejournal.com/WP_6/Schoonover.html.

⁵⁹ Jackson Davidow, “Review of *After Silence: A History of AIDS through Its Images* by Avram Finkelstein,” *Critical Inquiry* 45, no. 2 (Winter 2019): 552.

⁶⁰ So far, there is just one historical book devoted to ACT UP, Gran Fury, and General Idea. Its author, Tommaso Speretta, is an Italian art critic and curator. See Tommaso Speretta, *Rebels Rebel: AIDS, Art and Activism in New York, 1979-1989* (Ghent: MER. Paper Kunsthalle, 2014).

Johnstone, Neil Macdonald, Theodore Gordon, and Thibault Boulvain.⁶¹ In particular, the research of Boulvain and Aleksandra Gajowy, respectively tackling AIDS cultural production in France and Poland, promise to reconceptualize these histories in and across different linguistic and national context.⁶² The curatorial team of Aimar Arriola, Nancy Garín, and Linda Valdés has similarly begun to address AIDS, art, and activism in Spain, Chile, and in other Latin American countries.⁶³ On an institutional level, scholarly interest in AIDS cultural activism is also becoming more and more palpable. For example, in 2016 the Archives of American Art at the Smithsonian Institution launched “Visual Arts and the AIDS Epidemic: An Oral History Project,” which resulted in forty oral history interviews and a final symposium at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 2018. On top of this, the past couple years have witnessed a spate of academic panels and conferences about AIDS, art, and activism.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Tara Burk, “Let the Record Show: Mapping Queer Art and Activism in New York City, 1986-1995” (PhD Dissertation, City University of New York, 2015); Joe Madura, “Revising Minimal Art in the AIDS Crisis, 1984–1998” (PhD Dissertation, Emory University, n.d.); Fiona Johnstone, “Troubling Portraiture: AIDS, Self-Representation and the Death of the Artist in the Work of Mark Morrisroe, Robert Blanchon and Felix Gonzalez-Torres.” (PhD Thesis, Birkbeck, University of London, 2015); Neil Macdonald, “Wound Cultures: Explorations of Embodiment in Visual Culture in the Age of HIV/AIDS” (PhD Thesis, University of Manchester, 2017); Theodore Gordon, “Sex and Violence: A New Psychoanalysis of Art of the American AIDS Crisis” (PhD Thesis, The Courtauld Institute of Art, 2018); Thibault Boulvain, “L’art en sida. Les représentations de la séropositivité et du sida dans l’art américain et européen, 1981-1997” (PhD Thesis, Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, Paris, École doctorale 441 Histoire de l’art, 2017). Currently in the works are dissertations by Ksenia Soboleva on lesbian artists and the AIDS crisis in New York at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University; and Aleksandra Gajoway, on queer Polish body and performance art at Newcastle University.

⁶² For a preview of Gajoway’s dissertation, see Aleksandra Gajowy, “Performativity of the Private: The Ambiguity of Reenactment in Karol Radziszewski’s *Kisieland*,” *ARTMargins Online*, January 26, 2018, <http://artmargins.com/index.php/810-performativity-of-the-private>.

⁶³ Their recent exhibition was *AIDS Anarchive* (Barcelona Museum of Contemporary Art, 2018). See also Aimar Arriola and Nancy Garín, “Global Fictions, Local Struggles (or the Distribution of Three Documents from an AIDS Counter-Archive in Progress),” trans. Nuria Rodríguez, *L’Internationale Online*, March 31, 2014, https://www.internationaleonline.org/research/politics_of_life_and_death/5_global_fictions_local_struggles_or_the_distribution_of_three_documents_from_an_aids_counter_archive_in_progress#.VBxoTwaiqcY.facebook.

⁶⁴ Recent panels and conferences devoted to the topic include “Other Stories of HIV/AIDS: Culture, History, and the Ongoing Epidemic” (The Showroom, London, 2017), “AIDS and Cultural Activism (College Art Association Annual Conference, 2017), “HIV in Visual Culture: Interdisciplinary Approaches

To date, the most salient and large-scale exhibition and comprehensive publication project is *Art AIDS America*, curated by Jonathan D. Katz and Rock Hushka. After opening at the ONE Archives in Los Angeles and then the Tacoma Art Museum in late 2015, the show had further stops in 2016 and 2017 at the Zuckerman Museum of Art outside of Atlanta, the Bronx Museum of the Arts, and the Alphawood Gallery in Chicago. Its primary argument was that AIDS changed American art, that American postmodernism in part owes itself to the innovative political and aesthetic tactics evolved by artists in response to the urgent circumstances. *Art AIDS America* garnered much controversy because at first only five of its 107 artists were black, and black populations have statistically been much more affected by HIV/AIDS than any other racial demographic in the US.⁶⁵ Local artists and activists of the Tacoma Action Collective fervently protested the exhibition, even staging die-ins (an agitprop strategy associated with ACT UP) to combat what they perceived as the institutional disregard and erasure of black culture (see **Figure 1.10**). This conflict has overshadowed other aspects of the show, including how it has served, in many ways, as a valuable platform for research and critique. Due to the important backlash in Tacoma, however, future iterations of *Art AIDS America* tried to make amends, incorporating more work by artists of color, and more thoughtfully engaging with local histories during its stops in the Bronx and Chicago.⁶⁶

and Global Histories” (Association for Art History Annual Conference, 2018), “Visual Arts and the AIDS Epidemic” (Archives of American Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art, 2018), and “Queer Artists of Color in New York during the AIDS Epidemic” (College Art Association Annual Conference, 2019).

⁶⁵ See Linda Villarosa, “America’s Hidden H.I.V. Epidemic,” *The New York Times*, June 6, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/06/magazine/americas-hidden-hiv-epidemic.html>. For a more historical study, see Cathy J. Cohen, *The Boundaries of Blackness: AIDS and the Breakdown of Black Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

⁶⁶ For more on this show and the criticism it sparked, see Theodore Kerr, “A History of Erasing Black Artists and Bodies from the AIDS Conversation,” *Hyperallergic*, December 31, 2015, <https://hyperallergic.com/264934/a-history-of-erasing-black-artists-and-bodies-from-the-aids->

In my view, the show's controversy arose not from its ambition to be both a historical survey and an activist intervention, but from its volition to lay claim to and universalize a very particular narrative of AIDS. As Katz conveys in the catalogue, "[t]o make of AIDS an active historical protagonist requires understanding that it is in fact ours, a collective trauma with a collective impact. *Art AIDS America* is premised on that collectivity."⁶⁷ One must interrogate to whom the "ours" refers. While AIDS also figures as an active historical protagonist in my study, unlike the Katz/Hushka exhibition, my dissertation is not interested in collectivizing this history, even within a myopic, if loosely demarcated, American context. On the contrary, it does its best to highlight the numerous cultural tensions and disparities that have been at the heart of the AIDS pandemic since its emergence, many of which are part of much wider global histories.

In the end, this dissertation is not about trauma, affect, or mourning, but rather about the rise of a transnational network of activism in which the viral opened up new possibilities for global cultural production on distinctly local ground.⁶⁸ Focusing on the global, paradoxical as this may sound, allows this dissertation to underscore the difficulty of staking out "a collective trauma with a collective impact."⁶⁹ In his reflection on AIDS as a pandemic, literary theorist William Haver reminds us that the global is "at once a

conversation/; Julia Bryan-Wilson, "Susan E. Cahan's *Mounting Frustration: The Art Museum in the Age of Black Power*," *Artforum*, Summer 2016, <https://www.artforum.com/print/201606/susan-e-cahan-s-mounting-frustration-the-art-museum-in-the-age-of-black-power-60081>; Joe Madura, "Exhibiting Art in the AIDS Era," *Art Journal* 77, no. 1 (2018): 115–17.

⁶⁷ Jonathan David Katz, *Art AIDS America* (Tacoma, WA: Tacoma Art Museum, 2015), 24.

⁶⁸ Crucial recent interdisciplinary contributions about affect and collective trauma in AIDS activism include Deborah B. Gould, *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP's Fight against AIDS* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009); Roger Hallas, *Reframing Bodies: AIDS, Bearing Witness, and the Queer Moving Image* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009); Kylie Thomas, *Impossible Mourning: HIV/AIDS and Visuality After Apartheid* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2013); Dagmawi Woubshet, *The Calendar of Loss: Race, Sexuality, and Mourning in the Early Era of AIDS* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015). These books are highly useful and insightful, yet they approach AIDS (cultural) activism with an emphasis on theorizing great loss.

⁶⁹ Katz, *Art AIDS America*, 24.

necessary totalization... and the impossibility of totality... We are required to think the global as a contradiction, in its unthinkability.”⁷⁰ In light of Haver’s remark, my approach in this dissertation is to localize the global through epidemiological case-studies so that this construct becomes more thinkable and more historically precise. Just as each chapter shows different facets and histories of the virus, each presents different schemas of the global.

Juhasz and Kerr’s notion of “the AIDS crisis revisitation” is hardly a global phenomenon, with little traction beyond the US, Canada, and parts of Western Europe.⁷¹ The nearsightedness of this theorization and the shakiness of its implicit periodization are quickly made visible when one takes into consideration a national context like South Africa. In a country where 17.6 percent of the entire adult population (aged 15-49) was living with HIV/AIDS in 2008 (the estimated start date of the “revisitation”), the AIDS pandemic continues to be so raw and ubiquitous in many realms of life that the idea of a “revisitation” is simply out of the question in 2019.⁷² At the same time, as a recent sculpture called *Pan-African AIDS* by Nigerian-American artist Ekene Ijeoma highlights, whereas today HIV/AIDS is hyper-visible globally as an African health issue, its pervasive presence amongst black populations in the US is largely obscured from public discourse

⁷⁰ William Haver, *The Body of This Death: Historicity and Sociality in the Time of AIDS* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 10.

⁷¹Here are a few examples of “the AIDS crisis revisitation” in other national contexts: In Canada, Jon Davies curated a notable show called *Coming After* about the specter of AIDS in contemporary queer art at the Power Plant in Toronto in 2011. *Drain* magazine had a special issue on AIDS and Memory, mostly filled with contributions by Canadians and people living in Canada (2016). In France, there is a resurgence of interest in the work of writer and photographer Hervé Guibert, and a feature film *BPM* (2017) about ACT UP Paris. In Britain, the filmmaker and activist Stuart Marshall has been spotlighted in *Afterall* (Spring/Summer 2016) and at other events and screenings. Isaac Julien had a show “*I Dream a World*”: *Looking for Langston*, comprised of photographs and archival material from the 1989 film, at Victoria Miro Gallery (2017). There is also a recent documentary called *After 82* (2017), looking at the early years of the British AIDS crisis.

⁷²UNAIDS, “Country Factsheets: South Africa” (UNAIDS, 2017), <http://www.unaids.org/en/regionscountries/countries/southafrica>.

(see **Figure 1.11**). Ijeoma's work layers a series of silhouettes of the African continent and the US so as to suggest a blurring between black experiences of the pandemic in these different contexts. Cultural interventions such as this sculpture and the Tacoma Action Collective's demonstrations at *Art AIDS America* drive home the need for new critical genealogies of AIDS, activism, and art that address the complexities of race, postcoloniality, and especially the category of blackness. And in my opinion, this requires thinking about these histories and their present-day reverberations beyond America.

This study, therefore, is informed by postcolonial critique emanating from the global South, and South Africa in particular, that challenges enduring presumptions about Euro-American chronicles of modernity by affording Africa a more privileged place in the cultivation of discourse and practice on local and global scale.⁷³ Neither a foil for, nor an epilogue to, Euro-American accounts of AIDS cultural activism, South Africa in my narrative is central, not marginal. Like anthropologists Jean and John L. Comaroff in their landmark book *Theory from the South: Or, How Euro-America Is Evolving Toward Africa* (2012), I regard the AIDS pandemic in post-apartheid South Africa as a prime catalyst of cultural practice, political discourse, and social theory that can enhance approaches to the pandemic elsewhere.⁷⁴ Holding art to be an overlooked instrument of "theory from the South," this dissertation hopes to participate in these larger unfolding debates by

⁷³ In South African studies, historiographic touchstones include Sarah Nuttall and Achille Mbembe, eds., *Johannesburg: The Elusive Metropolis* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008); Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, *Theory from the South: Or, How Euro-America Is Evolving Toward Africa* (Boulder and London: Paradigm Publishers, 2012). For how these debates can flow into South African art history, see Federico Freschi, "Other Views: Art History in (South) Africa and the Global South," *Diogenes* 58, no. 3 (2012): 93–101. One must also remember that South Africa in no way represents the entirety of Africa or the global South; much of this intellectual production specifically reflects South Africa and the aftermath of apartheid.

⁷⁴ Comaroff and Comaroff, *Theory from the South: Or, How Euro-America Is Evolving Toward Africa*, 173–90.

envisioning alternative modes of analysis that re-center Africa in global circuits of politics and culture.

As I navigate such different yet interconnected clusters of art and activism, my aim is not to tease out a singular and monolithic collectivity brought about by the virus, in the manner of Katz and Hushka in *Art AIDS America*. I do, however, intend to contemplate how cultural formations surrounding the AIDS pandemic can help us understand both the shortcomings and the possibilities of the lofty idea of community during a historical moment of biopolitical, and nightmarish necropolitical, intensity.⁷⁵ It is useful, then, to call on the capacious writings of Roberto Esposito, an Italian philosopher who has breathed new life into the concepts of community, immunity, and biopolitics by evaluating them alongside and against one another. Approaching the philosophical and the political through a careful lexicon of the biological (and, by implication, the epidemiological), Esposito ruminates on the shared etymological roots of community (*cum-munus*) and immunity (*im-munus*) so as to reconceptualize a relationship between the two across several scales, from the personal to the geopolitical.

Because *munus* translates to “task,” “gift,” or “obligation,” the philosopher grasps community as a necessary, if fundamentally impossible, reciprocal duty pressed upon its members, whose individual identities run the risk of dissolving in the very formation of a community.⁷⁶ *Immunitas*, conversely, is what undoes *communitas*: “[i]f the free circulation of the *munus* characterizes *communitas*, *immunitas* is what deactivates *communitas*.

⁷⁵ I am referring, of course, to philosopher Achille Mbembe’s influential critique and refashioning of Michel Foucault’s paramount notion of biopower/biopolitics. Achille Mbembe, “Necropolitics,” *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (2003): 11–40; Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978--1979 (Lectures at the College de France)*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008).

⁷⁶ Roberto Esposito, *Terms of the Political: Community, Immunity, Biopolitics (Termini della politica: Comunità, immunità, biopolitica)*, 2008), trans. Rhiannon Noel Welch (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 14–26.

Immunitas abolishes it, setting up new protective borders against what is outside the group as well as among its very members.”⁷⁷ Crucially, according to Esposito, community and immunity need not oppose one another; working together, they have the potential to constitute an “immunitary paradigm” that preserves, nourishes, and affirms human life in modern and contemporary times.⁷⁸ Though operating at a much more grassroots and pragmatic level, many of the viral cultural works convened in this dissertation can be regarded as antibodies, as meaningful vessels of resistance and survival that lubricate and even make possible Esposito’s immunitary paradigm. For this reason, they encourage a broad rethinking of the interlocking domains of community and immunity in the ongoing struggle to politicize and resolutely uphold life.

Epidemiological Case-Studies

Each chapter of this dissertation focuses on artists, activists, and critics who formed communities in disparate milieus in which HIV/AIDS propelled new terms for thinking about and doing cultural activism locally, nationally, and globally. Besides wrestling with specific questions and contexts, each chapter strives to build on and engage with different scholarly fields and interdisciplinary frameworks, borrowed from queer, cultural, science, and postcolonial studies. The goal is for these chapters to paint a fuller (albeit inevitably incomplete) picture of this transnational network of cultural activism.

Following this introduction, Chapter Two examines how the pandemic impacted queer aesthetic strategies of storytelling in the alternative media arts scene in 1980s Toronto. To do so, it situates works of video, performance, and painting by artists such as

⁷⁷ Esposito, 127.

⁷⁸ Esposito, 129–32.

John Greyson, Lisa Steele, and Andy Fabo in relation to the local bubbling political and postmodern discourses of feminism and gay liberation in the 1970s. With the rise of AIDS activism in the 1980s, fragmented storytelling became an effective metafictional tactic for artists to chip away at nationally-inflected epidemiological master narratives that accounted for the pandemic—particularly the notion of Patient Zero. Ending at the 1989 International AIDS Conference in Montreal, this chapter shows that Toronto’s distinct approach to AIDS cultural activism originated a markedly transnational outlook on the pandemic and queer politics.

Chapter Three highlights HIV/AIDS as a crucial force in the development and worlding of British black and queer arts discourses and practices in 1980s London. With a focus on the innovative video, photography, and criticism by Isaac Julien, Kobena Mercer, Pratibha Parmar, Sunil Gupta, and Simon Watney, it investigates the ways in which the pandemic gave rise to new visual and intellectual articulations of queerness and the black diaspora. Aesthetic forms and criticism turned into privileged sites of nascent modes of intersectional identification, expression, and organization. Furthermore, diaspora, queerness, and virality materialized as entangled theoretical concepts with spatial and political undercurrents that troubled notions of origins and essence. Together, these terms reconfigured constructs of the national, and exposed a global field of inquiry and longing.

Turning to post-apartheid South Africa, Chapter Four contends that HIV/AIDS played a central role in the construction of a global queer public culture in Cape Town. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the demise of apartheid coincided with not only the rise of lesbian and gay organizing and visibility, including the need for a cultural identity, but also the growing presence of the pandemic. This chapter assesses the intersection of queer

cultural production and early AIDS activism through close analysis of two events in 1994: the first Out-in-Africa Gay and Lesbian Film Festival and an extravagant queer art party called the Locker Room Project. In so doing, it asserts that Cape Town's emergent global queer public culture was premised on poignant Euro-American, largely white AIDS narratives about mourning, resistance, and community-building. Just before the reborn nation was globally defined by the alarming rates of HIV/AIDS, the pandemic was a stimulating agent for a global queer cultural identity, opening up pathways and networks that testified to the manifold transformations at the heart of post-apartheid life.

Chapter Five traces a transnational history of Paper Prayers, a printmaking practice developed by Kim Berman at Artist Proof Studio in Johannesburg in 1995, and launched as a major nationwide campaign in 1998. Though originally inspired by a Japanese mourning custom, Paper Prayers first appeared in Boston at an AIDS-fundraising exhibition at the Howard Yezerski Gallery in 1989. Theorizing prints as viral media, this chapter maps out the initiatives, NGOs, and networks between Johannesburg and Boston during the 1980s and 1990s that led to Berman's remodeling of Paper Prayers as a far-reaching initiative, traveling to cities, townships, and remote areas. Her version uniquely combined elements of art therapy, AIDS education, activism, and income generation, revealing a precarious transnational economy of culture, political visibility, and belonging.

Pivoting around the cultural outpourings at the XIII International AIDS Conference in Durban in 2000, the Coda sums up the dissertation's findings through further bridging the four case-studies. It also reflects critically on the legacies of this cultural network in histories of art, activism, and health, as well as in contemporary cultural practice and discourse.

While writing this dissertation, I have felt the deep responsibility of conveying these very powerful, tender histories, often for the first time. This study merely represents the tip of the iceberg, and I hope that it will be succeeded by other art and cultural histories of HIV/AIDS. For guidance, I turn again to Patton, who began her trailblazing work *Sex and Germs: The Politics of AIDS* (1985) with a prophetic yet cautious sentence: “[m]any books have and will be written about AIDS; this is just one approach.”⁷⁹ With this in mind, let the epidemiology begin.

⁷⁹ Cindy Patton, *Sex and Germs: The Politics of AIDS* (Boston: South End Press, 1985), 3.

Chapter Two

How to Tell Stories in an Epidemic: Queer Art and Activism in Toronto

The queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick opens her influential text “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You’re So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay is About You” with a personal story from the mid-1980s.¹ During a conversation with her friend, the prolific sociologist and AIDS activist Cindy Patton, she asked about the likely origins of HIV. As Sedgwick recalls, “[t]his was a time when speculation was ubiquitous about whether the virus had been deliberately engineered or spread, whether HIV represented a plot or experiment by the U.S. military that had gotten out of control, or perhaps that was behaving exactly as it was meant to.”² In light of the aggregate of conspiracy theories, origin stories, and other etiological narratives that had been buzzing around the virus since the early 1980s, Patton responded that, even if one could get to the bottom of this epidemiological history, “what would we know then that we don’t already know?”³ Could identifying a singular “real” and fact-based narrative more effectively equip activists to contend with the most salient matters at hand (e.g. racism, sexism, homophobia, and countless other structures of oppression)? For Patton and many other AIDS activists of her generation, tracking down and delineating the “real story” was both different and less urgent than, well, fighting injustices related to AIDS. Beyond pure pessimism, Sedgwick recollects,

Patton’s response to me seemed to open a space for moving from the rather fixed question Is a particular piece of knowledge true, and how can we

¹ The version of the essay I reference here comes from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 123–51. Parts of this piece, however, were first published in the introduction to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, ed., *Novel Gazing: Queer Readings in Fiction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 1-37.

² Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 123.

³ Cindy Patton, quoted in *ibid.*

know? to the further questions: What does knowledge *do*—the pursuit of it, the having and exposing of it, the receiving again of knowledge of what one already knows? *How*, in short, is knowledge performative, and how best does one move among its causes and effects?⁴

This chapter, which attends to critical art practices surrounding the AIDS crisis in and out of Toronto, revolves around these very questions. I invoke this anecdote by Sedgwick, who was close friends with several Torontonians cultural practitioners despite living in the United States, because the questions raised readily point to a postmodern historical shift in the understanding of the relation between knowledge, narrative, and performativity. This relation became acutely palpable within many Euro-American urban gay and queer cultures through their encounters with HIV/AIDS in the late 1980s and early 1990s.⁵ In its activation of an epidemiological art-historical method, this chapter is likewise less concerned with the “real story” of the virus in Toronto than with the manifold patterns of AIDS narratives: their precursors and effects, their viral modes of propagation and circulation, their transformation into creative sites of seditious interrogation, and their generation of new subjectivities and worlds.

In the 1970s and early 1980s, before the incursion of widespread illness, the rambunctious art scene inhabiting Queen Street West in Downtown Toronto both defined itself and was defined by its penchant for storytelling. Pioneering artists such as Lisa

⁴ Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 124.

⁵ This chapter circles around the concept of performativity, which was at the heart of Anglo-American feminist and queer theory in the late 1980s and 1990s, especially through the staggeringly original work of Judith Butler and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. Providing new insights into the writings of J. L. Austin and Jacques Derrida, Butler theorized the ways in which gender identity is constructed by means of stylized repetitive acts and processes of citation. Sedgwick, meanwhile, opened up performativity to horizons of queerness, beyond Butler’s fairly binaristic model. For helpful intellectual histories of performativity, see Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Introduction: Performativity and Performance,” in *Performativity and Performance*, ed. Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (New York: Routledge, 1995), 1–18; Amelia Jones and Erin Silver, “Queer Feminist Art History, an Imperfect Genealogy,” in *Otherwise: Imagining Queer Feminist Art Histories*, ed. Amelia Jones and Erin Silver (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 26–34. This chapter will contend with performativity more meticulously later on, but for now this footnote intends to indicate in simple terms what I mean by this term.

Steele, Colin Campbell, General Idea, David Buchan, Rodney Werden, and the Clichettes deliberately and delightfully provoked the line between fact and fiction. Through photography, performance, and video, they experimented with techniques of narrative and appropriation that were part and parcel of a larger cultural upheaval on the brink of theorization in Toronto, in Canada, and in other countries such as France and the United States: postmodernism.⁶ Yet HIV/AIDS, fraught with political and epistemological concerns related to identity, science, and the nation state, raised the stakes in the battle between fact and fiction—one particularly urgent for cultural producers to define, publicize, and critique. Expanding on earlier aesthetic tactics, an energized cohort of slightly younger artists, including John Greyson, Richard Fung, Andy Fabo, Michael Balsler, and Stephen Andrews, applied their practices in novel capacities. Their aspirations were to bolster AIDS activism, to disseminate information, to counter mainstream representations of the virus, and to illuminate the geopolitics of disease and desire. Because storytelling combined and confused elements of fiction and fact, it proved a key method of artistic engagement for addressing the health crisis on local and global registers.

Through an epidemiological framework, this chapter identifies and contextualizes the main patterns of AIDS cultural activism in Toronto. It begins in the early 1970s by

⁶Like the term and concept of performativity, postmodernism was richly expansive as a historical preoccupation in art and criticism, roughly from the 1970s to the 1990s in Euro-American contexts and beyond. Various elaborated by Jean Baudrillard, Jean-François Lyotard, Linda Hutcheon, and countless other path-breaking thinkers, postmodernism was a reaction to the many projects and positions of modernism. Essential elements of postmodernist criticism include a rethinking of traditional concepts of the medium; a dawning understanding that art and artists operate within rather than outside society; an inclination for ever-proliferating and mutating discourse, in contrast to the idea of a finite and/or singular interpretation; and an interest in the performative. Postmodernism, in this chapter and throughout this dissertation, also synergized with theorizations of the cultural politics of difference, especially as formulated in feminist and queer critique, but also in relation to fields such as postcolonial studies. As this chapter nicely illustrates, much Euro-American postmodernist cultural and intellectual works had an increasingly international or global frame of references—even if they tended to be strongly rooted in a local context.

relating the history of the scene that had formed along Queen St. West in Toronto; it ends in June 1989 at the Fifth International AIDS Conference in Montreal, a watershed in the history of activism and art related to the pandemic. Its aim is to assess the extent to which the pandemic impacted the stories told within Toronto's gay-tending-towards-queer artistic milieu, as well as the strategies for telling such stories. If storytelling was a distinctive feature of Toronto's local art scene beginning in the 1970s, with the crescendo of AIDS activism by 1987, the practice became a way to militantly address the virus on local, national, and international scales. In particular, the paranoid narratives framing the pandemic, as alluded to earlier by Sedgwick, impelled artists in Toronto to reevaluate the dynamic between knowledge, narrative, and performativity. After all, storytelling might be conceived as the performance of knowledge by means of narrative.⁷ In the spirit of Patton's provocation, storytelling for these artists and activists enabled a visual mode of what Sedgwick christens "reparative reading"—a queer mode of critical inquiry that privileges a multiplicity of possibilities and thus undermines the norms of teleological narrativity.

Beyond giving birth to Toronto's art community, storytelling was, in part, what gave it sustenance throughout a period of great devastation. Its storytelling was reparative. On this note, I have three very simple conjectures about storytelling in this unique context and potentially beyond—conjectures that will ineluctably guide my approach to this chapter and to my entire dissertation. Firstly, storytelling cuts across aesthetic forms and media. It is correct that video, with its temporalized horizon of

⁷ Though "narrative" and "story" are often interchangeable, I look to Mieke Bal's concise definitions in *Narratology*: "A *narrative text* is a text in which an agent or subject conveys to an addressee ('tells' the reader) a story in a particular medium, such as language, imagery, sound, buildings, or a combination thereof. A *story* is the content of that text." See Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, 3rd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 5.

narrative possibilities, was a key enabler of storytelling; nevertheless, stories circulated and morphed across sites of representation, from magazine to safe sex guide to experimental video to exhibition to billboard to performance work to activist newsletter to painting to film script. In other words, storytelling was *promiscuous* and *infectious*; it is the project of this chapter to theorize its viral aesthetic nature. Secondly, storytelling involved a network of individuals, media, and technologies; it created contexts in which knowledge was recognized as inherently mutable due to how it could be produced, formulated, disseminated, received, and interpreted in myriad ways. Storytelling queered knowledge just as AIDS queered normative experiences of time and space. Storytellers were not only artists, but also critics, curators, activists, policy makers, healthcare workers, academics, pharmaceutical executives, journalists, epidemiologists, and so forth. Although surely self-evident, the networked nature of storytelling encourages me as a historian to tell stories that foreground a network in contrast to one or two focal author figures. After all, history, as we will ponder in greater depth later on, must be understood as a type of narrative.

And, thirdly, the storytelling pervading Toronto's queer culture was a form of "world making," as postulated by Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner in their path-breaking article "Sex in Public" (1998). According to these cultural theorists, queer culture encompasses a "world-making project" that is "dispersed through incommensurate registers, [and] by definition *unrealizable* as community or identity"—what they liken to a counterpublic.⁸ "The queer world," Berlant and Warner elaborate, "is a space of entrances and exits, unsystematized lines of acquaintance, projected horizons,

⁸ Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, "Sex in Public," *Critical Inquiry* 24, no. 2 (1998): 558.

typifying examples, alternate routes, blockages, incommensurate geographies.”⁹ In a recent essay, art historian Erin Silver has appropriately examined the gay/queer art scene, past and present, of Queen St. West in view of Berlant and Warner’s evocative (and truly performative) description of world making.¹⁰ Building on Silver’s activation of this concept, I posit in this chapter that storytelling was one crucial technique for the epistemic and aesthetic task of world making, for mobilizing queer counterpublics and intervening in public discourse locally, nationally, and internationally. And what most distinguished Toronto’s art and activism around HIV/AIDS is that a queer project of world making harmonized with an impulse of networked global thinking.¹¹ Storytelling was the linkage between the varied impulses of postmodernism and queer world making; via a reparative reading, this chapter intends to re-theorize these conceptual strands by historically locating, and localizing, a nascent global queer epistemology.

With regard to historiography, this chapter fills a gaping void in the existing art-historical literature of not only AIDS cultural activism in and outside of Toronto, but also the city’s innovative art scene in the 1970s and 1980s. To date, there are few art and film histories that attempt to present this textured history outside of an author-centric narrative. General Idea predominates over such scholarship from both before and after their work started to address the looming epidemic in 1987, at which point the collective

⁹ Berlant and Warner, 558.

¹⁰ Erin Silver, “What Ever Happened to Queer Street West?: Queer Artistic Imaginaries on Toronto’s Queen Street West,” *No More Potlucks* 9 (2010), <http://nomorepotlucks.org/site/what-ever-happened-to-queer-street-west-queer-artistic-imaginaries-on-toronto%E2%80%99s-queen-street-west/>.

¹¹ As historians, we must be careful about historicizing the term “queer,” which was popularized as a mode of identification in activist and intellectual circles in North America and Western Europe by about 1990. AIDS activism contributed to the widespread gravitation away from gay and lesbian towards queer. Of course, this chapter largely concerns people, histories, and subjectivities that are before or on the brink of the term’s various activations, so I attempt to use the term with historical diligence.

was mostly based in New York, not Toronto.¹² In parallel with General Idea scholarship, the historiography includes work in film, queer, and cultural studies richly analyzing John Greyson's acclaimed feature-length AIDS activist musical film *Zero Patience* (1993).¹³ A powerful critique of the AIDS narrative that singles out Patient Zero—the legend of the malicious Québécois flight attendant promulgated by scientists and the mainstream media beginning in the mid-1980s—*Zero Patience* is, in many ways, the apogee of aesthetic tactics and activist pursuits developed by Greyson and his incubatory Toronto community over the previous decade. While enormously indebted to such excellent cultural criticism, this chapter opts not to take this film, or even Greyson himself, as a starting point for understanding Toronto as a local yet internationally-minded context of artistic production. And, notably, it opts not to take the AIDS crisis as a starting point either. My interests lie then in delineating a genealogy that explains a historical shift. What cultural infrastructures, aesthetic tendencies, and worldly imaginaries enabled a work such as *Zero Patience* to come into being? And how did this particular constellation of narrative-obsessed and narratively-transgressive cultural work open up a queer episteme of global reparativity in the context of HIV/AIDS?

¹² Most scholarship on General Idea has been in the form of exhibitions. See, for example, Frédéric Bonnet, ed., *General Idea: Haute Culture, A Retrospective, 1969-1994* (Zurich: JRP-Ringier, 2011) and Philip Monk, *Glamour Is Theft: A User's Guide to General Idea* (Toronto: Art Gallery of York University, 2012). A recent dissertation to chronicle the collective's work is Virginia Solomon, "Sexuality and Signification: Episodes of General Idea's Subcultural Politics" (Dissertation, University of Southern California, 2013).

¹³ For instance, see Brenda Longfellow, Scott MacKenzie, and Thomas Waugh, eds., *The Perils of Pedagogy: The Works of John Greyson* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013); Susan Knabe and Wendy Gay Pearson, *Zero Patience* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2011); Roger Hallas, "The Genealogical Pedagogy of John Greyson's *Zero Patience*," *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 12, no. 1 (2003): 16–37.

Making a Scene

A clearer sense of the underground art scene of Queen St. West during the 1970s is needed to comprehend how the pandemic affected its cultural production in the 1980s. The city's fabled critic-turned-curator Philip Monk depicts its history as "a story with a cast of characters."¹⁴ Wistfully, he speculates on its performative self-constitution:

[t]he cast repeats, almost as if in a soap opera, with name and identity changes. Artists reappear performing in their own work and acting in others. This is a thing that makes Toronto distinctive, not just this co-operative production or staging (that also existed behind the scenes in artists shooting friends' works, for instance), but also the *fictional* image artists sustained of an art scene before it was recognized as one—and that helped usher it in. To be more exact, the reason it came into being, performatively [sic]. In this "fiction" we discover a collective portrait of an art scene and also an image of its making.¹⁵

Monk thus insists that this art scene (of which he was a participant) was a concatenation of fictional representations and self-representations in writing and image, a dynamic scene realized through careful performative methods of dissemination and display.¹⁶ AA Bronson, who, with Felix Partz and Jorge Zontal, formed the collective General Idea in 1967 (officially adopting the name in 1970), speaks in parallel terms about the necessity of dreaming up and enacting an art scene owing to the scarcity of existent cultural infrastructures and models at the time in Toronto, or anywhere else in Canada. As he asserted in 1983,

it was natural to call upon our national attributes - the bureaucratic tendency and the protestant work ethic - and working together, and working sometimes not together we laboured to structure, or rather to untangle from the messy post-Sixties spaghetti of our minds, artist-run galleries, artists'

¹⁴ Philip Monk, *Is Toronto Burning?: Three Years in the Making (and Unmaking) of the Toronto Art Scene* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2016), 7.

¹⁵ Monk, 7–8.

¹⁶ See also Philip Monk, "Picturing the Toronto Art Community," *C International Contemporary Art*, September 1998.

video, and artist-run magazines. And that allowed us to allow ourselves to see ourselves as an art scene. And we did.¹⁷

Even though art histories of 1970s Toronto too frequently pivot around the extensive, well-documented, and self-mythologizing activities of General Idea, the present history concedes that the collective's work was indeed indispensable to not only the crystallization of this art scene, but also its increasingly international visibility. One offshoot of their practice tied to the mail-arts movement was a spinoff of the American staple *LIFE* magazine, *FILE* magazine, or “megazine,” published from 1972 to 1989. This was an alternative platform where the collective communicated their ripening self-referential oeuvre, ideas, manifestos, and news from this period. Appropriating the flashy aesthetics of *LIFE*, *FILE* was conceived of, in the words of Bronson, “as a kind of virus within the communications systems, a concept that William Burroughs had written about in the early ‘60s.”¹⁸ Besides infiltrating the commercial distribution systems like a parasite, as well as linking artists within Toronto, Canada, and beyond, *FILE* provided international publicity for this burgeoning alternative arts scene—one which lacked the commercial and promotional infrastructures that New York possessed in these same years.¹⁹ A reader-response project from the first volume of *FILE* that powerfully speaks to American cultural dominance supplied readers with an unmarked map of the US and Canada, accompanied by directives to draw from memory the borderline and to mail it back (see **Figure 2.1**). In the subsequent edition, a composite version of the map shows a wonderful diversity of responses, most of which minimize Canada's territorial expanse;

¹⁷ AA Bronson, “The Humiliation of the Bureaucrat: Artist-Run Centres as Museums by Artists,” in *Museums by Artists*, ed. AA Bronson and Peggy Gale (Toronto: Art Metropole, 1983), 30.

¹⁸ Paul O'Neill, “Interview with AA Bronson,” *North Drive Press* 3 (2006): 2, http://www.northdrivepress.com/interviews/NDP3/NDP3_BRONSON_ONEILL.pdf.

¹⁹ Gwen Allen, *Artists' Magazines: An Alternative Space for Art* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2011), 148. See also Willoughby Sharp, “The Gold-Diggers of '84: An Interview with General Idea Toronto,” *Avalanche*, Winter-Spring 1973.

the collective beholds, “[w]hile Londoners [from Ontario, Canada] tended to extend Canada into the United States, Americans responded with a definite swing upwards.”²⁰ With the popularity of *FILE*, in 1974 General Idea opened Art Metropole, a major artist-run distribution center for artist books and other materials, foregrounding and cementing their presence in the Canadian cultural landscape and internationally.

To be clear, General Idea’s *FILE* and Art Metropole were just two nodes of a much more intricate network of arts-related institutions cropping up around Queen St. West. Whereas previously Toronto’s artistic life had centered in the neighborhoods of Yorkville, the Annex, and Don Vale, it moved to this cheaper former garment district in the early 1970s.²¹ What was different about the cultural development of this zone was its wealth of workshops, co-operative spaces, performance venues, community centers, alternative cinemas, and video studios. As cultural historian Rosemary Donegan observed in 1986, “[t]hese production, exhibition, and distribution centres are more than work spaces, but are in fact points at which the community of artists can meet, exchange valuable information, make production contacts, or socialize.”²² In addition to the proliferation of such spaces and artist-run institutions such as Art Metropole, A Space, the Centre for Experimental Art and Communication, Mercer Union, YYY, and the Cabana Room, a community surfaced through the surge in print culture, with a growing volume of alternative art periodicals like *FILE*, *Parachute*, *Parallelogramme*, and *Fuse*.²³

Requiring a new cultural, technological, and economic infrastructure, the trending

²⁰ General Idea, “Behind a Big Story There May Be Another One,” *FILE*, May-June 1972.

²¹ David Ley, “Artists, Aestheticisation and the Field of Gentrification,” *Urban Studies* 40, no. 12 (2003): 2540.

²² Rosemary Donegan, “What Ever Happened to Queen St. West?,” *Fuse*, Fall 1986, 12. All issues of *Fuse* can be found in the Dorothy H. Hoover Library of the Ontario College of Art and Design (OCAD) University.

²³ A careful chronology of spaces and magazines appears in Monk, “Picturing the Toronto Art Community,” 11–12.

aesthetic media, namely performance, video, and sound, engendered a particular social, collaborative, and participatory climate for art-making and discourse. In this regard, Charles Street Video and Trinity Square Video were social and artistic hubs as both production cooperatives and specialized institutions of pedagogy. Given that videotapes were not a commodity in the art market, were increasingly cheap to produce and reproduce, and were understood to be the inverse of commercial network television, they were, as curator Peggy Gale comments, “taken up by individuals for what-could-be-discovered, what-could-be-experienced.”²⁴

Influenced by articulations of conceptual art from the late 1960s and early 1970s, as furthered by body and performance art practices that privileged process over product, this generation of Toronto artists was particularly drawn to video as a medium of conceptual, documentary, and social experimentation.²⁵ Early video artists in Toronto, similar to their counterparts in cities such as New York and London, were keen to challenge the aesthetic and ideological terrains of modernism, to rethink the material and technological instruments of image-making. From the early 1970s, critical theory started to equip artists with a new lexicon for thinking about aesthetics and culture; for example, re-theorized feminism addressed sexual difference and desire in the visual field. Meanwhile, major advances in information technologies and electric media, as well as the ubiquity of television in particular, pushed artists to give thought to networks of communication and surfaces of screens.²⁶ This highly technological environment progressively evoked what

²⁴ Peggy Gale, “A History in Four Moments,” in *Mirror Machine: Video and Identity*, ed. Janine Marchessault (Toronto: YYZ Books and CRCCII, 1995), 56–57.

²⁵ Dot Tuer, “Mirroring Identities: Two Decades of Video Art in English-Canada,” in *Mirror Machine: Video and Identity*, ed. Janine Marchessault (Toronto: YYZ Books and CRCCII, 1995), 110.

²⁶ Louise Dompierre, “Toronto: A Play of History (Jeu D’histoire),” in *Toronto: A Play of History (Jeu D’histoire)*, ed. Louise Dompierre and Alvin Balkind (Toronto: The Power Plant, 1987), 21.

Toronto-based media theorist Marshall McLuhan called a “global village,” as sketched out in his well-known book *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964): “[w]ith instant electric technology, the globe itself can never again be more than a village, and the very nature of city as a form of major dimensions must inevitably dissolve like a fading shot in a movie.”²⁷

The archive of Toronto’s early video art, charged with such theoretical and technological associations that were hardly unique to the city itself, indicates a strong interest in exploring the body and the self. Published in the inaugural issue of the American journal *October* in 1976, “Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism” by American art critic Rosalind Krauss had a pronounced influence on the medium’s reception and production, including in Toronto.²⁸ In her essay, Krauss grapples with (and ultimately dismisses) innovative video practices revolving around the human body, often the artist’s, as illustrated in the work of American practitioners Vito Acconci and Lynda Benglis. Krauss posited that narcissism is the primal condition of the medium of video because the artist does not detach him or herself from the instantaneous loop of feedback as the image is at once received and transmitted. Thus the technological apparatus could not be divorced from the body, and accordingly the construction of subjectivity through (self-) representation.²⁹ Yet as art historian Amelia Jones has pointed out, narcissism as enacted by many feminist artists working in performance and video was a potent aesthetic tactic—an especially politicized and postmodern one—for fragmenting the normative

²⁷ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, [1964] 1994), 343. For a history and critique of the concept of the “global village,” see Ginger Nolan, *The Neocolonialism of the Global Village* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018).

²⁸ Rosalind Krauss, “Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism,” *October* 1 (Spring 1976): 50–64.

²⁹ For one generative critique of Krauss’ argument, see, for instance, Christine Ross, *Images de surface: L’art vidéo reconsidéré* (Montréal: Éditions Artexes, 1996), 51–55.

(i.e. white, male, heterosexual) subject position of modernism while interrogating the relationship between self and other.³⁰

Storytelling was one defining feature of such feminist and gay video art in Toronto that surely would have garnered Krauss' diagnosis. In an article called "Video Has Captured Our Imagination" (1977), Gale remarked that "[d]rawing, painting, literature have acted as open diaries for artists of all ages, consciously or other wise [sic], but now words and pictures join in a more explicit narration."³¹ And according to Bronson, the art scene in 1970s Toronto took the performative ethos of Andy Warhol's Factory in 1960s New York to a whole new level. He reflected in an interview in 1998:

there was a very interesting moment in which people started using all their friends to create these sort of extended narratives. There was a whole narrative thing that happened here, and things like Colin Campbell's videotapes, and Lisa Steele's videotapes, and Rodney Werden's videotapes, David Buchan's photo pieces, and so on, all involved people in sort of narrative structures. And that didn't happen anywhere else in North America; that's very specific to Toronto.³²

Beyond "fictional images" and "extended narratives," this cultural phenomenon has been framed as gossip. Donegan affirmed the central role gossip occupied as "part of the process of identification, recognition and self-consciousness that is inherent in both the 'scene' and 'the community.'"³³ In similar fashion, art historian Jon Davies has compellingly theorized how Campbell and those in his creative milieu prized low-budget video for its potential to create "'a perverse collage' of tall tales, rumours, conversations

³⁰ Amelia Jones, *Body Art/Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 46–52.

³¹ Peggy Gale, "Video Has Captured Our Imagination," in *Video Re/View: The (Best) Source for Critical Writings on Canadian Artists' Video*, ed. Peggy Gale and Lisa Steele (Toronto: Art Metropole and Vtape, 1996), 117. First published in *Parachute* 7 (Summer 1977): 16–18.

³² Philip Monk, *Picturing the Toronto Art Community: The Queen Street Years* (Toronto: The Power Plant, 1998), <https://vimeo.com/157616035>.

³³ Donegan, "What Ever Happened to Queen St. West?," 20.

and daydreams—discourse gleaned from his everyday life.”³⁴ To Campbell and his peers of Queen St. West, the formal characteristics of video, the normal protocols of acting, and the divide between fact and fiction were of little importance; what mattered most was the medium’s capacity to tease out an alternative epistemology through the powerful and performative structures of narrative.³⁵ This follows from feminist visual theorist Irit Rogoff’s provocation that gossip is “a radical model of postmodern knowledge which would serve us well in reading and rewriting gendered historical narratives.”³⁶

With its lack of clear author figure, origin, or trace, gossip supplies a postmodern model of not only storytelling but also composing history. Following Rogoff, art historian Gavin Butt asserts gossip’s queer potential, writing that “gossiping is a form of social activity which produces and maintains the filiations of artistic community”—which Davies directly links to the social circle of Campbell.³⁷ Gossip, in other words, is an infectious mode of communication that nourishes a collective experience and the (in)coherence of a scene. Berlant and Warner also specifically suggest that gossip is one type of critical knowledge practice aligned with the transformative queer project of world making.³⁸

³⁴ Jon Davies, “I Did Not Know Him: On the Gossip (and Ghosts) of Colin Campbell,” in *People like Us: The Gossip of Colin Campbell*, ed. Jon Davies and John Greyson (Oakville, Ontario: Oakville Galleries, 2008), 11.

³⁵ Davies, 11.

³⁶ Irit Rogoff, “Gossip as Testimony: A Postmodern Signature,” in *Generations & Geographies in the Visual Arts: Feminist Readings*, ed. Griselda Pollock (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 59. One work Rogoff builds on here is Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Gossip* (New York: Knopf, 1985).

³⁷ Butt, *Between You and Me*, 1.

³⁸ Berlant and Warner, “Sex in Public,” 561.

Lisa Steele's Storytelling

Before discussing the impact of HIV/AIDS on this brand of narrativity, I would like to zero in on two early tapes of Lisa Steele, an American expatriate who in 1968 moved to Toronto, where she started producing experimental videos in the early 1970s. Along with Campbell, her dear friend and collaborator, Steele innovated a video aesthetic that uses personal narrative and fragmented indefinite storylines, often through showcasing the body as a canvas of chatty performative intimacy—an aesthetic that would pervade and soon encapsulate Toronto's art scene in the 1970s.³⁹ The two tapes I investigate exemplify different facets of narrative works emerging from this scene, of which Steele was a key member. In addition to her art, she served as a founding editor of both *Fuse* magazine and Vtape, a major distribution center of video art, both of which were launched in 1980. Wearing these different hats, Steele was furthermore a force in local feminist and anti-censorship activism. Through storytelling, her tapes also take on themes—among them death, the politics of scientific knowledge, and virality—that subsequent gay artists in Toronto built on and engaged through the AIDS crisis. Across these works, storytelling as the articulation of experience sheds light on a productive tension between identity and performativity.

In 1974 Steele created *A Very Personal Story*, which presents a single facial close-up of the artist, naked, as she recounts the memory of returning home from school at age fifteen to find her mother dead in her sickbed (see **Figure 2.2**). The tape awkwardly begins with the confessional statement, “I have a story to tell you, a really, a very personal story.” Her eyes perpetually shifting, Steele cuts to the chase: “I’ll tell you the end first. The end is about... My mother dies in the end.... but... So there won’t be any

³⁹ Gale, “A History in Four Moments,” 60.

punch line. So you know that part before we start. So we can start the story now.” For more than half of the twenty-minute tape, she fidgets with her fingers and thus obstructs our view of her face while conveying the exceedingly banal details of her day that led up to such a weighty moment. Film theorist Catherine Russell casts the tape as “a scene of the artist stripping down and revealing herself. But she never relinquishes control, relying on the modes of performance and narrativity to mediate those inner truths and feelings.”⁴⁰ Another critic, Renée Baert, also picks up on these tactics of storytelling in Steele’s oeuvre, securing them within a context of feminism in the early 1970s. Baert, armed with the tools of feminist poststructuralist analysis, convincingly demonstrates the significance of Steele as female artist speaking the “I” in narrative form through the body: the “body is the ground of experience, the evidence of action: it is the guarantor of the self, the ‘I.’”⁴¹ Here, experience is a key word, one that, as historian Joan W. Scott reminds us, is both insufficient and necessary in scholarly, political, and artistic projects.⁴² Though “experience” essentializes identity, undercutting notions of performativity, it also enables subjects to construct their own identities and narrate their own stories. This pull is frequently at the heart of Steele’s semi-autobiographical work, in which the “I” of the filmmaker, the “I” of the narrator, and the “I” of the protagonist are constantly fused and confused; the truth of the story and the sincerity of subjectivity are impossible for viewers to glean.⁴³

⁴⁰ Catherine Russell, “The Lisa Steele Tapes: Investigation and Vision,” in *North of Everything: English-Canadian Cinema since 1980*, ed. William Beard and Jerry White (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2002), 433.

⁴¹ Renée Baert, “Subjects on the Threshold: Problems with Pronouns,” in *Mirror Machine: Video and Identity*, ed. Janine Marchessault (Toronto: YYZ Books and CRCCII, 1995), 190. First published in *Parachute* 69, Winter 1993.

⁴² Joan W. Scott, “The Evidence of Experience,” *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 4 (1991): 797.

⁴³ For more on such readings of semi-autobiographical cinema, see Raymond Bellour, “Self-Portraits,” in *Precarious Visualities: New Perspectives on Identification in Contemporary Art and Visual Culture*, ed.

Critics often associate Steele's early work with the confessional as a performative mode of self-articulation, whereby the video apparatus operates, in Russell's terms, as a "technology of confession."⁴⁴ In his classic text *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, Michel Foucault contends that confession is "one of the main rituals we rely on for the production of truth" in Western societies.⁴⁵ Such confessions are also, according to the philosopher, "inscribed at the heart of procedures of individualization by power" and thus a predominant way in which subjects both constitute themselves and are constituted as individuals within a web of social power.⁴⁶ Yet Foucault's later writings on technologies of the self from the early 1980s, just before his AIDS-related death in 1984, reveal a different, much more optimistic outlook on the confessional. Looking to Augustine's *Confessions* and Hellenistic culture at large, he considers writing of and about the self as a form of vigilance and knowledge: "[a]ttention was paid to the nuances of life, mood, and reading, and the experience of oneself was intensified and widened by virtue of this act of writing."⁴⁷ Though *A Very Personal Story* as a performative narrative undermines the confessional as a producer of truths contingent on the policing of fact and fiction, it does lend itself to the second theorization of the confessional as a mnemonic method of self-knowledge and care. Moreover, the tape signals what philosopher Seyla Benhabib has termed a "narrative" model of subjectivity and identity-construction in which, in a world of proliferating and competing narratives, "our agency consists in our capacity to weave out of those narratives and fragments of narratives a life story that

Olivier Asselin, Johanne Lamoureux, and Christine Ross, trans. Ron Ross (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008), 33–34.

⁴⁴ Russell, "The Lisa Steele Tapes: Investigation and Vision," 433.

⁴⁵ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction (Histoire de la sexualité, 1: la volonté de savoir*, 1976), trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), 58.

⁴⁶ Foucault, 58–59.

⁴⁷ Michel Foucault, *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, ed. Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, and Patrick H. Hutton (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 28.

makes sense for us, as unique individual selves.”⁴⁸ As Benhabib argues, then, subjectivity is not simply performed, as in Judith Butler’s famed model of performativity, but rather retold, remembered, and retooled through a multiplicity of inherited and new narratives.⁴⁹

If Steele’s *A Very Personal Story* represents storytelling as dubious confession and conduit of self-understanding, her four-part series *The Scientist Tapes*, produced while the artist was living in Los Angeles with Campbell for a few months from 1976 to 1977, utilizes a more impersonal narrative strategy. Almost seventy minutes in length, this slow work chronicles a long-distance love affair between a clinical microbiologist at the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) in Atlanta and a genetic engineer at Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory in Long Island, characters respectively embodied by Steele and Campbell (see **Figure 2.3**). In part one, we encounter the two in the midst of making out, but as each frontally addresses the camera in turn, their emotions are detached, and their language clinical, even robotic. The scientists report on their work, experiences, and skillsets in between awkward fits of kissing. For instance, she discloses with rhythmical precision,

I wear gloves. I decontaminate glassware. I work only in defined areas. That is all the protection I have. I know how to react in high-risk situations. I have handled blood and urine samples from Legionnaires’ Disease, Lassa fever, and even the last-recorded case of small pox in North America. I know what to do when a test tube is broken, a sample spilled.

As evident here, a central topic in part one and throughout *The Scientist Tapes* is contagion: cultural and scientific apprehension surrounding the spread of hazardous microorganisms and viruses. He articulates at one point,

⁴⁸ Seyla Benhabib, “Sexual Difference and Collective Identities: The New Global Constellation,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 24, no. 2 (1999): 344.

⁴⁹ For more on the debate between Benhabib and Butler vis-à-vis identity-construction, see Benhabib, “Sexual Difference and Collective Identities: The New Global Constellation.”

I am not able to say for certain that a particular recombinant DNA molecule which shows no evidence of being hazardous at the present time will not devastate our planet some time in the future. Nor can I say for certain that the vaccines we are administering to millions of children do not contain agents that will produce contagious cancer some time in the future. Or that a certain deadly virus will not be brought to the United States next winter by a traveler from abroad causing a nationwide fatal epidemic of an unknown disease.

From Legionnaires' Disease, to the possibilities of DNA manipulation, to Skylab (the first American space station that orbited the earth from 1973 to 1979), the lovers drift through current events and controversies in science and society. The main inspiration for the project, according to Steele, was the outbreak of Legionnaires' Disease, which obtained its name in 1976 when 182 American Legionnaires contracted pneumonia while attending a convention at the Bellevue-Stratford Hotel in Philadelphia; 29 of them died. Given the esteemed affected population, the alarmingly unique composition of the bacterium (*Legionella*), and the sensationalist nature of its media coverage, it was the first time, as Steele recalls, that individuals from the CDC were regularly featured on the news as commentators.⁵⁰ To stress the historical etiological significance of the disease, William H. Foege, Director of the CDC, wrote a couple years after the outbreak that “[w]e had not identified an important new human bacterial pathogen since the 1950’s, but now we must ask how many others there might be that do not follow the rules—a real challenge to all microbiologists and clinicians to reevaluate techniques.”⁵¹ Captivated by the media’s hysteria, Steele read in depth about the rumored pandemic in popular and

⁵⁰ Lisa Steele, interview by Jackson Davidow, March 20, 2017.

⁵¹ William H. Foege, “Foreward,” in *“Legionnaires”’: The Disease, the Bacterium and Methodology*, ed. Gilda L. Jones and G. Ann Hébert (Atlanta: U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1979), iii.

scientific journals, and produced *The Scientist Tapes* by appropriating and stitching together the various headlines and narratives she encountered.⁵²

Media scholar Joshua Thorson is correct to situate this work within a feminist critique of scientific objectivity, alluding in particular to the work of philosopher of science Sandra Harding. In her epic book *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?: Thinking from Women's Lives* (1991), Harding identifies a “feminist standpoint epistemology” that champions a “strong objectivity” emerging from women’s experiences—a model that counters the “weak objectivity” of supposedly value-neutral (yet often sexist and androcentric) inquiry. Moreover, it “call[s] for the acknowledgement that all human beliefs—including our best scientific beliefs—are socially situated, but also require[s] a critical evaluation to determine which social situations tend to generate the most objective knowledge claims.”⁵³ Thorson understands *The Scientist Tapes* to be voicing a similar critique, noting that the “injection of romance into science—a contamination, a spliced gene—articulates a collapsed space between objective processes and subjective passions.”⁵⁴

In an age of viral anxiety, Steele’s work ironically interrogates the seemingly sterile and innocent culture of scientific objectivity while probing at the mediated and ever-performative regimes of knowledge transmission that take place in culture, beyond the research laboratory or the CDC. *The Scientist Tapes* thus calls into question the stringent binary between objectivity and subjectivity that dates back to the mid-to-late nineteenth

⁵² Steele, interview.

⁵³ Sandra G. Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?: Thinking from Women's Lives* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 142. See, relatedly, Donna J. Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,” *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988): 575–99.

⁵⁴ Joshua Thorson, “Lisa Steele: The Conceptual Anthropology of Narrative Works, 1976-1982,” in *Lisa Steele Collection: 1972-1984* (Toronto: Vtape, 2013), n.p., <http://www.vtape.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Joshua-Thorson-Vtape-Fellowship-Essay.pdf>.

century, as described by historians of science Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison: “[I]ike the similarly complementary pair male/female, the details of what characteristics fall on one or another side of the boundary are less important than the extraordinarily elastic and resilient structure itself.”⁵⁵ Although, like Thorson, I view *The Scientist Tapes* as a feminist engagement with this boundary, framed historically here by Daston and Galison, our analyses part ways in regard to Harding’s notion of “strong objectivity.” That is to say, while Steele’s tape cleverly scrutinizes the binary between subjectivity and objectivity as perpetuated by regimes of knowledge and mass culture, it is disinterested in what objectivity is, if it even exists, or how, following Harding, women’s experiences can buttress protocols of objectivity in science. What matters to Steele is that knowledge is performative; cultures of gossip, tabloids, and “hard science” shore up epistemological projects. As opposed to Steele’s use of the confessional as a subjective mode of narrativity based on experience in *A Very Personal Story*, *The Scientist Tapes* concocts a clearly fictional, open-ended, and outrageous narrative in order to underscore the social and discursive construction of scientific (and especially etiological) narratives as paths to truth. As we begin to transition from Toronto’s feminist art of the 1970s to its progeny, emergent gay art of the 1980s, or from the opaqueness of Legionnaires’ Disease to a full-blown age of AIDS, we must bear in mind what I understand to be a fundamental distinction between the critique of science and the desire for a “strong objectivity.”

⁵⁵ Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, *Objectivity*, Paperback edition (New York: Zone Books, [2007] 2010), 5.

Local Art and Global Politics in the Age of Gay Liberation

In introducing two of Steele's tapes from the mid-1970s, my intention is twofold; first, to give a taste of the principle characters, aesthetics, narratives, and themes from the Queen St. West art scene, especially those in the field of video; and second, to set the stage for AIDS activism in the 1980s.⁵⁶ If, as Berlant and Warner explain, "[c]ontexts of queer world making depend on parasitic and fugitive elaboration" through incidents of gossip and storytelling, surely such narratives traversed the art and gay worlds of Toronto.⁵⁷ This is not to say, however, that the two worlds were one and the same. By 1986, Donegan reported that in the years prior, Queen St. West had "developed a consciousness of black, feminist, gay and lesbian issues"; the previous decade had witnessed significant shifts—both advances and setbacks—in gay politics and cultural attitudes towards homosexuality in Toronto's art world and in Canadian society at large.⁵⁸

Undeniably, references to gay life were plentiful in the art of the 1970s, particularly in the work of General Idea. Yet, as art historian Gwen Allen shows, any of *FILE*'s intimations of gay culture, such as drag, leather, and bondage were "at the level of innuendo and inference—subtext rather than text."⁵⁹ Coedited with artist Rodney Werden, the Fall 1979 issue of *FILE* more pointedly tackled gay identity, including an essay by French theorist and activist Guy Hocquenghem, as well as two sadomasochistic images by American photographer Robert Mapplethorpe. Although Bronson, Zontal, and Partz were increasingly open about their gay identities in their work and self-presentation by the mid-1980s, as Bronson would recollect much later, "sexuality was kind of a

⁵⁶ Though technically produced in Los Angeles, *The Scientist Tapes* should be located culturally and stylistically in Toronto.

⁵⁷ Berlant and Warner, "Sex in Public," 561.

⁵⁸ Donegan, "What Ever Happened to Queen St. West?," 10.

⁵⁹ Allen, *Artists' Magazines*, 167.

dangerous subject in the [1970s] art world... To call yourself a gay artist would be, of course, the death knell of your career.”⁶⁰ Be that as it may, Toronto artists making work with conspicuous gay reference points were among the nation’s most celebrated. To offer just one example, the Canadian Pavilion at the 39th Venice Biennale in 1980, curated by Bruce Ferguson, was dedicated to the sexually-transgressive video art of Lisa Steele, Colin Campbell, and General Idea.⁶¹

New York’s monumental Stonewall riots in June 1969 energized a transnational gay liberation movement, imbued with a commitment to the liberal idea that sexuality should be understood as an individual expression instead of a social imperative. There were gay regional and national communication networks predating the 1970s, particularly in large cities and on university campuses, but an explosion of print culture took place after Stonewall, strengthening and broadening the scope of earlier interconnectivity.⁶² The growing gay liberation movement in the US and Canada built on and interlaced with networks of other social movements, mainly the women’s liberation and the black civil rights movements.

As a result of this climate, by the early 1970s Toronto came to house a range of openly gay and lesbian organizations, periodicals, bars, bathhouses, a bookstore, and even a cultural repository that would become the Canadian Gay Archives. Due to the urbanization of downtown in the 1950s and 1960s, including a high-rise building boom

⁶⁰ AA Bronson, “Let’s Talk about Sex: AA Bronson Pushes Critics to Consider Queer Culture,” SFMOMA, July 2013, <https://www.sfmoma.org/watch/lets-talk-about-sex-aa-bronson-pushes-critics-to-consider-queer-culture/>. See also Sarah E. K. Smith, *General Idea: Life & Work* (Toronto: Art Canada Institute/Institut de l’art du Canada, 2016), 48–50, <https://www.aci-iac.ca/general-idea>.

⁶¹ Bruce Ferguson, *Canada Video* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1980). The other artists in the exhibition were Tom Sherman and Pierre Falardeau/Julien Poulin.

⁶² Jim Downs, *Stand by Me: The Forgotten History of Gay Liberation* (New York: Basic Books, 2016), 119–20. For a prehistory of these networks during the Cold War, see, for example, David S. Churchill, “Transnationalism and Homophile Political Culture in the Postwar Decades,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian & Gay Studies* 15, no. 1 (2009): 31–66.

and the development of the subway, single-person housing and small business rentals became increasingly affordable at the intersection of Church Street and Wellesley Street, attracting many gay men (and, to a lesser extent, lesbians). Once the intersection became defined as an epicenter of gay life in the 1970s, as confirmed by the establishment of the 519 Church Street Community Centre in 1975, the neighborhood became known as the gay ghetto.⁶³ It was the sole public place in Toronto where, for example, same-sex couples could hold hands without the risk of harassment. Despite how Minister of Justice Pierre Trudeau famously announced that “there’s no place for the state in the bedrooms of the nation” with the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1968-69, effectively decriminalizing homosexuality across Canada, this law was still only conditional.⁶⁴ And lesbians and gays were still frequent targets of discrimination and surveillance across all domains of society, especially at the hands of the police.

Launched in 1971 in Toronto as a radical newspaper for gay liberation, *The Body Politic* was a vital, if frequently contentious, platform for writing on politics, culture, and history, with a substantial circulation of up to 10,000 across Canada, the US, Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and even Latin America by the late 1970s. Longstanding subject matters covered in the pages of *The Body Politic* during this period ranged from lesbian separatism to racism, from the age of sexual consent to union organizing, from

⁶³ Tim McCaskell, *Queer Progress: From Homophobia to Homonationalism* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2016), 22. For more on histories of queer public space in Toronto, see John Grube, “‘No More Shit’: The Struggle for Democratic Gay Space in Toronto,” in *Queers in Space: Communities / Public Places / Sites of Resistance*, ed. Gordon Brent Ingram, Anne-Marie Bouthillette, and Yolanda Retter (Seattle: Bay Press, 1997), 127–46. See also Catherine Jean Nash, “Gay and Lesbian Political Mobilization in Urban Spaces: Toronto,” in *Queer Mobilizations: Social Movement Activism and Canadian Public Policy*, ed. Manon Tremblay (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2015), 209–11; Michael Ornstein and Tim McCaskell, “The Evolving Demographics of Toronto’s Gay Village,” in *Any Other Way: How Toronto Got Queer*, ed. Stephanie Chambers et al. (Toronto: Coach House Books, 2017), 66–70.

⁶⁴ For example, the age of consent was twenty-one, and sexual activity involving more than two people was criminal. Importantly, the law also allowed abortion under certain conditions, as well as decriminalized contraceptives.

editorship to religion, from gay history to human rights legislation.⁶⁵ From its beginnings, the newspaper had an investment in covering international topics, communicating with dozens of other gay periodicals worldwide, and framing gay liberation as a transnational issue. As Tim McCaskell, a member of the collective publishing *The Body Politic* from 1974 to 1986, remembers,

there was this notion that what we were doing had global implications. National liberation was getting rid of imperialism, women's liberation was getting rid of sexism, black liberation was getting rid of racism, and gay liberation was getting rid of sexual repression. We had a beachhead here, but the implication in what we were doing [was that] if it were to be successful, [it] needed to be global.⁶⁶

By 1977, McCaskell was officially named the international news editor, reading as best he could dozens of gay papers from around the world in order to stay informed about diverse regional and national contexts, from Nicaragua to South Africa.⁶⁷ With two full pages allocated to international news from 1977 to its closure in 1987, *The Body Politic* was easily the most international gay newspaper in the world in terms of the breadth of its coverage. This markedly transnational worldview endorsed by activists and writers in Toronto leads historian Jim Downs to conclude that “gay people in the seventies did not see themselves as citizens of Canada or of the United States or even of Europe, but as a people transcending time and place.”⁶⁸

⁶⁵ It is mandatory to note that the collective members who ran *The Body Politic* were overwhelmingly educated white men of middle-class backgrounds. Only one woman, Chris Bearchell, was consistently on the collective; Mariana Valverde, Sue Golding, and Gillian Rodgerson were also actively involved in the paper. Women and people of color frequently published work in the newspaper, sometimes to formulate concerns about gay liberation as a predominantly white male issue. While there were several other political groups and periodicals run by and for lesbians and gay men of color in Toronto, *The Body Politic* was the most established, far-reaching, and internationally-articulated.

⁶⁶ Tim McCaskell, interview by Jackson Davidow, March 21, 2017.

⁶⁷ McCaskell, *Queer Progress: From Homophobia to Homonationalism*, 116. McCaskell clarifies that for *The Body Politic* in the 1970s, the “international” largely meant the US, Europe, Australia, Mexico, Argentina, and Jamaica. No one on the collective could read Japanese, so it was difficult to report on gay politics in Japan. McCaskell, interview.

⁶⁸ Downs, *Stand by Me*, 126.

In addition to international news, *The Body Politic* had a cultural section called “Our Image,” which increasingly developed avant-garde tastes under the direction of collective-member Alexander Wilson from 1979 to 1981.⁶⁹ Critically analyzing works of local and international cinema, theatre, art, and literature, “Our Image” under Wilson attempted to bridge the art scene of Queen St. West and the gay ghetto. Though many individuals were part of both groups, the first and most cited instance of meaningful political solidarity between the two occurred in December 1978, in the aftermath of the raids on The Barracks Steam Baths, one of the city’s smaller gay saunas known for sadomasochism and bondage play.⁷⁰ In their attack, the police beat up and arrested twenty-six men, damaged the facilities, and confiscated not only sex toys, but also the membership list of over eight hundred clients.⁷¹ For the first time in Toronto, owners and employees of a bathhouse were charged as keepers of a “common bawdy house,” and the patrons were charged as “found-ins.”⁷² The February 1979 edition of *The Body Politic* featured on its cover a reimagined photograph of the bathhouse raid, as erotically envisioned by Gerald Hannon. Here, Wilson, bent-double, plays a dumbfounded patron and Keith Sly a ruthless, possibly interested cop behind him (see **Figure 2.4**). An impulse to counter acts of repression and censorship by playfully staging alternative representations and creating new narratives is visible in this image. As a matter of fact, *The Body Politic* was also on trial a few weeks later due to their publication of “obscene” textual materials on pedophilia and fisting that prompted a raid by the Toronto police and Ontario government in 1977.

⁶⁹ “Our Image” lasted from 1974 to 1981, but the newspaper regularly reported on cultural issues throughout its run.

⁷⁰ Monk, *Is Toronto Burning?*, 209.

⁷¹ McCaskell, *Queer Progress: From Homophobia to Homonationalism*, 97.

⁷² McCaskell, 98. The “bawdy house” law had been used against a Montreal bathhouse in 1977.

These two alarming events mobilized and united the gay and lesbian community and the Queen St. West crowd, who were both committed to combatting censorship. Under the editorship of Lisa Steele, *Centerfold*, an arts and cultural news magazine founded in 1978 that morphed into *Fuse* a year later, scrupulously reported what happened in the courtroom over the course of *The Body Politic* trial.⁷³ On January 3, 1979, the second day of the trial, local artists, including Steele, Clive Robertson, and General Idea members Felix Partz and AA Bronson, came together to perform experimental pieces on the theme of censorship as a part of a benefit for the Free the Press Fund. Another memorable performance was a rendition of Lesley Gore's resolute "You Don't Own Me" by the Clichettes, a group of women impersonating female impersonators in 1960s girl-group drag, comprised of artists Louise Garfield, Janice Hladaki, and Johanna Householder. McCaskell's partner, video artist Richard Fung, recorded and edited the whole event, which was subsequently broadcast widely on public-access television.⁷⁴

The Barracks raid was also the inspiration for a series by painter Andy Fabo, one of the first artists in Toronto to make work about gay identity and politics in straightforward terms. Fabo, in fact, worked part-time at The Barracks, and, along with colleagues, was arrested and charged with "keeping a bawdy house." He vividly depicted this experience in works such as *Mug Shot #1*, based on his actual mug shot and thumbprints (see **Figure 2.5**).⁷⁵ Exhibited in a modest yet aptly named solo show titled *Self-Portraits of an Alleged*

⁷³ Clive Robertson, *Policy Matters: Administrations of Art and Culture* (Toronto: YYZ Books, 2006), 223–25.

⁷⁴ McCaskell, *Queer Progress: From Homophobia to Homonationalism*, 100; Rick Bebout, "1979," *Promiscuous Affections: A Life in The Bar, 1969-2000* (blog), 2003, <http://www.rbebout.com/bar/1979.htm>.

⁷⁵ Annette Hurtig, "Andy Fabo: A Fluid Evolution," in *Andy Fabo* (Toronto: Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art, 2009), 4.

Keeper of a Common Bawdy House at the Funnel in 1980, the autobiographical paintings used an expressionistic and figurative language to convey a personal narrative, one that parted ways with the ironic sensibility that was more in favor along Queen St. West—and in Hannon’s dramatized photograph of Wilson and Sly.⁷⁶ John Bentley Mays, an art critic for the major national newspaper *The Globe and Mail*, published a review of the show, emphasizing why homosexual artistic authorship was important to consider in the age of liberationist politics:

[t]here is nothing explicitly erotic or even suggestive in the show. Yet the paintings could only have been made by a man who had lived through certain events and experiences radically precipitated by his erotic style, and by that alone. In the portraits on view, that is, Fabo is not making homosexual art. He is making art as a homosexual...⁷⁷

This entrance of gay identity politics into the visual arts, most observable in the work of artists such as Fabo, John Greyson, Stephen Andrews, Richard Fung, and Midi Onodera, was undoubtedly a result of the robust discourse of liberation in Toronto. Slightly younger and newer to Queen St. West than their more established mentors (the members of General Idea, Steele, Campbell, David Buchan, Rodney Werden, and the Clichettes), this generation more directly formulated their work in terms of a gay or lesbian subjectivity. There was an oscillation between postmodern irony and sincere reportage, in the parlance of a liberationist project that sometimes veered towards essentialism. In 1978 Greyson, an eighteen-year-old high school drop-out from London, Ontario, headed to Toronto to come out as gay and to become an artist. He happily landed

⁷⁶ Fabo was also a principle member of the influential ChromaZone Collective (1981-86), a group that promoted figurative art. For more on this, see, for instance, Dennis Reid, *A Concise History of Canadian Painting*, 3rd ed. (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2012), 414–18.

⁷⁷ John Bentley Mays, “Mix of Sex and Art: A Ticklish Problem,” *The Globe and Mail*, October 4, 1980, sec. Entertainment, 13. Andy Fabo Vertical File, Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives, Toronto (hereafter CLGA).

in the middle of this vibrant artistic milieu: briefly dating Bronson, collaborating closely with Campbell (whom he would also date in the late 1980s), working at *Centerfold/Fuse* magazine, writing criticism, and making experimental art for *The Body Politic*.⁷⁸

Throughout these endeavors, he was split between not only spheres of art and activism, but also divergent attitudes towards sexual politics. Whereas the older generation of artists subversively played with norms of gender and sexuality outside of a fixed identitarian framework, Greyson's peer group was more likely to embrace the language of identity politics, even if they were to do so with much criticality.⁷⁹ One might liken this gay self-articulation to what theorist Gayatri Spivak termed "strategic essentialism" in the early 1980s. Though fraught with complications, universalizing, essentializing identity categories that invoke the authenticity of experience can prove useful for minority groups to latch onto, at least initially, as they pursue political goals.⁸⁰

In this regard, a key, albeit understudied, project by Greyson was his performance "Aspects of Contemporary Gay Art: An International Symposium," which was part of an exhibition organized by A Space and the art gallery at Harbourfront in conjunction with Art Toronto in July 1980 (see **Figure 2.6**). A booklet promises a dazzling eleven-day schedule of lectures, panels, workshops, and art from over 200 cultural producers from

⁷⁸ John Greyson, Keren Zaiontz, and J. Paul Halferty, "Colonizing the 'Original': John Greyson and Queer Adaptation. An Interview with John Greyson," in *Performing Adaptations: Essays and Conversations on the Theory and Practice of Adaptation*, ed. Michelle MacArthur, Lydia Wilkinson, and Keren Zaiontz (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2009), 183.

⁷⁹ McCaskell uses a fabulous phrase, "drunk on identity," in his memoir. "For most of us at that point, gay was a universal category, just now being revealed by history. We were drunk on identity, and after what we had been through, it tasted very sweet, indeed." McCaskell, *Queer Progress: From Homophobia to Homonationalism*, 29.

⁸⁰ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Elizabeth Grosz, "Criticism, Feminism, and the Institution," in *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*, by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, ed. Sarah Harasym (New York: Routledge, [1984] 1990), 1–16.

around the world, brought together to ruminate on contemporary lesbian and gay art. The program, organized by the Association of Gay Artists, reads,

[t]o create a genre is furthest from our minds; we have always assumed that the title ‘gay artist’ is by no means a full definition of anyone’s cultural production. We do see Gay & Lesbian Art as central to the aims and goals of each respective movement—we see art as a means for questioning and redefining not only the growth of the movements, but also of society as a whole—a tool for social change.⁸¹

Listed among the conference’s eminent participants are James Baldwin, Valley Export [sic], Michel Foucault, Jean Genet, Viollet LeDuc [sic], Djuna Barnes, John Giorno, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Havelock Ellis, and Rita Mae Brown, as well as other more local and familiar artists, activists, and writers. At Harbourfront’s Warehouse 22, Greyson, reporting on behalf of the “CGAY radio station,” provided news updates: a slew of cancellations due to outrageous institutional and legal controversies, for instance, Edmund White being detained at the border on account of his button advertising “Aspects of Contemporary Gay Art” (see **Figure 2.7**).⁸² As a result of the purported censorship and hostility, the printed programs and ephemera were all stamped “CANCELLED.”

Stephen MacDonald, an art critic for *The Body Politic*, chronicled his realization that none of the events were ever scheduled in the first place: it was all “actually a fiction, a clever piece of performance art that hoped to sweep the crowd into a debate, a gesture of support for or perhaps even against the *idea* of the symposium.”⁸³ Certainly, some of the illustrious guests were dead in 1980, a few for almost a century. At the very least, they were unlikely to convene in Toronto for a pedantic gay art conference. It is true,

⁸¹ See John Greyson, *Aspects of Contemporary Gay Art: An International Symposium*, 1980, page 2, John Greyson Vertical File, CLGA.

⁸² Stephen MacDonald, “Aspects of a Fiction,” *The Body Politic*, September 1980, 33. Collection of Canadian Museum of Human Rights, Internet Archive.

⁸³ MacDonald, 33.

however, that the Harbourfront did attempt to censor Greyson's piece due to the gay content at one point, but following complaints from other artists participating in Art Toronto, there was no official suppression.⁸⁴ In this way, censorship—as threat, as reality, or as charade—was once again not purely a force of prohibition, but a creative means of picturing different possibilities, of critiquing the available terms of visibility and expression in a homophobic culture. The performance also simultaneously poked fun at and advocated for the category of contemporary gay art, one that was infused with the poignant political desires of gay liberation. Notably for my argument in this chapter, Greyson's "international symposium" reveals a decidedly transnational and trans-historical imaginary which would come to define his oeuvre through the AIDS crisis.

Even if certain artists directly engaged gay and lesbian politics, the role of art was barely intelligible within what activists fondly called "the movement." The "Our Image" section of *The Body Politic* became a battleground as Wilson assembled a crew of smart creative individuals (Fabo and Greyson, among them) to report on, critique, and ultimately champion the local arts scene of Queen St. West.⁸⁵ Wilson, whose boyfriend Stephen Andrews was another budding artist producing work with gay content, strongly believed that art should be at the center of the radical social movement. Artists, after all, were concerned about censorship in an increasingly hostile and conservative cultural climate. Yet other collective members thought that the newspaper should pay more attention to representations of lesbian and gay life in mainstream culture. In their perspective, art from Queen St. West was not only too obscure, avant-garde, and irrelevant for serious activism, but also, quite simply, inaccessible for at least two-thirds

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Fabo, for example, wrote an art world gossip column called Fab Blabs for *The Body Politic*.

of their readers who lived in other parts of Canada and worldwide, with no way of physically attending an opening or participating in a performance. Eventually this debate over the pertinence of Toronto's gossipy local art scene to an internationally-articulated gay newspaper became so heated that in the spring of 1981, Wilson was the only member in the history of the collective to be asked to leave.⁸⁶ Without his mentorship, the cultural critics who contributed to "Our Image" also found new places to write about the local, and more alternative, gay and lesbian art.⁸⁷

Local and Global Culture Wars: From Censorship to AIDS

In the aftermath of the 1978 raids, there were even larger, more tightly coordinated police raids on four bathhouses on the night of February 5, 1981; this flare-up stimulated a new wave of indignant grassroots organizing. Meanwhile, censorship also continued to be a focal issue in both the gay community and along Queen St. West. In 1981 the Ontario Censor Board, under the austere leadership of Mary Brown, insisted on cuts to Michael Snow's films *Rameau's Nephew...* and *Presents*, as well as Bruce Elder's *The Art of Worldly Wisdom* at the Funnel Experimental Film Theatre. These state actions were followed immediately by more police investigations at a screening of documentaries organized by *Fuse* and at the Canadian Images Film Festival in Peterborough, Ontario.⁸⁸ Many arts organizations were plagued by raids, fines, and legal actions. Shortly thereafter, and relatedly, Glad Day, Toronto's lesbian and gay bookshop, was charged

⁸⁶ Wilson's name is removed from the masthead by June 1981. He did, however, contribute a couple articles to the newspaper after being booted out.

⁸⁷ McCaskell, interview; Andy Fabo, interview by Jackson Davidow, March 17, 2017; Stephen Andrews, interview by Jackson Davidow, March 16, 2017.

⁸⁸ Taryn Sirove, "Freedom, Sex & Power: Film/Video Regulation in Ontario," *WRECK: Graduate Journal of Art History, Visual Art, and Theory* 2, no. 1 (2008): 35.

with possessing and selling “obscene material” in the form of “pornographic” magazines.⁸⁹ This bout of censorship in the early 1980s occurred at precisely the same time as the feminist “sex wars” in Toronto, Canada, and the United States regarding pornography, violence, and sadomasochism. In contrast to some outspoken feminists such as American thinkers Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon (who advocated that all pornography is violent and dangerous for women), other feminists, especially those in Toronto’s media arts community, including Steele and Greyson, firmly opposed these acts of censorship.⁹⁰

Though the draconian censor board claimed to protect women and all citizens, the institution had historically made a point of banning films that were considered by the arts and activist communities to be feminist, anti-sexist, gay, and anti-war. The intersectional struggle against such grueling acts of governmental censorship culminated in Six Days of Resistance, an intervention organized by individuals with various affiliations to the artist-run centres A Space, the Women’s Cultural Building, Vtape, the Artists’ Union, and Trinity Square Video. Taking place April 21 to 27, 1985, the festival of civil disobedience featured dozens of dialogues and screenings of tapes that had not been submitted to the censor board in advance; in so doing, the organizers advocated for communities to determine what they wanted to view themselves.⁹¹ Rather than merely propounding a “libertarian analysis that unproblematically champions free speech,” as Greyson, a lead organizer, remembered, “we tried to encourage a critique of power

⁸⁹ McCaskell, *Queer Progress: From Homophobia to Homonationalism*, 176.

⁹⁰ For more on these debates, see the important collection, to which Steele contributed, Varda Burstyn, ed., *Women against Censorship* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1985). For a more historical positioning beyond Toronto, see Lisa Duggan and Nan D. Hunter, *Sex Wars: Sexual Dissent and Political Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

⁹¹ Kerri Kwinter, “Ontario Open Screenings, Six Days of Resistance Against the Censor Board, April 21-27, 1985,” *Fuse*, Summer 1985.

relations within the spectrum of media exhibition, particularly noting how marginalized and disenfranchised artists and communities have very different stakes in the censorship debate.”⁹² On a more macroscopic and federal level, the days of the Liberal government under Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau of the 1970s and early 1980s were over, having given way in 1984 to an era dominated by Prime Minister Brian Mulroney’s “Progressive Conservative Government,” which would remain in power until 1993. During this period, right-wing efforts to censor, sue, ban, and fine various activities escalated, as did the impassioned demonstrations confronting these constraints.

And amid this awakening of cultural activity and community organizing in Toronto in the first half of the 1980s, a health crisis was beginning to emerge. Dozens of otherwise healthy gay men became afflicted with Kaposi’s sarcoma (KS), a rare cancer, and pneumocystis pneumonia (PCP). There were initial soundings and speculations about a “gay cancer” in the American gay and mainstream press beginning in 1981, most memorably a headline, “Rare Cancer Found in 41 Homosexuals,” printed on July 3 of that year in *The New York Times*. The American media, including the gay press, buzzed with pop-scientific, often groundless theories about intestinal parasites, recreational drug abuse, divine punishment, and accumulations of sexually transmitted diseases. Honed by their critical consciousness about the media, writers on *The Body Politic* who addressed the “cancer” in late 1981 and early 1982 were skeptical about these reports, focusing on the moralizing and homophobic biases that underpinned the sensational journalism. On the whole, gay populations in New York were more unnerved in the early years of the epidemic. That said, some Toronto activists such as American poet and professor Michael

⁹² John Greyson, “Preface,” in *Suggestive Poses: Artists and Critics Respond to Censorship*, ed. Lorraine Johnson (Toronto: Toronto Photographers Workshop and The Riverbank Press, 1997), 3.

Lynch were closely following what was happening in New York as the “gay cancer” turned into Gay Related Immune Deficiency in 1982.⁹³

By September 1982, there were fourteen official cases of what was now called AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) reported in Canada, and *The Body Politic* began to comment on the outbreak as Toronto’s gay community, unlike the government, responded with urgency. Modeled after earlier clusters of organizing from the bathhouse raids and the women’s health movement, the AIDS Committee of Toronto, founded in the summer of 1983, had five working groups devoted to education, patient support, fundraising, medical liaison, and public relations. Based on research at the Pasteur Institute in France, it was understood by late 1983 that AIDS was caused by a virus, first called HTLV-III (Human T-Lymphotropic Virus Type III) and soon thereafter renamed HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus). And though by 1984 the CDC declared the principle at-risk groups to be homosexuals, heroin-users, hemophiliacs, and Haitians, the mainstream media started to portray “the gay plague” as the main problem, especially after the scandalous revelation that Hollywood celebrity Rock Hudson was dying of the disease in August 1985; it seemed, contradictorily, that even though AIDS was a homosexual disease, no one was safe from it.

By and large, Mulroney’s governmental response to HIV/AIDS echoed Reagan’s in the US, failing to name the problem (acknowledging a new virus was afoot), refusing to address what was happening, and denying proper funding for research, education, prevention, and treatment. As the health crisis worsened in Canada (and in Toronto specifically), tense moral debates ensued regarding the confidentiality of testing, the

⁹³ McCaskell, *Queer Progress: From Homophobia to Homonationalism*, 171.

possibilities for safer sex, the politics of pornography, and the dangers of promiscuity.⁹⁴ If sex had been the glorious cornerstone of gay sociality and politics in the 1970s, its heightening associations with disease and death were hard for the gay and lesbian community to stomach. What were the consequences of being increasingly defined by illness? As Lynch noted in his piece “Living with Kaposi’s,” published in *The Body Politic* in November 1982,

[a]nother crisis coexists with the medical one. It has gone largely unexamined, even by the gay press. Like helpless mice we have peremptorily, almost inexplicably, relinquished the one power we so long fought for in constructing our modern gay community: the power to determine our own identity. And to whom have we relinquished it? The very authority we wrested it from in a struggle that occupied us for more than a hundred years: the medical profession.⁹⁵

This health crisis, in short, precipitated a community-wide identity crisis.

Many of Toronto’s earliest artistic responses to the pandemic attest to this experience, while also grappling with what it meant to be gay, Canadian, and a citizen of a postmodern, interconnected world. For example, Fabo’s painting *The Craft of the Contaminated* (1984) is a re-envisioning of Théodore Géricault’s *The Raft of the Medusa* (1819), a landmark work of French Romanticism that dramatizes the horrific consequences of the real-life shipwreck of a French naval frigate, the *Medusa*, off the coast of North Africa a couple years earlier (see **Figures 2.8 and 2.9**). In this nineteenth-century event, dozens of individuals died; by the time of their rescue, only fifteen remained on the makeshift raft, many of whom had reportedly resorted to cannibalism. Because of these gruesome outcomes, caused, moreover, by how the ship’s captain abandoned his slaves and workers to save himself, Géricault’s canvas became a testament

⁹⁴ McCaskell, 225–37.

⁹⁵ Michael Lynch, “Living with Kaposi’s,” *The Body Politic* 88 (November 1982). Collection of Canadian Museum of Human Rights, Internet Archive.

to the political scandal, which also involved the French state and its imbrication with the slave trade. Art-historically, this painting has achieved a canonical status because Géricault boldly transposed a contemporary real-life narrative into the visual idiom of a traditional history painting—a very innovative gesture at the time.

Fabo’s adaptation, painted in a rough, expressive style upon a large door-like surface, similarly features a knot of vulnerable figures on a raft, now littered with trademarks of Canadiana: the national flag, a teepee, a nature-themed television program on a screen. The artist discusses these over-determined signifiers of national identity in terms of the flattening and erosion of local culture and history in his text “Nationalism / Internationalism / Regionalism” (1984). “Whatever is truly local in particular works of art today,” writes Fabo, “is usually invisible or, at best, barely discernable. Anything that can be easily seen and named is actually a cliché, one of a proliferating number of blunt signposts that have long since left local culture to join the global.”⁹⁶ The text ends poetically with a section echoing the title of his painting, “The Craft of the Contaminated”:

[w]e’re all awash in a sea of information clinging desperately to our small craft. If we don’t have the wherewithall [sic] for real survival we at least have the image of survival down pat. There’s no point arguing who of the artists here caught what from whom; etiology hardly seems to matter at this point. We are all carriers and the waves incessantly pound against our raft.⁹⁷

Indeed, the work is hardly about a nineteenth-century shipwreck, or even a late twentieth-century one; instead, the cohort, trying to ward off sea creatures and the imminence of death, are likely battling AIDS and its cultural meanings. It is an allegory. In his wide-ranging and influential theorization of postmodernism in the visual arts in

⁹⁶ Andy Fabo, “Nationalism, Internationalism, Regionalism,” *C Magazine*, Autumn 1984, 71.

⁹⁷ Fabo, 73.

Canada, art historian Mark Cheetham analyzes this painting's treatment of national identity as infected by grammars of representation, specifically the violent colonization of aboriginal Canadian culture. Yet Cheetham also asserts that in an age of epidemic the "references to contamination no longer suggest only the problems of artmaking and the making of one's personal and national identity through art. Over these meanings—now memories, perhaps, just as the *Géricault* is a memory, is laid a more pressing threat of contamination."⁹⁸

As this painting and its interpretations by the artist and Cheetham make clear, contamination was consonant with disease, the undoing of the nation state, and, on an aesthetic level, postmodernism. Recently, theorists of impurity, including Ed Cohen, Roberto Esposito, Eula Biss, and Alexis Shotwell, have explored the densely interlocking discourses of the modern body, biological immunity, and constructs of the national. For these thinkers, realizing that the world is contaminated—with cells, molecules, pathogens, and bodies constantly mingling and infecting one another—is not simply a conceptual terrain, but a grounds for constructing a new politics.⁹⁹ In this regard, Fabo's painting and corresponding text should be considered activist calls, reminders that "etiology hardly seems to matter" in a viral world in which "[w]e are all carriers."¹⁰⁰ As a matter of fact, while he was making the painting, one of his friends, an Anishinaabe man, learned that he had AIDS; shortly thereafter so would Fabo himself, his partner at the

⁹⁸ Mark A. Cheetham, *Remembering Postmodernism: Trends in Canadian Art, 1970-1990*, 2nd ed (Don Mills, Ont: Oxford University Press, [1991] 2012), 18.

⁹⁹ Ed Cohen, *A Body Worth Defending: Immunity, Biopolitics, and the Apotheosis of the Modern Body* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009); Roberto Esposito, *Terms of the Political: Community, Immunity, Biopolitics* (Roberto Esposito, *Terms of the Political: Community, Immunity, Biopolitics (Termini della politica: Comunità, immunità, biopolitica*, 2008), trans. Rhiannon Noel Welch (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013); Eula Biss, *On Immunity: An Inoculation* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2014); Alexis Shotwell, *Against Purity: Living Ethically in Compromised Times* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016).

¹⁰⁰ Fabo, "Nationalism, Internationalism, Regionalism," 73.

time, the artist Tim Jocelyn, and many others active in the Queen St. West crowd.¹⁰¹ In addressing the incipient effects of the shipwreck that was AIDS on both individual and national levels, Fabo's painting (a nostalgic medium with charged affiliations to modernism) equally captures the weathering of a fundamentally Canadian aesthetic (epitomized by the Group of Seven, a modernist group of landscape painters) in a McLuhan's technological global village. As such, the work immediately conjures up American critic Susan Sontag's observation in 1989 that "AIDS is one of the dystopian harbingers of the global village."¹⁰²

While *The Craft of the Contaminated* broaches themes of national identity as wholly inadequate to dealing with the pandemic, another early response, Greyson's videotape *Moscow Does Not Believe in Queers* (1986), cleverly embeds the virus within the fraught sexual and geopolitics of the Cold War.¹⁰³ In 1985 Greyson became the first Canadian delegate to represent an openly lesbian and gay organization, Toronto's International Gay Association Support Group, at the anti-war, anti-imperialism International Youth Festival in Moscow. The tape he produced recounts, reenacts, and reimagines some of his experiences of trying to identify and network with gay delegates from around the world, expressing solidarity with other oppressed groups, and cruising in Russian bathhouses.¹⁰⁴ But this dramatization, which features local video artist Michael Balser as Greyson's character as he casually recollects his lurid memories to a boyfriend, delves into larger political issues regarding tourist documentary, over-determined

¹⁰¹ Reid, *A Concise History of Canadian Painting*, 416.

¹⁰² Susan Sontag, *AIDS and Its Metaphors* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1989), 93.

¹⁰³ Greyson's title borrows from *Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears* (1980), an acclaimed Soviet film that won an Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film in 1981.

¹⁰⁴ For Greyson's marvelous firsthand textual account of the trip, see Tim McCaskell, "Queer behind the Curtain," *The Body Politic*, October 1985, sec. The World.

discursive frameworks of the Cold War, and gay politics and sex in Moscow and Toronto. *Moscow Does Not Believe in Queers* also probes at Soviet histories of sexual liberation through extended interviews with Bolshevik feminist revolutionary Alexandra Kollontai, played by Louise Garfield of the Clichettes. Moreover, the work concentrates on the politics of representation of AIDS in the Soviet and international media, with an emphasis on the hysterical rumor-driven treatment of AIDS-victim/monster Rock Hudson's coming out, which happened to coincide with Greyson's trip (see **Figure 2.10**). As he explained in 1992, "AIDS was integrated in the tape not as the central subject, but rather as an inevitable aspect of the parameters of gay men's identities in both the East and the West that summer."¹⁰⁵ Indeed, the storyline that circles around the conference in *glasnost* Moscow is peppered with cultural tropes from North America: tabloid headlines about Hudson, scenes from *Ice Station Zebra* (1968), a classic Cold War espionage thriller in which he stars, as well as gay pornography that highlights "unsafe" or condomless anal sex.¹⁰⁶

As art historian Richard Meyer has argued, the public revelation of Hudson's illness had little to do with the pandemic, signaling instead the "the collapse of a particular fantasy of male containment and sexual safety—a fantasy once attached to Rock Hudson's body, a fantasy once embodied by Rock Hudson's closet."¹⁰⁷

Containment as a stance against contamination, infection, and the breakdown of bodily

¹⁰⁵ John Greyson, "Still Searching," in *A Leap in the Dark: AIDS, Art, and Contemporary Cultures*, ed. Allan Klusacek and Ken Morrison (Montreal: Véhicule Press, 1992), 87.

¹⁰⁶ By 1986, AIDS activists promoted "safe sex" as a preventive measure against the spread of HIV/AIDS. For more of Greyson's commentary on this video, an unpublished keynote delivered in 2006, see John Greyson, "A Whore on Terror: Several Quodlibets," in *The Perils of Pedagogy: The Works of John Greyson*, ed. Brenda Longfellow, Scott MacKenzie, and Thomas Waugh (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013), 315–16.

¹⁰⁷ Richard Meyer, "Rock Hudson's Body," in *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. Diana Fuss (New York: Routledge, 1991), 283.

boundaries in sexual acts maps powerfully as a metaphor onto the geopolitical *glasnost* era, when Mikhail Gorbachev was just beginning to initiate Soviet openings to the West and mass media. Even before the emergence of HIV, as literature scholar Priscilla Wald has demonstrated, constructions of virality in “outbreak narratives” were steeped in Cold War associations of “alien” infiltration. She writes,

[a]s viruses became increasingly sinister and wily, sneaking into cells and assuming control of their mechanisms, external agents, such as Communists, became viral, threatening to corrupt the dissemination of information as they infiltrated the nerve center of the state. The exchange crystallized vague and often conflicting anxieties about the changes of the post-war world.¹⁰⁸

Through the iconic figure of Hudson, Greyson’s video illuminates this ideological imbrication of viral contagion, homosexuality, and Communist politics in the North American imaginary.¹⁰⁹ Nevertheless, time and again the truth value of this tourist documentary is compromised, as evident in the recreation of the Soviet footage, such as the bathhouses scenes filmed at the University of Toronto gym. Like Steele’s storytelling, Greyson’s is unreliable in its accurate depiction of personal memory, yet it still effectively interrogates the dubious veracity, as well as the shock value, of tabloid journalism. Though not AIDS activist in tone, *Moscow Does Not Believe in Queers* utilizes personal narrative that tests the boundary between fact and fiction in order to contemplate the representational politics surrounding viral cultural anxieties on both sides of the Iron Curtain. And, as in the bogus conference Greyson organized in 1980, the

¹⁰⁸ Priscilla Wald, *Contagious: Cultures, Carriers, and the Outbreak Narrative* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 159.

¹⁰⁹ Interestingly, there were also intentional misinformation campaigns about the pandemic in East Germany and the Soviet Union in the mid-1980s. These conspiracy theories claimed that the U.S. State Department manufactured HIV as a bioweapon against the USSR. See Nicoli Nattrass, *The AIDS Conspiracy: Science Fights Back* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 27–28.

videotape imagines a networked gay life, history, and political movement across national borders.

A Transnational Network

Though tackling related issues, Greyson's future work about AIDS took on a more militant character as the crisis continued. Particularly stimulated by the willful leadership of Jake Epp, the homophobic Minister of National Health and Welfare, activists in Toronto were obliged to cook up new tactics for fighting governmental, corporate, and scientific inaction. With its concentration on research and getting drugs into bodies, the New York-based direct-action activist group AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP), founded in March 1987, had manifest ripples in Toronto. In the early years of the epidemic, the community group AIDS Committee of Toronto prioritized education, prevention, and palliative care; though originally founded by activists, it was unable to focus on political advocacy as an organization with charitable status.¹¹⁰

Tuned in to current events in New York, as well as the stagnation of medical practice and governmental response in Ontario, Michael Lynch brought together a mix of old and new friends touched by AIDS, including activists, politicians, and doctors, to form AIDS ACTION NOW! (AAN!) in the fall of 1987.¹¹¹ At the time, most AIDS-related deaths were due to PCP. And while the drug pentamidine could destroy the parasite that caused the pneumonia, when injected intravenously it was too toxic for patients. Even though trials in the US showed that the drug in its aerosolized form

¹¹⁰ Ann Silversides, *AIDS Activist: Michael Lynch and the Politics of Community* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2003), 131.

¹¹¹ Tim McCaskell, "AIDS ACTION NOW! And the Aerosolized Pentamidine Trial," in *Any Other Way: How Toronto Got Queer*, ed. Stephanie Chambers et al. (Toronto: Coach House Books, 2017), 236.

delivered to patients by inhalation helped ward off PCP infection, Health Canada was slow to sanction the aerosolized pentamidine. At AAN!'s first demonstration in March of 1988, five hundred people protested the use of placebos in the double-blind pentamidine trial that was in the works despite the scientific data from American research. In simple terms, this meant that half the desperate three hundred participants in the trial were slated to go untreated and therefore to die.¹¹²

On account of this direct-action demo, which involved a vigil and the deposition of empty coffins at Toronto General Hospital (one site of the trial), the company administering the trial created a “compassionate arm” for already ill patients.¹¹³ Though this initiative was a success, AAN! next turned their attention to cultivating a system so that aerosolized pentamidine could be available to all HIV-positive people in need, including those who could not afford the drug. With the cooperation of a Toronto doctor who was able to prescribe medications in New York state, and with financial support from the AIDS Committee of Toronto and the People With AIDS Foundation, the group created information packages for wide distribution and a phone line that gave instructions on how and where to purchase the drug in Buffalo, in the state of New York, just a two-hour drive away. AAN! also coordinated a carpool across the border.¹¹⁴ This drug delivery operation is but one example of a transnational orchestration, epitomizing how AIDS activism worlded the local to counterpoise the differing national contexts vis-à-vis healthcare, science, and politics.

And art. Unlike ACT UP New York, AAN! never had official attachments to an artist group such as Gran Fury or the Testing the Limits collective. Yet it did join forces

¹¹² See also Silversides, *AIDS Activist*, 156–58.

¹¹³ McCaskell, “AIDS ACTION NOW! And the Aerosolized Pentamidine Trial,” 237.

¹¹⁴ McCaskell, 238.

with the local video art community, amplifying the alliances established after the bathhouse raids in the late 1970s and feminist anti-censorship activism in the early to mid-1980s.¹¹⁵ Since his preliminary examination of AIDS cultural politics in *Moscow Does Not Believe in Queers*, by 1988 Greyson had become one of the most renowned video artists, activists, critics, and programmers in North America who worked on gay and lesbian issues. This was largely due to his mobility, articulateness, intense productivity, and long-lasting relationships with artists, activists, and intellectuals across the Americas and Europe. Furthermore, his work carried out an aesthetic that a new generation of passionate thinkers in the academy, the art world, and the streets were in the midst of theorizing as postmodernist and queer.¹¹⁶ In addition to his very early involvement with AAN!, he was closely engaged with the video art activism around ACT UP New York through friendships with Gregg Bordowitz, Jean Carlomusto, Douglas Crimp, and others. Thanks to a part-time teaching gig at the California Institute of the Arts in Los Angeles from 1986 to 1988, he also had strong ties to peers in ACT UP LA.¹¹⁷

The cultural work within AAN! reflected Greyson's investment in transnational activism. One major event was *Angry Initiatives Defiant Strategies: Community Responses to AIDS*, a six-night exhibition of AIDS activist videotapes by independent

¹¹⁵ John Greyson, AIDS Activist History Project, interview by Alexis Shotwell and Gary Kinsman, February 9, 2014, 5, https://aidsactivisthistory.files.wordpress.com/2016/06/aahp_-_john_greyson_.pdf.

¹¹⁶ With British filmmaker Pratibha Parmar and American film scholar Martha Gever, Greyson co-edited one of the most important anthologies to probe and theorize these intersections. See Martha Gever, Pratibha Parmar, and John Greyson, eds., *Queer Looks: Perspectives on Lesbian and Gay Film and Video* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

¹¹⁷ John Greyson, AIDS Activist History Project, interview by Alexis Shotwell and Gary Kinsman, February 9, 2014, 2-3, https://aidsactivisthistory.files.wordpress.com/2016/06/aahp_-_john_greyson_.pdf. Greyson also lived in New York from roughly 1980 to 1983.

producers and artists from Canada, the US, Haiti, and the UK.¹¹⁸ Curated by Greyson and presented by AAN! and A Space in October 1988, the series hosted screenings and discussions devoted to AIDS and women, the Latin American community, pornography, the black community, and activism. The event was based on Greyson's research for compiling AIDS tapes for a Deep Dish TV program that was broadcast across 300 public-access cable stations in the US in the spring of 1988. In the program notes, Greyson proclaimed that "AIDS is a war, not only of politics and medicine, but also of representations... [A] subculture of alternative media is fighting back."¹¹⁹ Undertakings such as *Angry Initiatives Defiant Strategies* and the "AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism" issue of *October*, edited by Douglas Crimp in the winter of 1987, hold significance historically, for they are attempts to gather together and theorize artistic, activist, and intellectual responses to the pandemic.¹²⁰ That is, it is precisely such projects that laid the groundwork for a distinct, coordinated, and forceful network of AIDS cultural activism in the late 1980s across Canada, the US, the UK, and beyond.

Patient Zero and Other Stories

Concurrent with these transnational activist, artistic, and epidemiological developments in the mid to late-1980s, a range of cutting-edge scholarship was emerging at the intersection of science studies and cultural theory. Donna Haraway, Bruno Latour,

¹¹⁸ Some artists to be included were Stuart Marshall, Isaac Julien, Stashu Kybartas, Tom Kalin, Michael Balsler, Andy Fabo, the Testing the Limits Collective, Pratibha Parmar, Gregg Bordowitz, and Jean Carlomusto.

¹¹⁹ John Greyson, "Angry Initiatives Defiant Strategies," 2003-007-05.45, John Greyson Archive, Film Reference Library, Toronto International Film Festival. For more on this project, see the important essay: John Greyson, "Strategic Compromises: AIDS and Alternative Video Practices," in *Reimagining America: The Arts of Social Change*, ed. Mark O'Brien and Craig Little (Philadelphia and Santa Cruz: New Society Publishers, 1990), 60–74.

¹²⁰ Crimp discusses Greyson's *The AIDS Epidemic* in this issue of *October*.

Françoise Bastide, Simon Schaffer, Steven Shapin, and other academics adopted literary methods to analyze scientific artifacts and documents, paying close attention to the function of narrative in making science legitimate and credible in scientific and non-scientific communities. Shapin and Schaffer's *Leviathan and the Air-Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and Experimental Life* (1985) examined how facts are produced not from experiments but from their incorporations into the social and discursive conventions of science; scientific knowledge, in other words, is socially constructed, and narrative plays a key role in the creation and dissemination of reliable testimony.¹²¹ In a similar vein, Latour and Bastide argued in 1986 that scientific knowledge is not only textually constructed but also performed: “[t]he ‘things behind’ the scientific texts are... similar to the heroes of a fairy tale. All of them are defined only by their performances.”¹²² Haraway's work from these years, voiced from an emphatic feminist perspective, foregrounded how scientific discourse “is a social process of producing stories... that constitute public meanings. Science is our myth.”¹²³ According to the theorist, a useful way for feminists to uncloak the social mechanisms of scientific production, to challenge scientific stories that insist on a pure truth, is “to tell stories and to set the historical conditions for imagining plots.”¹²⁴

Haraway's call to arms provides an excellent framework for understanding how artists, activists, and intellectuals repurposed storytelling, with great panache, to intervene

¹²¹ Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 61–65.

¹²² Bruno Latour and Françoise Bastide, “Writing Science - Fact and Fiction: The Analysis of the Process of Reality Construction Through the Application of Socio-Semiotic Methods to Scientific Texts,” in *Mapping the Dynamics of Science and Technology: Sociology of Science in the Real World*, ed. Michel Callon, John Law, and Arie Rip (London: Macmillan, 1986), 63.

¹²³ Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 81. Haraway's most famous text “A Cyborg Manifesto,” first published in 1984, also discusses scientific myths.

¹²⁴ Haraway, 107.

in the proliferation of troubling scientific and popular AIDS narratives that had begun to coalesce by the mid-1980s. In tandem with these intellectual projects in science studies, scholars and activists such as Cindy Patton, Simon Watney, Paula Treichler, Douglas Crimp, James Dawes, Alexandra Juhasz, Priscilla Wald, and Roger Hallas variously scrutinized the specific ways in which the AIDS pandemic both necessitated and produced new forms of etiological and epidemiological narratives. Perhaps Dawes most succinctly expanded Treichler's memorable claim that AIDS is an "epidemic of signification" (1987) when he remarked that AIDS can only exist as

a *narrated* [sic] disease, for it is, indeed, a disease about narration, a disease about narratives of cause (God's wrath, personal irresponsibility) and counternarratives of cause (the CIA, random affliction); about narratives of etiology (poppers, a gay lifestyle) and counternarratives of etiology (shared needs, exchange of bodily fluids). But it is also a disease about the *nature* of narration, about the ethical risks and imperatives of storytelling, and about the modes and structures of language itself.¹²⁵

By 1987, the most dominant AIDS narrative, in both science and popular culture, centered on Patient Zero: a gay Québécois flight attendant for Air Canada named Gaétan Dugas, accused of bringing AIDS to the US (similar to the traveler imagined in Steele's prescient *The Scientist Tapes*). In his hugely influential and widely read book *And the Band Played On: Politics, People, and the AIDS Epidemic* (1987), American gay journalist Randy Shilts reported on the early history of the virus, and, in so doing, portrayed Dugas as a malevolent French-Canadian sociopath who, aware of his illness, sought to infect others out of vengeance. Despite conducting hundreds of interviews and promising to be objective, Shilts took many liberties with crafting a juicy, dramatized,

¹²⁵ James Dawes, "Narrating Disease: Aids, Consent, and the Ethics of Representation," *Social Text* 43 (Autumn 1995): 28. For Treichler's influential article, see Paula A. Treichler, "AIDS, Homophobia, and Biomedical Discourse: An Epidemic of Signification," *October* 43, *AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism* (1987): 31–70.

and at times completely made-up story that became the model for how the media would represent the virus. Since the book's publication, many cultural critics such as Crimp, Wald, and most recently historian of medicine Richard A. McKay have critiqued the ways in which Dugas, who died of AIDS-related illness in Québec City in 1984, was transformed into the etiological icon "Patient 0" by the CDC in 1984, and subsequently into the literary arch-villain "Patient Zero" by Shilts in 1987.¹²⁶

Storytelling, as this chapter has insisted, had pride of place as a political and aesthetic strategy along Queen St. West, and beginning in 1987, Greyson, too, was preoccupied with these representations and constructions of Patient Zero that spanned scientific research, journalism, and pop culture. As such, he started to compose experimental "fake video scripts," the first of which was published in 1988 in the "Queer Media" issue of *Square Peg*, a British gay and lesbian quarterly.¹²⁷ Titled "Requiem for Gaetan," the piece replicates the experience of flipping through television channels, a textual collage of talk-show conversation snippets, reportage, and advertisements related to Patient Zero, customs censorship, AIDS activism, Canadian celebrity culture, safer sex, art criticism, Toronto's gay video art community, and the differences between the art scenes in New York and Toronto.¹²⁸ While Dugas is not the focus, he is regularly a topic

¹²⁶ Douglas Crimp, "How to Have Promiscuity in an Epidemic," *October* 43, AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism (1987): 237–71; Douglas Crimp, *Melancholia and Moralism: Essays on AIDS and Queer Politics* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002), 117–50; Wald, *Contagious*, 213–63; McKay, "'Patient Zero': The Absence of a Patient's View of the Early North American AIDS Epidemic."

¹²⁷ Greyson also published a "fake video script" called "Sir Gay Visits New City" as a part of his participation in the inaugural exhibition at The Power Plant, *Toronto: A Play of History (Jeu d'histoire)*, curated by Louise Dompierre and Alvin Balkind from May to June, 1987. Typical of his practice, the script, which is divided into eleven scenes, contemplates the latest local political issues related to safe sex, censorship, gay liberation, gentrification, the mainstream media, and postmodern art criticism by way of resurrecting (gay?) Soviet filmmaker and theorist Sergei Eisenstein from the dead. It does not, however, attend to Patient Zero; Shilts' book was also released this year. See John Greyson, "Sir Gay Visits the New City," in *Toronto: A Play of History (Jeu d'histoire)*, ed. Louise Dompierre and Alvin Balkind (Toronto: The Power Plant, 1987), 71–75.

¹²⁸ John Greyson, "Requiem for Gaetan," *Square Peg*, 1988. John Greyson Vertical File, CLGA.

of discussion; many characters and commentators attempt to rectify his reputation and to debunk this myth. The frenetic piece is also tremendously self-referential. Not only does it feature extracts of texts for safe-sex shorts and other ditties Greyson was then in the process of developing, but it also celebrates his own network in Toronto, listing out all members of the queer and feminist arts scene. Upon its republication in the Vancouver-based magazine *Video Guide* two years later, he reflected on the very peculiar requiem:

I decided that channel-hopping as a literary device would better serve the subject, than attempting any sort of authoritative overview. The arbitrary truth of clicking through fragments of a deeply fragmented culture seemed more appropriate than trying to string together in awkward linear fashion a few of the conflicted factors that produce our culture, and culture (like yoghurt) our productions.¹²⁹

Needless to say, Greyson's views on the arbitrariness of truth, as well as narrative fragmentation as a method to highlight truth as arbitrary, feed into other intellectual trends of the day. Among the most influential Euro-American accounts of postmodernism is Jean-François Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, a text that was originally commissioned by the government of Québec, published in French in 1979, and translated into English in 1984.¹³⁰ The philosopher posits that the status of knowledge changes in postindustrial information age. For Lyotard, postmodernism involves a skepticism towards "meta" or "master" narratives, a distrust of the ways in which knowledge is produced and conveyed through the *grands récits* of modernity:

¹²⁹ John Greyson, "Requiem for Gaetan," *Video Guide*, November 1989, 8. Video Guide Archive, VIVO Media Arts Centre, Vancouver. In the 1980s, it was common for Canadian artists and filmmakers to associate narrative conventions with American cinema. In his 1985 manifesto "The Cinema We Need," Canadian filmmaker and critic Bruce Elder rails against paradigms of narrativity that he associates with American filmmaking, arguing that filmmakers in Canada should seek out their own frameworks outside of a normative narrative structure. See Bruce Elder, "A Cinema We Need," in *Documents in Canadian Film*, ed. Douglas Fetherling (Peterborough, Canada: Broadview Press Ltd., 1988), 260–71. Originally published in *The Canadian Forum* in February 1985.

¹³⁰ For more on the text's commission and reception in art history, see Pamela M. Lee, *New Games: Postmodernism After Contemporary Art* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 14.

“[t]he narrative function is losing its functors, its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages, its great goal.”¹³¹ Or, as art critic Craig Owens, following Lyotard, puts it in much plainer terms, “no one narrative can possibly account for all aspects of human experience.”¹³² To similar ends, pioneering theorists of postmodernism, such as Hayden White, Michel Foucault, Fredric Jameson, and Linda Hutcheon, have critically examined the relationship between historiography and narrative. As a field that patrols real versus imaginary events, history relies on narrative. For White, there is a key difference between narrating and narrativizing; more precisely, it is a question of

a historical discourse that narrates, on the one side, and a discourse that narrativizes, on the other; between a discourse that openly adopts a perspective that looks out on the world and reports it and a discourse that feigns to make the world speak itself and speak itself *as a story*.¹³³

Narrativization, what White sees as a dangerous conversion of experience into story, is thus a key way through which people create and impose meaning, trying to make real-life events coherent and comprehensible.¹³⁴

One compelling method that Foucault invents to deal with the historian’s tendency to write the past as a story, like a novelist, is genealogical analysis, whereby the “traditional devices for constructing a comprehensive view of history and for retracing the past as a patient and continuous development must be systemically dismantled.”¹³⁵

¹³¹ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge (La Condition postmoderne: rapport sur le savoir*, 1979), trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xxiv.

¹³² Craig Owens, “The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism,” in *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power, and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, [1983] 1992), 174.

¹³³ Hayden White, “The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality,” *Critical Inquiry* 7, no. 1 (Autumn 1980): 6–7.

¹³⁴ See also Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981), 35.

¹³⁵ Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 153.

Similarly, Hannah Arendt had an aversion to traditional historical narrativity as a window to truth due to its tendency to make the past seem unavoidable. As Seyla Benhabib thoughtfully shows, Arendt's work strove to disrupt normative chronology and to accent the disjointed; her "method of fragmentary historiography" was to "do justice to the memory of the dead by telling the story of history in terms of their failed hopes and efforts... [as well as] a way of preserving the past without being enslaved by it, in particular without having one's moral and political imagination stifled by arguments of 'historical necessity.'" ¹³⁶ Along these lines, Greyson's "Requiem for Gaetan" puts into practice a Foucauldian and Arendtian method, a genealogical and fragmentary approach to historiography that gestures at possibilities of redemption and justice in the face of catastrophe. It is surely a requiem in this sense. As opposed to Shilts' narrativizing (and problematic) invention of the character Patient Zero, Greyson's upending of normative modes of narrativity, against the march of teleology, radically undermines the processes whereby historical knowledge is produced, disseminated, and received. ¹³⁷

However, we should also locate Greyson's oeuvre within the distinctly Canadian, or at least Torontonionian, discussions about postmodernism and national identity from the late 1980s and early 1990s. Linda Hutcheon, one of the most erudite literary theorists writing from a Canadian viewpoint, sums up two ways in which postmodernism has impacted the writing of history and literature: "[i]t reinstalls historical contexts as

¹³⁶ Seyla Benhabib, "Hannah Arendt and the Redemptive Power of Narrative," *Social Research* 57, no. 1 (1990): 181–82.

¹³⁷ Another "fake video script" by Greyson is "Parma Violets for Wayland Flowers," written as a catalogue contribution to *Against Nature*, the first gay and AIDS-related art show in Los Angeles at Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions in January 1989. The work is about aesthetic strategies surrounding AIDS: what Greyson viewed as a flimsy juxtaposition between "activist" art and "dandy" art. Comprised of seven scenes, it summons to California a host of fantastic characters from across history and geography (e.g. green monkeys, Aschenbach from *Death in Venice*, Victorian explorer Sir Richard Burton), with a choose-your-own ending. See John Greyson, "Parma Violets for Wayland Flowers," in *Fluid Exchanges: Artists and Critics in the AIDS Crisis*, ed. James Miller (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 135–45.

significant and even determining, but in so doing, it problematizes the entire notion of historical knowledge.”¹³⁸ Outside of historiography, in the territory of Canadian literature, Hutcheon has likewise coined the term “historiographic metafiction,” theorized broadly as “fiction that is intensely, self-reflexively art, but is also grounded in historical, social, and political realities.”¹³⁹ For the theorist, historiographic metafiction as a postmodern posturing in Canadian literature has something to do with constructs of Canadianness. Together with scholars such as Robert Schwartzwald, Kieran Keohane, and Christine Ross, Hutcheon has emphasized the rather uncertain character of Canadian identity culturally, particularly in contrast to the behemoth to the south.¹⁴⁰

Canada is a nation founded on French and British cultures, as well as, crucially, the violent suppression and frequent erasure of several First Nations cultures. Yet by the 1980s, Canada, and Toronto in particular, were known for their affirmation of racial, ethnic, and cultural heterogeneity, or multiculturalism, as evidenced by the Official Languages Act and the Canadian Multiculturalism Act, both passed in 1988. This diversity of cultures—increasingly pronounced as identity politics became a key analytic for thinking difference in the 1980s—has arguably precluded the possibility of a

¹³⁸ Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 89.

¹³⁹ Linda Hutcheon, *The Canadian Postmodern: A Study of Contemporary Canadian Fiction* (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 1988), 13. Of course, “historiographic metafiction” might have an interesting relationship with art historian Carrie Lambert-Beatty’s frequently cited work on “parafiction,” sketched out in her 2009 article, which quickly alludes to AIDS activism. Lambert-Beatty’s proclivities are largely art-critical and theoretical; she writes, “despite their many precedents, parafictions interest me because they are so powerfully and uniquely appropriate to our historical moment—which is to say, powerfully and uniquely troubling.” See Carrie Lambert-Beatty, “Make-Believe: Parafiction and Plausibility,” *October* 129 (2009): 58. In this chapter, I hope it is evident that I am interested in the *history* of these aesthetic and intellectual developments in and outside of Toronto.

¹⁴⁰ Hutcheon, *The Canadian Postmodern*, 3–4; Robert Schwartzwald, “An/Other Canada. Another Canada? Other Canadas,” *The Massachusetts Review* 31, no. 1–2 (1990): 9–27; Kieran Keohane, *Symptoms of Canada: An Essay on Canadian Identity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997). For more on these questions in relation to video art, see Christine Ross, “Experimental Video in Canada and the Question of Identity,” in *The Visual Arts in Canada: The Twentieth Century*, ed. Anne Whitelaw, Brian Foss, and Sandra Paikowsky (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 393–411.

universal Canadian identity. As McLuhan posited in 1976, Canada lacked a national identity because “it has too many borderlines. If you want a real identity then you have to close off most of the borderlines and most of the cultural situations have to be thrown away to concentrate on a few strong positions and then you get a national identity.”¹⁴¹ As we have seen, Canada’s heterogeneity, with all its identity-related borderlines of language, geography, gender, race, and sexuality, was brought to the fore in postmodern art practices beginning in the early 1970s, especially those along Queen St. West.

In parsing some of these borderlines as they related to HIV/AIDS, Greyson’s disjointed requiem, a kernel of what would become his film *Zero Patience* (1993), constitutes a work of historiographic metafiction. It casts a critical eye on not only the Canadian and Québécois identity-constructions of Patient Zero, but also, more fundamentally, the hysterics of the mass media, the politics of blame, the misguidedness of science, the pathologization of gay desire, and the conflation of sex, disease, and death. In the AIDS pandemic, according to Greyson, “traditional cultural forms of inquiry... become much more problematic than they already were. Certainly the fragmented address of channel-hopping seems much more appropriate to address the very queer place this fag still finds himself in.”¹⁴² Fragmented narrative, in this way, became an effective metafictional strategy for countering at the nationally-inscribed etiological master narratives that accounted for the pandemic and for articulating the queer complex of circumstances, spaces, experiences, and stories it precipitated.¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ Kirwan Cox and S.M. Crean, “‘It Will Probably End the Motor Car’: An Interview with Marshall McLuhan,” *Cinema Canada*, August 1976, 27.

¹⁴² Greyson, “Requiem for Gaetan,” November 1989, 8.

¹⁴³ I am also influenced by literary and film theorist Monica Pearl’s writings on narratives of HIV/AIDS and queer hybrid textuality. While not concerned with activism per se, Pearl’s theorization of queer postmodern fiction in formally-transgressive AIDS literature can offer insights into Greyson’s work too.

World Making in Montreal, or Performing a Global Queer Epistemology

To prepare for their infiltration of the Fifth International AIDS Conference in Montreal in June 1989, at the time the largest medical conference in history, AAN! worked closely with ACT UP in New York to write *Le Manifeste de Montréal*, a declaration of the Universal Rights and Needs of People Living with HIV (see **Figure 2.11**). The preamble read: “HIV disease (infection with HIV with or without symptoms) is a worldwide epidemic affecting every country. People are infected, sick and struggling to stay alive. Their voices must be heard and their special needs met.”¹⁴⁴ Published in English, French, and Spanish, the manifesto put forward three chief demands: (1) governments and health organizations must make accessible and available treatments to those living with HIV; (2) governments must understand that “casual contact” (e.g. kissing) does not lead to viral transmission; and (3) that “an international code must acknowledge and preserve the humanity of people with HIV disease”; this encompassed anti-discrimination legislation, participation in decision-making, drug access, anonymous and confidential testing, housing opportunities, restriction-less border-crossing and immigration, an absence of mandatory testing or quarantine, and the right to have children.¹⁴⁵

At this point in the history of the pandemic, many activists were becoming fluent in AIDS science and its institutions, overwhelmingly troubling the line between scientific expert and lay patient. As sociologist of science Steven Epstein has shown, a battle was raging over how biomedical certainty was constructed and deconstructed, how

See Monica Pearl, *AIDS Literature and Gay Identity: The Literature of Loss* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 55.

¹⁴⁴ ACT UP and AIDS ACTION NOW!, “Le manifeste de Montréal,” 1989, AIDS Activist History Project, <http://aidsactivisthistory.omeka.net/items/show/67>.

¹⁴⁵ ACT UP and AIDS ACTION NOW!

knowledge about AIDS was performed.¹⁴⁶ Generally speaking, science itself for activists such as those in AAN! was no longer something to be simply critiqued and parodied, as in Steele's *The Scientist Tapes*, but something to be critically grappled with based on experiences and practicalities.¹⁴⁷ Harding's concurrent feminist writings on "strong objectivity" encapsulate the attitudes of many AIDS activists who opposed the pharmaceutical industrial complex, the homophobic, racist, and sexist undercurrents in healthcare, and the governmental deficiency in research funding, while also maintaining a hopeful investment in biomedical research and knowledge.

In addition to releasing this unparalleled manifesto that claimed to speak for HIV-positive people around the world—even if it clearly didn't—AAN! and ACT UP had plans to bus in dozens of protesters, to interlace with Montreal's newly-formed AIDS activist group Réaction SIDA, and to network with other health activists and representatives from AIDS service groups from across the country and the world. At earlier iterations of international AIDS conferences (yearly affairs beginning in 1985), the focus was on medical research and pharmaceutical marketing; individuals living with HIV/AIDS were, according to McCaskell, the chair and co-founder of AAN!, "little more than medical exhibits or faceless statistics."¹⁴⁸ Beforehand in Toronto, Greyson designed and coordinated a catchy graphic campaign of tall protest signs, which were transported to Montreal, smuggled into the convention center in suitcases, and then assembled inside.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ Steven Epstein, *Impure Science: AIDS, Activism, and the Politics of Knowledge* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 2.

¹⁴⁷ McCaskell, interview.

¹⁴⁸ McCaskell, *Queer Progress: From Homophobia to Homonationalism*, 258.

¹⁴⁹ Greyson, AIDS Activist History Project, 3.

Though several demonstrations were planned throughout the week-long event, the first rally at the opening ceremony, which was supposed to feature opening remarks from Prime Minister Mulroney and Zambian president Kenneth Kaunda, all of a sudden turned highly theatrical. ACT UP activists, without warning their Toronto counterparts, stormed past security barriers, at which point the AAN! crew led the three hundred protestors up the escalators, into the main conference arena, and then on stage (see **Figure 2.12**). In front of the twelve thousand dumbstruck delegates, who were scientists, psychiatrists, condom entrepreneurs, politicians, and drug company representatives, the activists chanted with vigor amid a sea of Greyson's colorful agitprop bilingual banners that announced "THE WORLD IS SICK... OF AIDS HYSTERIA... OF YOUR QUARANTINES... LE MONDE EST TANNÉ... DE TA NÉGLIGENCE... DU GÉNOCIDE GOUVERNEMENTAL..." In the swarm onstage, the signs intermixed with the iconic SILENCE=DEATH posters from New York, where they were designed by a collective in 1987. After thirty minutes of heartfelt protest, the microphones were finally turned on for the activists to speak. As the chair of the main Canadian group, McCaskell improvised a speech (see **Figure 2.13**):

on behalf of people living with AIDS in Canada and around the world, I would like to officially open the Fifth International Conference on AIDS... After five years in office, Brian Mulroney, Prime Minister of Canada, had promised us, had promised the world, that today was the first time in public he was going to stand up and say the "A word," or if he was speaking in French, the "S word." We think that not only is that unprecedented in terms of Brian Mulroney's record, but it also has to be an unprecedented piece of historical hypocrisy given the record of the Mulroney government around AIDS.¹⁵⁰

Literary theorist Thomas Keenan has ruminated on this moment via a sophisticated reading of Austinian performance theory, arguing that McCaskell's act of "officially"

¹⁵⁰ Tim McCaskell, quoted in John Greyson, *The World Is Sick (Sic)* (Video Out, 1989).

opening the conference “not only failed to respect the context but outright changed it: accomplishing the speech act also meant transforming the conditions in which it was spoken and received, thus transforming the political context of AIDS discourse and science.”¹⁵¹ Indeed, by many accounts, this gripping and performative intervention that foregrounded the experience of actually living with AIDS changed the course of not only international AIDS conferences, but also research and activism on a global scale.

American Ron Goldberg of ACT UP remembered:

it was only when we refused to leave the auditorium and instead parked ourselves in the VIP section that the crowd realized that our action was more than just a symbolic protest. Despite threats and rumors of a potential “international incident,” we remained in our seats, alternatively chanting and cheering, and giving notice that PWAs [People With AIDS] were “inside” the conference to stay. From that point on in the crisis, researchers would have to make extra room at the table for PWAs and their advocates.¹⁵²

Besides supplying the visuals and filming the opening spectacle, Greyson, along with his partner Colin Campbell, scurried around interviewing as many grassroots organizers, profiteering pharmaceutical executives, healthcare workers, educators, and researchers as were willing to talk. Activists of diverse backgrounds in terms of gender, sexuality, race, and nationality addressed subject matters that ranged from safe sex to sex work, from the pharmaceutical industry to the latest therapies, from drug users’ needs to racism in healthcare. This raw footage forms the core of his experimental documentary, completed some months later and titled *The World is Sick (sic)* (see **Figure 2.14**).

Ridiculing the norms of televised news, Greyson casts drag queen David Roche as a sassy news reporter who, while narrating the conference events, gets kidnapped and

¹⁵¹ Thomas Keenan, “Drift: Politics and the Simulation of Real Life,” *Grey Room* 21 (2005): 99.

¹⁵² Ron Goldberg, “Conference Call: When PWAs First Sat at the High Table,” *POZ*, June 1998, <http://www.actupny.org/documents/montreal.html>.

indoctrinated by AIDS activists.¹⁵³ In contrast to the conference itself, *The World is Sick (sic)* privileges the testimony, opinions, and knowledge of AIDS activists and people living with HIV from Trinidad, South Africa, Canada, the US, the UK, Australia, and Thailand.

As a matter of fact, the tape commences with a voiceover disclaimer by Greyson: “there are many different accounts of what happened in Montreal. This unauthorized Toronto-centric version should be viewed with caution.” In this way, Greyson acknowledges not only his own local rootedness, or the inevitable limits of his worldview, but also the multiplicity of stories and experiences occasioned by this historical event. By constructing a fictional narrative around a real-life event, Greyson blurs the boundaries of art and life, which is furthermore epitomized by the self-referential placards he created. The video is an attempt to keep track of the conglomeration of activist responses to the virus around the world, to lay out the network of community organizers, artists, critics, journalists, educators, and others that had materialized. It is also, I believe, a performative enactment of queer world making through storytelling, one that can be traced back to the zeitgeist of the early 1970s along Queen St. West in the artwork of General Idea, Steele, Campbell, and others—figures who first complicated the opposition between performativity and identity-based experience. This alternative art scene witnessed a great deal of political and cultural transformations over these years, from the women’s movement to gay liberation to anti-censorship organizing, but its urgent interfacing with the AIDS crisis are what most

¹⁵³ For more on the tape, see Cindy Patton, “Buggering John Greyson,” in *The Perils of Pedagogy: The Works of John Greyson*, ed. Brenda Longfellow, Scott MacKenzie, and Thomas Waugh (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2013), 73–75.

directly inaugurated a markedly global way of thinking about and doing cultural activism on the cusp of the 1990s.

This project of world making through storytelling signals nothing less than a queer epistemology. I began this chapter with Sedgwick's prelude to her theorization of reparative reading, an alternative mode of critical inquiry formulated against the intellectual domination of what philosopher Paul Ricoeur famously termed "the hermeneutics of suspicion" in the 1960s.¹⁵⁴ Though an invaluable and necessary operation in many ways, the "hermeneutics of suspicion" galloping through so much deconstructionist, poststructuralist, and postmodernist thinking lays bare a paranoia, according to Sedgwick. She alleges that Ricoeur's criticism "may have made it less rather than more possible to unpack the local, contingent relations between any given piece of knowledge and its narrative/epistemological entailments for the seeker, knower, or teller."¹⁵⁵ Reparative inquiry contrasts with the stiff narrative inclinations of a paranoid hermeneutics; it recognizes the fact that knowledge, like epidemiology, is performative and embedded, not only in webs of local and global historical forces, but also, importantly, in webs of historical possibility. In the end, Sedgwick imparts that what "we can best learn from such [reparative] practices are, perhaps, the many ways selves and communities succeed in extracting sustenance from the objects of a culture—even of a culture whose avowed desire has often been not to sustain them."¹⁵⁶ Although this

¹⁵⁴ See Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation (De l'interprétation. Essai sur Sigmund Freud)*, 1965), trans. Denis Savage (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970). It is important to understand that Sedgwick and Patton were also part of this increasingly transnational network of activists, artists, and intellectuals. Michael Lynch, the poet, professor, and co-founder of AAN!, was actually Sedgwick's best friend, and she memorialized him in one of her most well-known texts, a transgressive and heartbreaking obituary called "White Glasses." See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993).

¹⁵⁵ Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 124.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 150–51.

dissertation is obliged to proceed in linear manner, to devise, historicize, narrate, and perform other stories about sustenance from other cultural contexts, let's bear in mind her critique.

Chapter Three

A Diasporic Virus: The Worlding of Black and Queer Cultural Resistance in London

In the fall of 1987, a small number of artists and activists gathered together at the London Lesbian and Gay Centre for the inaugural meeting of what would soon become known as the AIDS and Photography group. What drove each person to attend was fury about the AIDS pandemic and the many crises it provoked, as well as a commitment to put to use their disparate artistic, intellectual, and activist toolsets in the escalating war against misinformation, apathy, homophobia, racism, and xenophobia. Most recently, the activists were alarmed by the proposed Section 28 of the Local Government; this homophobic legal amendment, which would be enacted the following year, dictated that no local authority in England, Wales, or Scotland could “intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality” or “promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship.”¹ Gay and lesbian activists anticipated that Section 28 would have debilitating effects on AIDS activism and awareness efforts in the United Kingdom, especially on its most vulnerable gay and black communities. For the cultural practitioners who convened at the Lesbian and Gay Centre, the virus was the common denominator of these intensifying and interlinked public phenomena in governmental policy and throughout popular culture. Moreover, art and image-making were indispensable instruments for waging their activist campaigns at full throttle, for intervening in the interstices of the status quo.²

¹ “Local Government Act,” IV 9 § 28 (1988), 27.

² This opening vignette incorporates research from several sources. See Tessa Boffin and Sunil Gupta, “Introduction,” in *Ecstatic Antibodies: Resisting the AIDS Mythology*, ed. Tessa Boffin and Sunil Gupta

Many participants were already close friends, with common social circles through the AIDS activist and scholar Simon Watney, the photography collective and gallery Camerawork, the AIDS charity the Terrence Higgins Trust, and the art school of the Polytechnic of Central London. Others, however, were not previously acquainted. For instance, it was at this gathering that photographers Sunil Gupta and Tessa Boffin first met and quickly became close friends. Almost immediately Gupta, a black Indian-born Canadian gay man, and Boffin, a white British lesbian, embarked on a massive curatorial project about AIDS, along with their friend Jean Fraser (who would drop out after its conceptual stage).³ One night Gupta and Boffin went to a local gay bar with a paper and pencil, got drunk, and thought up possible names for the endeavor. What they agreed on was “Ecstatic Antibodies.” According to Gupta, the name was chosen due to its strong association with biomedicine and resistance, as well as its implied reframing of sex and pleasure, in contrast to the pervasive governmental and cultural fear-mongering. “Ecstatic” also was intended to reference nineteenth-century constructs about women, hysteria, sex, and promiscuity; Boffin and Gupta viewed the “loose women” of the past as brave forerunners to lesbians, who were direly under-represented in the media and policy when it came to existent efforts of HIV/AIDS education and prevention.⁴

Their exhibition *Ecstatic Antibodies: Resisting the AIDS Mythology* was at once anomalous in the global history of AIDS activism and entirely representative of the thickening cultural arena of black and queer, and black queer, activism in 1980s London. Coinciding with a highly significant book of the same name, the show traveled between

(London: Rivers Oram Press, 1990), 1–6; Simon Watney, interview by Jackson Davidow, August 1, 2017; Sunil Gupta, interview by Jackson Davidow, August 19, 2017.

³ Jean Fraser, a lesbian photographer who had previously collaborated with Gupta, was also originally part of the curatorial team. Boffin and Gupta, “Introduction,” 1.

⁴ Sunil Gupta, personal email communication to Jackson Davidow, March 3, 2019.

1990 and 1993 to seven venues in the UK, with further stops in Montreal, Canada, and Dublin, Ireland. During the early 1990s, it was, to my knowledge, the largest and most widely toured AIDS-related curatorial effort to date, globally.⁵ Most of all, what distinguished *Ecstatic Antibodies* from influential shows such as *AIDS: The Artists' Response* (1989), curated by Jan Zita Grover at Ohio State University in the United States, was its deliberate emphasis on art produced by black people, women, and lesbians. The exhibition featured work, much of which was freshly commissioned, by artists based in Britain (even if not all were British nationals): Emily Anderson, Allan deSouza, Rotimi Fani-Kayode and Alex Hirst, Joy Gregory, Lynn Hewett, Isaac Julien, the Lesbian & Gay Media Group, Nicholas Lowe, Stuart Marshall, Pratibha Parmar, and David Ruffell, as well as its curators Boffin and Gupta.⁶ *Ecstatic Antibodies* was difficult to place—and remains quite overlooked in scholarship—because it was both a traveling show and a serious book project, because it brought together photography, video, and other media (rarely exhibited together at the time), and because it was unmistakably British yet brazenly global in its preoccupations. By integrating local queer and black cultural politics, *Ecstatic Antibodies* moreover cemented an intersectional and global

⁵ *Ecstatic Antibodies: Resisting the AIDS Mythology* was organized by the Impressions Gallery in York, where it started its tour. Other venues were the Ikon Gallery (Birmingham), Chapter Arts Centre (Cardiff), Battersea Arts Centre (London), Street Level (Glasgow), La Maison de la culture (Montreal), Worcester Health Authority (Worcester), Gallery of Photography (Dublin), and Lighthouse Media Centre (Wolverhampton). For a full list of the venues on the tour, see letter from Stefan Sadofski (Education/Touring Officer of the Impressions Gallery) to Alan de Souza [sic; Allan deSouza is the correct spelling], February 18, 1994, box 1 of 2, folder 1 of 8, IMP/1/208, Impressions Gallery Archive, Insight Archives, National Science and Media Museum, Bradford, United Kingdom (hereafter Impressions Gallery Archive).

⁶ In addition to contributions by most of these practitioners, the book contained essays and text-based projects by Simon Watney, Mandy Merck, Mehboob Dada, Nicola Field, S. R. Tobe, Margot Farnham, Jeffrey Weeks, and Robert McGrath.

framework for AIDS activism and artistic discourse, one that had been richly and uniquely developing in London over the previous decade.⁷

Among the artwork created for the exhibition was an important photographic series by Fani-Kayode, a black Nigerian-British photographer who died in December 1989, just before Boffin and Gupta's exhibition first opened at the Impressions Gallery in York in January 1990.⁸ The title of the series was *Ecstatic Antibodies*, after the exhibition for which it was produced.⁹ One of its most iconic images is *The Golden Phallus* (1989), which was also featured on the cover of the book version of *Ecstatic Antibodies* (1990).¹⁰ Fani-Kayode's photograph shows a muscular black man hunching over, completely nude, save for a white *Commedia dell'Arte*-style mask; his phallus, luminously painted gold, bisects and is held erect by a taut white string (see **Figure 3.1**). Often interpreted by critics and scholars as a work about black male sexuality, racial fetishism, and resilient

⁷ I use the term "intersectional" with great caution because it was heavily associated with American legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, who coined the concept in 1989 as a way to think about race and sex together. See Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1989, 139–67; Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991): 1241–99. For a critical genealogy of intersectionality, see Britney Cooper, "Intersectionality," in *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory*, ed. Lisa Disch and Mary Hawkesworth (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 385–406. Intersectionality as an approach to conceptualizing identity did not take off fully in the field of British cultural studies, which, as this chapter will show, already had its own intellectual scaffolding for the intricacies of race, gender, sexuality, nationality, and class. Gupta and Boffin developed their exhibition at the same time as Crenshaw was beginning to theorize intersectionality in legal journals in the United States; they would not have been familiar with her work. As I discuss very localized British intellectual, artistic, and political debates, my usage of "intersectional" is out of convenience: to gesture at a wider breakdown of an essentialist subject, and to historicize a growing awareness that identity is variously structured by race, class, gender, and sexuality in relation to power systems.

⁸ On paper, the artist died of unexpected heart failure after suffering from meningitis; he was not deemed HIV-positive. For more his cause of death, and the uncertainty surrounding it, see W. Ian Bourland, *Bloodflowers: Rotimi Fani-Kayode, Photography, and the 1980s* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 209–10.

⁹ Scholarship on Fani-Kayode seems to have a working assumption that the artist originated the name and term "Ecstatic Antibodies" himself, without fully contextualizing it within Boffin and Gupta's exhibition. For instance, see, Evan Moffitt, "Rotimi Fani-Kayode's Ecstatic Antibodies," *Transition* 118 (2015): 74–86; Bourland, *Bloodflowers: Rotimi Fani-Kayode, Photography, and the 1980s*, 215. It should also be noted that Fani-Kayode was one of Gupta's best friends. Gupta, interview.

¹⁰ *The Golden Phallus* is cropped for the book's cover so that the phallus, ironically, is obscured from view.

desire in the age of AIDS, *The Golden Phallus* meticulously draws on a mix of transcultural visual references, from the European Baroque to Yoruba culture to white American photographer Robert Mapplethorpe's controversial and exploitative erotic images of black men.¹¹ In their contribution to the edited book *Ecstatic Antibodies*, Fani-Kayode and his partner and sometimes collaborator Alex Hirst, a white British writer, interpreted the former's artistic practice in light of the term "ecstatic antibodies": "[w]e aim to produce spiritual antibodies to HIV. There is nothing easy or straightforward about it."¹²

In this chapter, I extend my epidemiological approach to London, this time with an emphasis on identifying the development of antibodies, or pinpointing moments of resistance made visible in the black and queer cultural responses to HIV/AIDS. Generated to counteract foreign antigens, an antibody is a blood protein that works to fight substances such as viruses and pathogenic bacteria in the blood by chemically combining with them. Antibodies play an essential part in the self-regulating human immune system and, likewise, in Roberto Esposito's biologically-entrenched theorization of the immunitary paradigm that co-conceives community and immunity as a political and ethical way to think about individuality and otherness.¹³ HIV—literally, the Human

¹¹ For instance, see Kobena Mercer, "Mortal Coil: Eros and Diaspora in the Photographs of Rotimi Fani-Kayode," in *Travel & See: Black Diaspora Art Practices since the 1980s* (Durham: Duke University Press, [1999] 2016), 118–22; Moffitt, "Rotimi Fani-Kayode's Ecstatic Antibodies," 76–81.

¹² Rotimi Fani-Kayode and Alex Hirst, "Metaphysick: Every Moment Counts," in *Ecstatic Antibodies: Resisting the AIDS Mythology*, ed. Tessa Boffin and Sunil Gupta (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1990), 78.

¹³ For more Esposito's consideration of antibodies and immunity, see Roberto Esposito, "Community, Immunity, Biopolitics," trans. Zakiya Hanafi, *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 18, no. 3 (2013): 84–85; Roberto Esposito, *Terms of the Political: Community, Immunity, Biopolitics (Termini della politica: Comunità, immunità, biopolitica)*, 2008), trans. Rhiannon Noel Welch (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 42–43. See also Donna Haraway and Emily Martin's very important work on the immune system and immunology. Donna J. Haraway, "The Biopolitics of Postmodern Bodies: Determinations of Self in Immune System Discourse," *Differences* 1, no. 1 (1989): 3–44; Emily Martin, *Flexible Bodies: Tracking Immunity in American Culture--from the Days of Polio to the Age of AIDS* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994).

Immunodeficiency Syndrome—entails the weakening of the immune system in such a way that the body progressively becomes unable to resist infection. As Boffin and Gupta’s show, and Fani-Kayode and Hirst’s text together suggest, arts practices and discourse were understood to be effective antibodies and vectors of resistance.

For example, a few months before *Ecstatic Antibodies* was slated to open in October 1990 at the Viewpoint Gallery in Salford, a city in Greater Manchester, the local city council that funded the gallery called for the show’s cancellation. Though the governing body gave no particular reasons for this change, it was obvious to the organizers of *Ecstatic Antibodies* that the incident was due to pressures surrounding Section 28.¹⁴ This act of censorship was met with alarm from AIDS, queer, feminist, and anti-censorship activists, who were also concerned that other galleries would follow this example by cancelling the show. At the opening of its replacement show, *The Mix* (featuring mixed-media works by local artists) on October 9, activists from the Manchester branch of the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP)—a grassroots group that had its origins in New York City in 1987—held a protest.

A photograph by activist Andy Gardner shows three activists in front of the mixed-media works currently on display at the Viewpoint Gallery (see **Figure 3.2**). The central figure, whose back is turned towards the viewer, wears an ACT UP protest sign that reads “ignorance=fear, silence=death, action is life.” Flanking this person are two men who also have body signs, which instead display reproduced images of two works that would have been up on the gallery walls, had the local council not censored *Ecstatic Antibodies*.

¹⁴ “Council Accused of Censorship,” *British Journal of Photography*, September 20, 1990. Box 2 of 2, folder 5 of 8, IMP/1/208, Impressions Gallery Archive. See also Tessa Boffin and Sunil Gupta, Press Release for *Ecstatic Antibodies: Resisting the AIDS Mythology*, September 5, 1990, Box 2 of 2, folder 5 of 8, IMP/1/208, Impressions Gallery Archive.

On the left, we see an protester, who appears to be black, with a copy of Fani-Kayode's *The Golden Phallus*, and on the right a white activist with a reproduction of a ghoulish expressionistic painting by David Ruffell.¹⁵ "CANCELLED" is crudely stamped across the images. Even as both artists had died in the past year, the activists tenaciously animated their unwelcome artworks as ecstatic antibodies in the body politic of the nation state, as public enactments of resistance and memorialization.

This chapter posits that British cultural AIDS activism, which arguably reached its pinnacle at the *Ecstatic Antibodies* exhibition in the early 1990s, was a formative meeting ground for local black and queer arts practices and discourses during the 1980s. In the context of the pandemic, the frequent synergies between these spheres also heralded a particular vision of queer black globality. In 2014 the black (straight) cultural theorist Paul Gilroy reflected on the impact of HIV/AIDS on his extended milieu in 1980s London:

[t]he epiphany of a new disease transformed everything. It worlded the local, generating new alliances and enemies, prompting new varieties of care and fear, danger and responsibility...[I]t produced new ways of thinking about politics and culture that could not be confined to their melancholic origins, as well as a preference for political mobilization over the work of mourning.¹⁶

Motivated by Gilroy's remark, this chapter contends that HIV/AIDS imprinted new meanings onto visual and intellectual articulations of queerness and the black diaspora. The pandemic, I argue, sharpened modes of identification, expression, and mobilization that were nascent in London in the early 1980s. Diaspora, queerness, and virality materialized as intertwined theoretical terms that had both spatial and political

¹⁵ In fact, Boffin and Gupta dedicate the *Ecstatic Antibodies* book to David Ruffell. Likely, Fani-Kayode had not yet passed away when the book went to press.

¹⁶ Paul Gilroy, "Bad to Worse," in *Isaac Julien: Riot*, by Isaac Julien (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2014), 44.

undercurrents—concepts that also complicated notions of purity, origins, and essence. Collectively, the terms applied pressure to constructs of the national by exposing a global field of inquiry and longing. In particular, the homophobic, racist, and xenophobic discourses that widely framed AIDS as a gay, black, and African disease stoked nuanced, more intersectional debates on identity and culture in a global postmodern era. Thanks, in part, to the virus, rising theorizations of postmodernism rested on a multiplicity of the marginal and resisted essentialist models of difference. As the cultural practitioners parsed these confluences of identity and experience in the face of a pandemic, their work also reflected the heightened stakes of survival, of the very possibility of imagining a future. In this way, the project of visually representing the history of the queer black Atlantic in global terms became inseparable from historicizing their contemporary local milieu.

To make this set of arguments, I draw on archival research, oral history interviews, and secondary-source works to contextualize and analyze artworks, exhibitions, and writings by a network of cultural practitioners. In addition to those already encountered in *Ecstatic Antibodies*—Gupta, Boffin, Fani-Kayode, and Hirst—I consider the work and activities of Isaac Julien, Kobena Mercer, Pratibha Parmar, Simon Watney, Stuart Hall, and Paul Gilroy.¹⁷ Whereas all of these individuals were queer (with the exception of Hall and Gilroy), their racial identities varied; interracial relationships and collaborations were indeed critical to the development of pioneering cultural works. My analysis thus

¹⁷I have interviewed Sunil Gupta, Pratibha Parmar, and Simon Watney as part of my research for this chapter. Kobena Mercer declined an interview with me on June 19, 2017. When I asked him to reconsider my request in December 2018, he agreed to meet with me in the future, yet subsequently stopped responding to my emails. He also expressed to me that he was not involved in AIDS activism. Kobena Mercer, personal email correspondence to Jackson Davidow, December 3, 2018. I have likewise been trying to interview Isaac Julien since 2017. While we have been in contact, it has not been possible to set up a time as of the submission of this thesis in early August 2019.

highlights how AIDS became a fundamentally intersectional issue that hybridized identities, media, representations, and political movements, in ways that newly fertilized and worlded black and queer art.

As I attempt to reframe accounts of black and queer British cultural production by placing an emphasis on the AIDS pandemic, it is helpful to look to the notion of a “problem-space,” introduced by American cultural theorist David Scott in his book *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (2004). More than a discursive context, a problem-space is “an ensemble of questions and answers around which a horizon of identifiable stakes (conceptual as well as ideological-political stakes) hangs.”¹⁸ Central to this theorization is that problem-spaces are firmly embedded in particular historical moments. In order to comprehend historical problems, Scott argues that it is the historian’s job to illuminate the space around those problems, that is, to study the past by identifying the types of questions and answers that people in a discursive context were conscripted to give. Such an approach can lay bare the discrepancies between temporalities while also drawing attention to the most pronounced critical issues of the day. Hall, a founder of cultural studies, turned to Scott’s concept to sketch out a genealogy of black British art and politics in his lecture “Black Diaspora Artists in Britain: Three ‘Moments’ in Post-war History” (2004).¹⁹ As problem-spaces and their artistic dimensions change with time, he elaborates, the horizon of possible futures that

¹⁸ David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 4.

¹⁹ Stuart Hall’s Raphael Samuel Memorial Lecture was part of the “Black Diaspora Artists in Britain, Past and Present” conference at the University of East London in November 2004. *History Workshop Journal* published the transcript two years later.

previous generations envisaged becomes impossible for their successors to “create in, *see* or *represent* in the same way.”²⁰

Scott’s concept of problem-space guides my thinking as I set out to demonstrate that the AIDS pandemic was one crucial historical force that pushed cultural practitioners in London to respond, to formulate questions and answers, and, in so doing, to join in a transnational social movement. This notion also helps me situate the particular historiography of black and black queer cultural politics in Britain, because, so far, much of this history has been written and interpreted by its first-hand participants, especially Mercer and Eddie Chambers.²¹ As art historian Dorothy Price has noted, those directly involved in discourses of black British art such as Mercer, Chambers, Gilroy, Hall, Rasheed Araeen, and Gilane Tawadros had a strong “archival impulse” as early as the late 1980s and early 1990s.²² Such critics have also been at the forefront of revitalizing, historicizing, and archiving their own work, as evident by the conference “The Living Archive” (1997) at the Tate Gallery and the conference “Shades of Black” (2001) at

²⁰ Stuart Hall, “Black Diaspora Artists in Britain: Three ‘Moments’ in Post-War History,” *History Workshop Journal* 61 (Spring 2006): 4. Italics used in the original text.

²¹ See Kobena Mercer, *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Kobena Mercer, *Travel & See: Black Diaspora Art Practices since the 1980s* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016); Eddie Chambers, *Things Done Change: The Cultural Politics of Recent Black Artists in Britain* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2012); Eddie Chambers, *Black Artists in British Art: A History from 1950 to the Present* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2014); Eddie Chambers, *Roots and Culture: Cultural Politics in the Making of Black Britain* (London New York: I.B. Tauris, 2017). For art-historical accounts of British black art by figures with more of a critical and temporal distance, see Mora J. Beauchamp-Byrd, “London Bridge: Late Twentieth Century British Art and the Routes Of ‘National Culture,’” in *Transforming the Crown: African, Asian, and Caribbean Artists in Britain, 1966-1996*, ed. Mora J. Beauchamp-Byrd and M. Franklin Sirmans (New York: The Franklin H. Williams Caribbean Cultural Center, 1997), 16–45; Steven Nelson, “Diaspora: Multiple Practices, Multiple Worldviews,” in *Companion to Contemporary Art Since 1945*, ed. Amelia Jones (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 296–316; Dorothy Rowe, “Retrieving, Remapping, and Rewriting Histories of British Art: Lubaina Humid’s ‘Revenge,’” ed. Dana Arnold and David Peters Corbett (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishing, 2013), 289–314; Sophie Orlando, *British Black Art: Debates on the Western Art History*, trans. Charles La Via (Paris: Les presses du réel, 2016); Leon Wainwright, *Phenomenal Difference: A Philosophy of Black British Art* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017).

²² Rowe, “Retrieving, Remapping, and Rewriting Histories of British Art: Lubaina Humid’s ‘Revenge,’” 290. These debates often occurred in the pages of the journal *Third Text*, launched in London in 1987 by artist Rasheed Araeen.

Duke University.²³ These reassessments are invaluable resources, yet they are also symptomatic of the complexity of how a “living archive” might congeal into dominant narratives. As such, I am inclined to regard texts by participants as primary-source material, even if composed many years after the period they are discussing.

As to histories of black queer British art, Fani-Kayode has been the focal point in vital scholarship by Mercer, Mark Sealy, Steven Nelson, Mark A. Reid, Evan Moffitt, and W. Ian Bourland.²⁴ Meanwhile, Julien’s early work related to HIV/AIDS such as *This Is Not An AIDS Advertisement* (1987), *Looking for Langston* (1989), and *The Attendant* (1993)—films that catapulted the artist to fame in the global artworld—are staples of the queer cinematic canon. *Looking for Langston*, a haunting meditation on Langston Hughes and the Harlem Renaissance, is possibly written about more than any other work of queer cinema. Yet such texts are by critics and theorists rather than historians who thoroughly address the problem-space, so to say, of the work’s emergence.²⁵ Similarly, histories of white queer British art and video from the 1980s and 1990s center on the oeuvre of

²³ Proceedings from “The Living Archive” conference were published in *Third Text* 15, no. 54 (Spring 2001). And the Duke conference formed the basis of David A. Bailey, Ian Baucom, and Sonia Boyce, eds., *Shades of Black: Assembling Black Arts in 1980s Britain* (Durham: Duke University Press, in collaboration with the Institute of International Visual Arts and the African and Asian Visual Artists’ Archive, 2005).

²⁴ Mercer, “Mortal Coil: Eros and Diaspora in the Photographs of Rotimi Fani-Kayode”; Mark Sealy and Jean Loup Pivin, eds., *Rotimi Fani-Kayode & Alex Hirst* (London: Autograph, 1996); Steven Nelson, “Transgressive Transcendence in the Photographs of Rotimi Fani-Kayode,” *Art Journal* 64, no. 1 (2005): 4–19; Mark A. Reid, “Postnegritude Reappropriation and the Black Male Nude: The Photography of Rotimi Fani-Kayode,” in *The Passionate Camera: Photography and Bodies of Desire*, ed. Deborah Bright (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 216–28; Moffitt, “Rotimi Fani-Kayode’s Ecstatic Antibodies”; Bourland, *Bloodflowers: Rotimi Fani-Kayode, Photography, and the 1980s*.

²⁵ A few key texts about *Looking for Langston* include Henry Louis Gates, Jr., “The Black Man’s Burden,” in *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*, ed. Michael Warner (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 230–38; Kaja Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 83–121; José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 57–74; John Hill, *British Cinema in the 1980’s: Issues and Themes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 219–40; David S. Marriott, *Haunted Life: Visual Culture and Black Modernity* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 106–32.

specific author figures, particularly Derek Jarman and Stuart Marshall.²⁶ Indebted to this assortment of astute scholarship and criticism, my chapter subjects the problem-space of black and queer British cultural production to the viral and, in so doing, hopes to initiate a fuller dialogue between the worlds of photography, video, activism, and criticism. Like the rest of this dissertation, it tries to inch away from a monographic approach, opting instead for a more networked and decentralized epidemiological narrative.

Blackness, Culture, and Contagion in Postwar Britain

Before discussing these developments around HIV/AIDS in the 1980s, a deeper historical context is needed to set the stage for new subjectivities, political movements, and cultural forms in postwar Britain. As such, it is necessary to examine the shifting historical terrains of race, class, gender, and sexuality as overlapping elements of British national identity in order to comprehend the creative responses to HIV/AIDS in the 1980s. Long before the AIDS pandemic, the white British national imaginary likened both blackness and homosexuality to contagious diseases that put the whole body politic at risk of collapse. According to Roberto Esposito, this tendency is akin to when the immunitary paradigm, intended to preserve individual life, gives way to a response that works to quell difference in the name of a specific people: “[o]nce the immunitary paradigm is combined with the *dispositifs* of nationalism and then racism, the paradigm becomes what determines and orders the destruction of life.”²⁷ In light of the everyday

²⁶ See, for instance, Jim Ellis, *Derek Jarman's Angelic Conversations* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009); Niall Richardson, *The Queer Cinema of Derek Jarman* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009); Aimar Arriola, “Touching What Does Not Yet Exist: Stuart Marshall and the HIV/AIDS Archive,” *Afterall* 41, no. 1 (2016): 54–63; Ian White, “Intervention: Stuart Marshall,” *Afterall* 41 (Spring/Summer 2016): 49–54.

²⁷ Esposito, *Terms of the Political*, 130.

social and structural violence in their surroundings, the works of black and queer British cultural production can be theorized as antibodies to a diseased society.

The British government emerged from World War II in a feeble state of finances and infrastructure, eager to revamp its economy and to secure its place once again as a world power. Responding to these seismic geopolitical changes, Prime Minister Clement Richard Attlee's Parliament passed the Nationality Act in 1948, introducing the status of "Citizen of the United Kingdom and Colonies." On a legal level, this act guaranteed the universalization of British subjecthood throughout the commonwealth system. Due to the history of imperial domination and exploitation, however, on a cultural level Britain was built on nationalist notions of difference, scientifically-devised ideologies of racial supremacy, and a general intolerance of nonwhite colonial subjects. The government also needed to recruit large numbers of migrants from the Caribbean, South Asia, and Africa as laborers to rebuild the devastated urban infrastructure and to work in factories. As a result, steady and increasing numbers of nonwhite immigrants moved to British cities for economic opportunities, forming sizable diasporic communities beginning in the late 1940s.²⁸

As the presence of colonial and postcolonial subjects grew, so did the intensity of racism and hostility from the white public and policymakers, who attempted to curb immigration, and by the late 1950s and early 1960s effectively disabled the Nationality Act of 1948 through numerical controls with the passage of the Commonwealth

²⁸ Ashley Dawson, *Mongrel Nation: Diasporic Culture and the Making of Postcolonial Britain* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 9–10. For more on the presence of people of Asian and African descent in England prior to World War II, see Beauchamp-Byrd, "London Bridge: Late Twentieth Century British Art and the Routes Of 'National Culture,'" 18–19.

Immigrants Act of 1962.²⁹ Understood as a threat to the integrity and power of white Britain, black populations were regular targets of violence and racist demonstrations, such as those that occurred in Nottingham and Notting Hill in 1958. The alarming extent of British cultural bigotry was made manifest in Tory Member of Parliament Enoch Powell's 1968 speech in which he prophesied "rivers of blood" lest immigrants not undergo deportation and repatriation.³⁰

Beginning in the 1950s, black settlement and the overwhelming racism it engendered across white British society produced new forms of belonging and resistance within the African and Asian diasporas. At the same time, activities such as music that are usually understood to be in the "*cultural arena*," as Chambers contends, "had a habit of having direct consequences that gravitated towards the *political arena*."³¹ While the streets, factories, and dance halls were spatial incubators for emergent postcolonial identities and practices, the academy became a potent site for theorizing these transformations in black life as early as the 1960s.³² In particular, the politically-charged academic discipline of cultural studies, developed in the late 1950s by scholars of cultural Marxism such as Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams, and Stuart Hall, served as a springboard for black cultural and postcolonial theory.³³ Taking seriously forms of mass cultural production and consumption that were previously overlooked or dismissed by the Frankfurt School, this tradition of cultural Marxism grew out of working class politics and the rise of the New Left movement in the late 1950s.

²⁹ Dawson, *Mongrel Nation*, 11–12.

³⁰ Beauchamp-Byrd, "London Bridge: Late Twentieth Century British Art and the Routes Of 'National Culture,'" 20; Dawson, *Mongrel Nation*, 12–13.

³¹ Chambers, *Roots and Culture*, xiv. Italics used in the original text.

³² Dawson, *Mongrel Nation*, 7.

³³ For more on the foundation of this discipline, especially its intellectual roots, see Dennis L. Dworkin, "Culture is Ordinary," in *Cultural Marxism in Postwar Britain: History, the New Left, and the Origins of Cultural Studies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 79–124.

Shortly after Hoggart established the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at the University of Birmingham in 1964, Hall took up its directorship in 1968. Hall, who was born in colonial Jamaica and first came to England on a Rhodes Scholarship in 1951, led the research institute as it worked to redefine the relationship between theory and practice through bridging radical socialist politics and scholarship. In so doing, the CCCS played a pivotal role in analyzing the state of culture in Britain and abroad, including the student politics surrounding the 1968 uprisings, and the feminist, antiracist, and lesbian and gay political movements of the 1970s.³⁴ What linked these scholarly projects was the notion that culture and ideology propelled power relations. Among those intellectuals who were trained at CCCS and pushed the academic field in new directions in the 1970s and early 1980s were Hazel Carby, Paul Gilroy, Dick Hebdige, Paul Willis, Angela McRobbie, Richard Dyer, and Pratibha Parmar.

If initial contributions to the field had minimal engagements with racial politics, from the early 1970s onward the scholarship by Hall, as well as that of his students and colleagues, tracked and contemplated the racism that pervaded national politics, frustrating, above all, the idea that British culture was white. A year before the Conservative Party Leader Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister, further heightening national racial tensions, Hall succinctly stated in 1978,

[b]lack become the bearers, the signifiers of the crisis of British society in the 1970s... This is not a crisis of race. But race punctuates and periodizes the crisis. Race is the lens through which people come to perceive that a crisis is

³⁴ Dworkin, 5–6. For more on the intellectual atmosphere and organization of the CCCS, particularly its reconceptualization in the aftermath of 1968, see Kieren Connell and Matthew Hilton, “The Working Practices of Birmingham’s Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies,” *Social History* 40, no. 3 (2015): 287–311.

developing. It is the framework through which the crisis is experienced. It is the means by which the crisis is to be resolved—“send it away.”³⁵

This “crisis” was met by “crisis management,” characterized as “the control and containment of forms of black resistance against racial domination” in the path-breaking CCCS publication *The Empire Strikes Back: Race and Racism in 70s Britain* (1982).³⁶ As this study elucidates, blackness amassed criminal and pathological associations in white British culture, as furthered by the Police Federation’s influential “law and order” campaign of 1975; blacks were seen “as an ‘outside’ force, an alien *malaise* afflicting British society.”³⁷ As a result of mounting racism and police brutality, a monumental wave of race riots and uprisings took place in Brixton, Birmingham, Leeds, and Liverpool between early 1980 and July 1981. As illustrated by an article called “Outbreak of an Alien Disease” in *The Financial Times* in July 1981, the white mainstream media conceived these black protests—and black people at large—as a contagion: “[I]ike an epidemic of some alien disease, to which the body politic has no immunity, street riots have erupted in different parts of England during the past ten days.”³⁸ Blackness was like a virus infection in the white national imaginary, one that put the health of the white middle-class heterosexual family unit at risk.

Racist and xenophobic commentary like this needs to be placed within a wider political context of Thatcherism. Paralleled by Reaganomics in the US, this conservative agenda reconfigured national public life, setting the stage for heated cultural contestation

³⁵ Stuart Hall, “Racism and Reaction,” in *Five Views of Multi-Racial Britain: Talks on Race Relations Broadcast by BBC TV*, ed. British Broadcasting Corporation (London: Commission for Racial Equality, 1978), 31–32.

³⁶ John Solomos et al., “The Organic Crisis of British Capitalism and Race: The Experience of the Seventies,” in *The Empire Strikes Back: Race and Racism in 70s Britain*, ed. Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1982), 15.

³⁷ Solomos et al., 23, 26.

³⁸ *The Financial Times*, July 11, 1981, quoted in Solomos et al., 31.

across diverse sectors of civil society. In other words, the monetarist economic policies and conservative moral positions towards race and sexuality were deeply intertwined—and the advent of HIV/AIDS in the 1980s would further testify to this.³⁹ Following a campaign fueled by a discriminatory “law and order” platform, Thatcher and the New Right sought to remodel national culture by establishing a hegemonic neoconservative politics that put an end to democratic socialist desires and the postwar Keynesian welfare state, which was blamed for every imaginable predicament of industrial capitalism. Thatcher’s pioneering strategy across the board was privatization at the expense of the public good; consumerism, emergent technologies, a service economy, and free-market reforms were to be the driving forces of a new UK. The implications, however, were global.⁴⁰ As early as 1980, Hall, an unflinching critic of the evolution of these economic policies and their social effects, roused his comrades by declaring that the “key to ‘Thatcherism’ is the global character—the hegemonic thrust—of its intervention. Nothing short of a counter-hegemonic strategy of resistance is capable of matching it on the terrain of struggle which it is day-by-day beginning to map out.”⁴¹

With an emphasis on cultural difference and the plight of the working class, many social movements attempted to chip away at these ideological structures that upheld visions of privatization and hegemonic governmentality in Britain and abroad. Black communities, especially the generation of young people who came of age in the 1970s and 1980s, defined themselves in increasingly politicized terms that interrogated cultural

³⁹ Anna Marie Smith, *New Right Discourse on Race and Sexuality: Britain, 1968-1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 3–6.

⁴⁰ This economic policy and technique of governance has since acquired the signifier “neoliberalism,” which political theorist Wendy Brown characterizes as “at once a global phenomenon, yet inconstant, differentiated, unsystematic, impure.” Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism’s Stealth Revolution* (New York: Zone Books, 2015), 20.

⁴¹ Stuart Hall, “Thatcherism- a New Stage?,” *Marxism Today*, February 1980, 26.

constructions of identity vis-à-vis race, gender, class, nationality, and, eventually, sexuality. While it is a mistake to assume that all black and immigrant communities were politically-engaged, with leftist and progressive views on subjects such as feminism and gay and lesbian liberation, the surfacing black critique played a pivotal role in redefining British politics and culture. Borrowed from the US, where it had replaced the unfavorable “Negro” a decade earlier during the Black Power Movement, the term “black” was utilized as a political designation of anti-racism and a resolute mode of identification in Britain.⁴² Moreover, its reference extended beyond individuals of African and African-Caribbean decent, also encompassing those of Asian backgrounds and with other racialized and postcolonial identities that were constructed through colonialism; the label could even be applied to the Irish and other white groups with colonized identities.

Mercer concisely historicized the usage in the 1970s when he stated how “black”

arose not from any basis in genetics, nor from shared customs, but from the discursive slide whereby contested meanings that gathered under the markers of cultural difference served to expand the ground on which political antagonism to the status quo was articulated.⁴³

Broadly speaking, however, “black” came to swivel around a politics of diaspora, a rehabilitated concept dating back to antiquity that was first used to describe the dispersion of Jewish people outside of Israel.⁴⁴ Departing from the American understanding, “black” grouped together all diasporas in Britain, including African, Caribbean, Middle Eastern, South Asian, and East Asian diasporas.⁴⁵ Through his invaluable writings on diaspora in the 1980s, Gilroy activated the term as a framework

⁴² On both sides of the Atlantic, “Black” was sometimes capitalized by those proudly using the term as a means of empowerment. For more on this, see Chambers, *Things Done Change*, xv–xviii.

⁴³ Kobena Mercer, “Introduction,” in *The Fateful Triangle: Race, Ethnicity, Nation*, ed. Kobena Mercer (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2017), 5.

⁴⁴ For a helpful historical positioning of the term, as well as its adaptation in Afro-Atlantic contexts during the twentieth century, see Nelson, “Diaspora: Multiple Practices, Multiple Worldviews,” 297–300.

⁴⁵ Wainwright, *Phenomenal Difference*, 8.

for theorizing black culture outside of the conventional conceptual borderlines of race, ethnicity, and nation state. As he wrote in his book *There Ain't No Black in the Union*

Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation (1987),

[a]n intricate web of cultural and political connections bind blacks here to blacks elsewhere. At the same time, they are linked into the social relations of this country. Both dimensions have to be examined and the contradictions and continuities that exist must be brought out.⁴⁶

Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993) addressed these exact imperatives. By identifying the slave ship as the primal scene of black modernity, the writer urged historians and critics to study the Atlantic as "one single, complex unit of analysis in their discussion of the modern world and [to] use it to produce an explicitly transnational and intercultural perspective."⁴⁷

Out of this rich discourse that swept across the academy and the streets, a new black artistic movement that wrestled with the cultural politics of diaspora came into view. Art historians tend to pinpoint the 1981 foundation of the BLK Art Group, a collective comprised of Eddie Chambers, Marlene Smith, Keith Piper, and Donald Rodney, as a critical moment in the development of black art in Britain. Exhibitions such as *Black Art An' Done* at the Wolverhampton Art Gallery in 1981 and *Five Black Women*, organized by artist Lubaina Himid at the Africa Centre Gallery in London in 1983, nourished a growing conversation about black aesthetics.⁴⁸ As Mercer remembered,

⁴⁶ Paul Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, [1987] 2002), 205.

⁴⁷ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 15.

⁴⁸ Another important event was the First National Black Art Convention in 1982 at the Wolverhampton Polytechnic For histories of the BLK Art Group, see, for instance, Mercer, *Welcome to the Jungle*, 14–15; Stuart Hall, "Assembling the 1980s: The Deluge--and after," in *Shades of Black: Assembling Black Arts in 1980s Britain*, ed. David A. Bailey, Ian Baucom, and Sonia Boyce (Durham: Duke University Press, in collaboration with the Institute of International Visual Arts and the African and Asian Visual Artists' Archive, 2005), 13–14; Orlando, *British Black Art*, 17–27; Chambers, *Roots and Culture*, 175–204.

“[b]uilding upon structures and spaces created by our forebears, and seizing opportunities in the gaps and fissures arising from the chaos of the coincidence between the postcolonial and the postmodern, it was the younger generations who came to voice in the 1980s.”⁴⁹

Sex, Liberation, and Art in the 1970s

As this quotation asserts, a critical black lesbian and gay politics was on the rise in London by the early 1980s. Interrogating the white underpinnings of the liberation movement of the 1970s, activists and other cultural practitioners drew attention to structural and institutional forces that compromised meaningful black involvement in white-dominated lesbian and gay political organizing, criticism, and culture. Literature scholar Nadia Ellis has inspected the archives of black migration and white homosexuality in London in the 1950s and 1960s, revealing how, despite the simultaneous increase in black populations and the expanding presence of a gay subculture during this period, their archival points of intersection are exceedingly rare.⁵⁰ “Since homosexual men were figured largely as white,” Ellis acutely concludes, “and troublesome migrants were figured mostly as black and brown, this period in British history suggests that sexual freedom, aligned with whiteness, trumped black freedom of movement and access to metropolitan citizenship.”⁵¹ In other words, the figure of the gay or lesbian black Londoner is largely unaccounted for in cultural archives prior to the late

⁴⁹ Mercer, *Welcome to the Jungle*, 2.

⁵⁰ Nadia Ellis, “Black Migrants, White Queers and the Archive of Inclusion in Postwar London,” *Interventions* 17, no. 6 (2015): 895.

⁵¹ Ellis, 896.

1970s and early 1980s.⁵² This glaring absence surely speaks to the audacity of what Mercer called the “coming to voice” that defined many of the insurgent cultural efforts explored in this chapter.⁵³

Be that as it may, the years since 1967 had resulted in tremendous transformations with regard to gay and lesbian rights. Based on the findings of the Wolfenden Report (1957), the Sexual Offences Act a decade later decriminalized private homosexual acts between two men of 21 years or older in England and Wales.⁵⁴ Because of these significant developments, British gay and lesbian life garnered an increasing visibility in the public eye. At the heels of the Stonewall Inn riots in New York City in 1969, a radical and unapologetic gay liberation movement started to shake up London. Energized by the idea that homosexuality was both a personal and political issue, this burst of utopian and theatrical activism and expression was epitomized by the 1970 establishment of the Gay Liberation Front (GLF), inspired by an organization of the same named formed a year earlier in New York City.⁵⁵ In contrast to the cautious operations of the homophile organizations of the 1960s, now there was, in the words of GLF activist and intellectual

⁵² Historian Gemma Romain has built on Ellis’ work and is increasingly extending it into the territory of art history. See Gemma Romain, *Race, Sexuality and Identity in Britain and Jamaica: The Biography of Patrick Nelson, 1916-1963* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017); Gemma Romain, “Researching Black Queer Artistic Life Histories: Berto Pasuka in Jamaica, Britain and France,” Paul Mellon Centre, London (February 26, 2019).

⁵³ Mercer, *Welcome to the Jungle*, 2.

⁵⁴ While male homosexual acts were outlawed in Britain between 1885 and 1967, there was never technically legislation related to lesbian behavior. Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming out: Homosexual Politics in Britain, from the Nineteenth Century to the Present* (London: Quartet Books, 1977), 11–12. Yet female homosexuality still registered on a cultural level in the public imagination. For more on literary and cultural representations of lesbianism in pre-World War II Britain, see, for example, Deborah Cohler, *Citizen, Invert, Queer: Lesbianism and War in Early Twentieth-Century Britain* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

⁵⁵ Ken Plummer, “The Lesbian and Gay Movement in Britain: Schisms, Solidarities, and Social Worlds,” in *The Global Emergence of Gay and Lesbian Politics: National Imprints of a Worldwide Movement*, ed. Barry D. Adam, Jan Willem Duyvendak, and André Krouwel (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999), 134–35. See also Andy Beckett, *When the Lights Went out: Britain in the Seventies* (London: Faber, 2009), 210–20.

Jeffrey Weeks, “a new emphasis on the oppression of gay people, a belief that the taboo against homosexuality was so deeply embodied in Western civilization... that only a revolutionary overthrow of its structures could truly liberate the homosexual.”⁵⁶

Early articulations of gay liberation in both the US and Britain were, similar to their radical feminist counterparts, highly indebted to the American Black Power movement of the 1960s in terms of their rhetoric of pride and their repudiation of integration and assimilation. However, in the early 1970s the struggle’s leadership and membership on both sides of the Atlantic mainly consisted of white men, who did not make meaningful alliances with other marginalized groups.⁵⁷ Indeed, by 1973 heightened tensions about the importance of women’s issues caused the British GLF to splinter as many feminist lesbians abandoned the group to create their own, often separatist, political organizations.⁵⁸ Another reason the GLF collapsed, as activist and art historian Simon Watney claimed, was its internal disagreement over how earnestly class struggle could fit into a politics of sexual emancipation.⁵⁹ Beyond the GLF, the remainder of the 1970s also witnessed an upsurge in British gay and lesbian community groups such as Friend and Switchboard, newspapers like *Gay News* and the more intellectual *Gay Left*, as well as publishing houses like the Gay Men’s Press, and Gay’s the Word Bookshop.⁶⁰ By the

⁵⁶ Weeks, *Coming out: Homosexual Politics in Britain, from the Nineteenth Century to the Present*, 186.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 187. For a history of the transatlantic flows of gay liberation, especially in relation to the Black Power movement, see H. L. Malchow, “Coming Out and Coming Together: Anglo-American Gay Liberation” in *Special Relations: The Americanization of Britain?* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 216–45.

⁵⁸ Plummer, “The Lesbian and Gay Movement in Britain: Schisms, Solidarities, and Social Worlds,” 133.

⁵⁹ Simon Watney, “The Ideology of GLF,” in *Homosexuality: Power and Politics*, ed. Gay Left Collective (London: Allison & Busby, 1980), 64–76. For a solid history of the GLF, see Lucy Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left in Post-War Britain: How the Personal Got Political* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 65–92.

⁶⁰ Unlike many other nations, the British government never authorized the licensing of gay saunas in the years before the AIDS crisis; this condition arguably lessened the national rates of viral transmission in the early years of the health crisis in the UK. See Sunil Gupta, “Black, Brown, and White,” in *Coming on Strong: Gay Politics and Culture*, ed. Simon Shepherd and Mick Wallis (London and Boston: Unwin

early 1980s, such enterprises proliferated, forming a considerable culture industry, political infrastructure, and intellectual language around gay and lesbian life. By this, I mean *white* gay and lesbian life.⁶¹

Aromas of gay liberation could also be detected in the predominantly white worlds of art, film, and photography in 1970s London; by and large, lesbian and gay art took its cue from sophisticated feminist arts discourses and practices that grew out of 1968. White second-wave feminist artists and filmmakers, including Mary Kelly, Laura Mulvey, Sally Potter, and Jo Spence, put forward radical roadmaps for thinking about sexual politics and liberation, calling into question salient issues such as sexual reproduction, the family unit, labor, and the body.⁶² In addition to the establishment of the London Women's Liberation Art Group, the Women's Art History Collective, the History Group, and the Women's Workshop within the Artists' Union in the early 1970s, a range of feminist artistic initiatives aimed to foreground the voices of women through women-run journals and magazines, film programs, and other interventions in existent institutions such as the

Hyman, 1989), 164. For more on how liberationists related to the Left during the rest of the 1970s, see Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left in Post-War Britain*, 93–122.

⁶¹ It should be noted that (white) British gay political criticism learned significantly from discussions at the CCCS during the 1960s and 1970s. The early work of Richard Dyer, who completed his PhD at the institute in 1972 and regularly contributed to the *CCCS Selected Working Papers*, is a case in point; he cleverly applied tools from cultural theory to incipient debates on gay representation and popular culture. See, for instance, Richard Dyer, "Gays in Film," *Jump Cut*, August 1978; Richard Dyer, "In Defence of Disco," *Gay Left* 8 (Summer 1979): 20–23.

⁶² See Siona Wilson, "Introduction: Sex Politics," in *Art Labor, Sex Politics: Feminist Effects in 1970s British Art and Performance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), xi–xxix. Mulvey and Sue Clayton have recently reflected on this moment, remembering that "liberation would involve not only overcoming the literal forms of oppression but also challenging and analysing how oppression was inscribed into society through language, images and ideology." Sue Clayton and Laura Mulvey, "Introduction," in *Other Cinemas: Politics, Culture and Experimental Film in the 1970s*, ed. Sue Clayton and Laura Mulvey (London: I.B. Tauris, 2017), 3. The intellectual frameworks feminists harnessed—an amalgamation of feminist socialism and psychoanalysis—drew inspiration from American liberation movements and new translations of groundbreaking French texts by theorists such as Michel Foucault, Louis Althusser, Simone de Beauvoir, Julia Kristeva, Hélène Cixous, and Luce Irigaray. Typified by a rigorous conceptualism, emergent feminist art was emboldened by the brilliant philosophy and criticism of these thinkers, as well as the work of other local writers such as Griselda Pollock, Rozsika Parker, Juliet Mitchell, Sheila Rowbotham, Lynne Segal, Hilary Wainwright, and Jacqueline Rose.

London Filmmakers' Co-operative.⁶³ It is important to point out the near absence of black women artists from these white spaces; even the somewhat androcentric world of black British art was evidently a more welcoming context for practitioners such as Lubaina Himid, Sonia Boyce, and Claudette Johnson.⁶⁴

These feminist cultural practitioners paved the way discursively and institutionally for lesbian and gay artists, particularly in the growing fields of photography and video. In his article "The Gay Seventies?" (1979), British art critic Edward Lucie-Smith showed that much art participating in the women's and gay movements tended towards erotic figurative representation. Works by feminists like Judy Chicago in the US or Sylvia Sleigh in Britain rendered visible women's and men's sexuality in innovative ways.⁶⁵ If British visual artists such as Francis Bacon and David Hockney are known for creating incontestably homoerotic figurative works as early as the 1950s and 1960s, it took the foundation of the GLF for a younger generation to exercise a more legible politics that powered a gay and lesbian aesthetic in their various practices. Early artists to do so across film, photography, painting, and performance included Derek Jarman, Andrew Logan, Michael Leonard, Yve Lomax, and Susan Trangmar.⁶⁶ In the words of Lucie-Smith, this

⁶³ Lucy Reynolds, "'Whose history?': Feminist Advocacy and Experimental Film and Video," in *Other Cinemas: Politics, Culture and Experimental Film in the 1970s*, ed. Sue Clayton and Laura Mulvey (London: I.B. Tauris, 2017), 138–49; Lucy Reynolds, "Circulations and Cooperations: Art, Feminism, and Film in 1960s and 1970s London," in *London Art Worlds: Mobile, Contingent, and Ephemeral Networks, 1960-1980*, ed. Jo Applin, Catherine Spencer, and Amy Tobin (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2018), 133–50.

⁶⁴ For instance, see the minimal treatment of black women artists in Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, eds., *Framing Feminism: Art and the Women's Movement 1970-85* (London: Pandora Press, 1987), 64–69.

⁶⁵ Edward Lucie-Smith, "The Gay Seventies?," *Art and Artists* 14, no. 8 (December 1979): 5. For example, Sleigh's *The Turkish Bath* (1973) subverted Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres' classic painting of female nudity by reversing the conventionally gendered gaze in a voyeuristic depiction of her husband, critic Lawrence Alloway, and other men from his social circle, starkly nude.

⁶⁶ By the early 1980s, the campy collaborative duo Gilbert & George grew to be aligned with a recognizably gay aesthetic, though they resisted this categorization. John A. Walker, *Left Shift: Radical Art in 1970s Britain* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002), 61–62, 79. Compared to the US, there was very little gay and lesbian imagery in Britain during the 1970s on account of greater censorship and therefore less production

aesthetic, most apparent in the work of American photographers Robert Mapplethorpe and Arthur Tress, “successfully combines two apparently incompatible elements—a freewheeling live-for-the-day hedonism, and a claim to be avant-garde.”⁶⁷

At the same time, a paradigm shift surrounding artistic strategies was taking place at institutions and in the pages of journals that promoted critical engagement with photography and video—two media that artists and thinkers were increasingly mining, thanks in no small part to literature from cultural studies, for not only their aesthetic possibilities, but also their social and institutional applications. What I am alluding to here is commonly understood as a move from “the representation of politics” to “the politics of representation”—an idea that originated in the late 1970s that was associated with British critics and photographers such as Victor Burgin, Jo Spence, and John Tagg, as well as their American counterparts Allan Sekula, Martha Rosler, and Abigail Solomon-Godeau. Assessing the ideological assumptions of conventional documentary photography and photojournalism, these sharp thinkers drew attention to the power relations inherent to the photographic medium, which, in their view, was neither disinterested nor objective. More than straightforward agitprop that depicted political struggle, the work they championed was self-critical and intellectually demanding, seeking to unearth a politics of representation.⁶⁸

Essential to this discourse was the East End’s Half Moon Photography Workshop collective, the journal *Camerawork* it operated from 1976 to 1985, as well as its gallery

and distribution. See Pratibha Parmar and Sunil Gupta, “Homosexualities Part Two: UK,” *Ten.8* 32 (Spring 1989): 24. Collection of Chelsea College of Arts Library, London. On a different note, for one art-historical survey of queer British art prior to the partial decriminalization of male homosexuality in 1967, see the exhibition catalogue Clare Barlow, ed., *Queer British Art: 1861-1967* (London: Tate Publishing, 2017).

⁶⁷ Lucie-Smith, “The Gay Seventies?,” 5.

⁶⁸ Walker, *Left Shift*, 7–8; Victor Burgin, *Between* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 84–85. This thinking about aesthetics and politics was descended from Walter Benjamin’s argument in his famous essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1935).

space, educational programs, and community-based darkrooms.⁶⁹ Widely recognized for linking feminist socialist politics and photography through its dedicated participants like Spence, Terry Dennett, and Watney, the Camerawork gallery was gay and lesbian-friendly too.⁷⁰ For instance, it hosted *Same Difference*, the first group exhibition explicitly about lesbian and gay identity in Britain—possibly even the first in Europe—in July 1986 (see **Figure 3.3**). Organized by Sunil Gupta and Jean Fraser, the show featured work by a racially diverse array of men and women who posed together for its poster: Emily Anderson, Keith Cavanagh, Rotimi Fani-Kayode, Nigel Maudsley, Brenda Prince, Susan Trangmar, Val Wilmer, and Bob Workman—as well as its curators Gupta and Fraser themselves. At the time, Gupta was on the board of Camerawork, and Fraser, one of Watney’s former students at the Polytechnic of Central London, worked in its darkroom.⁷¹

Alongside these photo-focused initiatives and conversations, organizations committed to the production, dissemination, and exhibition of video materialized in the London media arts landscape beginning in the late 1960s; these included the London Filmmakers’ Co-op, TVX at Arts Lab, and London Video Arts, as well as important journals like *Screen* and *Undercut*.⁷² That many of these institutions and publications with interests in the sexual politics of representation were possible in the first place was

⁶⁹ For more information on the history of *Camerawork*, see Jessica Evans, “Introduction,” in *The Camerawork Essays: Context and Meaning in Photography*, ed. Jessica Evans (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1997), 11–35.

⁷⁰ Spence and Dennett were controversially booted from *Camerawork* in 1977, and they went on to pursue other exciting publishing and photography projects through the Photography Workshop. For more on their sacking, see Mathilde Bertrand, “The Half Moon Photography Workshop and *Camerawork*: Catalysts in the British Photographic Landscape (1972–1985),” *Photography & Culture* 11, no. 3 (2018): 251–52.

⁷¹ Gupta, interview.

⁷² Julia Knight, “Audiences: Not an Optional Extra,” in *Other Cinemas: Politics, Culture and Experimental Film in the 1970s*, ed. Sue Clayton and Laura Mulvey (London: I.B. Tauris, 2017), 91–106. In fact, Stuart Marshall was a cofounder of London Video Arts; his path-breaking criticism and video art circled around the politics of video in the 1970s, and then turned towards representations of homosexuality and AIDS in the 1980s. See White, “Intervention: Stuart Marshall.”

because of a wave of substantial financial support from the Arts Council and Regional Arts Associations during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Labour politician Ken Livingstone's leadership on the Greater London Council (GLC) from 1981 until the administrative body's termination in 1986 was also indispensable for arts funding.⁷³ These city and state-funded infrastructures contributed to a cultural landscape that ensured, for example, that many cities throughout the UK operated a public gallery that was entirely devoted to the medium of photography.

The GLC also demonstrated the potential of coalitional town hall politics as women, lesbians, gays, blacks, pensioners, and other marginalized groups worked together on numerous committees to implement progressive changes on a local scale—yet at the same time these different groups were also sometimes forced to compete for funding to pursue their political and cultural projects.⁷⁴ During the first half of the 1980s, the GLC channeled critical funding into community and especially “ethnic” arts organizations; for example, the budget for “Ethnic Arts Subcommittee” of the Arts and Recreation Committee increased considerably, from £30,000 to more than £2 million, over this period.⁷⁵ In spite of the racist, sexist, and homophobic public sphere austerey architected by Thatcher's government, these institutions and vital sources of funding from local authorities allowed for the development of visible and vibrant black and queer artistic communities in London. AIDS cultural activism in the mid to late-1980s was shaped by the remnants and legacies of such programs.

⁷³ For more on Livingstone and the GLC as they appealed to gay and lesbian communities, see Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left in Post-War Britain: How the Personal Got Political*, 141–46.

⁷⁴ Kobena Mercer and Isaac Julien, “Race, Sexual Politics and Black Masculinity: A Dossier,” in *Male Order: Unwrapping Masculinity*, ed. Rowena Chapman and Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1988), 100; Gupta, “Black, Brown, and White,” 167.

⁷⁵ Franco Bianchini, “GLC R.I.P.: Cultural Politics in London, 1981-1986,” *New Formations* 1 (Summer 1987): 103–17.

“Coming to Voice”: From Activism to Art

It was under these circumstances that black gay and lesbian critics, activists, and artists such as Mercer, Julien, Gupta, Parmar, Ajamu X, and Ingrid Pollard started to sound off, individually and collectively. Though their cultural and educational backgrounds, as well as their chosen social and artistic scenes and neighborhoods, sometimes differed, this cohort united around urgent concerns about identity, power, and representation through their involvement with the Gay Black Group and through other outlets.⁷⁶ By the early 1980s, these individuals, their projects, and their institutional infrastructures constituted a strong local network, one that expanded substantially as the AIDS crisis crescendoed by about 1987. With regular meetings at Gay’s the Word Bookshop in Bloomsbury beginning in 1981, the year of the race uprisings, the Gay Black Group formed as a loose activist, support, and intellectual circle of gay men of African, Asian, and Caribbean descent; it was not an advocacy organization. Soon enough it attracted more women and became the Black Lesbian and Gay Group, which eventually obtained funding from the GLC for the first Black Lesbian and Gay Centre in the country in Tottenham in 1985.⁷⁷

In a remarkable television segment broadcast locally in June 1983, journalist Paula Ahluwalia pays a visit to Gay’s the Word to learn more about black gay and lesbian experience. Julien, then a twenty-two-year-old second-year student in film at St. Martin’s

⁷⁶ To be clear, the participants I have identified did not start the group. Julien, for instance, joined a couple years after its establishment. See Isaac Julien, “Interview,” in *Male Order: Unwrapping Masculinity*, ed. Rowena Chapman and Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, [1987] 1988), 125. Originally published in *Square Peg* 16 (Summer 1987).

⁷⁷ For more on the history of the Black Lesbian and Gay Centre, see Veronica McKenzie, *Under Your Nose* (Reel Brit Productions, 2014). There were other side shoots from the Gay Black Group, including Fusion, a black and white mixed men’s group and the South Asian Lesbian and Gay Group. Preethi Manuel, Rotimi Fani-Kayode, and Sunil Gupta, “Imaging Black Sexuality,” in *Looking beyond the Frame: Racism, Representation and Resistance*, ed. Michelle Reeves and Jenny Hammond (Oxford: Links Publications, 1989), 48.

School of Art, is one of the eight people who volunteers to open up about his personal life (not all members of the Gay Black Group were comfortable being recorded) (see **Figure 3.4**).⁷⁸ Ahluwalia's interview with Julien is intercut with shots of the artist at work on an unspecified film (see **Figure 3.5**). In contrast to the other group members, who mainly accentuate their loving monogamous relationships, their homophobic families, and other personal hardships, Julien speaks with extraordinary poise and relish about his mother's acceptance of his sexuality and his robust dating life. While fielding the journalist's unimaginative questions (e.g. "Do you think it might be a phase? How can you be certain?"), Julien clarifies for television viewers that he has not one, but *two*, boyfriends, and that he generally dates white men. In his words, "I don't think [gay relationships] follow the pattern of heterosexual relationships, and I don't think I want them to either."⁷⁹

As Mercer and Julien would together recollect in 1988, the "Gay Black Group enabled us to start a conversation amongst ourselves, making connections between the patterns of our common experiences to recognise the structures responsible for the specificity of that oppression in the first place."⁸⁰ For the budding critic (Mercer) and filmmaker (Julien), as well as many of their peers, there was previously no physical or discursive space to congregate and address racism and homophobia as interlocking personal and political issues.⁸¹ As Mercer would write, the "construction of community through critical dialogue [within the Gay Black Group] was creating that space."⁸²

⁷⁸ Only one lesbian is present and interviewed in this television segment.

⁷⁹ "Here and Now: Gay Black Group," June 26, 1983, Central Television, London. Production number 2379/83. The Media Archive for Central England, Lincoln, United Kingdom.

⁸⁰ Mercer and Julien, "Race, Sexual Politics and Black Masculinity: A Dossier," 97–98.

⁸¹ Mercer and Julien first met in a Foucault reading group. Isaac Julien, "James R. Brunder '83 Memorial Prize Lecture," Yale University, New Haven (September 28, 2016).

⁸² Kobena Mercer, "Back to My Routes: A Postscript on the 80s," in *Writing Black Britain, 1948-1998: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, ed. James Proctor (Manchester: Manchester University Press, [1992] 2000),

Just like identities, spaces could be created, inherited, seized, and wielded. Space became the quintessential rubric for conceptualizing identity and difference in an age loaded with postmodern challenges to the universal white heterosexual male subject. Many artists and critics framed their practices as physical and discursive interventions in public space—despite, or because of, as Gupta noted, there was “no specifically Black/Brown gay space.”⁸³ An extended passage by lesbian feminist filmmaker Parmar, a Kenyan-born Indian who grew up in Britain and studied with Hall at CCCS in the early 1980s, illustrates this type of language.⁸⁴ As she stated in her text “Emergence 2” (1988),

[o]f necessity we have had to move between cultures and languages of domination, and in doing so have developed unique responses to questions of identity. In becoming distant from our pasts and struggling against the insecurity of our present, we have searched for a vocabulary to intervene into certain spaces.

Spaces can be real and imagined, spaces can tell stories and unfold histories. Spaces can be interrupted, appropriated and transformed through artistic and literary practices.

The appropriation and use of space are political acts. The kinds of spaces we have, don't have, or are denied access to, can empower us or render us powerless.⁸⁵

With reference to spatialized commentary like this, Mercer pointed out, “[l]ike left and right, centre and margin are merely metaphors: the question is whether or not these

287–88. Originally published in *Ten.8* (Special Issue, *The Critical Decade: Black British Photography in the 80s*) 2, no. 3 (1992): 32–39. Proctor's anthology incorrectly states that the original text is from 1990.

⁸³ Gupta, “Black, Brown, and White,” 164.

⁸⁴ For more on Parmar's early work and life story, see Gwendolyn Audrey Foster, *Women Filmmakers of the African & Asian Diaspora: Decolonizing the Gaze, Locating Subjectivity* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1997), 73–94. See also her classic essay, Pratibha Parmar, “Gender, Race and Class: Asian Women in Resistance,” in *The Empire Strikes Back: Race and Racism in 70s Britain*, ed. Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1982), 236–75.

⁸⁵ Pratibha Parmar, “Emergence 2,” in *Storms of the Heart: An Anthology of Black Arts & Culture*, ed. Kwesi Owusu (London: Camden Press, 1988), 47.

enable us to think through the complex terrain of combined and uneven development we each negotiate in everyday life in the struggle to get from one day to the next.”⁸⁶

Yet with the rise of black workshops, journals, and galleries that brought lesbian and gay issues to the fore by 1983, spaces were increasingly institutional—not simply metaphorical. Already existing photo journals such as *Camerawork* and *Ten.8* (founded in Birmingham in 1979) were gay- and black-friendly publications for photographers such as Gupta and Fani-Kayode, but video practitioners had to start from scratch to cultivate their own spaces of making and disseminating. Between the GLC and Channel 4’s Department of Independent Film and Video, which had a legal mandate to support programming that reflected “ethnic diversity,” the Black Audio Film Collective and the gay and lesbian-led Sankofa Film/Video Collective received the funding necessary to produce new work.⁸⁷ *Sankofa*, a Ghanaian Twi word that means “go back and get it,” and can also refer to a type of bird, was the namesake for this collective founded by recent black art school graduates Julien, Martina Attille, Maureen Blackwood, Nadine Marsh-Edwards, and Robert Cruz in the summer of 1983. According to Attille, one reason “Sankofa formed was to explore the gaps in theory and also the gaps in the visual representation.”⁸⁸ That is to say, Sankofa aimed to offer up a politics of representation, a notion that Hall most comprehensively fleshed out in relation to black subjectivity in 1988 when he theorized the death of the essential black subject insofar as this position

⁸⁶ Mercer, “Back to My Routes,” 286–87.

⁸⁷ Daniella Rose King, “Britain’s Black Filmmaking Workshops and Collective Practice,” in *Other Cinemas: Politics, Culture and Experimental Film in the 1970s*, ed. Sue Clayton and Laura Mulvey (London: I.B. Tauris, 2017), 206–7. For more on the formation of Channel 4, see Coco Fusco, *Young, British, and Black: The Work of Sankofa and Black Audio Film Collective* (Buffalo: Hallwalls/Contemporary Arts Center, 1988), 10.

⁸⁸ Martina Attille in Fusco, “An Interview with Martina Attille and Isaac Julien of Sankofa,” in *Young, British, and Black: The Work of Sankofa and Black Audio Film Collective*, 32.

“cannot be represented without reference to the dimensions of class, gender, sexuality and ethnicity.”⁸⁹

Whereas Sankofa’s early film *Who Killed Colin Roach?* (1983) tackled police brutality and racism, the more lyrical *Territories* (1985) drew on spatial metaphors for thinking about the overlapping registers of identity through an analysis of the heavily policed Notting Hill Carnival, a cornerstone of black British culture (see **Figure 3.6**). If one memorable image from *Territories* is the tender embrace of two black men dancing, montaged against footage of riot police, Julien and Blackwood more extensively address homosexuality and homophobia in *The Passion of Remembrance* (1986). Revolving around the fictional Baptiste family and their sometimes tense intergenerational conversations about policing, race, gender, and sexuality, the experimental narrative is punctuated by video documentation of recent black and gay activism, including the historic Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners campaign of 1984 (see **Figure 3.7**).⁹⁰ Along with work by the Black Audio Film Collective, these radiant films were vehicles of theorizations of diaspora, as a passage from Mercer’s text “Diaspora Culture and the Dialogic Imagination” (1988) makes clear:

[t]here is no escape from the fact that as a diaspora people... our blackness is thoroughly imbricated in Western modes and codes to which we arrived as the disseminated masses of migrant dispersal. What is in question [in such films] is not the expression of some lost origin or some uncontaminated essence in black film-language, but the adoption of a critical ‘voice’ that promotes consciousness of the collision of cultures and histories that constitute our very conditions of existence.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Stuart Hall, “New Ethnicities,” in *ICA Documents 7: Black Film, British Cinema*, ed. Kobena Mercer (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1988), 28.

⁹⁰ For more on Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners, a grassroots organization launched in 1984 in solidarity with the National Union of Mineworkers, see Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left in Post-War Britain: How the Personal Got Political*, 164–69.

⁹¹ Kobena Mercer, “Diaspora Culture and the Dialogic Imagination: The Aesthetics of Black Independent Film in Britain,” in *Blackframes: Critical Perspectives on Black Independent Cinema*, ed. Mbye B. Cham and Claire Andrade-Watkins (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988), 56.

What intellectually bolstered black independent film was calculated criticism like this, particularly by Mercer, who, unlike many of his peers, abstained from art-making to concentrate on writing, editing, and programming. Though in 1986 his author bio stated “Kobena Mercer is a part-time sex symbol (black, male) who lives and works in New Cross,” he had performed many other roles by this point.⁹² After obtaining his undergraduate degree at St. Martin’s School of Art in 1981, he became an active member in two invigorating organizations that had nothing to do with art: the Gay Black Group and the Black Health Workers and Patients Group. Each was predicated on a collaborative model of writing and activism. Guided by recent work at the Birmingham School, the Black Health Workers and Patients Group cast light on the significance of race and racism in the National Health Service (NHS), especially in the field of psychiatry.⁹³ In a 1984 article published on behalf of this collective, Mercer lambasted the Transcultural Psychiatry Society, a well-established mental-health service that was only beginning to “[create] a space to accommodate the voices of the Asian and Afro-Caribbean communities.” It was not the case, he maintained, that black people had only recently “found a voice” in challenging the pathologization and criminalization of black

⁹² Notes on Contributors, *Emergency* 4, 1986, 64, MCKENLEY/5/1, The Papers of Jan McKenley, Black Cultural Archives, Brixton, London. Born in 1960 to a white British mother and black Ghanaian father, Mercer moved with his mother to Plymouth in 1973 after his parents’ divorce. For more on his early family life, see Sue O’Sullivan, “Obituary: Araba Yacoba Mercer,” *The Guardian*, April 17, 2003, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2003/apr/17/guardianobituaries.gender>. During his undergraduate studies from 1978 to 1981, he was influenced by his studies under professors such as artists John Stezaker, Rosetta Brooks, and Malcolm Le Grice. Mercer would later recall that “[a]s practically the only black person around I was totally miserable at art school, and I think that situation helped shape how I’ve approached the question of marginality.” See Lorraine Kenny, “Traveling Theory: The Cultural Politics of Race and Representation. An Interview with Kobena Mercer,” *Afterimage* 18, no. 2 (September 1990): 9. Kobena Mercer archival file, Stuart Hall Library, London.

⁹³ See Black Health Workers and Patients Group, *Black People and the Health Service* (London: Brent Community Health Council, 1982).

culture at the hands of the police, prisons, and institutions of social work and healthcare; “the question is rather who has or has not been listening?”⁹⁴

Whereas Mercer contended that black critique of psychiatric services and the NHS at large had a history going back to the 1960s and 1970s, the task of “coming to voice” that defined his concurrent preoccupation, the Gay Black Group, had different stakes because of how unarticulated this position was at the time. In an important article called “White Gay Racism” in *Gay News* in October 1982, Mercer and Errol Francis criticized the whiteness of gay liberation, from its imperative of undoing the nuclear family (an agenda not shared by all black people) to the problematic and ubiquitous racist sexual stereotypes of black men. Interrogating the notion of “coming out,” the authors objected to the unique way in which European culture had treated sexuality, compared to other identities (feminist, socialist, or black), as “the essence of the self, the inner-most core of one’s ‘personality’.”⁹⁵ Fundamentally, this intervention asserted that racism and homophobia did not operate analogously or separately in Britain, and that white mainstream gay politics and culture needed to understand that race and sexuality were deeply interconnected facets of identity when it came to the mechanics of power and oppression.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Kobena Mercer, “Black Communities’ Experience of Psychiatric Services,” *International Journal of Social Psychiatry* 30, no. 1–2 (1984): 22. Of course, this question resonates with those posed in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s trailblazing essay a few years later. See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271–313.

⁹⁵ Gay Black Group, “White Gay Racism,” in *Male Order: Unwrapping Masculinity*, ed. Rowena Chapman and Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, [1982] 1988), 106. The article originally appeared in *Gay News*, no. 251 (October 1982); though Mercer and Errol Francis wrote the piece, its stated author was the Gay Black Group. See Mercer, “Back to My Routes,” 287.

⁹⁶ Gay Black Group, “White Gay Racism,” 110. Mercer and Francis collaborated on another piece unrelated to gay politics a month later in *Camerawork*, where they spelled out a Foucauldian argument about black cultural resistance against the state’s maneuvers of control and surveillance. Revealing the degree to which black struggles related to policing, social and health services, and in other contexts have been the locus of culture and identity, they propose a novel theory of black “surplus knowledge,” described

These debates on race, sexuality, and healthcare from Mercer's participation in the Black Health Workers and Patients Group and the Gay Black Group segued into others more explicitly heedful of the politics of visual representation—and progressively so as the AIDS crisis entered into public discourse. Published in the collection *Photography/Politics: Two* (1986), Mercer's electrifying essay "Imaging the Black Man's Sex" responded to Robert Mapplethorpe's retrospective at the Institute for Contemporary Arts (ICA) in 1983. The piece of criticism presented a textured reading of the troublesome ways in which the white photographer drew on and aestheticized erotic imagery of black men that was typically confined to pornography, yet also attached to racial stereotypes and sexual codes that pervaded Western visual culture at large.

With the help of Watney, a fellow critic and one of the editors of *Photography/Politics: Two*, Mercer staged a set of visual comparisons that emphasized the manual acts of image selection and arrangement, heightening the political stakes of representing and viewing. One of these juxtapositions shows Mapplethorpe's *Man in Polyester Suit* (1980) on the left and a seemingly ethnographic photograph of a powerfully built black man, naked, seated on top of another black man's shoulders, his genitals hidden by the other's head (see **Figure 3.8**). Equally suggestive is the placement of the four framing hands in proximity to the photographed sexual organs, and in dialogue with one another. As Watney remembers it, the hands were his and Mercer's; the black-and-white photograph, with its careful yet ambiguous layering of skin, is

as "analyses of power which are not covered by the gloss of bourgeois state, or capitalism as an economic system, but are *localised* knowledges with no validity in the dominant regime of Truth." Errol Francis and Kobena Mercer, "Black People, Culture and Resistance," *Camerawork*, November 1982, 6. Kobena Mercer archival file, Stuart Hall Library.

another site of interracial collaboration.⁹⁷ Weaving together psychoanalysis and black cultural studies, Mercer’s essay argues that the decontextualization and fragmentation of the black man’s idealized body augmented the white gay man’s sexual fetishization of racial otherness, with the result that the black man is reduced to nothing other than a “big, black prick.”⁹⁸ Moreover, the critic suggested that the antidote—or even the antibody—to what he ultimately deemed racist imagery resided in his local artistic milieu, where black artists and filmmakers were creatively ventilating new ideas about race and sex.⁹⁹

AIDS, Art, and Identity beyond the Nation State

In 1986 curator Alex Noble commissioned Gupta—one such local artist, curator, and critic invested in creating new representations of black queer life—to produce a series for the upcoming show *The Body Politic: Re-Presentations of Sexuality* at the Photographers’ Gallery.¹⁰⁰ What Gupta developed for the 1987 exhibition was *Exiles*, a series capturing clusters of gay Indian men—a furtive community that he had set out to find on several trips back to his hometown of Delhi during the 1980s (see **Figures 3.9 and 3.10**).¹⁰¹ For this project, the artist photographed gay men, whose faces are largely

⁹⁷ Simon Watney, personal email correspondence to Jackson Davidow, March 21, 2019.

⁹⁸ Kobena Mercer, “Imaging the Black Man’s Sex,” in *Photography/Politics: Two*, ed. Patricia Holland, Jo Spence, and Simon Watney (London: Comedia Publishing Group, 1986), 67.

⁹⁹ Mercer, 68. This text by Mercer makes similar points to Gupta’s concurrent essay “Desire and Black Men” (1986) in *Ten.8* in which the author interprets his own photographic representations of black gay life in opposition to racially-charged oeuvre by Mapplethorpe and other white gay photographers. Sunil Gupta, “Desire and Black Men,” *Ten.8* 22 (1986): 17–23. Collection of Chelsea College of Arts Library.

¹⁰⁰ Other photographers to be included in this provocative show were Emily Andersen, Diana Blok, Helen Chadwick, Roberta Graham & Ken Hollings, Barbara Kruger, Rosy Martin, Hiro Sato, Jo Spence, and David Roberts. See exhibition flyer, *The Body Politic* exhibition file, the Photographers’ Gallery archive, London.

¹⁰¹ Born in New Delhi in 1953, Gupta moved with his family to Montreal in 1969; here he pursued a degree in accounting, just as gay liberation was taking off in the early 1970s. In Montreal and New York later in the 1970s, Gupta turned to photography to document the increasingly visible gay subculture that he participated in, even though it was markedly white. In 1978 he moved to London, where he took up work as a press photographer, continued his studies at the West Surrey College of Art & Design and the Royal

obscured from view, in front of medieval public monuments; these images are paired with texts inspired by audio-recordings he had made over the years. Yet the series goes beyond traditional photojournalism; the captions reveal a fabricated narrative about an unrepresented white American character delivering news about the virus to Indians, who skeptically consider the health crisis an American problem.¹⁰²

Significantly, *Exiles* was one of the first projects by a black artist to make direct reference to the AIDS pandemic. In *Humayun's Tomb*, an image of two men, possibly cruising, is accompanied by a fragment that reads “Americans—talking about AIDS and distributing condoms. Nobody believes them. They’re always telling us what to do.” In his artist statement, published in *Ten.8* in 1987, Gupta contextualized his project and the global incidence of the virus:

Aids has arrived to reinforce all the worst stereotypes—the most common of which is that homosexuality is some terrible Western disease. (The few diagnosed Aids cases are inevitably traced back to New York). [sic] That this is not the case is obvious to anyone with a rudimentary contact with the gay ‘scene’ in India.¹⁰³

As *Exiles* indicated, the national origins of the virus was a global cause célèbre. As early as 1981, the American and British media stirred up hysteria across popular culture by manifesting a moral panic around the mysterious “gay cancer,” which morphed into Gay-Related Immune Deficiency and, by 1982, into Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS). Epidemiologists deduced that the causative agent of AIDS was the Human Immunodeficiency Virus in 1983.¹⁰⁴ In the early years, the moral panic largely

College of Art, and immersed himself in the discourses of black art and the GLC world of town hall politics. Sunil Gupta, *Queer* (Munich: Prestel, 2011), 22–27; Sunil Gupta, “ICP Lecture Series 2014: Sunil Gupta” (November 5, 2014), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7aPdzvCKvP4>.

¹⁰² Gupta, interview.

¹⁰³ Sunil Gupta, “Exiles,” *Ten.8* 25 (1987): 12–13. Collection of the Photographers’ Gallery, London.

¹⁰⁴ Jeffrey Weeks, “AIDS: The Intellectual Agenda,” in *AIDS: Social Representations, Social Practices*, ed. Peter Aggleton, Graham Hart, and Peter Davies (London: The Falmer Press, 1989), 3–5.

cast blame upon those individuals living with AIDS—between 1981 and 1983, this meant (white) gay men, but additionally black populations once the disease was understood to affect heterosexuals by around 1985. Unlike the American context, the NHS was a socialized healthcare system, but, even so, Thatcher’s government, with its relentless emphasis on traditional family values and individualism, methodically chose not to address the epidemic, denying the British public satisfactory health education and care. Compared to statistics in the US, however, the incidence in the UK was quite small. Whereas by 1986, for example, 20,000 Americans had been diagnosed, 11,000 of whom had died, 900 Britons had been diagnosed, half of whom had died.¹⁰⁵

Between 1981 and 1985, a range of informal alliances developed as gay activists, public health practitioners, clinicians, and scientists debated local and national AIDS policy in a “bottom-up” model.¹⁰⁶ While many gay men estimated the virus to be a distant threat, others mobilized to form special interest pressure and support groups, particularly the Terrence Higgins Trust (named in honor of one of the first people to die from AIDS-related causes in the UK). Inaugurated in November 1982 at a moment when national policy on the epidemic was nonexistent, this charity organization centered its work on providing health education and social support, networking with other gay organizations, and fundraising for research at local hospitals.¹⁰⁷ It was not until 1984 that the government started to respond to the health crisis, working to halt further contamination of the blood supply, and to quarantine in hospitals individuals who were believed to ignore medical advice and, accordingly, to spread the virus. These actions not only

¹⁰⁵ Simon Watney, *Policing Desire: Pornography, AIDS, and the Media*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, [1987] 1989), 8.

¹⁰⁶ Virginia Berridge, "AIDS Missionaries: Self-Help and the Initial Response to AIDS," in *AIDS in the UK: The Making of a Policy, 1981-1994* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 13–36.

¹⁰⁷ Berridge, 15–22.

reflected a growing understanding that AIDS affected the general heterosexual population, but also were predicated on the assumption that those living with the disease were either innocent (heterosexual, white) or guilty (gay, black). Promoting health education and AIDS prevention did not become a governmental plan until the end of 1986.¹⁰⁸

Though Watney had been a key activist in local gay initiatives such as the GLF, Switchboard (a lesbian and gay helpline), and *Gay Left* since the early 1970s, his career in art history and photo theory took a serious turn when he joined the board of the Health Education Committee of the Terrence Higgins Trust. Because of his personal and professional connections to New York, a regular destination from the mid-1970s, Watney was an avid monitor of the worsening health crisis in the US by 1983, enlisting his friends to ship him American mainstream and gay media such as the *New York Native* (illegal to import to the UK at the time) with the latest epidemiological developments and biomedical theories. After bringing a copy of Joseph Sonnabend and Michael Callen's unprecedented instructional booklet *How to Have Sex in an Epidemic*, which started to circulate in New York in 1983, to the Health Education Committee in 1984, Watney took charge of health promotion; this involved educating himself on AIDS epidemiology as best he could by reading extensively and coordinating a working group of feminist and gay health practitioners, researchers, and policy-makers in order to cultivate innovative strategies for safer sex campaigns. Meanwhile, he applied his frenzied self-education to teaching two consecutive courses on AIDS and representation to undergraduate photography students in a theory/practice module at the Polytechnic of Central London between 1984 and 1986. As a result of this course, the very first photography exhibition

¹⁰⁸ Weeks, "AIDS: The Intellectual Agenda," 7.

of AIDS-related work in the UK took place at the university's library. Once Watney left his teaching job to commit himself full-time to these urgent efforts at the Trust in 1986, he revised his lecture notes to write up his epochal book *Policing Desire: Pornography, AIDS and the Media* (1987) in six weeks' time.¹⁰⁹

With a focus on the vastly different American and British contexts, this book was outstanding for its application of analytic approaches from cultural studies to the unfolding yet omnipresent representations of the disease and homosexuality in the press, on television, and in safer sex materials. *Policing Desire* insisted that "Aids is not only a medical crisis on an unparalleled scale, it involves a crisis of representation itself, a crisis over the entire framing of knowledge about the human body and its capacities for sexual pleasure."¹¹⁰ The book's title is reminiscent of Hall's *Policing the Crisis* (1978), which responded to the criminalization and pathologization of blackness in a racist white society. While *Policing Desire* was indebted to Hall's scholarship on representation and ideology, the current crisis in question was a health crisis that was a window into old and new social and political issues in the age of Thatcherism. Along with visionary texts such as Weeks' *Sexuality and Its Discontents: Meanings, Myths, and Modern Sexualities* (1985), American scholar Cindy Patton's *Sex and Germs: The Politics of AIDS* (1985), and Australian activist Dennis Altman's *AIDS in the Mind of America* (1986), Watney's penetrating book scrutinized the pandemic and, in so doing, opened up new veins of political thinking about gay and lesbian identity, sex, and representation. Alongside this scholarship, white British filmmaker and media theorist Stuart Marshall was among the first practitioners to interpret the pandemic in view of the *longue durée* of pathologization

¹⁰⁹ Watney, interview.

¹¹⁰ Watney, *Policing Desire*, 9.

and oppression of homosexuality in his film *Bright Eyes* (1984) (see **Figure 3.11**).¹¹¹ This work likewise maintained that the pandemic was a crisis of representation, that it was necessary to unpack the discourses of disease and deviancy that constructed the virus in order to curb its ongoing spread and devastation. Originally produced for Channel 4, *Bright Eyes* countered the vexed mass-media coverage of AIDS by combining archival documentation, fictional reenactments of history, and present-day interviews with British and American activists from the Trust and other groups.¹¹²

Early responses to AIDS by black artists and filmmakers tended to underline the political meanings of the pandemic, albeit with different strategies. As the title announces, Julien's short video *This Is Not an AIDS Advertisement* (1987) articulated a critique against AIDS as mass-media spectacle, insisting on a radical reframing of sex amid the ubiquitous governmental fear-mongering. At first the tape presents a whirlwind of superimposed and colorfully enhanced footage of banal imagery such as water, sculpture, sunsets, and most of all, the recurring image of a gay couple embracing as they rock back and forth with a bouquet; the two men are Julien himself and his real-life partner, white film critic Mark Nash. Rather than commentary on AIDS, the film at first reads as a celebration of gay interracial love (see **Figure 3.12**). Thereafter, a thumping track by the Bronski Beat commences, accompanied by vocals from Julien and Nash that repeatedly proclaim "this is not an AIDS advertisement. Feel no guilt in your desire." In contrast to hysterical media representations that yoked homosexuality to disease and

¹¹¹ For more on the film, see the important essay by American critic, Martha Gever, "Pictures of Sickness: Stuart Marshall's *Bright Eyes*," *October* 43, *Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism* (Winter 1987): 108–26.

¹¹² Another British gay experimental filmmaker who addressed AIDS repeatedly in his rich and celebrated oeuvre was Derek Jarman. For historical and theoretical analyses of his filmography, see, for example, Jim Ellis, *Derek Jarman's Angelic Conversations* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 133–254; Niall Richardson, "AIDS and Its Metaphors: (Re)Imaging the Syndrome," in *The Queer Cinema of Derek Jarman* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009), 173–200.

death, or the profusion of safe-sex messages that were more accurately anti-sex, this work affirmed, or advertised, gay black life and sex—including the power of (self)-image-making as an aesthetic tactic for empowerment and resistance.¹¹³ As the filmmaker later explained, “I was interested in trying to make a more *plural* representation of gay men... at a time when we were seeing representational strategies that were closing off a number of debates, whether around interracial relationships, interracial sex—or having sex, period.”¹¹⁴

On top of this, the video hints at a broader engagement with the cultural politics of diaspora via the global reach of the pandemic. Interestingly, Julien incorporated certain still images from Gupta’s series *Exiles* (1986) about gay desire and AIDS in India as raw material in his fluid montage. Through these citations the filmmaker contextualized himself within a crew of cultural practitioners—a local network probing the intersections of race and sexuality across diasporic contexts (see **Figure 3.13**). Moreover, one evocative verse of the pulsating anthem refers explicitly to the international press’ proliferating reports that the virus originated in Africa and the notion of “African AIDS,” a profoundly racist concept on which I will elaborate shortly:

[p]arting glance, buddy’s friend, tell us of no “other” other’s tales,
in between the gaps, between mirrors and turned-away eyes,
the civilising-pleasure-seeking-mission-tourist,
black boys bought for a packet of cigarettes, that exotic other

might just translate

how a small disease in a third world domain
became a first world problem with a little name.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Isaac Julien and Pratibha Parmar, “In Conversation,” in *Ecstatic Antibodies: Resisting the AIDS Mythology*, ed. Tessa Boffin and Sunil Gupta (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1990), 100.

¹¹⁴ bell hooks and Isaac Julien, “States of Desire,” *Transition* 53 (1991): 170. Italics used in original text.

¹¹⁵ These lyrics also appear in Mercer and Julien, “Race, Sexual Politics and Black Masculinity: A Dossier,” 154.

These inconclusive insertions about AIDS as a racialized discourse of the “third world” Other are easy to miss in a video that by and large develops a cinematic syntax of sentimentalism and affirmation in seemingly European settings. Yet *This Is Not an AIDS Advertisement* raised critical questions about more global interracial circulations of disease and desire—prefiguring, together with Gupta’s *Exiles*, other artistic work and political criticism.

Parmar most lucidly brought these issues to light in her tape *Reframing AIDS* (1987), which stitched together an impressive variety of cultural activists and community workers across London, all of whom were enraged by how the government and media were responding to the health crisis. Though initially commissioned by Converse Pictures to make a film that followed lesbians and gay men in the borough of Lambeth, she felt strongly that the production needed to be about AIDS, the torrential backlash against her community, and the constellation of grassroots activist response (see **Figure 3.14**).¹¹⁶ The ensuing work was notable for, indeed, reframing AIDS on a number of levels. Besides giving voice to women, black people, individuals living with HIV, and artists—that is, those the mainstream media rarely gave the opportunity to speak for themselves—the video carved out a deeper context for understanding the virus as it operated politically and spatially on both local and global scales. Its participants were not talking heads, but engaged in thoughtful conversations with the filmmaker, whose interests in particular topics steered the direction of her inquiries.¹¹⁷ In the video, feminist activists Susan Ardill and Sue O’Sullivan discussed how the new national safe sex campaigns completely missed the mark by neglecting women and lesbians in particular. Ken Livingstone,

¹¹⁶ Julien and Parmar, “In Conversation,” 97–99.

¹¹⁷ Pratibha Parmar, interview by Jackson Davidow, Skype, June 11, 2018.

Labour politician and former leader of the now-defunct GLC, criticized the climate of fear propagated by Thatcher's government (see **Figure 3.15**). HIV-positive gay nurse George Cant shared his mixed experiences in the healthcare system. Exactly like the inter-textual *This Is Not an AIDS Advertisement*, which *Reframing AIDS* frequently excerpts, the film stressed the role of the arts in fostering new languages and spaces of representation. Interviews with Julien and Gupta, whose *Exiles* is featured once again, filmed during its installation at the Photographers' Gallery, also supported this perspective (see **Figure 3.16**).

Yet the majority of commentary spotlighted the indisputable ways in which the pandemic fed into and intensified anti-black racism, immigration control, and the lingering effects of colonialism. Watney cited the fact that seventeen countries, including the UK, restricted HIV-positive people from entering, and instituted mandatory testing for "high-risk" groups. Community activist Dorian Jabri pointed out the rampant Africanization of AIDS in the media—a phenomenon Marshall and Mercer also elaborated on. In dialogue with Grace Bailey, Mercer analyzed the strong cultural associations between the spread of germs and the intermixing of ethnic groups, especially Africans in Europe (see **Figure 3.17**). For the critic, a recent cover of British fashion magazine *The Face* epitomized these twin anxieties with its headline "Out of Africa," featuring celebrity Meryl Streep in her colonialist blockbuster (1985)—a historical romance of the same name directed by Sydney Pollack—alongside a sensational story on AIDS.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ I have looked through all issues of *The Face* from this period and have been unable to identify the "Out of Africa" cover image Mercer mentions. He must have been thinking of a different magazine.

These preliminary thoughts were a sketch of Mercer's important article "AIDS, Racism and Homophobia," published in *New Society* in February 1988. Here, the critic drew on recent scholarship and his own experiences with community organizing—and surely his earlier expertise and involvement in black mental health activism was of relevance—to spell out how racism and homophobia triggered “psychological defence-mechanisms whereby people avoid their inner fears by projecting them externally onto some Other.”¹¹⁹ He was talking in particular about the many shades of white racism and black homophobia when it came to AIDS. Beyond positioning scientific and pop-cultural claims about AIDS and its origins within a history of nationalist efforts to implement health restrictions that were racist and xenophobic in nature, Mercer theorized that the drive to identify an origin was simply a method for coming to grips with the unwieldiness of an alarming situation and all the trepidation it provoked.¹²⁰ In many ways, this critique was an updated version of the essay he co-authored with Errol Francis in 1982, “White Gay Racism,” which demonstrated that Western constructs of sexual deviance were historically fastened to projections about the primitive and promiscuous black Other.

The epidemic not only fortified his earlier interpretation, but also pushed other thinkers to analyze the emergent cross-cutting significations of blackness, virality, and Africanness in Britain and more globally. And, as *Reframing AIDS* posited and put into practice, the arena of culture was fertile for registering difference, for addressing these grim predicaments, and, most of all, for transforming the terms of representation. Watney more thoroughly fleshed out elements of Mercer's critique in his influential essay

¹¹⁹ Kobena Mercer, “AIDS, Racism, and Homophobia,” in *Male Order: Unwrapping Masculinity*, ed. Rowena Chapman and Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1988), 157. This text first appeared in *New Society* on February 5, 1988.

¹²⁰ Mercer, 157.

“Missionary Positions: AIDS, ‘Africa,’ and Race” (1988). Resonating with other recent publications by American science studies scholars Paula Treichler and Cindy Patton, Watney offered close readings of journalistic reports in *Newsweek*, *The Times*, and elsewhere, concluding that the discourse of “African AIDS” participated in Western traditions of representation that unearth “little or nothing of AIDS in Africa, but a very great deal about the changing organization of sexual and racial boundaries in the West.”¹²¹

Glossed by the racist media as hopelessly infected, barbaric, dirty, inert, and licentious, Africa as an entire continent was scapegoated for being at once the source and the cause of this globally mushrooming virus. For Watney and other Western intellectuals with their fingers on the pulse of governmental policy, epidemiology, and media portrayals, HIV/AIDS was symptomatic of nothing less than the postcolonial condition, for it reinforced enduring biopolitical vectors undergirded by residues of colonialism.¹²² Such critiques of “African AIDS” were tremendously well-researched and attentive, and offer valuable insights into the construction of AIDS as a threat to the cohesion of the (white) nation state in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Nevertheless, just as Watney

¹²¹ Simon Watney, “Missionary Positions: AIDS, ‘Africa,’ and Race,” in *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*, ed. Russell Ferguson et al. (New York and Cambridge: The New Museum of Contemporary Art and MIT Press, [1988] 1990), 100. Originally published in *Differences* 1, no. 1 (1988): 83-100. Watney’s essay built on an earlier text, produced as a leaflet for British journalists, commissioned by the British NGO AIDS Consortium for the Third World. See Simon Watney, “AIDS, Language and the Third World,” in *Taking Liberties: AIDS and Cultural Politics*, ed. Erica Carter and Simon Watney (London: Serpent’s Tail, published in association with the ICA, 1989), 183–92. For closely related scholarship, see Cindy Patton, *Inventing AIDS* (New York: Routledge, 1990); Paula A. Treichler, “AIDS, Africa, and Cultural Theory,” *Transition* 51 (1991): 86–103. American intellectual Susan Sontag’s book was also notable, though in a more macroscopic sense. Susan Sontag, *AIDS and Its Metaphors* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1989).

¹²² Many of these discursive critiques of “African AIDS” bring to mind, and could be amplified by, philosopher Achille Mbembe’s thinking on Africa, modernity, and representation in his landmark text *On the Postcolony*. See especially Achille Mbembe, “Introduction: Time on the Move,” in *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, [2000] 2001), 1–23. Originally published in French as *De la postcolonie: essai sur l’imagination politique dans l’Afrique contemporaine* in 2000. This chapter was translated into English by A. M. Berrett.

rightly contended that “African AIDS” evidenced the West’s problematic dualistic knowledge claims about Self and Other and accordingly had no relation to Africa itself, these postcolonial critiques likewise were confined by their Euro-American worldviews, with little or no currency in, and engagement with, African public and intellectual discourse at the time. This will be evident in Chapters Four and Five.¹²³

Including Watney’s critique, and anticipating its emergence in print, Parmar’s *Reframing AIDS* (1987) introduced these concerns about race, gender, sexuality, and immigration to British and international audiences. It traveled widely in Europe and North America in gay and lesbian film festivals and through other activist media circuits. As one of her earliest films (created a year before the more well-known *Sari Red*), the work helped her secure a place in the ascendant Euro-American field of lesbian and gay (soon-to-be queer) film and video.¹²⁴ At the time, some people were startled by her choice to tackle this subject matter, which, unlike much of her earlier work in criticism and film, inevitably encompassed and affected many individuals outside of her specific subject position. Rebuking the rigidity of essentialist identity politics, Parmar incisively reflected on this viewpoint in 1993:

[w]hat was I, an Asian lesbian, doing making a video about AIDS that did not have just black women’s voices, but also the voices of black and white men? Why had I dared to cross the boundaries of race and gender?... It is such experiences that have reinforced my criticism of an essentialist identity politics as being divisive, exclusionary, and retrogressive. I would assert that our territories should be as broad as we choose. Without doubt we still need categories of self-enunciation, but we need them in a political and theoretical discourse on identity which gives us the space for the diversity of our imaginations and visions.¹²⁵

¹²³ I am grateful to Kylie Thomas for pointing this out.

¹²⁴ Parmar, interview.

¹²⁵ Pratibha Parmar, “That Moment of Emergence,” in *Queer Looks: Perspectives on Lesbian and Gay Film and Video*, ed. Martha Gevers, Pratibha Parmar, and John Greyson (New York: Routledge, 1993), 9.

As this statement illustrates, AIDS neither transcended nor succumbed to essentialist models of identity, yet it did awaken new intersubjective modes of solidarity, mobilization, and resistance. For Parmar and many of her peers, cutting across these differences was necessary for pressuring the national government to develop an effective roadmap on AIDS-related issues such housing, healthcare, employment protection, welfare, and pharmaceuticals. Or, as Watney put it, the “greatest challenge is to be able to construct a politics of health that can speak across the barriers of class and race and gender and sexuality, providing a powerful collective vision of how our lives could be.”¹²⁶

In late 1987 the need to create coalitions was particularly great on account of the amplified pointed attacks on gay and lesbian rights, culminating with the advent of Section 28 of the Tory’s Local Government Act in March 1988 (discussed at the beginning of this chapter). Whereas the black figured as the breakdown of Thatcher’s white nation state, the homosexual served, in the words of political theorist Anna Marie Smith, as “one of the symptomatic supports for the phantasmatic representation of the family as an antagonism-free space.”¹²⁷ Representing both dissolutions, the black homosexual or lesbian was doubly dangerous. Though the clause purported not to interfere with efforts to prevent or treat disease, for obvious reasons it made adequate public programs of safe sex information and education totally unattainable in this climate of hysteria, ignorance, and silence. Bringing to mind the destruction Esposito describes when the immunitary paradigm merges with nationalism, racism, and other such

¹²⁶ Simon Watney, “Taking Liberties: An Introduction,” in *Taking Liberties: AIDS and Cultural Politics*, ed. Erica Carter and Simon Watney (London: Serpent’s Tail, published in association with the ICA, 1989), 51.

¹²⁷ Smith, *New Right Discourse on Race and Sexuality: Britain, 1968-1990*, 222.

ideological positions, the implication of Section 28 was that homosexuals, and especially black homosexuals, deserved to die.¹²⁸

Galvanized by the authorization of this law and the lack of vital HIV-related healthcare provision and services, as well as the spiraling debates on representation, the artistic community—black and white—magnified their interventions. Watney and Erica Carter organized a pivotal conference called *Taking Liberties: AIDS and Cultural Politics* at the ICA, convening a host of scholars, community activists, health practitioners, politicians, and artists from Britain and the US in March 1988. A book based on the original papers, along with a few additional contributions, was released the following year. Under the guidance of Watney, the AIDS and Photography group was born out of these conversations, as a way to think up a compelling visual counter-discourse to dominant representations of the epidemic in autumn of 1987. An AIDS cultural programming series and two exhibitions developed out of this.¹²⁹ The first of these, *Bodies of Experience: Stories about Living with HIV*, was a group show of photography curated by Chris Boot and Anna Harding on behalf of Camerawork and the Photo Co-op, touring to Edinburgh and Sheffield in 1989.¹³⁰ The second was, of course, Boffin and Gupta's *Ecstatic Antibodies*, which was larger, franker and more diverse in its treatment of sexuality, and thus more controversial than *Bodies of Experience*. For example, after the Salford City Council cancelled *Ecstatic Antibodies*, a spokesperson, trying to avert

¹²⁸ Esposito, *Terms of the Political*, 130.

¹²⁹ Simon Watney, "Bodies of Experience," *Ten*.8 35 (Winter 1989): 16.

¹³⁰ The other artists in the show were Arabella Plouviez, Frank Ainsworth, John Cole, Crispin Hughes and Chris Boot, and Anna Arnone.

future criticism, claimed that the Viewpoint Gallery might try to tour the more family-friendly *Bodies of Experience*; Camerawork, however, was never contacted about this.¹³¹

The only artists to be included in both exhibitions were Fani-Kayode and Hirst.¹³² In addition to *The Golden Phallus*, for *Ecstatic Antibodies* Fani-Kayode produced images such as *Mask*, which shows a muscular black man in S&M garb, squatting and protectively holding two large, shapely, and symmetrical banana leaves that crisscross so as to obscure his upper countenance (see **Figure 3.18**). Without question, the artist conceived of his practice as an aesthetic and political rebuttal to the visual hegemony of Mapplethorpe's fetishistic portrayals of black men. *Mask* and much of his oeuvre, as Mercer and subsequent scholars such as Nelson, Moffitt, and Bourland have pointed out in close readings of Fani-Kayode's photography and texts (the latter of which were often co-written or written by Hirst), are significant for their playful and mournful subversions of "Africanity" or "Africanicity" and other identity-based constructs during a period in which homosexuality, blackness, Africa, virality, and death were entangled discourses in British public consciousness. In their contribution to the *Ecstatic Antibodies* book, Fani-

¹³¹ "Council Accused of Censorship."

¹³² Born into an eminent political and religious family in Lagos in 1955, Fani-Kayode spent his youth in Nigeria but moved to England as a result of a coup in his home country in 1966. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, he pursued undergraduate and graduate studies at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. and the Pratt Institute in New York before moving to London in 1983. He lived and worked in Brixton with his white partner and frequent collaborator Hirst, who died from AIDS complications in 1989. With Gupta and other friends and colleagues, in 1987 Fani-Kayode cofounded and served as the inaugural chair of the Autograph: Association of Black Photographers, an organization that promoted photographic practice and discourse about the politics of black representation in Britain and internationally, beyond the shallow yet trending logics of multiculturalism. For more on his life, see Mercer, "Mortal Coil: Eros and Diaspora in the Photographs of Rotimi Fani-Kayode," 100–105. This text first appeared in *Over-Exposed: Essays on Contemporary Photography*, ed. Carol Squires (New York: New Press, 1999), 183–210. See also Moffitt, "Rotimi Fani-Kayode's *Ecstatic Antibodies*," 74–75. The degree to which Fani-Kayode and Hirst collaborated remains unclear and is sometimes disputed. See, for example, Octavio Zaya, "On Three Counts I Am an Outsider: The Work of Rotimi Fani-Kayode," *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art* 4, no. 1 (1996): 24–29. To date, the most authoritative monograph about the artist is Bourland, *Bloodflowers*.

Kayode and Hirst offered an oblique explanation of this body of work, which, to review, “aim[ed] to produce spiritual antibodies to HIV.”¹³³ They continued:

[w]e have drawn on trans-cultural and trans-historical techniques to offer our response to a phenomenon which is specific only in terms of the individuals it affects here and now.

We (happen to) have been inspired in this by ancestral African, ecclesiastical, and contemporary ‘Western’/erotic images. HIV has forced us to deal with dark ambiguities. Where better to look for clues than in the secret chambers of African shrines, the sumptuous ruins of Coptic and Eurasian temples, and the boarded-up fuck-rooms of the American dream?¹³⁴

The “dark ambiguities” thrown into relief by the pandemic could also apply to a monumental shift in the work of Mercer, who reexamined the work and legacy of Mapplethorpe in an immensely significant revision of his earlier 1986 essay.¹³⁵ After Mapplethorpe’s death from AIDS complications in 1989, his work was aggressively targeted by neoconservatives such as Senator Jesse Helms in the midst of the American “Culture Wars,” resulting in acts of censorship, exhibition cancellations, and a national debate on federal arts funding. In a paper given in New York at the historic conference *How Do I Look? Queer Film and Video* (1989), printed two years later in the proceedings, Mercer claimed that the horrifying way Mapplethorpe’s photography was taken up as part of the moral panic surrounding AIDS, as well as an awareness of other details about the artist’s biography, prompted a rethinking of his relationship to, and

¹³³ Fani-Kayode and Hirst, “Metaphysick: Every Moment Counts,” 78.

¹³⁴ Fani-Kayode and Hirst, 80.

¹³⁵ Mercer first presented his revised argument as a paper, “Skin Head Sex Thing: Racial Difference and the Homoerotic Imaginary,” at the *How Do I Look? Queer Film and Video* conference at the Anthology Film Archives in New York in 1989. It was published two years later. See Kobena Mercer, “Skin Head Sex Thing: Racial Difference and the Homoerotic Imaginary,” in *How Do I Look? Queer Film and Video*, ed. Bad Object-Choices (Seattle: Bay Press, 1991), 169–210. However, I will be using the page numbers from the reprints of both essays in his book *Welcome to the Jungle* (1994). For more on the historiographic importance of Mercer’s revisions in relation to theories of identity, see, for instance, Amelia Jones, *Seeing Differently: A History and Theory of Identification and the Visual Arts* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 133–35.

therefore his analysis of, the works in question.¹³⁶ Complicating his earlier clear-cut argument about racial fetishism, and cracking open a new, more intersectional approach to visual culture, Mercer wrote in a weighty passage:

the photographs are open to a range of contradictory readings whose political character depends on the social identity that different audiences bring to bear on them. The photographs can confirm a racist reading as easily as they can produce an antiracist one; they can elicit a homophobic reading as easily as they can confirm a homoerotic one. Once ambivalence and undecidability are situated in the contextual relations between author, text and audiences, a cultural struggle ensues in which antagonistic efforts compete to articulate their preferred meaning in the text.¹³⁷

In the same way that HIV/AIDS pushed Parmar to adopt a more intersectional approach to filmmaking, one that was built on a hybridized multiplicity of marginalized identities and subject positions so as to maximize its political potency, the virus was a core cause of Mercer's move to reassess the "dark ambiguities," to borrow a term from Hirst and Fani-Kayode, that are at the heart of identification vis-à-vis visual culture. Because of the sophistication of the previous decade's political thinking about diaspora, sexuality, race, and representation, these AIDS-related exhibitions, works, and texts demonstrated the degree to which the pandemic called into question the boundaries between bodies, subject positions, and nation states.¹³⁸

Queer Diasporas and Transnational Desires

Towards the end of the 1980s, there was little doubt that the cultural meanings of the virus in Britain were circumscribed by formidable ideological attitudes. Normative views saw blackness and homosexuality as disorders to the white middle-class

¹³⁶ Mercer, *Welcome to the Jungle*, 196–98.

¹³⁷ Mercer, 203–4.

¹³⁸ Mapplethorpe's images would later be subjected to serious scrutiny in *Notes on the Margin of the Black Book* (1991-1993), an important photographic and textual installation by American artist Glenn Ligon.

heterosexual family unit, what Hall dubbed the “imaginary community of the nation.”¹³⁹ As I have tried to chart out in this chapter, cultural practitioners occupying black, gay, and lesbian subject positions were perfectly equipped to make compelling interventions on the battlefield of AIDS representations, and thence into the imagined nation.

Due to the history of British blackness and the rising cultural politics of diaspora, figures such as Gupta, Parmar, Mercer, Julien, and Fani-Kayode also approached the pandemic through an intersectional and transnational lens. Compared to what was happening in other national contexts at the time, AIDS cultural activism in Britain had a markedly global disposition even if its range of activities was so tightly rooted in London. The significance of this wave of cultural activity surpasses the fact that they illuminated the transnationality of the HIV/AIDS by cultivating trenchant artistic and activist strategies, all the while raising critical questions about postmodernism, identity, and difference. I am also arguing, to return to Gilroy’s quotation, that the pandemic “worlded [this] local” milieu—though this scene was already worldly in a certain sense because of the dislocation of diaspora. However, to reassess the problem-space of local black and queer cultural resistance epidemiologically, via an express consideration of the AIDS pandemic, reveals new ways of thinking about queer globality. It is possible to map out how HIV/AIDS specifically made this black lesbian and gay artistic network more transnational or global in two ways: firstly, by identifying new routes of cultural transmission and movement, and secondly, by pointing out a transnational imaginary that

¹³⁹ Stuart Hall, *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left* (London: Verso, 1988), 8. Of course, this turn of phrase echoes Benedict Anderson’s prominent theorization of “imagined communities” from a few years earlier. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

was conditioned by the virus. This imaginary is most visible in the aesthetic and epistemic imbrications of HIV/AIDS, diaspora, and the up-and-coming idea of queerness.

Whereas British lesbian and gay identity derived from the commonalities of desire and oppression that lesbians and gay men experienced in the early 1970s, “queer” as a category of identification was first employed in Britain in about 1990 as a response to the perceived deficiencies of gay and lesbian identity, culture, and politics—especially with regards to the heightened problems posed by AIDS. Largely adopted from its usage by American activists and intellectuals, the term was also popularized through OutRage!, a direct-action political group founded in 1990 that drew on activist tactics of the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) and Queer Nation in the US. “Queer” possessed radical associations of endearment and defiance, carrying with it a performative challenge to normative modes of identification vis-à-vis sexuality and gender. Although these British gay and lesbian cultural practitioners, black and white, generally did not identify as queer during the 1980s, they embraced the term in the early 1990s, frequently applying it in retrospect to their former lives and activities.¹⁴⁰

By considering additional work by Julien and Mercer, my aim in the remainder of this chapter is to show that HIV/AIDS played a formative role in the imagining and imaging of the black queer diaspora. These cultural works testify to a powerful entanglement of the viral, the black, the diasporic, and the queer, as constructs and figures and identities, that together jeopardized the “imaginary community of the nation” by evoking a global imaginary, a postmodern field of discourse and desire that envisaged

¹⁴⁰ For example, when Mercer published his collected writings from the previous decade, *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies*, in 1994, his introduction spoke of the “black queer diaspora”—a latent concept in his earlier criticism about black gay subjectivity and image-making. In the 1980s, his texts did not use “queer.” Mercer, *Welcome to the Jungle*, 30.

new modes of identifying, belonging, and resisting. HIV was sometimes the cause of, and sometimes the context for, a boom of transatlantic cultural activity, as reflected in the work by these British practitioners, as well as, in the US, the poetry of Essex Hemphill, the writings of Joseph Beam, the criticism of Hilton Als, the films of Marlon Riggs, and the music of Blackberri.

In 1987 Julien traveled to New York, connecting with Cuban-American artist and writer Coco Fusco, who was the first to screen *This Is Not an AIDS Advertisement* in New York as a part of her *Young, British, and Black* program at the Collective for Living Cinema. At the time, his partner Mark Nash was also a guest professor in film studies at New York University, so the two were able to conduct archival research on the life and times of the black writer Langston Hughes at Yale's Beinecke Library. While in town, Julien was fortuitously able to catch the grand funeral services of his longtime icon, the American writer James Baldwin, who passed away on December 1. According to the filmmaker, the event was a principal inspiration for *Looking for Langston*, which commences with an open coffin in which a tuxedoed Julien fills in for Hughes (see **Figure 3.19**).¹⁴¹ In this performative literalization of the Barthesian concept of the “death of the author,” the filmmaker noted, “I was spending more and more of my time going to funerals, thinking about what it would be like to die in one’s twenties. In *Langston I* extended this feeling to seeing how I would look in a coffin.”¹⁴² Anything but a realist biopic, *Looking for Langston* is about the politics of looking, about gay black desire and

¹⁴¹ B. Ruby Rich, “Soul Patrol,” in *Isaac Julien: Riot*, ed. Isaac Julien and Cynthia Rose (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2014), 85.

¹⁴² Isaac Julien, “Mirror,” in *Isaac Julien: Looking for Langston* (London: Victoria Miro, 2017), 11-13. This is a revised version of the essay in Isaac Julien, *Riot* (New York, NY: Museum of Modern Art, 2013). In fact, several people who worked on the film died from AIDS complications shortly after its release, including the actors Matthew Baidoo, Ben Ellison, and Jon Iwenjiora.

culture, and about, as Julien's quotation has just suggested, the compounding loss of HIV/AIDS in a transnational and diasporic context.¹⁴³ To learn more about historical precedents of black and black gay art, the filmmaker was led outside of Britain and into the lush world of the Harlem Renaissance, which becomes a provisional point of origin for gay black culture. Instead of pigeonholing the prolific black modernist, Langston Hughes, as gay in any essentialist terms, "the issue of authorial identity," as Mercer discerned, "is invested with fantasy, memory, and desire, and serves as an imaginative point of departure for speculation on the historical and social relations in which black gay male identity is lived."¹⁴⁴

The immensely inter-textual film is filled with trans-historical referents and quotations—among them, photographs by James Van Der Zee and George Platt Lynes, poems by Richard Bruce Nugent, and texts by Baldwin (see **Figure 3.20**). For example, a key tableau vivant, also photographed as a film still by Gupta, is a rethinking of *Two Men, John Leapheart and Buddy McCartney* (1947) by Platt Lynes, a white American modern fashion photographer known for his images of homoerotic and interracial desire. Whereas Platt Lynes' photograph presents a black man and a white man embracing symmetrically, longingly, the reinterpretation in *Looking for Langston* features two black men—the characters Alex and Beauty. These archival meditations, comprised of documentary footage, fictional sequences, and sonic and visual montages, are creatively interwoven with the present-day work of Hemphill, Blackberri, and Mapplethorpe, as

¹⁴³ For powerful readings of the film in relation to an emergent black queer diaspora, see, for instance, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "The Black Man's Burden," in *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*, ed. Michael Warner (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 230–38; José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 57–74; David S. Marriott, *Haunted Life: Visual Culture and Black Modernity* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 106–32

¹⁴⁴ Mercer, *Welcome to the Jungle*, 206.

well as the voiceovers by Hall and the American writer Toni Morrison. Though produced by Sankofa for Channel 4 and filmed in its entirety in London, *Looking for Langston* is notable for its transplantation of 1920s Harlem to Julien's contemporary gay milieu. As such, the film was a refracted transatlantic mirror of London's spatial geographies, artistic communities, and political debates. For instance, the decision to film a cruising scene at a cemetery in Kings Cross was not simply to bracket desire and death in the age of AIDS, but also to capture what was then an actual local cruising hub. Following the release of the film, Julien choreographed a series of live performances called *Undressing Icons* at various sites in London, Newcastle upon Tyne, and Minneapolis—tableaux vivants inspired by the film and the layered histories it conjured up. The first was held at this very cemetery (see **Figure 3.21**).¹⁴⁵

Even if *Looking for Langston* was extraordinary with respect to its transnational predilections and archival animations, it ignited a controversy when first screened at the New York Film Festival in 1989. The Hughes Estate was infuriated by the suggestion that the poet was gay, thereby forbidding Julien to use his poetry; this snowballed into a larger conflict despite re-edited versions of the film for American audiences.¹⁴⁶ According to Julien, there were also sizable misapprehensions about British black identity in America, where there was no commensurate apparatus of black cultural studies at the time: “[t]hey think you’re not quite African, you’re British but you’re not quite British and you dare to make comments about black America! It’s almost like ‘how dare

¹⁴⁵ *Undressing Icons* was first commissioned for Edge 90, the International Biennale of Innovative Visual Arts in Newcastle upon Tyne. See program for *Undressing Icons* (Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, 1990), Isaac Julien archival file, Stuart Hall Library. The first iteration, however, happened at Kings Cross in London in 1989.

¹⁴⁶ Catherine Saalfield, “Overstepping the Bounds of Property: Film Offends Langston Hughes Estate,” *The Independent: Film & Media Monthly*, February 1990. Isaac Julien archival file, Stuart Hall Library.

you?”¹⁴⁷ Because of this ordeal, leading members of the black American intelligentsia like Henry Louis Gates, Jr., bell hooks, and Cornell West entered into public debate so to defend the film, developing long-lasting relationships with Julien.¹⁴⁸

As a young filmmaker in London in the early 1980s, Julien came to voice through the Gay Black Group, Sankofa, and a web of fiercely intelligent colleagues, friends, and mentors. By the mid-1980s, the AIDS crisis became increasingly palpable and turned into one of his focal concerns. Following *This Is Not an AIDS Advertisement* and *Looking for Langston*, the virus was even felt later on in *The Attendant* in 1993. The pandemic was thus a critical force in the evolution and internationalization of Julien’s particular practice, most importantly in the US, where a new set of American critics such as B. Ruby Rich, Douglas Crimp, Kaja Silverman, hooks, Gates, and West were eager to write about and promote his work from different vantage points, marking out his status as a highly sought-after artist internationally—as we will see in the next chapter with the Out-in-Africa Gay & Lesbian Film Festival in South Africa.

In a corresponding way to Julien’s professional trajectory, Mercer finished a doctoral thesis in sociology at Goldsmiths’ College, University of London, in 1990, and quickly took up an assistant professorship in Art History and the History of Consciousness departments at the University of California, Santa Cruz, bringing black British cultural studies with him.¹⁴⁹ Though these analytic tools emerged as a result of specific political, intellectual, and cultural formations in postwar Britain, their

¹⁴⁷ Paul Gilroy and Isaac Julien, “Climbing the Racial Mountain: A Conversation with Isaac Julien,” in *Small Acts: Thoughts on the Politics of Black Cultures* (London: Serpent’s Tail, 1993), 171.

¹⁴⁸ Commentary with Isaac Julien and Nina Kellgren on *Looking for Langston* (Strand Releasing, [1989] 2007).

¹⁴⁹ Kenny, “Traveling Theory: The Cultural Politics of Race and Representation. An Interview with Kobena Mercer,” 8.

transatlantic migrations in the late 1980s and early 1990s were indivisible from the burgeoning of black queer cultural work—concomitant with the rise of HIV/AIDS. As Mercer signaled so intelligibly in his introduction to *Welcome to the Jungle* (1994), “we have come out of the margins into the centre of global politics in the context of the AIDS crisis.”¹⁵⁰ Revisiting Scott’s notion of “problem-space,” I would also like to stress the necessity of accounting for the pandemic as a political and discursive space of questions and answers, of arguments and conjectures, of provocations and elegies, one that can enrich our understanding of black and queer cultural practice and modes of resistance in Britain.

What is so striking about the different writings of Mercer, Hall, Gilroy, and Watney is the extent to which their theorizations of diaspora, queerness, and HIV/AIDS converged and interlaced. This output was also thoroughly postmodern in its efforts to decenter the subject of modernity, and to construct a politics and aesthetics around those who were historically marginalized. For Mercer, the black queer cultural production around him was so vital “because it contributed to the pluralization of public space,” thereby fitting into and nuancing a larger discursive scaffolding of postmodernism.¹⁵¹ Together, these thinkers critiqued the modernist insistence on origins, purity, and essence in an age of globalization and HIV/AIDS. The concept of diaspora became infused with metaphors of contamination. Mercer, as we have seen, proposed that Sankofa’s work “is not the expression of some lost origin or some uncontaminated essence... but the adoption of a critical ‘voice’ that promotes consciousness of the collision of cultures and histories

¹⁵⁰ Mercer, *Welcome to the Jungle*, 31.

¹⁵¹ Mercer, “Back to My Routes,” 285.

that constitute our very conditions of existence.”¹⁵² For Gilroy, the term likewise “points emphatically to the fact that there can be no pure, uncontaminated or essential blackness anchored in an unsullied originary moment.”¹⁵³ Building on these definitions, Hall theorized diasporic identity as dynamic and processual, always taking place “within, not outside, representation.” As he put it, diaspora was “not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of ‘identity’ which lives with and through, not despite, difference.”¹⁵⁴

Throughout these theorizations ran the assumption that a diasporic sensibility and blackness at large were not biologically inscribed, or written in the blood, but rather culturally constructed and located in a matrix of multiple subject positions and anti-essentialist articulations of identity.¹⁵⁵ The same, perhaps, might be said about HIV/AIDS. As a biological pathogen, the virus was “diasporic”—and so were its emergent cultural antibodies. Whatever its origins, it generated far more than a politics or poetics of the blood, for it transformed into a cultural crisis, a crisis of representation, as well as a major transnational and intersectional social movement. In the same way that AIDS cultural practitioners excavated the hysterical epidemiological origin stories, particularly “African AIDS,” to enhance their programs of cultural activism, they were less interested in delineating the historical origins of black identity in Africa or even localizing black queer identity in the Harlem Renaissance. Rather, they were articulating the vivid contemporary

¹⁵² Mercer, “Diaspora Culture and the Dialogic Imagination: The Aesthetics of Black Independent Film in Britain,” 56.

¹⁵³ Paul Gilroy, “Cruciality and the Frog’s Perspective: An Agenda of Difficulties for the Black Arts Movement in Britain,” *Third Text* 2, no. 5 (1988): 35.

¹⁵⁴ Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” in *Identity: Community, Culture, and Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), 222, 235. This text first appeared in *Framework* 36 (no date).

¹⁵⁵ In his influential essay, James Clifford critiqued Gilroy’s conception of diaspora as essentialist in his insistence on an African origin, in comparison to the more pluralistic and hybridized—or queer—theorization by Mercer. See James Clifford, “Diasporas,” *Cultural Anthropology* 9, no. 3 (1994): 319.

resonances of diaspora as a structure of feeling and fluid intersectional belonging, as a realm of transnational possibility and desire. This was precisely why Mercer looked to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's concept of the rhizome to theorize diaspora; as a postmodern model of non-hierarchical multiplicities, the rhizome could counter the origin-obsessed modern "arborescent structure of dichotomous thinking."¹⁵⁶

In the early 1990s, a new set of associations between diaspora, queerness, and HIV/AIDS arose as the pandemic worsened and became more visible across the globe, particularly the global South. It is interesting that Watney was the first person, to my knowledge, to activate the concept of diaspora as a template for thinking queerness (outside of blackness, that is) in his overlooked essay "AIDS and the Politics of Queer Diaspora," written in 1993 and published in 1995.¹⁵⁷ As the activist later recalled, "it became apparent early on that the notion of diaspora was going to be important because we were dealing not just with an epidemic, but with several different epidemics moving at different speeds, relative to different degrees of intervention."¹⁵⁸ In his essay, however, Watney also drew on Hall's work to argue that, in light of the conditions of globalization and the backdrop of the exacerbating pandemic, diaspora was an appropriate way to picture the spectrum of similarities and differences that comprised queer cultural identity, outside of a national imaginary. He underlined that

the sense of international unity felt most strongly by gay men around the world these days is surely forged in relation to our direct experience of

¹⁵⁶ Mercer, "Back to My Routes," 292.

¹⁵⁷ In the early 2000s, scholars would more extensively theorize queer diasporas, sometimes in relation to HIV/AIDS and often in relation to blackness. For instance, see the important books Cindy Patton and Benigno Sánchez-Eppler, eds., *Queer Diasporas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000); Gayatri Gopinath, *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

¹⁵⁸ Watney, interview.

protracted illness, suffering, loss, and mourning, together with the cultural solidarity we obtain from what has always been a diasporic queer culture.¹⁵⁹

From blackness to queerness to HIV/AIDS, the re-theorizations and shifting meanings of diaspora—the diaspora of “diaspora,” if you will—opened up nuanced frameworks for thinking more transnationally about identity, culture, and resistance. As the following chapter will illustrate, the pandemic was a prime catalyst for the design of a global queer culture in post-apartheid South Africa.

¹⁵⁹ Simon Watney, “AIDS and the Politics of Queer Diaspora,” in *Negotiating Lesbian & Gay Subjects*, ed. Monica Dorenkamp and Richard Henke (New York: Routledge, 1995), 63–64.

Chapter Four

HIV/AIDS and the Making of a Global Queer Public Culture in Cape Town

In April 1994 the renowned white American lesbian filmmaker Barbara Hammer received a special message on her answering machine in San Francisco: “you are invited to the first lesbian and gay film festival ever on the African continent, and we want to have a retrospective of your films and videos.”¹ As the formal letter from Jack Lewis and Nodi Murphy, its organizers in Cape Town, elaborated, “[h]aving ‘discovered’ you through [your film] *Nitrate Kisses* and then in Canyon Cinema’s catalogue while working on pulling this festival together, we have heard increasing wonderful things as we tried to find out more!”² Neither Hammer’s invitation nor a lesbian and gay film festival in South Africa would have been imaginable just a few years earlier. Since Nelson Mandela’s historic release from prison in February 1990 and the ensuing negotiation process between the National Party and the African National Congress (ANC) to dismantle the apartheid system from 1990 to 1993, the South African state had been in the midst of a series of radical structural transformations that resounded internationally with great elation. In April 1994 South African citizens of all racial backgrounds went to the polls in the country’s first democratic election, voting in Mandela as President of an ANC-led government. Electing the ANC also meant supporting its unambiguous position on lesbian and gay protections—a policy enshrined in the Constitution’s Bill of Rights that was adopted officially in December 1996. Prohibiting unfair discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, the “Equality Clause” made South Africa the first country in the world to acknowledge lesbian and gay rights on a constitutional level.

¹ Barbara Hammer, *Out in South Africa* (Women Make Movies, 1995).

² Jack Lewis and Nodi Murphy to Barbara Hammer, March 22, 1994, B2.2, GAL0118A Out-In-Africa Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action, Johannesburg, South Africa (hereafter GALA).

Now the successful international cultural, academic, and economic boycott had come to an end, and soon South Africa would no longer be alienated from the global community. What, then, was the significance of inviting Hammer, as well as British filmmaker Isaac Julien, American director Greta Schiller, and American producer David Haughland to this festival? Within the span of a few chaotic years, apartheid was in the midst of being abolished, and homosexuality was in the course of being decriminalized. Lesbians and gay men from across the political and racial spectrum were newly visible and about to be guaranteed unprecedented constitutional rights; however, outside of emergent activist groups and social circles, they lacked both cultural recognition and a cultural infrastructure. As such, constructing gay, lesbian, and queer cultural identities was a paramount task in the reborn nation.

To do so, activists, journalists, performers, filmmakers, dramaturges, and visual artists gravitated towards two distinct approaches for making themselves visible and foregrounding their queer subjectivities in the public sphere. The first strategy involved a thorough excavation of local histories of queer life—covert narratives and uneven archives shaped by the machinery of apartheid. A number of cultural efforts spoke to this imperative. The hugely important book *Defiant Desire*, edited by activists Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron in 1994, is a prime early attempt to sketch out a history so as to register the diversity of gay and lesbian identities that had materialized out of a specific chronology of apartheid and resistance. As Gevisser noted in his preliminary account, “[g]iven the sparse documentation of lesbian and gay history in this country, I have had to construct a narrative from fragments.”³ Alongside this book and other vital scholarly

³ Mark Gevisser, “A Different Fight for Freedom: A History of South African Lesbian and Gay Organisation from the 1950s to 1990s,” in *Defiant Desire*, ed. Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron, 2nd ed.

works was a rush of films, artworks, and eventually the Gay and Lesbian Archives, founded in Johannesburg in 1997.⁴ Their goals were to produce new forms of knowledge and to initiate public conversations about the historical erasures of queer life and experience in the context of South African institutions and culture at large. Parallel to governmental entities such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), established in 1995 as a body of restorative justice to address the violence of the apartheid era, many of these lesbian and gay cultural projects were empowered by the idea that a nuanced understanding of history was more than a key ingredient of identity construction. It was also, for many, the hallmark of a robust democracy.

The second method cultural practitioners were attracted to—one that remains understudied in scholarship—was to gaze beyond the local or national terrain, to work towards a more global (in this case, Euro-American) template of queer experience. Evidenced by Hammer’s invitation to South Africa, a country with which she previously had no relationship, this invocation of the global queer followed the logic that queerness, including its cultures, languages, stylizations, histories, desires, icons, and canons, knew no national borders. Especially because South African gays and lesbians were now affirmed legally—a mightily impressive fact for their counterparts across the world—many queer cultural practitioners, as freshly minted global citizens, felt that it was about time to craft and partake in a global queer culture. Rather than conflicting, these somewhat divergent tendencies of digging up the past and reaching out to foreign models complemented each other, and were jointly articulated in such a way that matched a

(New York: Routledge, [1994] 1995), 17. The first South African edition was published by Ravan Press in Johannesburg in 1994. However, the book was completed in June 1993.

⁴ For more on the Gay and Lesbian Archives, see Graeme Reid, “‘The History of the Past Is the Trust of the Present’: Preservation and Excavation in the Gay and Lesbian Archives of South Africa,” in *Refiguring the Archive*, ed. Carolyn Hamilton et al. (Cape Town: David Philip, 2002), 193–208.

larger post-apartheid cultural sensibility: the fluctuating desires to be local and global, to gaze backward and forward, to mourn and to celebrate.

The crumbling of apartheid coincided with not only the invigoration of lesbian and gay organizing and visibility, but also the growing prevalence of HIV/AIDS. Bringing epidemiological art-historical analysis to the global South, this chapter asserts that the development of a global queer public culture in South Africa, particularly in Cape Town, was premised on more than just constitutional freedom. It was also based on the AIDS pandemic—a phenomenon commonly understood to be a chief global queer concern by the late 1980s. As Chapters Two and Three have illustrated, it was irrefutable that AIDS and its activist responses were in the DNA of queer cultural identity as it had been evolving in national contexts such as United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and Australia. Since 1982, when news of the pandemic first arrived in the South African media, and two white gay men were diagnosed with AIDS, many gay men and lesbians had a deep conviction that the health crisis connected them to their contemporaries elsewhere.⁵ In search of new cultural identities post-apartheid, the Cape Town groups that formed concentrated their efforts on raising awareness about AIDS, preaching safer sex practices, and memorializing the dead. Beyond simply absorbing the lessons in political and cultural activism from their increasingly international networks, these South African practitioners viewed HIV/AIDS as a profound inheritance that was central to their emergent identities. The global queer culture that manifested in South Africa was not overshadowed by the virus, but rather crosshatched by the conjoined risks of dying, of living with death, and of fighting for life. Riddled with disease, the global

⁵ Mandisa Mbali, *South African AIDS Activism and Global Health Politics* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), 5.

queer culture of Cape Town tested the ebullient promise of life in the wake of apartheid, sometimes with HIV/AIDS.⁶

To formulate this set of arguments, my chapter inspects two main instances in which the virus provided a blueprint for a global queer public culture emerging from South Africa. The inaugural Out-in-Africa Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, which took place in Johannesburg, Durban, Cape Town, and Bloemfontein from late June to early July 1994, offers one salient case-study. Hammer's participation in the festival is noteworthy because she led workshops in filmmaking and interviewing techniques in the townships of Soweto and Gugulethu; her footage in the workshops and from throughout the festival forms the core of her experimental documentary *Out in South Africa*, completed in 1995. Both the festival and the video it inspired are powerful enactments of a global queer culture, infused with transnational conviviality and the gravity of the pandemic.

The second cultural event I examine is the Locker Room Project in December 1994, the first iteration of the Mother City Queer Projects in Cape Town. Originated by artist Andrew Putter and architect André Vorster as an extravagantly kitsch Gesamtkunstwerk-like one-night party, the Locker Room Project can be credited for popularizing the term and notion "queer" in Cape Town, at least within the art world. Perhaps the largest work of public art in South African history at the time, it was also, crucially, conceived of as a memorial for Vorster's lover Craig Darlow, who had died from AIDS complications earlier that year. My analysis of this event is supplemented by a reading of Ashraf Jamal's rapturous novel *Love Themes for the Wilderness* (1996).

⁶ On the key difference between apartheid as a time of death and the post-apartheid as a time of living with death, we can look to Sarah Nuttall, *Entanglement: Literary and Cultural Reflections on Post-Apartheid* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2009), 151–52.

Circling around the queer arts community in the Observatory neighborhood of Cape Town, this semi-fictional text is punctuated by the evolution of the Locker Room Project and life with the surging presence of death.

In the months immediately following Mandela's election in March 1994, Out-in-Africa and the Locker Room Project took place in Cape Town, albeit the festival circulated nationally. These were some of the first large-scale public articulations of queer culture in Cape Town, in South Africa, and on the entire continent. Wildly different in terms of audience and objective, the two separate events both linked local participants and actuated a global queer culture, in part, through singling out HIV/AIDS. The social scenery of Cape Town played a major role in fostering distinct queer cultural sensibilities, but there was also plenty of political and artistic cross-pollination with Johannesburg, a city with its own identity and history.

What is essential to understand about these cultural configurations from the outset, something that cannot be overstated, is how predominantly white they were. Particularly before the first election in 1994 and Mandela's official promulgation of the constitution in 1996, the breakdown of decades' worth of segregation, division, and deprivation was, and continues to be, a very slow process. The domain of culture, including queer culture, must be placed firmly within these power relations. And though the artistic and activist projects this chapter explores had markedly disparate racial and political makeups, it is necessary to recognize that during this transitional period in the 1990s—overflowing with jubilation and uncertainty—the socio-spatial geographies of urban Cape Town had changed very little from the days of apartheid. The queer and arts communities were mostly white, hip, and with access to economic opportunities. White gay men and, to a

slightly lesser extent, lesbians were more likely to be educated, moneyed, and employed in positions of power than their black, coloured, or Indian compatriots. They tended to have the chance to travel within South Africa and feasibly even to Europe or North America, where they could see art and experience parts of other queer subcultures as tourists or long-term inhabitants. Apartheid ensured that black lesbians and gay men had restricted access to these economic resources, spatial experiences, and cultural infrastructures; for these reasons, they were much less linked into what I am calling the queer global during and even after apartheid.⁷

To be absolutely clear, this chapter scrutinizes queerness as a historical construct, as a magnetic mode of identification that swept from North America and Western Europe to South Africa in the early 1990s. In other words, I approach queerness and its various cultural forms epidemiologically, for, in many ways, global queer culture and HIV/AIDS were inseparable as they virally reproduced. Unlike activist scholars Zethu Matebeni and Jabu Pereira in their exhilarating book and exhibition *Reclaiming Afrikan: Queer Perspectives on Sexual and Gender Identities* (2014), I am not dissecting or theorizing the ontology of queerness in Africa, but rather laying out its meanings and deployment within a bracketed time and space.⁸ I am not suggesting that queerness was uniquely a white or Euro-American identity, but I do highlight the complex ways in which it was

⁷ Because of these different relationships to power based on race, I feel that it is important to note the racial identities of each person I discuss. While these classifications and constructions are greatly reductive and often debilitating, I hope they can supply a greater clarity to this history, particularly for readers less familiar with contemporary South Africa.

⁸ Zethu Matebeni and Jabu Pereira, “Preface,” in *Reclaiming Afrikan: Queer Perspectives on Sexual and Gender Identities*, ed. Zethu Matebeni (Athlone, Cape Town: Modjaji Books, 2014), 7–9. See also the important recent book, Zethu Matebeni, Surya Monro, and Vasu Reddy, eds., *Queer in Africa: LGBTQI Identities, Citizenship, and Activism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2018). Within this collection, I have found Jane Bennett’s essay on the limits of white queerness to be especially useful and provocative as I approach these constructs and identities more historically in this chapter. See Jane Bennett, “‘Queer/White’ in South Africa: A Troubling Oxymoron?,” in *Queer in Africa: LGBTQI Identities, Citizenship, and Activism*, ed. Zethu Matebeni, Surya Monro, and Vasu Reddy (London and New York: Routledge, 2018), 99–113.

sometimes wrapped up with white privilege and power on a cultural level in Cape Town and beyond in the early 1990s. Oftentimes led by white gay men, the cultural efforts did not always mirror the surrounding debates on race and practices of queer and AIDS activism.⁹ Nonetheless, Out-in-Africa, aware that most of its leaders, guests, and screenings were white, strove to address racial politics head-on, with the aim of giving rise to a queer community across racial lines. For the organizers of the Locker Room Project, however, black participation was more of an afterthought, and the event reflected this. In many respects, these queer cultural efforts sorely preview the limitations of multi-racialism and non-racialism as political stances in the fight against racism and white supremacy during this transitional moment in the 1990s. The failure of these approaches to confront racial difference and to work to undo whiteness persists today, calling for more radical ways to think about racial politics in view of anti-blackness in South Africa and globally.¹⁰

With an epidemiological outlook that considers the making and circulation of culture across populations, this chapter assesses the nexus between queer cultural production and AIDS activism in order to capture the local and transnational flows of images, ideas, and identities. As a structuring agent for a global queer culture, the pandemic opened up pathways and networks that provide us with a fresh perspective on the manifold transformations that were at the heart of post-apartheid life. Although I consider activism and advocacy, especially the critical work of groups such as the Gay and Lesbian Organisation of the Witwatersrand (GLOW) in Johannesburg and the

⁹ I am thankful to Graeme Reid for helping me clarify my analysis of these discrepancies.

¹⁰ The conceptions, histories, meanings, and designations of race in South Africa are different from those in America, Canada, or Britain. For more on multi-racialism and non-racialism, David Everatt, ed., *Non-Racialism in South Africa* (London: Routledge, 2014). In particular, the idea of multiculturalism never had any traction in the South African context. Thanks to Sarah Nuttall for her input on this.

Association of Bisexuals, Gays and Lesbians (ABIGALE) in Cape Town—the two driving forces behind Out-in-Africa—my focus is on visual culture. Both queer activism and visual culture are too frequently passed over in histories of AIDS in South Africa.¹¹ Moreover, there is no history of South African queer (visual) cultural production, accounting for fine art, photography, film, nightlife, literature, conferences, and political demonstrations, particularly during the first half of the 1990s. In writing this chapter, however, I am informed by a medley of cultural theory and criticism. Whereas literature scholars such as William Spurlin, Neville Hoad, Cheryl Stobie, and Brenna Munro have offered constructive insights into queer sexuality and representation via pointed and fairly canonical texts, art historian Annie Coombes, amongst others, has written eloquently about the work of queer visual artists Clive van den Berg and Jean Brundit in relation to public memory.¹² Building on this scholarship, Álvaro Luís Lima and Anna Stielau have theorized the quandaries of queer national belonging in South Africa through select close

¹¹ Historical, anthropological, and sociological accounts of AIDS activism that do not accentuate queer experience include Didier Fassin, *When Bodies Remember: Experiences and Politics of AIDS in South Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); and Claire Laurier Decoteau, *Ancestors and Antiretrovirals: The Biopolitics of HIV/AIDS in Post-Apartheid South Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013). A notable exception is Mandisa Mbali's excellent book, which thoroughly delves into histories of gay and lesbian response beginning in the early 1980s, yet it does not pay attention to cultural production. See Mbali, *South African AIDS Activism and Global Health Politics*. Finally, the scholarship of Rebecca Hodes on television and documentary is incredibly useful for me, for she takes into account both queer history and visual representation. See Rebecca Hodes, "HIV/AIDS in South African Documentary Film, c. 1990-2000," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 33, no. 1 (2007): 153–71; Rebecca Hodes, *Broadcasting the Pandemic: A History of HIV on South African Television* (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2014).

¹² William J. Spurlin, *Imperialism within the Margins: Queer Representation and the Politics of Culture in Southern Africa* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006); Neville Hoad, *African Intimacies: Race, Homosexuality, and Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007); Cheryl Stobie, "The Queer Celebratory in Ashraf Jamal's *Love Themes for the Wilderness*," *English in Africa* 2 (October 2007): 5–18; Brenna M. Munro, *South Africa and the Dream of Love to Come: Queer Sexuality and the Struggle for Freedom* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012); Annie E. Coombes, "New Subjectivities for the New Nation," in *History after Apartheid: Visual Culture and Public Memory in a Democratic South Africa* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 243-278. Another instructive resource for these intersectional histories is Neville Hoad, Karen Martin, and Graeme Reid, eds., *Sex & Politics in South Africa* (Cape Town: Double Storey Books, 2005). For a queer reading of work by the important artist Moshekwa Langa, see a chapter in the forthcoming book, "Structural Adjustment: Mapping, Geography, and the Visual Cultures of Blackness," by art historian Steven Nelson.

readings of contemporary artworks.¹³ Meanwhile, cultural theorists, especially Kylie Thomas and Zethu Matebeni, have brilliantly unpacked the visual and aesthetic dimensions of AIDS, queerness, and race in a post-apartheid world.¹⁴ A separate assortment of scholarship attends to AIDS cultural production outside of a queer field of references; the following chapter about Kim Berman and the Paper Prayers campaign will engage this historiography.

My interpretation of the visual culture stoking a global queer identity is indebted to the theoretical concerns of this astute scholarship, but it proceeds in a different direction by filling in a much-needed historical context. Beyond expounding programs of representation, I ponder how these events, as durational interventions in public space, reveal the making of the queer global culture. Aided by archival research, interviews, and secondary-source representations of history, including Hammer's film and Jamal's novel, my account contests two primary historiographic trends in histories of art and visual culture after apartheid. Firstly, my research rethinks cultural debates on national identity and history, typified in Coombes' cogent scholarship when she sweepingly theorizes that the work of South African artists in the 1990s was a window into the "complications of inhabiting subject positions that are riven with conflictual, inherited histories but out of which they attempt to fashion new subjectivities appropriate for the new nation."¹⁵ The contagious history this chapter probes is HIV/AIDS, which, I show, was endowed with global as opposed to national meanings in South Africa in the 1980s and early 1990s.

¹³ Álvaro Luís Lima, "Screw the Nation! Queer Nationalism and Representations of Power in Contemporary South African Art," *African Arts* 45, no. 4 (2012): 46–57; Anna Stielau, "Double Agents: Queer Citizenship(s) in Contemporary South African Visual Culture" (Master of Arts in Fine Art, University of Cape Town, 2016).

¹⁴ Kylie Thomas, *Impossible Mourning: HIV/AIDS and Visuality After Apartheid* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2013); Zethu Matebeni, ed., *Reclaiming Afrikan: Queer Perspectives on Sexual and Gender Identities* (Athlone, Cape Town: Modjaji Books, 2014).

¹⁵ Coombes, *History after Apartheid*, 245–46.

Moreover, apartheid as a national container was never and could never be the sole grounds for forging identity and culture.

For that reason, this chapter asks: what does it mean to enter into a global cultural history of trauma and resistance, one that was both inherited and contracted? This history, it goes without saying, had been unfolding for no more than a decade, most theatrically in North America and Europe—and yet the virus was a vital component of the global queer imaginary in South Africa.¹⁶ In making this argument, I am not claiming that (gay) South Africans were unaffected by AIDS during the 1980s, for they certainly were, but rather that the virus became a foundation upon which to construct a global queer culture during the transition to democracy. Because histories of modern and contemporary art in South Africa tend to fixate on the nation state as the one and only optic for knowledge production, they have left under-examined the complex ways in which culture, both during and after apartheid, has been entangled in dynamic processes of internationalization and globalization. As a consequence of my heterogeneous archives and my obligatorily transnational outlook, the approach in this chapter—and in this whole study—takes its cue from the vibrant field of South African cultural studies, which since at least 2000 has designed more transnational and global frameworks for grappling with the production, circulation, and reception of culture.¹⁷

¹⁶ So far, I have struggled to locate a literature that casts HIV/AIDS as a paradigm for trans-historical and transnational cultural trauma. For me, the scholar whose work most closely gets at this issue is literary theorist Debarati Sanyal, whose book explores the shifting meanings of the Holocaust in French literature and thought. She writes about “how Holocaust memory has energized solidarity and struggle in certain contexts while freezing into a paradigm in others.” Debarati Sanyal, *Memory and Complicity: Migrations of Holocaust Remembrance* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 18. Similarly, I am interested in HIV/AIDS as an archetype of violence and uprising, one that can catalyze and stultify in different contexts through powerful processes of inheritance, ownership, and recontextualization.

¹⁷ For more on transnational currents in literary and cultural studies in South Africa over the past two decades, see Isabel Hofmeyr and Liz Gunner, “Introduction: Transnationalism and African Literature,”

The second assumption this chapter contests—pervasive in both cultural histories and popular representations of HIV/AIDS in South Africa—is that AIDS activism commenced with the foundation of the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) in Cape Town in December 1998.¹⁸ Without question, this has coalesced into a dominant narrative, into an unshakable paradigm, of not only South African AIDS activism, but also post-apartheid activism in the most general sense.¹⁹ Yet I will hope to show that a decade before the administration of Thabo Mbeki, who became president in June 1999, stalwartly denied the link between HIV and AIDS, and suppressed the accessibility of life-saving antiretroviral drugs, South African queer AIDS activists had already started to launch awareness and prevention campaigns—and doing so by means of culture.²⁰ These queer AIDS cultural initiatives were in the pipeline long before HIV/AIDS started to consolidate in South Africa as a branch of art-making or a distinct non-fictional literary genre in the late 1990s and early 2000s.²¹

Scrutiny 2 10, no. 2 (2005): 3–14; Sarah Nuttall, “A Politics of the Emergent: Cultural Studies in South Africa,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 23, no. 7–8 (2006): 263–78.

¹⁸ This tendency is analogous to how many historians and commentators pinpoint the start of AIDS activism in New York as the launch of the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) in 1987, wrongfully neglecting a concatenation of queer cultural and political efforts that paved the way for subsequent formations.

¹⁹ I would argue that the highly influential scholarship of cultural theorists and anthropologists such as Steven L. Robins, Jean Comaroff, and John L. Comaroff has reflected this tendency. See Steven L. Robins, ed., *Limits to Liberation after Apartheid: Citizenship, Governance & Culture* (Cape Town: David Philip, 2005), 2; Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, *Theory from the South: Or, How Euro-America Is Evolving Toward Africa* (Boulder and London, 2012), 177–81. As one of the most celebrated social movements of the twenty-first century, TAC’s AIDS activism has become so mythologized that its activist paradigm arguably carries on beyond South Africa. For more on this critique, see, for example, John Greyson’s operatic documentary *Fig Trees* (2009)—to be discussed in the Coda.

²⁰ For more on Mbeki and AIDS denialism, see Mark Gevisser, *A Legacy of Liberation: Thabo Mbeki and the Future of the South African Dream* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2009), 276–96.

²¹ Chapter Five will analyze the rising centrality of AIDS visual-cultural production, which blended art, craft, therapy, education, and income-generation. For more on the prominent genre of AIDS memoir beginning in the early 2000s, see, for example, Ellen Grünkemeier, “Literary Genres,” in *Breaking the Silence: South African Representations of HIV/AIDS* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: James Currey, 2013), 163–220.

It is no coincidence that many of the same pioneering cultural practitioners who were involved in the development of TAC, including Zackie Achmat, Jack Lewis, Mido Achmat, and Theresa Raizenberg, were responsible for the early forms of queer and AIDS activism that this chapter historicizes. The international queer networks cultivated by these figures and others in the early 1990s, strategically building on those from the struggle against apartheid, were precisely what enabled TAC to mobilize transnationally, and to have such a compelling presence on the stage of both national and global politics. Accordingly, this chapter can be considered a prehistory of TAC, one that traces the co-development of a global queer public culture and AIDS activism in Cape Town.

Situating AIDS cultural activism as far back as the late 1980s and early 1990s is important because it casts light on a tender yet hopeful, even joyful, history of post-apartheid life before South Africa came to be identified internationally by its frightful pandemic, before the virus came to be inscribed in the nation's DNA. By the mid-1990s, as the final section of this chapter will show, the visibility of the rampant spread of HIV/AIDS beyond the queer community necessitated new methods and approaches for confronting the virus across broader social demographics. My aim in this chapter is not to underline the inevitability of the pandemic, to claim that it was singularly demarcated by the crushing weight of apartheid, or to glorify early acts of queer spatial intervention. On the contrary, I intend to expose a nearly forgotten archive of cultural work, one that fits awkwardly into extant South African histories of art, activism, and sexuality, so as to broach questions about public culture and globalization.

Sarah Nuttall and Cheryl-Ann Michael have posited that the field of South African cultural studies has been over-determined by the historical phenomenon of

apartheid.²² I am influenced by this critique, which, I think, can be adjusted so as to pertain to scholarly treatment of HIV/AIDS in South Africa. Possibly it seems paradoxical for me, in composing this transnational history of AIDS-related cultural production, to be wary of over-determining the significance of the virus here and elsewhere. However, what I find so valuable about this burst of queer cultural activity in the early 1990s is its buoyant insistence that the future could hold other historical possibilities. By the turn of the century, it was clear that the state and civil society had overwhelmingly failed to respond to the pandemic adequately at an early stage. As the culture-making in Chapter Five will demonstrate, the horizon of the late 1990s looks very different.

The Publics and Politics of Homosexuality: From Apartheid to AIDS

My assertions about this emergent queer public culture in the 1990s demand a historical sketch of homosexuality within the spatial, political, and social operations of power.²³ Apartheid's strength, as urban theorist Jennifer Robinson reminds us, was "rooted in the spatial practices referenced in its very name: much more than simply an

²² Sarah Nuttall and Cheryl-Ann Michael, "Introduction: Imagining the Present," in *Senses of Culture: South African Culture Studies*, ed. Sarah Nuttall and Cheryl-Ann Michael (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 1–23.

²³ Most associated with the journal founded by anthropologists Arjun Appadurai and Carol A. Breckenridge in 1988, the term "public culture" proposed a broad discursive arena of hybridized cosmopolitan cultural practice. It called into question the nation state as a hegemonic frame of reference, paying close attention to the transnational modes of cultural circulation that emerged under the conditions linked to late modernity and globalization. For more, see Arjun Appadurai and Carol A. Breckenridge, "Why Public Culture?," *Public Culture* 1, no. 1 (Fall 1988): 5–9. I am also informed by Michael Warner's persuasive theorizations of publics and counterpublics (and queer counterpublics in particular, originally elaborated with Lauren Berlant)—for thinking about a public as a social space constituted through circulating discourse, one in which a spectrum of world-making activities take place. For more on queer counterpublics as spaces of sociality and discourse, see Michael Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics," *Public Culture* 14, no. 1 (Winter 2002): 86–89; Berlant and Warner, "Sex in Public." For a remodeling of these ideas to frameworks of post-apartheid publics and the question of the private, see, for instance, Kerry Bystrom and Sarah Nuttall, "Introduction: Private Lives and Public Cultures in South Africa," *Cultural Studies* 27, no. 3 (2013): 307–32.

expression of a political order, the spaces of apartheid constituted and sustained that order.”²⁴ Beyond racial segregation, the spatial regulation of sexuality, both heterosexual and homosexual, was part and parcel of the apartheid state. Spatial partitions of public life and discourse enforced the categories of difference—the building blocks of apartheid—through producing and obstructing certain forms of sexual behavior, expression, and relationality. Yet elsewhere Robinson has noted the dynamism of urban space and social imaginaries, inquiring, “was even the apartheid city—a city of division—a place of movement, of change, of crossing?”²⁵ This question of traversing, of cruising, of deviating, was particularly relevant with respect to gay men and lesbians of every race, for, no matter how hard the state tried, it could never choreograph all social and sexual relations, or wipe out their public and private cultures.

If, as Mark Gevisser notes, the “strand of self-consciousness about borders and boundaries—a negotiation of frontiers and a fear of what lies beyond—is particularly (even if not uniquely) South African,” the very notion of transgression—sexual, racial, legal, physical, geographic, artistic—was charged with political modes of identifying, desiring, and imagining that were thought to endanger the apartheid state.²⁶ With the spatial and political rearrangements of the late 1980s and early 1990s, white and multi-racial queer public cultures manifested with vitality, laying claim to public space as never before. Especially in Cape Town, where most of this chapter takes place, queer spatial practices during this period were acutely shaped by—and part of—the legacy of

²⁴ Jennifer Robinson, *The Power of Apartheid: State, Power and Space in South African Cities* (Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, 1996), 2.

²⁵ Jennifer Robinson, “(Im)mobilizing Space--Dreaming of Change,” in *Blank--: Architecture, Apartheid and after*, ed. Hilton Judin and Ivan Vladislavić (Rotterdam: Netherlands Architecture Institute, 1998), D7.

²⁶ Mark Gevisser, *Lost and Found in Johannesburg: A Memoir* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014), 36.

apartheid. The racialized geographic organization of Cape Town remained virtually unchanged post-apartheid, with a stark division between the white City Centre and suburbs to the south, and the coloured and black townships.²⁷ Racial background, area of residence, class position, and other markers of social identity were key facilitators and impediments to one's access to, and awareness of, the various lesbian, gay, and queer cultural forms sprouting out of the urban landscape. Scholarship at the intersection of geography, urban theory, and queer studies has carefully elucidated the ongoing ways in which the spatialization of post-apartheid queer life in Cape Town kept alive many of the boundaries set in place by the apartheid state, particularly with regard to race.²⁸ Although most of this literature concentrates on queer urban articulation and visibility in the late 1990s and early 2000s, at which point Cape Town was, in fact, known internationally as a gay tourist destination, this research is helpful insofar as it stresses the interdependencies of identity formation and urban space. It also productively calls into question the fraught terms of queerness as, on the one hand, localized and lived in Cape Town, and, on the other, tightly lodged within colonial, postcolonial, and globalizing projects.

In any event, this history of sexual control runs deep. Beginning with the Immorality Act of 1927, South Africa criminalized all sexual activity between whites and Africans; the National Party, once it secured power in 1948 and implemented the policy

²⁷ Steven L. Robins, "City Sites," in *Senses of Culture: South African Cultural Studies*, ed. Sarah Nuttall and Cheryl-Ann Michael (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 2000), 408–25.

²⁸ For example, see Glen S. Elder, "Of Moffies, Kaffirs and Perverts: Male Homosexuality and the Discourses of Moral Order in the Apartheid State," in *Mapping Desire: Geographies of Sexualities*, ed. David Bell and Gill Valentine (New York: Routledge, 1995), 56–65; Glen S. Elder, "Somewhere, over the Rainbow: Cape Town, South Africa, as a 'Gay Destination,'" in *African Masculinities* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 43–59; William Leap, "Finding the Centre: Claiming Gay Space in Cape Town," in *Performing Queer: Shaping Sexualities 1994-2004*, ed. Mikki van Zyl and Melissa Steyn, vol. 1 (Cape Town: Kwela Books, 2005), 235–64; Natalie Oswin, "The End of Queer (as We Knew It): Globalization and the Making of a Gay-Friendly South Africa," *Gender, Place & Culture* 14, no. 1 (2007): 93–110; Andrew Tucker, *Queer Visibilities: Space, Identity and Interaction in Cape Town* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

of apartheid, extended this legislation to sexual acts between whites and all non-whites (i.e. coloureds and Asians), as well as all extramarital sex. All intermarriage between groups of different racial classification was also outlawed in 1950. Seven years later, a further amendment to the Immorality Act criminalized prostitution and “unlawful carnal intercourse and other acts in relation thereto.”²⁹ Though the legislation did not make specific mention of homosexual conduct, as the technically operative yet unenforced British colonial common law did, this amendment could be applied to gay men, whose subcultural presence was increasingly conspicuous in Cape Town, Durban, and Johannesburg. In the years after World War II, local social and sexual networks of white gay men and, to a smaller degree, lesbians, were on the rise in these cities through bars, house parties, parks, public toilets, cafés, and sporting clubs from the 1950s to 1960s.³⁰ Cape Town also had a sizable gay culture among the Cape Malay coloured communities in District Six before the government forcibly removed all of its inhabitants in the 1970s.³¹ Due to the segregation and regimented flows of the black workforce into white spaces, opportunities for interracial sex and intimacy were far rarer, albeit still possible; one well-known site of interracial mixing was in proximity to the train station in Johannesburg. As for black migrant workers, it should also be noted that the social and spatial composition of mine compounds enabled homosexual acts and intimacies.³²

²⁹ Neville Hoad, “Introduction,” in *Sex & Politics in South Africa*, ed. Neville Hoad, Karen Martin, and Graeme Reid (Cape Town: Double Storey Books, 2005), 16–17.

³⁰ Gevisser, “A Different Fight for Freedom: A History of South African Lesbian and Gay Organisation from the 1950s to 1990s,” 18–30.

³¹ For more on gay coloured communities in post-war Cape Town, see, for example, Dhianaraj Chetty, Mark Gevisser, and Edwin Cameron, “A Drag at Madame Costello’s: Cape Moffie Life and the Popular Press in the 1950s and 1960s,” in *Defiant Desire*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, [1994] 1995), 115–27.

³² For more on the mines and homosexuality, see, for instance, Zackie Achmat, “‘Apostles of Civilised Vice’: ‘Immoral Practices’ and ‘Unnatural Vice’ in South African Prisons and Compounds, 1890–1920,” *Social Dynamics* 19, no. 2 (1993): 92–110; Graeme Reid, *How to Be a Real Gay: Gay Identities in Small-Town South Africa* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2013), 20–24. There were also same-

After a highly publicized scandal in 1966, in which the police raided a house party of about 350 men in Forest Town, a wealthy white suburb of Johannesburg, there were unprecedented political undercurrents within white gay counterpublics as middle-class white gay men and lesbians came together to organize against further forms of criminalization. Though less draconian than expected, the revised Immorality Amendment Act of 1969 once again escalated its crackdown on homosexual activity, yet it now outlawed sexual acts at a party, sharply defined as a gathering of two or more persons. As white gay urban social establishments like bars and discos proliferated in the 1970s, solidifying a white gay subcultural identity, so did the scale of public backlash, as well as the number of police raids.³³ By the time of the 1982 foundation of the Gay Association of South Africa (GASA) in Johannesburg, a conservative constituency of gay white men were organizing politically and pressing for rights on a national scale. GASA's most glaring attribute was its refusal to support black liberation. And although, for instance, the important gay black anti-apartheid activist Simon Nkoli at first joined GASA in 1983, working to strengthen its black membership through the Saturday Group, the organization was generally considered unwelcome to black members, socially and politically.³⁴ In 1984 Nkoli was arrested due to his participation in a rent boycott demonstration in the township of Sebokeng, jailed for two years, and eventually charged with murder and treason, along with 21 comrades, in the landmark Delmas trial of 1986.³⁵

sex sexual practices in southern Africa before the advent of capitalism, Christianity, and colonialism. See, for example, Marc Epprecht, *Hungochani: The History of a Dissident Sexuality in Southern Africa* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004).

³³ Gevisser, "A Different Fight for Freedom: A History of South African Lesbian and Gay Organisation from the 1950s to 1990s," 30–47.

³⁴ Gevisser, 48–55.

³⁵ For more on Nkoli's life story and the Delmas trial, see, for instance, Simon Nkoli, "Wardrobes: Coming out as a Black Gay Activist in South Africa," in *Defiant Desire*, ed. Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, [1994] 1995), 249–57.

The fact that GASA chose not to support Nkoli at this critical juncture, positioning itself as “apolitical” at the very moment in which the government was doubling down on its attacks on black resistance, was lambasted internationally in the world of gay politics. In 1986, for example, Toronto gay activists affiliated with the liberation journal *The Body Politic* formed the Simon Nkoli Anti-Apartheid Committee, which became the subject of John Greyson’s experimental film *A Moffie Called Simon* (1986), his first work of many related to South African politics (see **Figure 4.1**).³⁶ Dramatizing the committee’s hunt for information about Nkoli, *A Moffie Called Simon* publicized the case and underscored what gay and lesbian anti-apartheid activists viewed as inherent links between these two political movements.³⁷ Because of the Delmas affair, in which Nkoli’s outspoken homosexuality became a leading topic of debate amongst other freedom fighters, gay rights also started to infiltrate the consciousness of the ANC. The mounting local and international opposition to GASA’s stance on black liberation led to its national demise in 1986, yet regional offshoots such as GASA Rand and Cape Town’s GASA-6010—an important organization for early articulations of AIDS activism, as I will soon show—were still in operation.³⁸ Concurrently, Alfred Siphwe Machela established the Rand Gay Organisation to create a space for black gays and lesbians and to counter the white hegemony of GASA.³⁹

³⁶ See Chapter Two.

³⁷ For more on the fascinating story of the Simon Nkoli Anti-Apartheid Committee, see McCaskell, *Queer Progress: From Homophobia to Homonationalism*, 222–23, 269–70. In the film version, the character Tim McCaskell inspired is converted to a lesbian.

³⁸ Gevisser, “A Different Fight for Freedom: A History of South African Lesbian and Gay Organisation from the 1950s to 1990s,” 57.

³⁹ This group quickly disbanded after its acceptance into the International Lesbian and Gay Association in 1986. Jens Rydström, “Solidarity--with Whom? The International Gay and Lesbian Rights Movement and Apartheid,” in *Sex & Politics in South Africa*, ed. Neville Hoad, Karen Martin, and Graeme Reid (Cape Town: Double Storey Books, 2005), 37.

With the increasing velocity of black resistance and international condemnation during the late 1980s, the apartheid government, reaching a critical point, was forced to enter into negotiations with the ANC. At the same time, there was a surge in non-racial gay and lesbian activism, characterized by its kinship and interchange with the overarching struggle against apartheid.⁴⁰ Two spirited political groups played a pivotal role in advocating and generating public discourse about lesbian and gay equality: GLOW, founded by Nkoli in Johannesburg in 1989, a year after his acquittal from all charges, and ABIGALE, established by Zackie and Midi Achmat, Theresa Raizenberg, and Jack Lewis in Cape Town in 1992. Moreover, the transnational networks of anti-apartheid activism, including those oriented around gay and lesbian issues, were indispensable in not only toppling the regime, but also facilitating the ANC's swift adoption of the "Equality Clause."⁴¹ Wider than a single minoritarian political struggle, lesbian and gay rights were espoused as a fundamental category of human rights, as a token of a free South Africa.

⁴⁰ During the anti-apartheid movement, non-racialism was a descriptor that was used by activists to envision and call for a South African society released from the shackles of racial power structures. However, the term "non-racial" melted away from post-apartheid public discourse in the 1990s with the rise of black empowerment and a larger array of racial identification models. See Nuttall, *Entanglement*, 172, footnote 23. For much more extensive political and economic accounts of apartheid's destruction, see, for instance, Chris Alden, *Apartheid's Last Stand: The Rise and Fall of the South African Security State* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996); Anton David Lowenberg and William H. Kaempfer, *The Origins and Demise of South African Apartheid: A Public Choice Analysis* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998); David Welsh, *The Rise and Fall of Apartheid* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009).

⁴¹ For more on the international lesbian and gay politics and the anti-apartheid struggle, see Rydström, "Solidarity--with Whom? The International Gay and Lesbian Rights Movement and Apartheid." According to Gevisser, this sudden embrace was thanks to a few factors. Members of the ANC intelligentsia like Frene Ginwala, Albie Sachs, and Thabo Mbeki were drawn to the utopian social progressive principles of grassroots movements based in the countries that had supported the fight against apartheid; these included Sweden, Britain, Holland, Canada, and Australia. As the nation's preeminent spiritual leader, Archbishop Desmond Tutu was also quite outspoken in his support of gay equality. Mark Gevisser, "Mandela's Stepchildren: Homosexual Identity in Post-Apartheid South Africa," in *Different Rainbows*, ed. Peter Drucker (London: Gay Men's Press, 2000), 118.

If the urban textures and spatial precepts of neighborhoods like Hillbrow in downtown Johannesburg had been undergoing radical redefinition in relation to race, sexuality, and class since the 1980s, the imminent formal demise of apartheid opened up new opportunities for public engagement with the cityscape. Johannesburg's inaugural Pride March, organized by GLOW in October 1990, is a case in point. Its advertisement in the September 1990 issue of GLOW's bulletin, *Glowletter*, shows a sketch of figures (who lack any identifiers with regard to race, gender, or sexuality), joyously convening around a triangle which encases "1990 Pride," and an emanating slogan that reads "Let's March for Unity in the Community" (see **Figure 4.2**). As the first national spectacle of gay and lesbian liberation on the entire continent, the Pride March was redolent of the anti-apartheid protests in recent memory, as well as other international gay parades dating back to the 1970s. Nkoli, now an icon of the international lesbian and gay movement, had recently returned from a series of tours and conferences across North America and Western Europe. Thanks to support from Toronto's Simon Nkoli Anti-Apartheid Committee (comprised of the same group of individuals who were also at the helm of AIDS Action Now!), he was able to raise the proper funds for South Africa's very first Pride March.⁴² Memorably, many of the 800 demonstrators chose to wear paper bags over their heads; many individuals were conflicted by the urge to participate in a resplendent moving mass and the wish (or need) to remain anonymous.⁴³ Some participants who sported paper bags, with smiley faces crudely drawn in and makeshift holes cut out for

⁴² *Glowletter* (September 1990), p. 15, A1.1, GAL0001, Gay and Lesbian Organization of the Witwatersrand (GLOW), GALA.

⁴³ Gevisser, "Mandela's Stepchildren: Homosexual Identity in Post-Apartheid South Africa," 111. See also Kim Berman, interview by Jackson Davidow, February 27, 2018. For more on the march, see Mark Gevisser and Graeme Reid, "Pride or Protest? Drag Queens, Comrades, and the Lesbian and Gay Pride March," in *Defiant Desire*, ed. Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, [1994] 1995), 278–83.

vision, appeared on the front page of the *Sunday Times* on October 19, 1990, under a headline that read “When the gays go marching in” (see **Figure 4.3**). The standard light brown color of the paper bag contrasted with the various colors of skin peeking out from underneath. Simultaneously a public and a private gesture, this masking of sexual identities in a multiracial show of sexual liberation summarized the climate of fear, hostility, and risk that cloaked the emergent public culture as these monumental transformations were taking place.

AIDS was also on the radar of activists. To skim the September 1990 issue of *Glowletter* is to notice advertisements for the upcoming Pride March alongside an article “Safe Sex: What is it?,” comprehensively detailing the risk levels of sexual acts, as well as a column called “AIDS Treatments,” with the latest updates on research and drugs being tested out in North America.⁴⁴ As this juxtaposition might suggest, advocacy for non-discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and the fight against AIDS were closely linked. The gay community already had a keen awareness of AIDS, as illustrated by GASA-6010’s implementation of its AIDS Action Group in 1984 and volunteer health clinic in 1987. The pronounced racial divisions that characterized the gay and lesbian movement in the mid-1980s also defined early initiatives of AIDS awareness, care, and activism. Beginning in 1983, the South African press echoed the worldwide media in its treatment of AIDS as a gay plague—that is, a white gay plague, for, as Neville Hoad has demonstrated, there are deep-seated social constructs of homosexuality as un-African, and Africa as homophobic, by both Africans and non-Africans.⁴⁵ Intertwined with and

⁴⁴ *Glowletter* (September 1990), A1.1, GAL0001, Gay and Lesbian Organization of the Witwatersrand (GLOW), GALA.

⁴⁵ Hoad contends in his path-breaking study that “‘homosexuality’ is one of the many imaginary contents, fantasies, or significations (sometimes in the negative, sometimes not) that circulate in the production of

produced by histories of colonialism, postcoloniality, and globalization, these dangerous refrains would repeatedly be invoked throughout the pandemic. AIDS would also largely be considered a white problem even though the virus was detected in black townships as early as 1985.

Because of the complex racialization of the virus, raising awareness about AIDS was tied not only to public expressions of gay and lesbian activism, but also to the countless wounds of apartheid. In the pages of *Glowletter* in July 1992, Nkoli likewise identified poignant continuities between anti-apartheid, gay and lesbian, and AIDS activism:

[i]n our lifetime we had fought [sic] against all sorts of odds and now more than ever, we were fighting against AIDS. We lost a lot and it hurts, and goes on hurting. But we got up and supported each other. We learnt how to protect ourselves and fight for ourselves, knowing that no-one who is not part of our community would fight for us.⁴⁶

The Township AIDS Project, founded in Soweto in 1989 by Nkoli and white activist Peter Busse, was a groundbreaking black-run organization that educated lesbians and gay men about safer sex.⁴⁷ In Cape Town, meanwhile, the very constitution of ABIGALE signaled their commitment to coordinate “workshops and other educational initiatives for our community and particularly around the effects of AIDS.”⁴⁸ The *Cape Times* featured a photograph of ABIGALE activist Raizenberg, radiating positive energy as she

African sovereignties and identities in their representations by Africans and others.” Hoad, *African Intimacies*, xvi. At the same time, as the previous chapter has revealed, AIDS was also seen as a black, African, and Haitian plague in North America and Europe in the mid-1980s.

⁴⁶ Simon Nkoli, “Gays and Lesbians Changing to Battle,” *Glowletter*, July 1992. A1.1, GAL0001, GLOW, GALA.

⁴⁷ Both Nkoli and Busse were HIV-positive yet not public about their status at this point. For more on early gay AIDS activism, racial divisions, and the foundation of the Township AIDS Project, including its gender tensions, see Mbali, *South African AIDS Activism and Global Health Politics*, 52–60. Lesbian activist Beverley Ditsie was a crucial GLOW member and Township AIDS Project health worker. For more on her relationship with Nkoli, see the excellent documentary, Beverley Ditsie and Nicky Newman, *Simon & I* (Women Make Movies, 2002).

⁴⁸ “Constitution: Association of Bisexuals, Gays, and Lesbians,” A1.1, AM 2802, ABIGALE, GALA.

broadcast the use of condoms in the World AIDS Day March in December 1993, just ten days before Cape Town's first Pride March (see **Figure 4.4**).⁴⁹ ABIGALE believed safer sex to be a political issue that, just like lesbian and gay rights, merited attention and celebration.

On a more legal level, historian Mandisa Mbali has convincingly shown that during this period leading white gay AIDS activists, particularly Edwin Cameron in his position at the Centre for Applied Legal Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand, exercised liberal human rights-based language to lobby for civil litigations and to draft up a Charter of Rights on AIDS and HIV. Released in late 1992, the document emphasized privacy, autonomy, medical assistance, adequate accommodation, and non-discrimination in clinics and public health settings at large. Though unattached to the Charter of Lesbian and Gay Rights that was endorsed by GLOW, ABIGALE, and the Organization of Lesbian and Gay Activists (OLGA) in 1992, it strategically incorporated the same types of liberal legal rhetoric, underlining the importance of individual rights. Thanks to the inclusion of the "Equality Clause" in the interim constitution in 1994, same-sex and AIDS-related speech was officially legalized, thereby facilitating AIDS education and activism going forward. Mbali also underscores that the transnational operations of AIDS activism—the ways in which activists sought to mobilize domestic and foreign resources by developing a network of alliances and counterparts—did not truly begin in a calculated and influential way until the foundation of TAC in 1998. Before this, there were moments of transnational cross-pollination, such as the short-lived, somewhat misplaced AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) branch in Johannesburg from

⁴⁹ "Condom Power," image of Theresa Raizenberg at World AIDS Day March, December 1, 1993 in *Cape Times*, December 2, 1993, p. 3, and "Report on Cape Town's 1st Gay, Lesbian & Bisexual Pride March, 11 December 1993," A2, AM 2802, ABIGALE, GALA.

1993 to 1995. Yet the radical methods of ACT UP, which was originally founded as a direct-action advocacy group in New York in 1987, did not accommodate the leading AIDS activist agendas in post-apartheid South Africa in the early 1990s, which is why the group quickly fell apart.⁵⁰

What is missing from Mbali's historical narrative is the significance of culture as it was conceived and practiced outside of the realms of law and public health. That is to say, a liberal human rights discourse was only one form of queer AIDS activism during the first half of the 1990s. Legal scholar Pierre de Vos has also insisted that the expeditious "constitutionalization of homosexuality" molded not only the public discourse on homosexuality, but also the multitudinous ways in which lesbians and gay men have constructed their own identities.⁵¹ The frameworks offered by Mbali and de Vos are coherent, but they overlook visual culture as a potent locus of a burgeoning queer identity.⁵² In this regard, a deliberate emphasis on visual-cultural production can shine light on the enmeshment of art and activism in the development of a global queer public culture.

"Queers Everywhere": The Out-in-Africa Gay & Lesbian Film Festival

In an influential 1989 talk (later published in 1990), "Preparing Ourselves for Freedom: Culture and the ANC Constitutional Guidelines," ANC leader Albie Sachs urged artists to abandon the idea that "culture is a weapon of struggle." Polemically, he

⁵⁰ Mbali, 66–73. In the late 1980s, dozens of chapters of ACT UP were set up across the US and internationally. Historical scholarship tracking the spread of ACT UP on these different scales is greatly needed.

⁵¹ Pierre de Vos, "The Constitution Made Us Queer: The Sexual Orientation Clause in the South African Constitution and the Emergence of Gay and Lesbian Identity," in *Sexuality in the Legal Arena*, ed. Didi Herman and Carl Stychin (London: Athlone, 2000), 195.

⁵² de Vos, 207.

inquired, “what about love?... It is as though our rulers stalk every page and haunt every picture; everything is obsessed by the oppressors and the trauma they have imposed; little is about us and the new consciousness we are developing.”⁵³ In advocating for an aesthetics of love as a means to concentrate on the future rather than the past, Sachs queried the trending ANC-sanctioned cultural idiom of “resistance art,” a concept most fully fleshed out by artist Sue Williamson in her 1989 book of the same name. “If the media can be used to brainwash the white electorate and dominate the mass of oppressed people in South Africa,” Williamson asserted, “then it can, in a different form, be used to fight that domination.”⁵⁴

For obvious reasons, Sachs’ appeal to separate love and politics was insufficient for many queer cultural producers at this particular crossroads in history.⁵⁵ Since the late 1980s, a racially diverse lesbian and gay community had been growing in Cape Town through underground film screenings of banned international VHS tapes at Jazzart, a key multi-racial dance studio and venue. The screenings were organized by Jack Lewis, a white anti-apartheid activist member of the ANC’s Marxist Workers Tendency and a lecturer in political economy at the University of the Western Cape—as well as the long-term boyfriend of Zackie Achmat. At the same time, Nodi Murphy, a white lesbian who

⁵³ Albie Sachs, “Preparing Ourselves for Freedom: Culture and the ANC Constitutional Guidelines,” *TDR: The Drama Review* 35, no. 1 ([1990] Spring 1991): 187, 188. This was originally presented as a paper in Lusaka in 1989 and published in *Protecting Human Rights in a New South Africa* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press) in 1990. For a helpful analysis and contextualization of this text, see Ashraf Jamal, “Towards a Celebratory Cultural Imagination in an Indifferent Time,” *African Identities* 1, no. 1 (2003): 19–36.

⁵⁴ Sue Williamson, *Resistance Art in South Africa* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1989), 9. For a remarkable study of South African artists, black and white, as they fostered innovative aesthetic strategies to represent and combat apartheid, see John Pepper, *Art and the End of Apartheid* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

⁵⁵ It should also be noted that Sachs, whom Mandela appointed as a judge on the Constitutional Court of South Africa in 1994, has been an outspoken supporter of gay and lesbian rights since the late 1980s. For more on Sachs, an important South African Jewish activist and public intellectual since the 1950s, see his memoir, Albie Sachs, *The Strange Alchemy of Life and Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

worked for the Cape Town International Film Festival yet was unaware of the Jazzart screenings, had an interest in screening films about queer life. Through word of mouth, Lewis and Murphy eventually met in 1992 or 1993, decided to co-direct a festival, and set up an office in Lewis' flat on Long Street in the City Centre—a space he shared with other ABIGALE activists Raizenberg and the two Achmat siblings, Midi and Zackie.⁵⁶ Here, they typed up and faxed out numerous requests for funding.⁵⁷ In addition to Lewis and Murphy, the festival committee was composed of top activists from Cape Town and Johannesburg: Raizenberg and Zackie Achmat from ABIGALE, and Nkoli, Beverley Ditsie, Graeme Reid, and Hugh McLean from GLOW.⁵⁸

Most of these figures had minimal experience in film and cultural programming; they were first and foremost political activists and health educators who believed in film's capacity to build community. By screening and promoting queer films, the festival organizers wanted to celebrate the new constitutional clause and to nourish more tolerant attitudes towards homosexuality. They hoped their cultural activism could help overcome the gulf between the exciting potential of the new constitutional protections and the reality that South African civil society still harbored considerable homophobia.⁵⁹ Due to initial fundraising difficulties, the festival was moved from late 1993 to summer 1994, after the national elections in March.⁶⁰ The postponement also afforded Murphy and Lewis more time to curate and coordinate the films, plan an extensive program across

⁵⁶ Lewis and Zackie Achmat were a couple, as were Raizenberg and Midi Achmat. All four were highly important activists in the overlapping anti-apartheid, lesbian and gay, and AIDS movements. For more on the life stories of Midi Achmat and Raizenberg, see Taghmeda Achmat and Theresa Raizenberg, "Midi and Theresa: Lesbian Activism in South Africa," *Feminist Studies* 29, no. 3 (2003): 643–51.

⁵⁷ Nodi Murphy, interview by Jackson Davidow, March 13, 2018.

⁵⁸ "First SA Gay and Lesbian Film Festival," B2.2, GAL0118A Out-In-Africa, GALA.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Memo from Jack Lewis to Paul Lee, Catherine Saalfield & All Committee members care of Hugh McLean, October 14, 1993, III-A, AM 2790 (A), Achmat and Lewis collection, GALA.

four cities, organize publicity and “in-reach” efforts, and invite Hammer, Julien, Schiller, and Haughland.

“Gay and lesbian contribution to world cinema has been immense,” states the final program, “yet in South Africa we have barely had a chance to acknowledge it.”⁶¹ Underlying this comment was the fact that, quite plainly, there were no lesbian and gay films publicly screened before 1994, and none made in the country. To host such a festival in South Africa therefore meant drawing on global queer expertise, inviting international guests of honor, and assembling an array of works from the US, the UK, Canada, New Zealand, Austria, Germany, and the Netherlands. In this way, the programming would have looked nearly identical to the current offerings of other lesbian and gay film festivals that had materialized across the US, Canada, and Europe in proximity to gay liberation and AIDS activist movements since the late 1970s.⁶² Given the limited previous exposure the South African audiences would have had to such films, the program of Out-in-Africa also resembled a historical survey of the greatest hits from North America and Europe. Besides the retrospectives devoted to the special guests, there was a focus on British director Derek Jarman, who had passed away from AIDS complications only three months before. Even the name of the festival called to mind foreign film, playfully evoking Sydney Pollack’s influential American colonialist romance *Out of Africa* (1985), based on Danish author Karen Blixen’s 1937 autobiographical book of the same name about her years in Kenya.

⁶¹ Out-in-Africa film program, June to July 1994, B10, GAL 0118, Out-in-Africa, GALA.

⁶² The first was Frameline in San Francisco, followed by others in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Pittsburgh in the late 1970s and early 1980s. By 1990, there were lesbian and gay film festivals sprinkled across Western and Central Europe, Australia, and in Hong Kong. For more on this global history, see Skadi Loist, “The Queer Film Festival Phenomenon in a Global Historical Perspective (the 1970s-2000s),” in *Une histoire des festivals, XXe-XXIe siècle*, ed. Anaïs Fléchet et al. (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2013), 109–12; Cindy Hing-Yuk Wong, *Film Festivals: Culture, People, and Power on the Global Screen* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2011), 179–88.

Although Murphy claims that she and Lewis did not try to import other festival models in their conceptualization of Out-in-Africa, the programming itself, determined through American and British film distribution catalogues, seems to epitomize South Africa's frenzied reentry into global capitalism.⁶³ At the macro level, it is possible to position the festival within Cape Town's post-apartheid comeback as a global, capitalist, and neoliberal player, characterized by development theorist David A. McDonald as "world city syndrome."⁶⁴ Yet more specifically Out-in-Africa is a textbook example of what Australian gay activist and intellectual Dennis Altman referred to as the "internationalization of gay identities" in 1996 when he asked:

[i]s there... a universal gay identity linked to modernity? This is not to argue for a transhistoric or essentialist position... but rather to question the extent to which the forces of globalization (both economic and cultural) can be said to produce a common consciousness and identity based on homosexuality.⁶⁵

Inflected by, and benefitting from, new forms of globalization after apartheid, Out-in-Africa reveals that the economic and the cultural could not be disentangled. Funding, tirelessly secured by the festival committee, came from the Dutch NGO Hivos, the British Council in Johannesburg, as well as from many other national bodies covering film transports, such as the Canadian High Commission, the German Consulate, and British Airways World Cargo.⁶⁶ In short, the organizations gave generously in order to

⁶³ Murphy, interview. As film theorist Janet Harbord points out, the film festival, as a site of global commerce, orchestrates space through its cultural flows and processes of hybridization. Janet Harbord, *Film Cultures* (London: SAGE Publications, 2002), 60–61.

⁶⁴ David A. McDonald, *World City Syndrome: Neoliberalism and Inequality in Cape Town* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

⁶⁵ Dennis Altman, "Rupture or Continuity? The Internationalization of Gay Identities," *Social Text* 48 (Autumn 1996): 79.

⁶⁶ Out-in-Africa film program, June to July 1994, p. 2, B10, GAL 0118, Out-in-Africa, GALA. In short, the national bodies would fund the shipment of their national products. Murphy, interview. I thank Brett Rogers for helping me understand how the British Council worked globally in the early 1990s.

promote independent films as their own home-grown products.⁶⁷ One reason Out-in-Africa employed the label “gay and lesbian,” rather than “queer,” was to be taken seriously with regard to fundraising. According to Murphy, the festival workers embraced the word “queer,” but opted for “lesbian and gay” in the official name because this language was unambiguous, more palatable, and newly enshrined in the constitution.⁶⁸

Notwithstanding these national biases and globalizing drives, Out-in-Africa, as Murphy saw it, was about building community, locally and transnationally. Even if there were no South African queer films to date, the event convened panels where local cultural workers conversed with their international peers about queer politics and art for the first time in a public forum (see **Figures 4.5, 4.6, and 4.7**). Rather than outside of or adjacent to the lesbian and gay political movement, films were understood to be conduits of activism and discourse. Linking politics and representation during his speech at the Cape Town opening, Isaac Julien—the only black international guest—broadly declared:

together we will be able to build an international gay and lesbian movement that South Africa will be a part of, in the fight for recognition for gay and lesbian rights...[It] will be inseparable from the demands [for] representation... In showing our films to you, we hope we can aid you in that fight.⁶⁹

The festival organizers shared Julien’s wish that works of international queer cinema would help jumpstart a queer culture in South Africa. In the words of Murphy,

it was very important for us to recognize that we were not isolated by any manner of means... That there were queers everywhere, and we were part of

⁶⁷ It is worth remembering that the film festival as an experience and event structure has its origin as a function of the European nation state, beginning in the last years of the nineteenth century. For more on national interests and geopolitical agendas of film festivals since then, see, for example, Marijke de Valck, *Film Festivals: From European Geopolitics to Global Cinophilia* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007), 47–49.

⁶⁸ Murphy, interview.

⁶⁹ Isaac Julien, in Hammer, *Out in South Africa*.

an international community. But the important thing was to create that community here—because it wasn't a community.⁷⁰

Like redesigning a nation, developing a community—particularly a multi-racial one—involved a great deal of strategizing and orchestrating. As media scholar Cindy Hing-Yuk Wong has demonstrated, film festivals can bring about new public spheres; this is especially true for queer film festivals, which can be understood as discursive arenas and sites of socialization reserved for queer people and queer concerns. As such, they are counterpublics outside of a largely heterosexual matrix.⁷¹ At the same time, Out-in-Africa prided itself on queering public space by rupturing the presumed heterosexuality of the mainstream Ster-Kinekor cinema chain that hosted the festival in each city. As Murphy recollected, “we weren't going to be in a backroom anymore. We weren't underground. We were out, and we were proud. And we were going to occupy spaces that are heterosexual spaces... It was so fabulous to see everybody, and to feel that freedom.”⁷² Apart from the screenings and workshops that took place in the townships, the festival locations were situated in heavily white middle-class spaces. To draw in a multi-racial audience, the organizers coordinated exhaustive “in-reach” programs through complimentary tickets and door-to-door taxis and buses so that the events were accessible and safe for people who lived far away in the townships.⁷³ As a result of these efforts, the screenings were packed with diverse audiences. Altogether, the organizers regarded the festival as an emphatic success.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Murphy, interview.

⁷¹ Wong, *Film Festivals: Culture, People, and Power on the Global Screen*, 182. Wong's theorization rests on the rubric of the public sphere, famously articulated by philosopher Jürgen Habermas, as well as critiques of the concept from Nancy Fraser and Michael Warner, among others.

⁷² Murphy, interview.

⁷³ Murphy. “In-reach” programs were paid for through general festival funding.

⁷⁴ Murphy. In her MFA thesis, Anna Stielau comes to similar conclusions about the festival. See Stielau, “Double Agents: Queer Citizenship(s) in Contemporary South African Visual Culture,” 43–50.

Since its inception, a critical part of forming this community was through HIV/AIDS education. In an early draft of a mission statement from August 1993, Lewis accentuated how the festival would advance safer sex and AIDS awareness, especially in the townships. As he framed it, the “festival with its wide spread [sic] of interesting HIV/AIDS related films will be an invaluable resource in promoting this consciousness, allowing people here to learn from, draw on and adapt international experience.”⁷⁵ This emphasis on peering outwards to international media strategies is notable, for Lewis himself was intimately involved in the creation of what is thought to be the first South African AIDS awareness video, *Spread the Word, Not the Virus* (1991).⁷⁶ The work was commissioned by the Bellevue Community Health Project, an organization that was not HIV/AIDS-specific despite its being established by Zackie Achmat in 1984. Twenty minutes in length, *Spread the Word, Not the Virus* featured an AIDS awareness school program in the township of Gugulethu, accompanied by interviews with parents and other conversations on the streets.⁷⁷

Though the original festival planned to have an intensive four-day video workshop for AIDS educators and cultural practitioners as a part of their programming in Johannesburg and Cape Town, it appears that this was cut back to two-day events in Soweto and Gugulethu. The sessions aimed to teach critical thinking skills in relation to representations of the virus. The analyzed films included those by Canadian John Greyson, as well as Americans Kermit Cole, Marlon Riggs, Mark Christopher, and Hammer herself. In historicizing the gay response to the crisis in other places, the

⁷⁵ Faxed letter from Jack Lewis to Hugh McLean, August 16, 1993, p. 2, C1.1, GALA.

⁷⁶ Hodes, *Broadcasting the Pandemic*, 8.

⁷⁷ For more, see Karen Rutter, “Aids Video Focuses on Awareness, Prevention,” *Cape Times*, June 21, 1991. I-A9, AM 2790 (A), Abdurrazack (Zackie) Achmat and Jack Lewis collection, GALA.

workshop’s description pointed out that the “tragedy of HIV/AIDS rekindled a spirit of solidarity and activism in gay communities—stimulating the broader drive for gay and lesbian people to develop their own identities.”⁷⁸ Out-in-Africa’s film and special guest selection similarly implied that the pandemic could be more than a cultural bond between gays and lesbians in North America and their counterparts elsewhere; it was also an emerging cornerstone of queer cultural identity in the reborn nation.

Hammer’s participation, as well as the experimental documentary film she produced about the experience, makes this clear. From exploring the official ANC store with Julien, to joining a political discussion at a multi-racial lesbian house party with Schiller, to teaching interviewing techniques in the townships, *Out in South Africa*—echoing the festival’s title—captures the sundry sights and sounds of the thrilling transition to democracy (see **Figures 4.8, 4.9, and 4.10**). As a visitor to Johannesburg, Soweto, Kwa-Thema, Cape Town, and Gugulethu, Hammer filmed her interactions with a range of gays and lesbians, collecting aching and resilient stories about violence, shame, joy, and pride through interviews and other more informal discussions.⁷⁹ “These stories,” she wrote, “changed my life by taking me outside of myself and my culture

⁷⁸ “Seeing through AIDS: The Use of Creative HIV/AIDS Feature Film & Documentary in AIDS Education” and “Video Workshop for AIDS Educators,” B10: AIDS Workshop, GAL 0118 Out-in-Africa, GALA.

⁷⁹ Though the filmmaker was keenly aware of her status as a privileged white American who was invited under a very specific set of circumstances, it is worthwhile to position the film in relation to debates about the artist as ethnographer—a phenomenon that has been problematized to various ends by art critics such as Hal Foster, Grant Kester, and Miwon Kwon. Kwon’s emphasis on the role of institutions in generating forms of collaborative practice between artists and the communities they engage with can offer a useful hermeneutic for Hammer’s film, which was produced entirely in the context of, though not particularly for, the festival and its emerging public. Nevertheless, *Out in South Africa* was screened at the festival the following year. For more on debates on collaboration, largely confined to the United States in the mid to late-1990s, see Hal Foster, “The Artist as Ethnographer?,” in *The Traffic in Culture: Refiguring Art and Anthropology*, ed. George E. Marcus and Fred R. Myers (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 302–9; Grant Kester, “Aesthetic Evangelists: Conversion and Empowerment in Contemporary Community Art,” *Afterimage* 22, no. 6 (January 1995): 5–11; Miwon Kwon, “From Site to Community in New Genre Public Art: The Case of ‘Culture in Action’” in *One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2004), 100–137.

through people willing to share and trust their private moments with me.”⁸⁰ In spite of much previous experience working on and screening her films internationally, Hammer claimed that coming to South Africa truly opened her eyes to the fact “that we can’t translate lesbian life in New York to lesbian life in Soweto, or Johannesburg for that matter... Every culture, every country has their own history and cultural development, their own signs and signifiers.”⁸¹ Even if AIDS was not her sole focus in *Out in South Africa*, its presence was ubiquitous in workshop dialogues and interviews in the townships, as well as at the festival screenings themselves. Whereas some people were anxious and full of questions, others were responding proactively to the virus by sharing safer sex measures and battling misinformation with verve. A swarm of red AIDS ribbons from Wola Nani, an NGO established in 1994 to provide HIV-positive women with craft-making skills and income generation opportunities, is also featured at the boisterous Cape Town opening shown in the film (see **Figures 4.11 and 4.12**).

Doubtless, Hammer’s own concerns about the pandemic influenced these conversations, for since her film *Snow Job: The Media Hysteria of AIDS* (1986), she had been a fierce AIDS activist in the US. In her view, *Snow Job* signaled a tremendous shift in her filmmaking practice. It started when her lover Jan Zita Grover, an academic and AIDS activist, criticized her work for being too experimental and abstract; though the films she had made in previous years surely showcased lesbian content, political

⁸⁰ Barbara Hammer, “Lesbian/Gay Media Comes Out in New South Africa,” *Release Print*, September 1994, 6.

⁸¹ Barbara Hammer, interview by Jackson Davidow, May 8, 2018. After attending the First International Feminist Film Conference in Amsterdam in 1980, for example, Hammer reflected, “[n]o longer could I remain an American isolationist. The feminist movement had outgrown its beginnings. National boundaries require international perspective, involving more flexible and varied understandings of women’s needs for survival, struggle, and the aesthetics of perception.” Barbara Hammer, *Hammer! Making Movies out of Sex and Life* (New York: The Feminist Press, 2010), 112.

commentary was more latent, which Grover found troubling in the era of AIDS.⁸² Hammer took this feedback to heart and began a new work, asking her students at Columbia College in Chicago to gather AIDS-related newspaper headlines, which then became raw material for *Snow Job* (see **Figure 4.13**).⁸³ A hypnotic, pulsing mosaic of headlines, such as “AIDS fears cancel lesbian blood drive,” the film was an early incisive critique of the media’s coverage of AIDS, warranting comparisons with Julien’s *This Is Not an AIDS Advertisement* from the same year (discussed in the preceding chapter). *Snow Job* marked a different political tack in Hammer’s own oeuvre, one that she would enlarge on in the late 1980s and early 1990s—as evident in *Out in South Africa*.

Through their increasing consciousness of and exchanges with Euro-American queer AIDS cultural activists such as Hammer and Julien, the organizers of Out-in-Africa stepped up their work around the pandemic once the festival was over. Lewis and Murphy convened Positive Visions, a seven-day festival of HIV/AIDS-themed films that accompanied the 7th International Conference of Persons Living with HIV/AIDS in Cape Town in March 1995. There was also an economic incentive: the conference, organized by the Global Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS, not only funded this festival, but also allowed Out-in-Africa to keep half of the profits, which they channeled to the next year’s gay and lesbian film festival.⁸⁴ Hammer, now an official patron of Out-in-Africa, and in the middle of editing her film and applying for grants to return to South

⁸² Barbara Hammer and Jarrett Earnest, “Time Is an Emotional Muscle,” *The Brooklyn Rail*, December 10, 2012, <https://brooklynrail.org/2012/12/art/time-is-an-emotional-musclebarbara-hammer-with-jarrett-earnest>.

⁸³ Hammer, interview.

⁸⁴ Letter from Jack Lewis to Barbara Hammer, October 31, 1994, B2.2, GAL0118A Out-In-Africa, GALA.

Africa for further workshop facilitation, agreed to assist Murphy and Lewis in obtaining copies of the latest AIDS videos.⁸⁵

The final program for the Positive Visions festival brought together more than seventy-five videos from the US, Canada, Germany, Switzerland, France, Britain, Brazil, the Philippines, Uganda, and Zimbabwe, offering a smorgasbord of dramas, documentaries, shorts, and art films. Intended to move beyond a narrow focus on gays and lesbians, Positive Visions, unlike the previous festival, was additionally geared towards school children, heterosexuals, IV drug users, and sex workers.⁸⁶ While the attendance of the general public was not as impressive as the organizers had hoped, the four free screenings for teenagers were exceptionally successful, drawing over 1600 students—even the aisles were packed with students as they discussed safer sex techniques with an AIDS educator from the Triangle Health Project (formerly GASA-6010). 350 collected evaluations indicate that the youths' responses to these programs ranged considerably. Common reactions included discomfort talking about sex so openly in a public setting, surprise that the virus could even affect teenagers, fear about contagion and death, interest in safer sex methods, pity for the sick, and empowerment through greater awareness.⁸⁷ Even though AIDS activism provided one framework for the activation of a global queer public culture, Positive Visions demonstrates quite intelligibly that its organizers recognized that the work of AIDS activism was equally urgent beyond the perimeters of the queer community. The fledgling government was by and large neglecting the worsening epidemic, dealing instead with the incalculable other

⁸⁵ Letter from Barbara Hammer to Nodi Murphy and Jack Lewis, October 31, 1994, B2.2, GAL0118A Out-In-Africa, GALA.

⁸⁶ Program for Positive Visions: AIDS Film Week, March 3-9, 1995, I4, GAL0118A Out-In-Africa, GALA.

⁸⁷ Report: AIDS Film Week, p. 3-4, I4, GAL0118A Out-In-Africa, GALA.

post-apartheid issues of the moment. Thus it fell to the gay and lesbian organizations, with their international resources and steadfast belief in the transformative capacity of culture, to take matters into their own hands.

Memorialization as Celebration: Andrew Putter and the Locker Room Project

In a wholly different way, the Locker Room Project, engineered by Andrew Putter and André Vorster in December 1994, also testifies to this intermingling of the virus, queer culture, and global consciousness. As a sexually active white gay teenager in Cape Town in the early 1980s, Putter was convinced that he would be dead by the age of thirty. Although he did not personally know anybody who was sick, the terrifying news pumped out by the South African media was so bleak that the budding artist could envision no other future for himself. During his undergraduate studies at the University of Cape Town during the mid to late-1980s, Putter became more immersed in the (largely white) social and political gay and lesbian student circles, developing a clearer understanding of the practices of safer sex through organizations like GASA-6010. As he explained, “we had to develop a very finely-tuned sense of what risk was. The world wasn’t yes or no anymore. It was about how much risk you were prepared to take. And I became very interested in... what very low-risk, pleasurable sex was like.”⁸⁸

After Putter finished art school and started to work as an arts journalist in the early 1990s, these indeterminate questions about risk, desire, and bodily boundaries fed into his creative practice; his visual artwork was among the earliest to grapple, at least in legible terms, with the pandemic in South Africa. Turning to assemblage, he incorporated materials found while scrounging the streets for junk, or given to him by friends. For

⁸⁸ Andrew Putter, interview by Jackson Davidow, March 16, 2018.

instance, his work *Intimacy* (1994) presents a silver plaster cast of his own penis in a hospital bedpan, framed by a multitude of broken test tubes—the medical utensils came from a friend who worked at a clinic (see **Figure 4.14**). Like a precious religious reliquary, the erotic assemblage, which brings to mind assemblages by American artists Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg from the 1950s and 1960s, was intended to express the new entanglement of sex and death. Due to the fragile yet dangerous glass shards, *Intimacy* was a challenge to pick up without cutting oneself, heightening one’s vulnerability and sensitivity to viral transmission.⁸⁹

Putter met André Vorster, a white architect, around 1992, and together they responded to a call for proposals to activate a newly renovated gallery space attached to the Association of Arts in the City Centre.⁹⁰ Their accepted scheme was an exhibition called *AIDS and Safer Sex*, which they advertised throughout their arts community. Mounted for approximately two weeks in 1993, the show was a catholic assortment of artworks inspired by the virus and precautionary techniques. Putter and Vorster curated indiscriminately, welcoming every submission; participating artists included Tracy Payne, Barend de Wet, and Lien Botha. “It was just like this massive crazy opening,” according to Putter. “Hundreds and hundreds of people came.”⁹¹ In addition to being the first AIDS-related exhibition in South Africa (and probably on the entire continent), it was the beginning of an important collaborative relationship between Vorster and Putter.

As the two coordinated this show, the virus was fairly indirect and conceptual for them, even with their high levels of inherited cultural trauma. By early 1994, however, Vorster would be in the throes of watching the health of his HIV-positive partner, Craig

⁸⁹ Putter.

⁹⁰ The Association of Arts was renamed the Association for Visual Arts in 1995.

⁹¹ Putter, interview.

Darlow, speedily waste away. A former ballet dancer and interior designer, Darlow transformed the house they shared into a “palace of kitsch, grotto,” as Putter remembered it, painting patterns onto every surface in lurid colors, installing whimsical bead curtains and campy window hangings. And then he died. Beside himself with devastation, Vorster entered into a hedonistic phase of constant and reckless partying. As a further matter, he was mistakenly diagnosed as HIV-positive.⁹² It was at this point that Putter interviewed Vorster on tape, asking him about Darlow for a project called *Art Home Art (Kunst Heimat Kunst)*. This work was a collaboration between Putter, white artist Sue Williamson, and black artist Willie Bester as a part of Steirischer Herbst, an Austrian art festival in Graz.⁹³ Williamson’s dream of a mobile exhibition, emblematic of post-apartheid spatial reconfigurations, came true when Transnet, the national rail service, lent the trio a traveling luggage car. Inside, they constructed multiple cargo boxes that spectators could switch on to light up the diorama-like interiors and activate audio components (see **Figure 4.15**). Each crate was devoted to the story of one individual, culled from the social fabric of the reborn nation. The boxcar started in July 1994 at the Grahamstown Festival, a major annual celebration of visual and performing arts, followed by stops the next year at the first Johannesburg Biennale and at the Cape Town train station.⁹⁴

One of the two boxes Putter designed served as a memorial to Darlow (see **Figure 4.16**). Titled *Home Is a Place to Die*, the work, once triggered by a viewer, illuminated a

⁹² Stielau, “Double Agents: Queer Citizenship(s) in Contemporary South African Visual Culture,” 51.

⁹³ Putter, interview. After showing work at the Venice Biennale in 1993, Williamson was invited by an Italian curator to participate in Steirischer Herbst. Rather than importing artists to Austria, the festival commissioned them to make work in their own countries; the documentation later traveled back to Graz for exhibition. Sue Williamson, interview by Jackson Davidow, March 20, 2018.

⁹⁴ For more on this project, see Sue Williamson, *Sue Williamson: Life and Work*, ed. Mark Gevisser (Milan: Skira, 2016), 118–21.

swirl of objects within an interior space that evoked a discotheque: a shimmering skull, syringes, medical tubing, flowers, photographs of Vorster that Darlow had taken in a photo booth, a red blanket from their bed, and other mementos. It drew on a similar aesthetic to Darlow's swan song, the kitsch palace. Meanwhile, Vorster's heart-wrenching voiceover was a scramble of free associations, ranging from the fight for his lover to die at home to their domestic routines and rituals.⁹⁵ When *Home Art Home* was first displayed in Grahamstown in July 1994, Putter met up with Vorster to go see *Get Hard*, a very popular one-man play in town. Starring and written by Peter Hayes, this show was a consensual adaptation of American performance artist Tim Miller's monologue *My Queer Body* (1992), which used movement and storytelling to ruminate on queerness, AIDS, sex, homophobia, and resistance. Whereas Miller's original version circled around his local context of New York City, Hayes' reinterpretation converted all the site-specific references to Cape Town. Even if, according to critic Michael Arthur, there was less attention given to AIDS than in Miller's monologue, Hayes' remodeling of the performance—one of the first post-apartheid theatrical pieces to tackle gay-bashing and AIDS so directly—corresponds to the trend of looking to, importing, and reworking Euro-American queer cultural forms so as to activate a global queer public culture in South Africa.⁹⁶

For Vorster and Putter, the affirmative display of gay and queer identities in *Get Hard* was enormously influential. Returning to Cape Town, where *Out-in-Africa* was

⁹⁵ For a transcription of this recording, see Andrew Putter, "La maison est un endroit où mourir: Home Is a Place to Die," *Revue Noire*, December 1995. Collection of the Stuart Hall Library, London.

⁹⁶ Michael Arthur, "Gay Theatres in South Africa," in *South African Theatre as/ and Intervention*, ed. Marcia Blumberg and Dennis Walder (Amsterdam: Rodopi B.V., 1999), 151. For more on Miller's awareness of the South African adaptation, see Tim Miller, personal email correspondence to Jackson Davidow, March 17, 2018.

then opening, they started to chat about another collaboration, conceptualized as a one-night event called the Locker Room Project—a reference to the locker room as site of erotic fantasy for gay men. Within their social circles, they started to publicize the event by handing out fliers and cards that depicted images of a muscular white man—the Italian-American bodybuilder Charles Atlas, no less—and a sulky white women in old-fashioned undergarments. Printed underneath these images were the captivating words “Art, Lust, Revenge, Hysteria” (see **Figure 4.17**). Vorster and Putter, however, had yet to determine what the event would actually be. Beyond envisioning a memorial for Darlow, similar to Putter’s recent installation, they also saw this as an opportunity to interrogate some of the attitudes and trends circulating in their local art scene.

As a result of the international art world’s sudden hunger for South African contemporary practice, as well as the approaching first Johannesburg Biennale in early 1995, many artists felt they needed to professionalize and articulate themselves in more global terms.⁹⁷ Firmly opposed to the predominant art school and gallery system that propped up the figure of the singular artistic genius, and suspicious of the vested interests of the global art world, the Locker Room Project was premised on the social and aesthetic possibilities of collaborative creative production—something white artists in Cape Town had previously shied away from.⁹⁸ As Putter elaborated,

I wanted to make an artwork that was an event... a one-night event that was made by a whole lot of people, but in such a way that it looked like it was made by one intelligence, across a wide range of fields... Photography,

⁹⁷ Putter, interview. For more on the causes and effects of this sudden international attention, see Sue Williamson, “Introduction,” in *Art in South Africa: The Future Present*, ed. Sue Williamson and Ashraf Jamal (Cape Town: David Philip, 1996), 7–11.

⁹⁸ As the next chapter will show in relation to printmaking, there are rich histories of collaborative artistic production amongst black communities in South Africa prior to the 1990s.

interior design, architecture, event design, graphic design, filmmaking, clothing and costume design, fashion, etc.⁹⁹

One fervid debate between Putter and Vorster orbited around the desired public of the Locker Room Project: should it just be for gay men, or should it also include lesbians, as well as their supportive straight friends? What type of community were they attempting to attract? How should they demarcate the emergent public that they wished to illuminate and celebrate? These questions were resolved when a straight friend drew Putter's attention to a recent article titled "Queer in the Streets, Straight in the Sheets: Notes on Passing" by American cultural commentator Ann Powers. Having first appeared in the New York newspaper *The Village Voice* in June 1993, the text that ended up in Putter's hands was anthologized in the American quarterly *Utne Reader* from later that year. The article strives, as its title indicates, to chronicle and pop-theorize the allure of American queer politics and aesthetic sensibilities for straight people, including the author herself:

[p]ostmodernism has turned the closet inside out, making the projection of a queer attitude enough to claim a place in homosexual culture. Yet queer straights don't practice the fundamental acts of intimacy that ground homosexual identity... Queer straights don't just hang around; what they do is pass. They carefully maneuver their rhetoric toward ambiguities of desire and display, leaving aside questions of the private.¹⁰⁰

Thoroughly unremarkable, even for its flattening of highbrow postmodernist queer theory by American academics Judith Butler and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, this text was bottomless fodder for the Locker Room Project.¹⁰¹ Perhaps an unlikely vessel for carrying

⁹⁹ Putter, interview.

¹⁰⁰ Ann Powers, "Queer in the Streets, Straight in the Sheets: Notes on Passing," *Utne Reader*, November/December 1993, 75. It was reprinted from *The Village Voice* (June 29, 1993). The title is a play on an old lesbian adage, "Butch in the Streets, Femme in the Sheets." Thanks to Michael Bronski for pointing this out.

¹⁰¹ Euro-American rubrics of postmodernism by and large did not intelligibly translate to South African academia, as well as the worlds of literature and art. Black thinkers such as Lewis Nkosi often judged the

the notion of queerness to the opposite end of the world, Powers' text had far-reaching effects on early popular (and even scholarly) conceptions of queer identity in South Africa.¹⁰² It was certainly more accessible and easier to mine than the writings of Butler and Sedgwick would have been. For Putter, the idea that the term "queer" could transcend particular idioms of sexuality was enticing, for it enabled him to picture a party that was a celebration of all sexual orientations, encompassing gay men, lesbians, and straight people. With the event only a month away, Putter and Vorster created an instructional booklet that they sold for 99 cents to raise money (see **Figure 4.18**). Featuring a black-and-white Xeroxed photomontage of scantily clad androgynous bodies, dartboards, musical notation, and an outstretched arm, the pamphlet asked, "What is the LOCKER ROOM PROJECT?" Inside, the organizers fleshed out what they had in mind, expanding on their embrace of queer:

[t]he word queer has many meanings: playful, productive, pleasure-loving, deviant. It could describe an off-the-wall approach to life. It questions conventions. It always finds creative alternatives to things we usually take for granted.

Queerness is not a cut-and-dried definition of one's sexual orientation. People (hetero- and homosexual alike) are waking up to the fact that their sexual identity will always defy neat labelling. Queerness is an attitude...¹⁰³

term to be shallow and totally inadequate for the pressing cultural and political concerns of the day; postcolonialism proved to be much more useful. See Lewis Nkosi, "Postmodernism and Black Writing in South Africa," in *Writing South Africa: Literature, Apartheid, and Democracy, 1970-1995*, ed. Derek Attridge and Rosemary Jolly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 75–90. I am most grateful to Sarah Nuttall for helping me comprehend this issue. By contrast, queer theory in the Anglo-American academy and art world, as Ann Powers mentions in her article, was generally thought to be under the umbrella of postmodernism during the 1980s and 1990s.

¹⁰² For example, Ashraf Jamal draws on the Locker Room Project's utilization of queer to theorize the concept in his own terms. See Ashraf Jamal, *Predicaments of Culture in South Africa* (Pretoria: University of South Africa Press, 2005), 103–4. I do not mean to imply that there weren't other migratory paths for queerness to South Africa. Surely, it was a term and means of identification that abounded at Out-in-Africa, which was taking place nearly simultaneously to the planning of the Locker Room Project.

¹⁰³ André Vorster and Andrew Putter, "The Politicised Party Princesses of the Peninsula," in *FAB: Mother City Queer Projects*, ed. Eric Miller and Karen Jeynes (Cape Town: Umuzi, 2007), 8. This text originally appeared in *The Locker Room Instructional Pamphlet*, November 1994.

On this occasion of celebration and commemoration, queerness became a rubric for appreciating, yet also overcoming, identity-based difference. A day after the event, Putter and Vorster furthermore commented on how the looming context of the pandemic encouraged this understanding of queerness as both the affirmation of sexual difference and its utter ambiguity; neither the virus nor the notion of queerness was confined to gay men and lesbians. In their words,

[t]he Aids crisis had forced people to talk more openly about sex and recognise how different we are sexually. This trend towards openness needed to be supported and developed. It was time to bring people from different sexual camps together to celebrate and share differences...¹⁰⁴

Like this activation of queer, Putter's perception of gay and queer culture during and after apartheid was that it was foreign—either American or Western European.¹⁰⁵ Even though he had scarcely traveled internationally, the queer cultural references he drew on, adapted, and elevated were sampled from a white Western canon of over-determined signifiers: American camp culture, Weimar Republic nightlife, the sadomasochistic photography of American artist Robert Mapplethorpe from the 1970s and 1980s, the costumed carnival of Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras in Sydney, and the Australian hit film *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (1994).¹⁰⁶ The fanciful work of French duo Pierre et Gilles, which had recently reached South Africa through a 1993 publication by Taschen, represented the pinnacle of queer aesthetics for Putter (see **Figure 4.19**). Epitomizing the camp aesthetic that Putter coveted, the image placed on the Taschen book's cover presents a handsome youthful white sailor, with an

¹⁰⁴ Vorster and Putter, 9. This quotation was reprinted from an unspecified local newspaper on December 10, 1994, a day after the original event.

¹⁰⁵ For more on homosexuality and gay white middle-class culture as a “Western import” in South Africa, see Hoad, *African Intimacies*, 71–74.

¹⁰⁶ He made a trip to Europe in about 1991. Putter, interview.

earnest expression on his face, against a dreamy background of daisies. This melodramatic photograph, carefully retouched with paint like most of Pierre et Gilles' work, exploits the figure of the sailor as a gay icon.¹⁰⁷ This Pierre et Gilles aesthetic informed Vorster and Putter as they adopted the locker room, rather than the naval ship, as an imaginative space of homosocial play. Vorster, unlike his collaborator who had always resided in Cape Town, possessed a deeper familiarity with international gay culture and nightlife because he had lived for short periods in New York and London. Just before Darlow's death, he attended Australian Mardi Gras, a wild party that was another inspiration for the Locker Room Project.

The organizers, significantly, wanted their event to be both a local and a global affair. On the one hand, they were seduced by the prospect of queer globality, outlining in their promotional booklet,

[w]e are living in extraordinary times here at the top of Africa.... San Francisco, London, Sydney—many cities in the world have staged queer events. Now it's our turn. The Locker Room Project is the first of many collaborative art parties guaranteed to put Cape Town on the global culture map.¹⁰⁸

On the other hand, a more local lexicon of queerness was desirable. As they reflected immediately after the event, “[f]or too long our city had looked elsewhere for culture. It was time to become more Peninsular-centric—time to develop and support a local, city-based culture.”¹⁰⁹ On the surface, such statements promoting a local culture might seem to repudiate the apartheid-era white mentality that South Africa, and specifically Cape

¹⁰⁷ For more on homoerotic imagery in Pierre et Gilles, see, for instance, Mike Yves, “Représentations alternatives du corps gay et queer dans l’œuvre de Pierre et Gilles,” *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies* 12, no. 1 (2008): 63–78.

¹⁰⁸ Vorster and Putter, “The Politicised Party Princesses of the Peninsula,” 8.

¹⁰⁹ Vorster and Putter, 9. This quotation was reprinted from a local newspaper on December 10, 1994, a day after the original event.

Town, were colonial extensions of Europe, which was, of course, long considered the beacon of culture and civilization. Yet these drives to be local and global, as formulated by Putter and Vorster, also register their whiteness; such attitudes must be comprehended in the climate of post-apartheid social and racial relations. If to be local meant to be Capetonian and to be global meant to be Euro-American, the twofold ambition of becoming “more Peninsular-centric” and “on the global culture map” points to a vision of queerness that was distinctly, and problematically, white. In retrospect, both Putter and Vorster have commented on this, lamenting the fact that the Locker Room Project overwhelmingly disregarded the incontestable entanglement of racial and sexual identities. In so doing, their event suggested that “queer,” though even open to heterosexuals, was principally reserved for white people.¹¹⁰

With their local queer target audience and decidedly white Western sources and fantasies, the artist and the architect were able to refine their vision of this monumental event: a “mega-deluxe, lush-galore, fancy-dress, art-[party] designed to celebrate and showcase queer culture in the Mother City.”¹¹¹ The venue they managed to secure for the night in December was the River Club, a former recreation center for railroad employees from the 1940s on the banks of the Liesbeek River in Observatory; the dozen sprawling rooms, grand corridors, and copious bars were precisely what they envisaged for the occasion. Following their call for involvement across various creative fields, approximately fifty people showed up to the first planning session, where Vorster and Putter presented model images from Pierre et Gilles such as the sailor to explain their

¹¹⁰ Putter, interview; Stielau, “Double Agents: Queer Citizenship(s) in Contemporary South African Visual Culture.”

¹¹¹ Vorster and Putter, “The Politicised Party Princesses of the Peninsula,” 8. This quotation originally appeared in *The Locker Room Instructional Pamphlet*, November 1994. Also, Cape Town is often referred to as the “Mother City” by locals and visitors.

desired dandyish, campy aesthetic, all the while laying out the overarching theme of sport. As Putter recalled,

we had to constantly break down and explore what that meant technically. Glitter. Mirror balls. Saturated color. Colors that are next to each other on a color wheel. Things that are just dreamy and gorgeous... You just had to feel pampered and divine. Wherever you looked, you just had to go “ahhh!”¹¹²

Adhering to these directives, teams of artists, designers, and students settled on sport-related subthemes, plotting out how they would transform their assigned rooms into extravagant spaces of queer paradise. As in Putter’s artistic practice, there was a tendency to repurpose available industrial materials and street junk, so as to develop a cheap-chic decor. It was also reminiscent of Darlow’s excessive domestic adornment. Though the River Club was unavailable for installation until a couple days before the event, Putter claims that he and Vorster worked ardently twelve hours a day, seven days a week for about five months to plan and promote this project.¹¹³

As the first edition of what became an annual party called the Mother City Queer Projects, the Locker Room Project took place on December 9, 1994. It cost thirty rand to attend—an expensive sum of money at the time—but the organizers offered complementary tickets to certain people, such as ABIGALE activists who were peripherally in their queer social circles. Out of the approximately two thousand participants who came to party, dance, and play with sexual identity, nearly everyone was white.¹¹⁴ For those who did attend, the use of imaginative costuming to transform the self was a critical element. Besides recalling the sartorial customs of Mardi Gras in Sydney,

¹¹² Putter, interview.

¹¹³ The two lived off very little money that they had saved from teaching at university (Vorster) and writing arts journalism (Putter). Fundraising for the Locker Room Project came from selling advertising and the instructional booklets. Putter.

¹¹⁴ Putter.

costuming, particularly drag, was a means of disguise—many participants, after all, were quite anxious about the prospect of being marked publicly as queer, just like the individuals garbed in paper bags at Johannesburg’s first Pride March in 1990.¹¹⁵ In one photograph, a dragged-up Putter shows off his meticulous outfit, which consisted of a white mini-skirt, wig of puffy pink feathers, and wedge heels (see **Figure 4.20**). He poses alongside a minotaur-like pair covered in silver body paint and red AIDS ribbons.

What was the event like? To answer this question, I turn to Jamal’s novel *Love Themes for the Wilderness* (1996), an affectionate fictionalization of this queer art community in Observatory—one in which the author, an important writer and critic, was also rooted. Jamal, a straight black man who studied in Britain, Canada, and the United States in the 1980s before returning to Cape Town, uses the Locker Room Project as a storyline anchor, opening with a character named Putter as he distributes the enigmatic promotional cards, and closing with the spectacle itself. Written in a brisk, associative, descriptive, and gritty manner, *Love Themes for the Wilderness* participates in a post-apartheid Capetonian literary genre, refined by black author K. Sello Duiker in his slightly later yet much more acclaimed queer coming-of-age novels *Thirteen Cents* (2000) and *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* (2001).¹¹⁶ Whereas Duiker’s novels have impoverished black protagonists, and Jamal’s text attends to a less desperate largely white arts bubble, both writers scour the local and shifting cityscape in order to fracture, sometimes quite brutally, the fantasy of being beyond apartheid. Among the highly germane subjects Jamal tackles are the complex impacts of globalization on art practices

¹¹⁵ In a certain sense, this mode of costuming might have evoked Cape Town’s Kaapse Klopse, the annual minstrel festival put on by Cape coloured communities. Yet this cultural tradition was not a reference point for Vorster and Putter.

¹¹⁶ K. Sello Duiker, *Thirteen Cents* (Cape Town: Kwela Books, 2000); K. Sello Duiker, *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* (Cape Town: Kwela Books, 2001).

in Cape Town, the eager embrace of queer culture and identity, and the dawning cognizance of the soaring presence of death, particularly due to HIV/AIDS.¹¹⁷ As literature scholar Cheryl Stobie has noted, the book is remarkable for its minimal engagement with racial politics and lack of clear racial designations; most characters, it can usually be assumed, are white.¹¹⁸

Though *Love Themes for the Wilderness* is technically a fictional representation, an extensive passage, told through the eyes of Stoker, the novel's protagonist, paints a vivid picture of the playful, performative, and sexual atmosphere of the Locker Room Project:

[p]eople streamed down the long driveway to the River Club in a dazzling array of costumes. Stoker saw a team of day-glo mountain-bikers, a team of parachutists with the parachutes miraculously floating above them like knowing clouds. There were hairy pom-pom girls, two lecherous geriatrics decked out in togas and purple grapes and gauges for measuring cocks. There were a group of buoyant balloonists, a gamut of aquatic sportists and, in a ditch alongside the rosy pink and mauve lane, a couple of fist-fuckers fist-fucking. The assailant wore industrial strength rubber gloves. Both the victim and the assailant wore T-shirts advocating safe sex.... Stoker had never seen so much urban wisdom and colour, so many preposterous and dazzling extensions of selves.¹¹⁹

Discussing the Locker Room Project elsewhere, Jamal has posited that for the participants, "it was not the liberated self that mattered, but the liberated collective. The self, conceived interdependently, promoted identity as a cluster formation. Those who attended assumed an eccentric group identity."¹²⁰ Part of this liberated collective, as these fist-fuckers in safe sex T-shirts would imply, was founded on a recognition of AIDS—its memorialization, its activism, its care, its prevention, and even its capacity to build local

¹¹⁷ For helpful analyses of Jamal's novel, see Stobie, "The Queer Celebratory in Ashraf Jamal's *Love Themes for the Wilderness*"; Munro, *South Africa and the Dream of Love to Come*, 234–41. Neither scholar thoroughly contextualizes the book in relation to the real-life Locker Room Project. The virus is also less prominent in their analyses.

¹¹⁸ Stobie, "The Queer Celebratory in Ashraf Jamal's *Love Themes for the Wilderness*," 5.

¹¹⁹ Ashraf Jamal, *Love Themes for the Wilderness* (Cape Town: Kwela Books, 1996), 295–96.

¹²⁰ Jamal, *Predicaments of Culture in South Africa*, 104.

queer community through global visions. For Vorster, Putter, and here Jamal, collective processes of memorializing the dead and celebrating global queer belonging were heartily knotted together. Several art and cultural historians have evaluated the many meanings and functions of public memorials in post-apartheid South Africa, with a special emphasis on the question of nation-building.¹²¹ Even though the Locker Room Project was not only initially conceptualized as an AIDS memorial but also, as Jamal and Williamson have pointed out, became the largest collaborative art event in South Africa at the time, it has completely escaped the attention of these historians and critics who write about memorials.¹²² As a one-night event that was equally commemorative and celebratory in tone, it unleashed a new prototype of public memory. And more than situating acts of memorialization outside of the white-cube gallery or national monument complex, the Locker Room also illuminated the extent to which the traveling concept of queerness, like the pandemic itself, had global routes.¹²³

¹²¹ For example, see Coombes, *History after Apartheid*; Zayd Minty, “Post-Apartheid Public Art in Cape Town: Symbolic Reparations and Public Space,” *Urban Studies* 43, no. 2 (February 2006): 421–40; Sabine Marschall, *Landscape of Memory: Commemorative Monuments, Memorials and Public Statuary in Post-Apartheid South Africa* (Leiden: Brill, 2010); Martin J. Murray, *Commemorating and Forgetting: Challenges for the New South Africa* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013); Kim Miller and Brenda Schmahmann, eds., *Public Art in South Africa: Bronze Warriors and Plastic Presidents* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017).

¹²² Sue Williamson and Ashraf Jamal, *Art in South Africa: The Future Present* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1996), 118.

¹²³ When I mention a “white-cube” memorial, I am thinking, for example, of Clive van den Berg’s influential work about queer memory in South Africa, starting with *Men Loving*—a series that first appeared in *Fault Lines*, a show curated by Jane Taylor at the Castle in Cape Town in 1996. Though van den Berg has long been interested in the role of public memorials, the differences between his practice, which has always been inside of the gallery system or through public large-scale governmental commissions, and the much more difficult-to-place Locker Room Project should be quite clear. AIDS was not a focal preoccupation in van den Berg’s oeuvre until later in the 1990s. Clive van den Berg, interview by Jackson Davidow, March 27, 2018.

Beyond the Queer Global

My motive for this chapter is not simply to compare and contrast Out-in-Africa and the Locker Room Project, but rather to show how the two events, in very different ways, were pivotal displays of an emergent queer public culture. They were also substantially modeled after mainly white Euro-American formulations of queerness. To carve out a cultural identity, the organizers of both ventures called on and reworked AIDS artistic strategies and narratives about loss, resistance, and awareness that were at the heart of queer collective memory and identity in (white) North America and Western Europe. At a moment of extraordinary jubilation, they were at once traumatized by the devastating effects of the incurable disease in international contexts, and acutely conscious of its accelerating local spread among queer and non-queer populations alike. More than an instrument of love—to return to Sachs’ resounding dictum—culture for these post-apartheid practitioners was an imperative agent of activism, community-building, memorialization, and globalization.

At one point in Jamal’s novel, the protagonist brazenly asks, “[w]hat’s this global thing anyway? What the fuck does it mean?”¹²⁴ These are excellent questions at the heart of this dissertation. It is crucial to understand that queer cultural globalization, though endlessly uneven in its intractable configurations of power and capital, was never one-sided in its spectrum of interchange. Even if AIDS activism became an express way for practitioners to implant a global idiom of queer culture in South Africa, with the hope of cultivating a more sharply defined local queer cosmopolitan identity, it is equally significant that the “rainbow nation” became a international poster child for gay and lesbian constitutional rights and later on, of course, for the fight against AIDS. The film

¹²⁴ Jamal, *Love Themes for the Wilderness*, 277.

festival in particular provided an invaluable platform for transnational cultural cross-pollination during the remainder of the 1990s. Apart from Hammer's *Out in South Africa*, there was *The Man Who Drove with Mandela* (1998), created by Schiller and Gevisser, and *Proteus* (2003), directed by Greyson and Lewis. These were noteworthy queer cinematic works that emanated from the transnational axes of collaboration that Out-in-Africa first set in place. In fact, Hammer would complete another film about black lesbian communities in South Africa based on a more extensive series of workshops she conducted on a second trip in 1996. Because one of the group participants withdrew her permission to appear in the film due to privacy concerns shortly after its completion, Hammer has never been able to screen the work.¹²⁵ Regardless, as the need for AIDS activism intensified, culminating in the launch of TAC by former ABIGALE activists after Nkoli's AIDS-related death in December 1998, these transnational queer bonds would be of service to future cultural manifestations of activism, advocacy, and awareness.

Despite their obvious roots in the queer community, these early forms of AIDS cultural activism arising from Out-in-Africa and the Locker Room Project also draw our attention to the limitations of a queer frame of reference for addressing the pandemic in South Africa. Whereas the Positive Visions festival took up the challenge of educating heterosexuals and other at-risk populations, the Locker Room Project re-theorized queer identity to incorporate straight people and to celebrate sexual diversity—and yet, as we have seen, its public was emphatically white. What was becoming more and more evident epidemiologically was the fact that AIDS could not solely be considered gay or straight,

¹²⁵ Hammer, interview. Though not collaborative in nature, Gregg Bordowitz's important film *Habit* (2001), about the many political and affective disparities between American and South African AIDS activism, can also be situated in this genealogy. I will discuss this work in the Coda.

black or white; it was an issue that demanded attention from every vantage point, transcending the inadequate binary categories and registers of difference that structured life during apartheid—and quite glaringly, too, in its wake. In other words, the cultural tactics inherited and gleaned from global queer experience elsewhere could not always effectively account for the specific circumstances of the South African context. There are two other significant episodes of cultural confrontation over AIDS and representation from this exact same period in Cape Town that further illustrate these insufficiencies of absorbing strategies from the global queer response to AIDS. Though neither example was oriented towards a gay, lesbian, or queer public, each reached out to these available techniques and models.

The first occurred in the Anglican Church. In 1994 Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the esteemed anti-apartheid activist, sent a priest to Washington, D.C., to conduct research on setting up an AIDS ministry. While visiting the Wesley Theological Seminary's Center for Art and Religion, this priest was touched by one particular painting, titled *Man of Sorrows: Christ with AIDS*. Its creator was Maxwell Lawton, a white gay American artist and divinity student who was HIV-positive. *Man of Sorrows* was intended as a humanizing appeal to faith communities to lend their support to HIV-positive people. Conceptually, Lawton drew inspiration from Christian iconographies of disease and martyrdom, especially Matthias Grünewald's sixteenth-century *Isenheim Altarpiece* that graphically shows Christ as a bubonic plague sufferer (see **Figure 4.21**).¹²⁶ A few months later, even with his deteriorating eyesight and very poor health, Lawton accepted an invitation from Archbishop Tutu and his new Wola Nani-Embrace ministry for an artist

¹²⁶ One might also look to American artist Jasper Johns' tracing of a detail from this altarpiece in his *Perilous Night* (1982); critic Jill Johnston connects this to the AIDS pandemic. See Jill Johnston, *Jasper Johns: Privileged Information* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1996), 294-96.

residency at St. George's Cathedral in Cape Town's City Centre. It would coincide with World AIDS Day in December 1994.¹²⁷ Publicly painted in the church and displayed for a period of twenty days, Lawton's new work was an adaptation of the earlier one: a seemingly white nude Christ on a wooden stump, his head lowered and his skin covered in lesions caused by AIDS-related Kaposi's Sarcoma (see **Figure 4.22**). To this version, the artist added a Christian verse from Matthew 25, superimposed against the background in the languages of Xhosa, Afrikaans, and English: "whatever you have done to the least of these, you have done unto me."¹²⁸

As a matter of fact, this representation of Christ with AIDS sparked a serious public debate in Cape Town and internationally. After being featured on the front cover of the *Cape Times*, Lawton received numerous violence and death threats, requiring him to retreat into protective custody while Archbishop Tutu and St. George's Cathedral defended the theological merit and social importance of the work.¹²⁹ Even Hayden Proud, a young curator of historical painting and sculpture at the South African National Gallery (SANG), penned an article in the *Cape Times*, sketching out the artistic and religious genealogies of the work. As Proud, also a white gay man, wrote, "the mystical body of Christ is affected by a new scourge, a new incurable infection, and a new fear... If a single member of Christ's mystical body—a single Christian—is infected, it affects the whole, for all are vulnerable and all are members of this body."¹³⁰ Along with these political debates about visual representation, part of the painting's controversy

¹²⁷ The ministry was affiliated with the Cape Town NGO Wola Nani that appears briefly in Hammer's *Out in South Africa*.

¹²⁸ Maxwell Lawton, "About the Artist," Maxwell Lawton, June 2006, <http://www.maxwelllawton.com/abouttheartist.html>.

¹²⁹ Lawton; Patricia Sullivan, "A Local Life: Wesley Maxwell Lawton," *The Washington Post*, October 15, 2006, sec. Obituaries; Hayden Proud, interview by Jackson Davidow, March 23, 2018.

¹³⁰ Hayden Proud, quoted in Catherine Kapikian, "Christ with AIDS," *The Other Side*, May 2000. Proud's op-ed originally appeared in the *Cape Times* in December 1994.

undoubtedly stemmed from the public perception of the artist's identity as a white gay HIV-positive American. While Lawton's story has more to do with the fraught racial and sexual politics of the church than with global circuits of art and activism, it still casts light on some salient issues: the overpowering stigma associated with the virus across society and faith communities, the difficulty of broaching sensitive themes, and the predicaments of translating visual representation from one context to another. As a result of the heated reception of *Man of Sorrows* in Cape Town, artists Colin Richards and Pitika Nthuli exploited this religious debate by displaying the painting in front of a radically different audience. When curated in their exhibition *Taking Liberties: The Body Politic* as a part of *Africus*, the first Johannesburg Biennale in 1995, the work acquired new meanings outside of the Church, in the context of the global art world.¹³¹

A second instance of representational incommensurability played out at the state-run museum. Eager to create space for public discourse and mourning around the pandemic, Proud, the curator who chimed in on behalf of Lawton's work, hoped to import a British photography show called *Positive Lives: Responses to HIV* to the SANG. Distressed by the virus, the young curator had been keeping track of the various responses from within the Capetonian gay and lesbian community. Exhibiting *Positive Lives*, it seemed to him, was a logical and meaningful way for the SANG not only to fulfill its responsibility as a public institution, but also to reinvent itself in a post-apartheid era of democracy and global connectivity.¹³² The black-and-white portfolio, picturing the quotidian effects of the pandemic on mostly white queer communities in the

¹³¹ Proud, interview. Though *Man of Sorrows* is strangely not included in the official exhibition catalogue for *Africus*, the Wola Nani-Embrace ministry is listed as responsible for a loan.

¹³² Proud. For a helpful recent historical account of the SANG, which opened as a colonial gallery in the 1870s, see Anna Tietze, *A History of the Iziko South African National Gallery: Reflections on Art and National Identity* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 2017).

UK, was a collaboration between Network Photographers, a British cooperative agency for documentary photography, and the Terrence Higgins Trust, a British AIDS charity that began as a grassroots gay activist group (discussed in the previous chapter). To mark the Trust's tenth anniversary in 1992, these two organizations produced *Positive Lives*, a book project and exhibition that opened at the Photographers' Gallery in London, followed by a stop at the Museum of Modern Art in Oxford.¹³³ With contributions from several Network photographers who concentrated on different themes, the portfolio juxtaposed images and words as a means of storytelling. Gideon Mendel, a white South African photographer who documented the final years of the struggle against apartheid before moving to London in 1990, recorded the AIDS ward of London's Middlesex Hospital in *Positive Lives*.¹³⁴ In one image from this compassionate yet voyeuristic series, we encounter, for example, a white dying AIDS patient called John lying with his lover in a hospital bed—an intimate act that was not socially acceptable for gay men in many clinical settings in 1993 (see **Figure 4.23**).¹³⁵

It was a surprise to Proud when the British Council refused his application for the funding necessary to bring *Positive Lives* to Cape Town. Though interested, the organization was not convinced of the proposal's relevance since by 1994 AIDS was increasingly understood as a black heterosexual problem in South Africa. After all, this

¹³³ Proud initially became aware of this portfolio because the SANG had worked with the Museum of Modern Art on *Art from South Africa*. Touring Britain from 1990 to 1991, the exhibition is also notable because it was co-organized on the threshold of South Africa's reentry into global cultural affairs, thereby one of the earliest welcomed efforts to export recent contemporary art. Proud, interview.

¹³⁴ For more on Mendel's life and work before moving to London, see Annabelle Wienand, "Strategies of Representation: South African Photography of the HIV Epidemic" (Dissertation, University of Cape Town, 2014), 107–10.

¹³⁵ Stephen Mayes and Lyndall Stein, eds., *Positive Lives: Responses to HIV* (London: Cassell, 1993), 128–29. For more on Mendel's images in this series, see Wienand, "Strategies of Representation: South African Photography of the HIV Epidemic," 110–17. For more on the show, see the digitized artist talk, featuring Mendel with others, for *Positive Lives: Responses to HIV*, Photographers' Gallery archive, London.

series was predominately about the pandemic in the lives of white gay men in the UK, where infrastructures of AIDS healthcare, advocacy, and education were infinitely better financed and more advanced. In light of this, the curator quickly floated the idea of commissioning Mendel to return to his country of origin to shoot a South African chapter pivoting around black heterosexuals. The British Council was thrilled to fund this proposal.¹³⁶ Further sponsorship streamed in from Levi Strauss & Company, the Terrence Higgins Trust, Old Mutual, and the AIDS Foundation of South Africa.¹³⁷ And so Mendel spent March and April 1995 in urban and rural areas in South Africa, taking black-and-white photographs of how the pandemic challenged and transformed various communities. For instance, one photograph from this body of work, taken in the town of Bizana in the Eastern Cape in April 1995, documents a group of women *sangomas* (traditional healers) as they skeptically encounter condoms in an AIDS education workshop (see **Figure 4.24**).

Fraught with interesting tensions, *Positive Lives* at the SANG rendered visible some of the disjunctions between the situations in Britain and in South Africa. As Mendel stated in an interview, “I included the South African component in the exhibition as a bridge of sorts because I wanted to form a thematic link between Aids in varying contexts. I felt it was important to articulate the different ways in which the disease affects different communities.”¹³⁸ In addition to the photography itself, Proud and the team of curators at the museum worked with representatives from twelve local AIDS

¹³⁶ Proud, interview.

¹³⁷ “South African National Gallery: Annual Report, 1994-1995” (Cape Town: South African National Gallery, 1995); Marilyn Martin, “HIV/AIDS in South Africa: Can the Visual Arts Make a Difference?,” in *AIDS and South Africa: The Social Expression of a Pandemic*, ed. Kyle D. Kauffman and David L. Lindauer (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 123.

¹³⁸ Gideon Mendel, quoted in Staff Reporter, “Powerful Images of Positive Lives,” *Mail & Guardian*, December 8, 1995, <https://mg.co.za/article/1995-12-08-powerful-images-of-positive-lives>.

organizations to plan extensive awareness programs for high school students, policymakers, and medical practitioners.¹³⁹ The SANG considered the exhibition, which later traveled on to the Johannesburg Art Gallery, a major success. “It opened eyes all over,” Proud recalled. “It was the first time people had actually seen a photograph of anyone who ever said, ‘I am HIV-positive,’ or ‘I am a sick person with AIDS.’”¹⁴⁰ Translated into the eleven official South African languages, Mendel’s new section of *Positive Lives* was widely displayed in community centers across the Western Cape, North Western Province, and Gauteng, as well as in Bamako, Mali, and Dakar, Senegal.¹⁴¹

If the global queer cultural precedents in the struggle against AIDS were far from optimal prototypes for South African institutions such as the Anglican Church and the SANG, *Man of Sorrows* and *Positive Lives* demonstrated the possibility of revising global queer methods, as well as the compounding need to develop new ones.¹⁴² Because the virus traversed so many identities, temporalities, geographies, and publics, even within the territory of a single city, the new cultural strategies were compelled to respond to and interlace with the old ones.

Nothing underscores this dense entanglement of people, spaces, and representations more strikingly than a passage from *Love Themes for the Wilderness*. At one point in the

¹³⁹ “South African National Gallery: Annual Report, 1994-1995.”

¹⁴⁰ Proud, interview.

¹⁴¹ For one review of the Cape Town show, see Peter Ride, “On View: Gideon Mendel’s Project *Positive Lives*, South Africa Tackles the Emotive Subject of AIDS from an African Perspective,” *The British Journal of Photography* 7042 (September 13, 1995): 17.

¹⁴² For the SANG, *Positive Lives* was significant owing to its introduction of more socially-engaged approaches to curation and programming, specifically in relation to AIDS. The next chapter will touch on the museum as an arena of AIDS cultural discourse and practice in the late 1990s. For more on AIDS activism at the SANG, see Martin, “HIV/AIDS in South Africa: Can the Visual Arts Make a Difference?”; Marilyn Martin, “Curating HIV/AIDS at the South African National Gallery,” *Kiosk* 1 (2007): 57–64; Marilyn Martin, interview by Jackson Davidow, March 16, 2018.

novel, Jamal has Stoker, the protagonist, and Bianca, a potential love interest and visiting art collector from Italy, stop by the SANG to take in *Positive Lives*. They find the show profoundly moving. Whereas the virus was the cause of Bianca's brother's death back in Europe, many members of Stoker's community in Observatory had been passing away on account of AIDS, and for other reasons. Studying the images, Stoker is reminded of how death was "the key to the Locker Room Project, the source of outrage, hope and fearlessness." However, the narrator ultimately reckons that "[i]n an Age of Disease no one was exempt. For Stoker's peers life was a matter of timing, of ethics and mathematics. Error reigned. The knowledge of premature death stalked his generation."¹⁴³ During the early 1990s, HIV/AIDS was indeed a central component of the global queer cultural imaginary in South Africa. Yet by the mid-1990s, as the cultural production in the next chapter will show, AIDS might be said to encapsulate the post-apartheid zeitgeist, proving the degree to which "no one was exempt."¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ Jamal, *Love Themes for the Wilderness*, 222–23.

¹⁴⁴ Jamal, 223.

Chapter Five

Kim Berman, Paper Prayers, and the Johannesburg-Boston Axis: Surfaces and Impressions

Three to four hours in length, the typical Paper Prayers printmaking workshop takes place in a community center or arts facility in a South African city, township, or village.¹ Present are the facilitator(s)—usually an art teacher and ideally an AIDS education partner—and no more than twenty participants, who might be youth group members, health workers, art educators, or people living with HIV/AIDS. A preliminary introduction leads to a playful warm-up exercise, perhaps artistically embodying an animal (“Imagine your crayon is an insect (e.g. grasshopper) and make marks on the paper”) or a group drawing activity that is reminiscent of the European Surrealist method of exquisite corpse.² After the icebreaker, thirty minutes are allotted to AIDS awareness and education, preferably facilitated by an AIDS health worker or HIV-positive person, in order to highlight key issues such as prevention (i.e. condom usage), prejudice, and anxiety. Despite the seriousness of the topic at hand, the facilitator is supposed to nurture an atmosphere of enjoyment and acceptance. After all, this is potentially the first time many of the participants have ever openly talked about sex and HIV/AIDS, so discomfort and shyness are common reactions. The aim is to make sex education as fun, informative, and engaging as possible.

¹ This extended description of a Paper Prayers workshop is based on the model in the workbook for facilitators printed by Artist Proof Studio in 1999. See Kim Berman et al., *Paper Prayers Workbook* (Johannesburg: Artist Proof Studio, 1999). Collection of Artist Proof Studio. It is also informed by interviews with the three prime Paper Prayers facilitators in the late 1990s, namely Kim Berman, Carol Hofmeyr, and Bart Cox: Berman, interview; Carol Hofmeyr, interview by Jackson Davidow, March 15, 2018; Bart Cox, interview by Jackson Davidow, March 6, 2018. Furthermore, I had the opportunity to participate in one of these workshops (for a group of art therapists-in-training) conducted by Berman at Artist Proof Studio on July 14, 2016; I do not, however, make reference to my own experience in this chapter. While the workshop format has always been adaptable and open to alterations, its template has changed considerably since the late 1990s. For the most up-to-date recommended structure, see Kim Berman, *Finding Voice: A Visual Arts Approach to Engaging Social Change* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017), 187–90.

² Berman et al., *Paper Prayers Workbook*, 16.

For instance, to heighten awareness and abate stigma, a facilitator might lead an exercise called “In My Life,” in which participants are asked to jot down the names of important people from across their social worlds. Working with a partner, each participant then considers the possibility of receiving an HIV-positive test through a series of pointed hypothetical questions, with an emphasis on finding a way to reveal this difficult news to the listed family members and friends. Subsequently, participants discuss the opposite: how to respond if any of these people were to confide in them about an HIV-positive test result. Instead of lingering on the logistical and rational aspects of this sensitive subject, participants are encouraged to meditate on and openly debate the spectrum of feelings attached to this situation, including their own biases and concerns.

Next comes the artmaking. Once the facilitator explains the philosophy behind Paper Prayers, including how it was inspired by a Japanese mourning custom involving paper strips, the participants begin to visualize their “prayer”—a skinny rectangle of paper, approximately 10.5 by 30 centimeters.³ In light of the previous awareness exercise, participants contemplate and collect suitable images and symbols (e.g. condoms, flowers, boats, and ribbons) to incorporate, resonant colors and textures to use, and meaningful messages to convey. Then there is a demonstration of the printmaking process; this varies widely depending on the facility, the facilitators’ expertise, and the available resources. Possible methods of printmaking consist of quick prints (rubblings, monoprints, string prints, stamp prints), drypoint prints (with an etching press), and wood- or linocut prints.

Filled with at least a rudimentary understanding of the mechanics of printmaking, participants now spend about one hour engaged in the act of creation: inking plates with

³ For the sake of clarity, I will use “Paper Prayers” for the workshop and general name of the project, and “paper prayer” or “prayer” for the print produced as part of Paper Prayers.

paint, experimenting with color, textures, and stencils, rubbing prints with a spoon or rolling them through a press, and, if possible, making multiple versions. After they clean up, individually sign, and share their prayers with one another, the session concludes with a group discussion that probes connections between printmaking, therapy, and AIDS awareness, which is once again enforced through the distribution of educational materials. Usually participants produce three prints: one to take home, one to gift to someone else, and one reserved for exhibitions and fundraising programs at schools, churches, galleries, or community halls.

Included in the booklet used to train facilitators from 1999 is an unlabeled photograph of a group of black children and teachers, surrounded by a wall decked with paper prayers; many of them proudly hold up the works they have just made, grins plastered on their faces (**see Figure 5.1**). As the sampling of nine exemplary anonymous prayers on the cover of this training booklet indicates, the makers can draw on different formal languages and techniques, yet common imagery includes hands, the sun and stars, religious symbols, the red AIDS ribbon, leaves, and animals, as well as more fully abstract designs (**see Figure 5.2**). There is also a textual component in the prayer in the lower right corner, which depicts five “stick” people in the foreground of a simply rendered church, accompanied by a mysterious, ominous black square and a radiant AIDS ribbon. “EACH OTHER SUPPORT,” it entreats or proselytizes, likely written in directly on the print’s surface.

Developed by Kim Berman in 1995 and launched as a nationwide campaign in 1998, Paper Prayers grew out of Artist Proof Studio (APS) in Johannesburg. In 1991, Berman, a white woman who had recently returned from seven years in Boston, and

Nhlanhla Xaba, a black man based in Soweto, cofounded this collaborative printmaking and education center, with the goal of using visual art to help build a non-racial, democratic South Africa. In line with this mission, Paper Prayers was the studio's response to the escalating national rates of HIV/AIDS in the mid-1990s. Thanks to a grant from the federal government's Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology (DACST) in 1998, the workshop traveled to all nine provinces, spreading the gospel of AIDS awareness through printmaking to over 1,200 people in its inaugural year.⁴ The project has since taken a plethora of forms, and though unfortunately there is no estimated tally since this first wave between 1998 and 1999, many thousands of people have been involved as participants over the decades. Though Paper Prayers has always been stationed at APS, during the late 1990s Berman was its primary leader, and as funding allowed, Carol Hofmeyr became the national coordinator. Before his death in 2003, APS co-director Xaba was very supportive of the project, yet for the most part marginally involved; at the time, he concentrated on other matters, including the daily operations of the studio and the refinement of his own artistic practice. In the late 1990s, Xaba's printmaking was in high demand in South Africa, especially after he won the very prestigious Standard Bank Young Artist Award in 1998.

I have taken pains to conjure up a Paper Prayers workshop circa 1999 because the transnational development of this multipurpose cultural form is the main focus of this chapter. The printmaking workshop carries much grander ambitions than the fostering of artistic interest or knowledge; it is an extremely elaborate and at times enigmatic process transcending the final paper prayers themselves. This chapter contends that the act of

⁴ Susan Sellschop and Pamela Allara, eds., *12 Years of Paper Prayers: Awareness, Action & Advocacy at Artist Proof Studio* (Johannesburg: Artist Proof Studio, 2010), no page number. Collection of Artist Proof Studio.

printmaking binds the participant not only to distinct pedagogical regimes of therapy, activism, sexuality, spirituality, and sometimes even employment, but also to a transnational economy of culture, political visibility, and belonging. By mapping out the projects, organizations, and networks stretching between Johannesburg and Boston during the 1980s and 1990s that collectively gave rise to APS and Paper Prayers, this chapter tells two stories. The first narrates the personal, political, and artistic trajectory of Berman, from her move from Johannesburg to Boston in 1983 to her repatriation in 1990, when, with Xaba, she established APS based on her local studio and workplace in Cambridge, MA. The second recounts the history of Paper Prayers, first incarnated by artist Tom Grabosky at the Howard Yezerski Gallery in Boston as a part of the local programming for Day Without Art for World AIDS Day in 1989. These strands of biography and institutional history join together through Berman's remodeling of Paper Prayers in South Africa in 1995.

As I track and theorize this significant development in post-apartheid cultural production—one in which art, therapy, education, activism, and work became either intensely intertwined or one and the same—it is necessary for me to make connections between the micro- and the macro-scales. What does Paper Prayers have to do with local histories and cultural practice? How does it relate to national predicaments, policies, and imperatives? And how does it take part in global processes and political movements? In asking and attempting to answer these cross-cutting questions, my research shows that AIDS cultural production operated within the complex interlocking of local, national, and global forces and processes. Put differently, Paper Prayers and attendant initiatives should be understood as both products and producers of this often contested set of

shifting and mutually-constituting relationships. Although this very specific category of AIDS cultural production sheds light on the pandemic, it also, I insist, opens up nuanced understandings of the confluence of art, globalization, and nation-building in post-apartheid South Africa.

As a distinctly transnational artistic initiative, Paper Prayers exposes a fresh perspective on more established narratives of South African AIDS activism, particularly those surrounding the effective efforts of the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC). This activist organization was founded just as Berman's 1998 campaign was winding down, and shortly before Thabo Mbeki became president in June 1999. It responded to the crisis presented by HIV/AIDS, which was reaching new heights as a result of Mbeki's recalcitrant denialism.⁵ As scholars such as Mandisa Mbali, Steven Robins, Eduard Grebe, Jean Comaroff, and John L. Comaroff have investigated, TAC activists strategically leveraged local, national, and global networks, mobilizing NGOs and other forces and institutions in order to make meaningful interventions in the fields of AIDS policy and treatment in South Africa.⁶ In many ways, the cultural tactics formulated by the Paper Prayers Campaign corresponded with this global trend in AIDS political organizing at the turn of the twenty-first century—epitomizing what Robins, drawing on the work of Arjun Appadurai, calls “globalization from below” or “grassroots

⁵ For more on Mbeki and AIDS denialism, see, for instance, Mark Gevisser, *A Legacy of Liberation: Thabo Mbeki and the Future of the South African Dream* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2009), particularly 276–96.

⁶ Mandisa Mbali, *South African AIDS Activism and Global Health Politics* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013); Steven L. Robins, “‘Long Live Zackie, Long Live’: AIDS Activism, Science and Citizenship after Apartheid,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 30, no. 3 (2004): 651–72; Eduard Grebe, “The Treatment Action Campaign's Struggle for AIDS Treatment in South Africa: Coalition-Building Through Networks,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 37, no. 4 (2011): 849–68; Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, *Theory from the South: Or, How Euro-America Is Evolving Toward Africa* (Boulder and London: Paradigm Publishers, 2012), 173–90.

globalization” by means of artmaking.⁷ At the same time, it is worthwhile to consider the myriad ways in which AIDS cultural production interfaced with, and even sometimes contributed to, what sociologist Claire Laurier Decoteau neatly labels the “postcolonial paradox,” a tug-of-war between global neoliberal capitalist desires and the South African need to redress the countless inequalities of the past so as to construct a more just future. According to her argument, “the battle to resolve the paradox of postcolonialism is waged on the terrain of AIDS politics.”⁸ The backdrop of Paper Prayers and other concomitant initiatives was this exact tension between nationalizing and globalizing, between human health needs and neoliberalism capitalism, between sincere hopes for social change and fixed formulas of NGO-speak.

The previous chapter demonstrated how the AIDS pandemic became a catalyst in the construction of a global queer public culture in Cape Town in the early 1990s, a time when the South African state, media, and civil society widely regarded the virus as white, homosexual, and foreign. Guided by international networks of AIDS activism, the gay, lesbian, and queer political and cultural initiatives were trailblazing in their commitments to elevate South African public consciousness about the virus, which also clearly affected large swaths of the heterosexual and non-white population. This chapter, unlike the others in my dissertation, inspects AIDS cultural production outside primarily gay, lesbian, and queer frames of reference, that was neither necessarily concocted by nor geared towards gay men and lesbians. And yet, as this chapter will uncover, the Paper Prayers Campaign was still heavily informed by Berman’s own experience and networks as a lesbian

⁷ Robins, “‘Long Live Zackie, Long Live’: AIDS Activism, Science and Citizenship after Apartheid,” 664–65.

⁸ Claire Laurier Decoteau, *Ancestors and Antiretrovirals: The Biopolitics of HIV/AIDS in Post-Apartheid South Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 7.

activist, as well as her consequential encounters with the American version of Paper Prayers and the AIDS Memorial Quilt in the United States. In other words, this surge of AIDS cultural production in South Africa was not at all severed from Euro-American queer cultural work around AIDS from about a decade earlier, or from South African queer AIDS activism that suffused the Out-in-Africa Gay & Lesbian Film Festival and the Locker Room Project in 1994 (examined in the previous chapter). Despite differences in tactics, activist priorities, and grammars of representation, there were still appreciable continuities, interchanges, and intersections between the queer and the not-necessarily-queer AIDS cultural efforts in South Africa and beyond.

Though unique and groundbreaking in many ways, Paper Prayers was far from alone in the national cultural landscape. By the late 1990s, prominent initiatives that melded art, craft, activism, social awareness, sex education, therapy, skill-training, and income-generation had begun to proliferate, particularly in relation to HIV/AIDS. Such initiatives often turned to and interlaced with “traditional” forms of local artistic and creative production, including beadwork, embroidery, telephone-wire basketry, paper products, and, of course, printmaking.⁹ To illustrate the increase in this genre of AIDS cultural projects over a short period, let me inventory some of the most visible and noteworthy efforts by city and year of establishment. In Cape Town, there was Wola Nani (1994), the Philani Printing Project (1997), the Memory Box Project (2001), and the Body Maps Project of the Bambanani Women’s Group (2002); in Durban, the Siyazama Project (1998); and in Hamburg (in the Eastern Cape), the Keiskamma Art Project (2000). Similar projects based in Johannesburg were either byproducts of Paper Prayers

⁹ For more on the history of “art” and “craft” as categories of indigenous cultural production, see, for instance, Anitra Nettleton, “Life in a Zulu Village: Craft and the Art of Modernity in South Africa,” *The Journal of Modern Craft* 3, no. 1 (2010): 55–59.

(1997), including the Thandanani Craft Project (1998), the Phumani Papermaking Poverty Relief Program (1999), the Kopenang Embroidery Collective (2000), and the Ikageng Embroidery Group (2003), or its already-existent official partners, such as the Community AIDS Response (CARE) Income Group Yeoville and the Mapula Embroidery Project.¹⁰ It is important to point out that most of these projects were engineered and implemented by well-connected, well-intentioned, middle-class white women operating in a network of NGOs and other institutions. Yet the participants and makers were (and, in many cases, continue to be) predominantly black women, living in poverty, with constrained resources and opportunities, and inordinately affected by HIV/AIDS.

While many of these initiatives are worthy of close historical analysis and could easily be the centerpiece of this chapter, I have chosen to concentrate my discussion on Kim Berman, APS, and Paper Prayers in its early years (up until 2000) for four reasons. First, Paper Prayers, as hinted above, was innovative, far-reaching, and enormously influential in South Africa, inspiring and incubating several other corresponding projects. Second, the transnational history of this particular project contributes to a richer understanding of the cultural links between the anti-apartheid, gay and lesbian, and AIDS activist movements on both local and global scales. Third, the history complicates a predictable import/export model of globalized cultural exchange, opening up a more hybrid and even viral narrative, while also illuminating a relatively uncharted route of

¹⁰ See “Paper Prayers Partner Groups,” report likely from 2004 or 2005, Folder “11: training materials HIV,” Kim Berman Archives, University of Johannesburg (hereafter Berman Archives). Founded in the Winterveld (in the North West Province) in 1991, Mapula first encountered Paper Prayers through the national campaign in 1998, entering into a collaboration in 2000. For more on the relationship between Mapula and Paper Prayers, see Brenda Schmahmann, *Mapula: Embroidery and Empowerment in the Winterveld* (Johannesburg: David Krut Publishing, 2006), 83–94.

transmission, that is, between Johannesburg and Boston. Fourth, *Paper Prayers* stirs up complex and fascinating questions about historical method, the uses of art and artmaking, and post-apartheid cultural ecosystems during a pandemic of unparalleled proportions.

Empowerment in Context: Thinking Epidemiologically

In spite of this limited focus, my chapter seeks to make a broader intervention in a scholarly literature at the crossroads of art, activism, and HIV/AIDS in South Africa. Often written concurrent to and with the express authorization of projects and programs such as those listed above, art histories that chronicle these endeavors tend to strike a celebratory note, singing their praises rather than offering critical histories and analyses. While there is nothing inherently wrong with this type of approach, and, to be sure, these assessments are meticulously researched and provide invaluable insight, I am wary of the lack of critical distance between the authorial subject and the object of study. The close-knit intimacies that exist between many of the scholars and the lead practitioners (nearly all of whom are white women who frequently collaborate) might explain why the default and definitive explanation of such AIDS cultural initiatives is a markedly liberal interpretation that promotes and cheers on the empowerment of black women. Whether it is through basket-weaving or keychain-beading, arts and crafts—the argument goes—are transformative portals to storytelling, therapy, education, activism, skills, financial gain, self-worth, and survival. Injected with the terminology and operating logics that come from NGOs and governmental white papers, this interpretation sees artmaking as a means of development. Variations on this reading are propagated in effectively every text that investigates such projects, including those by Brenda Schmahmann, Sabine Marschall,

Allen F. Roberts, Kim Miller, Ellen Grünkemeier, and Annie Coombes.¹¹ This interpretation has also been preserved by a team of committed and influential curators who have introduced these initiatives to national and international audiences, especially Marilyn Martin of the South African National Gallery, Carol Brown of the Durban Art Gallery, and David Gere and Robert Sember of the Make Art/Stop AIDS project.¹²

To illustrate this tendency—let’s call it “the empowerment thesis”—I will briefly review the scholarship of Schmahmann, a highly regarded white South African art historian who has written extensively on community arts projects addressing the pandemic. Her most recent monograph, *The Keiskamma Art Project: Restoring Hope and Livelihoods* (2016), is the product of many years of interview-based research with participants in the initiative in Hamburg in the Eastern Cape. The scholarly text, as well as the articles that led up to the final book, were sanctioned and encouraged by the initiative’s founder and director, Carol Hofmeyr, a white artist who was also the national coordinator of the first round of Paper Prayers in the late 1990s. Though Schmahmann

¹¹ Schmahmann, *Mapula: Embroidery and Empowerment in the Winterveld*; Brenda Schmahmann, *The Keiskamma Art Project: Restoring Hope and Livelihoods* (Cape Town: Print Matters Heritage, 2016); Sabine Marschall, “Getting the Message Across: Art and Craft in the Service of HIV/AIDS Awareness in South Africa,” *Visual Anthropology* 17, no. 2 (2004): 163–82; Allen F. Roberts, “‘Break the Silence’: Art and HIV/AIDS in KwaZulu-Natal,” *African Arts* 34, no. 1 (2001): 36–49; Kim Miller, “The Philani Printing Project: Women’s Art and Activism in Crossroads, South Africa,” *Feminist Studies* 29, no. 3 (Fall 2003): 618–37; Grünkemeier, *Breaking the Silence: South African Representations of HIV/AIDS*; Annie E. Coombes, “Witnessing History/ Embodying Testimony: Gender and Memory in Post-Apartheid South Africa,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 17, no. S1 (2011): S92–112. In her penetrating book *Impossible Mourning: HIV/AIDS and Visuality After Apartheid*, cultural theorist Kylie Thomas presents a different framework that draws in part on personal experience as an AIDS activist and key architect of the Memory Box Project. Though in certain ways Thomas’ study harmonizes with the repeatedly invoked notion of art as empowerment, I find it to be more self-aware and reflexive than some of the models and methods developed in this other scholarship. In fact, the author questions the political abilities of art and criticism in the age of HIV/AIDS. See Kylie Thomas, *Impossible Mourning: HIV/AIDS and Visuality After Apartheid* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2013).

¹² See, for instance, the key reflections and exhibition catalogues: Marilyn Martin, “HIV/AIDS in South Africa: Can the Visual Arts Make a Difference?” in *AIDS and South Africa: Can the Visual Arts Make a Difference?*, ed. Kyle D. Kauffman and David L. Lindauer (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 120–35; Marilyn Martin, “Curating HIV/AIDS at the South African National Gallery,” *Kiosk* 1 (2007): 57–64; David Gere and Robert Sember, *Not Alone: An International Project of Make Art/Stop Aids* (Los Angeles: Fowler Museum, 2006).

rigorously examines several works of embroidery produced by the Keiskamma Art Project, exposing layers of social, political, religious, and aesthetic meaning, the underlying purpose of this book is to uphold the oeuvre of Hofmeyr and the black women who embroider her designs as workers. Disregarding the manifold political complexities of this project, including its racial and economic power dynamics and missionary undertones, the art historian concludes with a hearty endorsement:

[g]iven the excellence of its work, as well as the significant impact the Keiskamma Art Project has had on the livelihoods and morale of people in Hamburg and its surrounds, it is to be hoped that the growth and development of this remarkable project will continue for many years to come.¹³

To complete the circuit, Berman, who was Hofmeyr's MFA advisor at the Technikon Witwatersrand (now the University of Johannesburg) and then supervisor at Paper Prayers, and is currently Schmahmann's departmental colleague at the University of Johannesburg, wrote a glowing review of the book in the South African art history journal *de arte*.¹⁴ It is indeed a very small circle of scholars and practitioners who create, promote, and historicize each other's initiatives.

These readings hinge on the concept of empowerment, a term that, as sociologist Deborah Posel points out, organized much public discourse both during and after the transition to democracy.¹⁵ Most visible in the early policy frameworks of the ANC, "empowering" black women and girls mainly involved advancing their political voice, opening up new economic opportunities, and nurturing their potential for social organization. Yet the political aspects of women's sexuality were largely sidelined in

¹³ Schmahmann, *The Keiskamma Art Project: Restoring Hope and Livelihoods*, 193.

¹⁴ Kim Berman, "Review: *The Keiskamma Art Project: Restoring Hope and Livelihoods*," *de arte* 52, no. 1 (2017): 139–43.

¹⁵ Deborah Posel, "Sex, Death and the Fate of the Nation: Reflections on the Politicization of Sexuality in Post-Apartheid South Africa," *Africa* 75, no. 2 (2005): 125–26, 134.

initial discussions and implemented policies; the mushrooming pandemic in the late 1990s politicized sexuality in new ways, resulting in the empowerment of “empowerment” by AIDS-related NGOs, cultural initiatives, and health education campaigns. Posel appropriately attaches this development buzzword to Foucault’s persuasive notion of how modern subjects incorporate “techniques of the self” in which self-disciplined sexuality “is presented as a site of rational, individual choice and agency—an opportunity for empowerment and ‘healthy positive living’.”¹⁶

This logic of empowerment, agency, and development percolates through the urgent work of Schmahmann and other thinkers. I would like to suggest that a constructive approach to such scholarship is to grasp it, on the one hand, as inside rather than outside the cultural projects themselves, and, on the other, as a forceful historiographic current in post-apartheid art history. Nonetheless, what discomforts me most about the empowerment thesis is its simplistic binary outlook, its disposition to deem such projects successes. To be clear, I am not trying to prove this thesis wrong, for my research cannot answer the gargantuan question as to whether or not these arts initiatives empowered their participants sexually, psychologically, financially, or politically. Empowerment is excruciatingly difficult for the historian to gauge—except in monetary terms when data is available about a project’s economic generation and its lasting effects on a community. On the contrary, my interests in these AIDS cultural projects lie in their extraordinary complexities—the tensions, surprises, crossings, and apertures that have revealed themselves at various stages of conceptualization, adaptation, and actualization. And yet, having said all this, I must acknowledge that I,

¹⁶ Posel, 134.

too, am under the influence of “the empowerment thesis,” and this chapter is inevitably immersed in its line of reasoning.

A remarkably slim and incestuous literature exists on the history of APS and Paper Prayers. Other than an extended profile by American community arts advocate William Cleveland, the most notable chronicler is Pamela Allara, who was in fact Berman’s Americanist art history professor during her graduate studies at Tufts University and the School of the Museum of Fine Arts (SMFA) in Boston in the late 1980s; thereafter Allara became a close friend, as well as an avid champion of, advisor to, and fundraiser for the studio since its early days.¹⁷ Berman has also been actively involved in historicizing and re-theorizing her own artistic practice, most thoroughly in her interdisciplinary doctoral thesis (co-supervised by Allara) at the Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research at the University of the Witwatersrand in 2009—a text she subsequently reworked and published as an academic book in 2017.¹⁸ In addition to print sources, I draw on oral history interviews with key individuals, and archival research conducted in Berman’s personal papers, as well as at the Johannesburg Art Gallery, the Howard Yezerski Gallery, and the African Activist Archive Project.

¹⁷ William Cleveland, *Art and Upheaval: Artists on the World’s Frontlines* (Oakland: New Village Press, 2008), 127–51. Notably, Allara curated the exhibition “The Boston-Jo’burg Connection” at the Tufts University Art Gallery in Medford, Massachusetts, accompanied by a catalogue and article: Pamela Allara, “The Boston-Jo’burg Connection,” *Art South Africa*, Summer 2012. Her other contributions include Sellschop and Allara, *12 Years of Paper Prayers: Awareness, Action & Advocacy at Artist Proof Studio*; Pamela Allara, “A Brief History of Artist Proof Studio,” in *Coming of Age: 21 Years of Artist Proof Studio*, ed. Pamela Allara and Kim Berman (Johannesburg: Johannesburg Art Gallery, 2012), 1–5. For more on the relationship between Berman and Allara, see Pamela Allara, interview by Jackson Davidow, April 18, 2018.

¹⁸ Kim Berman, “Agency, Imagination and Resilience: Facilitating Social Change through the Visual Arts in South Africa” (PhD Thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 2009); Berman, *Finding Voice*. For more on her development of Phumani Paper (a continuation and offshoot of Paper Prayers), see Kim Berman and Jane Hassinger, *Women on Purpose: Resilience and Creativity of the Founding Women of Phumani Paper*, ed. Susan Sellschop (Randburg: Desklink Media, 2012). Because it contains grittier historical detail, I tend to reference the dissertation. Though informative, these histories emerge with dates that are inconsistent and inaccurate, at times off by a couple years; I have attempted to sort out these discrepancies.

Assembled for the writing of her doctoral thesis, and currently held in her office at the University of Johannesburg, Berman's own archive, which also serves as the unofficial archive for APS and Paper Prayers, is uniquely shaped by its confrontations with death. Contemplating the kaleidoscopic relationship between the archive, death, and debris, philosopher Achille Mbembe has asserted that "[a]rchiving is a kind of internment, laying something in a coffin, if not to rest, then at least to consign elements of that life which could not be destroyed purely and simply."¹⁹ This linkage between archival practice, internment, destruction, and consecration becomes literalized in the case of Berman's papers. On the night of March 3, 2003, a horrible electrical fire took place at APS, burning the space to the ground. Besides destroying a trove of archival records related to its institutional history and Paper Prayers, the fire tragically claimed the life of Berman's cofounder Xaba, who happened to be working late into the night in preparation for an upcoming exhibition, and likely fell asleep on the couch.²⁰ A photograph of Berman, overflowing with grief as she excavates the debris of what was once a dream come true, the site where her dear friend and collaborator had just burned to death, is evocative of the ways in which devastating losses have haunted APS, the making of its archive, and the telling of its history (see **Figure 5.3**). In the face of compounding death—both during and after apartheid—notions of rebuilding, empowerment, transformation, and the South African idea of *ubuntu* are tempting and generative frameworks for understanding institutional practice and for articulating

¹⁹ Achille Mbembe, "The Power of the Archive and Its Limits," in *Refiguring the Archive*, ed. Carolyn Hamilton et al., trans. Judith Inggs (Cape Town: David Philip, 2002), 22.

²⁰ Berman, "Agency, Imagination and Resilience," 76.

histories, yet they can also overshadow other critical modes of inquiry and interpretation.²¹

On account of their special formal properties and the social relations involved in their creation, prints prompt interesting questions about virality and aesthetics in the context of the AIDS pandemic. They also demand an epidemiological approach for keeping track of and theorizing their reproductions and mutations across time and space. In view of the overpowering fantasies about cyberculture, redress, and global connectivity in 1990s South Africa, a focus on the age-old medium of the print might appear to be inconsistent with these concurrent technological transformations.²² Prints, however, can be considered viral media. According to theorists Alexander Galloway and Eugene Thacker, what fundamentally characterizes a biological or computational virus is its simultaneous replication and mutation in the act of exploiting a host entity.²³ Strictly speaking, prints lack a host entity for exploitation. But as battlegrounds between endless replication and inevitable, ongoing variation of an image, prints are viral. Notwithstanding Walter Benjamin's famous claim that the rise of mechanical reproduction coincided with the dissipation of an image's singular "aura," images printed in multiple are never precise copies, no matter how mechanically reproduced they are. Each pressing of an image upon a surface is a different staging of sameness: the trace of a viral encounter.

²¹ *Ubuntu* is a philosophical concept and ethos of humanity and reconciliation, repeatedly invoked by leaders such as Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela during the transition to democracy and especially in the context of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. After the 2003 fire, *ubuntu* also became a central organizing principle of APS. For more on her adaptation and theorization, see Berman, 46–59.

²² See, for instance, Candice Breitz, "Towards a Cyber-Creativity in Post-Apartheid South Africa (from Identification to Affinity)," in *Africus: Johannesburg Biennale, 28 February-30 April 1995*, ed. Johannesburg Transitional Metropolitan Council (Johannesburg: Thorold's Africana Books, 1995), 288–89.

²³ Alexander Galloway and Eugene Thacker, *The Exploit: A Theory of Networks* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 87.

Paper Prayers exploited the divide between sameness and difference, between repetition and ongoing change, in its drive to proliferate. Across the course of this chapter, the viral nature of Paper Prayers further reveals itself as the practice migrated and morphed formally through complex acts of appropriation and adaptation. From a worship practice at Shinto temples in Japan, to a participatory fundraiser at a small art gallery in Boston, to a printmaking workshop at the Johannesburg Art Gallery, to a national printmaking-turned-needlework campaign across South Africa, to a large-scale papermaking relief effort, Paper Prayers had many lives as it incorporated and repurposed existing and available cultural forms. Because no compendium of the paper prayers exists, and documentation of the process and outcomes is scarce and undated, it can be challenging for the historian to glean much, if any, information about the prints and the people who made them. Significantly, I have not had the opportunity to conduct oral histories with any of the individuals who participated in early Paper Prayers workshops in South Africa, but my research is enriched by interviews with Berman, Hofmeyr, and Bart Cox, who made up the lead team of facilitators during this period.

For these reasons, Paper Prayers asks for an epidemiological art-historical method that is not only attuned to cultural shifts, political and scientific developments, and the production of new subjectivities, but also keenly cognizant of its own limitations. At the level of language and rhetoric, prints have long been afflicted by a profusion of print-related metaphors, each inscribed with an over-determined dialectical logic of power. A few obvious examples would include the expressions “making a mark,” “leaving an imprint,” “impressing upon someone,” and “being etched in someone’s memory.” Despite their convenience, such metaphors are insufficient for an epidemiological art

history or for the history of Paper Prayers, which, as I have demonstrated, is too often appended to a celebratory and teleological narrative of one actor having a (positive) impact on another or others. In my view, these figures of speech fail to capture the complexities of cultural production in an age of HIV/AIDS and globalization. Having said that, however, I am attracted to the slipperiness of the word “impression,” which in common usage points to the immeasurable, the soft, the possible, and the dubious, while also, of course, retaining its printed significations.

Given the sheer magnitude of this highly networked and expansive project, as well as my own reluctance to perpetuate the empowerment thesis, I wish to advance a new way of thinking, epidemiologically, about Paper Prayers, printmaking, and transnational AIDS cultural production through the hermeneutic of the surface. The subject of surfaces has been vital to post-apartheid cultural theory, as seen in the work of David Bunn, Sarah Nuttall, and Achille Mbembe, all of whom persuasively describe Johannesburg through its urban surfaces and enduring preoccupations with the superficial.²⁴ In her theorization of entanglement, Nuttall elucidates that “[s]urface and depth exist in a set of relations in which each relies on the existence of the other, in which they are entwined or enfolded, suggestive each of the other, interpenetrating, and separating out at different points.”²⁵ And yet as she has posited elsewhere, the surface also represents “an epistemological place” that merits critical analysis “as a fundamentally *generative force* capable of

²⁴ In particular, see Achille Mbembe and Sarah Nuttall, “Writing the World from an African Metropolis,” *Public Culture* 16, no. 3 (2004): 347–72; David Bunn, “Art Johannesburg and Its Objects,” in *Johannesburg: The Elusive Metropolis*, ed. Sarah Nuttall and Achille Mbembe (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 137–69; Sarah Nuttall, *Entanglement: Literary and Cultural Reflections on Post-Apartheid* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2009), 83–107.

²⁵ Nuttall, *Entanglement*, 83.

producing effects of its own.”²⁶ For Nuttall and these other thinkers, aesthetic practices have the potential to unearth not necessarily the contested terrain of what lies below the surface, but rather the powerful interplays and entanglements between surface and depth that are constitutive of post-apartheid life, that endlessly arrange the social orders and exigencies of the (ongoing) AIDS pandemic.

With this theoretical rubric in mind, I would like to reframe the print as a play of surfaces, the trace of two or more different entities coming into contact. Departing from a conventional view of a print as the final product of one surface imprinting another with its inverted image, my understanding—my impression, so to speak—attends to the pressurized staging of multiple surfaces, each with their own characters and depths and layers that, like a virus, simultaneously give rise to replication and variation, to the strange doublings and hybridities of globalization. To comprehend a print as an intersection of surfaces is also to appreciate the processual conditions of its making, the peculiar forms of sociality, pedagogy, and discipline that the medium inherently permits and necessitates. Though epidemiological in its mission to map out how cultural forms migrate and morph across space and time, my approach also accounts for the numerous ways in which depth and impact are staggeringly hard to measure and interpret, particularly in such a wide-ranging, unwieldy, and ambitious project. Like *Paper Prayers* itself, its history lays bare a composite of surfaces, leaving copious impressions.

²⁶ Sarah Nuttall, “Surface, Depth and the Autobiographical Act: Texts and Images,” *Life Writing* 11, no. 2 (2014): 163. Italics in the original text.

Kim Berman and the Johannesburg-Boston Axis

Berman's influential brand of cultural work grew out of transnational networks that spanned a couple activist movements: anti-apartheid, lesbian and gay liberation, and AIDS. As such, an overview of her biography is needed to understand the instrumental channels of activism and art between Johannesburg and Boston that led to the development of APS and Paper Prayers. One of four sisters, Berman was born in 1960 into an influential Jewish family in Johannesburg. Her lineage sheds light upon her ingrained interests in art and social justice, as well as her fluency operating in the cultural sector upon her return from Boston. Her maternal grandparents, Richard and Freda Feldman, were key members of the South African Jewish intelligentsia and leading proponents of modern art.²⁷ For instance, they served as the chief patron for their dear friend Irma Stern, who is generally viewed as the most prolific white modern artist in South Africa.²⁸ The Feldmans' daughter, Mona Berman, was also drawn to the arts,

²⁷ Richard was a Lithuanian immigrant by way of England, who became a prominent businessman, Labour Party politician, philanthropist, and Jewish community leader. Richard and South African-born Freda married in 1931, and thereafter played an important role in developing the South African branch of ORT (*Obchestvo Remeslenogo Truda*), the international Society for the Promotion of Handicrafts and of Industrial and Agricultural Work among the Jews of Russia. Reflecting on her family's heritage, Berman has noted a tension between capitalist and socialist worldviews: "the materialism of the early Jewish immigrants in Johannesburg and the enclave of the Yiddish cultural group of writers, poets, artists and musicians." Berman, "Agency, Imagination and Resilience," xxxii.

²⁸ Stern, a Jewish expressionist painter studied with artist Max Pechstein of *Die Brücke* in Germany, made many portraits of the stylish Feldman family. One such work is her striking *Portrait of Freda in a Basuto Hat* (1943), in which the sitter, in typical white modernist fashion, dons a luxury hat belonging to the Basuto culture of what was then Basutoland. For more on the Freda and Richard Feldman's relationship with Irma Stern, see Mona Berman, *Remembering Irma: Irma Stern: A Memoir with Letters* (Cape Town: Double Storey Books, 2003); Sandra Klopper, ed., *Irma Stern: Are You Still Alive?: Stern's Life and Art Seen Through Her Letters to Richard and Freda Feldman, 1934-1966* (Cape Town: Orisha Publishing, 2017); Federico Freschi, "Irma Stern's Portraits of Freda Feldman," *Creative Feel*, December 8, 2017, <https://creativefeel.co.za/2017/12/irma-sterns-portraits-of-freda-feldman/>. For more on Richard's biography, see A.M. Cunningham, "Inventory of the Richard Feldman Papers, 1914-1968," (Johannesburg: Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, 2006). For more on the life and work of Stern, see, for example, Marion Arnold, *Irma Stern: A Feast for the Eyes* (Cape Town: Fernwood Press, 1995).

working as a writer and gallerist in Johannesburg for many years, and these interests were conveyed to her children, Kim Berman and her sisters.

Growing up with a great deal of privilege, Kim Berman was moved by Holocaust narratives and her regular encounters with anti-Semitic and racist ideologies, all of which kindled her commitment to fighting the apartheid regime.²⁹ As an undergraduate art student with a focus on printmaking at the University of the Witwatersrand from 1978 to 1982, she was active in the radical student movement, contributing visual artworks to the perpetually banned South African Students Press Union newspaper.³⁰ Beyond navigating the increasingly alarming outbursts of state repression of anti-apartheid activity in the early 1980s, Berman was, on a more personal level, making sense of her lesbian identity. As the previous chapter has detailed, lesbian and gay life during this period was still very risky and underground, and the prospect of coming out was daunting for many people, young and old, black and white. A year after graduating from university, Berman and her partner at the time took off for a summer school program in Boston—a prime reason for their departure, for their self-imposed exile, was the desire to come out and to live more openly as a couple.³¹

Compared to the apartheid state, Boston was a progressive haven for the lesbian couple. Outstaying the summer of 1983, they took up residence in Boston for seven years. For Berman, the city was also the perfect place to refine her printmaking skills, pursue graduate studies, and continue her anti-apartheid activism from afar. A summer job as a shop assistant at Artist's Proof in East Cambridge was a particularly

²⁹ For more on the position of South African Jews during the apartheid years, see, for example, Gideon Shimoni, *Community and Conscience: The Jews in Apartheid South Africa* (Lebanon: University Press of New England, 2003). The whiteness of Jews in South Africa was intermittent during the twentieth century.

³⁰ Berman, "Agency, Imagination and Resilience," xxxiii.

³¹ Berman, interview; Cleveland, *Art and Upheaval: Artists on the World's Frontlines*, 129–30.

transformative experience—and not simply on account of the green card she was able to obtain through working at this center. Soon Berman joined the collective of other young energetic printmakers, including Mary Sherwood, Jane Goldman, Catherine Kernan, and Ilana Manolson, who had come together to share a working space, artistic resources, and technical skillsets (see **Figures 5.4 and 5.5**).³² Parallel to her job and activities in this collective, Berman became a key volunteer for the Fund for a Free South Africa (FREESA), a Boston-based charity established in 1985 and led by a few South Africans in exile, including its director Themba Vilakazi. FREESA’s objective was to contribute various forms of material and financial support to organizations and initiatives devoted to “pursuing human, political, and economic rights for the oppressed in South Africa.”³³ The charity was part of a transnational network of other anti-apartheid organizations such as the African National Congress (ANC), the United Democratic Front, and the South African Congress of Trade Unions.³⁴ Under the banner of FREESA, Berman and her partner, also a volunteer, edited a publication called *Uncensored*, which brought together the latest news briefings and visual documentation of life in South Africa for wide

³² Founded in 1980, Artist’s Proof offered a radically different model of a printmaking studio to those existent locally because it was unaffiliated with a university or publisher. Beyond accommodating traditional forms of printmaking, editioning, and platemaking, the studio brought a trending set of formal aesthetic concerns to bear on the medium—among them, an exploration of the monotype and greater experimentation with regard to color, materials, texture, and gesture. Artist’s Proof was also a treasured women-run space of community building, and though without a specific political agenda, it facilitated vital conversations about art’s relationship to politics, particularly feminism. Due to rising property values, the studio was forced to close in 1984 when the building’s owner converted the space into offices. In addition to its reincarnation three years later as Mixit Print Studio in Somerville, Artist’s Proof supplied Berman with an archetype of a community printmaking center for Artist Proof Studio (APS)—the institution with a slightly variant name that she would cofound with Xaba in Johannesburg in 1991. Dorothy Thompson, “Short in Years, Long in Influence: Artist’s Proof (1980-1984),” in *Proof in Print: A Community of Printmaking Studios*, ed. Artist’s Proof et al. (Boston: Boston Public Library, 2001), 1–2.

³³ Brochure for Fund for a Free South Africa, undated yet likely 1988 or 1989, private collection of David Goodman, African Activist Archive Project, http://africanactivist.msu.edu/document_metadata.php?objectid=32-130-1212.

³⁴ From 1960 to 1990, the ANC was banned and forced to leave South Africa by the apartheid government. It was thus a crucial transnational organization in the fight against apartheid.

distribution to anti-apartheid organizations and solidarity groups across the US. Along with sending out this newsletter, they organized pop-up exhibitions of graphic resistance photography by the South African collective Afrapix and documentarian Gideon Mendel for divestment events at universities in Boston and New York.³⁵

To an increasing extent, documentary images of the struggle animated Berman's visual art practice, which drew on a looser expressionistic language to heighten the status of apartheid as an emotional disaster. For example, an informational brochure for FREESA from the late 1980s featured prints from her expanding portfolio about the plight of black communities and activists, accompanied by descriptive texts about the charity's mission (see **Figure 5.6**). Whereas one section underlined how "the majority of apartheid's victims are women, who form the major proportion of desolate, rural communities, and are among the most underpaid and overworked of the labor force," another concentrated on the importance of trade unions and workers' rights.³⁶ Shadowy and melancholic, Berman's uncredited images for this fundraising mailing were inspired by the popular resistance efforts and their photographic documentation. As she would express later on, the "silence I experienced in my safe haven of Boston was difficult to live with. I tried to reinterpret the images that were being smuggled out [of South Africa]

³⁵ Berman, interview; Cleveland, *Art and Upheaval: Artists on the World's Frontlines*, 130–31. For a brief historical account of resistance photography, with an emphasis on Afrapix, see, for instance, David L. Krantz, "Politics and Photography in Apartheid South Africa," *History of Photography* 32, no. 4 (2008): 290–300. For classic internationally-disseminated books that feature the work and commentary of Afrapix, see Omar Badsha, ed., *South Africa: The Cordoned Heart* (Cape Town, New York, and London: The Gallery Press and W.W. Norton & Company, 1986); David Bunn and Jane Taylor, eds., *From South Africa: New Writing, Photographs, and Art*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, [1987] 1988); Iris Tillman Hill and Alex Harris, eds., *Beyond the Barricades: Popular Resistance in South Africa in the 1980's* (London: Kliptown Books, 1989).

³⁶ Brochure for Fund for a Free South Africa, undated yet likely 1988 or 1989, private collection of David Goodman, African Activist Archive Project, http://africanactivist.msu.edu/document_metadata.php?objectid=32-130-1212.

and [to] give them a personal voice.”³⁷ This portfolio, in fact, was created as part of her joint master’s degree at the SMFA and Tufts University, where she also completed a written thesis called “South African Art: The Implications for Political Change” under the guidance of Pamela Allara in 1989. A specialist in American modernism, Allara introduced Berman to emergent writings in feminist art history, which honed her critical conceptualization of art’s potential in social movements, offering new theoretical frameworks for thinking about her own political art practice.³⁸

Once the National Party, under the leadership of F. W. de Klerk, released anti-apartheid activist Nelson Mandela from his prison sentence after 27 years on February 11, 1990, Berman put her printmaking skills to use in the design of a poster, this time with great joy (see **Figure 5.7**). Created to publicize the rally held for Mandela by FREESA in Boston on June 23, 1990, this powerful woodcut print pervaded the streets to welcome the leader to town.³⁹ It featured a dignified portrait of Mandela in black and white, framed by a border of yellow and green—the colors of his political party, the ANC—as well as an excerpt of his famous statement envisioning a democratic and free South Africa, first formulated from the dock at the Rivonia Trial in 1964 and frequently invoked upon his release from prison. At the boisterous rally held at Boston’s Charles River Esplanade, FREESA’s director, Themba Vilakazi, Governor Michael Dukakis, and Senator Edward Kennedy greeted Nelson and Winnie Mandela (see **Figure 5.8**). Boston, one of the earliest stops on their worldwide tour, raised \$450,000 for the ANC, which was recently legalized after thirty years of operating underground, and in desperate need

³⁷ Kim Berman, quoted in Cleveland, *Art and Upheaval: Artists on the World’s Frontlines*, 131.

³⁸ Allara, interview; Berman, “Agency, Imagination and Resilience,” 297.

³⁹ Kim Berman, “A Reflection,” *Peacebuilding and the Arts, Brandeis University* (blog), 2013, https://www.brandeis.edu/ethics/peacebuildingarts/images/news_from_the_field/2013/12_KimBerman_AP_S-Mandela-Memorial.pdf.

of financial resources for political negotiations.⁴⁰ When Nelson Mandela appealed to exiled South Africans to repatriate, come together, and concentrate their efforts on dismantling apartheid and constructing a democracy, Berman, who had recently separated from her partner of seven years, followed his command, eager to participate fully at this earth-shattering juncture in history. With the money obtained from selling her car, she bought a large American French Tool etching press, which she shipped to South Africa, where she had high hopes of opening a cooperative printmaking studio like Artist's Proof in Cambridge.⁴¹

As Berman transitioned back to life in Johannesburg in 1990 and 1991, her political activities were immediately divided between her participation in the lesbian and gay movement, her employment at NGOs, and her efforts to lay the groundwork for Artists Proof Studio (APS). Due to her demonstrated aptitude for networking and creatively bringing together disparate people and projects, it can be difficult to isolate these three interconnected pursuits. Whereas one reason she left South Africa was to come out, her homecoming was an opportunity to make visible her lesbian identity and to contribute to the euphoric yet cautious burst of lesbian and gay activism in Johannesburg and across the country. As a member of the Gay and Lesbian Organisation of the Witwatersrand (GLOW), a group founded by Simon Nkoli and other black activists in Johannesburg in 1988, Berman helped organize the inaugural Pride March on October 13, 1990 (discussed in the previous chapter), and contributed her skillset in other ways to the fight for constitutional enshrinement. For instance, she outlined the necessity of an anti-

⁴⁰ "Nelson Mandela Takes U.S. by Storm," *Fund for a Free South Africa*, Summer/Fall 1990. Private collection of David Wiley and Christine Root, African Activist Archive, http://africanactivist.msu.edu/document_metadata.php?objectid=32-130-1357.

⁴¹ Cleveland, *Art and Upheaval: Artists on the World's Frontlines*, 132–33; Berman, interview.

discrimination clause in the Bill of Rights in her role as chairperson for a workshop called “Lesbian and Gay Rights are Human Rights,” convened by GLOW and the Society for Homosexuals on Campus at the University of the Witwatersrand in March 1991. In her words:

[w]e, the lesbian and gay community, have to take our future into our own hands. We welcome solidarity and support from progressive organisations, but this is our struggle, and we demand that lesbian and gay rights be included as policy in a democratic, non-racial, non-sexist, non-heterosexist, non-homophobic new South Africa.⁴²

Another related project materialized when Matthew Krouse, a white writer and GLOW member, invited Berman to be a co-editor of the book he was working on, *The Invisible Ghetto: Lesbian & Gay Writing from South Africa*. Berman was particularly useful in helping to identify and collect stories from a group of black lesbians in Soweto, which formed a core part of the path-breaking book—the very first collection of writing on South African gay and lesbian history, literature, and culture. In her introduction, Berman posited that this work was significant because it embraced literature as a tool to demonstrate “that there can be positive lesbian role models for African women.” Moreover, “[i]n our racist and homophobic society it is essential that we begin to confront and decipher difference. *This Invisible Ghetto* is our belated beginning.”⁴³ It was

⁴² Kim Berman, introduction to Edwin Cameron, “Presentation to GLOW Action Committee and SHOC Workshop,” in *Sex and Politics in South Africa*, ed. Neville Hoad, Karen Martin, and Graeme Reid (Cape Town: Double Storey Books, 2005), 180. This is a transcription of a workshop that took place March 16, 1991, and the original audiotape is in the Gay and Lesbian Organisation of the Witwatersrand archival collections in the Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action Archives.

⁴³ Kim Berman, “Lesbians in South Africa: Challenging the Invisibility,” in *The Invisible Ghetto: Lesbian & Gay Writing from South Africa*, ed. Matthew Krouse and Kim Berman (London: Gay Men’s Press, [1993] 1995), xxi. Originally published in by COSAW Publishing in Johannesburg in 1993. While the book does not concentrate on the politics of AIDS, certain contributions such as the poems “We Are Too Young To Contemplate Our Death” by Graeme Reid and “Bring Out Your Dead” by Stephen Gray deal explicitly with the topic from a white gay perspective in South Africa and more internationally. There are two white South African gay activists named Graeme Reid, and they happened to have been partners for many years. The one who wrote these poems is not the anthropologist and current Director of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Rights Program at the NGO Human Rights Watch.

published in 1993, a year before the release of the more widely circulated *Defiant Desire: Gay and Lesbian Lives in South Africa*, edited by white gay activists Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron.

Alongside her activism in the gay and lesbian movement, Berman held jobs as a fieldworker for FREESA, which continued to be based in Boston, and as a coordinator for an NGO called World Education, gaining insight into the innumerable impediments and pressures that lay ahead in the long road to freedom. Beyond her role writing about current events and social movements in FREESA's newsletter, Berman was responsible for recommending different community groups and NGOs for FREESA grants.⁴⁴ Her ongoing intimate relationship with FREESA, which would be renamed the South Africa Development Fund (SADF) in 1998, was of utmost importance, for the charity financed many of her own undertakings, starting with her *People's Printmaking & Papermaking Handbook* (1990).⁴⁵ Based on her experiences teaching workshops with youth after her return, this low-budget illustrative booklet strove to share knowledge about printmaking and papermaking with found materials, particularly in rural areas where resources and facilities were more limited.⁴⁶ Topics covered included making ink from starch, plant dyes, and minerals; printing techniques such as woodblock printing, linocuts, stenciling, collage, and silk-screening; and papermaking from recycled products, plants, and grasses. The handbook stressed that, more than a vehicle of propaganda, printmaking enabled

⁴⁴ Berman, interview.

⁴⁵ This was a collaboration with the Congress of South African Writers, South African Youth Congress/ANC Youth League, and the Community Resource & Information Centre.

⁴⁶ Kim Berman, *People's Printmaking & Papermaking Handbook* (Johannesburg: Congress of South African Writers (COSAW), 1990), 1. Folder "12: other training materials," Kim Berman Archives.

people to create “visually rich, exciting and optimistic images...[that] can have as much or more, [sic] impact than a pamphlet or slogans.”⁴⁷

That printmaking could catalyze the democratization of South Africa was the underpinning of Berman’s cultural philosophy as her dream of opening a cooperative printmaking studio slowly became a reality. Mona Berman, who ran a gallery and framing shop called Frame-Up, introduced her daughter to Nhlanhla Xaba, the black Soweto-based emerging artist whose work she had shown. Like many black South Africans with restricted artistic opportunities during apartheid, Xaba, who was born just east of Johannesburg in Payneville, Springs in 1960, had worked hard to finance his training, spending years as a laborer before being able to concentrate on making art in the 1980s.⁴⁸ Soon Berman shared with Xaba her desire to start a studio, and the two developed a close relationship as friends and partners in this intoxicating endeavor. On Jeppe Street in the district of Newtown, they found a run-down warehouse space, which they cleaned and fixed up, constructing simple shelves and tables, and moving in the press that Berman had shipped all the way from the US.⁴⁹ In honor of Artist’s Proof in Cambridge, where Berman had many fond memories and informative experiences, they named it Artist Proof Studio (APS) (see **Figure 5.9**).⁵⁰

Situated on the western edge of the inner city, Newtown is a suburb with a distinct history of industry, turmoil, degeneration, and revitalization, one that both conforms to

⁴⁷ Berman, 2. For the referenced essay, see Albie Sachs, “Preparing Ourselves for Freedom: Culture and the ANC Constitutional Guidelines,” *TDR: The Drama Review* 35, no. 1 ([1990] Spring 1991): 187–93. This was originally presented as a paper in Lusaka in 1989 and published in *Protecting Human Rights in a New South Africa* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press) in 1990.

⁴⁸ For more on Xaba’s biography, see “Nhlanhla Xaba,” *The Artists’ Press* (website), accessed December 12, 2018, <https://www.artprintsa.com/nhlanhla-xaba.html>.

⁴⁹ The press was affectionately called Freda, possibly in reference to Berman’s maternal grandmother, Irma Stern’s patron. Berman, “Agency, Imagination and Resilience,” 33.

⁵⁰ Berman, 33; Cleveland, *Art and Upheaval: Artists on the World’s Frontlines*, 133.

and breaks away from the larger narrative of capitalist modernity normally attached to Johannesburg. It was once a brickyard and slum known for bad sanitation, disease, racial mixing, as well as the government's precedent-setting racialized forced removals in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁵¹ But by the 1910s Newtown turned into a lively commercial hub, with a large market, electric power plants, and industrial factories, furthermore serving as a prime public arena for Labour Party rallies and miners' strikes. As early as the 1940s, however, the district underwent a steady decline as power-generating complexes and businesses closed and relocated, just as apartheid was beginning to congeal and solidify the segregation of a district that was formerly quite mixed. As urban historian Sally Gaule has observed, the "final consummation of racial separation... confronted the racial engineers of *apartheid* [sic] with a paradox... The area [of Newtown] became simultaneously racially pure and economically ailing."⁵²

In spite of these developments, 1975 saw the transformation of Newtown's abandoned market building into the Market Theatre, an important non-racial institution that presented politically-incisive plays with casts of different racial backgrounds during the 1970s and 1980s. By the early 1990s, when Berman and Xaba were setting up APS Newtown mirrored the heightened uncertainty of the national period of transition, with profound spatial reconfigurations as white tenants and businesses vacated the district and reestablished themselves in the northern suburbs. Consequently, hundreds of poverty-stricken migrants—many of them arriving from other African nations—poured into the

⁵¹ Sally Gaule, "Alternating Currents of Power: From Colonial to Post-Apartheid Spatial Patterns in Newtown, Johannesburg," *Urban Studies* 42, no. 13 (2005): 2339–45; Ed Charlton, "From Liberation to Liberalization: Newtown, the Market Theatre, and Johannesburg's Relics of Meaning," *Interventions* 17, no. 6 (2015): 828–30.

⁵² Gaule, "Alternating Currents of Power: From Colonial to Post-Apartheid Spatial Patterns in Newtown, Johannesburg," 2345.

area, occupying the deserted and boarded-up buildings.⁵³ Though highly associated with crime, risk, and destitution, the precinct also offered a nugget of possibility and revitalization, particularly with regard to culture. In addition to the Market Theatre, a couple of crucial cultural initiatives to surface in this neighborhood included the Market Photo Workshop, founded by renowned white photographer David Goldblatt in 1989, and MuseumAfrica, a social and cultural history museum with colonial origins that was reconfigured and reopened in 1994.⁵⁴ This museum would also soon serve as the main venue for *Africus*, the first Johannesburg Biennale in 1995.

It is critical to situate APS not only within these layered histories, but also as a key part of the unfolding spatial, social, and artistic scenery of this precinct in the 1990s. As a collaboration between Berman and Xaba—a white lesbian and a black straight man—APS called to mind Newtown’s notorious history of racial mixing, while also typifying the fantasy of a non-racial South Africa. As Berman has claimed,

Nhlanhla and I found common ground and broke through the baggage of our history. It was, however, a huge learning curve. I was his first white friend, and he was my first real black friend, and we kind of found our way together.⁵⁵

Berman’s frank yet heartening commentary about becoming friends with Xaba might be crosshatched with a broader consideration of the promises and potential of post-apartheid camaraderie and relations at large. In their edited book *Ties That Bind: Race and the Politics of Friendship in South Africa* (2016), Shannon Walsh and Jon Soske have ignited debates about the multitudinous intimacies, complicities, and intensities that comprise

⁵³ Gaule, 2347–48; Charlton, “From Liberation to Liberalization: Newtown, the Market Theatre, and Johannesburg’s Relics of Meaning,” 835.

⁵⁴ For a detailed history of this institution, see Sarah Byala, *A Place That Matters Yet: John Gubbins’s MuseumAfrica in the Postcolonial World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

⁵⁵ Kim Berman, quoted in Cleveland, *Art and Upheaval: Artists on the World’s Frontlines*, 133.

and organize friendship across racial boundaries. As they write, “[r]ather than assume that cultural entanglement necessarily disrupts or diminishes difference, we are interested in the inverse: how intimacies expressed through friendship *produce* and *structure* difference.”⁵⁶ Pursuing a likeminded project, Franco Barchiesi rethinks interracial friendship through the very pronounced progressive political stance of non-racialism in the anti-apartheid movements, as well as after the transition to democracy. By carving out a critical genealogy of the concept across race and class, Barchiesi makes the case that non-racial nationalism has effectively reinforced anti-blackness in South African politics, culture, and, of course, modes of friendship.⁵⁷ My intention is not to critique Berman’s claims about becoming friends with Xaba, or her desire to rebuild a non-racial country, but instead to call attention to how this relationship was representative of a certain ideological position at this point in history.

Berman and Xaba were not only friends, but also professional collaborators, each endowed with different networks, skillsets, and resources that were requisite for running a bustling print studio and education center. Though both offered technical and artistic expertise, Berman had a special talent for fundraising and networking, thanks in part to her family’s prominence in the largely white art world and to her job at FREESA, which covered the rent and general expenses for APS in its early years.⁵⁸ Classes commenced in 1992 once the government-run Creative Arts Foundation provided funding in the form of ten bursaries that went mainly to students and affiliates of the Funda Arts Centre in

⁵⁶ Shannon Walsh and Jon Soske, “Thinking about Race and Friendship in South Africa,” in *Ties That Bind: Race and the Politics of Friendship in South Africa*, ed. Shannon Walsh and Jon Soske (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2016), 9. Italicization is in the original text.

⁵⁷ Franco Barchiesi, “The Problem With ‘We’: Affiliation, Political Economy, and the Counterhistory of Nonracialism,” in *Ties That Bind: Race and the Politics of Friendship in South Africa*, ed. Shannon Walsh and Jon Soske (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2016), 125–65.

⁵⁸ Even after Berman left FREESA, the NGO would continue to issue APS annual grants, as it does to this very day.

Soweto.⁵⁹ More money flowed in from Berman's summertime teaching gigs at the SMFA in Boston and from charging suburban white students tuition for printmaking classes. What Xaba brought to the studio was his knowledge of and involvement in communities of black artmaking. Scarred by the violence and exploitation of apartheid, many black artists initially had reservations about working with or under Berman, a white woman, so Xaba's wholehearted endorsement, co-leadership, and artistic networks were imperative for the foundation and sustained functioning of APS.⁶⁰

According to Berman, what banded together core participants of APS from the start—that is, herself and the other printmakers who were mostly black men—was their shared conviction that prints should be “a democratic medium accessible to all without regard to social or economic status.”⁶¹ Yet if printmaking held potential as a technology of democracy and redress in the 1990s, its history, as Philippa Hobbs, Elizabeth Rankin, Judith B. Hecker, and Lynne Cooney have demonstrated, was sharply incised by nearly a century of segregation and deprivation—as well as community-building and resistance.⁶² It is also productive to read such histories of printmaking, which tend to frame black apartheid-era art in solely political and activist terms, alongside and against historian Daniel Magaziner's book *The Art of Life in South Africa* (2016). In a nuanced yet provocative argument, Magaziner contends that artmaking, specifically at the government-run black art school of Indaleni in Natal, was not exclusively a response to

⁵⁹ Berman, “Agency, Imagination and Resilience,” 33.

⁶⁰ Cleveland, *Art and Upheaval: Artists on the World's Frontlines*, 133–34.

⁶¹ Berman, “Agency, Imagination and Resilience,” 36.

⁶² Philippa Hobbs and Elizabeth Rankin, *Printmaking in a Transforming South Africa* (Cape Town and Johannesburg: David Philip, 1997); Philippa Hobbs and Elizabeth Rankin, *Rorke's Drift: Empowering Prints* (Cape Town: Double Storey Books, 2003); Judith B. Hecker, ed., *Impressions from South Africa, 1965 to Now: Prints from the Museum of Modern Art* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2011); Lynne Cooney, “Ink, Paper, Plates: The Legacy of Printmaking in South Africa and the Caversham Press,” *African Arts* 45, no. 2 (Summer 2012): 36–45.

hardship, but rather a meaningful activity of self-making and world-making. Even though printmaking was not a high-priority part of the curriculum at Indaleni, and Magaziner's research is mainly concerned with other artistic media, his claim might refine our understanding of the history of printmaking in South Africa, troubling the assumption that all black art had political implications.⁶³

Whereas white academic institutions introduced printmaking techniques in South Africa as a component of art education in the early twentieth century, black practitioners, denied the opportunity to study alongside their white counterparts, only started to gain access to printmaking facilities, materials, and tools in the 1950s in the developing arena of alternative art centers and community workshops.⁶⁴ During the 1960s printmaking became a much more focal part of the curriculum at the influential Evangelical Lutheran Church Art and Craft Centre at Rorke's Drift (usually shortened to "Rorke's Drift"), set up by Swedish couple Peder and Ulla Gowenius in Natal. Interestingly, the institution first taught printmaking to occupational therapists for its incorporation as a method of skill cultivation in occupational therapy, yet soon enough print became valued as an art form in itself. In fact, Rorke's Drift quickly became known for the black-and-white relief prints produced there, particularly linoleum cuts or linocuts—expressive documents of quotidian life that increasingly visualized the urgent political messages of the Black Consciousness Movement of the 1970s.⁶⁵

⁶³ Daniel Magaziner, *The Art of Life in South Africa* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2016).

⁶⁴ Opened by the Johannesburg City Council in 1952, and under the direction of white artist and educator Cecil Skotnes, the Polly Street Art Centre permitted black South African artists to experiment with relief printing techniques, though the adult-education school prioritized painting and sculpting. Hobbs and Rankin, *Printmaking in a Transforming South Africa*, 13; Elza Miles, *Polly Street: The Story of an Art Centre* (Johannesburg: Ampersand Foundation, 2003).

⁶⁵ Hobbs and Rankin, *Printmaking in a Transforming South Africa*, 14–15.

Several artists who would later become founding members and affiliates of APS, including Charles Nkosi, Vincent Baloyi, Muzi Donga, Joe Ndlovu, and Gordon Gabashane, received training at Rorke's Drift before its closing in 1982. Many of them were also involved in schools, community arts centers, and workshops that proliferated in Johannesburg in the 1970s and 1980s; among these institutions were the Johannesburg Art Foundation, the Federated Union of Black Artists (FUBA) Academy, and in Soweto, the Mofolo Arts Centre and the Funda Arts Centre. APS cofounder Xaba, for instance, studied briefly at Rorke's Drift before transferring to Funda, and then later taught at the FUBA Academy. The discourses of resistance fostered by these institutions furthered his thinking on black consciousness and artistic activism as apartheid was on the verge of collapse.⁶⁶ In their authoritative study *Printmaking in a Transforming South Africa* (1997), Hobbs and Rankin imply that, more than the product of these histories, APS was poised to be their culmination: the very transformation of South Africa to a non-racial democracy.⁶⁷

As an institution, APS also strategically aligned itself with the restructured national policies and metropolitan infrastructures of culture developed by the Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology (DACST). Released by this governmental agency in June 1996, the White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage established new institutional frameworks for utilizing cultural production to stimulate democracy, reconciliation, and a strong economy. Accentuating the role of education in the creation and appreciation of culture, now understood as an inalienable human right, this document pledged to remedy the cultural disenfranchisement of black people during apartheid through the construction

⁶⁶ Berman, "Agency, Imagination and Resilience," 35–36.

⁶⁷ Hobbs and Rankin, *Printmaking in a Transforming South Africa*, 25–27.

of new opportunities, modes of governance and management, and public institutions. At the same time, the white paper openly admitted,

[n]o government can legislate creativity into effect. At best government can seek to ensure that its resources are used equitably so that impediments to expression are removed, that the social and political climate are conducive to self-expression, and that the arts, culture and heritage allow the full diversity of our people to be expressed in a framework of equity which is committed to redressing past imbalances and facilitating the development of all of its people.⁶⁸

As this quotation suggests, governmental policy was just one element of this reordered cultural sector, which also reflected the disparate political and economic interests of civil society organizations and other structures.⁶⁹ Comprised of NGOs, non-profits, governmental agencies, academic and arts institutions, and community groups, the cultural sector was especially torn between the tasks of nation-building and the political and economic projects of globalization.

As media theorist Jane Duncan has thoroughly shown, the two state-sponsored Johannesburg Biennales, staged by the Greater Johannesburg Transitional Metropolitan Council in 1995 and 1997, were illustrative of these tensions insofar as they directly called into question the functions and the publics of contemporary art.⁷⁰ As a matter of fact, APS coordinated an exhibition for the first Biennale, *Africus*, which took place at

⁶⁸ Department of Arts, Culture, Science And Technology, “White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage” (Department of Arts, Culture, Science And Technology, June 4, 1996), chapter 2, section 18, <http://www.dac.gov.za/content/white-paper-arts-culture-and-heritage-0>.

⁶⁹ After the establishment of a democratic government in 1994, many white-dominated NGOs were struggling to redefine their roles and identities in relation to the state and society. According to sociologist Ran Greenstein, however, these relationships were clarified by 1997 as civil society organizations centered their work on policy-making, monitoring, and delivering development aid. For more on this, see Ran Greenstein, *The State of Civil Society in South Africa: Past Legacies, Present Realities, and Future Prospects* (Johannesburg: Community Agency for Social Enquiry, 1998), 35–37, 43–44.

⁷⁰ Jane Duncan, “How Cultural Policy Creates Inequality: The Case of the Greater Johannesburg Metropolitan Council and Its Biennale Project,” in *Culture in the New South Africa: After Apartheid*, ed. Robert Krieger and Abebe Zegeye, vol. 2 (Cape Town: Kwela Books, 2001), 281–313; Jane Duncan, “Nation Building and Globalisation in the Visual Arts: A Case Study of Art Projects of the Greater Johannesburg Metropolitan Council (GJMC)” (PhD Thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 2007).

the neighboring and recently reopened MuseumAfrica from February to April, 1995. Titled *Volatile Alliances*, the show was the result of an international print exchange and series of workshops that brought together artists from the US, Canada, Belgium, Iceland, the Czech Republic, Ghana, Mozambique, Australia, and South Africa. Curated by Kim's mother, Mona Berman, Peter Scott and Craig Dongoski from the SMFA, and Margot Amoils, *Volatile Alliances* was conceptualized as an opportunity for American and European printmakers to impart their artistic skills and techniques to their under-resourced South African counterparts through the creation of a portfolio of forty-five prints and large-format monoprints. Acknowledging in its very name the strange relationship between the local and the global, including the attendant racial and economic disparities, *Volatile Alliances* was an attempt to negotiate the two-fold imperatives of international exchange and national enrichment.⁷¹

Nevertheless, according to Berman, the Nigerian curator Okwui Enwezor, a rising star in the global art world who would later direct the second Johannesburg Biennale in 1997, derided the work of APS as “ethno-tourist art.”⁷² In his view, *Volatile Alliances* perpetuated a debased and dangerous aesthetic idiom of seemingly authentic depictions of black life in the townships—a register of realistic representation that was marketable yet mercilessly at odds with conceptual trends in the elite and global art world. Despite this criticism, with which Berman and many others sharply disagreed, the exhibition and print exchange were successful to the extent that they helped secure long-term funding for APS. Notably, after its purchase of one of the portfolios, the Ford Foundation issued a

⁷¹ Berman, “Agency, Imagination and Resilience,” 39–40; Johannesburg Transitional Metropolitan Council, *Africus: Johannesburg Biennale, 28 February-30 April 1995* (Johannesburg: Thorold's Africana Books, 1995), 86. See also Berman, interview.

⁷² Berman, “Agency, Imagination and Resilience,” 60–61. Berman does not list a specific source for Enwezor's remark, so it is possible that this was word-of-mouth.

three-year operational grant that was used to hire an administrator, studio manager, and teachers.⁷³ Even with the increasing definition of educational and funding infrastructures, similar debates about the publics and purposes of art would continue to surface and inform the practice of Berman and APS, particularly as AIDS activism materialized as a core institutional commitment through Paper Prayers.

The Many Lives of Paper Prayers

When Berman lived in Boston in the 1980s, her political organizing revolved around apartheid rather than lesbian and gay issues, but she was still conscious and supportive of the smattering of AIDS awareness initiatives that were spreading through the local arts community. Importantly, Boston was where she first encountered Paper Prayers, of which the first manifestation took place at the Howard Yezerski Gallery as a response to the national call to participate in the inaugural Day Without Art on December 1, 1989. Locally, Dana Friis Hansen, an assistant curator at the List Visual Arts Center at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, took charge of coordinating the event in the Boston area, but Day Without Art was the brainchild of the New York-based organization Visual AIDS.⁷⁴ Visual AIDS had been formed in the fall of 1988 by art critic Robert Atkins and curators William Olander, Thomas Sokolowski, and Gary Garrels—four white gay men who, through their involvement in the advocacy groups Gay Men’s Health Crisis and the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP), sought to foreground the

⁷³ Cleveland, *Art and Upheaval: Artists on the World’s Frontlines*, 135.

⁷⁴ Rudy Kikel, “Art from the Heart,” *Bay Windows*, November 15, 1990. Paper Prayers archive, Howard Yezerski Gallery.

swelling presence of the epidemic in the artworld and across contemporary culture, and to champion AIDS-related exhibitions and programming.⁷⁵

As the first major project devised by Visual AIDS, Day Without Art was accompanied by the subtitle “a national day of mourning and action in response to the AIDS crisis.” Coinciding but contrasting with World AIDS Day, an annual day of observance that the World Health Organization had first implemented a year before on December 1, 1988, Day Without Art was a decentralized grass-roots initiative that took off in many directions.⁷⁶ As Atkins recalled, “[o]ur inability to co-ordinate a widely-dispersed national effort initially seemed a weakness, but proved to be an advantage. Local responses became the heart of a so-called national event.”⁷⁷ In the end, more than 800 arts institutions and AIDS organizations across the US took part in the first Day Without Art. Whereas some spaces closed for the day, removing or cloaking works of art so as to pay tribute to the dead, others chose more active approaches, such as highlighting work and exhibitions about the pandemic, or conducting AIDS education and prevention workshops.

To respond to Day Without Art in Boston, Tom Grabosky, a local self-taught white artist, composer, and critic, proposed an idea to Howard Yezerski, whose art gallery had recently relocated from the suburb of Andover to Downtown Boston, close to South Station. Or, Yezerski solicited an idea from the artist.⁷⁸ At any rate, what Grabosky came

⁷⁵ Robert Atkins, “Visual AIDS: Or How to Have Art (Events),” in *Disrupted Borders: An Intervention in Definitions of Boundaries*, ed. Sunil Gupta (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1993), 214–15.

⁷⁶ For more on the history of World AIDS Day, see the interview with one of its co-founders, Jim Bunn. Olivia B. Waxman, “‘We Need a Day.’ Meet the Man Who Helped Create World AIDS Day,” *Time*, November 30, 2017, <http://time.com/5042176/world-aids-day-2017/>.

⁷⁷ Atkins, “Visual AIDS: Or How to Have Art (Events),” 215.

⁷⁸ Though Yezerski claims that the artist first approached him with an idea, an article in *The Boston Globe* from 1991 states that Yezerski asked the artist to find a way to celebrate Day Without Art. Christine Temin,

up with was *Paper Prayers*, a collaborative exhibition inspired by a captivating picture he had randomly seen during his childhood in Braintree, a suburb of Boston. As he remembered it, the image showed countless small paper strips, intricately tied on tree branches outside of a Japanese temple. Each strip, in his understanding, represented a wish for good health—a paper prayer left to erode away through natural processes.⁷⁹ Liberally adapting a religious practice common at Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples in Japan—one he knew nothing about to all intents and purposes—to the context of HIV/AIDS in Boston, Grabosky invited local artists to create and donate “prayers” confined to a paper rectangle of roughly four-by-twelve inches. In terms of their formal qualities, the paper prayers ranged greatly, with abstract and representational elements, incorporating drawing, painting, ribbons, tree bark, leaves, buttons, doilies, feathers, and other materials. According to Grabosky, “the artists really invested their spirit. Some of these are prayers of mourning, but they’re also wishes for good health.”⁸⁰

For the exhibition itself, which opened on World AIDS Day, he pinned the 150 collected paper prayers to the walls, enclosing the twin words “CURE” (see **Figure 5.10**). Interestingly, in one installation photograph, a couple hanging paper prayers conceal part of the letters of “CURE,” in such a way that the word could instead resemble “QUEER” (see **Figure 5.11**). Even if there was no *cure* for AIDS in sight, the virus was without question *queer* insofar as it had a tremendous impact on gay and queer communities in Boston. This exhibition came into being through the national framework developed by Day Without Art and the informal gay arts network in Boston—of which Grabosky was a

“The Power of ‘Prayers,’” *The Boston Globe*, December 1, 1991, sec. Arts, Paper Prayers archive, Howard Yezerski Gallery; Howard Yezerski, interview by Jackson Davidow, April 20, 2018.

⁷⁹ Temin, “The Power of ‘Prayers.’”

⁸⁰ Tom Grabosky, quoted in Rebecca Nemser, “Empty Chairs and Paper Prayers: Diary of ‘A Day Without Art,’” *The Boston Phoenix*, December 8, 1989. Paper Prayers archive, Howard Yezerski Gallery.

important participant through his role as a cultural critic for the local gay and lesbian newspaper *Bay Windows*. And yet, similar to the NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt that was officially launched in San Francisco in June 1987, Paper Prayers was oriented towards a broader, mostly straight public.⁸¹ Without any revolutionary or distinctly queer aspirations, the event was a respectable, liberal attempt to memorialize, elevate consciousness—and fundraise.

The installation was participatory to the extent that artists donated their paper prayers, which the visitors could take in exchange for a cash contribution. The gallery then gifted the collected money to the Boston Pediatric AIDS Project, part of the Dimock Community Health Center in the neighborhood of Roxbury, which served lower-income, largely black communities that were affected by the virus by supplying food, medication, and daycare. Raising \$5000 for the Boston Pediatric AIDS Project in a single day, the first iteration of Paper Prayers was considered a resounding triumph by its organizers and the wider arts community. It was also professionally strategic insofar as it helped Yezerski, new to Boston's art scene, establish an identity for his gallery.⁸² For Rebecca Nemser, an arts reporter for *The Boston Phoenix*, Paper Prayers stood out among all the other local Day Without Art activities. As she described her experience upon leaving the exhibition, "in the cold night air, I touch my prayer... I know there are paper prayers whispering all over Boston tonight, and all of them are fragile and precious, like people's lives."⁸³

⁸¹ It seems that the NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt was not on Yezerski's radar in 1989. Yezerski, interview.

⁸² Yezerski.

⁸³ Nemser, "Empty Chairs and Paper Prayers: Diary of 'A Day Without Art.'"

Berman, too, attended this 1989 exhibition, and loved the idea, but it took a few years for her to rework *Paper Prayers for South Africa*.⁸⁴ As a result of the murmurings from gay activists and NGOs in the early 1990s, HIV/AIDS at first seemed to be a priority for Mandela's fledgling government, which was eager to rectify the dismal healthcare system for black people during apartheid. Despite the adoption of a National AIDS Plan in 1994, other political and economic issues were more pressing, and in reality not much happened by way of an architecture of AIDS services and facilities. But under the leadership of the newly-appointed Minister of Health, Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, there was an HIV/AIDS and STD Directorate that, for example, formed a media and education program called the Beyond Awareness Campaign in 1996. Spanning community-based media and national broadcast television, this information campaign emphasized HIV prevention; accessible treatment was far from possible for the wide South African public. Meanwhile in the US, Canada, Haiti, Brazil, and many advanced industrial countries, 1996 also witnessed the first pivotal introduction of the Highly Active Antiretroviral Therapy (HAART), transforming the virus from a death sentence to a chronic condition for individuals with access to the combination drug treatment.⁸⁵

In South Africa, however, despite small prevention campaigns, the prevalence of HIV was rapidly mounting. If less than 1% of the entire national population was thought to be HIV-positive in 1990, the statistics ballooned to 7.5% in 1994, and 22.8% in 1998,

⁸⁴ Berman and Allara have claimed that the former encountered *Paper Prayers* in 1986; this is incorrect. See Berman, "Agency, Imagination and Resilience," 84; Sellschop and Allara, *12 Years of Paper Prayers: Awareness, Action & Advocacy at Artist Proof Studio*, no page numbers.

⁸⁵ Rebecca Hodes, *Broadcasting the Pandemic: A History of HIV on South African Television* (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2014), 25–26. For more on the history of HAART, see Ethan B. Kapstein and Joshua W. Busby, *AIDS Drugs for All: Social Movements and Market Transformations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 26.

with black women as the demographic with the most new infections.⁸⁶ Dlamini-Zuma and her ministry were soon rocked by a spate of HIV-related scandals. The first concerned *Sarafina II*, a sequel musical to the immensely popular *Sarafina*, that was commissioned as an HIV awareness production for youth by the Department of Health in 1995, with an outrageous budget of 14 million rand. Due to the whopping cost and other grave instances of mismanagement, the initiative collapsed, with no replacement. In 1997 Dlamini-Zuma was again at the center of a controversy when she staunchly advocated for an ineffective experimental HIV drug called Virodene that was developed at Pretoria University—yet not subjected to appropriate peer review and testing.⁸⁷ The importance of the Virodene affair cannot be overstated because it set the tone for the new government’s hostility towards the scientific establishment, which would become even more pronounced, and fatally consequential, during Thabo Mbeki’s presidency beginning in June 1999. A third public scandal erupted in 1998 when Dlamini-Zuma refused to allocate the money required to install a national program to prevent perinatal transmission from mother to child, in spite of strong proven biomedical and economic evidence-based research that backed its implementation.⁸⁸

Amplifying fear, prejudice, silence, and ignorance, this national drama was an unfurling backdrop for the development of Paper Prayers at APS. Since its beginnings, the collaborative studio stressed art as an agent of social justice, also frequently serving as a meeting space for outside groups Berman was involved in; her own activism, however, started to shift away from lesbian and gay issues in 1994, when she met her

⁸⁶ Hein Marais, *To the Edge: AIDS Review 2000* (Pretoria: Centre for the Study of AIDS, University of Pretoria, 2000), 7; Mbali, *South African AIDS Activism and Global Health Politics*, 6.

⁸⁷ Hodes, *Broadcasting the Pandemic*, 27–29.

⁸⁸ Hodes, 27–29.

new partner who was then in the closet.⁸⁹ Paper Prayers pushed the political work of APS into very different territory on account of its large reach beyond the studio, its extensive networking, and its many social functions.

Berman began her adaptation of the project after receiving a special invitation to do so from Steven Sack, an eminent white arts professional who was then a curator at the Johannesburg Art Gallery (JAG).⁹⁰ Sack was looking for local programming to accompany the exhibition *Positive Lives: Responses to HIV* by white expat photographer Gideon Mendel from December 1995 to February 1996, following its run at the South African National Gallery (SANG) in Cape Town (featured in the previous chapter). Determined to respond to the pandemic on an institutional level, Sack was aware of the *Paper Prayers* exhibition at the Howard Yezerski Gallery because, as a matter of fact, he had seen a rendition of it himself while in Boston at one point between 1989 and 1994 (the exhibition-cum-fundraiser was now an annual event each December). On top of this, Sack had even asked express permission from Grabosky to rework the concept for the JAG. Due to her familiarity with *Paper Prayers* in Boston and leadership at APS, Sack knew that Berman was the natural person to take on this challenge.⁹¹ Berman conducted public workshops in October and November, and the prints produced were put in dialogue with Mendel's photography in an exhibition at the JAG on World AIDS Day in December. Though more than a year after the first gay and lesbian AIDS activism at Out-

⁸⁹ Berman, interview.

⁹⁰ Berman tends to pinpoint its starting date as 1997, but an Annual Report of the Johannesburg Art Gallery indicates that she conducted Paper Prayers workshops at the municipal museum two years earlier, in October and November 1995. Johannesburg Art Gallery, "Annual Report, 1995/1996" (Johannesburg: Johannesburg Art Gallery, 1996), no page numbers. Collection of the Johannesburg Art Gallery Library. This is confirmed by Steven Sack, personal email correspondence to Jackson Davidow, February 5, 2019. For chronological inconsistencies, see Berman, "Agency, Imagination and Resilience," 85; Sellschop and Allara, *12 Years of Paper Prayers: Awareness, Action & Advocacy at Artist Proof Studio*, no page numbers.

⁹¹ Steven Sack, personal email correspondence to Jackson Davidow, February 5, 2019.

in-Africa in Johannesburg, *Positive Lives* (imported from Cape Town and, before that, London) and Paper Prayers were still among the first AIDS cultural projects to take place in the city, particularly at a reputable, if glacially decolonizing, arts institution.

Another compelling template for Berman was the NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt.⁹² Comprised of a proliferating multitude of individually-designed 3-by-6-foot panels, the Quilt was conceptualized by activist Cleve Jones in San Francisco in 1985—yet not fully launched until its first display on the National Mall in 1987, which Berman herself ventured down to Washington, D.C., to view (see **Figure 5.12**). It has since sparked dozens of chapters across the US and internationally, amassing more than 48,000 contributions. The work is also indisputably the largest community arts project to date, worldwide. Beginning around 1992, the Quilt entered into a more international phase, with new chapters across eighteen countries in Europe and the Americas. By the early 1990s, it had arrived in Cape Town, with a chapter led by local health activist Carroll Jacobs.⁹³ As early as June 1993, the SANG exhibited the second quilt produced by the AIDS Support and Education Trust.⁹⁴ As part of the Global Conference for People Living with HIV and AIDS in March 1995, segments of the Quilt from Cape Town and those brought in from other countries were also displayed along the waterfront in Sea Point, an affluent white neighborhood (see **Figure 5.13**).⁹⁵ It is probable that these South African manifestations of the Quilt were also on Berman’s radar in her redesign of Paper Prayers,

⁹² Berman, “Agency, Imagination and Resilience,” 84–85.

⁹³ For more on the internationalization of the Quilt and Jacobs’ work in Cape Town, see Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Fray: Art and Textile Politics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), 230–31.

⁹⁴ Martin, “HIV/AIDS in South Africa: Can the Visual Arts Make a Difference?,” 123.

⁹⁵ Stewart Harris, “Annual Report 1994/95” (Cape Town: The AIDS Foundation of South Africa, June 1995), 14, https://www.aids.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/AFSA-1994_1995-1.pdf.

even if her memories of AIDS cultural response from her years in America were more vivid.

With a sense that HIV/AIDS was not strictly a health problem, but one that infected other realms of public and private life, the South African Cabinet formed an Inter-Ministerial Committee on AIDS in 1997.⁹⁶ Possibly trying to ameliorate its image in view of the ongoing AIDS-related scandals under Mandela's leadership, the government presented each ministry, including the DACST, with half a million rand for AIDS programming.⁹⁷ In his new role as the Director of DACST, Sack, who was impressed by the positive response to Paper Prayers at the JAG and in Johannesburg at large, turned immediately to Berman with another idea: to develop a project that would travel to every province, reaching a pinnacle on World AIDS Day in 1998.⁹⁸ The DACST also wanted a photo of every provincial health minister making a prayer in a printmaking studio in their own province.⁹⁹ Of course, Berman applied for and received a considerable grant of 350,000 rand to transform Paper Prayers from a small-scale workshop series into a far-reaching national campaign in 1998.¹⁰⁰ Her proposal was to bring Paper Prayers to all nine provinces over the course of nine months, and APS would supply partner AIDS and arts organizations in each province with 20,000 rand to lead concomitant workshops. The campaign furthermore set out to teach artistic skills to the workshop participants in order to open up sustainable job opportunities (to be elaborated in due course).¹⁰¹

⁹⁶ Department of Health, "HIV/AIDS & STD: Strategic Plan for South Africa, 2000-2005" (Pretoria: Department of Health, 2000), 10.

⁹⁷ This would have been roughly \$65,000. Cleveland, *Art and Upheaval: Artists on the World's Frontlines*, 143.

⁹⁸ Cleveland, 144.

⁹⁹ Hofmeyr, interview.

¹⁰⁰ It is possible that the awarded grant was actually 320,000 rand. See Matthew Krouse, "Prayers for the Living," *Mail & Guardian*, November 27, 1998, <https://mg.co.za/article/1998-11-27-prayers-for-the-living>.

¹⁰¹ Berman, "Agency, Imagination and Resilience," 87–88.

Berman's take on Paper Prayers differed substantially from the event in Boston. Confined to a white-cube gallery, Grabosky's version was a yearly fundraiser to observe World AIDS Day; local artists donated prayers, which were purchased by members of the public, and the proceeds went to charity. Though paper-based and of a certain size, the prayers were without stipulation as to medium and materials. Years later in South Africa, Berman's most salient revision was instituting a defined yet malleable pedagogical framework that variously enabled artmaking, therapy, AIDS and sex education, skill cultivation, income generation, and activism. While religion was never part of the campaign, its borrowed name from Boston injected the workshop with new meanings, helping many people with strong Christian faith connect to the activity on a spiritual level.¹⁰² Besides the obvious embrace of print, her campaign strove to be broad-based, hoping to touch the lives of anybody it encountered in meaningful and transformative ways. To produce a prayer, there was no need to be an artist or creatively savvy or skillful; what mattered above all was the caliber of experience and the knowledges gained. For the most part, however, its intended participants were the most disadvantaged and vulnerable of society, especially poverty-stricken black women whose worlds were often in the process of being brutally reconfigured as a result of a health emergency. By the late 1990s, experts believed there to be 1,500 new infections each day, and 3.6 million people living with HIV/AIDS in South Africa.¹⁰³ And there was effectively no accessible treatment.

Though Paper Prayers was officially stationed at APS and embedded in its institutional culture, Berman was undoubtedly the one at its helm. As she recalls, Xaba,

¹⁰² Berman, interview.

¹⁰³ Marais, *To the Edge: AIDS Review 2000*, 4.

while encouraging of the political activities she spearheaded, was “quietly activist, not explicitly.”¹⁰⁴ To support Paper Prayers, he would help prepare for and teach the printmaking process to outside groups, but was less vocal himself about HIV/AIDS. Even at APS, the stigma and silence around the virus was overwhelming in the 1990s, in spite of how all staff members and students were obliged to participate in Paper Prayers workshops, and urged to get tested themselves. Several studio members were HIV-positive, finding out about their status through testing sessions associated with Paper Prayers. Still, others refused to get tested—particularly a couple men working closely with Xaba—and though he was devastated by their illnesses, the degree to which he pressured his dying colleagues to seek medical attention and support was not always clear to Berman.¹⁰⁵

Xaba did, however, create a woodcut print called *AIDS Exodus* to the *Break the Silence* portfolio released by Artists for Humanity in 2000 (see **Figure 5.14**). The somber work juxtaposes an image of a rural funeral procession with a representation of a human figure, embedded in an evocative assortment of limbs and birds. Interestingly, the latter image is an inverse quotation of American artist Jasper Johns’ *Summer* (1985), a painting later produced as an intaglio print in 1987 (see **Figure 5.15**).¹⁰⁶ Whereas the right side of the canvas references a couple of Johns’ most iconic works, the left is dominated by an ominous shadow. If, as critic Jill Johnston has argued, the gloom of AIDS was central to Johns’ artistic output during the 1980s, it is fitting that Xaba visually cited *Summer*

¹⁰⁴ Berman, interview.

¹⁰⁵ Berman.

¹⁰⁶ I am grateful to Caroline A. Jones for pointing this out.

fifteen years later, expressly in relation to the South African AIDS pandemic.¹⁰⁷ Although the meaning of *AIDS Exodus* is far from didactic, it was chosen to be enlarged and exhibited on community billboards, like many other works in this print portfolio, so as to raise awareness about the disease.¹⁰⁸

Even with her strong vision and enthusiastic leadership, Berman did not pursue this campaign singlehandedly. To fabricate a prototype of Paper Prayers in 1997 or 1998, she tactically assembled a founding committee of individuals from local activist groups, non-profits, and NGOs, all of whom advised the multifarious endeavor, particularly the AIDS education module.¹⁰⁹ Besides herself, its members were Peter Busse of the National Association of People Living with HIV/AIDS (NAPWA); Simon Nkoli of the Township AIDS Project; Jenny Marcus and Bart Cox of Friends for Life and Community AIDS Response (CARE); Herman van der Watt of AIDSLINK; and Carol Hofmeyr, Berman's former MFA advisee at Technikon Witwatersrand, now hired to be the campaign's national coordinator.¹¹⁰ Prior to the foundation of the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) in December 1998, NAPWA, CARE, AIDSLINK, and the Township AIDS Project were among the most established AIDS NGOs and activist groups in the country. Though noticeably white (except for Nkoli), this diverse team reflected Berman's various transnational work experiences at APS, in NGOs, and in activism. Certainly, her former involvement in the Gay and Lesbian Organisation of the Witwatersrand (GLOW) was useful for ensuring the participation of Nkoli and Busse, both of whom had cofounded

¹⁰⁷ Jill Johnston, *Jasper Johns: Privileged Information* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1996), 276-77, 290-94.

¹⁰⁸ Marschall, "Getting the Message Across: Art and Craft in the Service of HIV/AIDS Awareness in South Africa," 168-71. Berman also produced a work for this print portfolio.

¹⁰⁹ Berman seems unable to comment on the evolution of the workshop form, and how she and other contributors settled on the model outlined in the 1999 workbook. Berman, interview.

¹¹⁰ Berman, "Agency, Imagination and Resilience," 86. I am unsure when precisely the founding committee was formed. Berman, interview.

GLOW and the Township AIDS Project, and were openly HIV-positive and gay AIDS activists. By 1999, the founding committee was known as the steering committee, and its composition was slightly different, for sadly Nkoli had died from AIDS complications on November 30, 1998—the eve of World AIDS Day.¹¹¹ The passing of this world-famous gay, anti-apartheid, and AIDS activist also provided the crucial impetus for Zackie Achmat and others to demand the creation of a campaign for accessible antiretroviral drugs, leading directly to TAC.¹¹²

Involved in *Paper Prayers* in a more behind-the-scenes capacity was Hayley Berman, who was not only Kim’s younger sister, but also one of the first and most productive art therapists in South Africa. After her training in art psychotherapy at St Albans College in the United Kingdom in the early 1990s, she returned to Johannesburg and founded an NGO called the Art Therapy Centre (later renamed Lefika la Phodiso) in 1993.¹¹³ Though Hayley Berman’s method was to utilize art and image-making as a means of expression, transference, and healing, her intellectual field of references, at least in the early years, was emphatically psychoanalytic, borrowing from the work of Sigmund Freud, Melanie Klein, Donald Winnicott, and Christopher Bollas to pick apart, and hopefully remedy, the post-apartheid psyche.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Draft copy of Kim Berman et al., *Paper Prayers Workbook* (Johannesburg: Artist Proof Studio, 1999), no page numbers. Collection of Shannin Antonopoulou. Other changes from the founding committee to the steering committee are the disappearance of Jenny Marcus and the addition of Tamar Mason, an artist.

¹¹² Grebe, “The Treatment Action Campaign’s Struggle for AIDS Treatment in South Africa: Coalition-Building Through Networks,” 851.

¹¹³ As might be expected, the traumas of apartheid supplied ample material for the consolidating mental-health profession, and the institution offered a clinical practice, art therapy groups for children, ex-combatant child soldiers, caregivers of those living with HIV/AIDS, educators, and, by 1997, a foundation course to train others in the field.

¹¹⁴ For more on Hayley Berman’s personal story and the evolution of the Art Therapy Centre, see Hayley Berman, “The Development and Practice of Art Therapy As ‘Community Art Counselling’ in South Africa,” *Art Therapy Online* 1, no. 3 (2011): 1–23.

Art therapy was also one of the stated objectives of Paper Prayers, and the Art Therapy Centre was an official partner organization. According to Kim Berman in the workbook (1999), the “process of making art provides a therapeutic and affirming support to AIDS workers and people living with HIV/AIDS.”¹¹⁵ In a condensed contribution to the same publication, Hayley Berman drafted up simple bullet points to differentiate “art as an educational/recreational activity” from “art as therapy.”¹¹⁶ What she outlined is consonant with assertions made by art therapists going back to the 1940s in the US and Britain.¹¹⁷ In her view, traditional art education in schools placed an emphasis on the cultivation of techniques and skills, aesthetic appreciation, and hierarchies of worth. Inversely, art and image-making in the context of art therapy promoted self-expression, unconditional acceptance of the work(s) produced, and psychological development rather than artistic skillfulness. In other words, it was the process, including the psychodynamic relationship with the art therapist, that was of true importance—not the produced artwork(s).¹¹⁸ While Paper Prayers loosely absorbed some of these tenets of art therapy, it deviated from a more traditional and recurring clinical practice of art therapy, such as the offerings at the Art Therapy Centre. Notably, the workshop was a one-time session with art and AIDS educators rather than trained mental-health professionals. Paper Prayers also had distinct pedagogical frameworks that prized the development of skill, intended to generate income for the participants.

¹¹⁵ Berman et al., *Paper Prayers Workbook*, 2.

¹¹⁶ While the “What is Art Therapy?” section does not explicitly credit Hayley Berman, it encourages its readers to contact her for more information, and Kim Berman claims that her sister was responsible for this text. Berman, “Agency, Imagination and Resilience,” 86.

¹¹⁷ For more on the development of art therapy as a mental-health profession, see Jackson Davidow, “Art Therapy, Occupational Therapy, and American Modernism,” *American Art* 32, no. 2 (2018): 80–99. There is not yet scholarship on the history of art therapy or occupational therapy in South Africa.

¹¹⁸ Hayley Berman, “What is Art Therapy?,” in Kim Berman et al., *Paper Prayers Workbook*, 14–15.

Indeed, one of the most intriguing aspects of Paper Prayers is its selective incorporations of not only art therapy, but also the arts and crafts-based methods of occupational therapy. Printmaking, which is seen by some as involving more skill, teaching, and dexterous precision than drawing and painting, has never been a common medium for art therapy. Moreover, it is interesting to recall that when printmaking was first taught to black practitioners in South Africa as part of the curriculum at Rorke's Drift in Natal in the 1960s, the practice was framed as a method of occupational therapy, as a way to rehabilitate patients suffering from mental and physical health issues through the development of arts-and-crafts skillsets. Just as APS paralleled the governmental priorities set forth in the White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage (1996) of the DACST, Paper Prayers, through its increasing emphasis on craft and sustainable economic growth initiatives, brilliantly capitalized on the trending national economic interests in the craft sector.

In 1997 the DACST developed the Cultural Industries Growth Strategy, an initiative whose purpose was to recommend policy measures for jumpstarting “cultural industries,” defined as “a wide variety of cultural activities which all have commercial organisation as their primary force.”¹¹⁹ Issued by this consortium in 1998, “The South African Craft Industry Report” focused on how the craft sector could create new and sustainable jobs for the unemployed, who made up roughly 30% of the economically-active population—particularly black women who were also historically the most economically disadvantaged, uneducated, and illiterate.¹²⁰ According to this report, the

¹¹⁹ Cultural Industries Growth Strategy, “The South African Craft Industry Report” (Pretoria: Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology, November 1998), 1, https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201409/cigs0.pdf.

¹²⁰ Cultural Industries Growth Strategy, 3.

variegated craft sector held great potential to strengthen the national economy through the global sales and circulations of South African-made “traditional art,” designer goods, “craftart” [sic], functional wares, touristic souvenirs, and musical instruments. Without broaching the pandemic’s impact on the cultural economy, the study cited as exemplary models the work of two institutions that had already collaborated with people living with HIV/AIDS in Cape Town, namely Wola Nani and the Philani Programme in Khayalitsha.¹²¹

The Paper Prayers Campaign responded to this imperative with its promise to teach skills and to create sustainable jobs. After regional coordinators and groups were identified in each province based on the combined knowledge of the steering committee, Berman, Hofmeyr, and Cox began their workshop tour, sometimes accompanied by expert embroiderer Margaret Epstein, and APS trainee teacher Stompie Selibe, though usually two or three people total would go on each trip. With the exception of Selibe, all of the Paper Prayers facilitators were white, middle-class, and from Johannesburg, typically traveling to poor black suburban and rural areas such as Bushbuckridge in Mpumalanga and Kuruman in the Northern Cape—to discuss, no less, extremely delicate topics like sexuality and disease. These racial, economic, and educational differences are necessary to keep in mind.

When the targeted communities lacked adequate printmaking infrastructures, such as in Northern Province and Mpumalanga, the facilitators made do, conducting Paper Prayers through embroidery.¹²² And so Paper Prayers—now limited to neither paper nor printmaking—underwent further mutation and modification, and developed working

¹²¹ Cultural Industries Growth Strategy, 113.

¹²² Hofmeyr, interview. Northern Province was renamed Limpopo in 2003.

relationships with already-existent women's groups and collectives, including the Kaross, the Chivurika, and the Mapula initiatives. The workshops enabled these collectives to embellish their needlework techniques in view of AIDS education. By embroidering their prayers, women such as those forming the Kaross Workers in Letsitele, Northern Province, slowly started to open up about sex and HIV/AIDS, possibly for the first time.¹²³ The colorful works produced by this collective were stitched together and taken back to Johannesburg for AIDS fundraising, and the contributors were paid for their work (see **Figure 5.16**). In the words of Hofmeyr, "if you can make something, you have a sense of self-worth.... So I think even with those rural women, when Margaret Epstein sewed all their funny and embroidered pieces together and made quilts, there was huge pride."¹²⁴

At the same time, Hofmeyr was convinced that what fundamentally drove women across the provinces to participate was not, most probably, the need for therapy or the burning desire to learn more about a deadly virus, but rather their destitution. In a sense, they had little choice. As she put it unambiguously, "the only reason people came was the prospect of earning some money... If a white urban person comes to teach something, there's some money in it."¹²⁵ From day one, Berman also recognized this acute reality, admitting that skill cultivation and economic development were at odds with the core underpinnings of art therapy. With a strategic and deliberate embrace of this tension, she carved out a framework for Paper Prayers that amalgamated skill training and art therapy

¹²³ Berman, "Agency, Imagination and Resilience," 89. For more on the history of the Kaross Workers, see Brenda Schmahmann, "Art as Empowerment: Needlework Projects in South Africa," in *Coexistence: Contemporary Cultural Production in South Africa*, ed. Pamela Allara, Marilyn Martin, and Zola Mtshiza (Waltham, Massachusetts: Brandeis University, 2003), 43–44.

¹²⁴ Hofmeyr, interview.

¹²⁵ Hofmeyr.

through AIDS prevention.¹²⁶ Perhaps the commodification (and exploitation?) of therapeutic experience could have, in theory, unleashed a Pandora's box of ethical, political, and psychological questions. But this did not seem to happen. Quite simply, these were the terms of participation and the stakes of visibility in the post-apartheid cultural ecosystem. Despite its mission to empower the disempowered and to create a more just world, Paper Prayers still relied on and reflected the starkly unbalanced power structures that defined most South African cultural production during the 1990s and still haunt the country today.

Because the DACST was not allotted money for AIDS programming the following year, it was unable to renew funding for Paper Prayers: the campaign had to come to an end. It culminated, as promised, with a series of events for World AIDS Day in 1998. For the occasion, the team at APS led over twenty workshops catered towards distinct groups, including interdenominational clergy, AIDS educators, street children, school children, art therapy trainees, NGOs, artists, AIDS organizations, and teachers.¹²⁷ Across the country, Paper Prayers shows also took place at local venues, where people could purchase the exhibited works for small donations. Although the anticipated proceeds were 20,000 rand (a tiny fraction of the entire DACST grant), what mattered most for the organizers was the degree of awareness. Even so, the total money raised from these exhibitions was channeled into local AIDS charities. In conjunction with NAPWA, the AIDS Consortium, Friends for Health, and DACST, APS also erected a curved concrete AIDS Memorial Wall right outside of the studio on December 1 (see **Figure 5.17**). Officially opened by the mayor of Johannesburg, the monument took its cue from

¹²⁶ Berman, "Agency, Imagination and Resilience," 87.

¹²⁷ Berman, 88.

Vietnam War and Holocaust sites of commemoration, with etched brass plates of names belonging to those who had died from AIDS complications.¹²⁸

Even with the funding termination, Paper Prayers was far from finished, and there were important and immediate offshoots, some of which were already in the works during the 1998 campaign. Most notably, Berman embarked on a massive new project called Papermaking for Poverty Alleviation in 1999, later renamed Phumani Paper in 2002. If the instruction of printmaking and embroidery had somewhat nebulous outcomes with regard to sustainability during the campaign, Berman became increasingly preoccupied with papermaking as a long-term model of income generation and rural development in areas devastated by the pandemic.¹²⁹ This interest derived from her experience teaching women how to make paper from waste material and local biological resources ten years earlier, as illustrated in her *People's Printmaking & Papermaking Handbook* (1990). Realizing the potential for handmade paper products in the craft sector, the Paper Prayers Campaign set up papermaking facilities in the Winterveld in North West Province and in the district of Hillbrow in Johannesburg, commissioning unemployed women to produce paper to be used for the prayers.¹³⁰ By virtue of a hefty DACST grant of three million rand, awarded over the course of three years to APS and Berman's employer, the Technikon Witwatersrand, these efforts grew substantially; between 2000 and 2001, the poverty relief program established 21 sustainable papermaking projects in seven provinces, creating dozens of jobs. This large-scale papermaking initiative often intersected with other measures of AIDS awareness, support,

¹²⁸ Berman, 94.

¹²⁹ In particular, Hofmeyr notes the great disappointment felt by many rural workshop participants when there was not adequate funding for Paper Prayers to return and collaborate on future projects: "what I learned is never to promise anything that you weren't absolutely sure you could do." Hofmeyr, interview.

¹³⁰ Berman et al., *Paper Prayers Workbook*, 17.

and activism.¹³¹ Beyond these papermaking projects, Paper Prayers continued in fits and starts, as funding permitted, and gave rise to new and different endeavors, virally reproducing and mutating in equal measure.

For Boston's Day Without Art in 1999, the Howard Yezerski Gallery and the Barbara Krakow Gallery teamed up to host the eleventh annual Paper Prayers show. This year, however, there was a twist. Aptly titled *The Eleventh Hour*, the exhibition was a fundraiser for the Boston Pediatric and Family AIDS Projects, as well as the South Africa Development Fund (formerly FREESA), placing small paper-based works from Boston and embroideries from South Africa side-by-side. The publicity flyer features an embroidered work by the Chivurika Project that depicts a multi-colored rhinoceros, warning in bold block letters: "AIDS IS DANGER-ROUS" (see **Figure 5.18**). Clearly, to understand how and why this object from Giyani in Northern Province made an appearance at an AIDS fundraiser in Boston requires mapping out an entire web of relationships and a whirlwind of cultural production.¹³²

In advance of World AIDS Day in 1998, Matthew Krouse reported on Paper Prayers in the *Mail & Guardian*:

[c]ross-cultural art concepts don't always work. Take Japanese Kabuki theatre—three decades ago America's high-performance hippies borrowed elements from that archaic, ritualised tradition. Anticipating the global age, many hailed the invention, now only remembered as a pretentious fad. Two

¹³¹ Berman has written extensively on Phumani Paper as a model of economic growth, rural development, and AIDS awareness. See, for instance, Kim Berman, "Artist Proof Studio and Phumani Paper: Reflections on Art and Social Transformation," in *Coexistence: Contemporary Cultural Production in South Africa*, ed. Pamela Allara, Marilyn Martin, and Zola Mtshiza (Waltham, Massachusetts: Brandeis University, 2003), 49–51; Berman, "Agency, Imagination and Resilience," 112–67; Berman and Hassinger, *Women on Purpose: Resilience and Creativity of the Founding Women of Phumani Paper*.

¹³² Paper Prayers continued at the Howard Yezerski Gallery until the early 2000s when the gallerist and the artist ran out of steam. Grabosky also moved to Florida in 2001. "Tom Grabosky," *Allyn Gallup Contemporary Art* (blog), accessed January 9, 2019, <http://allengallup.com/grabosky.html>; Yezerski, interview. Other local art spaces such as the Barbara Krakow Gallery have since kept up the event.

decades later, artists confronting the Aids pandemic are finding meaning in a cultural act cutting across equally removed divides.¹³³

Whether or not Paper Prayers “worked” in Boston or in South Africa is up for debate, but the project was extremely compelling in its inventive global appropriations and adaptations of what was thought to be a Japanese tradition. Image theorist W. J. T. Mitchell abstractly inquires, “[w]hat happens to objects when they undergo a ‘worlding’ in their circulation, moving across frontiers, flowing from one part of the globe to another?”¹³⁴ More than anything, the transnational history of Paper Prayers cogently demonstrates that objects, images, and ideas do not flow. On the contrary, their laborious movements are choreographed by networks of people, institutions, organizations, media, technologies, pathogens, and regimes of representation. Even if some structuring agents of Paper Prayers were deliberate and tightly coordinated, imbued with profound meaning and ardent desires for social justice, its history shows that others were quite arbitrary, hazy, and superficial, like the half-remembered image of a Japanese temple bedecked with paper strips. In the end, the most revelatory dimensions of Paper Prayers lie in the elusive interplays between intent and outcome, local and global, clarity and ambiguity, and surface and impression.

¹³³ Krouse, “Prayers for the Living.”

¹³⁴ W. J. T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 146.

Coda

At the XIII International AIDS Conference in July 2000, dozens of artists, curators, and other cultural practitioners from South Africa and around the world descended on the city of Durban to address the pandemic in activist, educational, and expressive ways. Bearing the name *Amasiko*—an Nguni word meaning culture, tradition, and values—an official program comprehensively catalogued a weeklong array of visual art, film, music, dance, poetry, and theater.¹ The visual arts guide alone boasted nineteen exhibitions and cultural interventions in Durban, coordinated by practitioners from South Africa, the United Kingdom, the United States, India, and Senegal.

Amasiko wove together several of the players and endeavors represented in this dissertation, illuminating the degree to which HIV/AIDS was truly a pandemic in how it called for and awakened new transnational models of activism, art, criticism, and culture-making. For instance, the Bartel Arts Trust Centre hosted an exhibition of Paper Prayers and embroideries, as well as a series of workshops (see **Figure 6.1**). A photograph captures Minister of Arts and Culture Dr. Ben Ngubane enthusiastically holding up the prayer he has just produced; on his print, we see the omnipresent red ribbon (see **Figure 6.2**). Elsewhere in town was an elaborated version of *Positive Lives*, the photographic portfolio first developed and exhibited by Network Photographers and the Terrence Higgins Trust in London in 1993. Gideon Mendel had been spearheading an expansion of the project in South Africa since his 1995 exhibition at the South African National Gallery in Cape Town. Other major programming consisted of the release of a print portfolio by the Artists for Human Rights Trust (including works by Nhlanhla Xaba and Kim Berman);

¹ *Amasiko* Cultural Programme, XIII International AIDS Conference, Durban, South Africa, 9-14 July 2000, “12: other training materials,” Kim Berman Archives, University of Johannesburg.

a group show of international artists called *Bodies of Resistance*, curated by Barbara Hunt on behalf of the American organization Visual AIDS; and a community art project under the direction of curator Carol Brown at the Durban Art Gallery. For this last contribution, the entirety of Durban City Hall (the same building as the gallery) was wrapped in a colossal red ribbon, composed of individual banners broadcasting educational and empowering messages. Designed by a group from the Sinethemba Children’s Street Shelter in Knysna in the Western Cape Province, one panel read “YOUR BODY BELONGS TO YOU—ALWAYS PROTECT IT” (see **Figures 6.3 and 6.4**).²

It was a new millennium, but the 12,000 conferences participants—scientists, healthcare workers, politicians, activists, and, evidently, cultural practitioners—were dealing with the ongoing devastation of the old one: in South Africa alone, hundreds of people were dying daily, and 34.3 million were living with HIV/AIDS worldwide. The location of the event mattered, too, for Durban was statistically more affected by the virus than anywhere else in the country; in 1999, for example, local public health facilities reported that 32.5% of pregnant women seeking antenatal care tested HIV-positive.³ Even though effective antiretroviral drugs had been approved and available in more affluent countries since 1996, their exorbitant cost ensured their inaccessibility for most South Africans and people living with HIV around the world.

By all accounts, the conference was a decisive moment in the global response to the pandemic—and not simply because it was the first such event to be held in the global

² Ibid., 10-11. For more on *Bodies of Resistance*, see its catalogue, Julia Bryan-Wilson and Barbara Hunt, eds., *Bodies of Resistance* (New York: Visual AIDS, 2000). “Durban Art Gallery AIDS Ribbon 2000” booklet, with forward by Carol Brown. Collection of the Johannesburg Art Gallery Library, Johannesburg. See also Carol Brown, interview by Jackson Davidow, March 27, 2018.

³ Mandisa Mbali, *South African AIDS Activism and Global Health Politics* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), 2.

South, or in a developing country. It not only brought activist voices to the fore, particularly those under the banner of the media-savvy Treatment Action Campaign (TAC), but also clarified the outrageous obstacles that greeted the movement for a universal, accessible treatment regimen. At the conference, Minister of Health Dr. Manto Tshabalala-Msimang notably reinforced her opposition to programs for the prevention of mother-to-child transmission; this brazen rejection of scientific and economic research was consonant with President Thabo Mbeki's deep-seated AIDS denialism in the name of a post-apartheid African Renaissance. A well-known photograph by Gideon Mendel documents TAC activists participating in one of the conference's marches, pulsing with vitality as they demand access to requisite healthcare, their matching T-shirts bravely and performatively stating "H.I.V. POSITIVE" (see **Figure 6.5**). The conference also featured moving and energizing speeches by former President Nelson Mandela, HIV-positive child activist Nkosi Johnson, and HIV-positive Constitutional Court Judge Edwin Cameron.⁴ According to historian Mandisa Mbali, the Durban conference marked the birth of "the new international HIV treatment access movement," which would substantially reorganize the existing medical, political, and economic infrastructures of global health.⁵

In the years after 2000, the activities of the conference lived on in public memory through crucial works by Gregg Bordowitz, an American artist known for his video

⁴ For more on the happenings at and overall significance of this conference, see Rebecca Hodes, *Broadcasting the Pandemic: A History of HIV on South African Television* (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2014), 75; Mbali, *South African AIDS Activism and Global Health Politics*, 1–2; Eduard Grebe, "The Treatment Action Campaign's Struggle for AIDS Treatment in South Africa: Coalition-Building Through Networks," *Journal of South African Studies* 37, no. 4 (2011), 861–62. For more on Mbeki and his denialism, see, for instance, Mark Gevisser, *A Legacy of Liberation: Thabo Mbeki and the Future of the South African Dream* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2009), 276–96; Daniel Herwitz, *Heritage, Culture, and Politics in the Postcolony* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 135–51; Robert Kowalenko, "Thabo Mbeki, Postmodernism, and the Consequences," *South African Journal of Philosophy* 34, no. 4 (2015): 441–61.

⁵ Mbali, *South African AIDS Activism and Global Health Politics*, 2.

activism on behalf of the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) in New York, and John Greyson, the Canadian filmmaker at the center of Chapter Two. In his pensive autobiographical video *Habit* (2001), Bordowitz juxtaposes the dire tasks of global AIDS activism, as epitomized by TAC at the Durban conference, with the quotidian realities of living with the disease in the US—no longer a death sentence for HIV-positive individuals who, like the white middle-class artist, had access to antiretrovirals. A film still shows Bordowitz and his partner, the artist Claire Pentecost, propped up in bed, squarely looking at the camera (see **Figure 6.6**). By sporting the iconic TAC “H.I.V. POSITIVE” T-shirt that proved to be so effective as a visual slogan in South Africa, Bordowitz draws attention to the pronounced disconnect between his calm domestic life in Chicago and the current trenches of AIDS politics in the global South.

Not only does Greyson’s video opera *Fig Trees* similarly use the Durban conference as a historical anchor, but it is also concerned with this tension between solidarity and incommensurability. Greyson first presented the work as an installation at the Oakville Galleries in Ontario (2003) before transforming it into a feature-length film (2009).⁶ An eccentric rethinking of *Four Saints in Three Acts* (1928), a legendary American modernist opera by Virgil Thomson and Gertrude Stein, the gallery rendition of *Fig Trees* used libretto performances and video to critically assess the concept of martyrdom (see **Figures 6.7 and 6.8**). Its focal figure was HIV-positive TAC activist Zackie Achmat, who famously pledged not to take antiretrovirals in 1998 until the drugs became available to all

⁶ Since his video *A Moffie Called Simon* (1986), Greyson and others in his activist milieu in Toronto, notably Tim McCaskell, were fully immersed in queer anti-apartheid organizing. During the 1990s, Greyson collaborated with Jack Lewis on the first South African-Canadian cinematic coproduction *Proteus* (2003), a queer eighteenth-century love story that took place on Robben Island. Lewis was the cofounder of the Out-in-Africa Gay & Lesbian Film Festival, the Association for Bisexuals, Gays and Lesbians (ABIGALE), and TAC, as well as the long-term partner of Zackie Achmat.

South Africans—despite the fact that his well-off friends could cover the cost of his treatment. Due to his rapidly declining health, however, TAC leadership demanded that he to put an end to this pledge in 2003.⁷ Building on the installation, Greyson’s subsequent film version of *Fig Trees* traces the dual and intersecting trajectories of Achmat and Tim McCaskell, the Toronto-based activist from *The Body Politic*, the Simon Nkoli Anti-Apartheid Committee, and AIDS Action Now! (see **Figure 6.9**).

From vastly different angles, *Habit* and *Fig Trees* convey the distinct need to confront not only the meaningful continuities, but also the stark discrepancies between and across contexts of AIDS activism. No matter how globally articulated AIDS activism ever was or claimed to be, these works by veteran AIDS activists from North America remind us that the economic and racial disparities that had structured the epidemiological, political, and cultural responses to the virus since the early 1980s had certainly not melted away by 2000. Indeed, the healthcare, resources, education, and cultural programs were, and continue to be, so unevenly distributed across populations. Nevertheless, *Habit* and *Fig Trees*, along with many other cultural works explored in this study, were also avid acts of worlding and world making, evidencing the necessary transnationality of the AIDS activist movement as it looked out on a new millennium.

Back at the conference in 2000, the cultural program had declared with flair, “[b]ounding beyond borders, leaping language barriers and jumping bridges the Visual Arts go global in Durban. From sassy to sad the ‘AMASIKO’ Visual Arts exhibitions are a feast for the heart, eyes and soul.”⁸ By analyzing different case-studies, this dissertation

⁷ For a reading of this installation version of *Fig Trees* in the context of Greyson’s oeuvre, see Roger Hallas, *Reframing Bodies: AIDS, Bearing Witness, and the Queer Moving Image* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 151–84.

⁸ *Amasiko*, 10-11.

has likewise interrogated the terms, sites, strategies, and manifestations of “going global” in the face of a pandemic, one that redefined the boundaries between bodies, cultures, subjectivities, and nation states. It has also explored the ways in which clusters of artistic and cultural production—“from sassy to sad,” indeed—were key vectors of transnational AIDS activism. The International AIDS Conference in 2000 might be considered the apotheosis, though certainly not the termination, of the transnational network of AIDS cultural activism that the chapters in this dissertation have brought to light.

The case-studies in this dissertation variously revealed that the virus engendered new methods for conceptualizing, articulating, and circulating culture across national borderlines. A broad yet pointed epidemiological outlook shed light on the myriad ways in which art and cultural production functioned in the context of both a crushing health crisis and a complex transnational political movement. By looking beyond a narrow American context, I have argued that the forms of AIDS cultural activism, in their viral proliferations and mutations, heralded and reconfigured cutting-edge articulations of the postmodern, the queer, the global, and the post-apartheid. In 1980s Toronto, AIDS activists and artists retooled storytelling to break down bewildering and homophobic epidemiological narratives, and to actuate a transnational arena of queer culture and politics. More than just a backdrop in 1980s London, the AIDS crisis was a principal ingredient in emergent black and queer cultural practice and theorizations of diaspora. As the pandemic became increasingly prevalent in South Africa in the early 1990s, Euro-American blueprints of AIDS cultural activism influenced the scaffolding of a post-apartheid global queer public culture in Cape Town. And the axis of political and artistic exchange between

Johannesburg and Boston during the 1980s and 1990s resulted in Kim Berman's redesign of Paper Prayers as a national campaign in South Africa.

In these chapters, I have tried to locate the disparate global imaginaries, orientations, and game plans of AIDS cultural activists in ways that are not obvious. Of course, International AIDS Conferences such as those in Montreal in 1989 or in Durban in 2000 were sites of global discourse, contestation, and connectivity. Yet globality could also be grasped in an image, in a catchphrase, in a conversation, in a campaign, in a schism, in a story, in an embrace, in a residue. There were many shades, stylizations, and whereabouts of globality that stretched far beyond the scope of this dissertation, even if, as I have shown, the viral was incorporated as a chief framework for many of its emergent senses. According to Roberto Esposito, “[t]he real question is how to think biopolitics and globalization within the other. There is nothing more global than human life.”⁹ Though precipitated by a terrible pandemic, the global registers of cultural production and resistance investigated in this study can nevertheless enrich our theorizations of a critical and affirmative biopolitics across lines of difference.

This dissertation draws to a finish in 2000, but the histories and legacies of this nexus of AIDS, art, and activism are still very much alive. And even as international headlines in early March 2019 give hope of a cure one day, the pandemic continues to be an anxious fault line in the overlapping spheres of not only politics, medicine, technology, economics, the law, and immigration, but also in contemporary culture. As mentioned in Chapter One, in December 2015 the Tacoma Action Collective made art-world headlines as a result of its demonstration against the lack of black representation in *Art AIDS*

⁹ Roberto Esposito, *Terms of the Political: Community, Immunity, Biopolitics (Termini della politica: Comunità, immunità, biopolitica)*, 2008), trans. Rhiannon Noel Welch (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 133.

America, curated by Jonathan D. Katz and Rock Hushka at the Tacoma Art Museum in Washington State.¹⁰ Their piercing campaign, *#StopErasingBlackPeople*, took off widely across social media, pushing the curators to include more black artists in subsequent iterations of the show. The potency of *#StopErasingBlackPeople* also led to the group's invitation to the 2016 International AIDS Conference, held in Durban for the second time, to present on their cultural activism in the US, and to lead workshops with South African and international conference participants about decolonizing institutions and fighting anti-blackness globally (see **Figures 6.10 and 6.11**).¹¹ Without question, the recent efforts of the Tacoma Action Collective have revived important and productive conversations about AIDS, politics, and representation, as well as their imbricated histories. I sincerely hope that this dissertation, too, with its epidemiological, networked, and transnational approach, opens up new pathways for interpreting the past, contextualizing the present, and imagining the future.

¹⁰ The exhibition started at the ONE Archives in Los Angeles before touring to Tacoma in 2015. Thereafter, it traveled to the Zuckerman Museum of Art in Georgia, the Bronx Museum of the Arts, and the Alphawood Gallery in Chicago. The Tacoma Action Collective has the same acronym as the Treatment Action Campaign; it is very unlikely, however, that activists from the former were taking this into consideration when choosing a name.

¹¹ For more on the Tacoma Action Campaign and *#StopErasingBlackPeople*, see Visual AIDS, “*#StopErasingBlackPeople* - Historical Lands - A Statement from the Tacoma Action Collective,” *Visual AIDS* (blog), November 29, 2017, <https://visualaids.org/blog/tacoma-action-collective>. See also the video about their activism, commissioned by Visual AIDS for Day Without Art 2018, *Alternative Endings, Activist Risings* (Tacoma Action Collective, 2018).

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Figures: Chapter One

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 1.1

Gran Fury, *You've Got Blood On Your Hands*, Stephen Joseph, poster, offset lithography, 1988. Collection of International Center of Photography.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 1.2

Gran Fury, photograph of bloody hands on mailbox, 1988. Collection of the New York Public Library.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 1.3

Gran Fury, *The Government Has Blood On Its Hands*, poster, offset lithography, 1988. Collection of International Center of Photography.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 1.4

Photograph of Food and Drug Administration Protest on October 11, 1988. Printed in the *U.S. News and World Report*. Collection of Tom Kalin.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 1.5

Template for protest poster, likely 1999, B1.1: TAC formation, Achmat, Lewis, and Treatment Action Campaign Papers, South African History Archive, Johannesburg.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 1.6

“TAC Press Conference, Durban AIDS Conference,” July 13, 2000, I-D8 Photos, Zackie Achmat/Jack Lewis Collection AM 2970, Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action Archives, Johannesburg.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 1.7

Diagram printed in David M. Auerbach et al., “Clusters of Cases of the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome: Patients Linked by Sexual Contact,” *The American Journal of Medicine* 76, no. 3 (March 1984): 488.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 1.8

“Centralized, Decentralized, and Distributed Networks,” printed in Paul Baran, “On Distributed Communications: I. Introduction to Distributed Communications Networks,” Memorandum (Santa Monica, CA: The RAND Corporation, 1964), 2.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 1.9

Installation view, *ACT UP New York: Activism, Art, and the AIDS Crisis, 1987–1993*, Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, Harvard University. On view Oct 15–Dec 23, 2009.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 1.10

Saiyare Rafael, photograph of Tacoma Action Collective die-in at *Art AIDS America*, Tacoma Art Museum, WA, December 17, 2015.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 1.11

Ekene Ijeoma, *Pan-African AIDS*, sculpture, 2018. Photo by Isometric studio.

Figures: Chapter Two

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 2.1

General Idea, composite map, “Borderline Research” reader response project, *FILE 1*, nos. 2 and 3, May-June 1972.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 2.2

Lisa Steele, *A Very Personal Story*, video still, 1974. Vtape Distribution.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 2.3

Lisa Steele, *The Scientist Tapes (4 Part Series)*, video still, 1976. Vtape Distribution.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 2.4

Cover of *The Body Politic*, February 1979. Collection of Canadian Museum of Human Rights, Internet Archive.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 2.5

Andy Fabo, *Mug Shot #1*, acrylic, heat transfer on canvas, 1979. 52 x 45 in.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 2.6

John Greyson, *Aspects of Contemporary Gay Art: An International Symposium*, paper booklet, 1980. Collection of Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 2.7

“CGAY’s John Greyson provides on-the-spot news reports,” *The Body Politic*, September 1980, page 33. Collection of Canadian Museum of Human Rights, Internet Archive.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 2.8

Andy Fabo, *The Craft of the Contaminated*, oil on wood, 1984. 91 x 72 inches. Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 2.9

Théodore Géricault, *The Raft of the Medusa* (*Le radeau de la Méduse*), oil on canvas, 1819. Louvre Museum, Paris.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 2.10

John Greyson, *Moscow Does Not Believe in Queers*, video still, 1986. Vtape Distribution.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 2.11

ACT UP and AIDS ACTION NOW!, *Le Manifeste de Montréal*, 1989. AIDS Activist History Project, accessed September 9, 2017, <http://aidsactivisthistory.omeka.net/items/show/67>.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 2.12

Rex Wockner, photograph of AIDS activists occupying the stage at the Fifth International AIDS Conference at the Palais des Congrès de Montréal, June 4, 1989.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 2.13

John Greyson, *The World is Sick (sic)*, video still, 1989. Video Out Distribution.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 2.14

John Greyson, *The World is Sick (sic)*, video still, 1989. Video Out Distribution.

Figures: Chapter Three

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 3.1

Rotimi Fani-Kayode, *The Golden Phallus* from *Ecstatic Antibodies*, c-type print, 1989. Autograph ABP.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 3.2

Andy Gardner (ACT-UP Manchester), photograph of ACT UP Manchester protest at the Viewpoint Gallery in Salford. Printed in *The British Journal of Photography*, October 25, 1990, box 1 of 2, folder 7 of 8, IMP/1/208, Impressions Gallery Archive, Insight Archives, National Science and Media Museum, Bradford, United Kingdom.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 3.3

Poster for *Same Difference* at Camerawork, 1986. Collection of Sunil Gupta.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 3.4

Video still from “Here and Now: Gay Black Group,” June 26, 1983, Central Television, London. Production number 2379/83. The Media Archive for Central England, Lincoln, United Kingdom.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 3.5

Video still from “Here and Now: Gay Black Group,” June 26, 1983, Central Television, London. Production number 2379/83. The Media Archive for Central England, Lincoln, United Kingdom.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 3.6

Sankofa Film/Video Collective, *Territories*, video still, 1984. Directed by Isaac Julien.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 3.7

Sankofa Film/Video Collective, *The Passion of Remembrance*, video still, 1986. Directed by Maureen Blackwood and Isaac Julien.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 3.8

Kobena Mercer and Simon Watney, photo montage published in Kobena Mercer, "Imaging the Black Man's Sex," in *Photography/Politics: Two*, ed. Patricia Holland, Jo Spence, and Simon Watney (London: Comedia Publishing Group, 1986), 61.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 3.9

The Body Politic, installation photography, 1987. The Photographers' Gallery, London.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 3.10

Sunil Gupta, *Humayun's Tomb*, from the series *Exiles*, 1986.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 3.11

Stuart Marshall, *Bright Eyes*, video still, 1984. Video Data Bank Distribution.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 3.12

Sankofa Film/Video Collective, *This Is Not an AIDS Advertisement*, video still, 1987.
Directed by Isaac Julien.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 3.13

Sankofa Film/Video Collective, *This Is Not an AIDS Advertisement*, video still, 1987. Directed by Isaac Julien. Showing Sunil Gupta's *Exiles* (1986).

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 3.14

Pratibha Parmar, *Reframing AIDS*, video still, 1987. Groupe Intervention Vidéo Distribution.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 3.15

Pratibha Parmar, *Reframing AIDS*, video still, 1987. Groupe Intervention Vidéo Distribution. Parmar interviewing Ken Livingstone.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 3.16

Pratibha Parmar, *Reframing AIDS*, video still, 1987. Groupe Intervention Vidéo Distribution.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 3.17

Pratibha Parmar, *Reframing AIDS*, video still, 1987. Groupe Intervention Vidéo Distribution. Pictured are Kobena Mercer and Grace Bailey.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 3.18

Rotimi Fani-Kayode, *Mask* from *Ecstatic Antibodies*, silver gelatin print, 1989. Autograph ABP.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 3.19

Sankofa Film/Video Collective, *Looking for Langston*, video still, 1989. Directed by Isaac Julien.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 3.20

Sankofa Film/Video Collective, *After George Platt Lynes: Looking for Langston*, 1989. Photographed by Sunil Gupta. Directed by Isaac Julien.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 3.21

Isaac Julien, *Looking for Langston: Undressing Icons*, live performance at Kings Cross Cemetery, 1989.

Figures: Chapter Four

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 4.1

John Greyson, *A Moffie Called Simon*, video still, 1986. Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 4.2

Pride March advertisement in *Glowletter* (September 1990), page 1, A1.1, GAL0001, Gay and Lesbian Organization of the Witwatersrand (GLOW), Collection of the Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action archives, Johannesburg (GALA).

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 4.3

Front page of the *Sunday Times*, October 19, 1990. Pictures by Pierre Oosthuysen.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 4.4

“Condom Power,” image of Theresa Raizenberg at World AIDS Day march, December 1, 1993 in *Cape Times*, December 2, 1993, p. 3. A2, AM 2802, Association of Bisexuals, Gays, and Lesbians, GALA.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 4.5

“Chair Charlotte Bauer, *Sunday Times* Arts Editor, and guest film director, Barbara Hammer during the ‘Queer Cinema’ panel discussion.” C9, GAL 0118, Out in Africa, GALA.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 4.6

“Zackie Achmat, Chair of the National Gay and Lesbian Coalition, guest director Isaac Julien and guest producer David Haughland discuss ‘Queer Cinema.’” C9, GAL 0118, Out in Africa, GALA.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 4.7

“Megan Pillay of the Lesbian Forum, Mark Gevisser, co-editor of *Defiant Desire*, Rose Telela, freelance journalist, Chair Hugh McLean of GLOW, guest film director Greta Schiller, Human Rights lawyer and co-editor of *Defiant Desire*, Edwin Cameron on the panel of ‘Defiant Desire Before and After Stonewall.’” C9, GAL 0118, Out in Africa, GALA.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 4.8

Barbara Hammer, *Out in South Africa*, video still, 1995. Women Make Movies Distribution.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 4.9

Barbara Hammer, *Out in South Africa*, video still, 1995. Women Make Movies Distribution.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 4.10

Barbara Hammer, *Out in South Africa*, video still, 1995. Women Make Movies Distribution.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 4.11

Barbara Hammer, *Out in South Africa*, video still, 1995. Women Make Movies Distribution.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 12

Barbara Hammer, *Out in South Africa*, video still, 1995. Women Make Movies Distribution.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 4.13

Barbara Hammer, *Snow Job: The Media Hysteria of AIDS*, video still, 1986. Electronic Arts Intermix Distribution.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 4.14

Andrew Putter, *Intimacy*, plaster, glass, paint, aluminum, 1994.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 4.15

Sue Williamson, with Andrew Putter and Willie Bester, *Art Home Art*, installation view, 1994. Transnet railway luggage van, Grahamstown Station, wooden crates, mixed media, sound, lighting.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 4.16

Andrew Putter, *Home Is a Place to Die* (detail) from *Art Home Art*, 1994. Photograph by André Vorster.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 4.17

Andrew Putter and André Vorster, promotional pamphlets for The Locker Room Project, 1994. Collection of André Vorster.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 4.18

Andrew Putter and André Vorster, The Locker Room Project Instructional Pamphlet, 1994. Collection of Andrew Putter.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 4.19

Cover of *Pierre et Gilles* (Cologne: Taschen, 1993).

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 4.20

Photograph of Andrew Putter (right) and other attendees of the Locker Room Project, 1994.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 4.21

Matthias Grünewald, *Isenheim Altarpiece*, 1516. Unterlinden Museu at Colmar, Alsace, France.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 4.22

Maxwell Lawton, *Man of Sorrows: Christ with AIDS*, painting, 1994. Installed above the altar in St. George's Cathedral in Cape Town, 1994.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 4.23

Gideon Mendel, photograph of John and his lover at the Middlesex Hospital in London, from “The Wards” in the portfolio *Positive Lives: Responses to HIV* by Network Photographers (London: Cassell, 1993).

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 4.24

Gideon Mendel, photograph of sangomas in an AIDS education workshop in Bizana, South Africa, April 1995. Created for *Positive Lives* portfolio.

Figures: Chapter Five

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 5.1

Image of a Paper Prayer Workshop, printed in Kim Berman et al., *Paper Prayers Workbook* (Johannesburg: Artist Proof Studio, 1999), 5. Collection of Artist Proof Studio.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 5.2

Cover image from Kim Berman et al., *Paper Prayers Workbook* (Johannesburg: Artist Proof Studio, 1999). Collection of Artist Proof Studio.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 5.3

“Aftermath of the 2003 APS fire,” picturing Kim Berman among the debris. Collection of Artist Proof Studio.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 5.4

Photograph of members of Artist’s Proof Studio in Cambridge, MA. Left to right: Ellen Kozak, Mary Sherwood, Catherine Kernan, Heddi Siebel, Kim Berman, Ilana Manolson, Carol Conchar, Robert Siegelman, Jan Arabas, Jane Goldman, Jinx Nolan. Published in *Proof in Print: A Community of Printmaking Studios* (Boston: Boston Public Library, 2001).

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 5.5

Catherin Kernan, photograph of Stephen Cadwalader and Kim Berman assisting Jane Goldman with editioning in 1983. Published in *Proof in Print: A Community of Printmaking Studios* (Boston: Boston Public Library, 2001).

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 5.6

Excerpt of a brochure for the Fund for a Free South Africa (FREESA), with prints by Kim Berman, 1988 or 1989. Private collection of David Goodman, African Activist Archive Project, Michigan State University,
http://africanactivist.msu.edu/document_metadata.php?objectid=32-130-1212.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 5.7

Kim Berman, for Fund for a Free South Africa, *Nelson Mandela*, poster, 1990. South Africa Development Fund collection, African Activist Archive Project, Michigan State University, <http://africanactivist.msu.edu/image.php?objectid=32-131-389>.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 5.8

Photograph of (from left to right) Governor Michael Dukakis, Winnie Mandela, Senator Edward Kennedy, Nelson Mandela, and FREESA Executive Director Themba Vilakazi at Boston's Esplanade, June 23, 1990. Printed in *Fund for a Free South Africa* newsletter 3, no. 1 (Summer/Fall 1990), 2. Private collection of David Wiley and Christine Root, African Activist Archive Project, Michigan State University, http://africanactivist.msu.edu/document_metadata.php?objectid=32-130-1357.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 5.9

Photograph of Artist Proof Studio, undated, likely early to mid-1990s. Available at <https://www.slideshare.net/mixitprint/artist-proof-studio-and-mixit-print-studio>.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 5.10

Stefan Pierce, installation photograph of *Paper Prayers* at the Howard Yezerski Gallery, December 1989. Printed in *Bay Windows* (November 15, 1990). Paper Prayers archive, Howard Yezerski Gallery.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 5.11

Dana Salvo, installation photograph of *Paper Prayers* at the Howard Yezerski Gallery, December 1, 1989. Collection of the Howard Yezerski Gallery.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 5.12

View of the NAMES AIDS Memorial Quilt on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. on October 11, 1987. Collection of the NAMES Project.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 5.13

AIDS Quilt in Sea Point, Cape Town in March 1995, printed in the Annual Report of the AIDS Foundation of South Africa, 1994-1995, p. 7, https://www.aids.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/AFSA-1994_1995-1.pdf.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 5.14

Nhlanhla Xaba, *AIDS Exodus*, from *Break the Silence!* Artists for Humanity Print Portfolio, woodcut print, 2000. Collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 5.15

Jasper Johns, *Summer*, encaustic on canvas, 1985. Collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 5.16

Kaross Collective (Limpopo), embroidered panels, 1998. Photograph by Kim Berman.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 5.17

AIDS Memorial Wall outside of Artist Proof Studio, December 1, 1998 Published in Susan Sellschop and Pamela Allara, eds., *12 Years of Paper Prayers: Awareness, Action & Advocacy at Artist Proof Studio* (Johannesburg: Artist Proof Studio), no page numbers.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 5.18

Flyer for Paper Prayers 11, December 1-23, 1999 at the Howard Yezerski Gallery and Barbara Krakow Gallery, Boston. Picturing a cotton embroidery by the Chivurika Project, Giyani, South Africa, 1999. Paper Prayers archive, Howard Yezerski Gallery.

Figures: Coda

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 6.1

Installation view, exhibition of Paper Prayers and Embroideries at the Bartel Arts Trust Centre, Durban, during the 13th International AIDS Conference, July 2000.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 6.3

Minister Dr. Ben Ngubane making a paper prayer at the Bartel Arts Trust Centre, International AIDS Conference, Durban, 2000. Published in “Report to the Ford Foundation,” July 2000 to June 2001, no page numbers. “3a: Strategic planning,” Kim Berman Archives.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 6.3

“Durban Art Gallery AIDS Ribbon 2000” booklet, with forward by Carol Brown. Collection of the Johannesburg Art Gallery Library, Johannesburg.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 6.4

Detail of the Durban Art Gallery AIDS Ribbon 2000, featuring panels by the Sinethemba Children’s Street Shelter and the Golden Hours School. “Durban Art Gallery AIDS Ribbon 2000” booklet, with forward by Carol Brown. Collection of the Johannesburg Art Gallery Library, Johannesburg.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 6.5

Gideon Mendel, *Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) march during the “Breaking the Silence” International AIDS Conference*, photograph, 2000. Collection of the International Center of Photography.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 6.6

Gregg Bordowitz, *Habit*, video still, 2001. Video Data Bank Distribution.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 6.7

Peter MacCallum, installation view of *Fig Trees* by John Greyson at Oakville Galleries in Gairloch Gardens, Oakville, Ontario, 2003.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 6.8

Peter MacCallum, installation view of *Fig Trees* by John Greyson at Oakville Galleries at Centennial Square, Oakville, Ontario, 2003.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 6.9

John Greyson, *Fig Trees*, video still, 2009. Vtape Distribution.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 6.10

Tacoma Action Collective, *Alternative Endings, Activist Risings*, video still, 2018. Visual AIDS Distribution.

IMAGE REDACTED

Figure 6.11

Freddie Allen, photograph of Tacoma Action Collective leaders Jamika Scott, Jaleesa Trapp, Cana Caldwell, and Christopher Jordan in the Global Village at the 2016 International AIDS Conference in Durban, South Africa. Available at <https://blackaids.org/blog/ending-erasure-the-struggle-to-center-black-voices-and-stories/>.