

IN AN

ACT

OF

GRIEF &

RAGE &

LOVE



INTRODUCTION

The LGBT community during the AIDS crisis was faced with the realization that not only was their community dying, but it was the very thing that banned them together, their sexual orientation and experiences formed because of it, that to the public and government justified inaction and classified HIV as a non-priority. The response was a wave of art and activism used to bring awareness to the crisis and express what life was like living in a world where many of those who surround you were becoming increasingly sick while politicians fiddle with their hands. A community told they would never be able to be themselves publicly began to refuse the idea of dying privately -- their loss was now going to be the nation's problem, and they would make sure you couldn't ignore it. Through their collective action using methods, the queer community gained a new sense of what historical commemoration could be through self-documentation and accurate productions that detail the experiences of losing yourself, or loved ones, to AIDS. The gay community saw themselves as preservers of life, health, and history since no one else outside of their community seemed to be able to tell their stories right. At the same time, they formed a uniquely queer approach to mourning and the idea of aging. I argue that the thing that ties together the experiences of AIDS throughout the diverse queer world is the fear, feeling, and inevitable experience of absence. This looming presence of loss can be found throughout both art and activism, and I believe is purposefully invoked to force the audience to confront the hollow grief put upon them by what they are viewing. Though they may not have lost people personally to AIDS, they experience the stages of grief as a second-hand observer who cannot do anything to mitigate the feeling -- similar to how those who were AIDS positive or loved someone who was, could not do anything to prevent the inevitable absence. There is a sense of frustration as a viewer that there is no hope of saving those we meet through these creations because the possibility of knowing them or living in a world that contained their presence has already been taken away from us by AIDS. Because the threat of absence is one of the only universally shared experiences of HIV/AIDS during the crisis peak in the late 20th century, I believe that this lens will allow us to truly approach a more encapsulating understanding of how the disease impacted our nation.

WHY A ZINE?

The term zine comes from the word magazine and originates from the science fiction community in the 1930s -- though it quickly attracted the attention of more diverse crowds especially exploding in popularity among the 1980s punk community due to their do-it-yourself culture. Now, they are regarded as a non-commercial homemade form of paper publication that is circulated among special-interest groups. A well-known creator who focuses his attention on the history and distribution of alternative press was a man by the name of Mike Gunderloy, who made a case for the importance of zines as a "critical component of underground press" that "constituted a democratic approach to political intervention, a do-it-yourself, from-the-ground-up practice with the potential to challenge the institutions of mainstream society" (Radway, pg. 140). As a way to remain the threat of being co-opted and commodified by pop culture, zines are messy and considered not traditionally reader-friendly as they are designed in a typically chaotic way. Cataloger at Hennepin County Library Chris Dodge published a piece trying to appeal to libraries around America in hopes of them recognizing zines as a more legitimate form of literature. A part of the appeal with zines was that they directly fought back against the idea of economic gatekeeping of knowledge -- they exposed their audience to taboo topics like queer sex, radical environmentalism, anti-establishment rhetoric and often were produced to teach readers in a way that was "gritty, lively, and a hell of a lot cheaper than overpriced academic journals" (Dodge, pg. 26)". This zine acts as a way to take the resources and time I have at my disposal as a university student and make them

accessible to those who do not have the same available to them. My topic speaks on queer history, civil unrest, and the intersections of art and activism -- it only seems appropriate to create my own piece of activist art that works to educate and acknowledge a history often overlooked.

WHAT SEPARATES AIDS FROM HIV

Before we can begin to unravel the experience during the 80s and 90s, we have to first understand what we are even talking about. HIV and AIDS are often used interchangeably due to a lack of public knowledge, but they aren't synonymous.

HIV → "human immunodeficiency virus" which attacks white blood cells, these cells remain infected for the rest of their lives, and it is left untreated, that is when HIV can lead to AIDS

AIDS → "acquired immune deficiency syndrome" works as an umbrella term for all the infections or viruses that are the result of a damaged immune system that is no longer able to protect its person (Planned Parenthood, n.d.)

What this means is that if an HIV-positive person is given accessible treatment, safe sex and drug use education, and testing AIDS is avoidable. We must remember that AIDS is a preventable progression from HIV when provided the right support by our government.

GOVERNMENT ABSENCE & CENSORSHIP

The 1980s is often referred to as the "Greed Generation" or the "Me First Decade" -- a time when young 'yuppies' flooded the urban marketplace and prioritized their own self advancement. This wasn't the mindset across the board however, and many acted in complete opposite from this mainstream notion. Many saw this as a time of revival for collective action and advocating for your community, where they prioritized the 'us' over the 'me'. Though the 60s in America is often regarded as the decade of activism due to the anti-Vietnam movement and significant dedication to the Black Civil Rights movement, the years following were infused with activist inspiration and a new sense of uplifting one's community. If the 60s were the years of advancing activist strategies and forcing government change, the 80s and 90s were the years of utilizing the ferocity of the past to keep the flame of social justice alive. So when a new threat made itself apparent, those it threatened most took action swiftly -- the government on the other hand, did not.

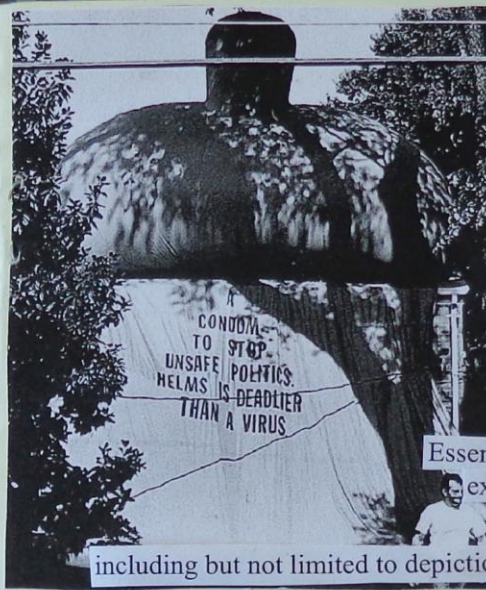
It took President Reagan 4 years since the CDC discovery of acquired

immune deficiency syndrome to even utter the word AIDS publicly -- after his close friend, Rock Hudson announced he was AIDS positive (Francis, pg. 292). White House director of communications, Patrick Buchanan, wrote upon the AIDS crisis without even feigned concern, stating "The poor homosexuals. They have declared war on nature and now nature is exacting an awful retribution (Morris, pg. 816)".

On February 4th, 1985 Donald Francis and Dr. John Bennet who was leader of the AIDS Taskforce had just proposed their plan to curb the spread of AIDS to leaders within the Reagan administration in Washington. Their proposal was rejected, and they were asked to "Look pretty, and do as little as you can (pg. 297)" -- Reagan's second term priorities were centered around a cut to government spending and the CDC was asked to attack the epidemic not with new funds but by simply shifting them from one priority to the next. Reagan's focus remained on correcting the behavior (specifically drug use) associated with the spread of AIDS without acknowledging the way AIDS heavily impacted the queer community. H.W. Bush followed in the footsteps of those before him when he took up the presidency, vowing for an eradication of the behavior that led to AIDS, but no promise of monetary allocation. In September of 1991, AIDS activist group ACT UP flooded the streets of Kennebunkport, Maine where the then-president was vacationing, signs carried with phrases like "We die Bush does nothing". This wasn't entirely true though, AIDS deaths were doubling every six months and the president had done something -- reduced funding for AIDS research (Gessen, 2018).

"We have got to call a spade a spade," states Jesse Helms, past senator of North Carolina, "and a perverted human being is a perverted human being" while discussing an amendment to a bill for the Departments of Labor, Health, and Human Services, and Education. This policy he hoped to advance would prohibit the CDC from allocating funds towards any programs associated with AIDS education if they "promote, encourage or condone homosexual activities (Koch, pg. 27)". The Senate passed this, 53 to 47. What inspired Senator Helms was his frustration with the Gay Men's Health Crisis in New York that sought to educate gay and bisexual men on how to have safe sex, which to Helms meant that they were further propelling the AIDS outbreak by normalizing sex between men. The issue here is that the men GMHC targeted were already sexually active and would remain sexually active regardless of if they were given sex education or not, which is why it is so important for them to have access to remain healthy. This incident with Jesse Helms is an example of the ways the American government was trying to evade its duties of taking care of citizens and in the process put their population at a significant disadvantage.

In response, the grassroots political group ACT UP that focuses on AIDS justice performed another demonstration in which they erected a giant handmade condom that covered up the senator's house which displayed the words "A condom to stop unsafe



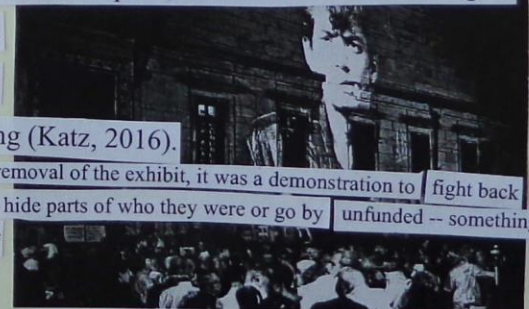
politics. Helms is deadlier than a virus." Jesse Helms continued to fight against the visibility of queerness even in a realm we often picture as welcoming; the arts. In 1989, Helms was successful in his proposal to restrict grants from the National Endowment of the Arts (as well as a cut to funding for NEA as a whole). Essentially, grants would not be allocated to any exhibit that would "promote, disseminate or produce obscene or indecent materials, including but not limited to depictions of sadomasochism, homoeroticism, the exploitation of children, or individuals engaged in sex acts (Orekes, pg. 1)". In 1990, the law was amended to also add a decency act, where funded creations must also reflect "general standards of decency and respect for the diverse beliefs and values of the American public" which further asked for the conformity of artistic demonstrations. As a result, a grant that had been promised to help produce 3 Lesbian-Gay film festivals would be vetoed for failing "to demonstrate artistic excellence" -- though in previous years the same fests had been funded (Salsberry). Congress incorporated these changes into the NEA's Reauthorization Bill, the Arts, Humanities, and Museum Amendments of 1990, Pub.L. No. 101-512, § 103(b), 104 Stat.1963 (codified at 20 U.S.C. § 951-59 (1990)).

This time Helms had been inspired specifically by the late LGBT photographer Robert Mapplethorpe, who had passed away from HIV/AIDS complications, and his homoerotic photography. Less than 2 weeks away from its grand opening at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington D.C., the museum's director Christina Orr-Cahall canceled the opening of *The Perfect Moment*, a photography exhibit by Mapplethorpe, in fear that the relationship with the NEA could be damaged.

In response, protestors gathered outside the museum and projected

the images on the side of the building (Katz, 2016).

This demonstration was about far more than the removal of the exhibit, it was a demonstration to fight back against the censorship that asked LGBT artists to hide parts of who they were or go by unfunded -- something that specifically limited the abilities and creative freedom of low-income gay artists.

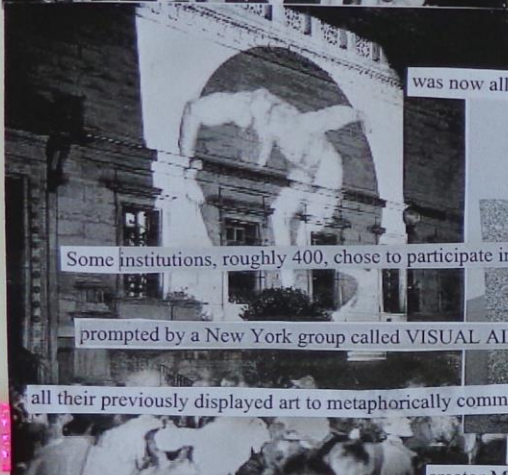


Protest of the cancellation of "Robert Mapplethorpe: The Perfect Moment," June 30, 1989, Washington, D.C. (Frank Herrera)



To censor the work of a late queer artist, specifically one that discussed sexuality and who had died due to AIDS is a fitting example of the elimination of representation caused by these censorship laws.

Art that wanted to represent gay love, sex, or the preservation of their community against AIDS was now all forced to be subliminal or abstract -- like the piece *Two-Part Chair* by Scott Burton (1986).



Some institutions, roughly 400, chose to participate in a project named "A Day Without Art" prompted by a New York group called VISUAL AIDS. On December 1st, 1989 these places took down

all their previously displayed art to metaphorically commemorate all the artistic lives lost, and ones that will be lost, due to the AIDS crisis. Author and creator Michael Stolbach is quoted saying that "gallery spaces abstract in their emptiness became shrines for the dead (Stolbach, pg. 182)".

However, was this an act of genuine concern and commemoration, or was it a loophole for the artistic spaces to continue to receive funding from the very institution working so hard to eliminate the publication of queer art?

In a way, absence was forced upon the artists' creations, the censorship that prioritized how palatable something is over the creators' honest expression of self. The soul of the art, the purpose behind it, having to remain in the shadows. An example of this is Felix Gonzalez-Torres's piece "Untitled (Perfect Lovers), 1991", two clocks side by side that don't even draw attention to themselves as art pieces at all. Slowly the two clocks that once were synchronized will fall out of sync, one eventually dying before the other. Though Torres never explicitly said what the clocks represented, in 1987 Torres' partner Ross Layloch was diagnosed with HIV/AIDS and was getting rapidly sick. In a letter to his lover

he included a first initial sketch of the piece with

the following message:



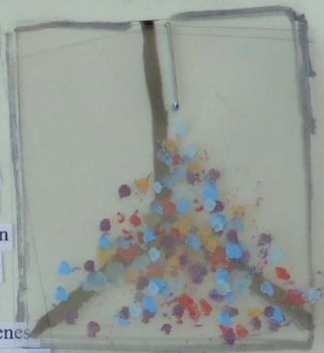
Felix Gonzalez-Torres - *Untitled (Perfect Lovers)*, 1991, photo: MoMA

Letter from Felix Gonzalez-Torres to Ross from 1988

Not only could this piece be seen as representative of how gay relationships had to be artistically represented in disguise, but it also represents the absence of a life partner and the secrecy related to of queer mourning at the time. Torres stated once that creating the piece was "the scariest thing I've ever done. I wanted to face it. I wanted those two clocks right in front of me, ticking (Public Delivery, 2021)".

Another piece by this artist was his "Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A.), 1991" which consists of a pile of candy, with colorful wrappers sitting in the corner of the room. The candies are weighted out to be 175 pounds, the ideal weight for a man of Ross Layochs' size. As the audience passes by, they are prompted to take a piece with them. Eventually, what is left behind is scarce amounts of candy to represent the physical disappearance of his lover, it mimics the extreme weight loss caused by the illness. The museums' action is also a part of this metaphor; replenishing the pile would symbolize the preservation of those we have lost through art, or one could let the pile run out which would symbolize the way inaction causes absence.

Art work like that of Felix Gonzalez-Torres, art made by those who love and had loved those who were HIV positive is incredibly important to us historically. At the time, this was an act of community preservation through different mediums of storytelling. AIDS history is passed down predominantly by only those who were directly or adjacently affected by the spread of it -- often by HIV positive people themselves, their lovers (who often were also HIV positive), or close friends and family. They had to do the work of commemorating this chapter of history because so few wanted to. To acknowledge the significance of the AIDS awareness movement is to acknowledge, and in a way accept, who these people were: sexually active queer humans.



ABSENT FROM THE MOVEMENT

If you were asked to picture an AIDS-positive person it is very likely who you imagined was a gay man. GRAN FURY, a social justice group that was a self-titled "...band of individuals united in anger and dedicated to exploiting the power of art to end the AIDS crisis (Meyer, pg. 227)" was concerned with accurate representation.

"In many ways, what happens in the art world replicates what happens in society...Women are routinely overlooked in the art world for a variety of reasons and they're routinely overlooked in medical research. As a consequence, women who go into the hospital with pelvic inflammatory disease are not even HIV-tested because PID is not in the CDC definition of what constitutes AIDS-opportunistic infection. Why is that? Because men do not get PID and the research matrix are based on the male model (pg. 13)" -- Representatives of GRAN FURY

It took around four years since the first discovered case of AIDS for doctors to start recognizing symptoms experienced by their female patients as something worthy of testing for HIV (Day, pg. 55). In 1993 it was found that the CDC "did not require physicians to collect sexual orientation data from any HIV-positive women nor ask women about same-sex practices, and researchers did not classify woman-to-woman transmission as a possible exposure category" -- though they followed these similar practices for men. (Madansky, pg. 2). When HIV was found in women, it was assumed the transmission was exclusively from drug use or their HIV-positive husbands/male partners.

Women, especially queer women, were eager to find ways to remain healthy during sex but content like that was not widely available or targeted toward gay women. In part, this can be attributed to even scientific denial of the risk women experienced. For example, Dr. Charles Schable for the CDC who had participated in HIV transmission studies believed that it wasn't necessary to broadcast risks for gay

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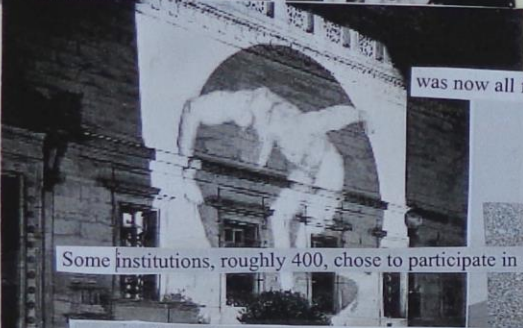


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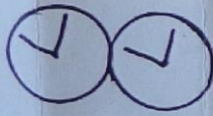
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Lovers, 1988
Dont be afraid of the clocks, they are our time, time has been so generous to us. We imprinted time with the sweet taste of victory. We conquered fate by meeting at a certain TIME in a certain space. We are a product of the time, therefore we give back credit where it is due: time.
We are synchronized, now and forever.
I love you.

the following message:



Felix Gonzalez-Torres - *Untitled (Perfect Lovers)*, 1991, photo: MoMA

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women because "lesbians don't have much sex" (Banzhaf et al., pg. 113)". As a response, The *Safer Sex Handbook for Women* was created. It was an intentionally radical, pro-sex brochure meant to fight back against the "myth of lesbian immunity" to HIV produced by LAP (Lesbian AIDS Project) which was an educational organization created by radical activist Amber Hollibaugh (Day, pg. 37). Hollibaugh regarded the HIV-positive lesbian community as "the disappeared (Hollibaugh, pg. 209)" generation. Designed by visual artist Cynthia Madansky and performance artist Julie Tolentino Wood, the brochure contributed to how groups could unite art and activism to make creations that called for action. "Our main beat isn't with the art world," says a representative of GRAN FURY, "it's with the United States government's lack

of response and the political crisis that underlies the medical crisis of AIDS. If we can use the art world as a tool to broadly articulate our concerns, then we are glad for that support (Grober, pg. 9)". Gay Men's Health Crisis, the same group that Senator Jesse Helms had fought to censor for their gay safe sex handbook for men, were the ones to distribute 67,000 copies. Unfortunately but not surprisingly, this handbook was not widely accepted by the majority public. Though efforts were made to promote safe sex strategies toward women, often they only framed heterosexual women because the main concern was to prevent HIV transmission to children. Because of this, and because of the style of the handbook,

The Safer Sex Handbook for Women remained unprotected. "Their efforts to equip lesbian women with detailed safer sex information was co-opted by the political right who, not viewing queer women's bodies as a threat to HIV in children, instead framed their attempts [of safe queer sex education] as dangerous homosexual propaganda in need of censorship for the sake of symbolically protecting America's children (Day, pg. 140)". This did not stop its wide distribution at often lesbian bars and activist events. Hollibaugh knew that the production of this brochure was essential additionally because not only were non-heterosexual women often absent from the conversations but there was a heavy pattern of unsafe drug use within many LGBT communities at this time which the handbook openly discussed. ACT UP group member and nurse practitioner Risa Denenberg who worked at the Bronx Hospital stated that "Just as lesbians are often invisible in the straight world, injection drug users who have sex with women aren't always visible in the lesbian world. All lesbians struggle with issues related to visibility, yet those of us who call ourselves lesbians often attempt to create a homogenized portrayal of who we are and what we do (Denenberg, pg. 32)".

"I kept finding lesbians with HIV. You know, nobody would say that they had anything to do with the epidemic and nobody would say that lesbians were at risk...I knew that lesbians were at risk and I knew that this was about class and race and I felt like all that I had believed in, and all I had been trying to say in the ways that I was a feminist would be at its best because I would be creating a project that would be built on the class and race and gender of women around HIV who were queer (Hollibaugh, 2004)."

Amber Hollibaugh photographed by Morgan Gwenwald on April 24th, 1982 at the Barnard Sex Conference

LGBT historian Emily Hobson reports that in the 80s and 90s, female prisons had higher rates of transmitted HIV/AIDS than male prisons, even though the male facilities had higher intake reports of HIV-positive inmates (2020). What could be concluded from this is that the lack of attention from the medical community focused on safe sex practices for women who have sex with women, especially during the AIDS epidemic, crucially harmed the female LGBT community. The lack of concern intersected with the refusal of prisons to acknowledge that their prisoners had active sex lives and provide STD protection. Women within prisons suffered a lack of quality healthcare in general -- for instance, inmates in Central California Women's Facility during the 90s were subjected to vaginal exams by minimally trained Correctional Officers because officials rejected the request to pay for a licensed gynecologist or HIV Specialist (LGBT Community Center, fol. 179). "As was the case outside prison, authorities treated women prisoners with HIV as an afterthought in terms of the time, money, and

resources spent on AIDS (Day, pg. 190)". Some of the first grassroots activists to concern themselves with the AIDS epidemic within female prisons were inmates themselves at Bedford Hill in New York; Katrina Haslip, and Doris Moises, Aida Rivera, Gloria Boyd, Kathy Boudin, and Judith Clark.

These women responded with collective action by entering the prisons ICU to take

The Women's Caucus of ACT UP/LA calls upon you to unite in action as we demonstrate at Frontera Women's Prison friday, november 30-1 p.m.

As a part of ACT UP's nation-wide "Week of Outrage" focusing on concerns of women with AIDS, we will protest Frontera's treatment of women with AIDS. Frontera has an AIDS ward where all incarcerated women in California with AIDS are sent. The medical treatment these women receive is completely inadequate: there is money allotted for an infectious disease doctor, yet there is no such doctor; women have no access to ACT UP until they become very ill; the infirmary has no state license resulting in no facilities for L.A. or other states; women in this ward are not allowed to receive visits from their children; the food these women receive is of sub-human quality. We demand that these women be treated properly and receive appropriate health care!

WE DEMAND:

- CONDITIONS: ACCESS TO PROPER MEDICATIONS FOR HIV POSITIVE INMATES ACCORDING TO ACCEPTED PROTOCOLS ALONG WITH SPECIAL DIETS TO MEET THE NEED OF SAME.
- TREATMENT: PROVISION OF A MEDICAL AIDS SPECIALIST, D.O. DOCTOR AND THE UPGRADING OF THE PRISON INFIRMARY FOR STATE LICENSING TO PROVIDE ACUTE CARE SERVICES.
- EDUCATION: DISTRIBUTION OF AND ACCESS TO DENTAL DAMS, CLEAN "WORKS", SAFE SEX EDUCATION AND SAFE "WORKS" EDUCATION FOR ALL INMATES AND STAFF.
- IMMEDIATE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE FOLLOWING: DAILY SICK CALLS, WEEKLY MONITORING OF PWAs, MONTHLY PHYSICALS (INCLUDING PAP SMEARS) FOR HIV POSITIVE INMATES AND BI-ANNUAL GYN EXAMS FOR ALL.

THE DEMONSTRATION BEGINS AT 1:00 p.m.
We will meet to carpool out to Chino at PLUMMER PARK in West Hollywood--
SOUTH PARKING LOT--11:15 a.m.



DIRECTIONS TO FRONTERA WOMEN'S PRISON:

from L.A. take the 50 Freeway East to Euclid Avenue. Take Euclid Avenue south (right) for 5.0 miles to Pine Street. Make a left on Pine Street and get into the right turning lane--make your first right onto Chino-Corona Street. The prison is within one block.

ACT UP/LA WOMEN'S CAUCUS IS UNITED IN ANGER AND COMMITTED TO DIRECT ACTION TO END THE AIDS PANDEMIC. WE DEMAND PROPER TREATMENT OF HIV POSITIVE WOMEN AND QUALITY HEALTHCARE FOR ALL. WE EDUCATE THE PUBLIC ON ALL ISSUES RELATED TO WOMEN AND AIDS. WE ARE NOT SILENT.

for more info, call the ACT UP office at (213) 669-7301

care of the HIV-positive prisoners who had been forced into isolation by the prisons and often received an inadequate concern that pushed their health status into potentially life-threatening. Workers within the prisons ICU and HIV quarantine block were often undereducated and ignorant on the topic, sometimes even refusing to come anywhere near their patients -- forming a group called AIDS Counseling and Education (ACE) in 1988 (Day, pg. 194). These six women often took on the roles of caretakers, helping feed, bathe, and medicate the HIV-positive inmates. They reflected on their experiences, stating that those in the facilities were "in a state of constant anxiety over whether or not we would test positive for HIV. Locked up with one another, sharing the same showers, kitchen, living space, we felt panic... We knew that we would have to help ourselves and each other (Scheffler, 2002)". Though the group's status floated in and out of administrative recognition, including a ban from hospital training sessions after suggesting an end to a ban on condoms and dental dams in women's facilities, they continued their work -- helping women prepare for examinations, leading seminars to inmates, and acting as accompaniments to women's consultations in hope of improving communication with medical staff (Boudin and Clark, pg. 246). What these women accomplished was not a traditional form of radical activism that one might think of, however, what they were able to do within the confines of one of the most restrictive institutions possible in America is undoubtedly a feat of championship.

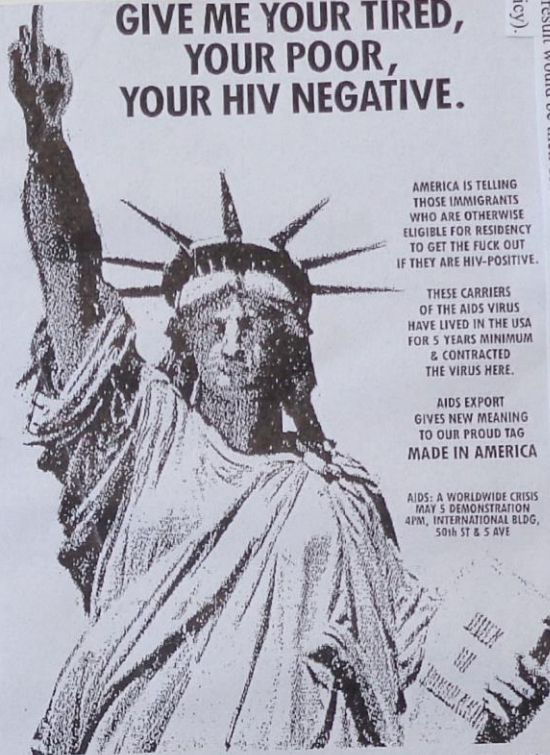
Another group that formed a foundation of health service support that emphasized the importance of acknowledging the intersection of identity was the San Francisco Gay Men of Color Consortium formed in 1989 in response to the lack of efforts established to include the specific experiences of being excluded from the main conversation of AIDS. Although Black and Latino people made up only

21% of the population in America in 1993, Dr. Eunice Diaz reports that they also made up over 50% of the HIV-positive community (Diaz, pg. 8). The first members were 5 HIV-positive gay men: Reggie Williams who was Black, Douglas Yaronon who was Filipino-American, Steve Lew who was Chinese-American, Phill Tingley who was Native American, and Rodrigo Reyes who was Latino-American. All had previously been founders or active members of various HIV activist groups, and they had come together to discuss the complexity of working towards bringing awareness and safety within their communities of color. In reflection of their first meeting, Reggie Williams recalls that:

“One of the most phenomenal things that happened in the meeting was that we all put all our cards on the table. This was a real learning process for all of us. To hear what the specific differences were in traditions and culture between our communities. It was truly amazing to listen, hear, and learn about all of our differences and sameness. To hear and learn about how we all felt that the mainstream had overlooked us, partly because of racism, and how our own ethnic organizations had failed us because of homophobia (1996)”.

Though there were different chapters of AIDS organizations that worked to tackle prevention in communities of color, they found themselves pulling away from the queer community because of rooted homophobia found within the various cultures. They tried to separate AIDS from the idea of being gay, and though anyone was susceptible to AIDS, this often further marginalized gay people of color from their own community. Although homophobia was rampant across the spectrum of racial and ethnic identities, it is important to acknowledge the specifically complex intersection of sexuality and race. **“Respectability was part of a larger interracial pedagogy on earning civil rights and gaining self-respect through proper conduct (Mitchell, pg. 85)”** -- in this way, anything considered ‘sexually deviant’ or going against norms were often considered as furthering their discrimination by members of the non-white community. In response, the San Francisco-based GMCC formed EACH (Early Advocacy and Care of HIV) which was a peer mentor program that helped connect gay men of color to health services and offered support as they began their journey of AIDS treatment. It was considered one of the most successful support programs targeted at queer men of color and EACH set up bases throughout the United States.

GIVE ME YOUR TIRED, YOUR POOR, YOUR HIV NEGATIVE.



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

Gran Fury

AMERICA IS TELLING THOSE IMMIGRANTS WHO ARE OTHERWISE ELIGIBLE FOR RESIDENCY TO GET THE FUCK OUT IF THEY ARE HIV-POSITIVE.

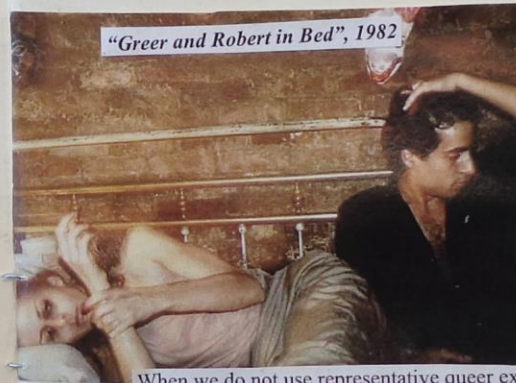
THESE CARRIERS OF THE AIDS VIRUS HAVE LIVED IN THE USA FOR 5 YEARS MINIMUM & CONTRACTED THE VIRUS HERE.

AIDS EXPORT GIVES NEW MEANING TO OUR PROUD TAG MADE IN AMERICA

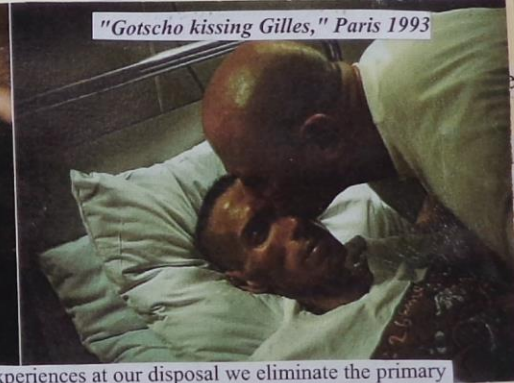
AIDS: A WORLDWIDE CRISIS
MAY 5 DEMONSTRATION
4PM, INTERNATIONAL BLDG,
50th ST & 5 AVE

Representation was a crucial aspect of assuring that the public was knowledgeable and aware of who was most at risk, and activist group GRAN FURY wanted to bring attention to the ways that the government justified inaction because the population most at-risk were not people the government was concerned about prioritizing. From 1987 to 2010, a travel ban affected the immigration experience by labeling people as inadmissible to the United States for fear of them spreading it. Though there were some exceptions to the ban, if one wanted to still come to the United States there was a blatant stigmatism of their health status. “Even if the waiver is granted – which may take three months or longer to obtain, and requires a personal interview at the US Embassy – the person’s passport is endorsed on each entry (The person may not enter the US without the waiver, which must be renegotiated on each entry (The Global Database on HIV-Specific Travel & Residence Restrictions)”. In reality, many people were seeking access to health services to help increase the likelihood of survival that their home country could not provide to them. During these 23 years, immigrants already in the United States, many of whom did not become HIV positive until their life here, were hesitant to get tested or seek medical help in fear that the result would be their forced removal and relocation to their home country (Center for HIV and Law Policy).

“Greer and Robert in Bed”, 1982



“Gotscho kissing Gilles,” Paris 1993

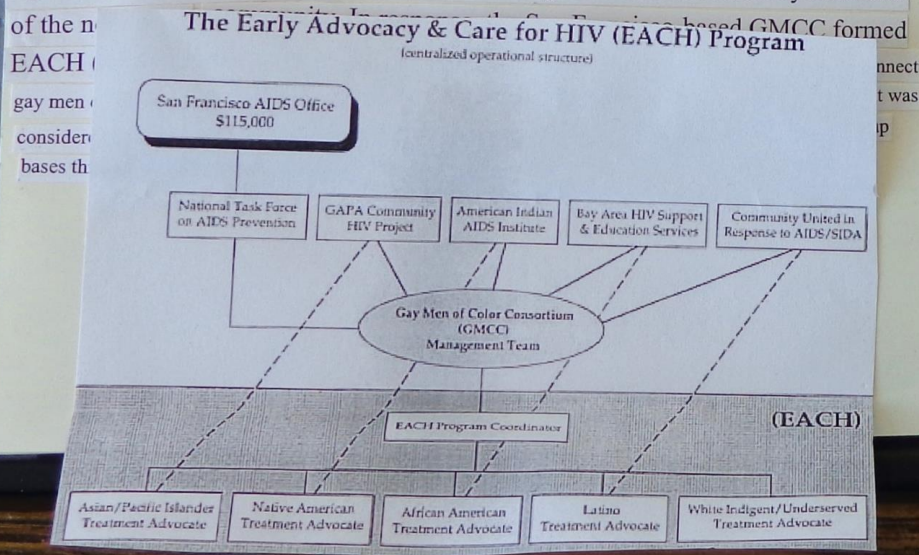


When we do not use representative queer experiences at our disposal we eliminate the primary source of valuable information and instead turn to a disconnected translation from an observer’s point of view that often fails to even center who it should. This is true also within the art world. Curator Marvin Heiferman says that “The communities Nan photographs are often as vulnerable as they are feared, people who must stay in the closet and shun public exposure in order to survive (Ruddy, pg. 358)”. Who he is speaking about is Nan Goldin, an LGBT photographer who focused her camera on subjects most susceptible to AIDS including active drug users, sex workers, and people who were transgender -- specifically in her pieces *Ballad of Sexual Dependency* (1985) *Witness: Against Our Vanishing* (1989). and . In the process, she caught some of the most intimate moments that were so often hidden away from the world.

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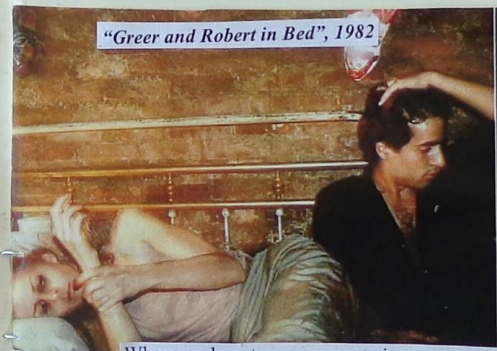
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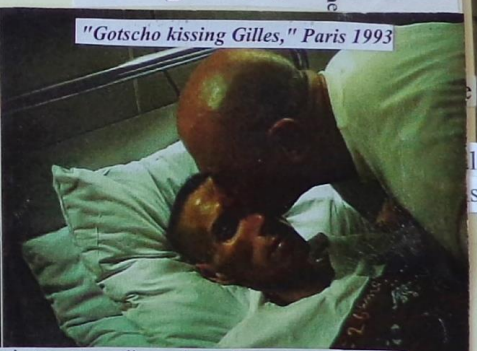
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"It's very important for me to trace people's histories before I lose them (Ruddy, pg. 348)" states photographer Nan Goldin when prompted to expose the purpose behind her work. "I used to think I couldn't lose anyone if I photographed them enough (pg. 351)". This is a popularly shared sentiment surrounding queer art, people within the LGBT community truly felt as though it was left to them to memorialize their people. "I don't ever want to be susceptible to anyone else's version of history... I don't ever want to lose the real memory of anyone again (Ruddy, pg. 358)".

To be susceptible to anyone else's version of history. These words painfully emphasize the terror of knowing that the world that condemns you while living will continue to villainize you when you're dead; when the only living people to tell your story are the voices of those who oppressed you in the first place. To be absent from your own story. Goldin directly addresses the idea of being the bearer of her friend's history and shares the sentiment of how art continues the effort of keeping them alive in a way -

"AIDS changed everything. Our history got cut off at an early age. There is a sense of loss of self also, because of the loss of community... But there's also a feeling that the tribe still goes on (Ruddy, pg. 359)". Art wasn't just a form of emotional release, but it was a form of autonomous history telling, of commemoration of those who were rarely acknowledged properly while alive, a form of activism, and a way to communally mourn. The intimacy that is undeniably present in Goldin's photographs is a melancholic version of mourning the loss of those in them -- something feminist writer Sarah Ruddy (pg. 352) compares to Virginia Woolf's expression "some little language such as lovers use (Woolf, pg. 381)". This can be interpreted to mean that we can see the love, even feel it, or almost hear some low hum of it, but there are no words in our vocabulary to describe it as we are the observers of an asynchronous moment caught between others who share this love. It is a love we will never truly understand ourselves.

Goldin's photography allows the borders between subject, photographer, and audience to crumble as viewers feel the emotions the photos demand, it is somehow both personal and impersonal, we do not know the subjects and yet the moments captured feel as though we have been let in on some secret. We are left to wonder "how could you bear losing this person?" when we, the audience, have never actually met the subject in the photo. "Rather than vainly attempting to negate loss by producing a representation of the lost object, Goldin's images deny this negation by enacting loss.



"Cookie in her Casket", 1989

These images are not monuments to loss but are instead acts of memory that acknowledge the impact of loss individually on and as the body (pg. 352)" author

Sarah Ruddy states. Nan Goldin was a contributor to the New York gallery's exhibit entitled *Witnesses: Against our Vanishing* which is an implicit reference to the growing absence of the LGBT community and artists' attempt to fight back. The National Endowment for the Arts has promised \$10,000 of funding towards this project which contained twenty-three artists who had centered the effects of AIDS in America -- however, because it was considered "primarily political in nature" the grant was canceled. John Frohnmayer, the chairman for NEA who was appointed during the initial art censorship bill, stated that "political discourse ought to be in the political arena, and not in a show sponsored by the Endowment (Walker, pg. 944)". The separation of politics and art is the new unachievable American dream. Art and activism, however, have been prominent partners in crime.



Untitled, 1987

(1954-1992),

David Wojnarowicz

One other contributor to *Witnesses: Against our Vanishing* was the artist David Wojnarowicz, a gay creator who later on died due to complications with AIDS, who wrote frequently about what he had pictured when it came to the future of AIDS activism and expressed openly not his emotions of grief but of anger and frustration. In fact -- one of his pieces expected to be on display in this exhibit, "POSTCARDS FROM AMERICA X Rays from Hell" directly tackled this topic:

"One of the first steps in making the private grief public is the ritual of memorials. I have loved the way memorials take the absence of a human being and make them somehow physical with the use of sound. I have attended a number of memorials in the last five years and at the last one I attended I found

myself suddenly experiencing something akin to rage. I realized halfway through the event that I had witnessed a good number of the same people participating in other previous memorials. What made me angry was realizing that the memorial had little reverberation outside the room it was held in. A tv commercial for handiwipes had a higher impact on the society at large. I got up and left because I didn't think I could control my urge to scream (1989)."

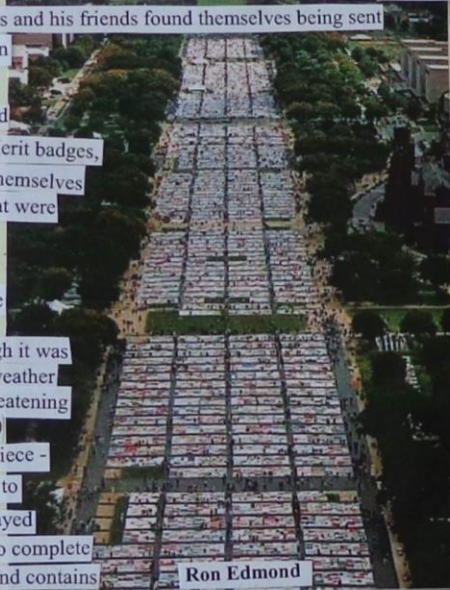
ABSENCE OF LIFE / PRESENCE OF ACTIVISM

November 27th, 1985

Cleve Jones found himself staring at the side of the old San Francisco building that he and others had just covered in hundreds of paper slips which had been handed out at the end of the annual Harvey Milk Memorial March where attendees had filled the papers with names of AIDS victims in a form of commemorative protest against the insufficient action by their government (Stull, pg.84). Standing back, Jones thought it looked a little bit like a quilt. This stuck with him, and after the death of his good friend Marvin Feldman due to HIV complications, he decided to begin what came to be known as the AIDS Memorial Quilt -- or the Names Project.

"On his back porch, Jones and a friend used spray paint to craft a panel for Marvin that was three feet by six feet, evoking, by its very size, a grave (pg. 86)". Jones saw this not only as a form of public mourning

but a call to action. Soon the word spread, and Jones and his friends found themselves being sent hundreds of panels of commemoration. These had been made by lovers, parents, siblings, friends, and other loved ones who were given no direct limit on what could be contained, just that it had to be efficiently secured. Merit badges, letters, wedding rings, flags, and stuffed animals found themselves pinned to the piece. The first showing was 2,000 panels that were displayed in 1987 beside the National Mall walkways.



Ron Edmond

October 1992 was the first showing of the quilt beside the Washington Monument containing 22,000 panels. Though it was supposed to be displayed for 24 hours across 3 days, the weather forced it to be cut short... in a way. Upon seeing the threatening clouds volunteers managed to secure the quilt in under 30 seconds beneath a plastic covering that protected the art piece - but the actual crowd still partially remained. "Committed to reciting all the names the quilt commemorates, people stayed throughout the weekend, sometimes in drenching rain, to complete the reading (pg. 87)". Today, the AIDS Quilt is 54 tons and contains nearly 50,000 panels that commemorate around 105,000 individuals



and is stored at the National AIDS Memorial where parts of it are regularly displayed in public places or schools to bring attention to the loss we suffered not only within the LGBT community but our nation as a whole. "So how political is the quilt? A redescription of the nation, a provocative exposure on the Washington Mall -- even the quilt's form embodies radical values: it is anti hierarchical, authorless, uncensored, centreless; its juxtapositions are often surprising; it has no start and no finish, with no narrative; it monumentalizes the homespun and the intimate (Gambardella, pg. 219)."

Some are active critics of the quilt, however, like activist Douglas Crimp. He believes the quilt contributes to the absence of genuine governmental change. Crimp argues that The NAMES project homogenizes the victims into a palatable public display of mourning that will do little more than cause cooing of the audience. He points to the fact that a quilt is one of the most comfortable items, that this display evokes little and is relatively easy to digest from viewers. "The quilt is a lie and the quilt, and rituals of mass-mourning in general, imply that AIDS is a natural disaster and not a social crisis (pg. 225)".

What Crimp may have been looking for was a more uncomfortable form of social outrage. He did not want demonstrations to beg for pity but for action -- and he like many others thought that this means you must make the public uncomfortable. You must make them look at what is happening around them, celebrations of life are for the living, forms of protest are for the people who are dead, and those most at risk of being lost. Previously, the writing from David Wojnarowicz's *POSTCARDS FROM AMERICA X Rays from Hell* was quoted to speak on behalf of the public mourning process. Unlike Crimp, he believes

that this is still an essential part of activism, he does however criticize that for many, activism stops there. Later in the same piece, he also addresses going beyond

WITH 47,524 DEAD, ART IS NOT ENOUGH

Our culture gives artists permission to name oppression, a permission denied those oppressed.

Outside the pages of this catalogue, permission is being seized by many communities to save their own lives.

WE URGE YOU TO TAKE COLLECTIVE DIRECT ACTION TO END THE AIDS CRISIS

commemoration: "There is a tendency for people affected by this epidemic to police each other or prescribe what the most important gestures would be for dealing with this experience of loss. I resent that.

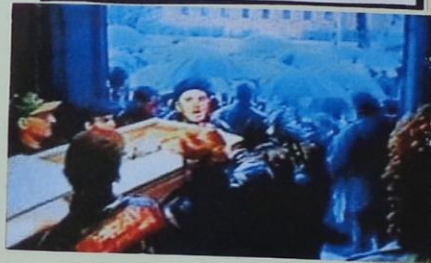
At the same time, I worry that friends will slowly become professional pallbearers, waiting for each death of their lovers, friends, and neighbors, and

polishing their funeral speeches; perfecting their rituals of death rather than a relatively simple ritual of life such as screaming in the streets. I worry because of the urgency of the situation, because of seeing death coming in from the edges of abstraction where those with the luxury of time have cast it. I imagine what it would be like if friends had a demonstration each time a lover or a friend or a stranger died of AIDS. I imagine what it would be like if, each time a lover, friend, or stranger died of this disease, their friends, lovers, or neighbors would take the dead body and drive with it in a car a hundred miles an hour to Washington D.C. and blast through the gates of the White House and come to a screeching halt before the entrance and dump their lifeless form on the front steps (1989)."

Although public forms of highlighting death had been carried out frequently, some of the most well-known were Die-Ins hosted by the group ACT UP where protestors would cover the floors of public spaces with their bodies, holding up cardboard gravestones. Inspired by the Sit-Ins of the Civil Rights movement, the first Die-Ins were from Environmentalist groups from the 70s which sometimes would even build coffins that protestors would lay in, or involve the participants even dropping to the ground in busy intersections to use shock in order to draw attention to health risks from pollution. Author of queer history Michael Bronski reported that he believed Die-Ins were powerful because "there's a cultural hesitation to think about death—and the protest made it physical (Montalvo, 2021)".

Similarly, one can say that the protestors enacted the threat of absence into an ironically present and unignorable thing. However, some took the words of Wojnarowicz more literally.

Mark Lowe Fisher was a member of the group ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) who died in 1992 from AIDS. In his piece "Bury Me Furiously" in which he makes his requests upon his death, he was recorded saying "... my death from AIDS is a form of political assassination. We are taking this action out of love and rage". After his funeral at Judson Memorial Church on November 2nd, his friends fulfilled his wish and carried his coffin to the reelection campaign headquarters of President George H.W. Bush. This was the first public funeral turned political protest held by ACT UP, it was not the last.



Tim Bailey died June 28th, 1993, and was also a member of ACT UP. His fellow members recall that "he wanted his body thrown over the White House gates" but that they "couldn't throw his body over the gates. Not because we didn't share his fury -- but because we loved him too much to treat his mortal remains that way". Instead, on his last days, Bailey made a more broad request where he said "Alright. Do something formal and aesthetic in front of the White House. I won't be there anyway. It'll be for you (Woubshet, pg.1)". His community decided on compromise -- they would not throw his body over the gates, but stage a non-violent protest in which they carried his body to them instead. It had not mattered that his brother arrived with his will that carried this request, police intervened and said the body will not be displayed. The demonstration fought to remain from around one o'clock



"I want my own funeral to be fierce and defiant."

—Mark Lowe Fisher

DIED OF AIDS

10/29/1992

**JOIN US AS WE INDICT
GEORGE BUSH WITH MURDER**

POLITICAL FUNERAL

Monday November 2nd, 3:00 p.m.

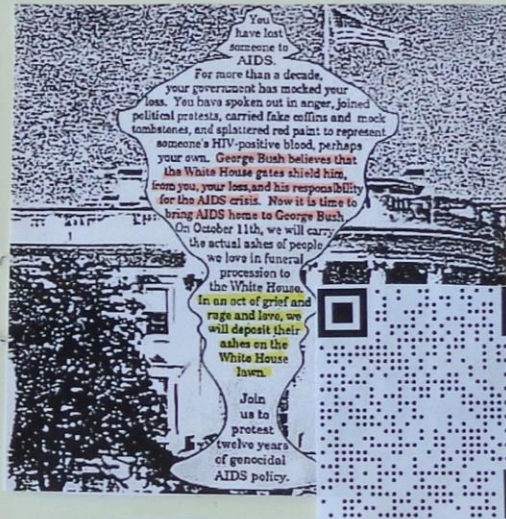
JUDSON MEMORIAL CHURCH

55 Washington Square South

PROCESSION

4:00 p.m.

to six, however, the real action happened nearing the end. Bailey's friends took a chance in order to keep the police from seizing their friend as the cops got hands on the coffin, and they began lifting his body from the casket hoping that the law enforcements fear of touching someone who was AIDS positive would deter them. "Do not pull it out" the police shouted to the pallbearers, while a human chain was formed around Bailey's coffin as his community began chanting "No violence. No violence. No violence (pg. 2)." As the police forced their way forward, grabbing back onto the casket that the deceased was now half in, half out of, the protestors began to lose grip. Police began ramming their bodies into the pallbearers, and the coffin slipped and fell to the ground with the late Tim Bailey landing inside as the crowd began yelling "You've dropped the dead!" to the cops (pg. 3).



In the absence of their loved ones, highlighted by the presence of their lifeless bodies, it seems though activists used public funerals as a way to show the public, as well as the government, the emptiness they must now all bear due to the lack of medical intervention or community care. Inspired by the words of Wojnarowicz previously mentioned was another public commemoration of those lost but instead of carrying their loved ones in a casket, they carried them in urns. The first group ashing was in 1992, put together by ACT UP but started with activist David Robinson. Robinson had originally planned to send then-president H.W. Bush the remains of his life partner Warren upon his request to do something political and public once he passed away (Silverstein, 2016). Instead, he was convinced by his fellow activists to make it a whole event and to invite those also

mourning to follow suit. The crowd, knowing they had no choice to sneak, decided to march -- singing and chanting as they walked with linked arms and hands clenched tightly on the remains of loved ones as they approached the White House gates.

ACT UP PROTESTORS AT THE ASHES ACTION



IN 1992. PHOTO BY SASKIA SCHEFFER

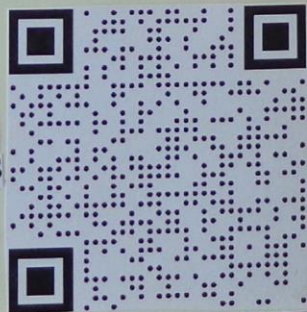
Then, throwing and screaming out the names of those they loved, shouting out goodbyes and thank yous as the remains

filled the air and coated the grass of the president's residence -- police stood by on horseback. Though they tried to form blockades around the gate, it was quickly recognized that the group was going to dump the ashes regardless of where they would be stopped -- and they began tossing them above the officer's heads when they had to. Some placed the boxes carefully on the inside of the gate, while others painted the gates in fake blood, and after the remains were distributed their eulogies began being read aloud through bullhorns (Iovannone, 2018).

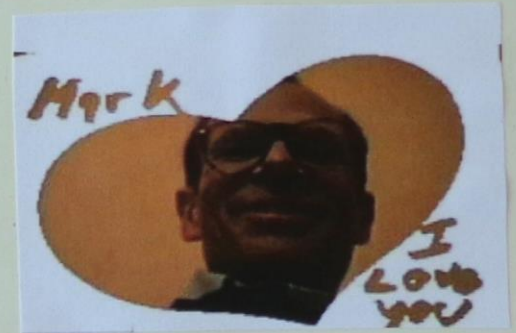
Robinson also participated in the second ashing, held 4 years later that aligned with the display of the AIDS Memorial Quilt purposely. In contrast to the aesthetic and highly debated part-art, part-activist piece that was discussed prior,

Robinson said that "this is a way of showing there is nothing beautiful about it--this is what I'm left with, a box full of ashes and bone chips" in a video of the 1996 event. In an interview for the 20th anniversary of the second ashing, demonstrator Eric Sawyer explained the reasons to Vice, stating:

"Carrying a wooden coffin in the streets doesn't seem to be getting your attention. How about we dump ashes and bone fragments from our friends who died of AIDS on your lawn? How about we literally carry our dead bodies that you condemned to death to your door? Will that get your attention? Part of it was a warning: We



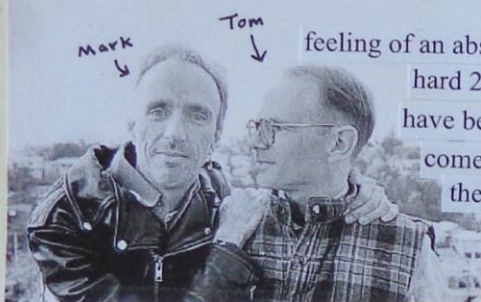
will literally start dumping our dead on your doorsteps unless you get your fucking act together (2016)." When I first began conducting the necessary research for this project, one of the first primary sources I found was what I would consider another form of public commemoration, but in a relatively private way and it only feels just to include it as our end.



The documentary *Silverlake Life: The View from Up Here* was a video project created by Tom Joslin, published after his death on Youtube and at the Sundance Film Festival of 1993, which welcomes one into the last stretch of his life, the majority of which is filmed and narrated by him. This film acts as a case study of the impact AIDS has on one's life, no longer reduced to being a statistic but instead is unimaginably and almost incomprehensibly personal and honest. Throughout the video which walks the line between documentary and informative home-video, the viewer becomes invested in the life of Tom and his lover of 22 years Mark Massi and we watch as the freedom of Tom's life slowly starts closing in and both his physical body and mental state change and fade. As the public funeral demonstrations communicate an absence of life by highlighting those who have already passed, *Silverlake: The View from Up Here* communicates to us the absence of life for those who are still living.

What this film offers us is not a single historical event to memorialize the loss of many lives and call for action, but instead is a multi-month long project to focus primarily on one man and his experience with AIDS -- though one could argue the inseparability of Tom and Mark makes it difficult to tell where the story of one of their lives ends and the other begins. The film explores the magnitude of HIV's impact on daily life, and what is left in his absence after death. What is remarkable and relevant to his story is the way it records how the absence of life does not begin with death, but months in advance as Tom struggles to exist in a world he can no longer keep pace with -- and the way he verbalizes this. After discussing

the way the two fell in love during their time working together at a university, the shaky record of Tom's daily life begins, and almost immediately one can recognize the ways in which it has been limited by the disease. "It's so tough," Tom says in the privacy of a grocery store parking lot. "The simplest five-minute task you have to come to the car and lie down and put the seat down and rest, and catch your breath. What a way to live (laughs), what a way to die (0:6:30)." This is one of the first many morbid but truthful assessments Tom expresses of the course of the documentary. What he



explains countless times is this internal feeling of an absence of will to live. Following a particularly hard 2 weeks, he says to the camera that he "would have been happy to have just died... the phrase I have come up with is that I have lost the steam of life... the steam of life. The thing that powers you and keeps you rolling towards something. I know the lesson is that you're just supposed to roll, and not roll towards something, like a rolling stone, ya know? It's old wisdom and it is wise, but I feel so empty (0:46:21)".

There is a moment that feels encapsulating of both how the loss of life is an experience that prefaces death, and how the identities of being queer and sick make one invisible; the absence of life framed in an untraditional way and the familiarity of being alienated from general society. Captured by Tom as he sits outside his house and watches his street around 54 minutes in.

"I spend most of my time looking, seeing. Just watching, this strange thing passes in front of me. I'm not much of a participant in life anymore, I'm a distant viewer. Just watching it all pass by. Knowing that I'm not gonna have that much longer... This civilization is so strange, I've never felt much a part of it. I think being gay separates you a little. Certainly having AIDS, being a walking dead if you will, separates you from the world (begins singing "It's a Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood")".

It is not long into the film that Tom finds difficulty in holding up the heavy camera himself, his body deteriorating relatively quickly, and Mark takes over the task of cameraman. One in fact becomes so accustomed to the skin-and-bones of our host that when the camera focuses on the couples of friends it is genuinely jarring to see people's physical bodies fill out the screen. By the hour mark, Mark has to cut Tom's nails for him, and by the hour and 10-minute mark, we witness how absent Tom is for his own

mind -- forming incoherent sentences that only Mark seems to be able to translate for his partner's family. At almost 1:15:00 exactly, Mark pans up and down the bed Tom rests in, crying. Tom is dead, and has just passed away. Mark, fulfilling his partner's wishes of broadcasting every part of what AIDS can do to a human, shares with us this moment. Explaining that in his final moments Mark had tried to comfort Tom, knowing he was about to pass as his breathing became labored, by singing to him

-- "You are my sunshine, my only sunshine, you make me happy while skies are gray. You'll never know, dear, how much I love you, please don't take my sunshine away... Ain't he beautiful? He's so beautiful. I love you, darling. All your friends will finish the tape for you okay? We promise, we promise. Bye! Bye Tom!"

Mark says as he tucks Tom in again, trying to comfort him even in death.

We are struck once more by a theme of absence as the documentary concludes with Mark discussing how he now faces the rest of his life alone. Earlier in the film, Tom and Mark had gotten into a brief spat, where Mark had expressed his frustration for Tom not taking his medication consistently. Tom replies that the medication just drags out the inevitable, but Mark who is also HIV positive says how he feels like his partner is deciding for both of them that he will have to be the one to bear the weight of dying alone. Now at the end of the film, he sits with the realization that this has come to fruition and for a moment reminisces on the life they had made.

The film ends with a video of the two dancing and singing together.



TABLE 1. Number and percentage of persons with AIDS, by selected characteristics and period of report — United States, 1981-2000

Characteristic	1981-1987		1988-1992		1993-1995		1996-2000	
	No.	(%)	No.	(%)	No.	(%)	No.	(%)
Sex								
Male	46,251	(92.0)	177,132	(87.5)	211,909	(82.4)	204,230	(77.4)
Female	4,029	(8.0)	25,387	(12.5)	45,353	(17.6)	59,672	(22.6)
Age group (yrs)								
0-4	649	(1.3)	2,763	(1.4)	2,105	(1.0)	1,355	(0.5)
5-12	101	(0.2)	627	(0.3)	550	(0.3)	616	(0.2)
13-19	199	(0.4)	759	(0.4)	1,331	(0.5)	1,722	(0.7)
20-29	10,523	(20.9)	38,507	(19.0)	43,445	(16.9)	36,252	(13.7)
30-39	23,239	(46.2)	92,178	(45.5)	116,335	(45.2)	114,072	(43.1)
40-49	10,472	(20.8)	46,922	(23.2)	67,475	(26.2)	76,632	(29.5)
50-59	3,684	(7.3)	14,494	(7.2)	19,153	(7.4)	23,980	(9.1)
≥60	1,413	(2.8)	6,230	(3.1)	6,718	(2.6)	8,373	(3.2)
Race/Ethnicity								
White, non-Hispanic	30,033	(59.7)	102,130	(50.4)	109,101	(42.4)	88,896	(34.0)
Black, non-Hispanic	12,796	(25.5)	63,319	(31.2)	97,742	(38.0)	118,665	(44.9)
Hispanic*	7,044	(14.0)	35,116	(17.3)	47,442	(18.4)	52,092	(19.7)
Asian/Pacific Islander	312	(0.6)	1,342	(0.7)	1,927	(0.8)	2,147	(0.8)
American Indian/Alaska Native	68	(0.1)	437	(0.2)	870	(0.3)	962	(0.4)
Region†								
Northeast	19,541	(38.9)	62,102	(30.7)	78,000	(30.3)	81,466	(30.8)
North Central	3,772	(7.5)	20,416	(10.1)	25,778	(10.0)	25,532	(9.7)
South	12,933	(25.7)	65,754	(32.5)	89,559	(34.8)	102,576	(38.8)
West	13,502	(26.9)	46,303	(22.9)	55,586	(21.8)	45,574	(17.2)
U.S. territories	524	(1.0)	7,883	(3.9)	8,812	(3.2)	8,829	(3.3)
Vital status								
Living	2,103	(4.2)	20,572	(10.2)	96,998	(37.7)	203,192	(76.9)
Deceased	47,993	(95.5)	181,212	(89.5)	189,048	(74.3)	159,807	(60.1)
Total‡	50,280	(100.0)	202,520	(100.0)	257,262	(100.0)	264,405	(100.0)

* Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race.
 † Northeast-Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Vermont; North Central-Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin; South-Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia; West-Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.
 ‡ Includes persons for whom sex, age, race/ethnicity, region, or vital status are missing.

From 1981 to 2000, 774,467 Americans were diagnosed with AIDS -- 448,060 of which died from disease-related complications with give or take 3,542 whose vitality status was never confirmed. Of these people, 79% were men, the majority of which were (61%) Black or Hispanic (see CDC, Table 1). This does not however

paint a full picture of the impact of AIDS as we have learned that the testing of females

was underperformed and that this can only include persons who took advantage of and had access to testing facilities. This also excludes anyone who died prior to the recognition of the virus in 1981. Although we live in an age where the rate of transmission is declining and the survival rates have increased, the impact the AIDS crisis had on our country, specifically the LGBT community can still be seen today.

The stigma around being HIV positive has remained, and the fact that we have a significant lack of queer elders can partially be attributed to the fact that so many did not receive sufficient life-preserving treatment. The government made significant strides to censor and victim blame the gay community, resulting in generations of people vanishing from our world. AIDS, like most other notable societal crisis, impacted those already marginalized the most.

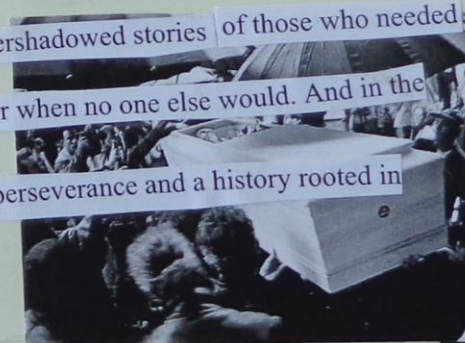
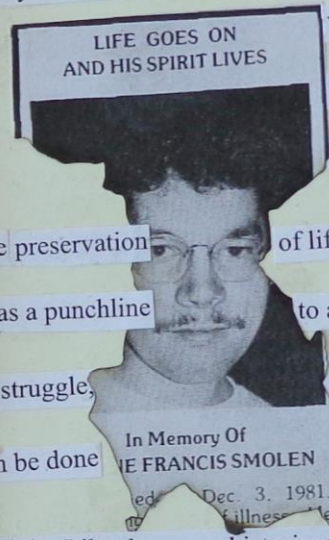
Through our theme of absence, we have exposed the way queer mourning and sexuality were censored from art and mainstream culture as a whole. We have discussed those

who were ignored within our community, and the absence of accurate representation. And lastly, we explored the absence of life and the ways that activists used their vanishing loved ones to call attention to the rapid disappearance of so many people.

AIDS is the story of loss and absence -- as the sick body shrinks we are reminded of the way absence threatens and looms over members of our community. Though anyone would be susceptible to the spread of HIV, it was the population of those most ignored by American society that forced the conversation of safe sex practices and

the preservation of life to the forefront. The first time I heard about AIDS it was a punchline to a joke that commodified the real history behind years of struggle, loss, and activism into a lazy bit for laughs. Nothing can be done to rewrite history, but all can be done to bring it to

the light. Like the queer historians, activists, authors, painters, sculptors, dancers, photographers, poets, and storytellers who worked to preserve accurate retellings of our history, this zine acts as a form of education and commemoration of a past still rarely addressed. In the absence of government, we find dedicated individuals devoting time and energy to capturing our history and advocating for change. In the absence of representation, we find the overlooked and overshadowed stories of those who needed us most and the way they cared for one another when no one else would. And in the absence of life, there remains a presence of perseverance and a history rooted in collective action.



The making of this zine was heavily influenced by the Queer with an upper case 'Q' artists & creators both covered & not who mixed the private & public & blurred the lines that separate the two. This is part essay, part zine, part art project, part diary, part obituary & part something else that doesn't have a name. The making of this is also credited to Rhinos Youth Center, a place replaced now by ugly apartments (do the residents know they rest on holy grounds of mine & others ten years? would they sleep so easily?), Amy Q. who got my hands moving towards creating, my brother Khy who kept alternative art & media in my life, and all the authors of the various zines I claimed from the 'free' box at Box Car Books (also shut down). I don't know what exactly I want you to gain from this zine, but I know what I have gained from making it & in a selfish way that is enough.

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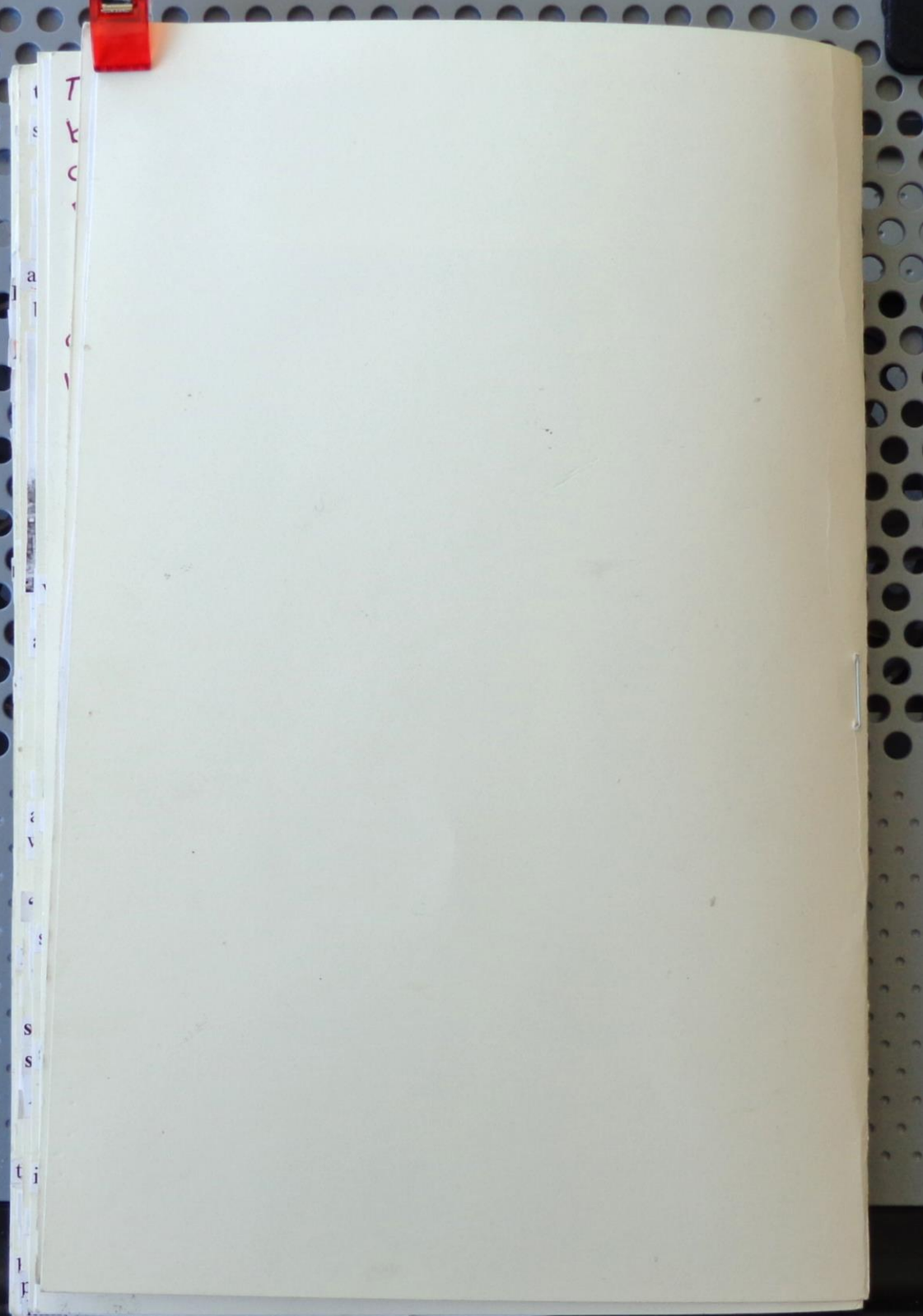
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