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Visual Residues:  
AIDS and Art in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

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## ABSTRACT

Visual Residues:

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Guided by under-studied archival documents, including public-health and pharmaceutical advertisements, as well as contemporaneous visual art and performance pieces by queer artists of color, this dissertation analyses the critical and evolving role that aesthetics have played in combatting HIV/AIDS since the early days of the pandemic. Drawing on methods and convictions from Performance Studies and Queer of Color Critique, this dissertation addresses a racially and sexually diverse range of cultural producers, invested in not only destabilizing the overwhelming focus on affluent white gay men’s perspectives in AIDS studies, but also in circulating their own culturally specific viewpoints, enlisted toward the survival of various communities. When pursuing such an important task, this dissertation demonstrates that one key strategy these producers turn to is the “appropriation” of aesthetics. In more recent years, culture workers have raided Reagan-era archives of art and activism to find tropes and icons they can tailor to fit specific aspects of the AIDS crisis in the 21st century. Salient aesthetic revisions over time have brought queer of color subjects closer to the center of HIV/AIDS narratives and their accompanying images—though in truth, their voices have never been absent. Indeed, many cultural productions linked to the pandemic were created by queer people of color, whose foundational efforts have finally come into clearer focus, crucially undoing white gay men’s often-unquestioned primacy in the history of AIDS. To point out this “alternative” lineage in this history, the dissertation asserts that contemporary queer of color and Indigenous cultural

production is a result or progression of the labor of artists and activists who have been responding to and resisting racist, homophobic, and transphobic frameworks across the last four decades of AIDS.

Aesthetic appropriation then establishes so-called “intergenerational dialogues” between multiple generations of makers and activists who have been laboriously working towards circumventing white supremacy and systemic racism regarding HIV/AIDS. Appropriation remains a relevant tactic today because so many aspects of the ongoing pandemic and its attendant forms of discrimination remain unchanged. As indicated by scholar Elizabeth Freeman’s notion of “temporal drag,” these dynamics have been “dragging” themselves into the present, surfacing vividly, for example, in recent pharmaceutical marketing images that showcase new HIV prevention drugs that fight the virus. This dissertation emphasizes how the *seemingly* innovative strategies of more ‘inclusive’ and ‘updated’ cultures around HIV/AIDS largely trace back to the existing tactics of prior activism. It also examines the paradoxes of reappropriation; the *newest* shift in these cultures not only swerves away from critique but embraces “Big Pharmacology” and advertising agencies turn to well-rehearsed images from the history of AIDS activism for their marketing purposes, preserving their widely-admired styles but using them for politically opposite ends, distinct from their radical origins. The importance of bringing queer of color perspectives to perform an anti-racist, anti-capitalist, and decolonial critique is asserted as vital for a more comprehensive future of AIDS studies.

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*[As a Black male walking through Art AIDS America at the opening, I was anticipating a show that was deeply representative of Black people. I went with a friend. We were so excited to see what work was in the space basically because demographically HIV is us, and we expected to see a lot of work relevant to our experiences. I was disturbed however when I walked in to an utterly white space. I felt like I was back in the 80s and my life didn't matter.*

[...]

*[Artist and organizer Christopher Jordan:] Ok I'm concerned [...] that this show is 30 years behind. You're saying as far as exploring the story of the prevalence of HIV in Black America...*

*[Rock Hushka, co-curator of Art AIDS America:] You have to wait for the next one. (Jordan 2015)*

## INTRODUCTION

### Reimagining Representation of AIDS

On December 17, 2015, a group of thirty protesters gathered at the Tacoma Art Museum in Tacoma, Washington, to stage a protest. To the surprise of the employees and visitors, young activists stormed through the interiors of the museum, chanting in unison “Stop Erasing Black People.” At one point, their bodies dropped to the ground near one another to perform a so-called “die-in,” a form of public performance disrupting everyday flows of movement, grabbing the attention of passersby, and forcing them to participate in the spectacle. The protesters were led by the Tacoma Action Collective (TAC), a Black-led partnership of community organizers who work to “eliminate systemic oppression and structural violence while empowering the people to build autonomous communities rooted in equity and justice” (Stop Erasing Black People 2020). TAC’s protest was aimed at mourning the immense number of Black lives lost to AIDS as well as highlighting the high rates of Black people living with the virus in the contemporary United States. Taking place before its closing night, TAC was protesting the travelling exhibition *Art AIDS America* (2015–2017) curated by Jonathan Katz and Rock Hushka, which evidently ignored these issues in their show. This exhibit, ten years in the making, had the stated mission of showcasing the ways in which AIDS has impacted the history of American art. Although the show claimed to represent a variety of artistic approaches to AIDS, out of 107 artists, the initial checklist for *Art AIDS America* included only five Black artists: Derek Jackson, Kalup Linzy, Glenn Ligon, Divinity Fudge (uncredited), and Kia Labeija (the only Black woman). This was in conflict with the face of AIDS today (Buhl 2016; Kerr 2015; Kerr 2019).

Drawing on statistics from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), throughout the 2010s Black populations continued to experience the most severe burden of HIV compared with other populations in the U.S. Since the beginning of the epidemic, an estimated 270,726 Black people with AIDS have died, including an estimated 7,053 in 2017 (CDC 2015; CDC 2020). TAC's protest reveals that *Art AIDS America*, marketed as a groundbreaking show on visual cultures in the history of AIDS, reproduces representational violence by blatantly erasing Black artists and activists. The die-in and the tagline "Stop Erasing Black People" went viral, placing the anti-Blackness of the art world under a spotlight, and prompting national awareness about the whitewashing of AIDS history. After facing much pressure, the touring show was amended with more diverse voices, as per TAC's request. The exhibit then traveled to Atlanta, the Bronx, and finally Chicago, where it faced its biggest changes. The Chicago instalment added 57 new works, with about half made by artists of color (Katz 2018, 44). Reimagined curatorial approaches were a result of grassroots resistance and TAC's series of demands, outlined in the collective's press release (Kerr 2019, 257).

*Art AIDS America* gestures towards a major problem in how AIDS is represented in contemporary visual cultures. According to critic Theodore (ted) Kerr (2016), this exhibit fits into the corpus of so-called "AIDS revisitation" projects, which includes documentaries, movies, and exhibitions about the early days of the crisis in the United States, primarily focused on the stories of white gay men. Kerr argues that revisitation can be powerful because sharing stories from the history of AIDS can inform the world, we live in now, but centering only affluent gay men as history-makers limits the positive impact such projects can have. TAC's die-in also revisits AIDS history: the protest recalls a tradition of non-violent protocols initially performed

by the collective AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP), a prominent grassroots organization that resisted government negligence and pharmaceutical greed during the first wave of the AIDS crisis. ACT UP staged numerous protests in the late 1980s and early 1990s, mobilizing the die-in as an effective public strategy; “dead” bodies on the ground were outlined with police-style chalk as a symbolic gesture highlighting institutional inaction (Campbell and Gindt 2018, 7; Crimp and Rolston 1990; Foster 2003, 404; Reed 2005, 195). The die-in intervenes in supremacist spaces and creates worlds otherwise suspended by their violence.<sup>1</sup>

Guided by a combination of archival research and close analysis of under-studied multimedia cultural productions related to the AIDS crisis, including performance, visual art, public health programming, memes, and social media postings, this dissertation reimagines how one studies the contemporary representation of HIV/AIDS. As the exhibit *Art AIDS America* reveals, representation of AIDS has been organized around the figure of the white gay man, with queer voices of color and Indigenous voices—and specifically Black queer voices—having been invisible or seriously underrepresented. Centering methods and convictions from Performance Studies and Queer of Color Critique, this dissertation showcases how contemporary cultural workers are invested in destabilizing the centrality of white gay men in AIDS cultural production, as well as white supremacy and systemic racism regarding HIV/AIDS in the art-historical canon and in public-health outreach. More importantly, they circulate their own

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<sup>1</sup> While TAC found inspiration in ACT UP’s die-ins, the collective that was the activist core of the AIDS movement in the late 1980s drew on and expanded the strategies of the civil rights, women’s, gay and lesbian, and anti-war movements from earlier decades.

culturally specific viewpoints, enlisted toward the survival of various communities by employing a variety of performative strategies.

One such key strategy that this dissertation examines from a variety of angles is the reappropriation of aesthetics. TAC articulated and circumvented the lack of Black representation of AIDS in the present, and pointed towards larger problems in the representation of the ongoing AIDS crisis in art historical and museum settings, by appropriating the aesthetics of the protests practiced by ACT UP's political die-in. In addition to TAC, there is a variety of contemporary artists and activists who heavily draw on not only well-rehearsed images and styles initially employed by cultural practitioners in the 1980s, but also Pop Art, minimalism, Black Arts, and other 20th-century movements that played a major influence among trailblazers in AIDS-related art and activism. Indeed, in their responses to the ongoing pandemic, most contemporary artists and activists heavily draw on and further reworked the already-appropriated styles of that 1980s generation. These contemporary artists and culture workers have raided those Reagan-era archives to find tropes and icons they can tailor to fit specific aspects of the AIDS crisis in the 21st century.

This dissertation argues that the reappropriation of aesthetics has been one of the key strategies in works by contemporary artists and activists that respond to the ongoing crisis. In addition, this dissertation proposes that contemporary cultural production is a result or progression of the labor of artists and activists who have been responding to and resisting racist, homophobic, and transphobic frameworks across the last four decades of AIDS. By exploring the "intergenerational dialogues" facilitated by creative appropriation, this dissertation shows that,

despite their frequent erasure, queer people of color were in many cases the progenitors of the art works or aesthetic strategies that still get strategically re-deployed today. Salient aesthetic revisions over time have brought gender-nonconforming and queer of color subjects closer to the center of this narrative and its accompanying images—though in truth, these voices and bodies have never been absent. Indeed, many cultural productions linked to the pandemic were created by queer people of color, whose foundational efforts have finally come into clearer focus, crucially undoing white gay men’s often-unquestioned primacy in the history of AIDS. Today’s cutting-edge artists with regards to AIDS are also predominantly queer and trans people of color, following distinct and culturally specific paths to address their communities and re-center them within AIDS-related discourses. Seriously accounting for these contributions, this dissertation significantly expands approach to studying contemporary AIDS related art and activism.

A major factor that enacts and enables conversations across generations is the correspondence in the conditions that perpetuate unjust politics, which queer activists and artists of color work to mitigate and change. As we will see, biochemical innovations, such as successful anti-HIV medications, are a major factor influencing how histories of the disease are generated. Focusing on the pharmaceutical aspect in AIDS studies allows us to comprehend appropriation more critically. Although appropriation is a major aesthetic strategy that gets reprised across generations, this dissertation refuses its naïve celebration as a nostalgic or foolproof program; instead, this dissertation stresses an ambivalent meditation on its value and limits. Aesthetic reappropriation coincides with perpetually evolving economic, biomedical, and political systems of power that exert major sway over how the disease gets narrated and who are its storytellers. Not only does this complicate any attempt to assign any single, static politics or

utopian character to appropriation, but that practice has itself been taken up recently in retrograde ways, complicit with white supremacy and pharmaceutical capital. Correspondingly, these two systems of power that sustain partial access to privilege play a major role in comprehending the role of appropriation in the history of AIDS in different, often contested, ways.

### **Histories of AIDS: White Gay Men's Primacy in the Field**

As a disease that has had global echoes, AIDS is a contested site with multiple overlapping histories. In the historical and epidemiological sense, the disease was implanted in public consciousness around 1980, when physicians in New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco noticed that a cluster of young homosexual men were dying of a mysterious form of pneumonia (Escoffier 1998, 10). Although it gradually became obvious that the disease was not specific to homosexual men, conservative governments and the news media had already equated AIDS with the “promiscuous gay male body,” as noted in early references to the disease as “gay cancer,” “gay pneumonia,” or “gay plague.” Even the CDC referred to the disease as GRID (Gay-Related Immune Deficiency). Scientists did soon depart from the homophobic term GRID and developed the notion of AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome)—as well as the HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) that causes it—but it was already too late: the association between the disease and homosexuality would continue to organize public and scientific understandings of the epidemic for many years (Geary 2014, 16).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Although it became a part of U.S. public life in the 1980s, the disease has been around for much longer. For instance, Kerr (2016) challenges the narrative of AIDS in an ongoing



As we can see, the “objective” epidemiological understanding of HIV and AIDS itself has a history and protagonists. The possibility of interpreting and analyzing viral nomenclature as a historical fact brings us to another aspect of the disease: as a construct facilitated by government homophobia and racism and media news, as well as activist resistance. When analyzing printed sources on the AIDS crisis in the 1980s, scholar Paula Treichler (1987) theorized the disease as a primarily discursive phenomenon that reflected an “epidemic of meanings or signification” (32). AIDS is a material reality, but it is also a linguistic and visual construct that carries a multiplicity of significations that are, as Treichler (1987) suggests, often fragmentary, contradictory, and incomplete, and not exempt from sexism, racism, and homophobia. Along the same lines, for scholar Douglas Crimp (1987), “AIDS does not exist apart from the practices that conceptualize it, represent it, and respond to it” (3). Following scholar Wende Elizabeth Marshall (2005), such a dual approach to AIDS would mean that the disease is a “socio-cultural and political-economic phenomenon with biological manifestation” (2515). These scholars do understand that there is a material and biological aspect to AIDS that deteriorates the body, but they argue that our understanding of the disease is largely shaped by a variety of contested representational and cultural practices created by government establishments, science, and the media.

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project that centers the life of Robert Rayford. Born in St. Louis Missouri, fifteen-year-old Rayford died of unknown complications in 1969. On the autopsy of saved tissues in 1987, it was discovered that Rayford passed due to Kaposi Sarcoma, an opportunistic infection that was not known to be related to HIV and AIDS at the time of his death (Kerr 2016). Rayford’s case challenged knowledge about AIDS, as a disease that may have been present longer than its “official” history has presupposed.

Although it has been made publicly known that AIDS is as much a heterosexual reality as it is a homosexual one, because of early conjoined political, epidemiological, and media influences, AIDS has been embedded in U.S. consciousness as a gay male disease. In responding to the contested nature of the disease, the movement of united affluent gay men used “a formidable store of cultural and social resources [...] to shape policies towards AIDS treatments, research, and prevention,” modeled after the activism of the Stonewall Riots in 1969 (Escoffier 1998, 2). As a result, lobbies of affluent gay men also had immense influence in shaping epidemiological, cultural, and political responses to the disease, as was seen with the approval of the first successful antiretroviral therapies (ART). Initially introduced at the 1996 International AIDS Conference in Vancouver, ART considerably prolonged the lives of people living with HIV and reduced their chances of transmitting the virus to others. In effect, ART initiated discourses about AIDS as a manageable illness. These developments also initiated conversations about a so called “post-crisis” or “post-AIDS” era and cultures that reflect the gay community’s “effort to distance itself from death, illness, and the stigmatization of [the disease]” (Butler 2004, 95).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> According to scholar Michael Hurley (2003), conversations about the “post-crisis” entail gay men’s aspirations to live their lives separately from HIV and at a distance from the effects of the epidemic. An exemplar of an early and widely discussed post-AIDS discourse was the 1996 New York Times article “When Plagues End: Notes on the Twilight of an Epidemic.” Written by gay male neoconservative journalist Andrew Sullivan, the article declared the end of the plague based on government approval of antiretroviral therapies. Although Sullivan (1996) explicitly states that “[t]he vast majority of H.I.V.-positive people in the world, and a significant minority in America [...] will not have access to the expensive and effective new drug treatments now available [a]nd many Americans—especially blacks and Latinos—will still die,” that did not stop him from making such controversial conclusions.

Although they first developed with ART in 1996, post-crisis conversations were reaffirmed in July 2012 when the FDA approved Pre-exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP), a daily pill regimen that successfully prevents the contraction of HIV. As with ART, PrEP, which has been in theory targeted towards the social groups disproportionately vulnerable to HIV and AIDS—including Black men, women, and trans people—has in practice been mostly consumed by affluent white gay men in urban areas (Black AIDS Institute 2016). As is clear, biochemical achievements in science represent yet more instances in the history of AIDS that expand its material and discursive trajectories.

According to scholars Jih-Fei Cheng, Alexandra Juhasz, and Nishant Shahani (2020), with the invention of antiretroviral drug combination therapies, the crisis rhetoric in the U.S. has been moved to the Global South and communities of color in the Global North (2). These scholars add an additional layer to the history of the disease, attached to its temporal and spatial dimensions. For these scholars AIDS “is not merely a crisis in epidemiological terms; rather, it is the uneven and varying spatialization and temporalization of crises” (Cheng, Juhasz, and Shahani 2020, 2). These variable aspects of the crisis are clear if we consider that the “post-AIDS” narratives are burgeoning at the same moment that socioeconomically vulnerable communities of color continue to have partial or obstructed access to medication, and as a result, disproportionately high rates of the virus. A large number of scholars and cultural workers approach AIDS as a matter of the past, but their narratives disregard multiple conditions that contribute to continuing high rates of the virus, including downward socioeconomic mobility, mass incarceration, unstable housing, inadequate healthcare, HIV stigma and criminalization (Cheng 2016; Geary 2014; Gossett 2014; Shavers and Shavers 2006; Watkins-Hayes 2014). The

question is: How does this alleged post-crisis stage look for those communities who continue to live in the time of the crisis?

Notably, part of the problem lies in the way that AIDS has been narrated. Historical retrospectives, such as *Art AIDS America*, suggest the disease stopped being a problem for affluent gay men after they acquired access to ART. According to such narratives, AIDS began on July 3, 1981, with physician and journalist Lawrence Altman's article in *The New York Times*, "Rare Cancer seen in 41 Homosexuals," which drew on a report by the CDC, and ended at the Vancouver conference in 1996 with the announcement of ART. Cheng, Juhasz, and Shahani (2020) claim that such narratives presuppose "a linear or singular history with one simple subject" (4). Framing "the AIDS crisis" within such static temporal parameters poses a danger to the communities who still live in the time of the crisis, because they frame white gay male experience as the defining factor in narratives about AIDS. Accordingly, there is need for a method that would help re-envision the historiography of AIDS and center queer of color perspectives.

### **Performance, AIDS, and Resistance: Queering the "Post-crisis" Temporalities**

Unlike AIDS scholarship that approaches the disease through firmly-set art historical canons or quantitative research that amasses data about origins, infections, death, and disease-management—two approaches that, in U.S. contexts, typically privilege the experiences of white gay men—this dissertation engages understudied queer of color art, activism, and (social) media production to challenge these outdated canons and traditions. Centering anti-racist and decolonial methods honed by Performance Studies and Queer of Color Critique, I impose new,

critical frameworks around whiteness and masculinity, refusing to treat these as monolithic norms across the long histories of AIDS scholarship. In addition, this dissertation examines immensely rich, but underestimated archival mass that offers a significant insight into how these norms were constructed, including public health messaging, news reports, and pharmaceutical advertising—a so-called “medicinal” cultural production, to which I will return.

Historically, scholars in Performance Studies have long demonstrated how health crises can bear a tremendous impact on developments in performance, which offer powerful means of shaping everyday resistance to racist, homophobic, and transphobic patterns of disproportionate affliction and unequal care (Arnold and Bailey 2009; Bailey 2009; Browning; Chambers-Letson 2010; Levine 2021; Román 1998; 2000). In the cultural history of AIDS, performance has, as scholar David Román (2000) argues, “proved [to be] a powerful means of intervening in the public understanding and experience of AIDS and of countering neglect of it by the larger culture [as well] provided a different perspective on events reported in the dominant media, including those of gay culture” (2000, 8). An example of such performance in contemporary times is TAC’s die-in, which influenced changes in *Art AIDS America’s* checklist. In this case, their die-in was a political performance that, by stopping everyday flows of movement, disrupted the status quo and made something happen.

TAC mobilized performance to intervene in supremacist spaces. Following scholar Marcela Fuentes’ (2019), one might think about TAC’s performance as a medium able to “reveal, make sense of, problematize, and interpellate local systems of power... and build counterhegemonic power” (4). TAC’s effort could be labelled a “world-making” performance, one that may “open new possibilities for valuing the lives and practices of people who have been

devalued and degraded within capitalism and related formations like white supremacy, colonialism, patriarchy, and heterosexism” (Chambers-Letson 2016, 152). This dissertation shows how world-making performances (both cultural and quotidian) unapologetically resists the radical conditions that contribute to the representational erasure of people of color in AIDS studies.

Expanding on Performance Studies tradition, this dissertation explores how a range of cultural activists and thinkers have combatted AIDS itself as well as the white, cis-masculine biases of the best-known anti-AIDS campaigns. Driven by an eagerness to provide a method that would reimagine visual cultures of AIDS from a more inclusive standpoint, this dissertation accounts for and expands on this lineage of cultural performance that has combatted (mis)perceptions of the virus. This dissertation also analyzes other cultural and quotidian forms as historically specific forms of performance, including visual and performance art; media production, including social media and memes; physical, verbal, and graphic forms of protest, including public posters and billboards; health rituals and regimens of care; drug advertisements; and medical surveillance, that have emerged over four decades of the ongoing AIDS crisis.

As an intellectual tradition, Performance Studies has also been intervening in the fields of Gender and Sexuality, Queer Studies, and Queer of Color Critique as a methodological practice that rethinks the time, space, and contributions of queer and trans people of color in the flows of AIDS histories. These fields allow us to understand the role played by systemic social inequalities in “constructing” gender, race, and sexuality, as well as in generating “alternative” historical narratives of the disease. Performance Studies attends to performance as an analytic lens and a method of inquiry and intervention and the field also allows for reconsidering history

merely as a “constructed” narrative that can be rewritten or re-performed, and therefore revised or “re-enacted” (Schneider 2011).<sup>4</sup> Equally as contested in its scholarly use as the notion of “performance,” “queer” has also had multiple interpretations, as a non-normative identity, a practice, and a politics and method for analyzing identities, heteropatriarchal systems of time, space, and life (Butler 1993; Cohen 1997; Jagose 2013; Sedgwick and Parker 2013). As a method, Queer Theory has provided critical vocabularies by revising or “queering” normative histories centered on state-run normativities, including marriage, monogamy, health, citizenship, and the notion of a “post-AIDS” society.

As Queer Studies scholar Carla Freccero (2011) argues, queer temporality departs from the linear concept of time by “denormativiz[ing] temporality through its relation to desire, fantasy, wish, and with the impossibility of sustaining linear narratives of teleological time” (21). In many cases, linear narratives of teleological time are related to the idea of progress and completion, and as a result, they erase the lives of queer and trans subjects of color lives and write them out of history (Dishaw 1999; Freeman 2001; Halberstam 2005; Love 2009). Thus, queering temporalities allows us to rethink exclusionary and partial histories and imagine alternative historical protagonists as they converse across time. Specifically, queering the temporalities of AIDS enables us to centralize queer figures of color and place dismissed cultural

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<sup>4</sup> In her study on performances of re-enactment, scholar Rebecca Schneider (2011) argues that all communicative behavior is a practice of reenactment, hence the definition of performance as a “practice of re-playing or re-doing [that can be] repeated or performed multiple times (Schneider 2011, 2). Placing such a definition in temporal perspective demonstrates that “[t]he past can disrupt the present [...], but so too can the present disrupt the past [...]; neither are entirely “over” nor discrete, but partially and porously persist” (Schneider 2011, 15). Therefore, reenactment “troubles linear temporality by offering at least the suggestion of recurrence, or return, even if the practice is peppered with its own ongoing incompleteness” (30).

work in conversation with historical canons that have historically reproduced and maintained whiteness and masculinity

### **AIDS Studies, “Temporal Drag,” and the Appropriation of Aesthetics**

This dissertation argues that a major factor that prompts intergenerational dialogues and the rethinking of the visual cultures of AIDS are the overlapping conditions that produce radical conditions of erasure for socioeconomically vulnerable communities. Partial epidemiology, greedy pharmaceutical companies, and government responses to the disease are just some of the factors that sustain these conditions: as during the initial crisis years, HIV epidemiology still explains the proliferation of the virus exclusively in behavioral terms, while the consumer-oriented public health and pharmaceutical industries preach that maintaining one’s health is one’s own responsibility and commitment. Since these ongoing detrimental conditions are “dragging” themselves into the present, the dissertation accounts for scholar Elizabeth Freeman’s (2000) notion of “temporal drag” (728).

Drawing on Freeman (2000), these problematic conditions may “pull of the past upon the present” (Freeman 2000, 728). Histories of events are “dragging” the temporal past into the present, establishing a dialogue between the two. Similarly, intergenerational dialogues resemble scholar Carolyn Dinshaw’s (2009) notion of “the queer historical impulse,” an instinct to make connections between the past and the present that cannot be reduced to linear narratives of time and kinship (1). Dinshaw’s idea of a cross-temporal “touch” allows us to rethink the way in which contemporary cultural production brings the past forward into the present. Under such consideration, the present is understood as a continual unfolding of past events: accumulations of



events that make us understand past and present as a cumulative process. We could also think about intergenerational touches through scholar José Esteban Muñoz's (2009) notion of "haunting." According to Muñoz (2009), "the networks of commonality and the structures of feeling [...] link queers across different identity markers, including positive and negative antibody status as well as bodies separated along generational lines" (47).

As several contemporary cultural workers have disclosed, staying in these cross-generational "networks of commonality" and nurturing the "touch" can be achieved by appropriating activism and aesthetic strategies from the first decade of the AIDS emergency. This dissertation approaches aesthetic appropriation as it appears in its art historical use, but it also expands thinking about this notion through a performance studies and queer studies lens. In the art historical definition, appropriation concerns a *new* use of pre-existing objects or styles, images, or objects. To appropriate means to intentionally adopt, borrow, copy, or recycle an existing visual image or other aesthetic form. There is little or no transformation applied to the appropriated object; the aspect that differentiates the "original" from its appropriated form is the new context.

Historically, appropriation as an aesthetic strategy or technique rose to prominence in European avant-garde modernist movements in the early 20th century, when Dadaism, surrealism, and cubism started implementing the use of utilitarian objects in the art context (Welchman 2001, 19–20, 29). Copying or imitation—appropriating—in these movements is, however, closely related to the history of colonization, which makes the origins of appropriation

a white supremacist cultural practice (Evans 2009, 19-20).<sup>5</sup> Appropriation proliferated in the post-World War II era, with the rise of consumerism. Artists, such as Andy Warhol, started adapting and implementing images from mass media, from magazines to television, bringing pop culture into museum and galleries (Evans 2009, 13). Pop Art, a genre I will discuss more in Chapter 4, is a genre that is entirely dependent on appropriation, as it intertwines elements of mass media, pop culture, utilitarian objects, and traditional art forms, such as painting and sculpture. In addition, appropriation has also been a political strategy, used by feminist artists beginning in the late 1970s. Artists, including Jenny Holzer, Barbara Kruger, Sherrie Levine, and Cindy Sherman used a combination of artistic and quotidian forms, including photography, mass media, and advertising, to introduce missing female perspectives in the art world and reinvent feminist representation in visual cultures by stressing sexual difference.

These artists used the appropriation of aesthetics as a major strategy to revolutionize predominantly heterosexual and male art historical canon by asking questions like, to whom is the presentation directed and who is excluded or misrepresented (Engel 2003, 181-183; Meyer 2004, 24-6; Spector 1995, 4-5; Katz 2015, 32-33). Ironically, when reinventing this representation, focus on gender and sexual difference occurred at the expense of other

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<sup>5</sup> Scholar John C. Welchman thinks about appropriation as an integral part of historical colonization, as “relocation, annexation or theft of cultural properties—whether objects, ideas or notations — associated with the rise of European colonialism and global capital” (10). European avant-garde movements that developed consecutively with colonial conquests are not exempt from history. As scholar and artist Coco Fusco (1994) reminds us, cubists and Dadaists of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century were fascinated by and drew heavily on African aesthetic traditions and gestures, “ranging from dressing up and dancing as ‘Africans,’ to making ‘primitive-looking’ masks and sketches”, but at the same time they erased their original sources, and in the art historical canons, still today, they are taught as progenitors of innovative art (149–150).

intersectional identities, including race and class, as the list of predominantly white feminist artist testifies. In a similar fashion, artists during the AIDS emergency in the 1980s used appropriation to add missing queer voices in the artistic discourse and create representation that would resist homophobic approaches to AIDS (Crimp 1987; Grover and Molnar 1989; Meyer 1992; Katz 2015; Treichler 1987). Inspired by Pop Art, minimalism, and feminist art, AIDS-related art embraced “mass culture that obscured the differences between original and reproduction, high and low art, entertainment and information, art and advertising” (Grover 1989, 2). Regardless of the efforts, similar to the omission of race in the feminist art of previous decades, AIDS representation in the 1980s initially centered white gay men’s experiences.

Approached through a lens of performance theory and scholarship in queer temporalities, appropriation converses with “temporal drag.” “Dragged” through the decades, we can see that the aesthetic processes of copying and reproducing are integral to making the tie between different queer generations live through appropriative aesthetics. These processes enable the appropriation of images, styles, and forms from the cultural past to acquire new meanings in new contexts. As the curator Nancy Spector (1995) argues, appropriation can be considered a “form of communication” that “presupposes the coexistence of multiple voices and competing discursive practices that generate meaning through the analogies and contradictions that are generated between them” (15–6). In other words, an artwork is never simply a product of the present moment, but instead carries the residue of a variety of significations from the past.

It is important to mention that while the appropriation of aesthetics is similar across different generations of makers, the specific methods, implications, and effects of reappropriation vary greatly across media, reflecting different community histories and cultural

contexts that are part of a more expansive, inclusive history of AIDS in the U. S.

“Recontextualization” is important, as it can shift the meaning and intention of an appropriated image or style. Regarding AIDS studies, this means that although newer generations of cultural workers and activists have used the appropriation of styles and images from the history of AIDS activism to resist hegemonic power dynamics through aesthetics, this strategy can have multiple other effects once recontextualized, all depending on how it is being used, and of course, by whom; appropriation can be celebratory or political, but also ironic, static, lazy, illegible, or even ineffectual or counterproductive. Citations and near-duplication of famous gestures from the history of AIDS-related art and activism are heavily dependent on the cultural, economic, and ideological contexts around them that have changed massively, and their use can re-center familiar power classes of white gay men in the visual cultures of AIDS. Respectively, the appropriation of well-known images has also been utilized by the systems of power that enhance and sustain inequality and white supremacy.

The *seemingly* innovative strategies of more ‘inclusive’ and ‘updated’ visual and performance cultures around HIV/AIDS largely trace back to existing tactics of prior activism, including those developed by and for people of color in the earliest years of AIDS. In contrast, the genuinely *newest* shift in these cultures—most obvious in the celebratory showcasing of new anti-HIV medications and its users—not only exhibits a swerve from critique to an embrace of Big Pharmacology and its loyal patient-citizens, but also involves a *resurgence* of those affluent, physically robust gay white male subjects whom other activists have worked so hard to de-center. I unravel these problems further in Chapters 4 and 5: as contemporary pharmaceutical messaging and social media marketing show, pharmaceutical agencies turn to well-rehearsed,

familiar images from the history of AIDS activism for their marketing purposes—preserving their widely-admired styles towards politically opposite ends, quite apart from their radical origins.

### **Histories of AIDS Representation**

Homophobic right-wing affiliated establishments have had a major influence on the development of AIDS representation and its turn to appropriation of earlier aesthetic genres. Scholar Simon Watney (1997) argues that AIDS was “not only a medical crisis on an unparalleled scale, [but] it involve[d] a crisis of representation itself, a crisis over the entire framing of knowledge about the human body and its capacities for sexual pleasure” (9). Since initially the disease was attached to gay male bodies and their sexual practices, the omnipresent representation of AIDS was personified in the image of a dying gay male body, represented as a result of the promiscuous 1970s. Such portrayals have become “a convenient symbol for moral majoritarians who [saw] the virus [as] a retribution for past and current sins, a deserved and necessary ending caused by the ‘sexual revolution’” (Lawrence 1997, 243). Bodies of people with AIDS were portrayed as sites of toxicity, decay, and fragility, as figures that were typically “ravaged, disfigured, and debilitated by the syndrome; [...] generally alone, desperate, but resigned to their ‘inevitable’ deaths” (Crimp 2004, 118).

Bodies covered with Kaposi’s sarcoma lesions were often seen as fragile, sick, and toxic, as not in control of their own existence and as sites of abjection; for instance, in documentary photographs by Nicholas Nixon, which were united in the retrospective *Pictures of People* (1988) at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Among the five serial projects, each

organized around a central unifying theme, the section “People with AIDS: Excerpts from Work in Progress” was dedicated to AIDS. This section documented Tom Moran’s physical deterioration from an AIDS-related illness from August 1987 until a few days before his death in February 1988 (see fig. 1). The photographer claimed such an approach to documenting AIDS was to “humanize the disease, to make it a little bit less something that people see at arm’s length” (Nixon 1989, 45). In a similar vein, Rosalind Solomon’s *Portraits in the Time of AIDS* (1988), exhibited at the Grey Art Gallery in New York, utilizes a similar photojournalist approach in depicting AIDS through a factual and melodramatic lens (see fig. 2).

Although works by both photographers were praised by the critics as “unsentimental, honest, and committed portrayal[s] of the devastating illness,” they nevertheless contribute to a problematic depiction of the sick body (Crimp 2004, 117). Both projects were criticized for how they represented their subjects with a lack of social and political context (Atkins 1989, 27; Ogdon 2001, 75-76). Documentary photographs of close-up sad faces in isolation or in hospital settings work in tandem with the portrayal of AIDS in the media, reinforcing the negative representation of the vanishing body.<sup>6</sup> With the aim of recuperating the damage caused by homophobic politics, this representational crisis signified the inaugural moment when visual cultures consolidated around whiteness and masculinity. Because of this consolidation, much of

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<sup>6</sup> Although such images may be factual, by isolating their subjects, these photographs reduce the complex reality of AIDS to a set of stereotypical approaches perpetuated by media and its urge to “sell magazines” (Atkins 1989, 27; Kalin 1990, 24; Ogdon 2001, 76). As a resistance to such problematic portrayals of people with AIDS, ACT UP protested Nixon’s exhibit and distributed flyers that, among other demands, read “No more pictures without context” and “STOP LOOKING AT US; START LISTENING TO US” (Grover 1992, 39–40). The activists were demanding images of “vibrant, angry, loving, sexy, beautiful [people living with AIDS], acting and fighting back” (Atkins 1989, 27).

the visual art and initial scholarship in gender and sexuality with respect to AIDS was produced by and for white gay men. One of the ways to circumvent this representation was to portray the opposite of the disease—a sexualized healthy body, as was seen across a variety of safer sex campaigns that eroticized condoms (see fig. 3). In most cases, however, these campaigns usually gathered a team of professional models or safer sex ambassadors, such as well-known porn actors or those with influence in gay men’s communities, with celebrated photographers and prominent advertising agencies, reproducing the problematic nature of a white gaze that has historically oversexualized and pathologized bodies of color and Black bodies. I will discuss this further in Chapters 1 and 2.

Aside from documentary photography, at the time of the so-called “culture wars,” initially enacted by Ronald Reagan’s administration through multiple acts of censorship in the art world, artists began thinking about representation and visual cultures strategically.<sup>7</sup> As I noted preciously, artists turned to appropriation or earlier genres that had developed alongside burgeoning consumerism and post-World War II mass culture, including Pop Art, minimalism, and feminist art, to express the urgency of the moment. Appropriating art from previous decades was meant to deconstruct, expand, and reimagine the naïvely realist and policed visual cultures of AIDS representation, which were not adequately capturing the complexities of the disease.

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<sup>7</sup> For instance, in 1987, Senator Jesse Helms’ [R-NC] amendment prohibiting the use of any government funds for materials and activities that promote or encourage homosexual activities, and placing restrictions on art supported by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and other federally funded arts agencies and institutions (Katz 2015, 29-30). An example of how the culture wars affected the arts world is the cancellation of the Robert Mapplethorpe retrospective *The Perfect Moment* by the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, in 1989, as well as the defunding of the so-called NEA Four, a group of four performance artists whose grants were vetoed due to the work’s content that same year.

Appropriation, as scholar James Meyer (1992) argues, was a sign of “progressive art” or resistance, not only towards the traditional arts but also towards conservative and homophobic political regimes of power. While governments and religious organizations used information about AIDS to forward their homophobic agendas, artists enhanced anti-homophobic propaganda by utilizing methods and semiotics of commodity culture and advertising to re-educate the masses and suggest new ways of looking at AIDS; for example, the art collective Silence=Death Project.

The collective was mostly known for the ubiquitous political poster *Silence=Death* (1987) that gradually became a symbol of the AIDS movement; with large white lettering on the bottom, the entirely black poster with a small pink triangle turned right side up remakes the symbol, originally of homosexual persecution during the Nazi period, into an emblem of gay liberation (see fig. 4) (Crimp 1987, 7; Meyer 1992, 65). Subsequently, this imagery made an appearance as part of the installation *Let the Record Show...* (1987) in the window of the New Museum in New York, at the same time the collective ACT UP was being formed (see fig. 5).<sup>8</sup> Some members of the Silence=Death Project were also founding members of the collective Gran Fury, established in 1988. Members of both collectives worked in advertising, design, and propaganda and were familiar with the power of the image and visual culture. As a result, they

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<sup>8</sup> In the installation, a large neon sign that reads “Silence=Death” is placed next to the large photomural of the Nuremberg trials. In front of the large image, there are six life-size, carved-out photographs of a so called “AIDS criminals” and their statements regarding AIDS and homosexuality (Crimp 1987, 7). Hence, the installation parallels these right-wing figures and their homophobic statements with the Nazi era. This use of pop culture, historical ephemera, and news was a strategic way to create counter-discourses to mainstream perception of AIDS at the time.



turned to pop culture, mass media, and mechanical reproduction to shape the counter-discourses that would resist homophobic and racial stereotypes, as well as contextualize scientific facts that were circulating in the public.

Gran Fury appropriated already established formats to spread messages about rigorous and unequal health politics by creating “political posters” that accompanied ACT UP’s demonstrations. The collective combined already-circulating images from mass media and placed them in a new context. In provocative posters, a variety of reversed discourses and detrimental statistics were used to challenge the problematic politics of the time and prompt a response from the masses (see fig. 6). The activists aimed to forward conversations approachable to all parts of the public, to “provoke them, cause a reaction, make them think, and hopefully educate them” (Deitcher 1994, 222). Even Gran Fury’s name is an appropriation of the Plymouth automobile used for undercover police work (Gober 1994, 233; Cohen 2015, 6). The collective put a lot of effort into infiltrating existing mainstream discourses with the aim of changing and expanding them from within.

Another influential example in early AIDS visual cultures was artist Felix Gonzales-Torres, whose cutting-edge work I will return to in Chapter 3. Amongst other artists and activists, Gonzales-Torres is known for reinventing the customary representation of the dying body and same-sex desire, while using unconventional aesthetic means, such as stacks of paper, piles of candy, and billboards. For instance, *Untitled* (1991), a printed billboard displayed in twenty-four locations in New York in 1992, depicts a black and white close up of a double bed, empty and unmade, with fresh indentations of two heads on the pillows (see fig. 7). The dents in the two pillows and the wrinkled sheets hint towards both the absence and presence of bodies

resting in the bed. While the imagery might imply intimacies that occurred in the bed, or possible death and loneliness, the broader context in which Gonzales-Torres created his work gestures towards absent bodies lost due to AIDS. As scholar José Esteban Muñoz (1999) suggests, while some spectators had to ask for clarification when encountering such pieces in public spaces, “[f]or others, those touched by the catastrophe of HIV and other genocidal epidemics, the image is an allusion to the loss, absence, and negation that blankets queer lives, Latino/a lives, and many other communities at risk” (170). The billboards were strategically set up throughout Manhattan, Brooklyn, and Queens, with locations ranging from 10th Avenue near the Javits Center to the far corners of Brighton Beach (Conaty 2012). Through this distribution of billboards, the work reached diverse populations living across these boroughs.

With many successful protests and direct actions, visual activism around AIDS began to slow down with the advent of ART in the mid-1990s. This is also the period when many cultural workers and artists were lost to AIDS-related complications. Reaching the point of exhaustion, Gran Fury dissolved in 1994 (12<sup>th</sup> Session of the *École du Magasin* 1994, 184). At the time, the mainstream media and affluent gay lobbies used successful antiretroviral therapies to proclaim that the AIDS crisis is over, which prompted silence about AIDS, all related to the new wave of liberal gay politics developing at the time, which I will discuss further in Chapter 2. As a result of the new “post-AIDS” discourses, many artists turned to aestheticizing their private experiences with HIV and their consumption of ART (Manning 2014). While post-crisis politics advocates for a return to normalcy and distance from AIDS, some cultural production made in the post-crisis years has been foregrounding the ongoing AIDS crisis.

The burgeoning cultural production of the 2010s, framed by Kerr (2016) as “AIDS revisitation,” has returned AIDS into the public consciousness, but only through the lens of historical retrospective. Next to the exhibit *Art AIDS America*, Kerr (2016) lists other examples that historicize AIDS through the lens of white gay male history makers. These include the documentaries *Last Address* (2010), *We Were Here* (2011), *How to Survive a Plague* (2012), and *United in Anger* (2012); museum exhibitions such as *AIDS in New York: The First 5 Years* (2013), and *Why We Fight: Remembering AIDS Activism* (2013); and retrospectives on the collectives General Idea (2011) and Gran Fury (2012), as well as artist Frank Moore (2012). Juxtaposed with this cultural production, prompted by TAC’s protest, to date there have been multiple curatorial projects that have “raised the bar on AIDS culture representation [and] set[] a new standard in which the meaningful inclusion of black artists living with and impacted by HIV was the new minimum” (Kerr 2019, 257).

For instance, *One Day This Kid Will Get Larger* (2017), curated by Danny Orendorff, was showcased at the DePaul Museum in Chicago during the same time as the problematic *Art AIDS America*. Orendorff’s exhibit was framed around artist David Wojnarowicz’s photo-text collage *Untitled (One Day This Kid)* (1990). Orendorff juxtaposes Wojnarowicz’s artwork—made during the early years of the AIDS emergency—with contemporary art and activism by queer and trans people of color, which is essential to understanding the current complexities and problems of AIDS now, such as poverty, partial or no access to healthcare, housing, and education, pre-mature death of Indigenous and queer youth of color, trans people, and women. The exhibit showcases photography, prints, collages, pamphlets, zines, audio, and video, and also offers flyers and other informative materials about healthcare, housing, and educational

resources from many Chicago agencies (Orendorff 2018, 143). *One Day* is only one of the cultural projects that works towards changing how AIDS is represented in the present.<sup>9</sup>

### **Excavating the Archive: “Medicinal” Cultural Production**

With respect to the “official” visual histories of AIDS, this dissertation significantly expands the archive with less researched artists and ephemera that have not been meaningfully considered in the study of the disease. While there have been myriad cultural projects that set up the contours of what has come to be known as AIDS-related art and activism, I draw on Kerr’s (2019) insight that “the bulk of AIDS cultural production lies far outside what currently will ever appear in most exhibitions about the epidemic” (16). More traditional forms, such as paintings, videos, photos, performance, and archival ephemera that “currently serve as the bulk of AIDS representation [...] are nothing compared to the digital and analog detritus of state public health messaging, news reports, fundraising calls, NGO reports, and pharmaceutical advertising [that remain] under-exhibited, [...] under-theorized and not meaningfully considered” (Kerr 2019, 16). This dissertation engages with parts of this understudied corpus in multiple prominent

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<sup>9</sup> Other projects include *In Plain Sight* (2016), by Jennifer Brier and Matthew Wizinsky, *Alternate Endings, Radical Beginnings: Day With(out) Art 2017* and *Alternate Endings, Activist Risings: Day With(out) Art 2018* by the organization Visual AIDS; *Cell Count* (2018) curated by Kyle Croft and Asher Mones for Visual AIDS; *Lost & Found: Safer Sex Activism* (2018), co-curated by David Evans Frantz and Hannah Grossman for the ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives at the USC Libraries; and *Metanoia: Transformation through AIDS Archives* (2019), curated by the collective What Would an HIV Doula Do?

AIDS-related archives in New York City, San Francisco, and Los Angeles, as well as multiple digitalized archives across the Internet.<sup>10</sup>

My dissertation excavates public health and safer sex programming, advertising, and correspondence that center prevention methods, such as condoms, PrEP, and HIV medicine, including AZT and ART. I regard this corpus as a so-called “medicinal” cultural and quotidian production related to HIV and AIDS, a seldom-studied domain of work that takes anti-AIDS drug regimens as a key visual motif, and thus responds to the highly contested pharmaceutical politics surrounding HIV medication and prevention from the late 1980s onward. Given the efforts of AIDS activists to gain access to these treatments, as scholar Eli Manning (2014) argues, it is no surprise that information (both visual and archival correspondence) about HIV medications and prevention methods are prominent figures in the history of AIDS-related cultural production. Medicinal cultural production began with the proliferation of protests by the collectives ACT UP and Gran Fury in the late 1980s, and continued to the moment when the FDA released ART, as well as the arrival of PrEP in 2012.

The first two chapters pay close attention to the analysis of the poster, a major part of medicinal production that highlights the importance of having sex with condoms and of being on PrEP, in addition to its related forms, including brochures, pamphlets, pins, T-shirts, and billboards. Posters, as scholars Roger Cooter and Claudia Stein (2007) argue, are peculiar objects

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<sup>10</sup> For this dissertation, I conducted archival research at the GLBTQ Center at the San Francisco Public Library, the Dr. John P. De Cecco Archives & Special Collections of the GLBT Historical Society, the Archives and Special Collections of the UC San Francisco Library, the ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives at USC Libraries, the Manuscripts and Archives Division of the New York Public Library, and NYU’s Special Collections at the Fales Library.

because they find their place in between art and popular mass-produced products (5). It could be said that posters “‘bridge the gap’ between high art and pop art” (Abdy 1969, 3). It is not unusual for posters originally exhibited in public spaces, including at protests or gay men’s venues, to now be kept in archives and used in multiple curatorial projects that historicize AIDS-related matters, due to their aesthetic value.<sup>11</sup> According to artist and curator Felix Studinka (2002), the AIDS emergency changed approaches to the use of posters in public health: “Never before was so much money, aesthetic effort, and psychological marketing put into this particular medium on the part of voluntary bodies, national governments, and international health agencies” (5). Whereas in the 21<sup>st</sup> century posters are no longer a primary medium for distributing safer sex information, digital banners across the web are as frequent now as posters were in the past. As curator Alex Fiahlo (2013) argues, “Whereas in the past a ubiquitous AIDS poster would be ‘plastered’ across the city, nowadays an image [...] can be equally ubiquitous online” (30). As was the case with their predecessors, digital banners are also a result of multiple networks composed of public health officials, wealthy donors, and advertising and styling agencies.

### **Biopolitics of the “Medicinal” Visual Cultures**

Overall, medicinal cultural production related to HIV/AIDS is a valuable corpus of study that allows for a nuanced analysis of political and cultural circumstances of the time led by the virus and its problematic politics. In addition, the visual aspect of medicinal cultural production

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<sup>11</sup> As collector William H. Helfand (1990) argues, “many posters are worth keeping, either for their artistic qualities or for their timeliness as evidence of commercial or social attitudes. For those concerning health matters, particularly public health issues, they reflect problems of importance to governments or to private groups who provide posters as part of educational campaigns” (1).

brings us closer to understanding the biopolitical aspects of biomedical HIV-related innovations and prevention methods, and their relationship to one's body, organism, and sex life.

Consumption of medication and the use of prevention methods directly involve a body-at-risk in a field of intersected power dynamics. According to philosopher Michel Foucault (1995), since the late eighteenth century, "power relations have an immediate hold upon [the body]; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs" (Foucault 1995, 25). One of the institutional holds over the body has been HIV prevention and safer sex, advertised on pamphlets, banners, and posters. Although initially the result of the efforts of queer vernacular knowledge, safer sex has been gradually implemented in public health (Escoffier 1998). Produced by public health networks, the visual cultures of safer sex have the task of reeducating and producing "self-docile" sexual bodies that engage in safer sex practices (Cooter and Stein 2007, 195). Demands for sexual docility are predicated upon changes and achievements in science, as has been the case with the implementation of ART and PrEP.

Condom-based HIV prevention is strictly an external disciplinary measure, while the daily consumption of a pill pushes discipline inside the body. As Giami and Perrey (2012) argue, since the 1980s, HIV prevention has gone through a "shift from behavioral to biomedical and surgical prevention techniques—a shift symbolic of a more general trend toward the biomedicalization of sexuality" (353). In the past, safer sex sought modification of one's own sexual behavior but with biomedicalized approaches to sexuality, one undergoes mass testing and consumes myriad pharmaceutical products for "chemoprevention and treatment" (Giami and Perrey 2012, 353). The notion of "chemoprevention" denotes biomedical substances developed as treatments given to already-healthy populations to stay healthy (Fosket 2010, 340).

Chemoprevention is yet another example of how medical institutions turn “naked flesh...into socially meaningful embodiment through temporal regulation” (Freeman 2010, 3). Let’s take a body on PrEP as an example of such regulation. One benefits from PrEP only if one agrees to be closely monitored by medical institutions; the intake of PrEP must occur daily, with regular doctor’s visits and STI, kidney, and liver screenings, while continuously informing medical personnel about one’s sexual practices. As a result of these events, reoccurring every couple of months, the medical control is an integral part of chemoprevention. As a reminder to take PrEP daily, the drug market offers pill cases, alongside digital banners and public health posters, yet another instance of medicinal production that has the role of surveillance. According to scholar Paul B. Preciado (2013), although a pill case signals neat organization and serves as a friendly reminder, this object represents “a disciplinary system of power and knowledge production derived from Enlightenment architectures of the hospital and prison [...] into a domestic and portable [...] technique” (201–202).<sup>12</sup> Writing specifically about the birth control pill, Preciado (2013) suggests that the packaging of the pill operates as the “edible panopticon,” a device for “the domestic self-surveillance of female sexuality” that is a completely private experience (198). Such cases have been a part of the AIDS market as well, made for pills such as AZT and PrEP (see fig. 8).

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<sup>12</sup> Preciado draws on Foucault’s (1995) uses of the panopticon, which describes the architecture of a circular prison that serves as a perfect disciplinary mechanism (195–228). With an observation tower in the center, the panopticon’s outer wall contains cells for occupants. Placing them in a state of constant visibility, the efficiency of the institution is maximized because it guarantees the automatic function of power, even with no one physically asserting it. Regardless, since the occupants do not know when and if they are being watched, they internalize power’s gaze and ultimately police themselves. Medical regimens such as a daily pill intake operate similarly.



PrEP and HIV medicine are merely two instances that exemplify the dependency between chemoprevention, pharmaceutical consumption, and subject-formation. Alongside the kind of government control that consists of the external disciplining of one's body, biochemical substances regulate our performances through consumption—by entering the body. Such biopolitical power dynamics, operating from the outside-in, are what Preciado (2013) terms pharmacopower. Preciado expands on Foucault's theory of biopower, showing the ways in which power relations work in and through the human body. According to Preciado, contemporary sexuality is built by molecules marketed by the pharmacological industry and a set of immaterial representations that circulate in social networks and the media. Gender, race, and sexuality are somatic fictions that are in part the results of biochemical devices that, although consumed by an individual body, operate on the social body, producing new forms of relationships, desires, and affections (Preciado 2008, 112). To expand on Preciado, the trajectories of AIDS temporalities are also heavily influenced by biomedical devices and their uses; while ART initiated a conversation about "the end of AIDS" and "post-AIDS" conversations, PrEP lands onto an established market that re-privileges affluent gay male consumers.

### **Chapter Glosses: AIDS and Queer of Color World-Making**

While this dissertation destabilizes white gay men's primacy in presentations of AIDS, its pivotal goal is also to provide an insight into multiple aesthetic and activist strategies geared towards centralizing queer of color life that has only sporadically been researched in the study of the disease. The urgency of such a study has been previously outlined by scholar Dagmawi Woubshet (2015), who recognized that AIDS scholarship "isolates people of color in a separate chapter, away from and contingent on the experiences of white gay men, or gestures to them

parenthetically, as if an afterthought” (6). Correspondingly, while the first three chapters shed light on visual strategies that have sustained white supremacy in AIDS studies, they also establish a variety of aesthetic strategies utilized to explicitly or implicitly resist queer of color erasure. Building on queer of color critique, I show that the visual cultures that mostly privilege white gay figures simultaneously foster the possibility of queer of color world-making. In other words, radical conditions of erasure also foster the conditions of possibility for a queer of color creation.

Following Muñoz (1999), queers of color disidentify with the violent structure of power “that continuously elides or pushes the existence of subjects who do not conform to the phantasm of normative citizenship” (4). Such disidentifications are survival strategies. As scholar Darius Bost’s (2019) study on Black cultural responses during the early years of the epidemic determines, “black gay men have created selves and communities amid the ubiquitous forces of antigay and antiblack violence [...] that targeted them” (4). Gay activists, writers, and poets, including Essex Hemphill, Joseph Beam, and Melvin Dixon, have formed community and shaped the world in the face of the gendered and sexualized formations of anti-Black violence. The visual cultures discussed across the upcoming chapters are the product of an oppression that simultaneously serves as a means of resistance and a source of creation. In addition, disidentifying with problematic visual cultures during the early crisis years paved the way for larger visibility in contemporary cultural production. Engagement with the past enables a space for imagining otherwise-suspended realities in the future that are, counterintuitively, made possible by oppressive hierarchies.

The first two chapters provide a historical overview of the cultural and political conditions that gradually subordinated grassroots anti-AIDS movements—many of them premised initially on racially inclusive and gender-expansive representations—to images and ideologies linked principally to white, class-advantaged gay men. Chapter 1 analyzes a specific set of HIV prevention advertisements—posters, banners, brochures, and virtual banners—that use either sexually explicit imagery or suggestive language to gain the audience’s attention. Although these posters that strategically “use” pleasure have been geared towards *all* queer men, they rely on the long visual tradition of the white gaze that either hypersexualizes or pathologizes male queer bodies of color, and Black bodies specifically. These images adhere to a so-called “colonial fantasy,” a visual strategy that “attempts to “fix” the position of the black subject into a space that mirrors the object of white desires” (Mercer 1994, 134–136). Following queer of color critique, the provocative question is if colonial fantasy can be read against the grain: what possibilities can disidentifying with the objectifying images enact? In other words, can racial stereotypes have world-making effects in their Black queer spectatorship?

As the first chapter shows, early visual cultures that objectify queer men of color paved the way for the creation of other types of representations that do not only rely only on raunchy imagery and have also assisted in establishing a variety of currently active programs, initiatives, and events led by and made specifically for queer people of color. This chapter also focuses on the presentation in HIV prevention of trans people of color populations, initially visible only as a site of the medical gaze and classification. Trans people have found their voice in disidentifying with institutional violence, expanding representation to show trans people as fully fleshed-out desiring subjects with everyday life experiences, narratives, and perspectives. This trajectory has

been mediated by references to the semiotics of ball cultures, which have historically taken place at venues where trans people of color would consolidate community, experience pleasure, and become mighty real.

Chapter 2 argues that archetypal masculine figures, including soldiers and marines, appear in HIV prevention advertising in the service of enhancing ideas of “good citizenship.” While promoting participation in national life to reach liberty and happiness, these advertisements were rarely geared towards populations of color. As a result, AIDS organizations incorporated multiculturalism to avoid criticism and drawbacks for their lack of diversity. Implementing multicultural policy, however, did not shift these organizations away from their reliance on white male bodily normativity in creating their advertisements. Drawing on scholar Huey Copeland’s (2013) study of contemporary Black cultural practitioners who expand limited representations of Blackness, this chapter turns to artworks that circumvent visual and political usurpation by white male bodies by turning to non-realist abstraction. AIDS-related works by artists Howardena Pindell, Willie Cole, Charles Ryan Long, and Chris Jordan utilize national emblems, such as the American flag, appropriate the aesthetics and rhetoric of historic slave narratives, and converse more broadly with Black artistic movements of the 1960s to link the spread of AIDS to the ongoing socio-economic, cultural, and political dispossession of Black Americans; the enactment of layered intergenerational aesthetic dialogues. On the one hand, they address contemporary socio-economic, cultural, and political inequalities as residues of trans-Atlantic slavery; on the other hand, when conversing with the artistic tradition of Black practitioners, they expand the dominant field of vision and center experiences that have been erased in the narratives of AIDS.

Chapter 3 analyzes artworks by contemporary artists Luke Cheng, Ben Cuevas, Israel Macedo, Apolo Gomez, and Sheldon Raymore, who reimagine visualizing the medicated queer of color and Indigenous body on PrEP. Unlike the dominant visual cultures surrounding PrEP that celebrate the healthy white, male body, this group of artists employ a so-called “aesthetics of the absent body” to call critical attention to questions of access, treatment, and survival in relation to anti-AIDS treatments. The artworks do not portray physical bodies, but instead only render them conceptually, the audience becomes a crucial maker of politically inflected meanings. This chapter draws on curator Nancy Spector’s (1995) study on the aesthetics of the absent body as an intervention into problematic AIDS visual cultures during the first wave of the crisis, specifically when studying artist Felix Gonzalez-Torres’s oeuvre. Correspondingly, this chapter demonstrates contemporary medicinal production’s contribution to an art historical lineage that started with Gonzalez-Torres’s stack and spill pieces and the sculptures and posters the art collective General Idea made in response to the controversial government politics on drugs in the 1980s. Another significant aspect of the work by contemporary artists is their contribution to rethinking AIDS temporalities. While reworking the limited representations of the medicated body, these artists decentralize the timelines of affluent communities; alongside the forerunners of AIDS cultures in the 1980s, they also turn to traditions specific to their identitarian attachments to converse with their ancestors, with the aim of imagining better lives for their people. By placing omitted perspectives at the forefront, when staging these intergenerational dialogues, they simultaneously “queer” temporalities of AIDS.

Chapters 1-3 determine that the appropriation of aesthetics across different generations of makers and activists is used as an act of creation and resistance to overtly white and male AIDS

cultures. In contradistinction, Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 show that references to the past can also be counterproductive. These two final chapters reveal most vividly the double bind of appropriation; I develop a critical account on the recent developments of PrEP, which has sparked widespread enthusiasm for “Big Pharma” and its products. This enthusiasm has not only shifted the ideological foundations of anti-AIDS work, but also largely re-privileged affluent, cis-gender, able-bodied white men.

Chapter 4 begins to unravel these problems in relation to consumption, a crucial preoccupation of medicinal cultural production. Initially, problems tied to partial, inequitable access to life-saving medicine were critiqued in protest art, political posters, and banners by ACT UP and Gran Fury, which frequently appropriated familiar images from pop culture as one widely legible means of making progressive, justice-oriented points. Regarding the use of well-rehearsed and widely circulated images, this chapter close-reads artworks by Chicano Los Angeles-based artist Joey Terrill, who turns to Pop Art and mass culture to mobilize a critique about partial access to ART among socio-economically vulnerable Chicano queer people. This chapter then tackles the contemporary pharmaceutical messaging and social media marketing surrounding PrEP, to demonstrate how pharmaceutical agencies turn to well-rehearsed images for their marketing purposes, preserving their widely admired styles but using them for politically opposite ends, quite distinct from their radical origins. This chapter shows that key parts of PrEP-centered social media production lacks resistance to consumption of health, as was also the case during the first wave of the crisis. Instead, commercialization of PrEP is uncritically celebrated as a source of personal freedom.

Chapter 5 continues my critical preoccupation with PrEP, while it also brings “the uses of pleasure” back into conversation. This chapter analyzes aspects of PrEP advertising as found in the social media campaign #TruvadaWhore, about destigmatizing sex on PrEP, and a memoir inspired by the campaign, *The PrEP Diaries: A Safe(r) Sex Memoir* (2016) by author Evan J. Peterson. Celebrating PrEP’s ability to suspend the fear of contracting HIV while having unsafe sex, both case studies invoke radical 1970s gay male sex culture from before HIV/AIDS was known, while disregarding their exclusionary character: centering whiteness, masculinity, and youth. Nevertheless, being on PrEP is considered a heroic act that creates superpowers, as analyzing the high-end campaign “PrEP Heroes” aimed at younger gay male party goers demonstrates. While these case studies show that users perceive consumption of PrEP as a sign of one’s commitment and responsibility, this chapter shows this sentiment is produced by the pharmaceutical industry and used for marketing purposes. These dynamics are seen in one’s commitment to disclose their “heroism” on social media through so-called “selfie activism.” These documentary auto-portraits have the function of publicly announcing that one is on PrEP. The “good citizen” who publicly advertises their use of PrEP—either through corporate-designed ads or social-media posts—is, once again, normatively white and male. This chapter addresses these problems through an analysis of the *PrEP Manifesto*, by radical queer collective SPIT! (Sodomites, Perverts, Inverts Together!). In a dual project that includes a set of live performances and a published collection of historical queer and trans manifestos and speeches—in attempt to articulate social injustice—the project decenters the masculine character of current PrEP activism by accounting for the significant contributions of cis-gender and trans women in the history of AIDS activism.

The epilogue underlines the double bind of appropriation, but also reaffirms the importance of intergenerational aesthetic bonding between cultural workers working towards socially just ends. Based on the variety of case studies across Chapters 1-5, it is clear that contemporary cultural endeavors are an extension of the cultural production that has been responding for decades to unjust politics. In addition, the epilogue is a reminder that the lingering disease is only one instance of a much more complex network of violence that queer and trans people of color have been exposed to throughout U.S. history. The epilogue hints at the future of this project. Multiple accounts draw on the aesthetic, political, and social similarities between HIV/AIDS and COVID-19. The current COVID-19 crisis continues to perpetuate violence towards socially and economically vulnerable communities, inspiring cultural workers, journalists, and the media to revisit the lessons created by radical AIDS activism, in an attempt to create effective resistance towards anti-Black state-run institutions and their (lack of) response to the crisis. Drawing on a Performance Studies approach, this dissertation provides a method of rethinking how we perceive AIDS and its visual residues in the contemporary era, and strives towards imagining worlds unconstrained by state-run racism, anti-Blackness, homophobia, transphobia, white supremacy, and “post-crisis” politics.



*Our starting point is ambivalence, because we want to look, but do not always find the images we want to see. As black men we are implicated in the same landscape of stereotypes which is dominated and organized around the needs, demands and desires of white males.*

(Mercer 1994, 133)

*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.*

(Mercer 1994, 203)

## CHAPTER 1

### **Undoing the White Gaze: Queer and Trans of Color “Double Bind” in HIV Prevention**

In the 1980s, there were a variety of approaches to advertising HIV prevention, with most of them centering portrayals of bodies at the risk of dying. Unlike the usual visual cultures of prevention, which focused on messages of warning and danger, safer sex aimed at gay men promoted “a beautiful body” to “sex-up” life, instead of exposing its limitations (Cooter and Stein 2010, 196; Gilman 1995, 115–172). Correspondingly, a large portion of promotional material geared towards gay men was heavily eroticized, portraying male bodies entangled in moments of pleasure. Most of the time, advertising replicated the aesthetics of ads for gay saunas and sex clubs, found in publications targeted specifically to gay men prior to the crisis years (Brier 2009; Fiahlo and Katz 2013), while many times also fostering racially charged visual vocabularies, as, for instance, in the first erotically explicit poster made by the San Francisco AIDS Foundation (SFAF) in 1984. The poster features a headless, fully undressed Black male body with his back turned to the camera, showing off a well-rounded smooth butt to the viewer. Behind the Black silhouette there is a light male figure, noticeable only because its hand is gently crossing the muscular Black back. If not for the contrast in skin color between the two bodies, the pale body would almost completely fade into the bleached background. The viewer reads “YOU CAN HAVE FUN (and be safe, too),” followed by instructions on how to engage in safer sex (see fig. 9).

Because of its visual framing, SFAF’s poster implies a dialogic mode with the spectators, giving them access to the nude Black body. As writer Daniel Demens (2014) recalls, the poster stirred controversy when it ended up in a column in *The San Francisco*. Many gay bars in

San Francisco refused to display it because they found its racial overtones unacceptable. Such imagery of erotic or even raunchy interracial couples or groups, or fragmentized, highly sexualized body parts of men of color, were not a rare occurrence in safer sex advertising, as evident by another brochure “I CAN Relate” (1997), created by the AIDS Committee of Toronto (ACT) and which somehow appropriates the aesthetics of the 1984 poster (see fig. 10).

Historically, the leadership of AIDS organizations focusing on the health of queer communities has been comprised of predominantly white gay men, so it is no surprise that the presentation of men of color and Black men in safer sex programming has been, as in other visual cultures of throughout the twentieth century, organized around the needs and desires of white men (Mercer 1994, 133). The questions are: if the posters that use racial stereotypes were made to enact sexual desire, what is the relationship between this imagery and spectators of color? If the assumption is that a safer sex poster exists in a dialogic mode with a spectator, what does such a poster communicate to a spectator of color?

In this chapter, I focus on the specific production of safer sex programming that has attempted to tackle the question of race through racially and sexually charged visual vocabularies, with a specific emphasis on visualizing Black cis-male bodies, as well as Black queer and trans bodies. Although portrayals of Black bodies in pleasure in safer sex reflects the “demands” of the white gaze, this chapter raises the question of whether racial stereotypes pathologizing or hypereroticizing Black bodies may have transformative effects on their spectatorship. To this end, this chapter considers the possibility of disidentification with stereotyped racial imagery as a method of rethinking its effects with regards to world-making. Muñoz (1999) coined the critical vocabularies of disidentification as a source of creation.

Following Muñoz, to negotiate “a phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or pushes the existence of subjects who do not conform to the phantasm of normative citizenship,” queers of color disidentify with violence as a survival strategy (4). A result of appropriating and resisting violent racist and homophobic structures of power is the inception of otherwise suspended worlds. Queers of color “work on and against” the dominant ideologies of power to “transform a cultural logic from within, always laboring to enact permanent structural change while at the same time valuing the importance of local or everyday struggles of resistance” (Muñoz 1999, 11–12). The possibility of disidentifying is not only to rectify the representations of communities of color in HIV prevention, but also to work towards a (re)construction of their relationship to power.

In the process of staging disidentification, pleasure has a specifically important role. Drawing on queer of color revisions to Foucault’s (1990; 1997) study of gay men’s pleasure as a site that creates alternative forms of being in the world, this chapter reconsiders the use of pleasure in HIV prevention as a flexible site that might enable political potential within the phallic white-supremacist representational economies of desire (Nash 2014, 2).<sup>13</sup> As such, pleasure offers a frame of thinking about embodiment that exceeds the disciplinary regimes of the white gaze and opens new modes of theorizing resistance to power and being in the world. Applying this approach to the visual cultures of HIV prevention, pleasure could circumvent

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<sup>13</sup> For instance, in her reading of Black women in pornography, scholar Jennifer Nash (2014) imagines the possibility of finding pleasure in racialization. Instead of “reading racialized pornography for evidence of the wound,” Nash (2014) provides a counterintuitive reading of interracial “race play” between white men and Black women. Although an exemplar of racialized and racist hailing, Nash (2014) explores how these scenes serve as an encounter that can possibly transform racism into taking pleasure in racialization.

harmful stereotypes and take a step closer towards creating visual cultures that do not rely on the needs, demands, and desires of the white gaze. As will be seen, the images and language of the affectionate “brotherhood” or “boo,” an alteration of the French *beau* (boyfriend or admirer), that has been revived in the current advertising for PrEP, displays yet another productive use of pleasure in HIV prevention transmitted through generations. The common thread in safer sex campaigns in this chapter is their productive and world-making use of pleasure as it cuts across the field of vision, either through sexually explicit imagery or suggestive language that fosters other types of pleasures.

During the initial years of the AIDS emergency, the pedagogies of pleasure in the visual cultures of safer sex advertising was oriented towards cis-gender gay men, while trans communities remained invisible. If trans narratives appeared in the media, it was through sensationalist headlines, under the belief that trans people were born in the “wrong body” (Halberstam 2017, 1–2). However, in recent years, there has been a rapid change; currently, there are many HIV prevention campaigns that focus on the nuances of everyday trans of color experiences, as part of the so-called “trans tipping point,” “a period characterized by the scaling up of legal protections, visibility, rights, and politics centered on trans people” that tragically parallels the ongoing death rates of trans people (Ellison, Green, Richardson, and Snorton 2017, 162).<sup>14</sup> The chapter observes these campaigns and their positive presentation of trans sexual health in their “double bind” character: on the one hand, they are ground-breaking and world-

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<sup>14</sup> Examples that contribute to trans visibility in the public domain are the advocacy and writings of authors, entertainers, and activists Janet Mock and Laverne Cox, as well as the television show *Pose* (FX 2018–), which celebrates ball cultures, drag queens, and the legacy of trans women of color.

making enterprises, but on the other hand, they are not exempt from the economic interests of the pharmaceutical industry, public health networks, and health agencies.

Although the visual cultures of these campaigns are heavily influenced by biomedical capitalism, they also enact the possibility of disidentifying with previously problematic visual narratives. According to scholar and artist Sandy Stone (1992), “to occupy a place as speaking subject [...] is to become complicit in the discourse that one wishes to deconstruct. Rather, we can seize upon the textual violence inscribed in the transsexual body and turn it into a reconstructive force” (164). Thinking about how this transformation works in the HIV sector, this chapter argues that a turn to the semiotics of ball cultures—historical venues where trans people would consolidate community and experience pleasure—in HIV prevention campaigns has had a large role in mediating and creating worlds in which a trans body acquires this reconstructive force. Portraying a trans body in everyday small moments of pleasure in the growing body of trans-oriented campaigns reframes the historical narratives that have accounted for these bodies only through the lens of the medical gaze, and therefore, yet again, expresses the world-making possibilities of pleasure.

### **The Use of Pleasure in HIV Prevention**

Ever since the U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) declared that men who have sex with men were the most common “at-risk” group to contract HIV, AIDS organizations have been studiously working towards resisting the conflation of promiscuous sex between men with the disease. Safer sex was an early technique of this resistance; it emerged amid homophobic state discourses that equated sex with death and promoted abstinence. In other

words, safer sex was a contribution to the public health's partial and inadequate approach to suspending the transmission of HIV among gay men, without striving to eradicate sex from the lives of people disproportionately vulnerable to the virus. Eliminating sex would mean getting rid of an important aspect of underground queer culture, and would also destroy an important historical queer strategy used to resist calls for normalcy. Homosexuality was removed from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Diseases* in 1973, less than a decade before the epidemic erupted, and the movement's mission was to resist a politics that wanted to re-pathologize gay men's sex. In addition, departing from the pleasures and joys of queer sex and turning towards promoting abstinence would have proved the political conservatives right for equating AIDS and death with queer sex.

Therefore, it is not strange that post-Stonewall activists and grassroots organizers turned to the pivotal element in queer culture—the pleasures of queer sex—while creating safer sex, a life-saving strategy that “articulate[d] an alternative communal and political vision to the Reagan administration's inaction” (Brier 2009, 7). Eroticizing prevention methods developed from gay men's initial resistance to using condoms, which were originally marketed to straight consumers (Brier 2009, 46). For this reason, sex programming replicated the aesthetics of ads for gay saunas and sex clubs, found in publications targeted to gay men in the 1970s. For instance, the poster “Are You Man Enough” (1985) created by the West Hollywood organization Aid for AIDS, portrays a black and white illustration of three racially ambiguous masculine figures in gear associated with leather culture, including a leather hat, harness, armband, belts, and leather chaps (see fig. 11). Based on the suggestive poses of the three manly men, it is easy to imagine the scene takes place in a sex club or some other gay men's cruising site. In similar fashion, the

CORE program in West Hollywood produced a variety of sexually explicit images targeting leather gay men's communities. One of the images portrays a man dressed in leather, holding an erect penis in his hand, and reads: "Are You Really Man Enough?" (see fig. 12). By asking the question, both posters propose that safe sex is a manly endeavor and that the use of condoms will not endanger one's masculinity, sex appeal or marketability.

These safer sex images testify to the productive and educational use of sexual knowledge and pleasure in HIV prevention. Such a use of pleasure was analyzed by Foucault (1990; 1997), who imagined gay men's sex cultures of the 1970s as a site of communal resistance and creation. Looking specifically at gay men's leather and sadomasochist scenes, Foucault (1997) argues that the sex acts practiced in this subculture gesture towards a shift in power and the possibility of freedom, because the subjects involved manipulate their bodies ways that reconfigures their relationship to pleasure (165).<sup>15</sup> Unlike a hegemonic approach that comes with a variety of rules differentiating between permitted and forbidden sex acts, Foucault (1990) examines the truth drawn from pleasure itself (57). Drawing on Foucault's study, scholar Kane Race (2008) argues that pleasure enables the recreation of power dynamics in HIV prevention, when "entwined with specific techniques, knowledges and practices" (5). Specifically, this recreation is possible when considering pleasure as a historical construct open to experimentation. In Foucault's approach to gay men's leather subcultures, pleasure is a part of creative experimentation, with the result of

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<sup>15</sup> As scholar Amber J. Musser (2014) reminds us, Foucault understands sadomasochism as an emergent sexual subculture that developed as an alternative to 1950s homophile societies, "a place for gay men to assert and play with their masculinity" (11). Foucault imagines sadomasochist practices as "kinship structures" not bound by reproduction. Instead, linked together by experimental sexual practices, this subculture offers a space to think about resistance and the possibility of freedom enacted by the pleasures of these practices (Musser 2014, 11).



world-building. Similar principles have been applied to HIV prevention, where pleasure was used to create safer sex education and its accompanying visual cultures.

Even though a large portion of gay men's promotional materials were sex-positive and heavily eroticized, this method was limited in its scope. The campaigns were only speaking to members of established urban gay communities who had the privilege of accessing the venues with safer sex messaging. Because of racism in gay men's communities, men of color had limited access to certain gay venues where safer sex materials were being distributed. In addition, not all men of color centered their lives around their sexual identities, some of them rejecting gay identity as intrinsically a white construct (Brier 2009, 47). In addition, the sexuality of gay men was seen as a homogenous site, resisting heterosexism and homophobia as a universal system. Scholar Cathy Cohen (1999) argues that focusing solely on resistance to heterosexism has come "dangerously close to a single oppression model" (31), not recognizing that institutional racism and class exploitation also negatively impact some queers as well.<sup>16</sup>

### **"Colonial Fantasy" in Safer Sex**

From the early years until today, AIDS organizations have used a variety of ways to include men of color in the visual cultures of safer sex. For instance, created specifically for the pleasure of Black men, a 1990 poster by SFAF eroticizes the use of condoms, while portraying

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<sup>16</sup> If sexuality is observed politically, it becomes clear that the multiplicity of diverse factors that influence and compose it as a site of power cannot be reconciled under a homogenous signifier (Geary 2014, 68–9). Correspondingly, Brier (2009) argues that AIDS organizations "regularly inserted conversations about sexuality into public spaces and called for an increase in government spending and the need to care for citizens [while it] often failed to reach people of color affected by AIDS because it was unable to comprehend, and act on, how racial inequality affected both gay culture and AIDS prevention" (48).

two nude Black men in an embrace, kissing. The text above the image reads “Get Carried Away” and continues below it “with Condoms” (see fig. 13). A poster by the Gay Men’s Health Crisis (GMHC), “Once, Twice, Thrice: Fierce!” (1991) is similarly sexually explicit, composed of a sequence of five photographs depicting two Black men engaging in safer sex, while using a condom with lubricant (see fig. 14). Since today’s gay sex cultures are still heavily informed by the residues of sexual liberation and its possibilities (a thought I will further pursue in Chapter 5), contemporary safer sex advertising replicates the aesthetics of a well-built young body, also at times depicting interracial desire, or Black male body parts (see fig. 15 and fig. 16).

Objectifying bodies of color in the visual cultures of HIV prevention is merely one of the examples of racist visual cultures. Drawing on queer of color visual and cultural studies, I suggest that safer sex visual cultures replicate a long tradition of the white gaze hypersexualizing, pathologizing, or subjecting bodies of color to other forms racial violence, dating back to the age of Western global expansion (Fusco 1994; Fusco 2003). In such a white supremacist tradition, white male subjects inflict the violent injury of racialization on bodies of color and take pleasure in objectifying racial difference. This tradition has been replicated in contemporary visual cultures, and consequently reflected in safer sex advertising. According to scholar Kobena Mercer (1994), visualizing sexualized Black male bodies in pop culture and art reinforces a so-called “colonial fantasy”—“a rigid set of racial roles and identities which

rehearse scenarios of desire in a way which traces the cultural legacies of slavery, empire, and imperialism” (133–134).<sup>17</sup>

Reading visual cultures that imagine the Black body as a site where power, pleasure, visibility, and historical violence intersect, some scholars inquire if an encounter with racial imagery may result in disidentification. As Mercer argues, when gazing at the fetishized Black male bodies in erotic photography, his position as a spectator is ambivalent; based on the same historical wound he shares with the models, the encounter with the image results in an identification. However, since Mercer also participates in this encounter as a desiring subject, he partakes in objectification of the photographed subjects. Due to the shared desire, the photographer, who initiated this potential through the exploitative process of racial objectification, and Mercer as a desiring spectator share the same position (193). Accordingly, the other aspect of identification is the result of desire: because of the ambivalence these images produce, Mercer suggests the possibility of disidentification with initially harmful and violent images, as “black readers may appropriate pleasures by reading against the grain, overturning signs of otherness into signifiers of identity” (136).

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<sup>17</sup> An example of the fantasy is the cropping of bodies of color, a representational strategy that uses body parts to make up for the whole (Mercer, 1994: 183). Cropping is organized around the desires of a white gaze that “confine[s] [bodies of color] to a narrow repertoire of “types”; whereby Black men fit the box of a supersexual ‘savage,’ Asian men are depicted as “delicate, fragile and exotic ‘oriental’” (Mercer 1994, 133). This repertoire of types corresponds with the demand for a “singular image,” in which one image—or stereotype—represents the complexity of lived experience as a whole (Fleetwood 2011,2). Through such a singular image, “Blackness and black life become intelligible and valued, as well as consumable and disposable, through racial discourse” (Fleetwood 2011, 6).

In a similar fashion, scholar Darieck Scott (2010) considers pleasure in abjection as a site of production of Black subjectivity and possible access to power. Thinking of Blackness “in-and-as” abjection produced as such by historical white supremacy and its general anti-Blackness, Scott argues that “[t]he possibilities or capabilities [for transformation] emerge out of the subjugation (at once past and present, material and discursive) that makes a black subjectivity possible” (12-13). Since Blackness is in the Western imagination associated with a perverse and non-normative sexuality needing to be cultured through domination, Scott asks if this stigma could be rethought and reclaimed as a source of power. Specifically, although sexuality is “a mode of conquest [that] often cannot avoid being deployed in a field of representation,” Scott questions if that very domination and historical defeat might have the potential for political transformation (9). The question is whether disidentification with images that are a product of colonial fantasy could result in finding pleasure in imposed subject-positions (Scott 2010, 15). Following Scott (2010), Musser (2014) contends that “representations of pleasure in abjection [...] grant us access to the *possibility* of pleasure even as they may not have an exact correlation to reality” (166). Disidentifying with racialized images could be a way of creating new morphologies that do not rely on the needs, demands, and desires of the white gaze. As we can see, pedagogies of pleasure enable a frame of thinking that exceeds the disciplinary regimes of the white gaze and opens new modes of theorizing resistance to power.

### **The “Brotherhood” and “Boo” Approach**

Sexually explicit portrayals of Black gay men in HIV prevention came under significant critique from conservative, highly influenced by the Black church (Cohen 1999; Brier 2009;

Mumford 2019, 187).<sup>18</sup> Conservative leaders saw the promotional materials as harmful to the image of Black men. At the same time, Black gay men's bodies have been subject to the workings of both racism and homophobia; while white supremacy either erases or commodifies Black queer men, in Black masculine cultures, they have been discredited as not adequately Black or manly enough. The two types of violence that cut across Black queer men's bodies are what scholar Darius Bost (2019) terms "double cremation" (3).

As artist Marlon Riggs (1991) claimed, being a gay man in Black men's cultures is

a triple negation: Because of my sexuality, I cannot be Black [...] Hence I remain a Negro. My sexual difference is considered of no value [...] Hence I remain a sissy, punk, faggot. I cannot be a Black Gay Man because, by the tenets of Black Macho, Black Gay Man is a triple negation. I am consigned, by these tenets, to remain a Negro Faggot. (390)

According to scholar E. Patrick Johnson (2003) "negro faggot" is a way to demean and disparage Black gay men and ultimately exclude them from "authentic blackness" because they stand at odds with traditional white masculinity (51). As a result of these contradictory and contested dynamics, Black gay men consolidate into a cultural "brotherhood" movement that has reinvented Black male personhood in such detrimental conditions and worked against the forces of "double cremation."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> As scholar Evelyn Hammonds (1986) argues, responses to AIDS in Black communities overall were a result of the historical association of Black people with deviance, disease, and sexual irresponsibility—narratives that were incorporated into the image of AIDS—and were resisted by the conservatives.

<sup>19</sup> Black gay men's modes of care and activism in response to AIDS, as well as their investment in literary and cultural collectivity, has been informed by Black lesbian feminist cultures and politics since at least the 1970s and 1980s, as well as literary figures from earlier decades, such as James Baldwin and writers of the Harlem Renaissance (9). For instance, writer

The resonances of this movement have also been present in the HIV sector, as seen in HIV prevention campaigns that depart from explicit sexual imagery to an approach foregrounding closeness with family members, the church, and the neighborhood, also aimed at Black men who, for whatever reason, did not identify as gay. For instance, one of the GMHC's attempts to reach out to Black men was seen in the campaign "Listen Up!" (1993), geared towards "street-smart, inner city men who are primarily black and [L]atino and homosexually active, ages 18-30" (see fig. 17). The imagery of this campaign completely departs from the homoerotic overtones in the recommendations for safer sex. Although the imagery embraces hip-hop and street aesthetics, sexually explicit descriptions utilize Black vernaculars to resonate better with the targeted audiences. For instance, "So, if you do men, you can fuck, suck, eat ass, whatever. Just do it safely...When fucking, 'doing the nasty,' or 'the wild thang' or whatever you call it, use a condom," "Don't be messing around. Drinking and drugging ain't down," "YO! Be cool. Your mama didn't raise a fool, so protect yourself" (Gay Men's Health Crisis 1993).

As an extension of this tradition, there is a number of current PrEP prevention campaigns that revive the imagery of average and everyday men and the language of pleasure, but in non-sexualized fashion. For instance, the "Love your Brotha" (2017) banners by the Philadelphia Department of Public Health and the marketing agency Better World Advertising (BWA), include a close-up image of a Black and/or Latino male couple, fully dressed in casual clothing,

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Joseph Bean's literary anthologies *In the Life: A Black Gay Anthology* (1986) and *Brother to Brother* (1991), edited by poet Essex Hemphill, as well as filmmaker Marlon Riggs's documentaries *Tongues Untied* (1989) and *Black is... Black Ain't* (1994), reflect on the pathological construction of Black gay men within white gay men's imaginaries and develop critical vocabularies that reinvent Black gay personhood and how Black men relate to one another.

gazing into the camera. The text below the photograph urges the spectator to “Love Your Brotha” in “the city of brotherly love” (see fig. 18). Other variations on the brotherhood approach include the use of “boo,” a boyfriend and admirer. For example, GMHC’s campaign “I Love My Boo” (2010 and 2014) portrays fully dressed Black men from everyday life being affectionate towards one another in a variety of quotidian situations (see fig. 19 and 20).<sup>20</sup>

Historically, the brotherhood approach among men of color developed in response to a politics of white masculinity that has emasculated and systematically oppressed, exploited, and degraded Black men for generations (Lemmelle, Jr. 2010, 1). This politics is most notable in the violence which continuously denied Black men access to economic structures of power and used sexuality as a tool through which white supremacists “displayed their will and enforced the racial caste system” (Mumford 2019, 42, 52–56). As George W. Roberts (1994) argues, denied access to institutions of power, Black men turn towards each other, to collectivity, and to familial values such as sharing, caring, and respect. With the mission of creating positive self-image and developing self-love, the brotherhood approach to Black gay men’s communities during the AIDS emergency was a response to preceding anti-Blackness and anti-queerness (Bost 2019, 6, 10; Cohen 1999; Mumford 2019, 187).

In HIV prevention, as Brier (2009) suggests, the brotherhood language “invoke[s] a communal responsibility for AIDS that provided the grounds for men not blaming one another

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<sup>20</sup> In the statement, the campaign suggests: “[r]ather than sexualizing gay relationships, with chiseled bodies and glossy imagery, the beauty of this campaign is that it features intimacy and focuses on what is possible for gay men of color as they boldly and unapologetically express trust, respect and commitment for one another” (Gay Men’s Health Crisis 2020).

for diseases that they had transmitted, knowingly, unknowingly, or in ignorance of the ultimate consequences” (39). Campaigns that promoted “brotherhood” and “boo” strategically turned away from erotic imagery and the prioritizing of gay sex, but still mobilized pleasure, affection, and tenderness as the main sites of education in HIV prevention. More importantly, on the level of visual cultures and decoding, these images challenged the demands of the white gaze, by enacting what scholar Nicole Fleetwood (2011) terms “an alternative visual index of black lived experience,” one that does not rely on “the familiar device of photographic iconicity” (37). Such alternative visual indexing is used in the service of protecting the health of men of color, but it also functions as a world-building gesture as it recreates the representation of initially hypersexualized and pathologized Black men.

### **Black Queer and Trans Cultures of PrEP**

These campaigns, undisputedly, foster exclusively masculine aesthetics. However, keeping in mind the complex status of Black masculinities as historically constructed genders, one may say that the language of brotherhood in HIV prevention has a recuperative function in its aim to reimagine healthy Black men and their futurities.<sup>21</sup> As I will demonstrate in this

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<sup>21</sup> In addition to this claim, one needs to take into account the complex history and status of Black genders. A history of (de)constructing Black genders has, according to scholar Hortense Spillers (2003), to start with the trans-Atlantic slave commerce that produced contemporary racialized and gendered representation. The violence of the trans-Atlantic slave trade effectively de-gendered Black bodies that “become a territory of cultural and political maneuver, not at all gender-related, gender-specific” (Spillers 2003, 206). Such ungendered Black bodies then became Black flesh relegated to the marketplace where they became fungible sites that could be “seared [and] divided,” ripped apart and available for sexual use (Spillers 2003, 206). As a result, following scholar Roderick Ferguson (2004), the development of Black gender has historically developed contrary to the norms of heterosexuality and patriarchy, thus indexing “social heterogeneity that oversteps the boundaries of gender propriety and sexual normativity” (2). In



section, that parts of Black communities that expand or overstep the traditional two-gender system are not excluded from these reimaginings. However, the early 1990s were a different story. Because of public health's denial of gender and sexual multiplicity, HIV prevention campaigns that promoted the fluidity of Black genders were rare. As a result, Black and trans people of color were exposed to the conditions responsible for a higher vulnerability to contracting HIV at a much higher rate than their white and cis-gender counterparts. A contributing factor to producing these conditions were AIDS organizations that did not have the resources or knowledge to successfully reach out to communities of color, as the visual cultures that include fragmented bodies of color make clear.

While Black people navigate white supremacist systems that equate Blackness with deviancy and sexual excess, trans communities face problems regarding their compliance to a set of policies that often fail to understand the particularities of trans bodies.<sup>22</sup> Although poor and dispossessed trans of color populations have gained some visibility in the media due to commodifying interests, the public health system has done little to prevent high HIV rates and

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addition, Nash (2014) argues that the violent traumas of the past are the point of origin for the racial-sexual wounding found in contemporary representation (42).

<sup>22</sup> Violent power relations are what bring Blackness and transness into dialogue. Scholar C. Riley Snorton (2017) argues that both transness and Blackness have been sites on which supremacist systems of power have been practicing the limits of what it means to be a properly gendered and racialized human. Since transness is a site of "primordial being" from which racial and gender difference is formed, Snorton argues that transness and Blackness are in apposition to one another and these sites can be brought into the same frame because they were historically treated as "fungible, thingified, and interchangeable, particularly within the logics of transatlantic exchange" (6).

AIDS deaths in these populations.<sup>23</sup> However, the historical wounding and institutional violence, following the method of disidentification previously outlined, also represents a space for creation. One of the early examples that destabilized common same-sex cis-male desire in HIV prevention was the Red Hot Organization, a not-for-profit company established in New York in 1990. With the goal of normalizing and eroticizing safer sex for diverse audiences, Red Hot created a campaign composed of postcards and posters, “Safe Sex is Hot Sex” (1991/1992). A series of highly stylized black and white photographs of nude male and female bodies composed by celebrated photographers Steven Meisel and Bruce Weber, the images included a queer feminine couple of color, which was not a usual sight in HIV prevention production at the time (see fig. 21).

This high-budget project was more an exception than the rule, but it paved the way for complete narratives and representation in contemporary HIV prevention. Currently, there is production on the rise that centers Black queer and trans people in their everyday lived experience. While this production is part of the current Black queer and trans tipping point, this moment needs to be placed in historical dialogue with grassroots organizers, cultural workers, and historical cultural tropes, communities, and venues who made this movement possible. Generously speaking, large parts of contemporary HIV prevention campaigns echo years and years of labor oriented towards the visibility of Black people in HIV sector.

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<sup>23</sup> A rare mainstream portrayal of trans communities was facilitated by filmmaker Jennie Livingston’s documentary *Paris is Burning* (1990). The documentary focused on the worlds of Harlem’s Black and Latino ball cultures in the 1980s; however, it gave little recognition to these cultures as educational venues where the participants could learn about the disease and HIV prevention.

For instance, the illustration “Gay Pride PrEP Illustration” (2018) by Brooklyn-based artist Charles Chaisson, was made as a part of the PrEP campaign “I Swallow Daily” (2018) by New York-based community health center Apicha. The viewer of Chaisson’s “Gay Pride PrEP Illustration” (2018) meets a charismatic bearded Black queer figure in the nude, modeled after New York-based musician DUBEM. Adorned with extravagant golden necklaces falling gracefully down their back, the bearded figure genially rests on an oversized blue PrEP pill, sipping tea from a small gold cup. Gazing towards the beholder, seeking attention, the figure seems to be taking a daily dose of PrEP. In the background, the spectator encounters oversized orchids in radiant violet and pink, as well as a large brain surrounded by a halo (see fig. 22). The illustration “reference[s...] a brain nested among flowers in the background to hint at [PrEP] putting your mind at ease” (Apicha 2018). According to Chaisson, the focus on Black queerness is an intentional response to the supremacy of bodily representation that celebrates traditional forms of masculinities. The artist’s intent was “to create an image that showed the beauty of femininity in men, specifically gay men of color, which society often shames into hiding” (Chaisson 2018). We could say that Chaisson’s illustration disidentifies with flamboyant Black queerness or the “Negro Faggotry” Riggs wrote about and becomes a positive instance for identity and world-making.

Another example that destabilizes gender stereotypes is the campaign “PrEP4Love” (2016). This campaign not only reinvents Black queer and trans representation, but also converses with historically important tea parties and ball cultures. Produced by the AIDS Foundation of Chicago, the Chicago PrEP working group, and multiple individual donors, the campaign redefines pleasure, specifically for queer and trans audiences of color, by combining

the imagery of sex positivity and intimacy. In its first iteration, the virtual banners appeared in public bus and train stations across Chicago, portraying diverse, affectionate couples of multiple genders and body shapes. Four black and white photographs depict models of color who engage in flirtatious moments of touch and affection (see fig. 23). Departing from previous campaigns with unrealistic body standards, “PrEP4Love” featured people with diverse bodies, all found and hired through casting calls shared on social media.<sup>24</sup> The slogans that accompanied the campaign, including “Love is contractible,” “Lust is transmittable,” “Touch is contagious,” and “With PrEP, people can catch feelings, not HIV,” in addition to the messages that were scrawled across the models’ bodies in the images, paired words related to the language of HIV epidemiology with the language of feelings, intimacy, and pleasure. In addition to visual representation, “PrEP4Love” organizers reached out directly to targeted communities, organizing occasional tea parties in collaboration with a variety of Chicago queer of color nightlife organizations.

As the promotional materials and titles reflect, the overall nature of the events was to promote HIV prevention and advocate for consciousness raising. For instance, whereas the event Black Tea was organized to celebrate “carefree Black boys,” the events Formation and Black Joy were dedicated to uplifting Black womanhood and “carefree Black girls.” Accordingly, these events gathered communities of color to talk about sexual health, intimacy, pleasure, and joy by using multiple performances as a means of community-building. Drawing on the cultures of

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<sup>24</sup> As Jim Pickett (2017), a director of the campaign, stated in a private conversation, the campaign was interested in hiring models who were socially engaged activists and “popular opinion leaders” with a good social media presence.

balls, “PrEP4Love” builds on a long tradition of queer and trans of color alternative world-making.<sup>25</sup> As venues where one experiences care and a sense of familiarity and belonging, ball events also provide communal education in HIV prevention. Scholar Marlon M. Bailey (2009) argues that ball cultures were instrumental venues for the creation of a so-called HIV “invention,” practices deployed by Black queer and trans people and “conducted and sustained [...] within at-risk communities themselves” (255). Such prevention strategies are considered a more culturally appropriate way of educating Black youth at risk of HIV, as they simultaneously honor and celebrate sexual and gender heterogeneity through performances and dance. HIV “invention” stands in contrast to institutional and medical methods that dismiss the complexity of trans experience and embodiment and approach trans bodies as “unreal, inauthentic, and aberrant” (Halberstam 2017, 34). Therefore, ball cultures contribute to the creation of a “counterdiscourse” to those hegemonic methods (Bailey 2009, 254).

Since the current HIV prevention model uses models of knowledge produced by “invention,” we could say that public health has adopted a trans of color vernacular in its official health promotion—quite the opposite of its hegemonic beginnings. Ballrooms—historically venues of refuge—have been appropriated by the same institutions that send trans and queer people of color into exile. These dynamics are not new and echoes the public health

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<sup>25</sup> Ball cultures have served as community-building enterprises and systems of support for socioeconomically vulnerable trans and queer communities since the 1920s (Arnold and Bailey 2009). Since the participants of ball cultures are divided into so called “houses,” these venues appropriate and disidentify the traditional signification of the notion of the nuclear household, facilitating the possibility of “alternative kinship systems” (Arnold and Bailey 2009; Halberstam 2017, 64–66). Ball houses enable cross-generational care between their family members and offer “their children multiple forms of social support, a network of friends, and a social setting that allows for free gender and sexual expression” (Arnold and Bailey 2009, 3).

network's adoption of safer sex strategies in the 1980s, as elaborated previously.<sup>26</sup> The emerging prevention aimed at trans people exists in dialogue with historical safer sex organizing. As reflected in the visual cultures of this HIV prevention production, disidentifying with historical violence and embracing public health's implementation of intervention is a site for communal mobilization. Counterintuitively, these violent systems are also sources that enable more inclusive visual cultures in HIV prevention. Therefore, disidentifying may be a positive step towards a more complete trans representation that engages narratives of affection, intimacy, and joy.

This is present in the Los Angeles-based health care system AltaMed's campaign "Ask Me About PrEP" (2017), focusing on everyday trans experience. Through a five-part bilingual short narrative film series, the initiative "Fierce/Ella" is fully dedicated to trans women of color and emphasizes preventing HIV with PrEP as a sign of empowerment (Hydro Studios 2020). As was the case with "PrEP4Love," Altamed's movies give trans characters agency and place them in the of making their own fate, while moments of pleasure and intimacy portray them as desiring subjects. Consider aspects of the narrative in this campaign. For instance, *The Queen* is a scene set in a ballroom setting. As the competitors walk the runway, two audience members talk about PrEP and the positive effects it has had on their sexual health. "In the world that doesn't always support us, we need to support each other," says the queen, as she wins the competition with the support of her community (see fig. 24). Moreover, the campaign

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<sup>26</sup> As scholar Jeffrey Escoffier (1998) argues, community-based knowledge of HIV prevention and safer sex has been the basis for the federal government's prevention strategy from 1984 (24). Medical researchers have been guided by the sexual and social life of queer people as well as their networks of care, with the result of more inclusionary HIV prevention.

destigmatizes alternative economies of sex work. In *United*, two friends stumble into each other in a public toilet. Prior to the encounter, as the distressed protagonist looks at a text message on her phone, the narrator of the movie reads her thoughts: “Oh, not him again, she says. But she needed the money.” A seemingly shaken up sex worker confides: “Well, I have this client. He’s a regular and everything... it’s just... he hates using condoms, and I can’t keep doing that.” “Are you worried about HIV?” her friend asks. “Of course, it’s always on my mind!” she answers. She cannot afford to lose out on the money from the offer that scares her, but a pep talk from her friend, including information about PrEP, calms her down (see fig. 25).

In *The Romantic* pillow talk between two lovers brings up issues of negotiating trust, monogamy, and safer sex. As the couple is being playful in bed, the viewer can hear the protagonist’s thoughts: “This is nice. Being in the arms of a fine man, but I still have to take care of business.” Leaving the bed to respond to a client who texted to ask about her availability, the protagonist’s stream of consciousness thoughts about her lover continue: “I know he wants me, that makes me feel good, but I always wonder am I truly safe with him? He always knows the right things to say. I do love him, but my health comes first.” As she takes a PrEP pill, her seemingly bothered lover says: “I don’t know why you take that babe. You know I got you.” The confident protagonist responds: “I’m just trying to take care of both of us, babe” (see fig. 26).

As the narratives in the short videos suggest, transgender communities must navigate myriad complexities influencing their health, wellbeing, and happiness. These complexities may result from engaging in alternative economies that put not only their sexual health at risk, but also their existence in general. Another major complexity is policy that influences their access to and support from the health system. Institutional recognition relies on complying with a set of

documents and policies that often do not understand the complexity of transgender bodies. As scholar Vivian Namaste (2007) argues, trans people navigate a set of convoluted and arbitrary policies that change over time and are discordant across different departments and institutions, disallowing a clear sense of directives and protocols (Namaste 2007, 253).

The requirements of one institution are not in dialogue with that of another, with the result that transgender people often find themselves shut out from several institutional sites at once. This sea of policies and discordance between institutions represents a so called “administrative abyss” that produces trans people through institutional erasure (Namaste 2007). As archivist and scholar Che Gossett (2014) argues, social abandonment and neglect result in job discrimination and homelessness and force trans people to turn to underground economies, experiences that often end in police encounters or incarcerated brutalization, which includes sexual violence, involuntary disclosure of HIV status, placement in carceral facilities, and/or ultimately death (41).<sup>27</sup>

The narratives in the short videos work towards depathologizing trans experience and underground economies, such as sex work, while they simultaneously prioritize aspects of

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<sup>27</sup> An additional layer can be found by reading the construction of a transgender subject through biomedical regimens, i.e., adherence to a prescribed dose of hormones and other biomedical substances that influence one’s experience of gender, sexuality, and pleasure. Medical institutions decide the appropriate dose of substances and the protocols of their intake. The two affect the subject’s construction as well as how this subject is going to experience the gendered or sexualized self as well as pleasure (Preciado 2013). Accordingly, biochemical devices, including synthetic hormones and PrEP taken daily, count towards biochemical regimens that enable transgender experiences in a form enabled and monitored by the public health sector in conversation with the pharmaceutical-industrial complex. Although one might claim such biochemical regimens are disciplinary tools that count towards policing, I would like to read the campaigns against the grain.



pleasure and intimacy. Since conversations about pleasure, desire, and sex are an uncommon approach in the history of public health oriented towards trans people, it's possible to claim that pleasure and references to the nurturing worlds of ball cultures reorient the power dynamics of the contemporary HIV prevention sector. The use of pleasure in HIV prevention is here a site of potential that can build a world amid the radical conditions of erasure which trans people face on an everyday basis. One might claim that imagining trans people as desiring subjects counts towards subverting the radical conditions of erasure to which these communities have been subjected institutionally. Following Scott's (2010) argument about Black abjection, as well as Musser's (2014) study, pleasure in this case "open[s] up different modes of theorizing resistance to power" (8). The PrEP campaigns analyzed here portray both everyday struggles and pleasurable moments in the lives of trans people, and in so doing dissent from the usual approach of trans bodies as subjects (only) of the medical gaze and institutional brutality.

### **Problems of Positive Trans Representation**

Focusing on pleasurable moments in the lives of trans people can also have less productive or radical outcomes. Although I argue for the world-making properties of pleasure in HIV prevention, we should bear in mind that pleasure is—in Foucauldian fashion—flexible enough to resist power, but in the same way it can sustain power and work in its favor. These dynamics should be taken into consideration when observing the conformity of trans visual cultures. Although they focus on "diversity," visual cultures suggest that trans individuals must first be recognized as citizens (determined by gender, sexual, and racial conformity) to be catered to in the sector of public health and HIV prevention. In other words, the "diverse" presentation of

trans populations included in public health does not always undermine the normative two-gender system, but rather can reinforce it.

Due to the complexity of trans experience and the limitations of the two-gender system, the image of trans people currently supported by public media cannot encapsulate the complex totality of trans multiplicities. J. R. Latham's ethnographic account of trans surgeries and treatments suggests that in the history of Western medicine, trans has been streamlined into a singular phenomenon, canceling out a wide range of other experiences not compatible with the institutional categories operating within the two-gender regulatory system. Latham (2017) calls this "the presumed singularity of 'transsexuality'" (178). While mainstream visual cultures appropriate traditional femininity and masculinity, trans embodiment is a much more expansive site and cannot be contained within only these two possibilities.

The safer sex initiative "Pledge" (2018) by the DC Department of Health in Washington provides a relevant example demonstrating Latham's critique. Aimed at the sexual health of Black trans women, this campaign was made using high-end photography sessions. In one photo, three Black trans women wearing red cocktail dresses are elegantly wrapped in transgender pride flags. Their elegant cocktail dresses and white satin gloves signal elegance and refinement. The transgender flag, now a widely recognizable public emblem, represents trans pride. On one of the banners, the models lean on one another, suggesting community and being able to count on one another. Above their heads, "Pledge" is defined as "a solemn promise or undertaking," with an example: "she took the PrEP Pledge to protect her sexual health" (see fig. 27).

The imagery, flag, and invocation of “The Pledge of Allegiance” show how the campaign works at constructing so-called trans respectability politics: it portrays transness in the context of U.S. citizenship, and an ideology of progress and success, whereas the pledge, undertaken for the benefit of one’s health hints at PrEP patients being docile and respectable citizens. As such, this campaign reflects the complexities of positive trans representation. According to activists and scholars Reina Gossett, Eric A. Stanley, and Johanna Burton (2017), positive public representations that center a narrative of empowerment, fabulousness, and progress give little support or protection to the low-income parts of trans communities, the very people whose lives and labor have made this current moment of visibility possible (xv). Although abandoned and underrepresented parts of trans communities are a target of the ongoing high rates of violence against trans people, the system focuses only on possible consumers.

Correspondingly, although campaigns oriented towards trans people undisputedly have world-making capabilities, they are not free from orchestration by the pharmaceutical industry, which ultimately funds and controls the politics of inclusion. Scholar Jack Halberstam (2017) argues that the recent emphasis on sexual and gender diversity represents “both a break with nineteenth- and twentieth-century concepts of classification, norms, and identity and a new mode of social control that continues the social project that classification and normative regulation began” (28). Although parting from the historical pathology of the trans body suggests a certain level of agency in embracing gender, sexual, and racial multiplicity, Halberstam sees this as part of the current biomedical capitalism enabling it. Although public health now recognizes and celebrates racial and trans “difference,” it also capitalizes on and benefits from including queer and trans people.

Scholar Roderick Ferguson (2004) argues that Black gender and sexual diversity “allegedly represents the socially disorganizing effects of capital, [but it actually] play[s] a powerful part [...] of political economy” (1). Racialized Black gender and sexuality diversity pertaining to Black cultural formations is for Ferguson a “part of the secular trends of capitalist modes of production” (2). On the one hand, normative national culture constitutes itself against these cultural formations. On the other hand, the “heterogeneity” and “non-normativity” of these cultural formations can be capitalized on, hence their status as “a fixture of urban capitalism” (Ferguson 2004, 1). An example of capitalizing on Black (and) trans diversity in consumer-oriented public health can be found in the Centers for Disease Control’s (CDC) statistics, which creates the “high risk” populations classification and determines their inclusion in prevention work.<sup>28</sup> These statistics are further utilized by public health networks, the pharmaceutical-industrial complex, and advertising agencies, which promotes sexual health via the consumption of biochemical substances, such as PrEP, to “high risk” populations.

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<sup>28</sup> The production of these “high risk” groups is problematic for multiple reasons. For instance, public health discourses constructing “risk” attach HIV to particular bodies based on a range of racial stereotypes that place socioeconomically dispossessed people outside the parameters of “the general population” (Bailey 2009, 258). As scholar Adam Geary (2014) argues, stereotypes used by the CDC to “explain” the high HIV rates among Black Americans include the whispers of “rough” sex [...] the secretly bisexual man on the “down low”; the compensatory hypermasculinity of urban black men; the black women disempowered in the marriage market by high rates of male incarceration, vulnerable to eligible black men’s caprice; or the superabundance of inner-city drug use and risky sex” (11). Moreover, in the CDC’s statistics, racial, ethnic, and other social identities are categorized as fundamentally “behavioral identities” and placed together in the same discursive space with “high risk” behaviors, such as “men who have sex with men” or “injection drug use” (11–20). While such categorization reflects the racist logic under which HIV is prescribed to one’s irresponsible and risky behavior, the fact that behavior can be manipulated is a marketing entry point for biomedical capitalism.

The CDC provides extensive technical assistance to state and local health departments in promoting these biomedical prevention methods. In addition, prevention campaigns are usually the result of a collaboration between health agencies and professional international advertising corporations, that shape the visual cultures of these campaigns with input from their clients (Cooter and Stein 2010, 186). As a result, this network of state and local health actors creates social marketing campaigns and visual cultures with tremendous influence in constructing desirable representations of queerness and transness of color. The campaigns analyzed in this chapter are no exemption. For example, AltaMed's initiative "Fierce," was sponsored by the pharmaceutical company Gilead Sciences, which has the patent for the pill Truvada, a brand name for PrEP. Similarly, with \$350,000 at its disposal, PrEP4Love's case is a result of a network of funding that enables its sex-positive character. The ability to create these cultures centralizing pleasure comes from funding, and funding influences who appears in the campaigns and how the campaign narrates pleasure.<sup>29</sup>

Consequentially, not only does funding affect the visual cultures of HIV prevention, but it also influences the politics of pleasure used in the campaigns. As previously mentioned, the flexibility of pleasure makes it a site suitable for both resisting and reinforcing power. This

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<sup>29</sup> The same can be said for the not-for-profit organization Red Hot, one of the bigger players in the industry. Red Hot's mission was promoted by mainstream celebrities, including Madonna, George Michael, Elizabeth Taylor, Boy George, and Lisa Stansfield, and their promotional materials were exhibited at museums, including MoMA in New York City (in 1991). Information about the campaign (images, information about events, and CD's) have appeared in mainstream music venues, including MTV, and publications such as *Rolling Stone*, *Billboard*, and *Paper Magazine* targeted towards general audiences. In addition, the organization has distributed and managed around \$15 million dollars to AIDS organizations around the world, influencing the nature of their work, approach to prevention and visual cultures.

means that the use of pleasure in HIV prevention is also tied to the demands of biomedical consumption. According to Preciado (2008; 2013), biomedical capitalism makes pleasure possible via the consumption of specific biochemical substances, such as PrEP.<sup>30</sup> Safer sex—performed via condoms and/or PrEP—is not only a site that uses pleasure in experimental ways but also a site that reinforces consumption and maintaining the capitalist status quo. The cultural critic Susan Sontag (1990), recognizing this dynamic decades ago, argued that the marketing of HIV prevention serves the economic interests of commodity capitalism.<sup>31</sup> In Sontag’s (1990) view, the promotion of safer sex through the consumption of condoms strengthened the existing capitalist system and celebrated consumption as a source of individual freedom. I will discuss this idea further in Chapter 5.

### **Conclusion: The Double Bind of Pleasure**

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<sup>30</sup> As a result of consuming a variety of these biomedical commodities, Preciado (2008) claims that contemporary subjectivities are defined by the substances that dominate their metabolism, producing gender, sexuality, and our experience of pleasure: “the synthetic molecules [...] are edible somatic-political programs for the manufacturing of subjectivity and its affects. We are equipped techno-bio-politically to fuck, to reproduce or to control the possibility of reproduction” (112). Since these biochemical substances enable one’s embodiment, participation in biochemical capitalism is inevitable.

<sup>31</sup> The most explicit example portraying how HIV prevention, the horrors of AIDS, and capitalism have been intertwined was a 1992 *Shock of Reality* campaign by the Italian fashion knitwear company the United Colors of Benetton, at a cost of 70 million US dollars (Sevecke 1997, 24). The company ran a highly controversial ad consisting of the award-winning photograph “Dying of AIDS” (1990) by Therese Frare, which shows the dying AIDS activist David Kirby surrounded by his grieving family. Although Oliviero Toscani, creative director of the campaign, claimed that advertisements like this reveal the commitment of commercial organizations to contemporary global political and social issues, this move also reflects the appropriation of AIDS misery to sell sweaters (Cooter and Stein 2010) (see fig. 28).

In a somewhat linear fashion, this chapter has laid out the development of visual cultures in HIV prevention advertising since the early years of the AIDS crisis and underlined the role pleasure has played in establishing safer sex education, facilitated first by condoms and now PrEP. In addition, this chapter argued that disidentifying with structural violence, here embodied by the transphobic and anti-Black public health network, during the AIDS crisis, might be a source of positive self-determination and subject-construction. While Black cis-gender gay men disidentify with colonial fantasy and the white gay male gaze, this chapter shows that Black trans people and trans people of color can also find their voice in disidentifying with the medical gaze. Disidentification is a first step in creating more accurate visual cultures accounting for the complexity of everyday trans experience. Initial HIV prevention was predominantly cis-male, but with major grassroots efforts to establish more inclusive HIV prevention, gradually HIV prevention advertising became more responsive to images of diverse queer and trans bodies of color. These changes were also possible because of the interactions between the HIV prevention sector and biomedical consumption. Because pleasure has a major role in facilitating world-making, another instance enabling the possibility of world-making is, perhaps counter-intuitively, biomedical market and consumption. In other words, the same institutional networks that have historically not been as amicable to trans and queer people of color co-create a politics of inclusivity. However, as the cultural “Black trans tipping point” has shown, there have been major changes.

This chapter has shown how the current tipping point in the HIV sector exploits racial and trans difference by monetizing their communal tropes and narratives, such as ballroom, while at the same time being extremely selective and exclusive about who can enjoy the perks of

health. However, this same system of power also offers a possibility for world-making.

Accordingly, prevention work's reliance on biomedical capital and funding is a double bind: the persistent tie between consumption and prevention work simultaneously restricts and enables trans and queer of color presence. In addition, although this chapter argued that pleasure in HIV prevention adds to the possibility of world-building, various systems of power, for example advertising agencies in consolidation with "Big Pharma," prescribe what a narrative of pleasure looks like. Pleasure, therefore, is itself a double bind: a site that enables resistance, but also maintains power. Under these circumstances, diverse trans-oriented imagery in HIV prevention is bitter-sweet: it may work towards dismantling the racist and transphobic regimes of the white medical gaze, reinventing what the trans body of color can "do" or "be" in everyday quotidian life, creating possible future narratives; yet, as this chapter has stressed, part of what the body can "do" is consume (buy and ingest) expensive medications and perform a barely ironic ceremony of national allegiance.



*This assumption that white people are just people, which is not far off saying that whites are people whereas other colors are something else, is endemic to white people. (Dyer 2003, 302)*

*Racial subjection is most successfully realized when the state is able to seduce and compel racialized bodies to perform as raced subjects. (Chambers-Letson 2013, 26)*

*To be American is to occupy the place of the universal subject, for which whiteness was once the synecdoche, with the authority to intervene, order, and rationalize that such universality entails. Once the conflation of whiteness with the universal is recalibrated through the discursive matrix of liberal antiracism, race itself disappears. (Melamed 2006, 8)*

*At some point whiteness became less rigid and more adaptive. Rather than continue to scoff at the idea that it was not alone in the world, it learned to acknowledge the presence of particularities and indeed regard itself as a particularity as well. (Ferguson 2014, 1101)*

## CHAPTER 2

### **“How Do I Spell America?”: AIDS, Anti-Blackness, and National Belonging**

The HIV prevention campaign “Conquer AIDS” (ca. 1995) by the organization Gay Men Fighting AIDS (GMFA) pays homage to photographer Joe Rosenthal’s Pulitzer Prize-winning photograph of six U.S. marines raising the U.S. flag atop Mount Suribachi, taken during the Battle of Iwo Jima during World War II. “Conquer AIDS” is a black and white photograph of five partially dressed and racially diverse men who wear army style fatigues, as they raise a rainbow flag atop a hill (see fig. 29 and fig. 30). Above the soldiers’ heads there is a large banner with “Conquer AIDS” written in the colors of rainbow, as in the gay pride flag. Written beneath them is “the safest weapons, condoms & lube.” While GMFA’s *gay soldiers* are meant to emulate the conquering of AIDS with pride and commitment, the political connotations of Rosenthal’s photograph, U.S. imperialism and its overt military presence in the Pacific region, cannot be ignored. The campaign is drawing a correlation between the battle against AIDS and the project of U.S. military imperialism; gay soldiers have become aligned with U.S. military power and its global expansion. By including models of diverse cultural backgrounds in the project, the GMFA seems to suggest that anyone can participate in national endeavors. Therefore, the questions are: What are the connotations of placing a body—the same body scapegoated just a few decades ago by government institutions for the spread of AIDS—into narratives of national belonging and the U.S.’s military imperialism? In a narrative promoting a condom as a placeholder for national belonging and entitlement to freedom and liberty, what is the function of diverse representation and inclusion of race?

“Conquer AIDS” is only one example of patriotic aesthetics in HIV prevention.<sup>32</sup>

Throughout the 1990s, the portrayal of the healthy gay cis-male body as the national body in HIV prevention was a common occurrence, as can be seen in multiple campaigns portraying marines and soldiers in the context of sexual citizenship and national pride. The function of “Conquer AIDS” is twofold: it appropriates the aesthetics and norms of traditional heterosexual masculinity in the context of national and gay pride, while also celebrating diversity as the face of the gay movement. This chapter touches on the emerging interaction between homonationalism and multiculturalism in HIV prevention and closely explores the visual language of multiple prevention campaigns, to better understand how this interaction has influenced the presentation of race, masculinity, and sexual citizenship.

The so-called “(homo)nationalism genre” of HIV prevention corresponds with the rapid infiltration of white gay liberal politics into U.S. public life just as the first antiretroviral therapies were approved by the FDA and appeared on the market. Gay liberalism—or homonormativity—is widely understood as a set of juridical rules enabling gays and lesbians to access the recognition of citizenship rights. Queer studies scholars like Lisa Duggan (2003) are critical of gay liberalism, as it fails to contest dominant state institutions, values, traditions and gender and kinship normativity, including marriage, family, and military service, but instead operates in tandem with them (50). Gay liberal politics work in tandem with homonationalism.

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<sup>32</sup> This campaign is only one of the examples equating the AIDS emergency with defining historical events in U.S. military history. For instance, there have been multiple scholarly and activist comparisons between AIDS-related atrocities and the Vietnam war or the Holocaust (Butler 2004, 105; Cotter 2016; Cvetkovich 2003, 160; Katz and Hushka 2015; Sullivan 1996; Sturken 2009).

Scholar Jasbir Puar introduced the term homonationalism to describe the variety of institutional processes granting gay men and women the freedom to consume goods, services, and relationships, in exchange for being complicit not only in consumption, but also and more importantly, in perpetuating state violence in support of homeland security and nationalist values (2, 38).

Homonationalism can be detected in different eras throughout U.S. history.<sup>33</sup> This chapter locates homonationalism in the visual cultures of HIV prevention. What all types of (homo)nationalism in U.S. history have in common is their reinforcement of the ever-narrowing parameters of white racial privilege. In addition, the white supremacist system in the U.S. tries repeatedly to maintain power through policies aimed at populations outside of these narrow parameters. This was the case in the HIV sector, which was sympathetic to the liberal gay politics of the 1990s: when mainstream AIDS organizations—composed of predominantly white board structures and creating programs for affluent white gay men—were faced with criticism, they implemented multicultural policies and representation.<sup>34</sup> These policies were supposed to

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<sup>33</sup> Whereas Puar (2007) argues that homonationalism is tied to the liberal gay agenda that developed with the post-9/11 re-emergence of American nationalism, scholar Scott Lauria Morgensen (2010) ties homonationalism to settler sexualities during the Native American genocide. Scholar Hiram Pérez (2015) notes that colonization and cosmopolitanism are sites predating homonationalism in U.S. expansionist politics.

<sup>34</sup> Paving the way for multiple AIDS organizations, the San Francisco AIDS Foundation (SFAF) and the Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC) were two of the first organizations to implement programs and policies in sexual education accounting for "minorities." Starting in 1989, the GMHC incorporated multiculturalism as part of its "strategic plan" to identify strategies that would assist in overcoming barriers based on inadequate programs aimed at communities of color. The GMHC defined multiculturalism as "the understanding, sensitivity, respect and support for various cultures, through the implementation of [...] programs, services, education, advocacy, internal and external communications, employment, volunteerism,

tackle issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion. According to queer of color critique, however, multiculturalism only re-creates a hierarchy of acceptable differences measured by proximity to racial, class, and national normativities, i.e., whiteness (Ferguson, 2012; Hong, 2012; Melamed, 2006). Therefore, an important question to consider when critically approaching the multicultural project: how can visual cultures that do not function the way they claim to be improved?

The first part of this chapter establishes the many ways that AIDS organizations maintained an allegiance to whiteness and the American flag, through either explicit portrayals or by incorporating multiculturalism. Although this chapter does not dismiss the possibility of disidentifying with the racially diverse representation of multicultural inclusion (because visibility and representation do matter), I am more interested in other, possibly radical ways to reinvent or expand visual cultures, not dependent on the approval of the white majority and the white gaze. Therefore, in the second half of this chapter I do a close-reading on visual artwork that departs altogether from portrayals of the body, instead portraying discursive forms and text. This chapter engages with the work of the artists Howardena Pindell, Willie Cole, Charles Ryan Long, and Chris Jordan, whose art—mixed-media canvases and letterpress posters—utilizes

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technical assistance and all aspects of human resources” (Gay Men’s Health Crisis). Notably, SFAF only implemented multiculturalism after losing a large amount of money because of its limited inclusion of people of color. In 1987, Evelyn C. White’s article “How S.F. Lost \$3 Million In AIDS Funds” published by the San Francisco Chronicle suggested that because of the lack of diversity in prevention programs, the Foundation had lost funding. Timothy Wolfred, the executive director of the Foundation at the time, denied the accusation, despite the predominantly white focus of the SFAF. As a response to this and similar public incidents, SFAF has gradually increased “ethnic” staff and collaborated with other organizations more involved with communities of color (White 1987; Wolfred 1987, 1987).

emblems of the nation-state, including the American flag and historical slave narratives, strategically to refute (homo)nationalist logic and its color-blind politics.

These artists place the contemporary AIDS crisis in historical perspective, demonstrating that high rates of HIV among Black people are a part of the long history of anti-Black violence “dragging” itself into the present. They stage multiple intergenerational dialogues extending back a full century before the first wave of anti-AIDS campaigns. They invoke the residues of trans-Atlantic slavery embodied in contemporary socio-economic, cultural, and political dispossession. They also converse with the artistic traditions of Black practitioners, who started exploring alternate ways to depict Blackness decades before AIDS landed on the U.S. political and cultural landscapes, beginning with the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s and continuing through the Black arts movement of the 1960s.<sup>35</sup> In addressing the inherent contradictions and social inequalities that place a different value on white and Black American life, these artists show that the Black experience is tied together through time by a necropolitics that “drags” into the inequalities of the present day.<sup>36</sup> Contemporary residues of past systemic violence, such as

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<sup>35</sup> Drawing on scholar Huey Copeland’s (2013) study, the artists I analyze in this chapter can also be placed in conversation with other artists occupied by the contemporary residues of slavery. For instance, according to Copeland (2013), Renée Green, Glenn Ligon, Lorna Simpson, and Fred Wilson have “a shared investment in critical artistic strategies developed since the 1960s, [as noted in their] nearly simultaneous turn toward slavery in large-scale installations executed between 1991 and 1993” (4).

<sup>36</sup> Necropolitics interacts with Foucault’s (2003) notions of biopower and biopolitics, forms of power that dictate who may live and who must die based on biological predispositions, i.e., race and racism, and distribute people accordingly into a variety of populations and groups. Mbembe finds “necropower” or necropolitics a more sufficient way to account for contemporary forms of the subjugation of life to the power of death. Necropolitics is a form of power applicable to a fraction of the population predisposed for death, while it deems other fractions

lynching and the Jim Crow laws, are found both in the present's partial health protection and legislation that criminalizes HIV status and contributes to the mass incarceration of Black people. Using a variety of discursive forms, these artists resist, displace, and challenge the primacy of bodily representation and expand the dominant field of vision, which has been commodifying, hypersexualizing, fragmentizing, or simply erasing Black bodies for centuries.

### **Biopolitical Transition and “A New Gay Man”**

Through the 1980s, government inaction reflected a necropolitical agenda directed towards gay men (Butler 1995, 346). However, with the approval of successful HIV antiretroviral therapies in the mid-1990s, the production of homosexual death has been transformed into the protection of life. According to scholar Dagmawi Woubshet (2015), the success of antiretroviral therapy influenced the public perception of AIDS as a manageable condition and assisted in developing discourses about a return to normalcy; these discourses “displaced AIDS [...] as a demarcated past against which a new normative gay identity could be forged” (23). This moment represents a biopolitical shift for gay men and introduces a liberal gay politics and culture that differed substantially from the radical origins of the grassroots gay movements of the past.<sup>37</sup> In addition, these changes created the prototype of “a new gay man,” an archetype of redemption for the “irresponsible” past.

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suitable for the reproduction of life. Those predisposed for death are subjected to conditions of life bestowing upon them the status of the “living dead” (Mbembe 2003, 40).

<sup>37</sup> In other words, the grassroots queer activism crucial for the formation of the AIDS-related resistance in the 1980s was exchanged for the corporate-style organizations that work on establishing basic civil rights for gay men and lesbians, such as the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) and the Human Rights Campaign (HRC). These organizations,

As scholar Dion Kagan (2018) argues, “a new gay man” is “a white, bourgeois, domesticated image of gayness [with a figure that] adopts a more palatable role as the best friend of heterosexual women and willing aid to the narrative priorities of reproductive futures” (21, 46). This figure does not represent a threat to the heterosexual majority, instead embracing its values, including white masculinity, monogamy, family, and a commitment to health. In addition, this man also departs from the “irresponsible” promiscuous past of nightlife, drugs, and AIDS, and fully partakes in national life. Corresponding with these political changes, the HIV sector also constructed its own version of “a *new* gay patriot.” Soldiers and marines, figures that for decades have been part of gay men’s imaginaries, have been used strategically as a way of establishing affluent gay men in national narratives, with the ultimate function of depathologizing homosexuality (now conflated with AIDS).

A good example of how AIDS organizations contributed to creating “a new gay patriot” is the campaign “Life, Liberty, & the Pursuit of Happiness” (1990). The campaign, the result of a collaborative effort between the San Francisco AIDS Foundation (SFAF) and the Haight Ashbury Free Clinics, promoted condoms to young gay men under 25 years of age with a “bold and controversial” message (SFAF 1990). Billboards were installed across bus shelters in San Francisco portraying two attractive bare-chested men with a U.S. flag draped below their waists. As they gaze into the camera, one man has his arm wrapped around the other. In his free hand, he

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which support centralized politics and have headquarters in Washington, aim to secure a place in the domain of the nation-state for gays and lesbians. As scholar Ramón Rivera-Servera (2014) argues, such establishments have been more focused on the development of consumer identities and less on “macro- and microeconomic obstacles to the fair and ethical distribution of rights and resources” (13).



holds a condom, showing the viewer a safer sex practice (see fig. 31). This phrase from the Declaration of Independence (1776) initially proclaimed the U.S. separation from Britain and connotes the “unalienable rights” given to all human beings, even though these rights were not extended to African Americans, indentured servants, or women. In HIV prevention, the Declaration speaks to audiences of young gay men, “a group which recent surveys suggest is practicing unsafe sex at a significantly high rate” (SFAF 1990). Les Pappas, the SFAF Campaign Development Coordinator, explains that the campaign relied on the American flag to convey an explicit safer sex message to the targeted audience: “You are a valuable part of this community. You’re entitled to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” (SFAF 1990).

Many projects similar to SFAF’s campaign were created during this time. For instance, the campaign “Condom Brigade” (1998) by the Southern Arizona AIDS Foundation features partially dressed white gay men in national uniforms. The two smaller images on the left portray affectionate semi-nude soldiers and marines, while the central visual depicts two naked men embracing with the U.S. flag covers their genitalia (see fig. 32). Artist Jay Critchley’s safer sex calendar “1992 Men of Old Glory” articulates the relationship between condoms, AIDS, and war by depicting a group of masculine and exclusively white men (see fig. 33).<sup>38</sup> What these projects

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<sup>38</sup> For instance, a soldier Mark poses shirtless in camouflage pants and declares: “Sack It or Whack It Soldier! AIDS is the biggest killer of peacetime soldiers. The Pentagon spends more in one day than the U.S. Government has spent on AIDS Research and Education in the last five years. Stop the Leaks Guys!” The message seems to suggest that one needs to be a responsible soldier of one’s own fate because of poor AIDS funding. A similar message is conveyed by “Uncle Sam” Glen, the half-nude cover model in denim short-shorts. Posing in front of two large U.S. flags on the wall behind him, Glen asserts: “Never Flown at Half Mast. The Highest Form of Patriotism is Protecting Lives; so What are You Waiting For? Do it!” The calendar is a part of Critchley’s larger project *Old Glory Condom Corporation* (1990), which promotes latex

have in common is their reinforcement of a healthy traditional masculinity. Although attached to the ideal of “a new gay man” of the 1990s, the roots of and references to traditional masculinity were initially used prior to the first wave of the AIDS crisis, in the so-called “gay clone” cultures.

These “gay clone” cultures, emerging in the post-Stonewall era, referred to a novel take on gay masculinity, drawn heavily from the aesthetics of heterosexual working class occupations and appearances, including mustaches, muscular bodies, tight Levi’s jeans, and leather boots (Dean, 2002; Levine 1998; Mercer 1994; Meyer 1995). In a comprehensive ethnographic account of gay clone cultures, Martin P. Levine (1998) argues that alignment with hypermasculinity was a way to challenge gay men’s stigmatization as “sissies” and “failed men” (5, 20). Because the clones were copying an ideal of traditional masculinity that was white, as well as sexist and racist, it is not surprising that these clones also followed protocols of racial and gender exclusion (Levine 1998, 1).<sup>39</sup> According to Mercer (1994), a lack of political awareness in the gay male community, ignoring the racial dimensions of gay clone cultures, and appropriating traditional masculinity is ironic, especially when taking into account that the gay

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condoms—in the colors of the U.S. flag—as a symbol of national pride and commitment. The project “utiliz[es] the power and image of the American flag to mobilize the country for war against AIDS” (Durland 1990). During the opening in Provincetown on Flag Day in 1990, Critchley states that one of the project’s primary purposes is “Providing a new perspective on patriotism” (Rolbein 1992, 11). Critchley also called on President Bush to organize an army of safer sex soldiers to fight HIV/AIDS and “redefine what it means to be patriotic: to protect and save lives” (Critchley 2019).

<sup>39</sup> As Levine (1998) suggests, black men were visible in clone culture but often for the wrong reasons, i.e., stereotyping and their association with danger, “rougher masculinity,” and overt hypersexualization (10–11).

cultures of the 1970s were a product of the modern gay liberation movement, closely informed by the Black liberation movement and the symbolism of “Black Pride” of the 1960s (132).

### **Only Skin Deep: A Turn to Multiculturalism in HIV Prevention**

Whereas Levine suggests that many people abandoned clone culture with the proliferation of AIDS in the 1980s (8), I argue that the crisis and its aftermath provided an occasion to create a new version of this gay male aesthetic—as seen in the “birth” of a new gay man post-biopolitical transition.<sup>40</sup> It’s possible that this transition signals new possibilities, especially because it occurred in parallel with the discourse of normalization, influenced by the approval of ART. Before ART, it’s possible to say that gay masculinity was in crisis, especially because it was largely related to promiscuous sex, AIDS, and death. Now, through medical innovation, gay men overcame the crisis and became an idealized first citizen, making explicit their allegiance to the nationalist trinity of state, soldier, and the U.S. flag. In the process of creating a new gay man, AIDS organizations focused on whiteness as an unmarked ideal, made obvious through a lack of services for people of color, including a lack of outreach to minorities,

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<sup>40</sup> Although public health has had a major role in supporting and shaping homonationalism, heterosexual figures, including sailors, marines, and soldiers, were a defining part of male homosexual culture for decades before the AIDS emergency. It’s possible to say that post-Stonewall gay male cultures reflect homonationalist tendencies by fetishizing military, marine, and working-class labor, and disidentifying with the aesthetics of these occupations. Therefore, it seems homonationalism has been “dragging” itself through gay history. Since the consolidation of contemporary gay identities, homonationalism has been a defining factor of gay male cultures.

a lack of recruitment for employees and volunteers of color, and overwhelmingly white board structures. To correct these oversights, AIDS organizations turned to multiculturalism.

For instance, as a response to the GMHC's problematic lack of racial diversity in staff and volunteer structures, the organization formed the People of Color Resource Committee (POCRC) in November 1989, to serve people of color at the GMHC and reduce racism in the overwhelmingly white structure of the organization. Similarly, around 1985 SFAF founded the Third World AIDS Advisory Task Force (TWAATF), the first organization in San Francisco to focus on the needs of people of color affected by AIDS. Formed to tackle the problems of race in safer sex campaigns, TWAATF began challenging safer sex's consumer model of prevention aimed strictly at white gay men (Brier 2009, 47–48).

According to queer of color critique, the concept of multiculturalism has its roots in post-World War II liberation movements, including the decolonization, civil rights, and Black Power movements that challenged a weakened post-war white masculinity (Hong 2012). Although multiculturalism was initially developed to enhance community-based racial reconstruction and protested white supremacy by promoting justice on the part of historically marginalized groups, it has gradually become a policy rubric for business, government, civil society, and education (Melamed 2006, 15). Not only do these institutions see social justice as good for business and capitalizing, but also for regulating and controlling non-white and non-heteronormative formations: “the affirmation of previously degraded forms of subjectivity became a part of the apparatus of power” (Hong 2012, 94).

Multiculturalism can include the wealthy parts of queer communities of color. This is similar to how homosexual men were incorporated into systems of power, despite being previously despised. However, these subjects must replicate white standards to become recognized and valued members of public life. The approach of multiculturalism might be called “color-blind” or “post-racial,” and can be seen in numerous campaigns portraying and addressing Black men and gay men of color. For example, the bilingual campaign “He Plays Hard... And He *Always* Uses Condoms!” (1992) which included “hunkily multicultural guys in a locker room” (Span 1992). The posters showed three attractive men of different races dressed in tight sportswear and hanging out at a gym, a trope representing the lifestyle of young gay clones. One of the men is sitting, turned away from the other two, with a content expression of his face; he knows he is being watched and approves of the gaze. The two men behind him have an obvious erotic interest, and one of them whispers into the other’s ear: “He Plays Hard... And He *Always* Uses Condoms!” (see fig. 34).

These “multicultural” aesthetics continue to appear in campaigns promoting PrEP.<sup>41</sup> These safer sex campaigns deploy the rhetoric of diversity and imagery of clone aesthetics to suggest that the problem of race is only skin deep. For example, a letter sent by Lyn Paleo to the Scientific Advisory Committee Members of SFAF about the brochure “Safe Sex for Gay and

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<sup>41</sup> For instance, two posters by the Health Education Resource Organization (HERO) of Baltimore entitled “You won’t believe what we like to wear in bed” (1986) show two handsome men undressing, one taking his top off and the other gazing into the camera as he is unbuttoning his trousers. The identical tableaux in both posters differ only in the men’s racial background (see fig. 35). Comparable to HERO’s posters, a municipal campaign by New York City’s Department of Health “We Play Sure” (2015) includes diverse couples of different genders, sexual orientations, and races, including playful white and Black male couples in white tank tops (see fig 36).

Bisexual Men: Man to Man” (1988) specifies, “There will be four different versions of this brochure. The text will remain the same, but the race of the models will be different in each” (Paleo, 1988). This approach does the opposite of what it claims to be doing, leaving culturally specific contexts out of the picture and producing so-called color-blindness. HIV prevention campaigns are only one example of multicultural advertising, where, as scholar Ann DuCille (1996) points out, heterogeneity stops at the level of the skin.<sup>42</sup>

The inclusion of cultural difference in HIV prevention advertising appropriates the aesthetics and norms of white heterosexual masculinity, then presents white heterosexual masculinity as an unmarked ideal one should conform to. According to scholar Laura Azzarito (2009), multicultural advertising and its emphasis on celebrating diversity reproduces the dominant norm through “discourses of ‘sameness’” suggesting “we are different but we are all the same” (192). The dominant norm has been tailored on “Anglo-American culture,” which then becomes “a superior bodily norm to other cultures” (Azzarito 2009, 186). Although color-blind portrayals of cultural difference make current system of power seem benevolent and friendly, it “sets back to the socio-educational, educational, economic, and racial struggle needed to pursue equality” (Azzarito 2009, 192). If the cultural contexts of these types of campaigns were more accurately depicted, it would be clear that multiculturalism does not work the way it is supposed to.

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<sup>42</sup> In DuCille’s (1996) study on dolls with diverse complexions but white features, she argues that “toymakers have got around the problem by making the other at once different and the same. In this sense, Mattel’s play with mass-produced difference resembles the nation’s uneasy play with a melting pot pluralism that both produces and denies difference” (38).

Multiculturalism may be a good strategy for diversifying visual cultures in HIV prevention. However, the multiculturalism project assumes that the problem of racial inequality can be solved through an acontextual body politics that erases the ongoing systemic violence AIDS organizations were tasked with addressing. That multiculturalism, and its umbrella term “diversity,” refers to everyone who is not white is intrinsically anti-Black. According to scholar Jared Sexton (2010), placing multiple perspectives, experiences, and identities under the singular signifier of “diversity” and “people-of-color” discourses erases the specificity of Blackness. Sexton claims that so-called “people-of-color-blindness,” “misunderstands the specificity of antiblackness and presumes or insists upon the monolithic character of victimization under white supremacy” (2010, 48).

### **Destabilizing Multiculturalism: Black American AIDS**

Although the GMHC called itself “a truly multicultural agency” and implemented policies in 1987, almost a decade later in 1996, three Black board members resigned over their perceived subservient position on the board. One of the board members, Billy E. Jones, former head of the New York City Health and Hospitals Corporation said: “Much work needs to be done at the GMHC to make it truly inclusive and welcoming of diversity...It is also clear that such work will be a great struggle” (Dunlap 1996). Multiculturalism represents a struggle for predominantly white AIDS organizations at multiple levels, including the internal board structures and programs. Aside from the multicultural rhetoric and subsequent visual representation, these policies did little with regards to communities of color. In other words, the systems of oppression promoting the protection of life through a politics of multiculturalism

while simultaneously exposing bodies of color, and particularly Black bodies, to the same conditions that created their vulnerability to the virus, reflect the larger necropolitical agenda.

Following Mmembe (2003), the necropolitical agenda is seen in the state's production of death, reserved for those communities that do not comply with the demands of racial, gender, and national normativity. Although CDC reports often cite socioeconomic status as an underlying factor in the pervasive disparities in health observed for racial minority populations, little consideration is given to the social history and prevailing social climate of racial discrimination. Treating systemic impoverishment, racial segregation, and mass incarceration as conditions of possibility that "allowed the HIV virus to establish itself and emerge as an epidemic," Geary (2014) argues that "the state has structured the ways in which black Americans have been made vulnerable to HIV exposure and infection far beyond the capacity of any individual or community mitigation or control" (23, 2). These politics continue to reproduce the division between healthy and unhealthy bodies, a binary in which health and disease are characterized as a personal choice, a driving force of (gay) liberalism and (homo)nationalism.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Narratives in campaigns that invite their targeted audiences to make the right choice or to make certain commitments disregard the larger socio-economic issues that produce the conditions of one's vulnerability to HIV, which goes well beyond individual behavior. As scholar and archivist Che Gossett (2014) argues, the rhetoric of "individualizing neoliberal logic of choice and responsibility" that public health officials utilize in their reports on HIV rates forecloses the possibility of systemic analysis (43). Narratives of choice are used against poor, gender non-conforming and trans communities of color, as well as sex workers, incarcerated people, and drug users, who are not seen in any of the campaigns that promote multiculturalism. Instead of understanding individual behaviors as a primary category facilitating the transmission of HIV, a focus on racialized economic and political state violence would significantly shift our understanding of how the epidemic and virus function (Geary 2014; Gossett 2014; Shavers and Shavers 2006; Watkins-Hayes 2014).



Instead of the insufficient multicultural visual cultures and color-blind body politics, there are other ways to tackle representation of Blackness, accounting for its cultural context, but without reproducing the dominant bodily norm or falling into the trap of colonial fantasy. As I have argued, although disidentifying with multiculturalism (which can coexist with colonial fantasy) might be one possible way to tackle the political and socioeconomic aspects of AIDS, I am interested in exploring a different strategy in this chapter: departing from corporeal representation all together. As Copeland (2013) argues:

visuality [...] thanks to its frequent denigration of the black image [...] has been construed as the mastering conceit from which African Americans have sought refuge. Everywhere haunted and pursued by the gaze, black cultural practitioner's past and present have often turned to the word in posing alternative articulations of the self. (129)

In posing such alternatives, some artists “position blackness as a discursive site” to reposition our approach to visual cultures depicting Blackness in partial or objectifying ways (Copeland 2013: 12).

One such artist is abstract painter and mixed media artist Howardena Pindell. In her expansive body of work, beginning before the initial AIDS emergency and spanning decades, Pindell addresses the intersecting issues of racism, slavery, and exploitation (Brief Biographies 2020).<sup>44</sup> Her work shows that the inequalities caused by the disease are the result of a longer history. Pindell's mixed media piece *Separate but Equal Genocide: AIDS* (1991-92) was inspired

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<sup>44</sup> As curator Naomi Beckwith (2018) argues, since her earliest work, Pindell has turned away from visualizing a body in her work precisely because of her subjection to a scopic white gaze (107). Working against the scopic gaze distorts the power dynamics set by the scopic white supremacist visual regimes that approach the Black body with a set of “associations, presumptions, and misreadings” (Beckwith 2018, 106).

by thirteen friends Pindell lost to AIDS, children and infants lost to AIDS-related complications in hospitals in New York, and the racial imbalances with regards to the disease. Pindell's installation consists of two side by side six-foot-tall panels reminiscent of two American flags—one painted black and one painted white. Stitched together to give a slightly quilt-like look, each flag is covered with columns of names, memorializing Pindell's friends, her cousin who died from AIDS-related complications at the age of 35, and the lost children and infants (see fig. 37).

When she called local New York hospitals to acquire the full names of those lost, Pindell was only provided with first names, which she used in the installation (Hazel 2018, 117). The absence of surnames adds to the sense of anonymity and injustice under which these deaths occurred. The two flags—one black and one white—touch on the unequal treatment of Black people in the U.S. As Lowery Stokes Sims (2018) argues, the piece clearly represents a dichotomy between Black and white America, and “a new matrix of exclusionary and diversionary policies and attitudes” (78). The names on the white flag are painted over with a washed-out powder blue but are still visible. Painting over the names has two purposes. It both memorializes lost friends and children and points out that these people the presence have been removed from public consciousness.

The divided flags also point out how disproportionately often Black bodies affected by HIV and AIDS are portrayed in public spaces. Scholar Cathy Cohen (1999) contends that the AIDS epidemic increasingly became a disease of people of color, yet the literature, images, and general representation of the disease stayed predominantly white (23). According to Cohen, this misrepresentation suggests that AIDS is not a problem in Black communities. AIDS “is something with which the country, the state, and communities of color in particular need not

concern themselves (Cohen 1999, 23). Although the turn to multiculturalism had the effect of changing such discordant representations, the experiences of people affected by HIV have not been remedied. In other words, the visual representation of Black people and their experiences with the virus do not correspond.

As scholar Nicole Fleetwood (2011) argues, “visual representations of blacks are meant to substitute for the real experiences” (13). As result, if representation of the disease is white (whether via the actual absence of Blackness or a multicultural body politics), the experiences of Black people are swept away and the impression is they are doing fine. There is a significant difference between body politics and visual cultures and the experiences of people affected by HIV and AIDS, as Pindell’s work suggests. One of the names featured in the work is Pindell’s cousin, who passed as white or Latino throughout his life. Because of his ambiguous ethnic appearance, this cousin would receive different types of treatment at the hospital: “If he went to a hospital and they thought he was white, he would get one kind of treatment. And if they thought he was non-white he got another—that’s why there are two flags” (Pindell as quoted in Hazel 2018, 117). Pindell’s cousin’s experience, which inspired *Separate but Equal Genocide*, shows the nuances of “federal and corporate racism in response to the AIDS crisis” (Hirschel 2018, 19). The mobility, prosperity, progress of Black people are affected by the lack of access to medical protection.

During the early years of the crisis, poor Black people continued to be deprived of basic health needs. Multiple similar narratives can be found in U.S. history, including the Tuskegee experiment, in which the U.S. Public Health Service studied untreated syphilis using the bodies of Black men between 1932 and 1972, without informing them of the nature of these

experiments and without giving them the treatment needed to be cured (McBride 1991). The public health system is only one example of the history of anti-Black sentiment in the U.S., which has dragged itself into the contemporary day.

As Pindell's artwork attests, proximity and distance from Blackness fundamentally decides Black livability. Structural inequalities upholding high HIV rates in Black communities are a part of the centuries old problem of anti-Blackness present in the legal, social, and political structures of the U.S. According to Gossett (2014), other "anti-black enterprises" range from:

lynching, Jim Crow-era racial apartheid and terrorism, to contemporary militarized police violence against black people crystallizing in 'stop and frisk' orders and reminiscent of slave patrols [and] outright police assassination of black 'citizens' such as Amadou Diallo, Oscar Grant, Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Stephon Clark, Terence Crutcher, Alton Sterling, Philando Castile, Eric Garner, Laquan McDonald, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd] and so many others. (32)

Anti-Blackness maintains death as an integral part of Black life. As scholar Rinaldo Walcott (2013) argues, whereas death is the universal outcome of life in the future, everyday state violence as practiced by police forces and institutional anti-Black racism makes death an integral part of "black peoples' everyday livability" in the present (143–144). Those predisposed to death are subjected to conditions of life bestowing on them the status of the "living dead" (Mbembe 2003, 40). Literary scholar and historian Saidiya Hartman (1997) calls current structural inequalities "the aftermath of slavery," the material residues of slavery that remain present throughout the legal, social, and political structures conditioning contemporary Black life.

**Anxious Objects: *How Do I Spell America?***

Residues of anti-Blackness and Black death produce generational trauma and anxieties, and speak to the dangerous, chaotic, and often contradictory nature of what it means to be Black and American at the same time. The multivalent nature of Blackness in the context of the U.S. nation-state are explored in Willie Cole's installations, what the artist himself calls "anxious objects" (Sims 2006, 17). Critical of American capitalist and consumerist culture, Cole adapts plastic and metal domestic objects, including flags, irons, blow dryers, ironing boards, shoes, old windows, lawn jockeys, and bicycle parts into sculptures and installations reminiscent of forms and scenes from the slave trade and African diaspora (Sims 2006, 15-16). In addition, Cole uses wordplay and acronyms to encapsulate his own Black experience and identity, as in a series of installations made from actual U.S. flags titled *America* (1993), and an installation composed of an actual blackboard titled *How Do I Spell America?* (1993). In both installations, the word "AMERICA" is used as a point of departure to create acronyms that express multivalent views on what it means to be Black in America.

Whereas Pindell used a flag-like canvas to inscribe the names of people lost to AIDS, in *America I* (1993) Cole uses the actual U.S. flag attached to thick ply board. While two rows of stars from the upper left-side corner are slightly visible at the top, the majority of the work features the red and white stripes hanging vertically. The word "AMERICA" is written with a wax pencil at the top of the flag as an acronym. Words appears in a column beneath each letter on the seven red stripes, with the six white stripes left blank. Under the letter A, the column of words, includes American, as, African, any, Americas, allied, areas, all, account, angry, AIDS, armed, accused, adult. Read horizontally, the words beneath each letter of "AMERICA" compose forty ambiguous sentences of chaotic and often contradictory combinations of nouns

and adjectives, a sort of stream of consciousness prose. For instance, some of the smudged words read: “AIDS MOM EVADE RUMOR INFECTED CHILD ASKS” “AFRICAN MAN ELUDES RUNNING INTO COPS AGAIN,” “AMERICAN MASSES ENJOY RELAXING IN COOL AIR,” “AFRICAN MOTHERS EMBRYOS REMAIN IN CUSTODY ALWAYS” (see fig. 38).

The installation *How Do I Spell America? #2* follows similar principles but with “AMERICA” inscribed on an old-school blackboard. Words are written in white chalk on the board, with some of them crossed-out, and new ones written above them (see fig. 39). Sims (2006) argues that “[t]he changed, crossed-out out “chalk” messages [...] manifest the fluidity of language and the kaleidoscope of U.S. realities: shifts of words utterly re-direct our consciousness” (46). Redirections are influenced not only by one’s perspective and interpretation, but also one’s race, gender, and socioeconomic status. What one consider a “robbery,” another might consider a “riot,” to use some of the crossed words and replacements from Cole’s blackboard (as the recent lootings across the U.S. during the COVID-19 lockdown showed). Similarly, “American” can become “alternative” or “Africa,” depending on one’s experience, status, and history. In the overwhelming number of words under column “A,” “AIDS” is also a part of someone’s experience. Read from left to right, the antonyms compose a sentence: “AIDS ~~MOM~~ MAN EXPRESSES ~~RELUCTANCE~~ RAGE IN(VOLVING) COITUS ACTIVITIES.”

Witnessing Cole’s installations causes a sense of unease, which might suggest that the visual aspect is not the primary one. Rather, the installations unsettle and produce anxiety, disorientation, and a sense of placelessness. These affects speak to the experiences of Black people in the history of the U.S., starting with the terrors of slavery through Jim Crow to the

present, “determined [by] the realities of placelessness (Copeland 2013, 123). This displaces the importance of the visual, or “the regime within which queer bodies and bodies of color have been most violently subjected to the demands of cultural legibility” (Amin, Musser, and Pérez 2017, 228). Considering affect and sensation with regards to the artwork opens a new way of engaging with their multifaceted materiality. Following scholars Kadji Amin, Amber Musser, and Roy Pérez (2017), Cole’s installations can be considered what these scholars call “sensuous knowledge” or “as a sensuous mode of relation to their audience” (2017, 227-228).

According to Katz (2018), the multiplicity of words in Coles’ work represents “a fugue of competing voices and perspectives born of our differences, [...] that stage [...] our very contemporary divide between Black and white, between those for whom AIDS is central and that other America that barely knows it exists, between those who emphasize Africa and those for whom America is all that matters” (46). Similarly, Sims (2006) suggests that smudged words capture the components of American identity and reflect the country’s “bewildering diversity and inherent contradictions [...] informed by African-American consciousness” (46). However, unlike the diversity promoted by multicultural policies through a discourse of sameness, Cole’s approach to diversity is closer to reality: in thinking about the contradictory, opposing, and clashing perspectives as they coexist together, one can understand why African American citizenship is a contested container of multiple significations, feelings, and experiences, influenced by the residues of historical trauma and violence carried into the present.

### **Decriminalizing the Virus: The “HIV<sub>x</sub>” movement**

Historically, the citizenship status of Black people has been compromised of a variety of policies, legislations, and laws that criminalize and police their mobility and freedom. In the domain of HIV, the anti-Black nature of the law is seen in legislation that criminalizes one's HIV status. According to individualized state laws, exposing others to HIV is a crime. Even though it is very hard to scientifically prove the source of contraction, some states treat the transmission of HIV as a felony or misdemeanor.<sup>45</sup> This legislation disproportionately affects socioeconomically vulnerable people of color and Black people (Conrad 2016; Geary 2014).<sup>46</sup> Thirty-two U.S. states have laws that criminalize HIV nondisclosure, a contemporary residue of slavery “dragged” into current legislation (Conrad 2016, 175).

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<sup>45</sup> Although knowledge about risk, transmission, and treatments has significantly changed over the last three decades, criminal laws influenced by heterosexism, racism, and xenophobia have persistently quarantined HIV-positive people and criminalized their status, starting with Florida non-disclosure laws enacted in 1986 (Conrad 2016, 174–175; Croft and Mones 2018, 11–12).

<sup>46</sup> The case of Michael Johnson brought the relationship between HIV criminalization and Blackness into the public consciousness. In 2013, Johnson, a 23-year-old college wrestler, was arrested for allegedly withholding his HIV status from six former sexual partners, four of them white. As a result, Johnson was sentenced to thirty years on a felony conviction for recklessly transmitting HIV without disclosure to two sexual partners, and thirty-and-a-half years for exposing four other men to HIV without disclosure. Although initially the predominantly white jury sought the maximum penalty of sixty-and-a-half years, the judge ultimately sentenced Johnson to thirty years in prison (Croft and Mones 2018, 23; Rueb 2019). Journalist Steven Thrasher notes that Johnson received a longer sentence than most people convicted of second-degree murder in Missouri (Tien 2019). Johnson's case was taken up by activists who resisted the problematic nature of HIV criminalization laws and point to its racist motivation. For instance, there was no genetic proof connecting Johnson's strain of HIV to the other men, meaning it was possible they had contracted HIV from someone else. More importantly, Johnson claimed he did disclose his status. Following pressure and advocacy, Johnson was released in 2019.



The final example I will be addressing in this chapter shows how HIV criminalization corresponds with other moments in anti-Black history “dragged” into the present: the activist poster *Decriminalizing the Status Symbol* (2018), which relates HIV criminalization to slavery. Made by Chicago-based artist and Black liberationist Charles Ryan Long and Christopher Jordan, a member of the Tacoma Action Collective (TAC), the poster was initially commissioned for the exhibition *Cell Count* (2018), which problematized HIV criminalization and its relationship to gender, race, and state surveillance. The two-sided letterpress poster calls on the communities most likely to be subjected to unjust legislation to resist. It encourages “the Black, the Brown, the undocumented, the Female, the Non-Cis, the sex worker, the sissy, the dyke, the faggot, the user, the poor, the poz and the neg” to end all tolerance of “racist, sexist, transphobic, xenophobic, sex negative & classist individuals, systems and governments” (see fig. 40).

In staging resistance, the poster appropriates the visuals and rhetoric of a poster about “the Fugitive Slave Law” made in Boston by abolitionist Theodore Parker on April 24, 1851, as a reaction to the Compromise of 1850. The Compromise was a package of five separate bills passed by the United States Congress in September of 1850, including the Fugitive Slave Law. The stringent bill required that law enforcement in states free of slavery support the capturing and returning of fugitive slaves.<sup>47</sup> Parker’s poster cautions “COLORED PEOPLE OF BOSTON” to “Keep a Sharp Look Out” and to avoid the watchmen and police officers due to “the recent

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<sup>47</sup> In addition, the Fugitive Slave Law denied juried trials to escaped slaves, empowered the federal government to prosecute, and increased penalties for northerners who shielded runaways. It also sometimes affected free African Americans kidnapped as escaped slaves.

ORDER OF THE MAYOR & ALDERMEN, they are empowered to act as KIDNAPPERS and Slave Catchers” (see fig. 41). In establishing a dialogue with the historical poster, Long and Jordan’s protest seems to suggest that Black people and other people who do not conform to white supremacy need to be warned to be cautious, but more importantly to resist. Long and Jordan investigate the past to enact a deep critique of the American society of the present: the poster makes it clear that current anti-Black legislation replicates the historical traditions continually “massacr[ing], enslav[ing], rap[ing]” Black communities.

The poster does not utilize national emblems. Instead, in discussing the systemic violence of a nation falsely propagating the ideas of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, it turns to text and establishes another aesthetic dialogue. Specifically, the poster can be placed in dialogue with artist Glen Ligon’s work, where the artist “reconsider[s] [...] blackness and slavery as artistic, cultural, and political sites in multicultural America with repercussions far beyond the nation’s shores” (Copeland 2013, 7). Like Long and Jordan, Ligon appropriates slave imagery and narratives, and explores U.S. history and how it relates to the creation of his Black and American subjectivity. His untitled work from 1989 asked, “Am I Not a Man and A Brother?,” a question originally asked by the eighteenth-century British Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade, accompanied by a stock figure of a half-dressed slave (Copeland 2013, 116) (see fig. 42). Similarly, Ligon’s series of lithographs *Runaways* (1993) was inspired by mid-1800s runaway advertisements offering monetary rewards for runaway slaves (see fig. 43).

Long and Jordan’s poster re-signifies and expands the connection between violent systems of power and HIV/AIDS; on the bottom of the poster, the declaration “We are HIV<sub>x</sub>,” with the “x” as a tilted “+” sign. I read the “HIV<sub>x</sub>” in relation to the multiplicity of “preventative

identities” that have developed since the approval of ART in the mid-1990s. Some of these identities include “undetectable” (undetectable viral load), “HIV=,” (HIV equal), “TasP” (treatment as prevention), and the most recent “on PrEP.” While most of these preventative identities are based on an intake of medicine and work towards normalizing one’s HIV status, they are determined by access to the pricey medication.<sup>48</sup> The bodies with no access remain pathologized and criminalized, deemed “dirty.”<sup>49</sup> “HIV<sub>x</sub>” stands as an alternative to these limited preventative identities and expands consumerist politics they rely on. More specifically, the “x” is an example of a discursive strategy that can represent any HIV status, a signifier that has the capacity to hold people exposed to the stigma and anxiety of HIV criminalization. The large “x” imprinted on the other side of the poster is a world-making gesture for “outlawed” communities. Put differently, the “x” is a container filled with the experiences of people vulnerable to the virus and without state protection. Long and Jordan invite these people to join, insisting that: “WE ARE HERE although they deem us, our actions and bodies illegal and therefore cageable they will never succeed.” The poster initiates the “HIV<sub>x</sub>” movement, a space where vulnerable

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<sup>48</sup> These identities are used to negotiate safety among people who engage in sexual relations, but they also reflect the heritage of deep anxieties that developed with the AIDS emergency. Since temporally the emergence of these preventative identities happened simultaneously with the rise of homonationalist agendas in the HIV sector, one can claim that these identities normalize HIV for members of affluent gay male communities who have established access to treatments and national civic life.

<sup>49</sup> The identity of being “clean” or “DDF” (drugs and disease free) used during gay men’s sex trade is an example of both the anxiety regarding one’s status, and the racist undertones of the distribution of health and cleanliness based on access to healthcare. Correspondingly, the category is often posed as a question when it comes to bodies of non-conforming individuals, including Black men who have sex with men, gender-nonconforming and transgender individuals, sex workers, and drug users. Thus, claiming “cleanliness” is an inherently racist and classist act, since it emphasizes the historical differentiation between the white middle class as clean and healthy and the working class as dirty and contagious (Lupton 1994, 36).

communities can unite, settle, and possibly circumvent various pathologies attached to their bodies.

Moreover, the “HIV<sub>x</sub>” movement revises “the facts” informing knowledge about “risk-groups” with regards to HIV/AIDS, which are often based on harmful stereotypes and create a gap between medical facts, CDC’s statistics, and actual lived experiences. It’s possible to look at this gap as a space for resistance, political action, and action, not foreclosed by the violence that “facts” and stereotypes create. Consequently, the large “x” signifies an invitation to create a space for pathologized and criminalized bodies, without reinforcing harmful scopic mechanisms. Such is the case in all the case studies here: Pindell, Cole, Long, and Jordan turn away from exclusionary and anti-Black body politics and embrace experimental discursive forms only to arrive at a space of possibilities otherwise foreclosed by white supremacy. To echo Johnson (2003), such artistic acts are “[n]o longer visible under the colonizer’s scopophilic gaze,” and the “manifestation [of Blackness] is neither solely volitional nor without agency” (8). Departing from multicultural bodily representation not only creates a “break” from problematic visualities, but more importantly allows us to imagine historically, culturally, and economically massacred communities at peace.

### **Conclusion: “x” as a Black American Futurity**

As this chapter has shown, affluent homosexual men have undergone a biopolitical transition and become an integral part of sustaining national life. However, Black queer life remains exposed to socio-economic and cultural disparities and struggles. Although multiculturalism in the HIV sector was deployed as a strategy to address these problems, this

system re-centers whiteness and maleness; regardless of the “diverse” representation that has proven to be of immense importance in the HIV sector, safer-sex campaigns catering to audiences of color do not address specific cultural contexts. The rhetoric of these campaigns theoretically supports life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for all U.S. citizens. These campaigns value proximity to gender and racial-national normativity and reproduces hierarchies between those less and more deserving of health. “Diverse” visual cultures embrace a color-blind approach, placing their socially just ends under a big question mark. In other words, these visual cultures may be counter-productive because they do not account for cultural differences. Instead, they sustain the status quo of the social injustices they claim to diminish.

The injustice tackled in this chapter has to do with the problems of the healthcare industry, criminal justice system, and public education, all of which help spread the virus disproportionately among socio-economically vulnerable communities. These are all problems that multicultural visual cultures cannot contain or fix. Resistance to a multicultural body politic has been tackled by artists who engage in a variety of discursive forms. Pindell, Cole, Long, and Jordan reinvent visual practices that commodify, hypersexualize, and fragmentize bodies of color, simultaneously leaving these bodies to die from AIDS. These artists frame the HIV/AIDS health crisis as only one contemporary instance in a long history of exploitation and dispossession. To show how this violence is “dragging” itself through centuries, they establish aesthetic dialogues with other traditions in the lineage of Black arts, that has been studiously resisting white supremacy in visual cultures for decades. By using discursive forms, they demonstrate the complexities, inconsistencies, and paradoxes of Black experience in America, while also resisting, displacing, and challenging the problems of colonial and the anti-Black

white gaze. Black people become the writers of their own narratives and producers of their own visual culture in this AIDS-related art and activism.

*AIDS is a nexus where multiple meanings, stories, and discourses intersect and overlap, reinforce, and subvert one another. (Treichler 1987, 42)*

*[G]iving the person with AIDS an identity as well as a face can [...] be a dangerous enterprise. (Crimp 2004, 121)*

*We injected ourselves into the mainstream of this infectious culture, and lived, as parasites, off the monstrous host. (Bronson 2011, 123)*

## CHAPTER 3

### Queering and Decolonizing “Big Pharma”:

#### Cultural Spies and Contemporary Visual Cultures of AIDS

The small and compact sculpture *Truvada Case* (2017) features thirty PrEP pills, neatly arranged in a rectangular grid, five pills across and six pills down, supported by shiny metallic pins and placed in a framed Plexiglas surface painted in white acrylic (see fig. 44). The case, displaying a monthly dose of thirty real pills, was made by artist Luke Cheng, with the assistance of his architect friend Yun Liao. Cheng, a New York-based film-photographer and software designer born in Jiangxi, investigates queerness and the legacy of colonialism, while with his camera he captures his closest personal relationships with family, friends, and lovers. According to Cheng (2018), *Truvada Case* was imagined as “a personal use item” to be installed on a wall or table as a reminder to take the medicine.<sup>50</sup> That cost of that monthly dose can, without health insurance, reach up to approximately \$1,600 raises larger political concerns, including the arbitrary pricing of the pill and the privilege of being healthy. This raises the question: who is the ideal consumer of this medical commodity-turned-cultural artefact?

In a personal conversation with the artist, I learned that *Truvada Case* was inspired by General Idea’s installations *One Year of AZT* (1991) and *One Day of AZT* (1991). The two installations show, retrospectively, one yearly and one daily dose of Azydothymidine (AZT), licensed by the FDA in 1987 as the only HIV medication. Unlike Cheng’s real pills, *One Year of*

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<sup>50</sup> Cheng considers the everyday habit of consuming PrEP a sort of quotidian ritual, which could also be seen as a significant biopolitical gesture of docility, compliance, and loyalty to medical institutions, as discussed in the Introduction.



*AZT* consists of three hundred and sixty-five sets of five bas relief pills in signature white with a blue stripe, arranged in daily and monthly sequences along the walls of a gallery.<sup>51</sup> In addition, five human-size fiberglass units were placed in the middle of the room to represent a daily dose, hence the title *One Day of AZT* (see fig. 45). As an allegory of one's overmedicated, yet decaying body, these installations responded to the contested politics surrounding the drug AZT and its initial, extremely high price.<sup>52</sup> In addition, the installation has a personal meaning, as it reflects the daily dose of AZT taken by the collective's members Felix Partz and Jorge Zontal, who passed due to AIDS-related complications in 1994. Surviving member AA Bronson reminisces:

Your watch is ringing little bells every two to four hours and you have to take two of this and four of that.... [The work] was to create that environment, a pill environment. To reproduce that feeling. To give it a physical sense of what it's like to be surrounded by pills ... a very clinical atmosphere. (Smith 2016, 45)

While AZT and PrEP have different properties and were launched on the market in different eras and circumstances, they signal that the pharmaceutical industry's interest in profit has not changed. Created in response to "Big Pharma's" devious politics, both Cheng and

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<sup>51</sup> In total, the installation is comprised of 1,825 pills, corresponding to the amount of collective member Felix Partz's annual dosage of AZT (Smith 2016, 44). The pills surround the spectator with "a calendar of wall-to-wall, floor-to-ceiling pharmaceuticals" (General Idea 1994, 256).

<sup>52</sup> As a highly controversial drug, AZT proved to be successful in suspending HIV's replication. Initially an abandoned drug for cancer chemotherapy, AZT was discarded in the mid-1960s because it was fatally toxic, expensive to produce, and totally ineffective (Farber 2015). Specifically, the drug was not selective in its cell destruction and would attack healthy cells along with malicious cells. Because of its severely toxic effects, some argued that the drug killed faster than the natural progression of AIDS if left untreated (Farber 2015). Because it went through the research processes earlier, it was massively profitable for its maker, pharmaceutical company Burroughs Wellcome, once it was revisited in the late 1980s.

General Idea's pieces are an example of so-called "medicinal" cultural production. Started by collectives ACT UP and Gran Fury protesting AZT, its toxicity and limited access, so-called "medicinal cultural production" is a seldom studied domain of work related to AIDS that takes anti-HIV drug regimens as a key visual motif, and responds to the highly contested pharmaceutical politics of the late 1980s forward.<sup>53</sup> Currently, there is burgeoning medicinal production surrounding PrEP—the newest preventative anti-HIV biomedical device. While a large part of PrEP production is apolitical, made by overtly white gay artists and activists, there are cultural engagements on the rise that pay attention to the pill's politically contested aspects.

Drawing on under-studied artwork by queer of color and Indigenous perspectives, this chapter showcases how contemporary cultural workers are invested not just in destabilizing the centrality of white gay men in contemporary medicinal production pertinent to anti-HIV medication, but also in circulating their own culturally specific viewpoints, to support the survival of various communities. Unlike the predominant cultural production surrounding PrEP—both in visual arts and PrEP advertising—celebrating a healthy, predominantly white, male body, this chapter analyzes artwork by artists, including Ben Cuevas, Israel Macedo, Apolo Gomez, and Sheldon Raymore who call critical attention to questions of access, treatment, and survival in relation to AIDS-related treatments. Although they all engage in different mediums, they are similar in turning away from visualizing corporeality. Their work asks: Whom does corporeal

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<sup>53</sup> Medicinal production in response to anti-HIV medication has been immense. Just a few of the artists and activists inspired by the public response and personal experiences of anti-HIV medications are Barton Lidice Beneš, Gregg Bordowitz, John Greyson, Max Greenberg, Joey Terrill, Frederick Weston, Bruce Volpone, Juan Arce, Joe Monroe, Benjamin Fredrickson, Paul Chisholm, Joe De Hoyos, Grahame Perry, Hector Toscano, Carl Tandatnick, Frank Moore, Frank Green, Carl W. Rush, and Joe D Hoyos.

representation validate and disavow? What are effective strategies for circumventing the visualization of predominantly male white bodies?

The work of these artists promotes the visibility of queer of color and Indigenous people in narratives that concern access to PrEP, while also envisioning worlds unconstrained by the same temporalities of white gay male activists or white male virtuoso artists, whose production is in urgent need of queering.<sup>54</sup> When re-centering the experiences and problems of communities exposed to systemic violence and erasure, this group of young artists has raided Reagan-era archives to find tropes and icons they can tailor to fit specific aspects of the problematic politics of “Big Pharma” in the 21st century; they appropriate artists who were active during the first decades of the crisis, many lost to AIDS-related complications. Felix Gonzales-Torres and the General Idea collective are the most commonly revisited “cultural spies.” As Katz (2015) reminds us, both Gonzales-Torres and the General Idea collective found innovative ways to infiltrate museums and galleries with their art during a time of culture war and censorship. To avoid censorship and defunding, these artists echoed earlier artistic avant-garde movements in art history to insinuate themselves into artistic institutions as “spies,” camouflaging straightforward portrayals of AIDS, same-sex desire, and problematic pharmaceutical politics (Katz 2015, 27).

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<sup>54</sup> For instance, during the process of making *Truvada Case*, Cheng and Liao’s conversations concerned the lack of diversity of gender and race in minimalist art production. Aware this genre had historically been a “white straight men’s activity,” Cheng (2018) singles out Gonzalez-Torres as a leading influence on this sculpture. It’s possible to claim that Cheng inserts his Asian-American self in the minimalist tradition, queering its problematic white, male, and heterosexual history.

In their responses to the ongoing pandemic, this group of contemporary artists similarly draws on their role models when reinventing a presentation of the body on PrEP; they heavily draw on and rework the already-appropriated styles of the 1980s generation. Specifically, they appropriate a so-called “aesthetics of the absent body,” not only to challenge the predominant focus on white male representation in PrEP cultures, but also and more importantly, to re-center the experiences and vocalize the problems queer and Indigenous communities have been facing when it comes to access and distribution of the life-saving medicine. Absent bodies was taken up by queer artists during the 1980s and early 1990s as one of the “spy” strategies; a response to the culture wars and censorship in the art world. According to Copeland (2013), “artists galvanized by the AIDS crisis and the concomitant attack on queer identities, drew upon languages of absence that spoke to and of resistive politics while often refusing the essentialization of identity” (5–6). Curator Nancy Spector (1995) studies the absent body as a tactical way of representing experiences erased from history and develops critical vocabularies about the aesthetics of absence as an intervention into problematic AIDS visual cultures during the first wave of the crisis, specifically through studying artist Felix Gonzalez-Torres’s oeuvre.

This chapter expands on Spector’s work by engaging in conversation with the contemporary medicinal production surrounding PrEP and establishing its contribution to the lineage complicating medicinal cultural production. The growing volume of PrEP cultural production is an integral part of AIDS-related art and activism, which has been problematizing the representation of the disease and the vulnerable body for decades. Contemporary artists’ shift in focus away from corporeality is two-fold: to not only challenge the representational politics conceptualizing a body-at-risk as a spectacle, but also to reinvent representation that has

historically been white, gay, and male. Their artwork can be thought of as acts of creation; they tackle the issues of structural racism seen in partial access to medication, the politics of overmedicated bodies and daily dependence on drugs, and the racist and commodifying politics of the white gaze.

While drawing attention to the problems specific to Indigenous and queer of color communities, these contemporary artists do not only appropriate the aesthetics of Gonzalez-Torres and the General Idea. They are also in conversation with traditions specific to their own identitarian and affective attachments, for instance in Gomez's engagement with Mexican traditions and Raymore's use of objects important to the Sioux peoples. Through this work, these artists expand "official" AIDS history, predicated on the worldviews, values, and politics of affluent gay men with "milestones" heavily influenced by access to medical achievements. Rather than sticking with these partial histories, contemporary artists converse with their ancestors, with the aim of imagining better lives for their people. This imagining is similar to the ideas of queer utopia developed by scholar José Esteban Muñoz (2009); these artists turn to the past to imagine better worlds for their people in the present, and consequently, the future. By placing these omitted perspectives in the foreground when staging intergenerational dialogues, Cheng, Cuevas, Macedo, Gomez, and Raymore simultaneously "queer" and expand the temporalities of AIDS in the current period dominated by PrEP.

### **Entrance into the Scene: The Afterlives of Felix Gonzales-Torres**

When AIDS landed in the public consciousness of the 1980s, responses to and representation of the disease were heavily influenced by homophobic governments and right-

wing-affiliated establishments, while the only representation permitted of the disease in mainstream spaces was didactical; images of people with AIDS were portrayed as desexualized sites of toxicity, decay, and waste. In this homophobic climate, many arts establishments were wary of exhibiting edgier or more radical representation of AIDS-related matters due to the fear of losing funding or being censored. Therefore, to resist the atrocities caused by homophobia, government negligence, and the media, artists and museums started thinking about the representation of AIDS and same-sex desire more strategically (Crimp 2004; Katz 2015, 24–25). As the first two chapters have shown, drawing on gay ads for saunas and sex clubs from the 1970s, eroticized safer-sex posters used photographs as their primary medium and portrayed mostly white and fit male bodies as a response to problematic representations.<sup>55</sup>

In addition, artists and artists collectives utilized a variety of experimental, conflicting, and often contradictory discourses to develop more effective forms for expressing the urgency of the crisis, while appropriating the aesthetic traditions of earlier decades. A turn to abstraction and the “language of absence” was only one of the strategic ways of reinventing AIDS representation. Artists who turned to the language of absence appropriated feminist art that brought the invisible female body into the traditional and predominantly male canon of the 1960s and 1970s. Challenging the authority of the white heterosexual man as the “unitary and

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<sup>55</sup> Such recuperative images also served the function of circumventing the pathologized history of homosexuality overall. To depathologize previously problematized male homosexuality, activists in the 1960s placed an immense amount of pressure on the beautiful and healthy male body. The intent of the movement, as scholar Sander L. Gilman (1995) argues, was to create an image of the homosexual that is “not only not ‘ill’ but ‘healthy’, is not ‘ugly’ but ‘beautiful’” (119). As a continuation of this tradition after the advent of AIDS, the image of the homosexual became highly eroticized “to counter the conventional association of homosexuality with deviancy and disease” (Gilman 1995, 119).

dominant” subject led to questions about what bodies were excluded and how well they were portrayed when they were included (Spector 1995, 4).

One of the iconic cultural spies during the first decade of the crisis was Felix Gonzalez-Torres, who reinvented the representation of AIDS with minimalist installations. The artist expanded the traditional art canon by disidentifying with historically white straight masculine minimalist artists, including Donald Judd, Carl Andre, and Dan Flavin. According to Gonzalez-Torres, “when we insert our own discourse into these [canonical] forms, we soil them [...] We make them our own and that is our final revenge. We become part of the language of the authority, part of history” (Spector 1995, 15). While inserting his own Brown queer self into the traditional art canon, Gonzalez-Torres not only “queered” the traditionally white and heterosexual minimalist genre, but also expanded how one thinks of AIDS, same-sex desire, and the decaying body. Gonzalez-Torres’s work was also innovative in its use of quotidian material, including hanging lightbulbs, giant spills of candies, and reproducible paper, and mounted artworks in public spaces, including billboards, where it would be accessible to everyone (Chambers-Letson 2010, 560; Kwon 2016, 286-288). This kind of artmaking subverts the modes of exchange practiced by the institutions of the art market and shifts perceptions of high art.

For instance, his well-known sculptures were made of stacks of paper, so-called “stack pieces.” While a large stack, once set up, was reminiscent of a minimalist cubic sculpture, the interactive character of a stack piece created a completely novel approach to minimalist art. Viewers were instructed to take a sheet of paper and, with this gesture, became part of the artwork itself. The piles of infinitely reproducible sheets of give-away paper shrank every time an individual piece of paper was removed, and then the stack was renewed daily by the galleries

and museums to create the initial shape of the minimalist cubic sculptures. The artist made his first give-away stack piece in 1989, composed of two endlessly replicable piles of white paper, printed with the phrases “Veterans Day Sale” and “Memorial Day Weekend” (Tallman 2016, 123) (fig. 46 and fig. 47).<sup>56</sup>

By making stack pieces accessible to the masses, Gonzalez-Torres also reimagined the dominant means of distribution in the art world. These pieces, made of endlessly replaceable paper, are objects for which there is no original. The concept of reproducible art directly interferes with the concept of unique art objects and their authenticity (Getsy 2014, 533; Tallman 2016, 124; Spector 1995, 90, 95). By making artworks that belong to the public in some way, Gonzales-Torres transformed the “aesthetic encounter into a scene of redistributive sharing” (Chambers-Letson 2018, 130-131). It’s possible to claim that this type of art given to the public is literally communal in nature. On a larger political level, following Chambers-Letson (2018), art by Gonzalez-Torres (re)distributes resources and knowledge necessary to sustain queer of color life (139). His art, “foster[s] the collective sharing (out) and survival of black and brown queer life” (Chambers-Letson 2018, 34). Gonzalez-Torres himself considered his art as having a communal and even humanitarian role: “I’m [...] proposing the radical idea of trying to make this place a better place for *everyone*” (Gonzalez-Torres and Nickas 2006, 89).

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<sup>56</sup> Other examples of stack pieces include *Infinite sheets of Untitled (Death by Gun)* (1990) that reproduced the names, ages, and faces of 464 people killed by guns in the U.S. in a one-week period. *Untitled (NRA)* (1991) is composed of a stack of red paper, each paper outlined by a funereal black border. As a response to the AIDS crisis, each paper in the white paper stack *Untitled (The End)* (1990), was framed with a thick black border, with a vacant surface for projecting one’s own personal memorialization (1990).



Moreover, although the meaning of some of the stack pieces was predetermined, with the titles in parentheses, their blank surfaces were generous enough and open enough for the beholder's personal imprint and meaning making. While the stack pieces do not portray physical bodies, Chambers-Letson (2010) suggests that in Gonzalez-Torres's work "different forms of bodies were continually engaged, referenced, and rendered conceptually" (561). Also, the absent bodies in these works were supplemented by the bodies of the audience, the crucial meaning-makers of these artworks. In other words, the final signification occurs through an interaction with the artwork requiring an audience member's physical presence and participation. Accordingly, the audience member's body is a part of the artwork itself (Spector 1995, 156). As I will show in the next section, Gonzales-Torres' pieces are inherently performative and call on the spectator for a physical interaction. As such, their value has been recognized by contemporary artists problematizing PrEP-related representation and politics.

### **Absent Body on PrEP**

Contemporary PrEP cultural production depicts healthy, mostly white, sexually active male bodies, as seen in the mixed-media photography and collage works of the artist Boston Elements; Ivan Lupi's watercolor "Truvadians" (2020); the work of artists commissioned by the Apicha Health Center for their "I Swallow Daily" PrEP campaign; and the illustrations Daniel Arzola made for the blog series "The Pleasure on PrEP" (2017) (see figures 48, 49, 50, and 51). However, there are also artists in dialogue with a tradition that expands this narrow HIV/AIDS representation. For example, the Brazilian artist Israel Macedo's work, heavily influenced by abstract and minimalist aesthetics from earlier decades, provides a commentary on the commodification of the health industry and the overt medicalization of the body. The corpus of

Macedo's work consists in turning a museum or gallery space into a scientific and medical site, where the spectator can learn more about the life of a patient who undergoes an ART regimen.<sup>57</sup> His work also touches on PrEP.

For instance, Macedo's stack pieces *Post Exposure Prophylaxis* (2015) and *One per Day (Antiretrovirals)* (2015) cunningly appropriate Gonzalez-Torres's stack sculptures.<sup>58</sup> *Post Exposure Prophylaxis* is comprised of blue cotton paper, with "Gilead" printed on the front and "701" on the back, drawing the spectator's attention to the biochemical prevention method (see fig. 54). Specifically, the piece points the spectator's attention to Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP). Unlike PrEP, PEP is a prevention method that consists of taking Truvada after exposure to HIV. Taken once daily for twenty-eight days, the regimen includes Truvada in combination with one or two other pills from the antiretroviral therapy. Similarly, *One per Day (Antiretrovirals)* (2015), is also composed of printed sheets of paper. Unlike other stack pieces, which are usually placed on a gallery's floor, this one is mounted to the wall. Nine stacks, each representing a different pill from antiretroviral therapy, are placed in separate transparent plastic

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<sup>57</sup> For instance, twenty-three separated canvases painted in acrylics of many colors, *Antiretrovirals* (2014), are mounted to the wall horizontally next to each other, with each framed canvas mimicking the color of a pill composing antiretroviral therapy (ART) (see fig. 52). While at first colorful canvases might stimulate one's eye due to their vibrant schema, the abundance of color, as well as the title of the artwork, gesture towards a more poignant signification: the abundance of pills as a patient's daily routine, but also the burgeoning pharmaceutical industry producing several generations of ART therapies, based on the achievements of science and demands of the market.

<sup>58</sup> Due to the blue color of the paper and the ability to take some, it could be said that Macedo's pieces are reminiscent of Gonzalez-Torres's stack piece *Untitled (Loverboy)* (1990), a stack of baby-blue paper (see fig. 53). Although the piece is untitled, the "loverboy" in brackets signals that the piece was dedicated to Gonzalez-Torres's lifetime partner Ross Laycock, who died of AIDS-related complications in 1991.

holders mounted to the wall. As with other stack pieces, *One per Day (Antiretrovirals)* is also easily accessible to visitors (see fig. 55). By separating the paper stacks into plastic folders, Macedo instructs the visitors how to interact with the piece.

Like Gonzalez-Torres's stack pieces, Macedo's installations are also performative in nature. One aspect of this performativity consists in the function of these pieces: they operate as souvenirs that can be taken by the audience. As scholars Muñoz (1999, 170) and Chambers-Letson (2018, 130) argue when analyzing Gonzalez-Torres's artwork, these works utilize performance as their central element.<sup>59</sup> The absence of bodies in the artwork is supplemented by the bodies of the audience. Spectators not only constitute the artwork by their very presence, but also give life to these artworks through their engagement with them. The spectator's engagement and experience, is what materializes these installations.<sup>60</sup> While Gonzalez-Torres's stack pieces

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<sup>59</sup> When imagining such artistic production as performance, performance studies scholars rethink and build on art critic Michael Fried's (2011) dismissal of theatricality in minimalist art. Fried (2011) disdains minimalist sculpture because of its lack of self-sufficiency. In other words, since this art requires elaboration, its meaning dependent on an encounter with a spectator, according to Fried, minimalist sculpture transforms the act of viewing into a type of spectacle. In contrast, for performance studies, engagement with art is essential. Scholar Fred Moten (2003) rethinks theatricality and determines that "the resistance of the object" is the condition of possibility (234).

<sup>60</sup> Each spectator has a unique experience that ultimately expands the artwork's meaning (Chambers-Letson 2010, 560; Chambers-Letson 2018, 143; Getsy 2014, 531). As scholar Jennifer Doyle (2013) argues, until the middle of the twentieth century, art critics' reactions universalized the meaning of art, often ignoring the social, political, and historical implications of the work (70). When considering the critical aspects of abstract work, it's possible to claim that Fried's critique of contemporary art reflects a tradition that does not consider these implications. In addition, greatness and authenticity have been traditionally ascribed to art production by white and male artists. The relational aspect of art, dismissed by Fried, disrupts universalizing and ahistorical narratives and centralizes the experience of the audience as art's integral aspect. Not only does the spectator's positionality constitute the artwork, but it also rethinks the artwork, existing inevitably "within language (ideology) [that] reflects the

are more open to audience interpretation, the meanings of Macedo's installations are predetermined through the inscribed "701" and "Truvada." Despite this obvious difference, viewing each minimalist piece is "the entrance into a scene, into the context of the other, of the object" that estranges and absorbs the beholder (Moten 2003, 235–236). Scholar Fred Moten (2003) argues that the possibility of an object's signification is ascribed during the audience's encounter and constitutes "the artwork's syntax" (237).

The experience of beholding and meaning making is inevitably racialized, gendered, and sexualized (Doyle and Getsy, 2014), and this work supplements representations of AIDS that usually feature a sick, mostly white male body. Following Spector's (1995) consideration of Gonzalez-Torres's work, the turn to abstraction counts as "a deliberate attempt to *déphallicize* aesthetic vision, to resist visual mastery, to renounce the objectification of his subjects [and] to encourage a more open-ended reading of the work, one that does not presume a specific gender or sexual orientation" (original emphasis, 144). To expand on this claim, the turn to absent bodies is also a way to prepare a space for a sort of aesthetic resistance to the problematic (lack of) visibility of bodies of color in AIDS-related narratives.

While Gonzalez-Torres's stack pieces address various contemporary atrocities in the U.S., including the gun epidemic and the AIDS crisis, Macedo appropriates this iconic work to gesture towards the overt medicalization of the body, as well as the problems posed by both

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intersection of many different expressions, both past and present" (Spector 1995, 15-6). This strategy, intermingling the absence and presence of physical bodies, works to resist universalizing significations of the artwork, and brings racialized, gendered, and classed aspects into focus. What materializes the artwork are the experiences and personal histories viewers bring to the encounter.

access and distribution of anti-HIV medication. This gesture is present in *One per Day (Antiretrovirals)*: after taking all nine papers one at a time from their holders, a visitor ends up with a stack of papers that symbolically signals the abundance of a daily intake of pills.

In terms of questioning the pills' distribution, audience members are of great importance. The visitors disseminate the give-away paper in the world, outside of the gallery space. Based on these interactions, it's possible to see Macedo's give-away pieces as an activist gesture—a reference to Gonzales-Torres's reframing of the distribution of art making accessible to all, as mentioned previously. In a sense, Macedo's art imagines the communal aspect of art sharing but giving away the pieces of paper are a gesture symbolic of giving away life-saving pills. Macedo stages a resistance to pharmaceutical companies and public health agencies that enable access only to a select few. When taking a set of papers made by Macedo, the audience participates in a symbolic dissemination of urgent medical technologies. A gallery or museum becomes a “factory” where medical technologies are produced as a communal good available to everyone, and particularly to communities exposed to ongoing systemic violence.

### **The Afterlives of General Idea**

The Albuquerque-based artist Apolo Gomez's art creates a similarly communal gesture with regards to the limited distribution of PrEP. In his artistic oeuvre, Gomez speaks to themes of queer erasure, with explorations of contemporary queer subjectivities and their relationship to pharmaceutical technologies. In his artistic endeavors, Gomez turns to the collective General Idea for inspiration when complicating the representation of the body on PrEP. As already discussed in the analysis of their installation *One Year/Day of AZT*, the collective challenged the

culture market by appropriating mainstream commercial forms in their artwork. Like Gonzalez-Torres, the collective was interested in challenging authorship and the “copyright” of specific forms and images. According to AA Bronson (2011), while contemporary consumer culture relies on copyright politics, museums are not an exception; they “act as symbolic keepers of the virtue of copyright, and an art expert’s opinion on the authenticity of a work” (122). For instance, *LIFE* magazine sued the collective for using its copyrighted white block lettering on a red parallelogram in the publication *FILE Magazine*. This did not stop the collective from continuing with their artistic practice, a so-called politics of “simulacrum.”

Drawing on their radical politics and trying to keep the collective’s spirit alive, Gomez appropriates the style of their most iconic works, placing it in the new cultural context of PrEP, also characterized by rapid biochemical consumerism. The collective’s influences exist in *General PrEP* (2019), a piece made from spraying blue enamel on Plexiglas with large white lettering reading “PrEP” (see fig. 56). Specifically, this piece is an homage to General Idea’s infamous poster *IMAGEVIRUS* (1987), made in response to the problematic portrayal of sick people in the 1980s. General Idea appropriated Robert Indiana’s ubiquitous pop art *LOVE* logo to change the focus and replace the photojournalist imagery of AIDS with the color and language of love. Keeping the visual arrangement and color composition of the original piece, the collective changed the letters L-O-V-E with A-I-D-S (see fig. 57).

In its initial reception, the artwork was highly controversial, especially among activists who critiqued its coded and colorful language for a lack of explicit messaging and frivolity (Bordowitz 2010, 1, 9–10; Decter 2007, 99; Tone 2018). However, this critique did not damage the overall success of *IMAGEVIRUS*, still circulating in art and quotidian spaces; since its first

appearance, the image has appeared as a series of posters, paintings, videos, wallpapers, sculptures, and been displayed in public spaces, including subway cars, walls, and billboards all over the world. *IMAGEVIRUS* has allowed AIDS to infiltrate mainstream spaces, “escape[d] the copyright and travel[led] freely through the mainstream of our culture’s advertising and communications systems (Bronson 2011, 122). General Idea’s popular poster speaks to the fact that the forerunners of AIDS culture, like this current generation of artists, were appropriating, recycling, and imitating iconic art pieces from the pre-AIDS decades. While *IMAGEVIRUS* is a simulacrum of Indiana’s project, Gomez’s *General PrEP* is a simulacrum of a simulacrum, hence the productive and world-making politics of aesthetic appropriation. In communication with his role models, Gomez’s *General PrEP* brings the pill into the consciousness of museum attendees.

Inspired by the playfulness of General Idea’s artistic oeuvre, combining high art with pop culture and mass media, as is common for Pop Art production, Gomez’s other artwork—the installation *PrEPñata* (2018)—does consult his artistic role models, but also demonstrates a more personal cast and expression, reflecting his cultural background. Made for the exhibition *Because It’s Time: Unraveling Race and Place in New Mexico* at the National Hispanic Cultural Center, *PrEPñata* (2018) consists of a hundred papier-mâché piñatas in the shape of oversized Truvada pills, sprayed in blue acrylic. Some piñatas are elevated with wax-coated string to hang from the gallery ceilings and others are stacked on top of each other on the floor (see fig. 58). The installation was produced in response to the high rates of HIV in Latino communities in New Mexico, who are disproportionately affected by the virus due to partial education and

access to health care. In the work, piñatas are weighted with condoms instead of traditional candies.

In addition to being influenced by General Idea's pill pieces, Gomez's installation also converses with a variety of other sources, such as the installation *HIV Condom Piñata & Baby HIV* (1993) by Eric Avery (Gomez 2019), in which an interdisciplinary artist, printmaker, and HIV psychiatrist made piñatas in the shape of the virus from molded paper woodcuts and then filled them with condoms (see fig. 59). Also, the pile of *PrEPñata* pills placed in the corner of the gallery is reminiscent of Gonzalez-Torres' candy spill pieces. Specifically, because of the color and message, *PrEPñata* is most reminiscent of a candy spill piece called *Untitled (Lover Boys)* (1991), which is composed of delicate white-and-blue swirled candies, weighing 350 pounds—the combined weight of Gonzalez-Torres and Laycock (see fig. 60). When the spectators take the candies, the stack of *Untitled (Loverboys)* slowly disappears, symbolizing both the slow vanishing of their sick bodies and eternal life. On being consumed as treats by visitors, the supply of candies is replenished daily, symbolically restoring the subjects of the piece—sick loved ones or two lovers in a corporeal fusion (Muñoz 1999, 177).

Gomez (2020) created exactly one hundred and twelve piñatas in total, a figurative gesture representing the number of people in New Mexico who contract HIV each year. According to Gomez (2020), “over time as our community becomes more sex-positive and aware of preventative measure this installation will decrease in size as the rate of new HIV infections in N[ew] M[exico] decreases.” While touching on these detrimental statistics, Gomez not only appropriates AIDS-related aesthetics from earlier decades, but also fosters a culturally specific papier-mâché technique. Accordingly, Gomez's art is in conversation with the AIDS-related



aesthetics of previous decades, while also paying respect to Mexican traditions. Together, they work in the service of raising awareness with regards to the high rates of HIV among Latino communities.

The piñata has been adopted as a popular object during private and public events and gatherings, including holiday festivities and birthdays in Mexico and other Latin American countries (Chen 2018, 69). Initially made of pottery and decorated with paper or cloth in different colors, piñatas are filled with candies, fruit, and other things attractive to children. When they are broken by a blindfolded person with a stick, the contents leak out and are grabbed by the participants in an attempt to supposedly secure good luck (Chen 2018, 69-70). Although not a participatory event, *PrEPñata* symbolically gestures towards the human body necessary for the piñata to be activated. *PrEPñata* draws on a participatory tradition where blindfolded participants take turns hitting the piñata, hung above their heads on a string. Gomez's PrEPñatas draws attention to this type of celebrating but also to the culturally specific and economic character of PrEP. Not everybody has equal access to the pricey pill. Unlike traditional piñatas used during celebratory events, Gomez's PrEPñatas are ambivalent and bitter-sweet. While the approval of PrEP could count as a celebratory moment, as the HIV statistics in economically vulnerable Latino communities in the U.S. show, high rates of the virus due to lack of proper health care and HIV prevention get in the way of this celebration.

### **Knitting: Queering AIDS Temporalities**

Alongside artists who problematize access to PrEP and are oriented towards communal world-makings, some artists engage in knitting and beading. These methods allow artists to

momentarily depart from the burdens of the everyday management of life, in realities constrained by AIDS and the overall institutional surveillance increased by the disease. For instance, Los Angeles-based artist Ben Cuevas problematizes “temporal” surveillance through the knitting techniques that compose much of his oeuvre. Cuevas’s interests in the body’s interiority, as well as in how one’s internal landscapes are affected by modern medicine, are reflected in his knitted sculptures, which include veins, organs (brain, heart, intestines, thyroid, and rectum), a skeleton, and a variety of pills. The artist questions the pharmaceutical marketing and medicine telling us “that happiness lies in a pill, by offering a cure for every ailment in life [and] ignore[] the metaphysical condition of embodiment (i.e., the condition of having a body, mind, and spirit)” (Cuevas 2010, 2).

These questions are relevant to the installation *Medicine Cabinets* (2010), composed of five oversized popular anxiolytics regulating depression, anxiety, and other psychiatric disorders: Lorazepam (Ativan), Escitalopram (Lexapro), Fluoxetine (Prozac), Alprazolam (Xanax), and Sertraline (Zoloft). Each soft sculpture is placed inside an individual medicine cabinet attached to a gallery wall. Placed next to the other, each cabinet is lit with fluorescent lights, turning the cabinets into light boxes or display cases. Inscribed in the background of each box is the molecular structure, generic composition, and brand name of each pill (see fig. 61). The knitted pills speak to “how intimately the pharmaceutical industry is insinuated with corporeal experience” (Cuevas 2010, 3). A similar reading can be applied to Cuevas’s soft sculpture *Knit PrEP* (2014). This small pillow, made from blue knit wool and filled with poly-fil, has “701” woven on the front and “Gilead” on the back (see fig. 62). Although not an anxiolytic, PrEP has

an anxiety-mitigating function, enabling the possibility of sex without the fear of contracting HIV.

These knitted chemical substances represent a commentary on contemporary pharmaceutical politics, which monitors mental and sexual health and co-creates a desirable subject—the result of the pharmaceutical industry, pornography industry, and late capitalism (Preciado 2013). The use of fabric, yarn, and thread in Cuevas’s sculptures show how “intimately the pharmaceutical industry is insinuated with corporeal experience” (Cuevas 2010, 3). In other words, it’s possible to claim that the pharmaceutical industry and daily experience are “knitted” together. Historically, knitting has been thought of as “women’s work” and the domestic endeavor has been appropriated for multiple purposes. As scholar Julia Bryan-Wilson (2017) argues, knitting, along with sewing, embroidery, and quilting, has been historically mobilized to stabilize pro-war nationalism, but was also used in anticolonial and feminist politics (10). For Cuevas (2020), knitting is “a meditative practice...steeped in queer feminist ideologies, with an awareness of the mind, body, and spirit.”

As a meditative practice, possibly knitting transcends time and space, repudiating the chrononormative politics of time. According to scholar Elizabeth Freeman (2010), “chrononormativity” represents a linear conception of time that functions to organize individual human bodies towards their maximum productivity through “schedules, calendars, time zones, and even wristwatches” (3). These devices organize “bodily tempos and routines, which in turn organize the value and meaning of [one’s] time” oriented towards progress and prosperity (Freeman 2010, 3). As a process that takes Cuevas “into an altered state” and “in his body” (Santos 2016, 18), knitting allows the artist to momentarily “get lost” in a meditative state of

creation. According to scholar Lauren Berlant (2007), the urge to “get lost” reflects the need to depart from these burdens. Berlant (2007) argues:

the body and a life are [...] sites of episodic intermission from personality, of inhabiting agency differently in small vacations from the will itself, which is so often spent from the pressures of coordinating one’s pacing with the pace of the working day, including times of preparation and recovery from it. (779)

Whereas Berlant analyzes practices of overeating, there are other ways to enact so-called moments of “self-interruption.” Regarding Cuevas, knitting, anxiolytics, or (sex on) PrEP all serve as strategies to momentarily depart from the burdens of the everyday management of life, embodied in realities constrained by AIDS and institutional surveillance. It’s possible that these moments of self-interruption can bring one closer to imagining “queer temporalities” that resist the institutional management of AIDS, health, and the call for docility, whether considering health or desired gender, class, and racialized embodiment. Knitting and its transcendent properties of “self-interruption” facilitate a momentary instance of the “queering of time,” as a way to imagine realities unconstrained by AIDS.

### **Beading: De-colonizing AIDS Temporalities**

New York-based artist and storyteller Sheldon Raymore transcends AIDS temporalities through the practices of beading, while also turning to intergenerational dialogues with Indigenous tradition. As a member of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, Raymore’s (2020) mission has been to increase HIV and AIDS awareness, sexual health education, and accessibility of PrEP services for Indigenous communities, while employing motifs from Native American tradition and history. The majority of Raymore’s advocacy has been created through his persona PrEPahHontoz (see fig. 63). Disidentifying with a historical Indigenous female

figure while raising awareness about PrEP, PrEPahHontoz combines Native American sign language and vogue dancing in educational songs, including “Take the Pill” and “Excuse My Beauty.” The imagery Raymore uses to create PrEPahHontoz intertwines traditional Indigenous costuming with symbols from the AIDS movement, including the red ribbon and a blue “PrEP” wooden belt decorated with bottles of Truvada.

One of Raymore’s projects is the *PrEPahHontoz Tipi Project* (2018–). With volunteers from the American Indian Community House, Raymore has produced pictorial images which were hand-printed onto multiple tipis, permanent or seasonal dwellings traditionally made of animal skins on wooden poles and associated with the Plains Indians.<sup>61</sup> Appropriating this traditional tipi form, the *PrEPahHontoz Tipi Project* tells a story of the history of HIV and the AIDS movement in Native American communities in an effort to decrease social and cultural stigmas associated with the disease (Raymore 2020). Raymore’s tipis are inscribed with traditional “Winter Counts,” illustrations of annual events amongst the Lakota-Sioux people made by etching, painting, or drawing on deer, elk, antelope or buffalo hides; they serve as a sort of “history book” or timeline of significant event among the Sioux people to preserve information for following generations (Kerr 2019, 28; Raymore 2020).

The *PrEPahHontoz Tipi Project* tells a story about the AIDS movement in Native American communities in New York and nationally (see fig. 64). According to Raymore, this

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<sup>61</sup> A tipi consists of a few thin wooden poles, that form a conical framework when placed vertically, and tent pegs, rocks, or sod used to hold canvas cover to the ground. The Kiowas of the Southern Plains and the Blackfeet of the Northern Plains were known for painting their tipi canvases. The paintings included geometric shapes and sacred animals. In the nineteenth century each tipi accommodated, on average, eight to ten adults and children (“Tipis” 2011).

project disseminates information about HIV, while utilizing “culture as prevention” (Raymore 2020). One miniature tipi cover was on display during the exhibition *Germ City* (2019) at the Museum of the City of New York, a historical retrospective of the city’s battle against infectious diseases (see fig. 65). PrEPahHontoz’s miniature tipi cover was placed in a glass vitrine assigned the American Indian Community House, which started servicing New York Native Americans living with HIV and AIDS in 1990.<sup>62</sup> As a collaborative project, members of the American Indian Community House collectively made and chose the objects to be placed in the vitrine. The items on display represent their history and ongoing work in the present (American Indian Community House 2018). Aside from the miniature tipi cover, objects in the vitrine include PrEPahHontoz’s beaded PrEP pills, made of beads reminiscent of the PrEP pill; the white letters “PrEP” are written across the oversized blue pill-shaped object (see fig. 66). The vitrine also contains a “Silence=Death” choker with a breast plate designed and crafted by Phillip Stands, a miniature buffalo skull carving, and a small, beaded turtle umbilical cord bag with beaded red AIDS ribbon.

These objects signify a serious engagement with two types of tradition appropriated in the context of contemporary Indigenous AIDS-related art and activism, for the purposes of placing Indigenous life at the center of narratives of the disease. For instance, a “Silence=Death” choker with a breast plate appropriates the 1980s phrase coined by the Silence=Death collective

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<sup>62</sup> Drawing on the model of the Welcome Collection’s “Reading Room,” parts of *Germ City* feature a hybrid between a gallery and a library space where visitors can engage with the topics in question through a curated selection of books, as well as historical artifacts and contemporary artworks created specifically for the exhibition placed in glass vitrines (Museum of the City of New York 2020).

that gradually became the symbol of ACT UP and the overall movement (see fig. 67). In addition, in Lakota tradition, a breast plate protects a warrior's areas of vulnerability. According to the American Indian Community House members (2018):

the choker is designed to signify to Two-Spirits in New York City that what makes us vulnerable can become our means of protection. Our identity can be slur or armor, our voice can be a war-cry or silent. To stay silent is to leave yourself exposed in a land of new threats and challenges.

A miniature buffalo skull carving symbolizes the nineteenth century demise of the buffalo, an emblem of Great Plains Native culture, while also engaging in the myth of the vanishing of Indigenous people (American Indian Community House 2018).

As a call to protect Indigenous life, the small, beaded turtle umbilical cord bag with a beaded red AIDS ribbon combines the tradition of the umbilical case with the urgency of the high HIV rates among Indigenous communities (see fig. 68). Whereas Cheng's artwork references a case where one stores PrEP pills, this type of case has historically stored an umbilical cord once it detaches from a newborn's body. Among the Plains tribal nations and in Lakota tradition, female babies' umbilical cords are placed in these small bags and the child wears them until puberty for good luck. While both cases aim to preserve life, this umbilical case is specifically geared towards preserving an Indigenous woman's life from the high rates of HIV affecting Indigenous communities. Scholar Scott Lauria Morgensen (2011) argues that high rates of HIV among Indigenous peoples are a result of colonial heteropatriarchy, which poses a danger to Indigenous health and reinforces the "biopolitics of settler colonialism in state and global health governance" (270). Since public health agencies inadequately approach and erase Indigenous communities, Morgensen gestures towards organizing and prevention work that

accounts for Indigenous particularity, tailored with respect to gender diversity, challenging the internalization of colonial power in Indigenous peoples and recuperating intergenerational trauma.

According to Morgensen (2011), “shared knowledge and experience of trauma [...] inform how Native people negotiate health services” (273). In a history of unethical research practice, inattentive medical treatment has left many Native individuals distrustful (Duran and Walters 2004). As a result, a disease is understood as “a strategy of colonization” (Morgensen 2011, 273). Many refer to AIDS in the context of other diseases, including smallpox, typhus, and measles, that have devastated Native populations since the arrival of settler colonizers and the beginning of trans-Atlantic slavery (Vermon 2001, 1). As one organization working for the collective decolonization of Native peoples, the American Indian Community House and its project in *Germ City* dialogues with Indigenous ancestors. Raymore’s work does the same. The use of beads in this artwork corresponds with the cultural significance beadwork has had across multiple generations. In a way, this artwork represent the resilience of Indigenous peoples amid the forces of colonialism.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Prior to settler colonialism, beads were used to embellish clothing and everyday objects with patterns that resembled animals; geometric shapes and abstract floral patterns were made from shell, bone, pottery, copper, claws, nuts, seeds, hoofs, horns, fish vertebrae, pearl, teeth, stone, and fossil crinoid stems (Belcourt 2010, 8–9; Dubin 2009, 261–263). With the arrival of settler colonizers, Europeans introduced glass beads as a means of trade, in monochrome and polychrome colors that were previously unavailable, including white, black, red, green, or blue (Dubin 2009, 261; Hamell 1992, 459–460). On the introduction of thin still needles, trade cloth, and quillwork, Indigenous beadwork began borrowed from European motifs brought to Turtle Island (Dubin 2009, 261–262).



As anthropologist Malinda Joy Gray (2017) suggests, beads were an integral element of Native communities prior to and concurrent with European colonialism and, as a result, beadwork and Indigenous identity stand in a symbiotic relationship where it “is hard to separate one from another” (1). Historian Lois Sherr Dubin (2009) suggests that Indigenous communities of the North American territories did not have a word for art. Instead, artistic expression was integrated into multiple aspects of their lives and not understood as a separate activity (Dubin 2009, 261). Beading is traditionally a communal endeavor during which community members spend hours together; “getting lost” in beadwork builds and strengthens Indigenous identity, while the practice also represents a form of healing, therapy, or form of prayer or meditation (Gray 2017, 24–25). Beading brings multiple Indigenous generations together and performs the function of cultural resiliency, therapy, and healing (Gray 2017, 24). The technique of beading, like knitting, serves as “self-interruption.” As Gray (2017) suggests:

Beadwork allows you to forget the chaotic life that surrounds you, while you create an order with your pattern in beadwork. There is a sense of satisfaction watching a piece of embroidery you visualized manifest itself and that can be healing and calming. (25)

Beading also represents a momentary break from the constraints posed by chrononormative temporal organizational schemas produced by settler institutions, which see Indigenous peoples as backward and disappearing.

This temporal organization, “a particular way of narrating, conceptualizing, and experiencing temporality” is a part of what scholar Mark Rifkin (2017) calls “settler time” (viii). Rifkin argues that there is not “one singular unfolding of time,” but rather, time is heterogeneous and plural, applicable to different peoples differently (Rifkin 2017, 1). Under this framework,

U.S. settler colonialism, connected to ideas of progress, trade, and subsequently capital, produces its own temporal formation (Rifkin 2017, 1). During the initial trades between European settlers and Indigenous people, a watch, both an organizational and status symbol for European settlers, had no value in Indigenous society, but the beads did.<sup>64</sup> According to Rifkin (2017), Native peoples “occupy a double bind within dominant settler reckonings of time. Either they are consigned to the past, or they are inserted into a present defined on non-native terms” (vii). The cultural meaning of beadwork moves us closer to thinking about the specificity of Indigenous temporalities and their unfolding amid the continuous erasure of settler colonialism.

Beading, just like storytelling and oral history, creates a bridge to the past and reaffirms the Indigenous present. It speaks to the intergenerational dialogues transmitted through this cultural art form. In other words, since beadwork still occupies the same central cultural role it did generations ago, this art form is a tool that mediates Indigenous temporalities. Artworks by members of Indigenous communities use traditional techniques that transcend and *queer* normative temporal frameworks. Such “queer insights” into the normative (chrono)temporalities “can enrich the meaning of historical density when approaching forms of everyday Native perception, storying, and processes of becoming” (Rifkin 2017, 40). In addition, beadwork techniques, as used by Raymore and members of the American Indian Community House,

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<sup>64</sup> Aside from their cultural and spiritual value, beads were important to the early fur trade because they were light and easily transportable, with a different bead having different value in exchange. For example, one beaver skin was worth a six-foot string of small blue beads in 1860 (Dubin 2009, 274). In one such trade, members of the Indigenous Clot Sop Nation wanted to trade two sea-otter skins, asking for coveted blue beads in return. Unable to provide as many beads as required, traders proposed a counter-offer, which included a watch, handkerchief, a bunch of red beads, and a dollar, which the Indigenous men refused. Instead, the Indigenous men wanted beads they described as ‘*tia-co-mo-shack*,’ or blue chief’s beads (Dubin 2009, 274).

establish intergenerational dialogues and create maps for the worlds of Indigenous communities erased from conversations about AIDS. Consequently, beadwork could also be thought of as exploring realities unconstrained by AIDS.

### **Conclusion: Imagining Queer of Color and Indigenous Futures**

As this chapter has shown us, contemporary artists appropriate artworks by their role models, with the aim of not only challenging the trajectory of the white male representational tradition but also re-centering the experiences and problems of queer communities of color and Indigenous communities. Consequentially, appropriation is not only a means of continuing intergenerational dialogues between two generations of queer artists, but also of keeping the radical critique of “Big Pharma” alive. In addition, while reviving dialogues with Gonzalez-Torres and General Idea, contemporary artists also engage in dialogues with their own cultural traditions, as was the case with Raymore and members of the American Indian Community House and Gomez’s engagement with Mexican tradition. These artists build on multiple rich artistic histories, opening possibilities that may otherwise be foreclosed by mainstream pharmaceutical politics and limited access to PrEP—issues that are not discontinuous from the problems present during the initial years of the AIDS emergency.

More importantly, by “activating” intergenerational dialogues, contemporary artists reimagine AIDS temporalities that have previously prioritized the affluent as the makers of AIDS history. By placing current systemic problems in perspective, Cheng, Cuevas, Macedo, Gomez, and Raymore expand the temporalities of AIDS and bring previously invisible perspectives to the forefront. Their art reminds us there are multiple AIDS temporalities, and that

the history of and current art and activism surrounding the disease coexist and inform one another. When revisiting the past, these contemporary indigenous and queer of color artists envision a futurity, hope, and utopia; their aesthetic engagements are aimed at creating worlds and vocabularies previously muted or ignored.

Based on the world-making gestures of these engagements, it is now possible to understand the productivity of aesthetic appropriation, as well as its larger social and political functions in contemporary medicinal production. The question that has remained unanswered and which I will tackle in the following chapter is: why does the new generation of queer of color artists and activists choose to appropriate Gonzalez-Torres and General Idea, despite a plethora of other artists in the cultural history of AIDS, many of whom have not been included in these intergenerational aesthetic dialogues? One possible answer is the cult status the work by these two forerunners of AIDS art has acquired, because of its friendly, democratic, and fun nature—all characteristics that make this work still fresh, approachable, and relevant today. This brings up questions regarding the power a well-known image from mass culture and pop culture has when circulated, especially when appropriated, recycled, or imitated in different temporal, cultural, political, or economic contexts.

*WILLKOMMEN!*

*Willkommen to PHARMA©OPIA.  
We would like to dispense you some pleasure...  
and dispense with your problems  
if only one-day-at-a-time*

[...]

*BENVIGUSTI*

*Come to PHARMA©OPIA  
bathe in the cleansing white light  
the hyper-white light of the fluorescent drug store  
the full spectrum life-giving light  
with a trace of daylight blue...*

*See the light at  
PHARMA©OPIA.”*

[...]

*Are you curious about today's new pharma-cocktails?  
Do you long to mix and never worry?  
Does drug maintenance sound dreary as housework?  
Do you think of pharmaceuticals as an acquired taste?  
Should you acquire it?  
Can you afford another habit?  
Do you have a choice?  
(General Idea 1994, 243, 254)*

*Corporate culture used copyright-protected logos [...] as a virus to be injected into the mainstream of our society, infecting the population, and creating a sympathetic cash flow.  
(Bronson 2011, 122)*

*We are technobiopolitically equipped to screw, reproduce the National Body, and consume. We live under the control of molecular technologies, hormonal straitjackets intended to maintain biopower: hyperestrogened bodies-rape-testosterone-love-pregnancy-sex drives-abjection-ejaculation. (Preciado 2013, 118)*

*There is a profound difference between those who died of AIDS-related complications in the 1980s and 1990s and those who survived those initial years, those who came of age after the AIDS Cocktail was introduced in 1996, and those who have access to PrEP today. For each of these groups, the stakes are so high, so different, so layered, and so fraught with contradictions.  
(Motta and Peetz 2019, 134)*

## CHAPTER 4

### **Andy Warhol and AIDS: Pharmaceutical Advertising as a Site of Visual Protest**

“Enjoy AZT” (1989), a print designed by filmmaker Vincent Gagliostro and activist and artist Avram Finkelstein, a co-founding member of the collective Gran Fury, was envisioned as a fake ad for the controversial drug, produced by the pharmaceutical company Burroughs Wellcome. A bright red screen-print reading “Enjoy AZT” appropriates the slogan and font of “Enjoy Coke” to condemn the government and AZT’s producer for making a profit from people dying of AIDS (see fig. 69). Printed in capital letters at the bottom of the poster is the question: “IS THIS HEALTH CARE OR WEATLH CARE?” provoking discussion about AZT’s initial price of ten thousand dollars, and the government’s inaction regarding approving other experimental drugs. “Enjoy AZT” mobilizes advertising and brands with the purpose of resisting detrimental politics and prompting a response from the masses. According to Finkelstein (2019), the poster draws on the recognizable imagery of the widely known soft drink to display “how similar the mechanisms of delivering a drug to the marketplace were to those of any other consumer product” (60).<sup>65</sup> Gagliostro and Finkelstein’s artwork inspired contemporary artist Israel Macedo’s print “Enjoy” (2015), which also appropriates the aesthetics of Coca-Cola to bring attention to the intertwined nature of branding and pharmaceutical consumerism of

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<sup>65</sup> Initially used for protests and demonstrations organized by ACT UP in the late 1980s, “Enjoy AZT” is merely one of the artworks that critiqued the detrimental politics of AZT on its release by the FDA in the 1980s. Although Finkelstein (2019) proposed the poster during the early months of the art collective Gran Fury in 1988, the idea was not supported because the collective’s members felt discomfort critiquing the only drug available to people living with HIV and AIDS at the time (59).

Truvada, the manufacturer's name for PrEP (see fig. 70). Aside from Felix Gonzales-Torres's afterlives, Gran Fury also found its way into contemporary medicinal production.

Macedo's print is only one of the examples that show how the unjust politics surrounding access and distribution of anti-HIV medications has persisted through decades; the dialogue between the two artworks determines a cross-generational aesthetic touch, staged because of the socio-economic and political conditions "dragging" themselves into the present. While Macedo represents a newer generation of cultural workers who appropriate well-rehearsed images to keep the tradition of radical AIDS politics alive, this chapter demonstrates that the implications and effects of appropriation may vary significantly across generations. As Chapter 3 has shown, the *seemingly* innovative strategies of the more "inclusive" and "updated" visual and performance cultures around HIV/AIDS largely trace back to the existing tactics of prior activism, including those developed by and for people of color in the earliest years of AIDS. By contrast, this chapter reveals the *newest* shift in these cultures, most obviously found in the celebratory and uncritical approach to celebrating anti-HIV medications, a departure from the critique of "Big Pharma" to an embrace of "Big Pharma" and its loyal patient-citizens.

The problems of partial, inequitable access to life-saving medicine were critiqued in protest art, political posters, and banners by ACT UP and Gran Fury. These collectives frequently turned to images from pop culture as one widely legible means of making progressive and urgent justice-oriented points. Regarding the strategic use of widely circulated images, such as Coca-Cola, this chapter close-reads artworks by Chicano Los Angeles-based artist Joey Terrill, who turns to Pop Art, advertising, and mass culture to mobilize a critique about partial access to ART among socio-economically vulnerable Chicano queer people. Terrill mobilizes

pharmaceutical advertising as a site of critique. This strategy places Terrill in direct dialogue with the tradition of public protest art started by AIDS activists in the 1980s, who also turned to advertising, Pop Art,<sup>66</sup> and Andy Warhol when creating their visual protests.

As this chapter will show, Warhol has had a major influence on the lineage of AIDS related art and activism over the last four decades of the crisis. Although, as scholar Jonathan Flatley (1996) suggests, Warhol himself did not respond to the AIDS atrocities, his art strategies were successfully taken up by AIDS activists appropriating already recognizable images to challenge public responses to the disease (122–23). Warhol started his career as a graphic designer in propaganda and advertising, while many AIDS activists were also trained in the same fields. Imagery from mass culture, including commercial products, advertisements, newspaper clippings, comic books, and pornography, were used by activists to resist the gradual creation of various public discourses that negatively or ambiguously approached the disease.

Propaganda and advertising have had major influences, both positive and negative, on “constructing” the meaning of AIDS (Clark 1997, 159; Treichler 1987). On the one hand, this influence was present in the early years of AIDS when the news media, government, and religious institutions worked towards condemning AIDS as the price gay men had to pay for their sinful, promiscuous behavior and perpetuating racist stereotypes when equating the disease

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<sup>66</sup> Pop Art emerged in the late 1950s, as a response to the tradition of fine art led by the abstract expressionist movement, incorporating mass culture and commodity objects into the canon of so-called “high” art (Danto 2010; Warhol and Hackett 2007). While aiming to diminish the boundaries between “low” and “high” art of the post-war era, the Pop Art movement was heavily influenced by mass commercial culture, as seen in its inclusion of widely circulated imagery, including “the Coca-Cola bottle, the hamburger, the comic-strip, the pop idol and the Hollywood superstar” (Shanes 2009, 24).



with African origins. To counter these harmful discourses and stereotypes, activists and artists have also used these advertising techniques, drawing on pop culture imagery and Pop Art to overcome misconceptions created by homophobic and racist state institutions, and critique partial access to HIV medications. Activism in the 1980s heavily drew on the aesthetics of anti-war propaganda, as well as street posters developed during the protests for civil rights, women's rights, and gay rights during the late 1960s. These posters were, in turn, inspired by the Symbolism and Art Nouveau of the early twentieth century (Moore 2010, 185–186).

While pharmaceutical consumerism was critiqued in the early years of AIDS activism, an analysis of PrEP-centered social media advertising and Internet memes will show that consumption of anti-HIV drugs is now celebrated. Because of its cultural and social significance in contemporary queer cultures, the prophylaxis has become a true “Pop Art icon,” as was previously the case with Warhol's installations and silkscreen prints of Coca-Cola bottles, Brillo boxes, and Campbell's soup cans. While this chapter points at the ongoing influence of Pop Art and Warhol in PrEP related art, activism, and advertising, it also looks at the complexity of aesthetic appropriation.

Citations and the near-duplication of famous gestures from the history of AIDS-related art and activism are heavily dependent on surrounding cultural, economic, and ideological contexts, which have changed massively over time. This means that although newer generations of cultural workers and activists have appropriated styles and images from the history of AIDS activism to resist hegemonic power dynamics through aesthetics, this strategy can have many different outcomes in a new context. This chapter asks questions raised by the recontextualizing of well-rehearsed imagery from the history of AIDS for the purposes of PrEP advertising,

specifically: How is the well-known image or style being used in this new context, for what purpose, and by whom?

Whereas in the past, resistance towards pharmaceutical greed was staged with direct-action activism, in the present organizing occurs on social media platforms. Although communities of PrEP supporters on social media appropriate well-rehearsed images from pop culture and the history of AIDS activism, this chapter illustrates fewer radical effects from this appropriation. Pharmaceutical messaging and social media marketing supporting PrEP exposes that pharmaceutical agencies have turned to well-known images only for their marketing purposes—preserving their widely-admired styles but using them for politically opposite ends, quite distinct from their radical origins. That major parts of PrEP-centered social media production demonstrate a lack of the resistance to the consumption of health that featured in the first wave of the crisis. This ultimately expands my thinking on appropriation as a radical aesthetic strategy only.

### ***Still Life: AIDS as a Domestic Experience***

The AIDS movement of the 1980s was communal in nature, committed to socially just ends, especially in the consistent fight for access to medications. With a myriad of successful protests and direct actions organized by ACT UP and other grassroots organizations, activism gradually slowed down. The shift in gears was heavily influenced with the FDA's approval of the first successful antiretroviral HIV therapy in the mid-1990s. This was also the period when “cultural spies,” including General Idea members Jorge Zontal and Felix Parts, and Felix Gonzales-Torres, died of AIDS-related complications. Reaching the point of exhaustion, Gran

Fury dissolved in 1994 (12<sup>th</sup> Session of the École du Magasin 1994, 184). With the institutional, pharmaceutical, and social changes initiated by ART, as well as the rising importance of the internet and consequential development of social media, grassroots social organizing acquired a corporate character. These developments occurred parallel to the proclamation from the mainstream media and affluent gay lobbies that “the AIDS crisis is over.”

As a result, themes in medicinal art are less communal and about the movement and have become more personal, but the critique of medications and the medical establishment in artists’ work has not subsided. Artists continue to create works in which they relate these perspectives to larger questions of consumerism and medicalization, as the crisis did not disappear with the appearance of antiretroviral therapies, but merely changed course. Scholar Eli Manning (2014) argues that critical approaches to the industry and the overt medicalization of one’s body continue in the era of antiretroviral therapies. Manning (2014) claims, “these works remain at the forefront of cultural and political critiques on AIDS, responding to the shifting medical, political, economic, and social discourses; a critique that clearly extends through to present day.” Some artists continue to draw inspiration from commodity culture and treat the medications as cultural objects on which they inscribe a larger social critique. Hence, the turn to Pop Art.

For instance, Los Angeles-based Chicano artist Joey Terrill turns to Pop Art to depict the commodity culture around HIV medications and the economic and racial politics of these medications. Most of Terrill’s artwork has focused on social justice regarding L.A.’s queer Chicano communities. As scholar Richard T. Rodríguez (2011) argues, since the beginning, Terrill’s work studied what it meant to be both Chicano and gay, two identities that seem to exclude one another; whereas gay spaces were predominantly white and dismissive of racial

politics, Chicano spaces were requisitely heterosexual and hostile to queers (476). As a response to these social and political dynamics, Terrill developed “maricón” aesthetics, a reclaiming of the initially derogatory term (Spanish slang for faggot) into positive self-definition. “Maricón” aesthetics, or what scholar Robb Hernández (2014) terms “maricónography” entails “subversive [...] image production that empowers culturally distinct ways of being and seeing maricones” (Hernández 2014, 123). According to Hernández (2014), “maricónography” involves rereading, rearticulating, and reinhabiting hostile racist and homophobic cultures by tricking and overthrowing the image system set by Latino heteronormativity and white gay racial superiority (123, 145). Therefore, “maricónography” is a type of disidentification based on appropriating the dominant culture’s visual paradigms.

Terrill’s “maricón” aesthetics are informed by Pop Art aesthetics, East Coast Pop Art, and feminist image production from the L.A. art scene in the 1970s (Hernández 2014,132). For example, these aesthetics can be found in Terrill’s T-shirts, which show a large “maricón” and “malflora” (Spanish slang for dyke). These T-shirts, popular among Chicano/a and Latino/a gay men and lesbians in Los Angeles during the mid-1970s, were an attempt to perform a Chicano/Latino identity in predominantly white gay public spaces (Rodríguez 2011, 476). In addition, the publications *Homeboy Beautiful* (1978) and *Chico Modernos* (1989), embody these aesthetics. While the zine *Homeboy Beautiful*, inspired by the radical feminist publication *House Beautiful* from the 1970s, was made in response to the machismo and homophobia of homeboy culture, the Spanish-language educational comic book *Chico Modernos* served as a safer sex handbook. Illustrated by Terrill, the comic book was geared towards Latino men who have sex

with other men and distributed at gay venues throughout California, along with condoms (Rodríguez 2011, 484) (see fig. 71).

Inhabiting conflicting identities—Chicano and queer—but not fully belonging to either or disidentifying with both, Terrill infiltrates the art world as a sort of spy. As with Gonzalez-Torres, one could argue that Terrill also infiltrates a canon of work traditionally occupied by heterosexual white artists, the masculine American “virtuoso artist,” like Jackson Pollock or Willem de Kooning (Jones 1998; Meyer 1995, 97–99). In addition, the subjects of predominantly white Pop Art makers were not absent of racist stereotypes. Muñoz (1999) argues that the representations of people of color in Pop Art are “worn-out” stereotypes, and Warhol’s work was no exception (38). According to Muñoz (1999), “Pop art’s racial iconography is racist” (38–39). While circumventing this imagery with his “maricón” aesthetics and subject-matter, Terrill, self-described as a “Mexican American, queer, working-class, and HIV-positive subject,” brings a dose of queerness of color to the predominantly white world of Pop Art (Hernández and Terrill 2015, 109).<sup>67</sup>

Occupying multiple identities at once, Terrill dedicates some of his artwork to questioning the commercialization of HIV medications and the market that flourished around AIDS with the release of successful HIV medications in the mid-1990s. In a series of mixed-media canvases of quotidian domestic interiors titled *Still Life* (1997–2012), Terrill (2020) captures an ambivalence regarding HIV cocktails and the industry that flourished around these

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<sup>67</sup> Previously, a similar move was made by Warhol, who in a way “queered” the macho art world with his presence, “a faggy, pasty-white, working-class queer from Pittsburgh,” as well as with his subject matter (Flatley 1996: 102).

life-saving medications. According to Terrill (2020), the ambivalence is a product of multiple, often conflicting feelings:

[W]e have the psychological (and physical) reality of being alive while most of our friends are dead, coupled with the bombardment of pharmaceutical advertising portraying a healthy, athletic, even sexually vibrant way of life with full page imagery of men climbing mountains, looking at sunrises, holding hands and smiling with fulfillment. The marketing of pharmaceuticals, (with HIV drugs as a subset niche market) has become an accepted part of American life with ads in media outlets from radio and television to billboards and magazines bombarding us with a range of pills, capsules and tablets.

While ruminating on the medications as an integral part of American life and pop culture, Terrill's *Still Life* appropriates artist Tom Wesselmann's series of the same name. Wesselmann's 1950s Pop Art pieces in turn appropriate photographs of consumer objects and packaged comestibles, such as food cans, beer bottles, and cigarette packs, to "project a visually brilliant and sharply-focused awareness of the garish side of American consumerism" (Shanes 2009, 52). Created in the context of the predominantly white arts movements of the 1950s and 1960s, Wesseleman's artworks reflect the consumption habits of middle-class white lifestyles. Terrill appropriates Wesselmann's mixed-media *Still Life* to tell a story about West Coast Chicano consumer experiences.

Each painting in Terrill's *Still Life* series depicts a variety of everyday household products situated on a tablecloth of traditional Mexican design in a kitchen. On the table, next to essential groceries, the spectator also encounters an oversized prescription drug to treat HIV. For instance, in *Still Life with Crixivan* (1997–98), the spectator encounters an assemblage of Arm & Hammer baking soda, Cheerios, an orange, a large cucumber, a donut, and a bottle of Coca-Cola next to a box of antiretroviral drugs. On the table, there is also a lush bouquet of red roses neatly

placed in a sky-blue vase. Gracefully situated, the roses look like they might be emerging from a bottle of Coke or even a bottle of Crixivan (see fig. 72).

The paintings narrate Terrill's personal story. They speak to the artist's prolonged temporality, enabled by antiretroviral therapies. They also draw on the memories of his childhood by portraying consumer products from Terrill's life growing up in Los Angeles in the 1950s and 1960s (Hernández and Terrill 2015, 109). Terrill's turn to widely circulated brands, such as Coca-Cola, is a common trope of the Pop Art movement. When thinking about the infatuation with Coca Cola in art, it's impossible to ignore Warhol's pieces. Warhol introduced Coca-Cola in an art context and then used it as a major subject of his art for decades, beginning in the 1950s (Binlot 2015). He would draw a Coca-Cola bottle with a pair of legs with an ink-on-gouache, tearing out Coca-Cola ads from magazines to use them in collages, or silk screening three bottles on linen. In 1966, he placed a Coca-Cola bottle on screen tests with Lou Reed and Nico, before creating a sculpture of silver spray paint-covered Coca-Cola bottles in a wooden crate in 1967. In the silkscreen print *Green Coca-Cola Bottles* from 1962, Warhol depicts one hundred and twelve almost identical bottles.

Warhol's *Still Life (Flowers)* is an early drawing centralizing the soft drink, depicting a giant rose that springs from an empty Coca-Cola bottle (see fig. 73). When close reading Warhol's drawing, Muñoz (2009) underlines the significance of Coca-Cola's aesthetic dimension in the drawing. Although in its everyday manifestation, the soft drink represents "alienated production, consumption, and labor," for Warhol the "Coke bottle is the everyday material that is represented in a different frame, laying bare its aesthetic dimension and the potentiality it represents" (Muñoz 2009, 145). In the drawing, the "image of the Coke bottle is not an isolated

mass-produced commodity; it is touched by a flower that springs forth [...] a natural surplus that surges forth from the apparently sterile container” (Muñoz 2009, 145). This interaction between natural surplus and commodity relates to the “radically democratic [...] component” of Coke, reflecting Warhol’s overall philosophy of the “radical idea of democracy via commodity form” (Muñoz 2009, 145). In Warhol’s (1979) philosophy, Coca-Cola is accessible to a wide range of people regardless of their socio-economic status:

You can be watching TV and see Cola-Cola, and you know that the President drinks Coke, Liz Taylor drinks Coke, and just think, you can drink Coke, too. A Coke is a Coke, and no amount of money can get you a better Coke than the one the bum on the corner is drinking. All the Cokes are the same and all the Cokes are good. Liz Taylor knows it, the President knows it, and you know it. (100–101)

No one can buy a better bottle of Coke than anyone else. Every new Coke is the same as the last one. Warhol’s philosophy is, of course, merely a gesture, since as scholar John A. Walker (2001) observes, Coke “is hardly essential to human life” and “the fact that a poor person can afford a fizzy drink does not mean that they can afford [...] education, housing, and healthcare” (37). This radical idea can also be applied to Warhol’s Pop Art politics, which challenged high art through the means of mechanical reproduction and by centralizing images of commodities and celebrity culture, recognizable and adored by the masses. Such egalitarian Pop Art politics can be found in Warhol’s subject-choice and means of reproduction, what art historian and critic Arthur C. Danto (2010) calls “an emblem of political equality” (84).

The depiction of commodities in Terrill’s canvases—groceries, Coca-Cola, and HIV medication—is pitched towards similar political ends. In *Still Life with Crixivan*, the lush flowers placed next to the Coke and pills could be read as “a natural surplus” granting these two “sterile



containers” a new meaning. Just as with Warhol, the flowers in *Still Life* gesture towards hope, enhanced by a rethinking of the radical potential of commodities. The hope in this case is specifically related to the futurity of Chicano and Latino communities enabled by these partially accessible medications. With the development of antiretroviral therapies in the mid-1990s, the perception of time in the lives of people living with the virus has shifted. For the first time, there was an ostensible decrease in morbidity rates. According to scholar Lauren Berlant (2012), while the AIDS crisis destroyed one’s habits and reinvented ideas of “what it means to be in life itself,” with the approval of antiretroviral therapies, “habituation” in relation to the virus had to be reinvented once again (17).

Although at first, prolonged life expectancy was an exceptional event, as Berlant (2012) argues, “the AIDS cocktail [gradually] turned fated life back into an ellipsis, a time marked by pill- and test-taking, and other things, the usual” (58). Regular doctor visits and viral load checkups developed into a routine became a part of life. Although antiretroviral therapies, along with progressive biomedical capitalism and homonormative politics, assisted in proclaiming “the end of the plague” and the return to normal life, the limited availability of biomedical treatments complicates the meaning of normalcy. As Jack Halberstam (2005) argues, although there has been excellent work focusing on the temporality of lives in relation to the virus, lives lived in the “shadow of an epidemic,” including the lives of women and trans and queer people “partake of this temporal shift in less obvious ways” (3). Terrill’s *Still Life* asks, with limited access to antiretroviral therapies: how does the commodification of health influence normalcy? What does a return to normalcy look like for the most vulnerable communities? Does *life* remain *still* for socio-economically vulnerable communities?

## **PrEP, Pharmaceutical Consumerism, and Social Media**

Although the consumption of antiretroviral therapies gestures to survival, prolonged temporality, and the possibility of a return to normalcy, it also points to the afterlives of biomedical consumerism in the age of PrEP. That the politics of PrEP reflects the problematic politics of ART in the late 1990s and early 2000s is noted in Terrill's mixed-media canvas *Forget-Me-Nots and One Week's Dose of Truvada* (2012). While the canvas follows the aesthetics of other works in the series *Still Life* that engage with Terrill's personal history, it expands the usual assemblage of household brand name products and suburban kitchen interiors with a reproduction of art by artist David Wojnarowicz, a pivotal figure in AIDS-related art and activism of the 1980s. Specifically, Terrill establishes a generational dialogue with the first decade of the crisis through Wojnarowicz's artwork *Untitled (One Day This Kid)* (1990), a photo-text collage of a toothy young boy surrounded by writing that encapsulates "his traumatic formative experiences of persecution, abuse, and abandonment" (Orendorff 2018, 146). The canvas not only blurs different temporalities of AIDS and poses the question of a radical activism directed towards resisting the biomedical industry in the present, but also touches on the larger problem of "unremembering" early AIDS activism in the current PrEP activism, through the small bouquet of forget-me-nots in the center of the kitchen table. I will return to this topic in Chapter 5 (see fig. 74).

In retrospect, current PrEP politics can be seen as an extension of the pharmaceutical consumerism in the making during the 1990s. At the time, the mainstream media and affluent gay lobbies used successful antiretroviral therapies to proclaim the end of AIDS; advances in treatments and lobbying contributed to the perception of AIDS as a chronic rather than terminal

illness, leading to its gradual normalization (Gillett 2003, 609). In 1997, the FDA revised its direct-to-consumer advertising restrictions, resulting in broadcast ads for medications. As a result, in subsequent years, pharmaceutical companies' advertising dollars went from millions to billions (Cohen 2015, 25). According to Tom Kalin, a member of Gran Fury, now every pill has an advertising campaign (Cohen 2015, 25), which was not the case prior to the FDA's revisions. These campaigns target specific audiences and perpetuate the gap between the rich and the poor, i.e., the more and less deserving of medical protection. According to scholar James Gillet (2003):

media projects have become more mainstream, professionalized, and less political because of their closer alignment with dominant power structures. Use of the internet during this period has flourished, as access to technology has increased and organizations have received greater institutional support for infrastructure and outreach initiatives.  
(611)

Progressive biomedical capitalism and advances in technology constitute a major difference in how pharmaceutical advertising is mobilized and how it reaches and interacts with its targeted audience.

### **AIDS 2.0: PrEP as Icon**

Initially, AIDS activists turned to advertising as a tool to mobilize the masses against the pharmaceutical-industrial complex and homophobic governments. Most importantly, these practitioners pose resistance to pharmaceutical greed, which has gradually come to influence what it means to be human in the age of biomedical capitalism and pharmaceutical achievements. In Preciado's (2013) consideration, PrEP is only one of the commercial chemical

compounds that heavily influence the “manufacturing of subjectivity and its affects” (118).<sup>68</sup> For instance, the affective attachment to PrEP (among the plethora of other chemical substances and other commodities) may explain why the pill has acquired a cult status and following among its consumers on the internet, social media, and dating apps. Not present during the AZT and initial ART era, social media serves as a novel platform for organizing, information sharing, and activist action. On social media platforms, people create and nurture networks of support, as well as offer virtual HIV prevention, education, and advocacy.

At its core, social media serves as a tool creating communities and facilitates and enhancing human networks and connectedness (Fuchs 2014, 5; van Dijck 2013, 11). What ties people into virtual communities are not only social relationships, but also, as scholar Christian Fuchs (2014) argues, “feelings of belonging together or friendship” (5). According to scholar Jodi Dean (2005), “[i]n their online communications, people are apt to express intense emotions, intimate feelings, some of the more secret or significant aspects of their sense of who they are” (60). These online communities are predicated not only on shared experiences, but they are also mediated by desire, ability, and access to consumption. People “bond” over brands and the

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<sup>68</sup> These chemical compounds are “an ensemble of new microprosthetic mechanisms of control of subjectivity by means of biomolecular and multimedia technical protocols;” or what Preciado terms the “pharmacopornographic regime”—“the processes of a biomolecular (pharmaco) and semiotic-technical (pornographic) government of sexual subjectivity—of which ‘the Pill’ and *Playboy* are two paradigmatic offsprings” (33–34). According to Preciado, AIDS grassroots activism in the 1980s represents “anti-pharmacopornographic activism;” “fighting AIDS became fighting the biopolitical and cultural apparatuses of the production of the AIDS syndrome—which include biomedical models, advertising campaigns, government and nongovernmental health organizations, [...] pharmacological industries, intellectual property, bio patents, [and] trademarks” (337).

consumption of products that significantly inform their identities. Online communities who bond over PrEP are queer, and more specifically, as I will discuss in Chapter 5, affluent gay men.

According to Gamson (2003), the internet and social media have been “hotspot[s] for sexual minorities” for a while and promote “the kind of marketing-as-liberation logic that has characterized much of gay public life for the last couple of decades” (Gamson 2003, 263). The growing virtual production on social media and dating apps, could be contextualized within what Finkelstein (2019) calls “AIDS 2.0” (57). For Finkelstein (2018) “AIDS 2.0” represents an era when “the Internet mash-ups convert an AIDS past into memes [that] get passed across the perpetual motion machine of social media” (2). This production is indicative of how the consumption of PrEP facilitates the idea of belonging to a group and creation of a community. For example, there are multiple circulating memes that parallel widely recognizable imagery from pop culture with PrEP, reflecting the debates surrounding the pill.

Memes are a piece of “cultural information” passed from person to person, gradually scaled into “a shared social phenomenon” (Shifman 2014, 18).<sup>69</sup> As with most memes, memes made in response to the public debates about PrEP often use tropes, including analogy, metaphor, allegory, rumor, irony, parody, or pastiche, as a means of communicating with their audience (Wiggins 2019, xvi, 11). Many PrEP memes draw on tropes, discourses, and values common to gay men’s cultures. Understanding them is dependent on pop culture knowledge

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<sup>69</sup> Scholar Bradley E. Wiggins (2019) thinks of memes as a “genre of online communication,” emblematic of digital culture (xvi), and scholar An Xiao Mina (2014) considers meme culture a new forms of public conversation and community building (362). According to scholar Limor Shifman (2014), internet memes are “socially constructed public discourses [...] in which different memetic variants represent diverse voices and perspectives” (8).

shared by this specific demographic; PrEP memes refer to a variety of animated shows, series, and movies, as well as influential figures from social and political life.

Let us consider a few examples. One PrEP meme portrays Skeletor and He-Man from the animated show *Masters of the Universe* (1983–1985). The meme reads “Before,” under the image of Skeletor, and “After,” under the face of He-Man, giving PrEP a “transformative” power. The meme “Hakuna Truvada Means No Worries” is paired with characters from Disney’s *The Lion King* (1994), Simba, Timon, and Pumbaa. Next to an illustration of Elsa from Disney’s *Frozen* (2013), a caption reads “Take control of your sexual health! Who Elsa gonna do it?!” Some memes depict metaphors referring to PrEP’s role in enabling sex without condoms, i.e., barebacking or “breeding.” Those memes usually portray a glazed donut in contrast to a donut with filling, or other similar treats, signaling that after using PrEP the penetrating partner’s orgasm can occur inside the bottom’s body (see fig. 75).

Since they depend on mimicking, copying, appropriating, collaging, and intertwining a variety of diverse and conflicting pop cultural, artistic, and commercial discourses, these memes can be thought of as a contemporary instance of Pop Art production. Like Pop Art, which uses “low” and consumer culture as sites of social critique, memes—seemingly trivial and mundane—can reflect deeper social and cultural structures (Shifman 2014, 15). Since memes usually respond to current political or social events, the variety of diverse messages they carry can be thought of as a sort of social commentary. In some cases, they constitute virtual activism.

In other words, as Shifman (2014) suggests, “memes shape the mindsets, forms of behavior, and actions of social groups” (18).<sup>70</sup>

Aside from memes, there are other parts of virtual PrEP cultural production that make direct reference to Warhol’s iconic prints. For instance, appropriating Warhol’s famous banana silkscreen, which covered the Velvet Underground & Nico’s debut album (1967), PrEP appears as part of a group with a banana and condom. In addition, PrEP-inspired digitally made images mimic the mass-produced silkscreen process, used in Warhol’s Coca-Cola silkscreen *Green Coca-Cola Bottles* (1962) and other silkscreens (see fig. 76 and 77). It’s possible to say that PrEP in a food and Pop Art context appropriates old imagery to critique the commodifying aspect of medications, as was done AZT was placed next to Coca-Cola in Terrill’s *Still Life*. However, when the older generation of art-makers placed HIV medication in the context of foodstuff, they proposed a critical observation of the burgeoning AIDS industry. In the case of PrEP, it seems that the imagery does so from a different point of departure; it celebrates consumption without a critical standpoint. When using recognizable imagery from pop culture, the aim of activist art during the first wave of the crisis was to suggest the need for democratizing HIV medications, otherwise targeted and available only to affluent consumers.

Virtual PrEP endeavors, however, seem to overlook unequal access to medical innovations and neglect the continued high rates of HIV among vulnerable communities without

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<sup>70</sup> Memes are performative agents. Scholar Marcela Fuentes (2019) argues that “unmediated, body-to-body” performance can also be activated “online” (3). Fuentes (2019) suggests that “[s]ocial media posts, including still photos, videos, GIFs, and memes, which are almost in sync with actual happenings [are] drive[n] toward audience participation, enabling transversal dialogue among actual and potential audience members” (15).

access to life-saving medications, instead focusing on personal self-care and a narrative of “choice.” As demonstrated in the next chapter, social media serves as a venue where neoliberal calls for individualism and free choice, consumerism, and activism meet. PrEP cultural production on the internet shows how these calls reinforce and facilitate the (re)creation of a desirable consumer identity and community based on consumption and brands. As Trottier (2012) argues, brands and individual identities collapse:

On the one hand, individuals are invited to build their profiles using brands, logos and other corporate content [that] links individual identities to branded products and services, bringing the latter to life through the faces and names of their enthusiasts. (159–160)

In instances of PrEP virtual activism based on a brand, Truvada solidifies consumption as a site of possibility.

Based on the interest in PrEP in multiple virtual domains, the pill can be juxtaposed with Warhol’s images of celebrities and household products. As scholar Jennifer Dyer (2011) argues, by transporting images of Marilyn Monroe, Judy Garland, Campbell’s soup cans, and Coca-Cola bottles into the arts sphere, Warhol expanded the iconographic tradition with mundane figures recognizable to broad audiences of people. Just like images of Christ or the Virgin Mary, Warhol’s subjects are static, portrayed in empty spaces, without temporal location or background (Dyer 2011, 199). Emblems of mass culture and Pop Art influences are present in the visual arts production circulating on contemporary social media in response to PrEP. As writer Alexander McClelland (2019) argues, the kind of cultural production prompted by PrEP has not been seen since the birth control pill. Initially a medical product, PrEP has been appropriated by the arts and pop culture, just like Andy Warhol’s icons. By acquiring value outside of its primary



medical field, PrEP has become a widely recognizable icon just like other objects in the history of Pop Art.

Such is the case with Instagram user askmissjai's digitally created image *Colorful Slut*, which explicitly appropriates Pop Art aesthetics. The image consists of nine squares with Truvada pills in different color schemes, recalling Warhol's Marilyn Monroe portraiture (see fig. 78). Although the icons appear acontextual in space, drawing on illusionary temporal sequencing based on the repetition of images, Warhol's multicolored Marilyn series can be read in terms of the various light effects of the different times of day (Dyer 2011, 208). As scholar Richard Meyer (1995) argues, "each [repeated] image both mimics and differentiates itself from a chain of adjacent shots, as in a filmic sequence of an object in motion" (105). Accordingly, the differences in the sequence produce a movement that gives the print temporal depth and provides space for a narrative.

As is the case with Warhol's icons, the multiplicity of the repeated PrEP pills creates an illusion of temporality and consequently a possible narrative dependent on the spectator. *Colorful Slut* can be read as a portrait of nine identical pills, but the spectator could also differentiate the pills by ascribing a certain narrative based on their various color schemes. More specifically, if the spectator considers Truvada's colorful schema in terms of temporal sequencing, the illustration acquires the perception of a filmic illusion. This filmic illusion could be thought of as symbolic of taking one pill daily. Mostly consumed by and targeted to affluent gay men, PrEP's desirability comes from the pill's property: enabling one to be "a slut," i.e., enjoy numerous sexual encounters with the possibility of omitting condoms without fear of

contracting HIV, a preventative identity I will elaborate on in detail in the following chapter. The circulation of imagery related to PrEP on the internet and social media speaks to this point.

### ***Most Wanted Men: PrEP on Dating Apps***

Similar examples of how PrEP mediates the creation of icons is present on a variety of gay men's dating apps promoting the pill, including Scruff, Grindr, Hornet, Bareback Real Time, Planet Romeo, Daddy Hunt, Bare Buddy, and Adam4Adam (alittlebluepill 2019). These apps use a phone's location to locate other users in proximity. The interface of the app usually displays a grid of pictures, arranged from nearest to farthest. The variety of male bodies changes on the user's screen as they change location. Scruff's virtual cruising ground is where sexual desires are exchanged and negotiated, and where quotidian masculine icons become produced and desired. As is the case with social media, users have control over how they promote themselves on the apps. Their status can be based on the interest their images arouse. For instance, the app Scruff has a category for the most desirable users, in the section titled "Most Woof'd." The "Most Woof'd" section represents the group of users who receive the most attention from other users using the "Woof" option while responding to their image, like a "like" on other social media platforms. Scruffy guys posing half-nude with beards and athletic bodies are generally to be found in this section (see fig. 79).

Reimagining the "Most Woof'd" men through the lens of Pop Art, it can be claimed that everyday gay men, drawing on the number of "woofs" and "likes" they receive, are self-creating icons. The iconic status of quotidian masculinity has been documented in Warhol's mural *Thirteen Most Wanted Men* (1964). Although Warhol usually portrayed movie stars and

commodity objects as icons, the subjects in this mural were quotidian middle-class men. In a silkscreen series made for the World's Fair in New York City in 1964, Warhol decorated the facade of the New York Pavilion with mug shots of various felons, found in FBI files of the late 1950s (Meyer 1995, 93–4; Shanes 2005, 122). Images of attractive young men were “mass-reproduced across the nation, in post offices and police stations rather than films and fan magazines,” hence their “low-level stars” status (Meyer 1995, 96) (see fig. 80). Endowing the mug shots with a sort of praise and attention, as hinted in the word play of the mural's title, Warhol situated the felons in a domain where he would have usually placed celebrities. The mural met with disapproval and Warhol was ordered to remove the mural shortly before the exhibition. He then covered it with aluminum house paint.

The type of men who appear in the grid of Warhol's *Most Wanted Men*, “whose clothing (sport jackets, crisp shirts, and ties) conforms to a classic fifties image of American masculinity” (Meyer 1995, 96), served as a prototype on which the clone aesthetics of the 1970s were conceived. As scholar Richard Meyer (1995) argues, the mural's composition, including “the format of the grid, the deployment of men inside it, [and] the exchange of gazes passing among those men” figure Warhol's homoerotic vision (96). Both conceptually and aesthetically, the *Most Wanted Men* resemble the “low-level stars” of the “Most Woof'd” grid on Scruff. Tapping on a picture of one's own liking shows that user's profile, including their overall interests, sexual preference, and HIV status, as well as safety practices. One can choose between condoms and treatment as prevention, with PrEP also one of the selectable safety practices.

Gay men's dating apps are also a venue where HIV prevention, consumption, and same-sex desire overlap. As scholar Mark Davis (2009) argues, public health has been undertaking

“Internet-based interventions” for sexual health and its prevention (7). For instance, as a part of its affirmative PrEP campaign, in 2015 the app Hornet partnered with MSMGF (The Global Forum on MSM and HIV) to create “Blue Ribbon Boys” (Murphy 2015). If a Hornet user qualifies, they are granted a small blue ribbon icon on their profile photo. The Blue Ribbon icon, an appropriation of the red ribbon of World AIDS Day, prompts Hornet users to answer a short series of questions about their sexual health to receive the icon on their profile photo (see fig. 81). PrEP has literally become an icon. The icon signifies “their personal commitment to sexual health regardless of their HIV status” (Murphy 2015).

Users who do not qualify for a blue ribbon are offered recommendations for ways to improve their sexual health. The pharmaceutical industry’s marketing has infiltrated social media and dating apps, outlets that celebrate the pill’s properties. According to scholar Joshua Gamson (2003), a gay “cyberworld” such as the one facilitated by dating apps is an example of a gay market, “which requires narrow and palatable versions of identity and community” (274). In this particular case, the needs of gay men for “community [...] are conflated with consumption desires, and community equated with market” (271). In the case of Hornet’s virtual PrEP movement, desires, identities, and consumption are served to its users through the rhetoric of the right to be on PrEP, i.e., to be healthy, which coexists with the rhetoric of the right to consume. In turn, this consumption is rewarded with the “blue ribbon,” the marketable and desired icon.

### **Conclusion: PrEP Advertising and the “Warhol 2.0” Era**

Drawing on protest art, such as *Enjoy AZT* and Terrill’s *Still Life* series, this chapter has shown how activists during the first decades of the crisis used advertising strategies to mobilize

communities against misconceptions created by homophobic and racist state institutions, and greedy pharmaceutical companies. To contest the meanings generated by the mass media and right-wing politics, grassroots activists mobilized recognizable images from pop and consumer cultures to reinvent the harmful representation of AIDS. In the past, protest art and direct-action activism were envisioned as a critique of these institutions of power. In contrast, with the gradual progression of the pharmaceutical industry, its rigorous and aggressive way of conquering the market, and the development of the internet and social media, while communities of people on social media do use these platforms as sites for political mobilization and organizing, they relate to the institutions differently.

This chapter analyzed these developments and how they have influenced the current nature of pharmaceutical critique or lack thereof. In the past, Pop Art imagery, brands, and advertising were used as sites to extend the pharmaceutical critique put forth by grassroots AIDS organizing. The use of iconic images to advertise PrEP has the opposite intent. Without any references to political or socially just goals, including partial access to the pill, PrEP advertising on social media and dating apps celebrates pharmaceutical consumption. In the next chapter, parts of this PrEP advertising involve a *resurgence* of images of affluent, physically robust gay white male bodies, which recenters white gay men's primacy in the cultures of PrEP, after other activists worked so hard to de-center them.

This chapter showed the strategic use of well-rehearsed Pop Art imagery in current social media production. Initially, this imagery was utilized to construct a radical critique of pharmaceutical politics, but when recontextualizing the images, their radical origins are altered. The contested character of this appropriation brings us back to Warhol. By merging the art world

and the “high” art of his time with rapid consumerism and “low” culture, Warhol unveiled an ambivalence about artmaking and the power of re-contextualizing and appropriating consumer culture in novel contexts. PrEP cultural production appropriates images, styles, and forms from earlier decades in favor of “Big Pharma” and at the expense of their original radical ends, showing how advanced pharmaceutical capitalism has found innovative ways to utilize aesthetic appropriation for its marketing goals. These goals are an example of the contested, yet productive and powerful character of appropriating: images, styles, and forms from the cultural past acquire myriad new meanings in unexplored contexts. What relates the two seemingly different forms of cultural production—grassroots AIDS activism and PrEP advertising—is their reliance on Pop Art and its mobilization of everyday mundane objects as cultural and iconic objects. The current PrEP cultural production is yet another creative instance of appropriation, with progressive biochemical capitalism as the new context, an instance of the so-called “Warhol 2.0” era in the making.

*Alongside the dismal toll of death, what many of us have lost [to AIDS] is a culture of sexual possibility: back rooms, tea rooms, bookstores, movie houses, and baths; the trucks, the pier, the ramble, the dunes. Sex was everywhere for us, and everything we wanted to venture: golden showers and water sports, cocksucking and rimming, fucking and fist fucking. Now our untamed impulses are either proscribed once again or shielded from us by latex. Even Crisco, the lube we used because it was edible, is now forbidden because it breaks down the rubber. Sex toys are no longer added enhancements; they're safer substitutes. (Crimp 1989, 11)*

*Although the moment that Crimp describes is a moment that is behind us, its memory, its ghosts, and the ritualized performance of transmitting its vision of utopia across generational divides still fuels and propels our political and erotic lives. (Muñoz 2009, 34)*

*There is an undeniable beauty to fucking without condoms and to surrendering to my uncensored desires, yet PrEP is about much more than my sexual enjoyment: PrEP represents a medical, social, cultural and political shift that defines sexual subjectivities in a profoundly unequal neoliberal world economy where financial profit precedes pretty much anything else. (Motta and Peetz 2019, 132)*

## CHAPTER 5

### **“A Culture of Sexual Possibilities” Revisited:**

#### **“Big Pharma” and Radical Queer Politics in the Age of Hashtag Activism**

In 2012, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved the first anti-HIV pill. PrEP successfully prevents contraction of the virus over 90 percent of the time, if taken as advised by medical authorities. Targeted at the beginning mostly to affluent gay men, a demographic historically intimately connected to HIV/AIDS, it was only a question of time before PrEP acquired a cult status and became a sort of mass media “icon.” There are many items associated with the little blue pill Truvada, the manufacturer’s name for PrEP. For instance, Truvada enthusiasts can buy small pins or cufflinks in the shape and color of the Truvada pill, or a pin mimicking the Pepsi brand with “PrEP” wording. PrEP design on T-shirts either foster pride, responsibility, and protection— “Protection is the new blue,” “Proactive responsible Empowered Pleasure!” (PrEP), and “Proud to be Prepped”—or celebrate PrEP’s recreational nature, placing the pill in a basket with other so called “party drugs”—“ Truvada Poppers Molly Cocaine G and K,” and “Breed Me.” Some enjoy “PrEP” scented candles, and others get tattoos with the pill’s chemical formula. PrEP fanatics also engage in PrEP-inspired arts and crafts projects; some use Truvada pills or bottles for decorative blue shiny cushions, festive lights, Christmas tree ornaments, or nail art; others bake PrEP-shaped celebratory cakes and cookies. PrEP-themed costumes are not an uncommon sight during Gay Pride marches or



Halloween. The Chilean drag queen Truvada Salvation made the pill into her stage name (see fig. 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, and 88).<sup>71</sup>

Drawing on PrEP's presence on the Internet and social media, this chapter focuses on the pill's pivotal property—sexual intercourse with the reduced fear of contracting HIV—that makes it an extremely attractive commodity in the gay male-oriented market. In promoting PrEP as a “lifestyle product,” advertising agencies and PrEP advocates frequently reference promiscuous gay male sexual cultures prior to AIDS, which has been addressed by activists as “a culture of sexual possibility” (Crimp 1989, 11). According to PrEP advocates, the pill enables a sort of return to that era, but in the present. It's possible to claim that this reflects an intergenerational dialogue with the radical sex cultures before AIDS was known. However, this chapter digs a bit deeper into these historical references to reveal how they are counter-productive for the current queer and trans of color movement and politics.

Other chapters in this dissertation have shown that appropriation in aesthetics across different generations of makers and activists can be used as an act of creation and resistance related to the erasure of queer of color life. Taking a different direction, this chapter demonstrates that appropriation can also signal a reversal of politics; copying, referencing, and imitating these aesthetics sustains and re-centers the privilege of white gay men's communities

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<sup>71</sup> New York City-based drag queen Sherry Vine's parody “Truvada,” sung to the tune of Cyndi Lauper's “True Colors,” received considerable attention and was widely discussed. Some drag queens from the reality TV show *RuPaul's Drag Race* (2009-) promote PrEP to their fan bases. In the television industry, Truvada has been used to spark narratives in various TV shows, including *Looking* (2014–2015), *Transparent* (2014–2019), *American Horror Story* (2011–), and *How to Get Away With Murder* (2014–).

in AIDS-related narratives. Specifically, in the case of PrEP, their privileged status is sustained by unlimited access and the sexual lifestyles the pill enables.

Drawing on gay men's revived nightlife, PrEP on social media platforms, the pharmaceutical advertising that uses these platforms, and pharmaceutical consumption, this chapter critically analyzes so called "PrEP activism," based on loyalty and blind faith in the pill. This activism surrounding the "new" sexual culture enabled by a pharmaceutical commodity is almost exclusively masculine and predominantly white in nature. Therefore, I take its self-proclaimed radical character with a grain of salt. This chapter analyzes "activist" social media campaigns involving mostly gay men, for example #TruvadaWhore, that work towards destigmatizing casual sex (without condoms) on PrEP, and the memoir *The PrEP Diaries: A Safe(r) Sex Memoir* by author Evan J. Peterson, inspired both by daily consumption of the pill and the campaign itself. Aside from celebrating PrEP and the possibility of promiscuous sex without condoms, what unites these case studies is their oddly fetishizing representation, with oaths of loyalty to pills and their makers, and discourses of heroism. That being on PrEP is heroic is promoted in a high-end HIV prevention campaign "PrEP Heroes," aimed at younger gay male party goers, suggesting PrEP gives superpowers.

These case studies show that users perceive consumption of PrEP as a responsible and heroic act. This sentiment is also used strategically for pharmaceutical marketing purposes. These dynamics can be seen in so-called "selfie activism," where users disclose their "heroism" on social media through documentary auto-portraits. The announcement gets the PrEP user "a like," and entry to a larger movement. However, users naively think of this act as an activist gesture that will spread knowledge about PrEP and, as a result, end the AIDS crisis. Instead, by

publicly announcing they use PrEP, they submit to a novel surveillance strategy helping sustain neoliberal economies. In other words, the confessional aspect of PrEP-celebrating projects is an instance of neoliberal governance: where the governance of our everyday activities is not domineering or repressive, but rather *enhances* our personal freedoms. As a result of the willing disclosure of one's personal information and health rituals, PrEP provides a great resource for agencies that collect and sell this data to multinational companies.

Marketing agencies use the semiotics of early sex cultures and desirable bodily aesthetic to advertise PrEP as part of a self-care routine, and they also favor politically reversed, demographically biased displays of healthy self-management. The “good citizen” who publicly advertises their use of PrEP—either in corporate-designed ads or in social-media posts—is, once again, normatively white and male. Juxtaposed with the uncritical PrEP advocacy on social media, this chapter reflects on other examples of “PrEP activism” that are critical towards both nostalgic references to the pre-AIDS past and pharmaceutical capitalism, such as *PrEP Manifesto* (2017). Written and performed by the radical queer art collective SPIT! (Sodomites, Perverts, Inverts Together!), the project is composed of two installments. In the first installment, *PrEP Manifesto* was performed by London-based artist Claudia Palazzo in a gallery context in front of live audience, and in its second installment it was published in SPIT!'s collection of historically influential queer and trans manifestos and speeches, *The SPIT! Manifesto Reader: A Selection of Historical and Contemporary Queer Manifestos*.

Aside from articulating the importance of queer sex cultures, this project is also interesting because it places cis-gender, queer, and trans women at the center of PrEP narratives—groups usually absent in any cultural production about the pill, but who have been at

the forefront of grassroots activism, often playing the role of caregivers to gay men dying of AIDS. In addition, the project uses performance as an educational medium. *PrEP Manifesto* established a dialogue with radical queer and trans history and AIDS performance, an important medium for establishing counter-hegemonic meanings of the disease in its initial years (Román 2000), as in feminist performance artist Karen Finley's work. More importantly, the manifesto opens a conversation about the dangers of pharmaceutical capitalism and blind trust in PrEP as a means of stopping the ongoing AIDS epidemic. What SPIT!'s manifesto and Truvada whose advocacy have in common is "Big Pharma" and their conversation with the past: the former provides a critical overview about harmful elements of pharmaceutical consumerism in a dialogue with radical queer and trans of color forerunners, while the latter relies on access to PrEP as a source of personal freedom and sexual liberation.

### **Nightlife, Hashtag Activism, and Identity Politics**

That consumerism and the market have historically created the possibility of unconstrained sexual worlds and cultures can be traced back to the nineteenth century. As historian John D'Emilio (1993) argues, the development of the free-labor system generated the necessary conditions for the constitution of white male homosexual identity, that later formed into a movement and experienced its highlight during liberationist post-Stonewall sexual politics. Similarly, Michael Bronski (2015) argues that the rise of capitalism has been a crucial force in the sustaining and developing of a gay culture. Access to same-sex pleasure has been capitalized on in multiple gay venues, including sex theaters, bars, and bathhouses. These venues emerged during the 1970s, as spaces where a sense of gay culture was strengthened. They also became pedagogical venues for promoting safer sex in the 1980s.

During the proliferation of AIDS, the advertising of safer sex and condoms landed in an already established gay market and nightlife. When AIDS organizations started eroticizing condoms, they were creating alliances with department stores and gay bars to display condoms and provide customers with information on how to use them. They also asked for attention from condom manufacturers, describing gay men as “an all-but-untapped market, ripe for sales pitches to their particular needs” (Brier 2009, 45). This market continues with PrEP. As seen in the example of the “Blue Ribbon Boys” in Chapter 4, PrEP has been advertised towards affluent gay men on dating apps and the internet. According to Gamson (2003), the internet has been a major force in transforming “gay and lesbian media from organizations answering at least partly to geographical and political communities into businesses answering primarily to advertisers and investors” (260). Such entanglement between community organizers and advertisers has been especially notable in the example of social media, as I will talk about in the next section.

Throughout different eras of the gay market, party cultures have had an important role in strengthening the movement. Party cultures slowed during the first decades of the health emergency but have been revived in the age of PrEP. Scholar Douglas Crimp (1989) coined the term “culture of sexual possibilities” to define these cultures that were symbols of the gay 1970s. This culture fostered “golden showers and water sports, cocksucking and rimming, fucking and fist fucking” at public places such as “the back rooms, tea rooms, movies houses, and baths, the trucks, the piers, the ramble, the dunes” (11). Writing in response to Crimp, Muñoz (2009) argues that these cultures are also alive today and “still fuels and propels our political and erotic lives” (34). In a way, pleasures on PrEP mediate the moments of ecstasy that, according to Muñoz (2009), has world-making potential and helps us imagine realities unconstrained by HIV

and AIDS, heteropatriarchy, and institutionalized state homophobia (33–35). Unlike Crimp, who writes on behalf of gay men, at the time mostly targeted by state homophobia, Muñoz writes specifically about the pleasures for queer of color communities, whose lives have been continually erased or only partially present in these narratives.

Correspondingly, it's possible to tentatively think of revisiting a “culture of sexual possibilities” in the era dominated by PrEP as an intergenerational contact between the contemporary and the “lost” generation of the 1970s. However, its selective nature needs to be taken into consideration. In other words, the current gay market centered around PrEP does establish intergenerational contact with the practices of sexual cultures from before the emergence of AIDS, but these ecstasies mediated by the pill seem to be reserved for predominantly white gay men and are predicated on access to consumption of the pill. On PrEP's release, the pill was a source of multiple contested debates; some were affirmative, and others stressed the “irresponsible” sexual behavior it would foster. Written shortly after PrEP's approval in 2012, journalist David Duran's (2012) opinion piece “Truvada Whores?” condemned PrEP as a gateway to unsafe sexual behavior. Drawing on the CDC's recommendation regarding targeted groups, Duran raised the question of responsibility. For Duran (2012), “legit couples who are in monogamous relationships” should consider PrEP, while “men who engage in unsafe sex with other men, this is just an excuse to continue to be irresponsible.” Duran's position is in sync with a moralizing agenda, whereby only respectable citizens who pursue stable, domestic

relationships have the right to protection.<sup>72</sup> In other words, if gay men adhere to prescribed rules of “health,” i.e., practicing monogamy and using PrEP, their performance is rewarded with access to consume, vote, and participate in respectable “normal” life.

As a response to Duran’s opinion piece, San Francisco-based blogger and activist Adam Zeboski (2014) established the social media campaign #TruvadaWhore. Rapidly, the widely affirmatory circulation of this hashtag developed into such a virtual movement that a blue “#TruvadaWhore” tee shirt became a “material” symbol of the campaign (see fig. 89). This campaign is an instance of so-called “hashtag activism,” similar to other recent widely discussed examples including #BlackLivesMatter and #metoo. In “hashtag activism,” a hashtagged word or phrase used by a mass of people comes to represent a sort of virtual protest across social media platforms, responding to a social or political problem (Yang 2016, 13). This virtual activism allows people to create a virtual movement that, as scholar Zizi Papacharissi (2015) suggests, utilizes a variety of “digital means to connect with broader publics and express their point of view” (7). Zeboski’s initial use of the derogatory term brought together gay men advocating for the right to “irresponsible” pleasure on PrEP. Condemning the pill as a recreational “party drug,” encouraged participation in promiscuous sex with no condoms.

Partying has developed into a sort of movement; the Truvada Whore movement is in a dialogue with the “chemsex” practices of gay men. Also known as Party ‘n’ Play (PnP), chemsex includes prolonged sex sessions under the influence of multiple psychoactive drugs, with PrEP

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<sup>72</sup> On March 27, 2014 Duran officially recanted the term in another Huffington Post article, “An Evolved Opinion on Truvada,” following the conversations his initial article prompted.

having become a major part of the repertoire. Numerous urban sex-positive parties have been organized in the wake of PrEP's introduction to gay men.<sup>73</sup> The problematic aspect of these parties is that they turn to the past to imagine the future. While Muñoz's (2009) claimed this is necessary for imagining queer futurities, reimagining and rethinking the 1970s and 1980s without AIDS is problematic. These parties refer to the politics of the pre-AIDS 1970s, when recreational sex without condoms served as a way of creating alternative sexual communities of gay men and was considered a strategy for resisting the heteronormative social order. However, the lure of reimagining the past at the expense of the ongoing AIDS crisis prevents its world-making character, especially for those socio-economically communities still in the crisis. Returning to the past or reimagining the past as though the pandemic had never happened is not that different from making America great again, without asking for whom.

Although these nightlife practices have been under the scrutiny of public health and respectability politics, scholar Kane Race (2015) considers the alternative sexual ethics, and connections between people, that these parties provide. Notwithstanding the known dangers of recreational drug use, Race (2015) places chemsex in historical perspective to claim that "illicit drugs have in fact long been part of the sexual and social practices through which gay social

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<sup>73</sup> One of these well-attended such parties is the New York-based Inferno, organized in secret locations. Inferno contains a dance floor, and multiple "play areas," such as semi-private cubicles and glory holes, vinyl-covered beds and slings, with a lot of condomless sex. Another reference to the past was the high-end party "PrEP+," hosted by celebrated musician Frank Ocean. "PrEP+" pays "homage to what could have been of the 1980s NYC's club scene if the drug... had been invented in that era," according to the press statement. In addition, developed on the disco model in the 1970s, the current iteration of large circuit parties are also popular all-day and night events, a number of all-day events, leading to all-night dance parties, attended primarily by gay men (Westhaver 2005).



bonds and community have been forged” (254). Consequently, chemsex is a contemporary rendition of a gay men’s sex culture that re-envision “pleasure, connection, eroticism and intimacy” (Race 2015, 256). Since sex without condoms, as well as promiscuous sex enhanced by drugs, is integral to both chemsex cultures and the Truvada Whore movement, this phenomenon can also be placed in conversation with the barebacking cultures that gained public visibility with the approval of antiretroviral therapies in the mid-1990s<sup>74</sup> In both cases—barebacking and now the type of intercourse PrEP enables—so called “PrEP activism” resists sex stigma.<sup>75</sup>

A pervasive “selfie-activism” on social media is one of the main vessels for the Truvada Whore movement. Instagram, the popular image-driven social media app where #TruvadaWhore has a profound presence, “provides users an instantaneous way to capture and share their life moments with friends through a series of (filter manipulated) pictures and videos” (Hu,

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<sup>74</sup> Barebacking cultures have been interpreted as performing resistance to the politics of respectability upheld by the public health, as well as a rapidly developing homonormativity. Scholar Tim Dean (2015) suggests that “the emergence of an organized subculture of barebacking in the US was as a form of resistance to the encroachment of health-and-hygiene imperatives into every zone of contemporary life” (10). A “barebacker” who engages in practices of barebacking thus describes gay men “who don’t want to be considered ‘normal’” (Dean 2008, 81).

<sup>75</sup> In his opinion piece, writer Alexander McClelland (2019) questioned the reclaiming of the whore identity amid the sexual stigma of gay men who have sex on PrEP: “He thinks he experiences stigma,” laughed my friend, who works in HIV prevention. “Tell him to call me once he’s lost his job or housing or been sent to jail because of HIV.” As can be read from McClelland’s exchange with his friend, Truvada Whore activism is largely related to one’s access—and thus class and socio-economic position—to identify and engage in “stigmatized” sexual behavior. McClelland (2019) claims that PrEP allows HIV-negative gay men to explore new possibilities in their sex lives, but the regimen also provides them with the “space to unleash all their sexual entitlement, not to mention some narcissistic exhibitionism,” as is the case with “selfie-activism” on social media, for instance.

Manikonda, and Kambhampati 2014).<sup>76</sup> Gay men proudly post selfies on Instagram, posing in blue tee shirts or semi-nude, with Truvada in their mouths or hands, or simply placing the pill next to their meals, confessing to their audiences that they have their sexual health “under control,” using the hashtag Truvada Whore (see fig. 90 and 91).

The participants in this activism mostly nurture the aesthetics of the gay clone. Of course, some Truvada whores are cultural tastemakers and influencers, such as party promoters, porn stars, and socialites. They do not only “dictate” what a desirable gay male body should look like, they also serve as circuits for medical advertising and consumption. Their social media accounts are the embodiment of the pleasures, desires, images, and lifestyle others wish to take part in; they act as a lure into the Truvada Whore movement, where these desires (but only provisionally) may come true. In addition, Truvada selfies are, according to their creators, educational: the images send the message that their creators have their health under control and are making the right *choice*. Regardless of the different filters used, the overall message of social media activism is although we are whores, we are responsible whores on PrEP; we are proud; and we have *a right* to be healthy. Truvada Whores are interesting because they consider

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<sup>76</sup> Instagram users have power in deciding how they want to present themselves to their followers. The need for public exposure and maintaining one’s virtual presence has been made part of fostering preventative identities and belonging to virtual communities. One’s profile is a window into the world, a space where one literally constructs an identity. The curated self-presentation is a performance of self in everyday life *par excellence*. Social media is only one of the multiple stages where, as sociologist Erving Goffman (2008) has taught us, an individual performs in an interaction with other people, creating “a face” for each interaction, depending on the situational context.

themselves as heroes who took their health into their own hands, with Truvada being the perfect “magic pill,” giving superpowers.

### **“PrEP Heroes”: Consumption of Truvada as a Courageous Act**

A virtual campaign that combines the discourses of responsible and courageous Truvada whores, heroism, and nightlife, and referencing PrEP users as superheroes, is “PrEP Heroes” (2015). Unlike the Do-It-Yourself superhero costumes by PrEP enthusiasts mentioned previously, this high-end production campaign organized in 2015 by New York City’s Housing Works Community Healthcare, represents a group of nine PrEP users who share their stories to raise awareness about biochemical HIV prevention. Photographed by celebrated photographer Mike Ruiz, a group of predominantly cis-gender male models, except for one trans model of color, are dressed in various costumes reminiscent of a sort of dystopian milieu. Covered in body paint and wearing props including angel wings, satyr horns, football shoulder pads, and spikes of silver armor, the models stand strong, as if they are ready to take flight, go to battle, or, more realistically, head to a circuit party (see fig. 92).

On the campaign’s website, there is a link to individual interviews with the models, all of whom are known photographers, producers, porn actors, and dancers in gay men’s cultures, “to highlight the heroism of those who protect themselves as well as their community from HIV exposure through diligent use of treatment and medications” (Housing Work 2016). Based on the statement appearing on the campaign’s website, PrEP Heroes have a “choice” and are “committed” to using “a secret weapon” to successfully protect themselves and others. Although the visuals suggest comic-book superheroes, the text proposes that PrEP Heroes are simply “our

friends, our co-workers, our partners, and our family members” who choose to become superheroes through their “diligent” use of a treatment that gives them a kind of power (Housing Work 2016). Their gym-toned and conventionally masculine bodies appear as though they are an effect of PrEP.

Based on its rhetoric and aesthetics, this campaign draws on traditionally masculine American values and aesthetics, as nurtured in the comic book superheroes genre. As literary figures, comic book superheroes were originally developed in response to social transformations brought about in the post-WWII era, but the genre has recently been revived amidst the rise of U.S. nationalism, following 9/11 (Chambliss and Svitavsky 2013, 17; Weltzien 2005, 231; Hassler-Forest 2012). Superheroes serve as allegories of “all-American” masculinity and heroic manhood: loyal, likeable patriots who fight the villains to protect American values, including truth, justice, and freedom.<sup>77</sup> These PrEP superheroes contribute to the discussion on the meaning of national tropes in HIV prevention and homosexual biopolitical transition in Chapter 2; PrEP superheroes may appear to be in the service of constructing a new *new* gay man who has “conquered” AIDS—this time with the assistance of PrEP—and reestablished his heroic status and justified his sexual citizenship.

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<sup>77</sup> As scholars Julian C. Chambliss and William L. Svitavsky (2013) argue, the American superhero responded to a post-war American imagination that had been increasingly shaped by “an urban life amidst ethnic diversity and technological change” (17). At a time when white masculinity was in crisis and the world was witnessing the subsequent rise of the civil rights movements, superheroes represented a symbol of strength and of the victory of white masculinity over “otherness.” After the war, the superhero become “an idealized first citizen, identifying and vanquishing clear enemies to the state, and, clad in red, white, and blue, making explicit the nationalist trinity of state, soldier, and flag” (Wanzo 2009, 339).

Whereby other projects in this chapter reference pre-AIDS sexual cultures, “PrEP Heroes” can be understood as an upgraded version of an HIV prevention genre that initially appeared in the early 1990s, as in SFAF’s multimedia campaign “The Rubbermen” (1990). Comprised of bar cards that featured educational and flirtatious guidelines on how to “be a Rubberman,” as well as a safer sex calendar for 1991, the campaign included a pledge: “As an Honorary Rubberman, I hereby commit to being a condom ambassador—using them [every time] I have sex and encouraging everyone I know to do the same” (SFAF 1990). The statement defines the Rubbermen as a dedicated group of (new) gay men who have made a commitment to using condoms. This commitment “has the power to transform ordinary men into modern heroes...it has the power to save lives” (Rubbermen 1991). The back of the calendar includes six photographs of predominantly white, average-looking, “guy-next-door” type male volunteers who promoted the campaign, dressed in masks and capes, passing out condoms at bars and clubs across San Francisco. Posing for the camera during a volunteering event, each man is dressed in a white T-shirt with a large “R” in the middle, complemented by a cape (see fig. 93). The message is that anybody can be a superhero if they obey public health recommendations. Accordingly, PrEP Heroes and Truvada Whore recycle aesthetics that have worked in favor of sustaining gay male primacy in HIV prevention since the early days of liberal gay politics.

***The PrEP Diaries: “Selfie-activism” as Self-Surveillance***

Detailed accounts of a new *new* gay man enhanced by the pharmaceutical market can be found in multiple opinion pieces written either about PrEP’s impact at large or to provide a more intimate insight into personal experiences with the pill. Aside from popular opinion pieces, such as the ones initiated by David Duran and Adam Zeboski, that developed into the Truvada Whore

movement, personal PrEP experience inspired Seattle-based author Evan J. Peterson to write his “safer sex memoir” *The PrEP Diaries* (2017). In a series of humorous reflections with multiple gay pop culture references, Peterson (2017)—a self-declared Truvada whore activist—explains how PrEP informed his sexual maturity (121). Peterson’s strong sense of self and passion for PrEP are vividly present on the cover of the memoir. The cover resembles one of the iconic scenes from the Oscar-winning movie *American Beauty* (1999); actress Mena Suvari, covered in rose petals, “lures” the spectator’s attention. Peterson appears nude, covered in a bed of blue Truvada pills, appropriating the scene from the movie (see fig. 94). If rose petals in *American Beauty* symbolized desire, lust, and freedom, and the movie calls for reconnecting with the lost decade of the 1960s, then it can be understood that Peterson is making correlations between access to PrEP and the 1970s and the desires and pleasures (in gay men’s imaginaries) that predate the AIDS crisis.

*The PrEP Diaries* describe a journey from gay boyhood to fully adult PrEP user—a responsible gay man who makes the choice to take “control” over his sexual health. Born in 1982, Peterson came of age after the approval of successful antiretroviral therapies. Therefore, one might claim that Peterson’s consideration of AIDS has developed at a time when the disease was going through a transformation and when post-crisis discourses were in formation. Peterson (2017) narrates his journey from initial, fraught sexual encounters informed by fear and stigma about AIDS to an assured and emancipated sexual being, informed in large part by PrEP:

I eat, I drink, and I suck cock like a champ, all without consistent suffering or fear of HIV. Thank you, Gilead Sciences, for this blessing. (48) I love PrEP. I love it, love it, love it. It allows me to go into each new dating or sexual situation with absolutely no fears about HIV. I grew up terrified of AIDS. I grew up afraid that I’d get it from love, from rape, from a hasty blowjob between strangers [...] Now that I’m in my thirties and

PrEP is real and poz-undetectable status is real, I'm giddy to have all the friendly, informed, affectionate sex I missed out on as a younger man. (146) [A]fter a decade and a half of adulthood, I finally got up the resolve and confidence to bottom. Thanks, Truvada! (147)

Since biomedical substance mediates Peterson's sexual emancipation, Peterson celebrates both the pill and its producer. This affectionate attachment to a biomedical substance makes Peterson's identity reflect the workings of a pharmacopornographic regime that mediates the creation of contemporary subjectivities. According to Preciado (2013), these subjectivities are

defined by the substance (or substances) that supply their metabolism, by the cybernetic prostheses and various types of pharmacopornographic desires that feed the subject's actions and through which they turn into agents. So we can speak of Prozac subjects, cannabis subjects, cocaine subjects, alcohol subjects, Ritalin subjects, [...] Viagra subjects. (35)

To add to this list, now we can also speak of PrEP subjects.

Aside from PrEP, Peterson's (2017) persona is also mediated by "a device in [his] pocket that acts as a video telephone, an encyclopedia of all human knowledge, and a match-making catalogue to pick out nearly compatible sex partners" (9). This is the life of a contemporary gay clone, highly dependent on biomedical and technological enhancements. Moreover, Peterson (2017) believes that PrEP will create major differences in the future of HIV and AIDS; with PrEP "[w]e will finally defeat AIDS" (4). By relying on a medical commodity as the main source of stopping the AIDS crisis, he joins an argument put forth by affluent gay men: that the pill will provide a global solution to AIDS. Such blind trust in pills started with antiretroviral therapies in the mid-1990s, when influential groups proclaimed the end of AIDS. However, as history has shown, approval does not necessarily mean access to medical innovations.

Peterson (2017) argues that Truvada is not “a perfect miracle that is given to any soul in need,” having in mind “classism and racism [that] has led to less access to prevention resources for Latino Americans and African Americans” (9). When declaring the end of plague at the advent of ART, journalist Andrew Sullivan (1996) performed a similar differentiation when suggesting that, amid the success of the therapies, “many Americans – especially blacks and Latinos – will still die.” Although acknowledging the lack of access to life-saving medicine for socio-economically vulnerable communities, the conservative journalist declared that ART would lead to a generation without AIDS. In declaring that a medical commodity has the power to end AIDS, Peterson focuses on the positionality of a mid-thirties “white [...] cis-gender person, someone who lives in a very liberal city with access to healthcare” (Galassi 2017). This intergenerational dialogue prioritizes access to biochemical consumption over socially just ends.

What is shared among these cases studies, aside from the alleged heroism of consuming a biochemical substance, are discourses of “personal responsibility” and choice, as well as a user’s “commitment” to disclose publicly their “heroism,” as previously noted in “selfie activism.” The characteristics of the so-called “PrEP activism” work in support of contemporary neoliberal ideologies, creating an environment where consumers have the illusion of free choice, individuality, and authenticity. These methods are not obviously domineering, repressive or authoritarian, but rather a part of multiple institutions and agencies all directed at enhancing personal freedoms and individual development (Lupton and Peterson 1996, 12). As both “PrEP Heroes” and the Truvada Whore movement suggest, one can have sexual health under the control of free will, but only by purchasing and consuming the right products and being committed to the achieving the end results. The consumption of products is then conflated with



health itself. Health is ascribed to responsible consumers, and illness is attributed to irresponsible people who get what they deserve, a division that comes down to the question of access to health care and socio-economic status.

Disclosing that one's health is under control via social media not only sustains neoliberal economies, but also allows for a new wave of institutional surveillance: consumers are being managed through less apparent methods of self-governing. For instance, PrEP users confess what type of sex they have and desire to normalize it in the public arena; on social media, as well as in their literary writings, Truvada Whores "confess" that PrEP is a part of their daily routines, while gay app users "share" their sexual preferences and safety practices with other users and with pharmaceutical companies. Confession serves as a form of public declaration about users' docility, adherence, and willingness to follow the protocols of public health. When gay men on PrEP use strategies of disclosure on social media to show they have chosen to keep their sexual health under control and perform the role of the good and responsible homosexual citizen, disclosure is an instance of institutional control. The confessional style in PrEP-celebrating projects not only contributes to greater visibility and normalization of sex on PrEP, but also serves the function of contemporary surveillance.

As scholar Tim Dean (2015) argues, with PrEP, "the long history of medicalizing [and monitoring] homosexuality has embarked upon a significant new phase" (5).<sup>78</sup> When thinking of

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<sup>78</sup> In its contemporary use, homosexuality was first placed under institutionalized scrutiny in the work of Richard Freiherr von Krafft-Ebing, specifically *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886). One of the first works about sexual pathologies, this book considers homosexuality a mental illness, next to sadism and masochism.

the ways in which homosexuality has developed in proximity to medical institutions, regular doctor's check-ups, STI and kidney screenings, and the "confession" of sexual habits and experiences to medical personnel, are all extensions of this historical institutional scrutiny. Scholars Dave Holmes and Patrick O'Byrne (2006) argue that contemporary health institutions use confession as a technique to collect information about people's sexual practices for the creation and maintenance of databases (431). Sexual health interviews are not merely a neutral dialogue between clinicians and clients, but "the divulging of information from a client to a healthcare professional in the same manner that 'sins' are confessed to a pastor" (Holmes and O'Byrne 2006, 431).

Drawing on Michel Foucault's study (1990), these scholars' parallel contemporary confession to its pre-Enlightenment form; confessing details about one's life to a Catholic priest was not only an early form of knowledge production, but also an effective surveillance strategy. As a contemporary rendition of historical confession, the "sharing" of one's information and data in the age of the internet, dating apps, and social media represents an upgraded form of confession. Without any repressive measures, social media users partake in these exchanges because they can establish belonging to a movement, such as Truvada Whore. Consequently, social media traffic and maintaining one's profile serve as perfect examples of contemporary governance and surveillance.

As scholar Daniel Trottier (2012) suggests, "The profile is the principal interface between an individual and other individuals, but also with corporations, governments, and other organizations. Individual profiles range from online identities on social media, to customer profiles in loyalty card systems" (66). The profile is both a platform for social media user's

creation, and a venue for neoliberal governance. In addition, disclosure is encouraged because it enables the tracking of a user's virtual movement through the user's hashtag history, as in the case of #TruvadaWhore, which then becomes a monetized piece of information. Although gay portals and dating apps are promoted as safe spaces for gay men, they primarily function to deliver a market share to corporations (Gamson 2003). In the era of social media, scholar Christian Fuchs (2014) suggests that "sharing" serves as a euphemism for selling and commodifying users' data (36).<sup>79</sup> With the rapid commercialization of virtual spaces, the information social media users disclose becomes capitalized at their expense. As the pill's multiple, often conflicting, significations have demonstrated, Truvada fluctuates between being an object of care, desire, and surveillance. Whereas Truvada represents the possibility of creating a preventative identity and belonging to a group, at the same time the pill facilitates a sophisticated type of social control.

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<sup>79</sup> Personal information like dates of birth, but also transactional data like online purchases that can be linked to an individual, are potentially useful information for corporations or investigative agencies (Trottier 2012, 66). By "sharing" one's interests, preferences, desires, and probing insights into daily life, social media users agree to have their data collected by platforms, to be sold to both multinational companies and state institutions. For instance, in 2018, the gay men's dating app Grindr found itself in a controversy around sharing its users' data to two companies that were paid to monitor and analyze how the app was being used. The package included information about users' HIV status, as well as information about STI screening, sexual preferences, relationship status, and ethnicity. Although the data was encrypted, with the users' GPS data, phone ID, and email hidden, the information could be easily related to a specific user (Ghorayshi and Ray 2018). In the statement, Grindr said that "It's important to remember that Grindr is a public forum. We give users the option to post information about themselves including HIV status and last test date, and we make it clear in our privacy policy that if you choose to include this information in your profile, the information will also become public" (Neuman 2018). Events like this demonstrate that the surveillance of the homosexual body has been elegantly updated, with a redefined "privacy policy" as publicly shareable information.

### **Women, AIDS, and Performance: *PrEP Manifesto***

Unlike Truvada Whores' blind faith in support of medical capitalism, socialized uniformity, and mythologies of white maleness, I would like to point the reader's attention to a different type of PrEP activism, one that does reach towards the culture of sexual possibilities as a defining moment in modern queer histories but not at the expense of activism oriented towards socially just ends in the present. As argued, some Truvada Whores—sexually active men on PrEP—reach back to the sexual cultures of the 1970s, giving this preventative identity a sexy and desirable character. Such “revisitation” of the “cultures of sexual possibilities” approaches the past with a large dose of nostalgia, as it reinforces and replicates the “only-male” character of these sexual cultures in the present. Romanticizing the sexual past in the present period of PrEP can obscure priorities dictated by the ongoing AIDS emergency, such as access to the pill. *PrEP Manifesto* (2017), written by the radical queer art collective SPIT! (Sodomites, Perverts, Inverts Together!), comprised of Colombian artist Carlos Motta, American art writer John Arthur Peetz, and Colombian choreographer and dancer Carlos Maria Romero, echoes this and myriad other challenges posed by the pill, placing them in a larger cultural, social, and political context.

As part of a larger project that responds to pressing issues of sexual and gender oppression, *PrEP Manifesto* (2017) was one in a series of five manifestos written by SPIT! All of the manifestos were written in the tone of the radical queer tradition, refuting consumerism, homonormativity, and assimilation, and addressing the current state of queer politics, oppression, complacency, and resistance: *PrEP Manifesto*, *We The Enemy...*, *The Anti-assimilation Manifesto*, *Faggot Manifesto*, and *The Separatist Manifesto*. The first component of the project took place during the art fair at the Frieze Projects in London, when the collective invited gender

non-conforming and queer of color performers Joshua Hubbard, Carlos Mauricio Rojas, Claudia Palazzo, Malik Nashad Sharpe, Daniel Brathwaite-Shirley, and Despina Zacharopoulou to perform these manifestos (Motta 2020). Standing on a chair in the space of the Frieze Projects London, Claudia Palazzo performed verses from *PrEP Manifesto* (see fig. 95). Palazzo, a London-based dancer working across the intersections of dance, performance art, and cabaret, whose work exists somewhere between the nightclub, gallery, and street, delivered answers to the question “Why PrEP?”:

Because AIDS has redefined the boundaries between class and race, rich and poor, white and brown / Because AIDS has redefined the boundaries between north and south, urban and rural, healthy and ill / Because the PrEP regime has significantly impacted the political, social, and cultural bedrock of HIV/AIDS / Because AIDS and PrEP treatments have engendered pharmaceutical greed in the form of access to treatment / Because PrEP is a deal with the devil of capitalism and the devil likes to barter with the privileged and affluent first / Because the price of PrEP is not dictated by the people most affected by the disease [...] / Because PrEP is the product of the years of labour of AIDS activism / Because PrEP embodies at once the liberatory sexual ethos of the pre-AIDS crisis while retaining HIV/AIDS stigmatisation of the 80s, 90s and 2000s / Because of how PrEP is situated in regards to the criminalisation of HIV status non-disclosure [...] / Because PrEP is the bridge between the serodiscordant, the infected and the uninfected, the positive and the negative / Because PrEP protects sex workers / Because PrEP isn't just a men's issue [...] / Because we refute the hierarchy of health crises [...] / Because PrEP has been hailed as a victory for the assumed 'end' of the AIDS crisis / Because we are the survivors and the inheritors of a plague that has killed millions (SPIT! 2017, 5)

As the exigent verses in the manifesto point out, PrEP embodies a so-called “new wave” of (pharmaceutical) racism, transphobia, and wealth disparity, all problems that were dealt with by radical queer, anti-racist, and trans politics since the 1980s. In other words, the problems articulated here are not new, and have been fueled by the profit-centered pharmaceutical companies for decades. Thus, the manifesto speaks to a set of ongoing problems that mainstream activism, such as #TruvadaWhore, does not engage with. These omissions are not only

noticeable in Truvada Whore's focus on sexual freedoms, but also in the fact that many Truvada Whore advocates are affluent, gay, (predominantly) white, and male. What makes the performed *PrEP Manifesto* so powerful is not only its call for greater inclusivity, but also its delivery by a woman.

Although women, specifically Black women and women of color, are a high risk group for contracting HIV per the CDC, they are not the face of PrEP or contemporary mainstream AIDS activism. However, they have been at the forefront of grassroots activism, often playing the role of caregiver to gay men dying of AIDS during the early years of the crisis, starting food banks and working in hospitals (Brekke 2015; Wyne 2015). Even before AIDS entered the U.S. consciousness, both trans and cis-women of color were not only fighting for queer, gay, and lesbian rights, but also starting the modern gay and lesbian movement. The initially ignored, but now celebrated activist Marsha P. Johnson was the first to confront the police during the Stonewall Riots in 1969—an uprising considered an inaugural moment of the modern queer movement. Although historically it was inclusionary and led by queer and trans people of color, the gay movement became whitewashed and taken over by affluent cis-male gay men quite rapidly. Gradually, its radical ground was exchanged for homonationalist and consumerist politics and values.<sup>80</sup> *PrEP Manifesto* is a reminder of the problems these values pose, as it

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<sup>80</sup> Once disregarded by the movement, Johnson, along with Sylvia Rivera, and a group of other trans and gender non-conforming people, co-founded STAR (Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries), dealing with issues usually overlooked by the overly masculine and violent gay movement. Trans and queer individuals of color who have fought for the rights of poor and incarcerated people since the beginning have often been violently removed from the history books. One example of literal removing occurred during the 1973 Gay Pride Rally, during which Rivera broke on stage to remind participants about their incarcerated brothers and sisters amid

places a performance about the pill in a larger political, historical, and cultural perspective.

Palazzo's persuasive and educational performance transformed a gallery space into a site for socially just ends, once again making performance:

a powerful means of intervening in the public understanding and experience of AIDS and of countering neglect of it by the larger culture [as well] provided a different perspective on events reported in the dominant media, including those of gay culture." (Román 2000, 8)

Like TAC's die-in, discussed in the Introduction, SPIT!'s performance stops the everyday flows of movement, disrupts the status quo, and makes something happen. Correspondingly, *PrEP Manifesto*—as performed by Palazzo—can be put in dialogue with the lineage of radical performance aimed not only at educating people about the nuanced politics of the disease, but also to give social injustice a humane and more inclusionary character beyond the communities of gay men. In the late 1980s and 1990s, feminist performance artist Karen Finley's work took on the same task. One of the victims of censorship in the arts and "culture wars," Finley's work dedicated to AIDS is brutally honest, vulnerable, and personal.<sup>81</sup> Dedicated to the loved ones lost

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the celebrated cultural progress, before she was booed off stage. (Gossett, Reina, Stanley, and Burton 2017, xvii).

<sup>81</sup> Major parts of Finley's work are dedicated to AIDS: the book *Shock Treatment* candidly portrays the unfolding terror of AIDS in the 1980s, serving as a sharp criticism of the mainstream culture that so badly mistreated most vulnerable communities at the time. Her poem "The Black Sheep," told in the perspective of queers outcast by this culture, was in 1990 inscribed in bronze and set into a stone in New York City's East Village. In the 1991 installation *Written in Sand*, a part of a bigger traveling project *Memento Mori* initially exhibited at LA's Museum of Contemporary Art, Finley's idea was to engage the public in a work of mourning. Finley created a collective ritual of grieving at a time when public grieving for the ones lost to the disease was taboo. Finley filled a large gallery space with sand, where the public could write the names of loved ones lost to AIDS. *Ribbon Gate* was the centerpiece of *Memento Mori*. The gate was almost bare at the exhibit's opening; by the time it closed, 14,000 visitors had tied ribbons in memory of their loved ones who died. In Toronto, Finley added an installation called

to HIV/AIDS, Finley's work also had a straightforward political character, giving a voice to vulnerable queer communities at the time of Reagan's silence. The work was written at a time when medical treatment was ineffective and Finley was losing her friends to the disease on a constant basis.

It is important to consider the emotional labor cis and trans as well as of color and white women—often forgotten or taken for granted—have played in the history of AIDS activism, and the gay movement in general. Moments of these forgotten histories are brought back to the foreground in SPIT!'s second component of the project. *PrEP Manifesto* was printed in the reader *The SPIT! Manifesto Reader: A Selection of Historical and Contemporary Queer Manifestos* that includes manifestos and speeches written by influential individuals and collectives that have spoken out publicly against violence and oppression, setting the ground and inspiring contemporary radical queer, anti-racist, trans politics and art since the 1970s. The reader includes works by Sylvia Rivera; groups like the Combahee River Collective, the Gay Liberation Front, the Lavender Menace, the Lesbian Avengers, Gran Fury, and ACT UP, and the contemporary collective What Would An HIV Doula Do?; historical and contemporary queer thinkers like Audre Lorde, Paul B. Preciado, Sarah Schulman, David Getsy, Dean Spade, Harry Hay; and queer and trans artists including Julius Eastman, Emily Roysdon, Barbara Hammer, Derek Jarman, David Wojnarowicz, Vaginal Davis, and Del LaGrace Volcano. These works provided a context for SPIT!'s own manifestos.

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*Vacant Chair* to the traveling show. The installation consisted of two wooden chairs, different in sizes. The visitors could sit with the vacant chair, representing the deceased, and adjust themselves emotionally and mentally before going back to their daily lives.



By combining a set of influential manifestos historically influential collectives, thinkers, and artists, SPIT!'s reader and the *PrEP Manifesto* represent a written dialogue between the radical queer past and present, casting PrEP, as the manifest mentions, as "the product of the years of labour of AIDS activism." Put differently, PrEP is a part of a larger set of systemic problems integral to AIDS politics and activism since the beginning. By recognizing the labor of historical AIDS activism in current responses to PrEP, SPIT! works against erasing AIDS from current conversations about PrEP. Correspondingly, by creating a dialogue with both pre-AIDS cultures and activists of the first wave of the AIDS crisis, the manifesto works against the idea of post-crisis years. In addition, *PrEP Manifesto* continues the tradition of radical manifestos written in the history of queer of color resistance, extending and contributing to a queer temporality placing queers of color in the center, rather than margins, of AIDS and PrEP narratives. In its loud and pointed verses, the manifesto clearly articulates contemporary problems accounting for a plethora of problems related to systemic violence in queer communities. The manifesto resists PrEP politics as practiced by overtly white and male gay cultures, advocating sexual freedom and celebrating the sexual past in the present.

### **Conclusion: A Step in The Wrong Direction**

This chapter argued that the contemporary gay men's movement's attraction to the nostalgia of the gay past, when whiteness, youth, and traditional masculinity held a high value in the sexual trade, is a step in the wrong direction. Aspects of gay men's activism that draws heavily on 1970s sexual freedoms (#TruvadaWhore) can be useful in re-creating sexual pleasures with less fear, but these references can also be quite limited or even counter-productive, as they are limited in their scope; the Truvada Whore movement not only erases decades of AIDS

activism and the current realities of AIDS, but also romanticizes the past. This can obscure present priorities dictated by the ongoing AIDS emergency. This approach to PrEP advocacy does not strive for the undoing of unjust pharma politics and disregards the problems of partial access and the overt medicalization of the body, problems at the core of *PrEP Manifesto*.

Creating explicit dialogues with pre-AIDS cultures, the radical queer past, and activism, art, and politics from the first wave of the AIDS crisis can be seen not only in using the medium of performance, but also in the SPIT!'s reader of historical manifestos, speeches, and other works in queer and trans radical art, activism, and politics.

Although opposite in their messages, what SPIT!'s project and Truvada Whores have in common is the centralizing of "Big Pharma" and its role in creating contemporary sexual subjectivities. A larger issue is blind faith in pharmaceutical innovations and consumption. PrEP advertising and advocacy has sparked widespread enthusiasm for "Big Pharma" and its products, which have not only shifted the ideological foundations of anti-AIDS work but also largely re-privileged affluent, cis-gender, and able-bodied white men. This privilege does not come without a price: "Big Pharma" and biomedical capitalism treat affluent gay men as desirable consumers, but these systems of power also use these communities as a circuit for their own maintenance. PrEP advertising and advocacy on social media is an exemplar of depoliticized communal organizing. This organizing also contributes to the notion of the post-AIDS years, where the disease is a problem only for those who cannot access life-saving medicine. With undisputed trust in pharmaceutical innovations, the pill pulls out of focus the discourse that made its presence on the market necessary: the disease itself.

Writer John Arthur Peetz, SPIT!'s member and co-founder, argues, "those who market, distribute, and manufacture" PrEP, contribute to the erasure of "the legacy of AIDS activism as well as an erasure of the concerns that affect the people who are still most disproportionately affected by the virus," and therefore perpetuate the idea that "the discourse around PrEP is no longer about AIDS" (Motta and Peetz 2019, 133). Although the tie with historical sex cultures affected by AIDS is evident, the active unremembering of AIDS in the context of PrEP is facilitated by the current installment of biomedical capitalism. Current medicinal innovations, such as PrEP, have been made possible because of AIDS and sex-positive activism. According to Peetz, the problem may lie with us; we "are no longer asking to be in charge of constructing ourselves as active pharmaceutical subjects, rather we are passively allowing ourselves to be constructed as consumers and test-subjects" (Motta and Peetz 2019, 135). Correspondingly, the uncritical undertones of PrEP activism are a product of a pharmaceutical consumption that prioritizes those with access, hence the continuation of affluent gay men's privileged status in the AIDS-related market, cultures, politics, and studies.

*Everything repeats itself. It's amazing that everyone thinks that everything is new,  
but it's all repeat. (Warhol 1997, 273)*

## EPILOGUE

### **“Here We Go Again”: Echoes of AIDS Activism in the Unfolding COVID-19 Pandemic**

On November 29, 2017, ACT UP organized a demonstration in Times Square in New York City for their thirtieth anniversary. Organized by ACT UP and direct-action group Rise and Resist, Times Square was filled with nearly one hundred protesters and thousands of onlookers while the staged “die-in” performance took place (ACT UP 2017). With chants and banners calling to end the ongoing AIDS stigma, ACT UP asked: “Why is HIV still going untreated?” The answers lie in the politics of the current administration, which appears to be uninterested in a disease that mostly affects people of color and social outcasts including sex workers and drug users, as was indicated by the defunding of national and global AIDS efforts (ACT UP 2017). In addition, protestors also directed attention towards HIV criminalization and disclosure laws, as well as the problematic politics of PrEP. One of the banners read: “PrEP costs: \$7 to make, \$1500 per month to take.” The protest irresistibly recalls the protest organized by ACT UP in response to the problematic nature of AIDS and AZT in the late 1980s.

This dissertation has unveiled that the important contributions by contemporary cultural practitioners who work in the AIDS domain are not only a product of the present moment but have dense and multivalent historical, political, and aesthetic backing. Once placed in perspective, it is clear that contemporary cultural and activist endeavors are an extension of the radical and innovative cultural production that has been responding to the unjust circumstances produced by HIV/AIDS for the last four decades of the crisis. Their laborious engagements determine that the lingering disease is only one instance of a much more complex network of

violence to which queer and trans people of color have been exposed throughout history, even before HIV/AIDS.

Placing contemporary cultural production in dialogue with the trailblazers of AIDS activism in visual and performance work has had a strategic function: to undo the ongoing white gay male primacy in the field; to include queer and trans of color narratives; and by doing so, to critically tackle so-called “post-AIDS” discourses. By including erased narratives in the conversation, showing that queer and trans people have had a major role in the history of AIDS activism, and staging aesthetic dialogues between multiple generations of cultural workers, this dissertation has in a way “queered” the temporalities of AIDS. Whereby the function of such a methodological move has been to imagine otherwise foreclosed futurities and possibilities, the previous chapters have shown the reason contemporary cultural workers enact intergenerational aesthetic dialogues is to dismantle the ongoing systemic violence that has lingered to the present day.

This dissertation is a reminder that disidentifying with violence—either in the form of colonial fantasy or the white or medical gaze—paves the way for greater visibility and more complete queer and trans of color cultures in the history and present of AIDS. Engagement with the past enables a space for imagining otherwise-suspended realities in the future, counterintuitively made possible by oppressive hierarchies. In other words, a major factor playing into conversations across generations is the correspondence in the conditions that have been “dragging” themselves into the present, including partial and biased epidemiology, market-driven pharmaceutical politics, and overall government responses that pathologize queer and trans bodies of color and maintain a high rate of the virus among them. Let us consider two final

examples of the lingering conditions that have been “dragging” themselves into the most recent present.

A poster by the organization Visual AIDS, “HERE WE GO AGAIN” (2017), features Donald Trump’s head shot painted in garish green with demonic fuchsia where the whites of his eyes would normally be. Beneath the image, the poster lists the current statistics counting Black and Hispanic people as the populations most vulnerable to HIV and AIDS in the U.S., and asks “What is Trump’s policy on AIDS?” This question was raised in response to the current administration’s proposed cuts in HIV prevention and education in 2017 and 2019, as discussed previously with regards to the protest by ACT UP. The poster reads “He hasn’t said the word ‘AIDS’—Sound familiar,” which clearly references the politics of Reagan’s administration in the early 1980s, when statistics regarding HIV rates among communities of color were equally high (see fig. 96).

Visual AIDS’s poster was inspired by activism that targeted the homophobic figures contributing to the proliferation of the virus in the 1980s.<sup>82</sup> The poster cites “AIDSGATE” (1987), a poster by the collective Silence=Death Project. Produced for ACT UP’s protest at the White House on June 1, 1987, this protest coincided with the Third International Conference on AIDS held in Washington D.C., when Reagan publicly addressed AIDS for the first time (Gott

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<sup>82</sup> Posters made for ACT UP’s protests depicted the faces of opponents, such as Cardinal James O’Connor, New York mayor Ed Koch, New York health commissioner Stephen Joseph, Burroughs Wellcome CEO A. J. Shepperd, and former President Ronald Reagan, associating them all with various “crimes” that perpetuated the AIDS crisis (Reed 2005, 203).

1994, 193).<sup>83</sup> The Silence=Death Project attached the suffix “AIDS” and stamped “a shocking-pink” “AIDSGATE” over a Warhol-like image of Reagan’s “ugly mug—made a little uglier with the repetition of the hot pink in the whites of the president’s eyes” (Crimp and Rolston 1990, 34) (see fig. 97).

This intergenerational touch has been made possible by violence that has persisted throughout decades, while another aspect that appears as a common thread among the majority of case studies discussed in this dissertation is the appropriation of aesthetics. Although appropriation—processes of copying, reproducing, citing, imitating, and honoring—has been a characteristic of the art historical canon for over a century, it has also shown itself to be a suitable strategy when reimagining censored AIDS representations from the time of the culture wars in the 1980s. Even back then, artists used a variety of references to the decades before the 1980s. As this dissertation has shown, appropriating the aesthetics of activism and art from the height of the first decade of the AIDS emergency in the works of contemporary artists was a productive strategy because it brings previously erased communities into the center. However, appropriating can be counterproductive and work in favor of the systems AIDS activists attempt to dismantle, including the pharmaceutical industry and biomedical capitalism.

The first three chapters provided close analyses of multiple case studies that use appropriation in socially just and radical purposes, and the last two chapters have shown that appropriation can be much more flexible and trickier. Processes of copying, reproduction, and

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<sup>83</sup> “AIDSGATE” references congressional hearings about secret diversions to the Nicaraguan contras of funds from illegal arms sales to Iran, referred to in media as “Irangate” or “Contragate.”



appropriation are an intrinsic quality of any image, style, or genre. What makes a difference is the political, cultural, and economic context in which the appropriated object reappears. When calling for the greater inclusion of Black artists in AIDS-related art, the Tacoma Action Collective (TAC) appropriated ACT UP's die-in from the late 1980s (Introduction). HIV prevention geared towards queer and trans people of color has appropriated the aesthetics and structure of historical ball cultures or the brotherhood approach (Chapter 1). Charles Ryan Long and Chris Jordan referenced abolition posters and Glenn Ligon's work when resisting HIV criminalization (Chapter 2). When contemporary artists, including Luke Cheng, Israel Macedo, Ben Cueavas, Apolo Gomez, and Sheldon Raymore appropriate the aesthetics of absent bodies, they are using strategies first developed by Felix Gonzalez-Torres and General Idea, as well as traditions close to their own identitarian attachments (Chapter 3).

Although these examples show that aesthetic appropriation across different generations of makers and activists can be used as an act of creation and resistance, references to the past can also sustain white gay men's primacy. Specifically, this was clear in Chapters 4 and 5, which detailed how pharmaceutical companies and advertising agencies recycle images and styles from radical AIDS history, recontextualizing their initial socially justice oriented ends. Chapter 4 showed how PrEP has acquired popularity like Andy Warhol's icons, including the Campbell's soup cans and Brillo boxes. Advertising of PrEP relies on Pop Art aesthetics, but only for the purposes of pharmaceutical profit. Moreover, as the Truvada Whore activism from Chapter 5, public health programming in Chapters 1 and 2, and major parts of the visual cultures of PrEP in Chapter 3 have demonstrated, contemporary visual cultures that celebrate healthy sexualized gay

(white) bodies draw on the politics of sexual liberation from the post-Stonewall years replicated in current hashtag and social media “activism.”

Multiple case studies have revealed how contemporary art and activism works towards destabilizing white gay men’s primacy in AIDS cultures and expands contemporary visual cultures of HIV/AIDS by establishing a meaningful and transformative relationship to the radical AIDS activism in the past. Contemporary cultural production is therefore an “evolution” of the years of labor and AIDS activism that started four decades ago. This brings back “temporal drag,” a notion that assists in understating how history is “dragging” itself into the present. By reconsidering the temporalities of AIDS by queering them, as Freeman (2010) argues, “within the lost moments of official history, [a so called] queer time generates a discontinuous history of its own [...] that may be invisible to the historicist eye” (Freeman 2010, xi). These lost moments represents ground where the possibility for world-building takes place. Diverse groups of artists and activists across generations facilitate the creation of new queer of color realities, bringing erased and forgotten perspectives into histories that still need to be written.

However, this dissertation has also shown how institutions of power and their practices keep finding a way to reproduce white gay primacy. Although this dissertation has developed a critique of white gay men’s endeavors and politics, it is also important to gesture towards the obvious: their primacy is made possible by self-evolving systems of power, such as biomedical capitalism, which have an important role in prioritizing this demographic. Correspondingly, the positive representation of queer and trans of color populations in contemporary HIV prevention shows the routes biomedicalization and pharmacology are taking. Although this project showed that aesthetic appropriation is useful because it accounts for previously invisible queer and trans

of color history-makers and expands histories previously written only from white gay perspectives, it also pays close attention to the moments and places where these dominant perspectives keep up re-emerging.

This objective determines the future of this project and brings us to the current world dominated by COVID-19, which carries many similarities and differences to the AIDS crisis. Both health crises have been fueled by mounting public performances and virulent escalations of racism, anti-Black sentiment, and striking socioeconomic inequalities; conditions that make these historic events both health and political emergencies. There have been multiple media accounts comparing the first wave of the AIDS crisis with COVID (Butler 2020; Crary 2020; Williams 2020), without recognizing that the two health emergencies still coexist. It is therefore not strange that many cultural organizers contributing to reimagining the visual cultures and politics of AIDS have also contributed to creating representations of the COVID crisis, including Karen Finley and Avram Finklestein, both trailblazers in radical AIDS cultures since the early 1980s.<sup>84</sup> Considering the cultural, political, and socioeconomic conditions “dragging” themselves from

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<sup>84</sup> For instance, For Tinworks Art 2020, Finkelstein composed a series of eight hanging pieces titled “1933, 1984, and 2020” that contemplate the relationship between public health, economics, personal loss, and state responsibility. The series is anchored at three historical moments, the years 1933, 1984, and 2020: in 1933, Germany burnt the Reichstag and America created the New Deal; in 1984, Finkelstein lost his boyfriend due to AIDS-related complications; in 2020, the COVID crisis began. With regards to the year 2020, Finkelstein created a print titled *HOME* (2020) (see fig. 98), a single word print that mediates “on conditions necessitated by America’s pandemic response in 2020” (Tinworks Art 2020). The print is curious because it establishes a dialogue with three historical images, each referring to the other: Robert Indiana’s *LOVE* (1965), General Idea’s *AIDS* (1987) and Gran Fury’s *RIOT* (1989), with the latter two made in response to the AIDS crisis.

one emergency to another, aesthetic appropriation has found its place, or new context, as a suitable strategy for addressing these conditions, demonstrating yet again its productivity, flexibility, and timeliness.

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## APPENDIX



Figure 1. Nicholas Nixon, "Tom Moran, Boston, January 1988" (1988), from the series "People with AIDS," gelatin silver print, 8 x 10 in.

Source: Institute of Contemporary Art Boston, <https://www.icaboston.org/artists/nicholas-nixon>.



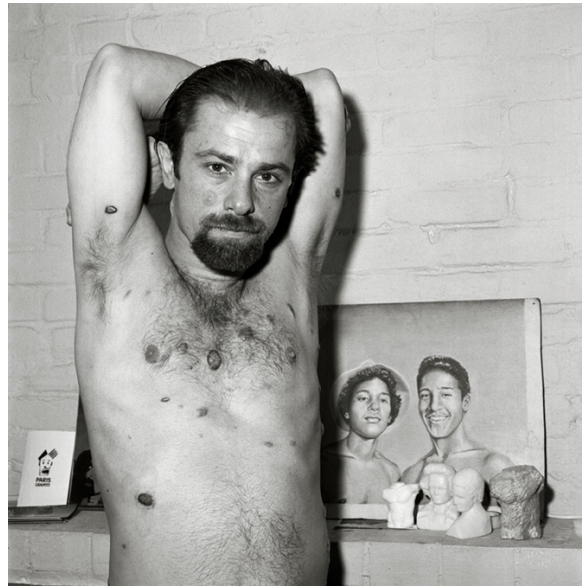


Figure 2. Rosalind Solomon, "Portraits in the time of AIDS" (1988),  
gelatin silver print, 42 1/2 x 39 3/4 in.  
Source: <https://www.rosalindfoxsolomon.com/aids>. Accessed 9 March, 2020.



Figure 3. "Dress for the Occasion" (1988) by San Francisco AIDS Foundation (SFAF)  
Source: U.S. National Library of Medicine (NLM) Digital Collections, 1988,  
<https://collections.nlm.nih.gov/catalog.nlm:nlmuid-101437889-img>. Accessed 3 February, 2020.

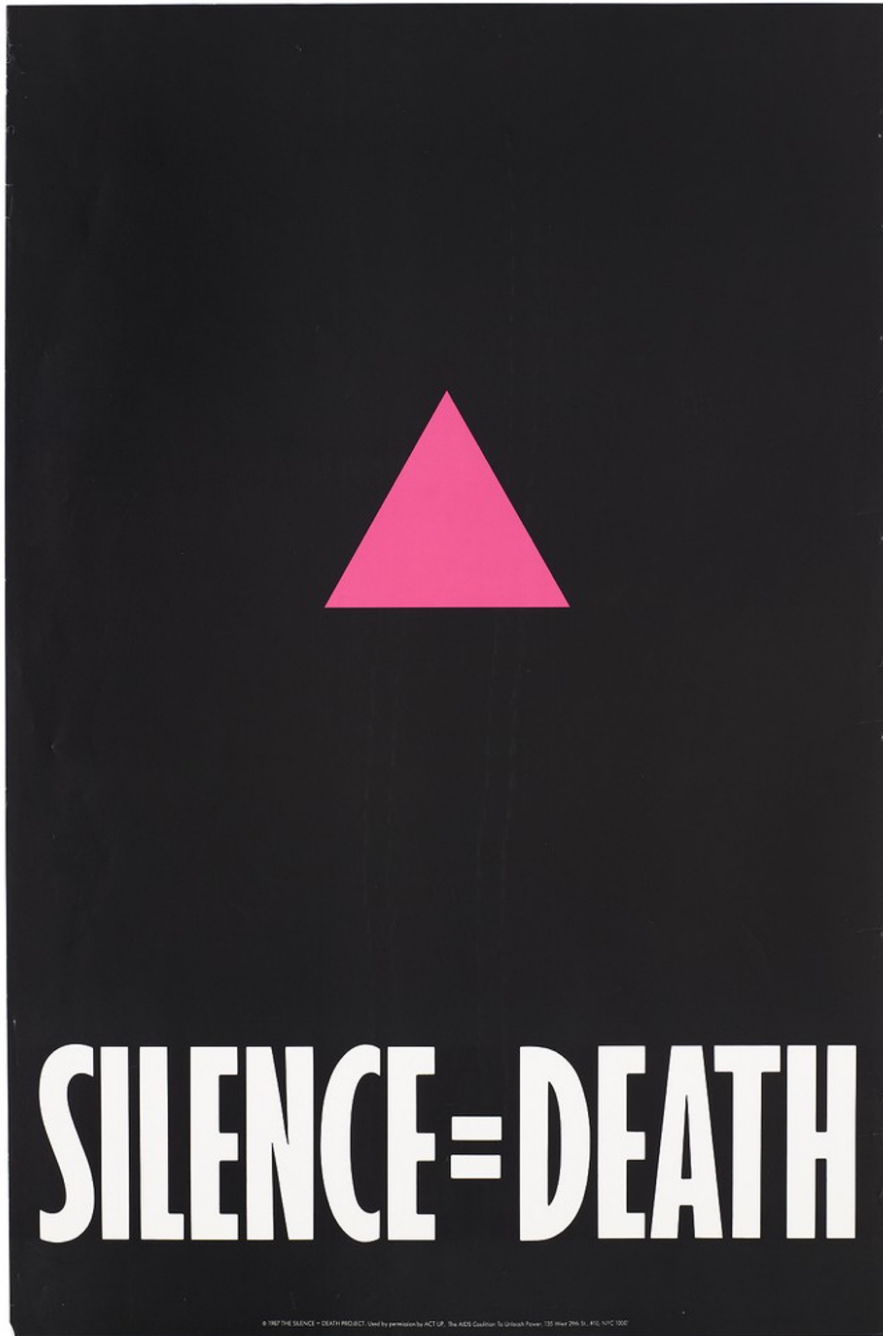


Figure 4. “Silence=Death” (1987) by the Silence=Death Project, lithograph, printed in pink and white on black sheet 85.1 x 56 cm  
Source: Wellcome Collection, <https://wellcomecollection.org/works/d2mxjdkb/items?canvas=1&langCode=eng&sierraId=b16691362>. Accessed 25 March, 2020.



Figure 5. Gran Fury, “Let the Record Show” (1987), mixed-media installation  
 Sources: Arrington, Ashleigh. “Public, Purposeful, Political: Gran Fury.” 16 February, 2017, Medium,  
<https://medium.com/queer-theory/public-purposeful-political-gran-fury-9bb9d6688909>. Accessed 25  
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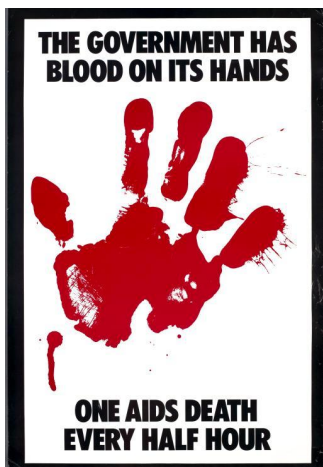
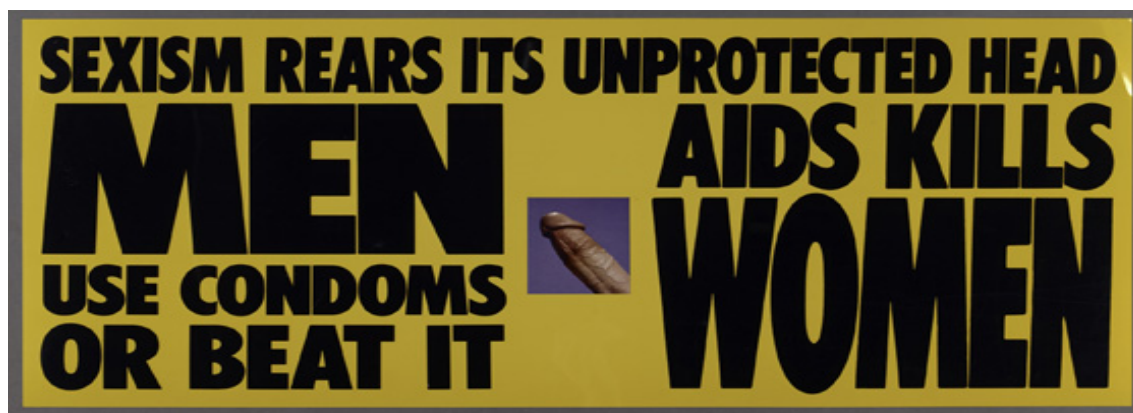
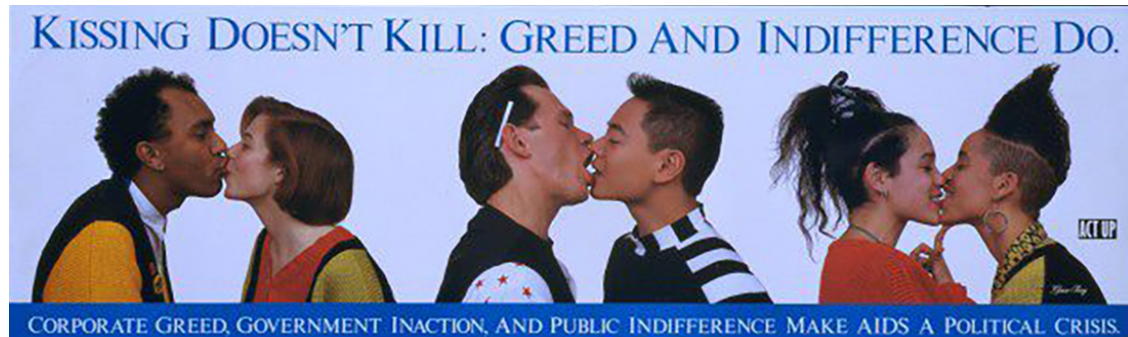


Figure 6. Political posters by Gran Fury: “Sexism Rears Its Unprotected Head/Men Use Condoms or Beat It” (1988); “Kissing Doesn’t Kill: Greed and Indifference Do” (1989); “The Government Has Blood on Its Hands” (1988); “Know Your Scumbag” (1989); “AIDS: 1 in 61” (1988).

Sources: Liclair, Christian. “Gran Fury,” <https://nomoi.hypotheses.org/tag/silencedeath-project>; Victoria and Albert Museum Collection. <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O76239/kissing-doesnt-kill-greed-and-poster-gran-fury/>; Artnet, <http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/news/artnetnews/80s-aids-activists.asp>; Clampart, [https://clampart.com/2017/06/know-your-scumbags/deagle-and-mendolia\\_know-your-scumbags-980/](https://clampart.com/2017/06/know-your-scumbags/deagle-and-mendolia_know-your-scumbags-980/). Accessed 1 June, 2020.



Figure 7. Felix Gonzales-Torres, "Untitled" (1991), billboard, a part of the exhibit "Projects 34: Felix Gonzales-Torres at the Museum of Modern Art"

Source: Gonzales-Torres, Felix. "Untitled (1991)." MoMA, <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/79063>. Accessed 9 March, 2020.

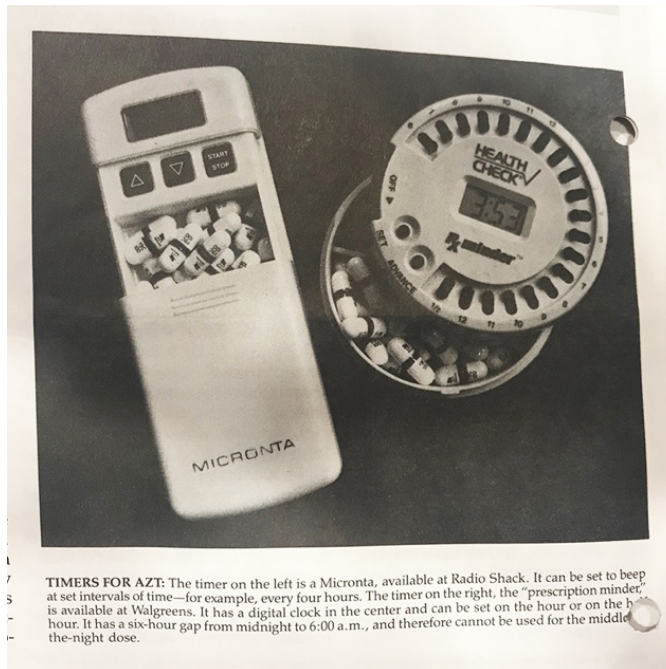


Figure 8. Cases for AZT (1988) and PrEP (2020)

Sources: Palazzolo Jim, and Ron Baker. “AZT.” BETA, A publication of the San Francisco AIDS Foundation, June 1988. AIDS History Project — Ephemera Collection, 1973, 1981-2002, University of California San Francisco Library, MSS 2000-31, Box 4; Fathers Project. “Original Pill and Goodie Case with Truvada Illustration by Allan Herrera,” <https://www.iftheylived.org/merch/self-care-kit>. Accessed 12 March, 2020.



# YOU CAN HAVE FUN

*(and be safe, too)*

- **Be creative.** Mutual masturbation and erotic massage are pleasurable and safe.
- **Use your imagination.** Fantasies can be fun and no risk, as long as they're by mutual consent and don't involve exchanging semen or blood-contaminated secretions. Indulge yourself!
- **Avoid** sexual acts which involve the exchange of semen or blood. Use condoms when you play.
- **Limit** your use of recreational drugs and **DON'T** use needles.

For more information, call the San Francisco AIDS Foundation:  
 In SF **863-AIDS**  
 In Northern Calif. TOLL FREE  
**800-FOR-AIDS**

PRODUCED AND DISTRIBUTED BY THE  
 SAN FRANCISCO AIDS FOUNDATION

PHOTO BY MICK HICKS

Figure 9. "YOU CAN HAVE FUN (and be safe, too)" (1984) by SFAF  
 Source: River Campus Libraries, Rare Books and Special Collections, AIDS Education Posters, University of Rochester, <https://aep.lib.rochester.edu/node/47378>. Accessed 3 February, 2020.



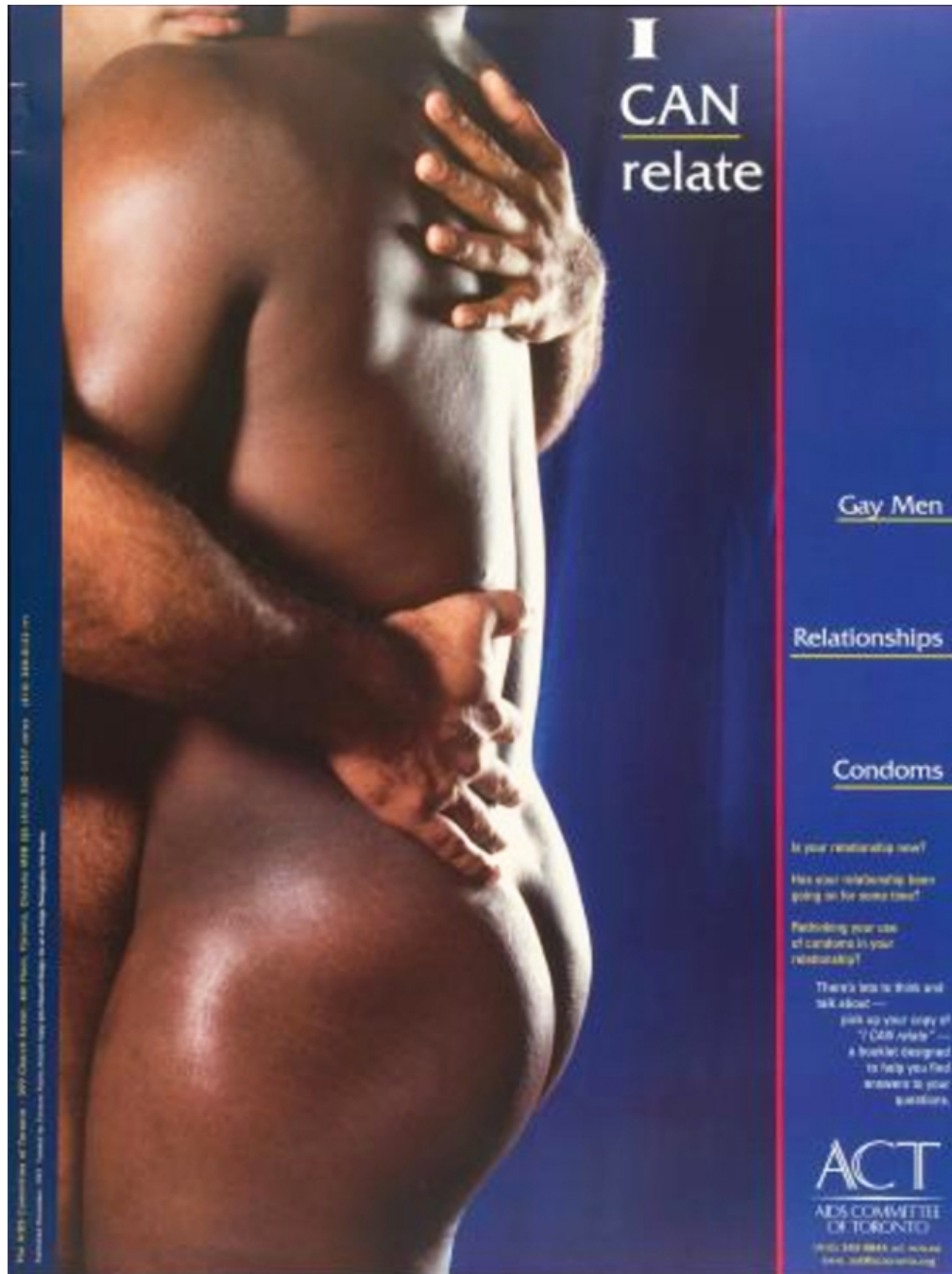


Figure 10. "I CAN Relate" (1997) by AIDS Committee of Toronto (ACT)  
Source: River Campus Libraries, Rare Books and Special Collections, AIDS Education Posters, University of Rochester, <https://aep.lib.rochester.edu/node/43611>. Accessed 3 February, 2020.

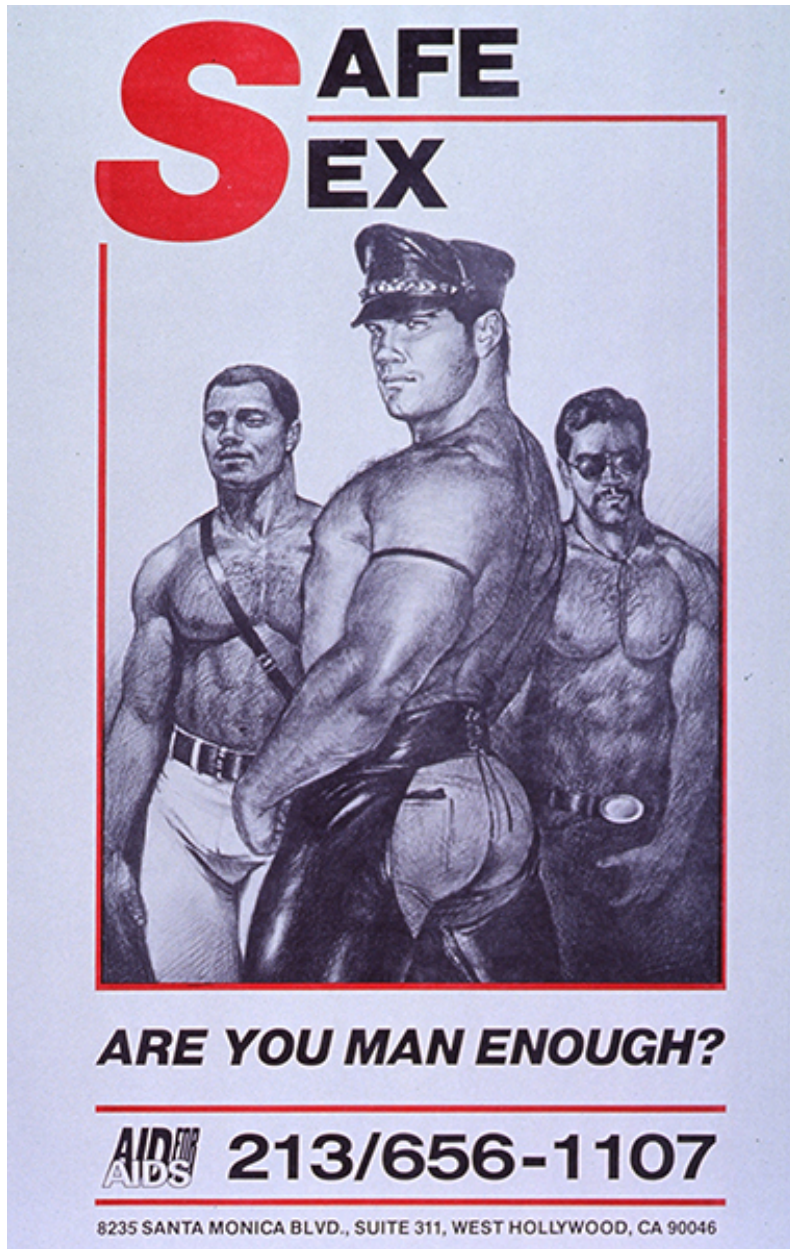


Figure 11. "Are You Man Enough" (1985) by the West Hollywood organization Aid for AIDS  
Source: U.S. National Library of Medicine Digital Collections,  
<https://collections.nlm.nih.gov/catalog/nlm:nlmuid-101437707-img>. Accessed 3 February, 2020.

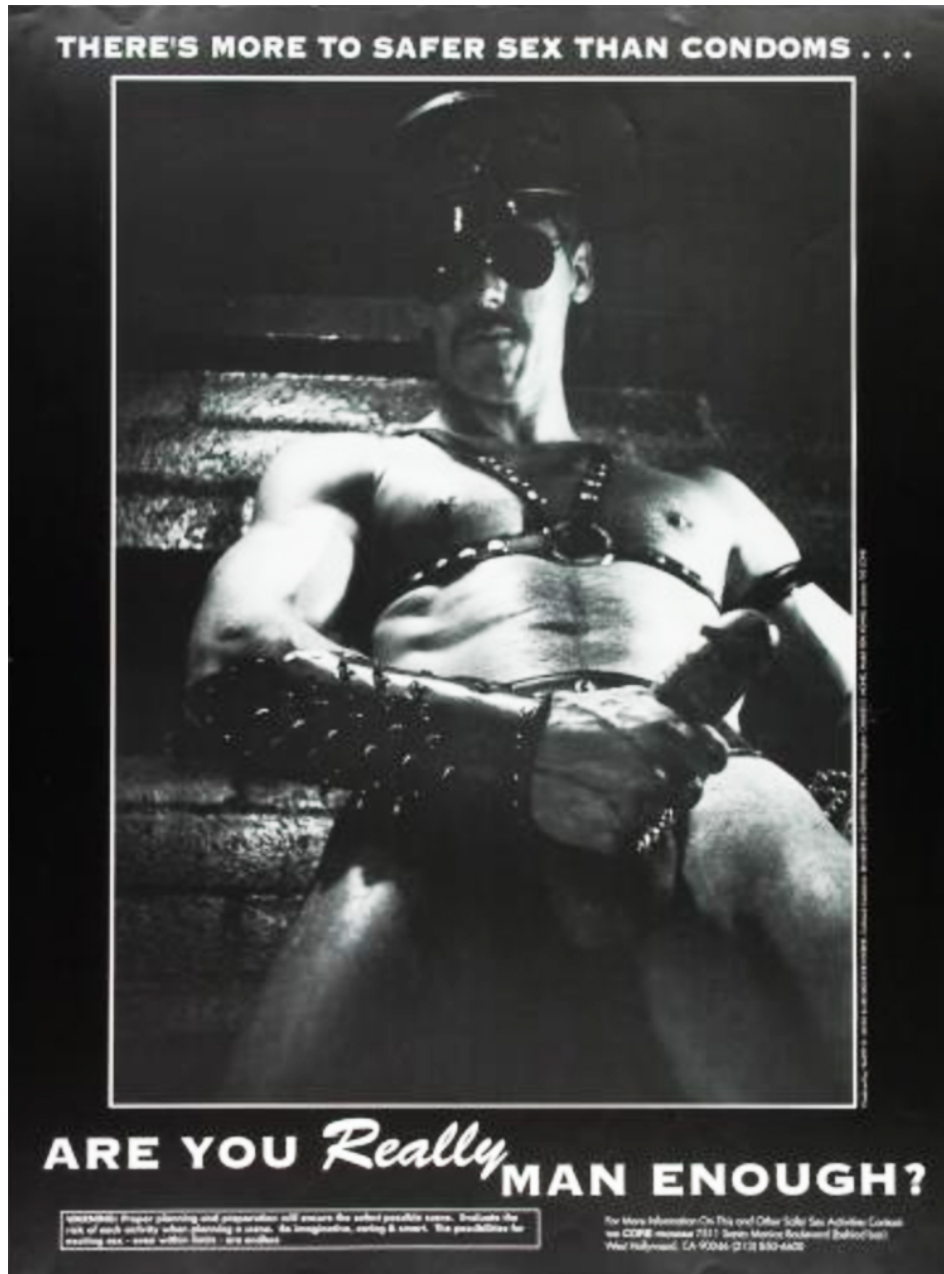


Figure 12. “Are You Really Man Enough?” (1994) by the CORE program in West Hollywood  
 Source: River Campus Libraries, Rare Books and Special Collections, AIDS Education Posters,  
 University of Rochester, <https://aep.lib.rochester.edu/node/41784>. Accessed 3 February, 2020.



Figure 13. "Get Carried Away with Condoms" (1990) by SFAF  
Source: U.S. National Library of Medicine Digital Collections,  
<https://collections.nlm.nih.gov/catalog/nlm:nlmuid-101450320-img>. Accessed 3 February, 2020.

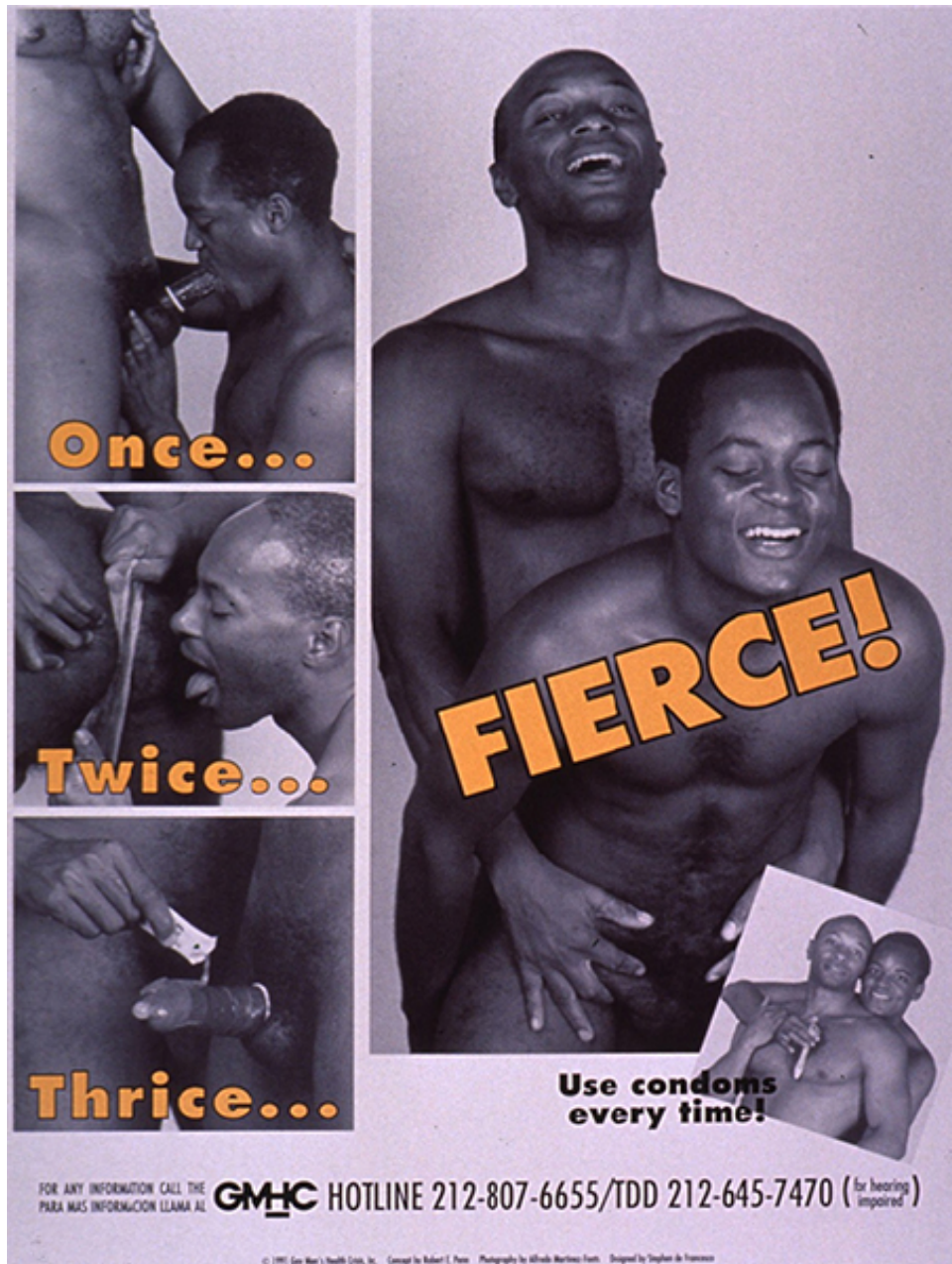


Figure 14. "Once, Twice, Thrice: Fierce!" (1991) by GMHC  
Source: U.S. National Library of Medicine Digital Collections,

<https://collections.nlm.nih.gov/catalog.nlm:nlmuid-101449945-img>. Accessed 3 February, 2020.



Figure 15. Australian initiative “Ending HIV” (2016)

Source: Ending HIV, <https://endinghiv.org.au/blog/is-prep-for-you-campaign/>. Accessed 27 January, 2021

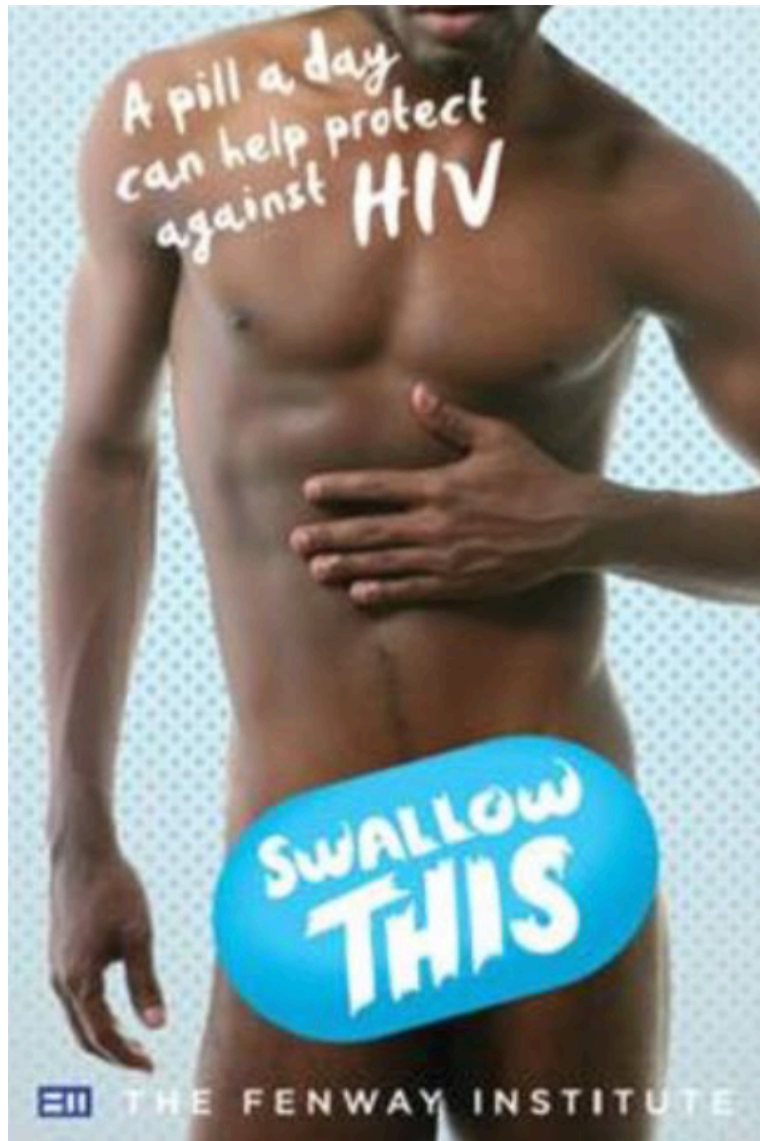


Figure 16. "Swallow This" by the Fenway Institute

Source: Pickett, Jim. "Project RSP! Training on PrEP for HIV Prevention." Slide Share, <https://www.slideshare.net/JimPickett/project-rsp-training-on-prep-for-hiv-prevention>. Accessed 27 January, 2021

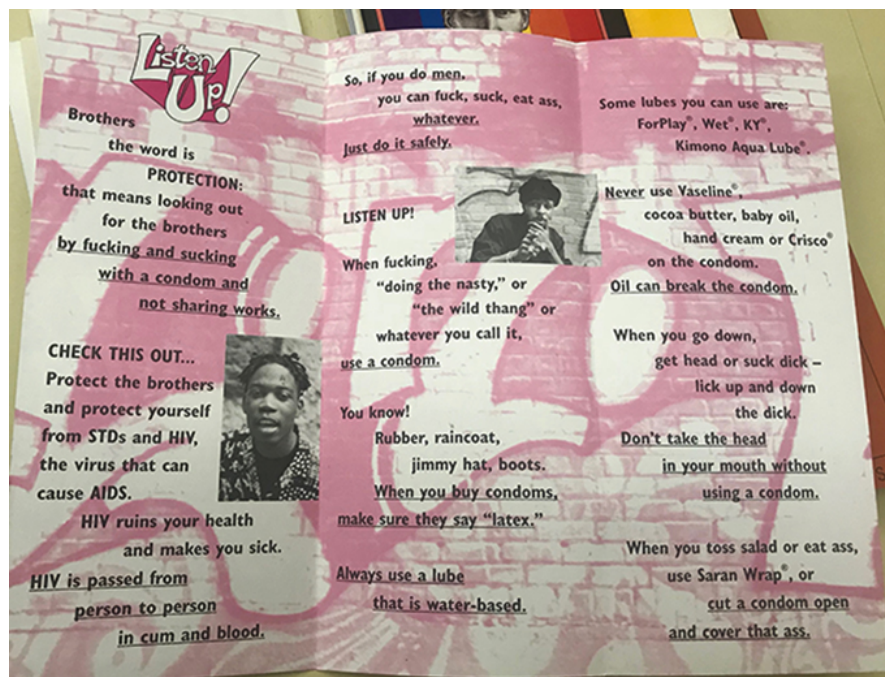
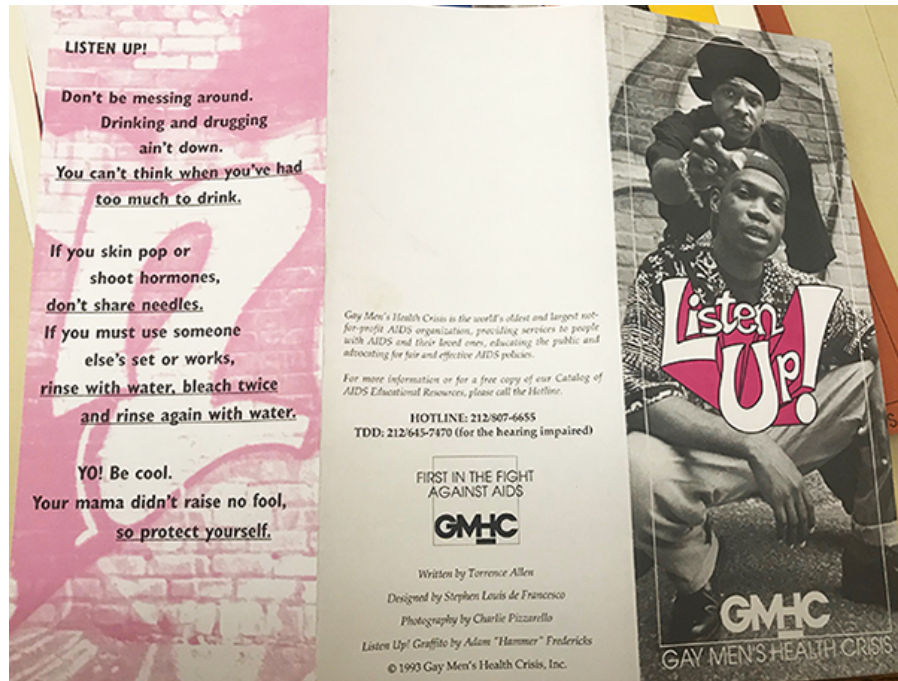


Figure 17. GMHC's brochure "Listen Up!" (1993)

Source: Gay Men's Health Crisis. "Listen Up." 1993. Gay Men's Health Crisis records, 1975-1978, 1982-1999 (bulk 1982-1993), New York Public Library, Mss Col 1126, b. 220 f. 15 GMHC 1990-1995.





Figure 18. “Love your Brotha” (2017) by the Philadelphia Department of Public Health and Better World Advertising (BWA)  
Source: Do you Philly, <http://www.doyouphilly.org/love-your-brotha>. Accessed 3 February, 2020.

**i love my boo.**

We're about trust, respect and commitment.

We're PROUD of who we are and how we LOVE.

**GMHC**  
FIGHT AIDS. LOVE LIFE.

My boo loves to kiss and hold hands in public. I feel safe enough with him to not care about what other people think. We know that it's not safe for us to do this in all spaces. Homophobic people are out there but I'm not going to let fear limit how I show my love.

**i love my boo.**

Check us out on facebook.com: **I Love My Boo**

**i love my boo.**

We're about trust, respect and commitment.

We're PROUD of who we are and how we LOVE.

**i love my boo.**


He's a good man and real sexy. But what really got me was how he came at me with respect. It just made me want to open myself up and love him. The most important thing now is that I know I can count on him.

**GMHC**  
FIGHT AIDS. LOVE LIFE.

Check us out on facebook.com: **I Love My Boo**

Figure 19. GMHC’s campaign “I Love My Boo” (2010)  
 Source: Gay Men’s Health Crisis, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention,  
<https://npin.cdc.gov/campaign/i-love-my-boo>. Accessed 3 February, 2020.

We're about trust, respect and commitment.



I LOVE MY BOO

Safer sex is one way we show our love.

When we met it was all about the sex. He's got the nicest lips and a beautiful ass. But what got me was how he cared at me with respect. It just made me want to open myself up and love him.

He is real sexy and we have the hottest sex I've ever had. It's a win-win. The most important thing is I know I can count on him.

GMHC  
446 West 35th Street  
New York, NY  
HIV/AIDS Hotline  
1-800-243-7892  
hivmen.org

I love my boo.

We're about trust, respect and commitment.



I LOVE MY BOO

Safer sex is one way we show our love.

My baby loves to kiss and hold hands in public. I wouldn't do it with just anyone, but I feel safe enough with him to not care what other people think.

I know that there are homophobic people out there, but I'm not going to let fear limit how I show my love.

GMHC  
446 West 35th Street  
New York, NY  
HIV/AIDS Hotline  
1-800-243-7892  
hivmen.org

I love my boo.

We're about trust, respect and commitment.



I LOVE MY BOO

Safer sex is one way we show our love.

When we first met we didn't talk about sex, we would just use condoms and that was it. Eventually, we wanted to stop using condoms, so now we get tested together regularly. We are all about taking care of each other.

GMHC  
446 West 35th Street  
New York, NY  
HIV/AIDS Hotline  
1-800-243-7892  
hivmen.org

I love my boo.

Figure 20. GMHC's relaunched campaign "I Love My Boo" (2014)  
 Source: Gay Men's Health Crisis, <http://www.gmhc.org/about-us/publications/hiv-prevention-and-testing-campaigns-i-love-my-boo>. Accessed 3 February, 2020.

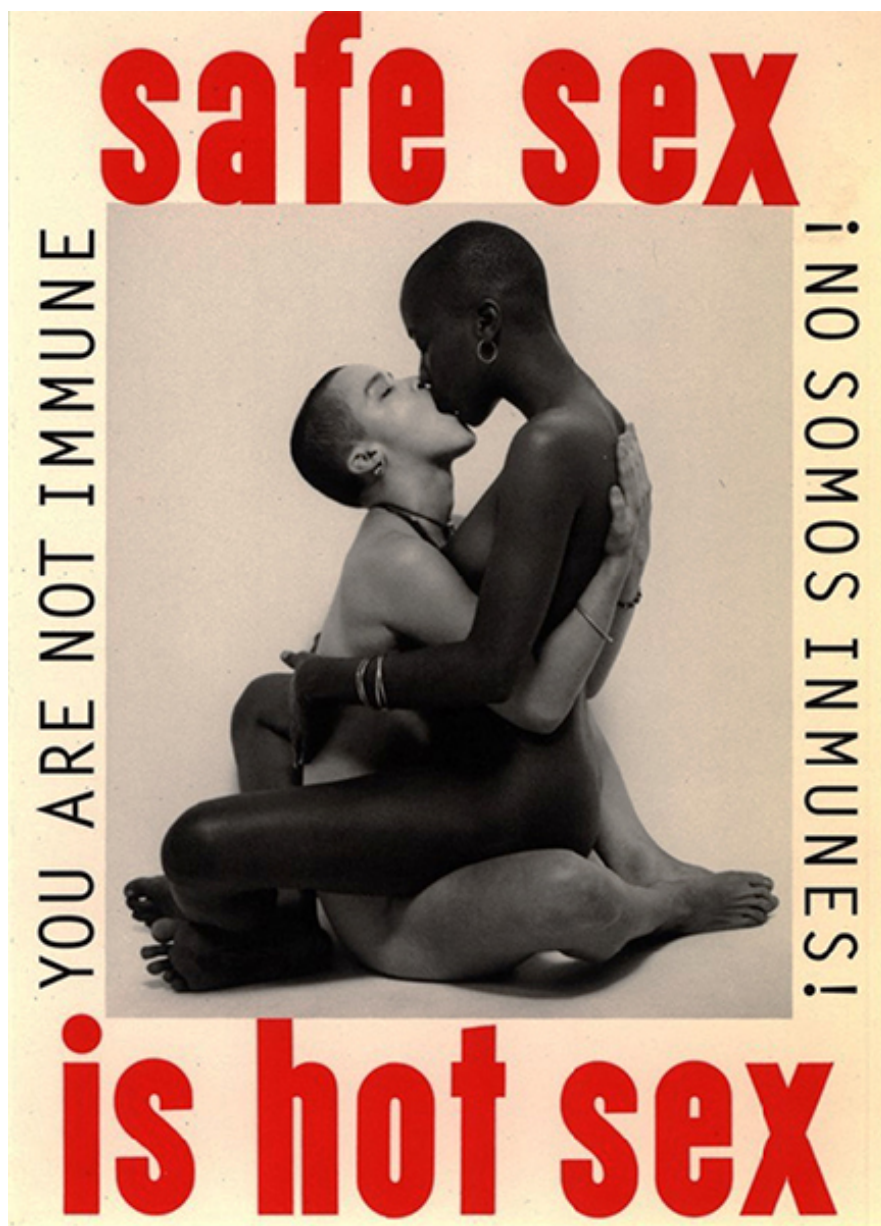


Figure 21. "Safer Sex is Hot Sex" by Red Hot (1991/92)  
Source: National Library of Medicine Digital Collections,  
<https://collections.nlm.nih.gov/catalog/nlm:nlmuid-101457440-img>. Accessed 3 February, 2020.



Figure 22. Charles Chaisson's illustration "Gay Pride PrEP Illustration" (2018)  
Source: IN PRNT, <https://www.inprnt.com/gallery/charleschaisson/gay-pride-prep-illustration/>. Accessed 3 February, 2020.

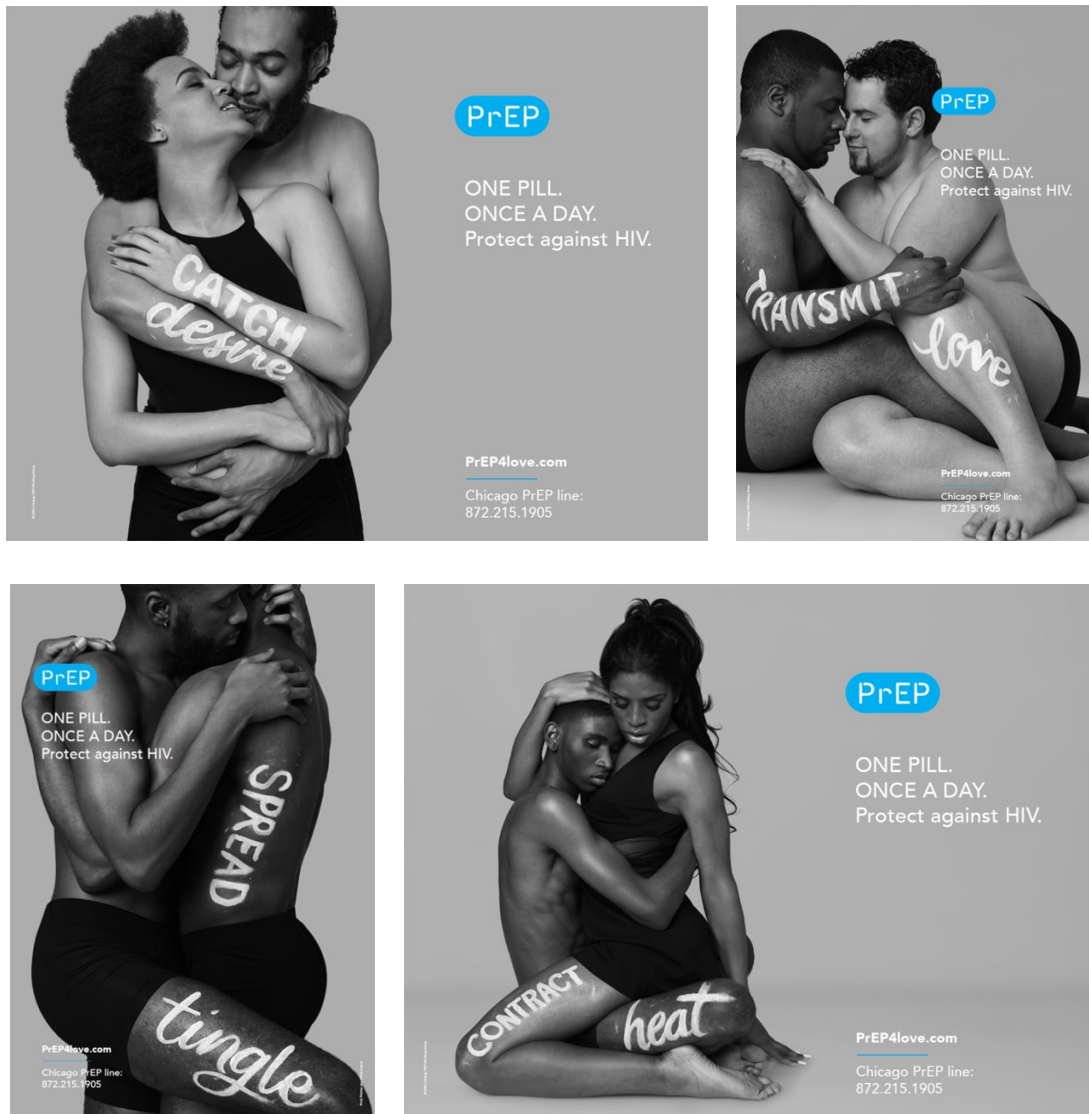


Figure 23. Chicago-based campaign “PrEP4Love” (2016)  
Source: Le Book, <https://www.lebook.com/creative/prep4love-advertising-2016>. Accessed 3 February, 2020.



Figure 24. Stills from a short video *The Queen*, AltaMed's campaign "Ask Me About PrEP," initiative "Fierce" (2017)  
Source: YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-IaCx0FHUEM>. Accessed 3 February, 2020.



Figure 25. Stills from a short video *United*, AltaMed's campaign "Ask Me About PrEP," initiative "Fierce" (2017)

Source: YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JJtb5Px8ViE&t=16s>. Accessed 3 February, 2020.





Figure 26. Stills from a short video *The Romantic*, AltaMed's campaign "Ask Me About PrEP," initiative "Fierce" (2017)  
Source: YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CX-CDRXXqxA>. Accessed 3 February, 2020.



Figure 27. Initiative “Pledge” (2018) by the DC Department of Health in Washington  
 Sources: Instagram, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BcYNXpHFVQT/>;  
<https://www.instagram.com/p/BcV-a5SjvWd/>; <https://www.instagram.com/p/BcMcIBgixgQ/>;  
<https://www.instagram.com/p/BcNpaBpDKKZ/>; <https://www.instagram.com/p/BeWTbvCFJHT/>.  
 Accessed 3 February, 2020.



Figure 28. Therese Frare, “Dying on AIDS” (1990)/Oliviero Toscani’s campaign Shock of Reality (1992)  
Source: ICP, <https://www.icp.org/browse/archive/objects/united-colors-of-benetton-aids-david-kirby>.  
Accessed 3 February, 2020.

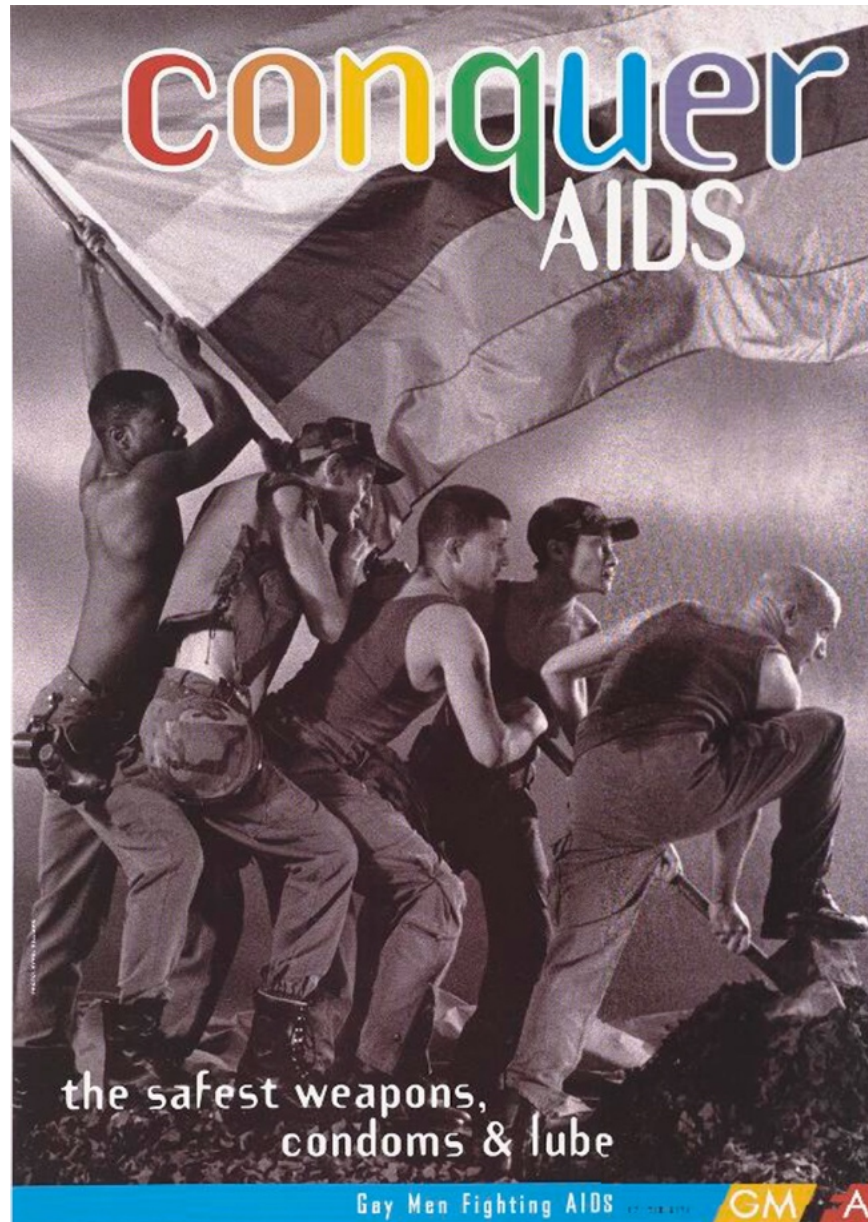


Figure 29. "Conquer AIDS" by GMFA (ca. 1995)

Source: Wellcome Collection, <https://wellcomecollection.org/works/ujkyfatz>. Accessed 11 February, 2020.



Figure 30. Joe Rosenthal's photograph of six U.S. marines raising the U.S. flag atop Mount Suribachi  
Source: General Photographic File of the Department of Navy, 1943 – 1958, General Records of the Department of the Navy, 1804 – 1958, National Archives, NWDNS-80-G-413988, Record Group 80, <https://www.archives.gov/historical-docs/todays-doc/?dod-date=223>. Accessed 11 February, 2020.

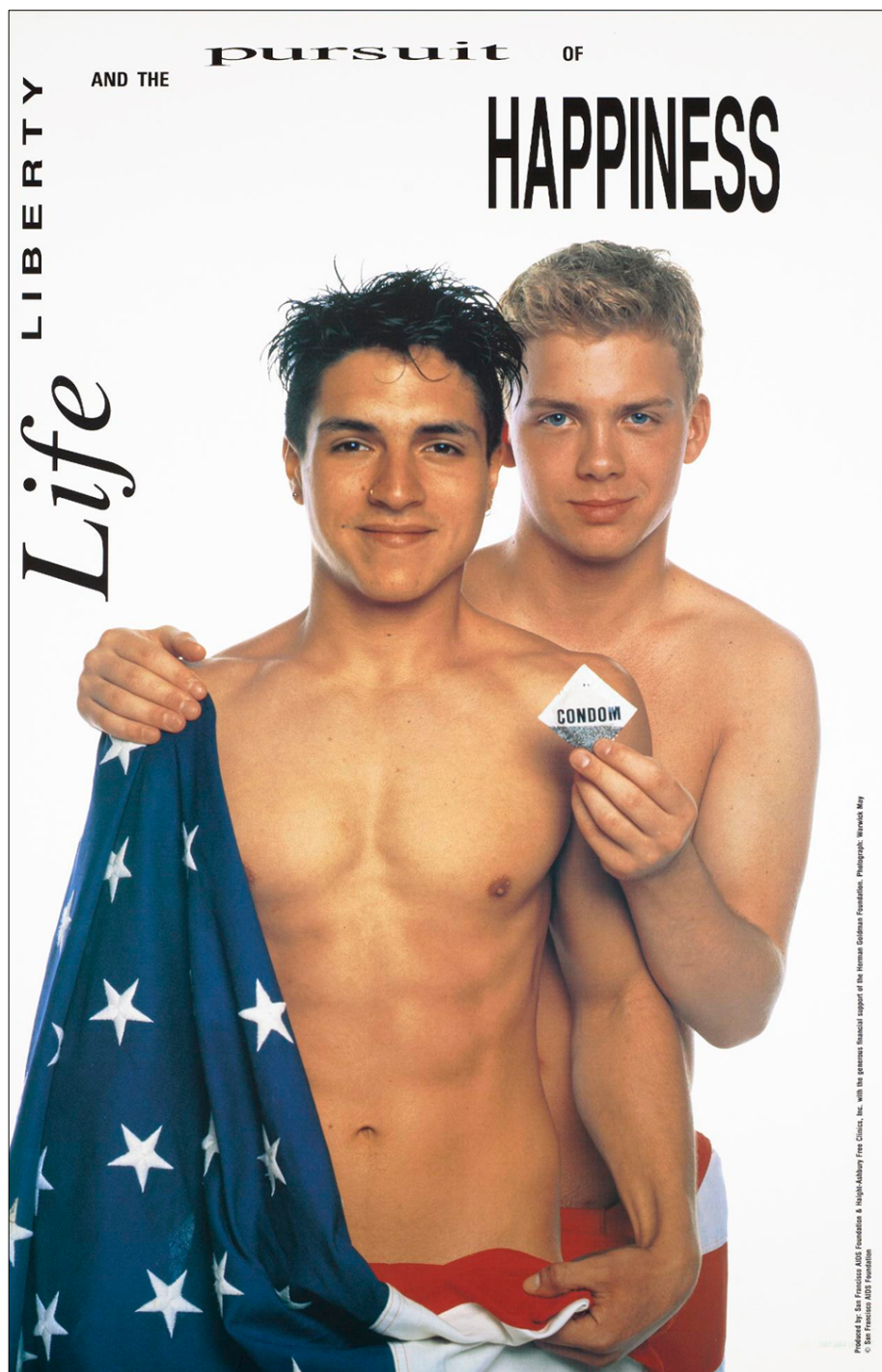


Figure 31. “Life, Liberty, & the Pursuit of Happiness” (1990) by SFAF and Haight Ashbury Free Clinics  
 Source: Wellcome Collection, <https://wellcomecollection.org/works/e97ydxxk>, Accessed 11 February 2020.

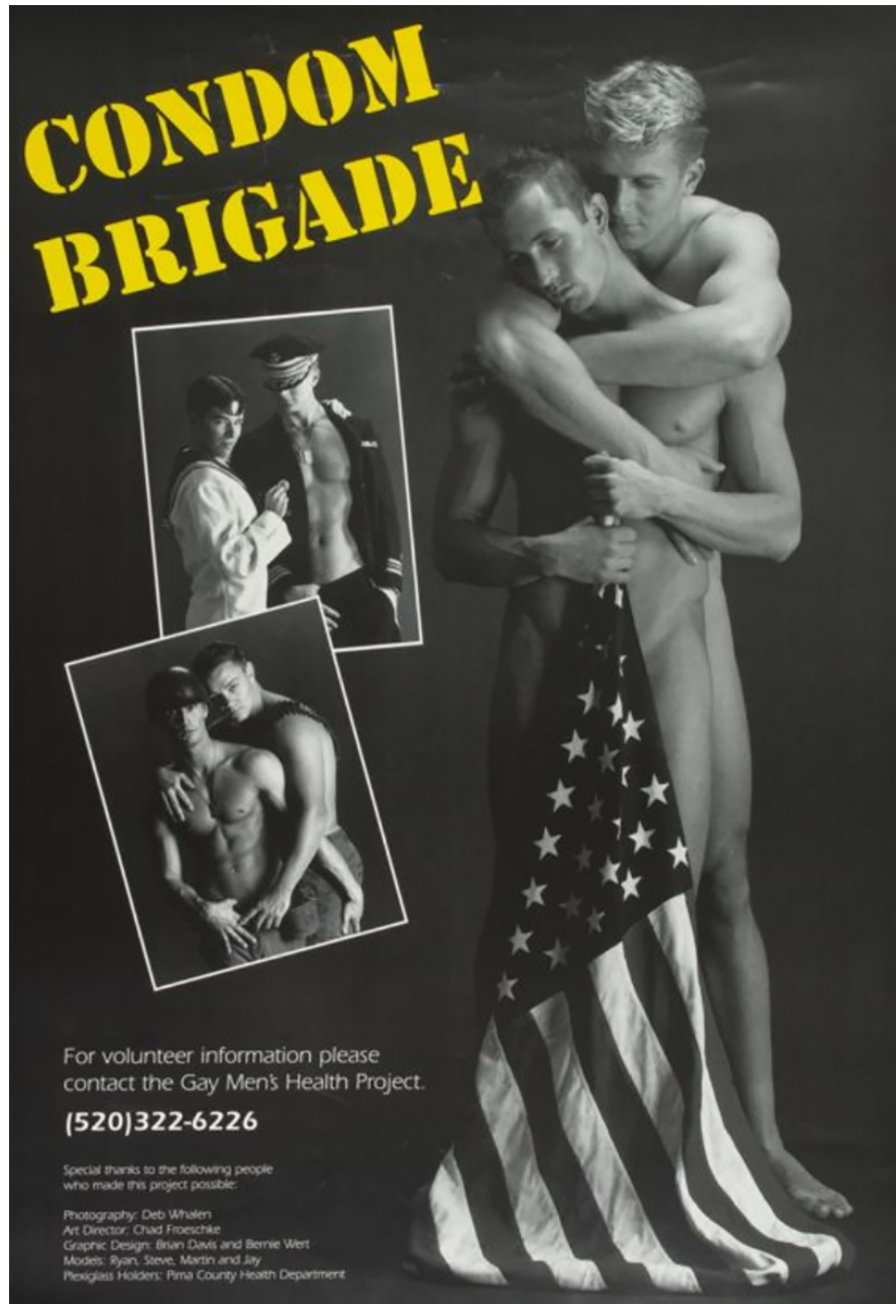


Figure 32. "Condom Brigade" (1998) by Southern Arizona AIDS Foundation  
Source: University of Rochester AIDS Education  
Collection, <https://digitalcollections.lib.rochester.edu/uraids/condom-brigade>. Accessed 11 February,  
2020

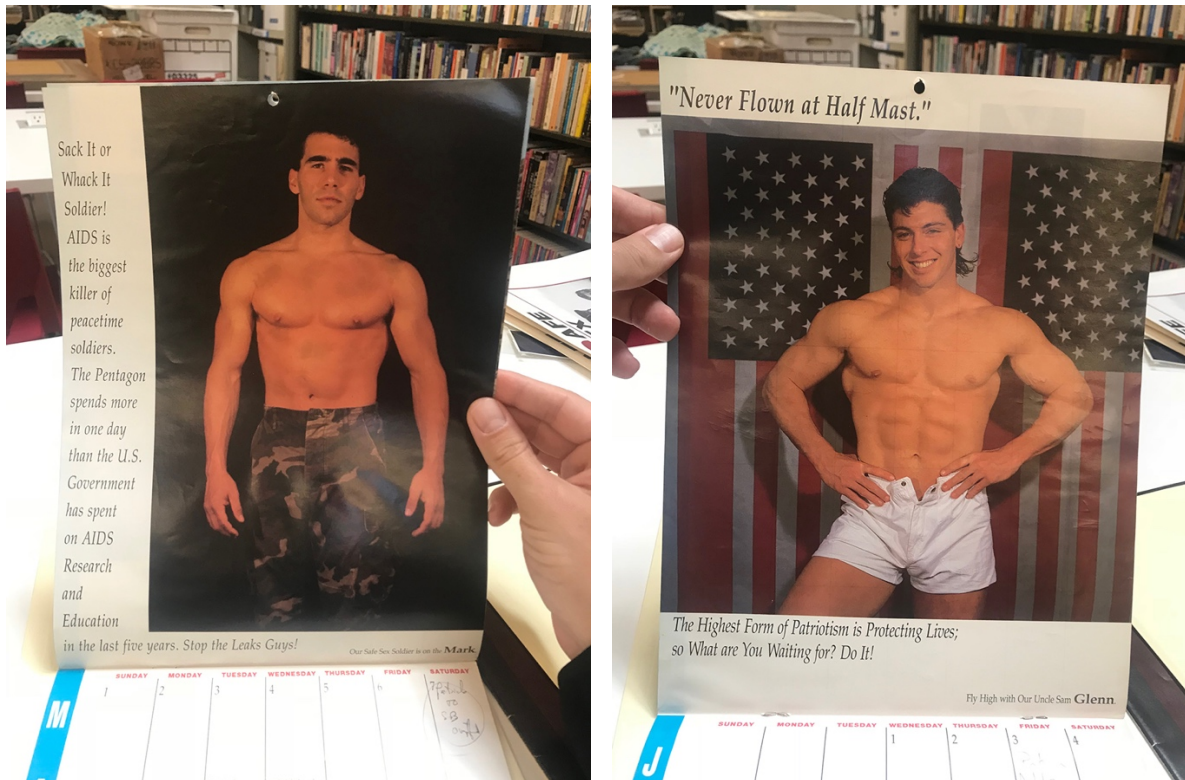


Figure 33. Jay Critchley's "Old Glory Condom Corporation" (1990)  
 Sources: "1992 Men of Old Glory Calendar." ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives, ONE Calendar Collection, Box 6, Folder "Old Glory."



“He plays hard...  
and he *always*  
uses condoms!”

Pro Shop  
and  
Locker  
Rooms

CONDOM

**GMHC** FOR MORE  
INFORMATION CALL **212/807-6655**  
TDD 212/645-7470 FOR THE HEARING IMPAIRED

© 1992 Gay Men's Health Clinic, Inc. Concept: Tommaso Albi, Stephen Louis de Francesco, Michael DeMarco, José Jorge Pizarro, David Rizz, Robert E. Pines, Guillermo Vazquez, Christopher White  
Art Director: Stephen Louis de Francesco; Photography: David Margen; Clothing: Courtesy of The Loft

“He plays hard...  
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Art Director: Stephen Louis de Francesco; Photography: David Margen; Clothing: Courtesy of The Loft

Figure 34. “He Plays Hard...” (1992) by GMHC

Source: U.S. National Library of Medicine Digital Collections,  
<https://collections.nlm.nih.gov/catalog/nlm:nlmuid-101452848-img>; Europeana Collection,  
[https://www.europeana.eu/portal/en/record/9200\\_GMHC\\_He\\_Plays\\_Hard\\_2\\_GMHC\\_He\\_Plays\\_Hard579/zpede632.html](https://www.europeana.eu/portal/en/record/9200_GMHC_He_Plays_Hard_2_GMHC_He_Plays_Hard579/zpede632.html), visited 11 February, 2020.

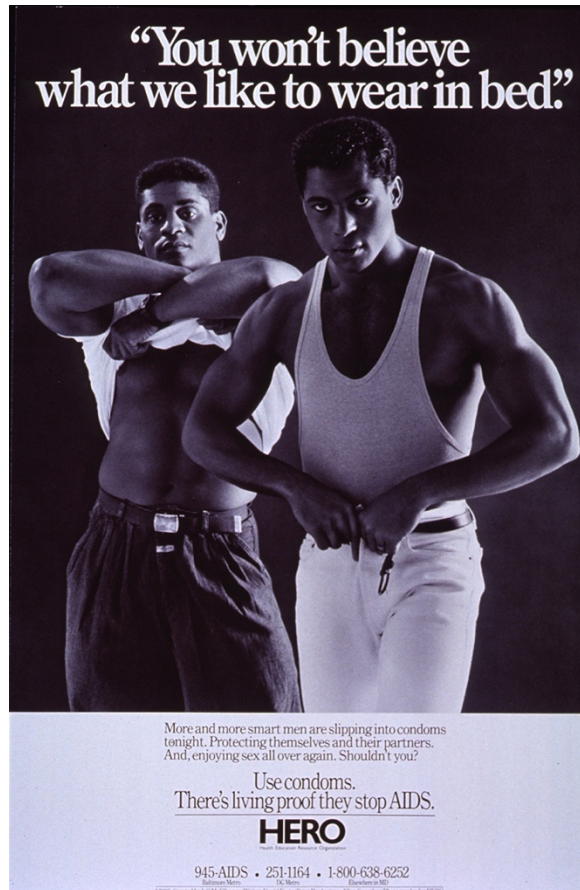
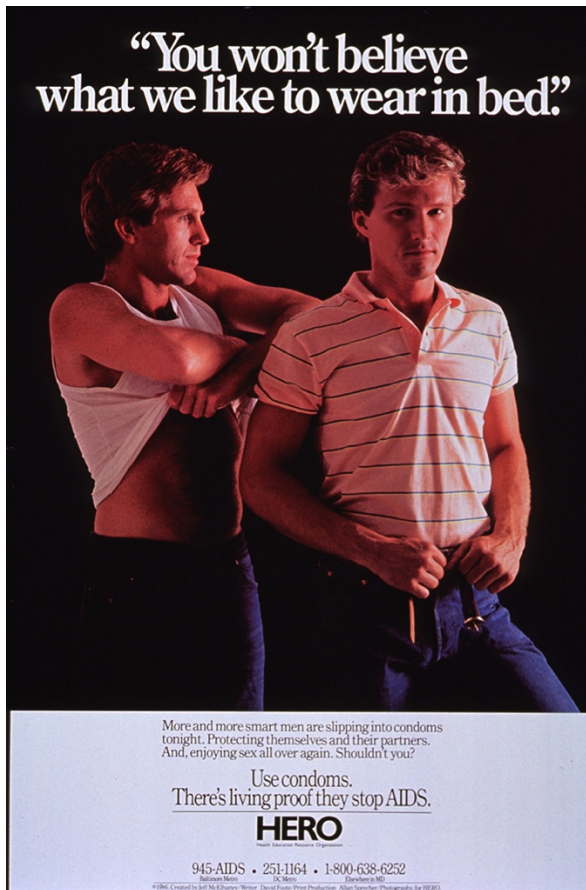


Figure 35. “You Won’t Believe What We Like to Wear in Bed” (1986) by Health Education Resource Organization (HERO)

Source: U.S. National Library of Medicine Digital Collections,  
<https://collections.nlm.nih.gov/catalog/nlm:nlmuid-101438832-img>;  
<https://collections.nlm.nih.gov/catalog/nlm:nlmuid-101438831-img>. Accessed 11 February, 2020.



**WE PLAY SURE**  
PrEP + HIV TREATMENT + CONDOMS

#PLAYSURE

**BE HIV & STI SURE**  
If you are HIV negative, PrEP is a daily pill that protects you from HIV. If you have HIV, treatment can keep your virus level UNDETECTABLE and decreases the chance of passing HIV to your partners. Condoms add more protection against HIV and help prevent Sexually Transmitted Infections.  
PLAY SURE: Call 311 or visit [nyc.gov/health](http://nyc.gov/health) to design the right HIV and STI prevention combination for you.

**NYC** NYC Health + Hospitals  
The City of New York  
Department of Health + Mental Hygiene



**WE PLAY SURE**  
PrEP + HIV TREATMENT + CONDOMS

#PLAYSURE

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**NYC** NYC Health + Hospitals  
The City of New York  
Department of Health + Mental Hygiene

Figure 36. “We Play Sure” (2015), the City of New York City’s campaign  
Source: Desiree Kennedy Productions, <https://desireekennedyproductions.wordpress.com/2015/12/15/i-bet-by-now-you-have-seen-the-nyc-plays-sure-campaign-on-the-subway/>. Accessed 12 February, 2020.



Figure 37. Howardena Pindell, "Separate but Equal Genocide: AIDS" (1991-92),  
 mixed media on canvas, 75 ½ x 91 in.

Source: Garth Greenan Gallery, <https://www.garthgreenan.com/artists/howardena-pindell/featured-works?view=slider#11>. Visited 12 February, 2020.

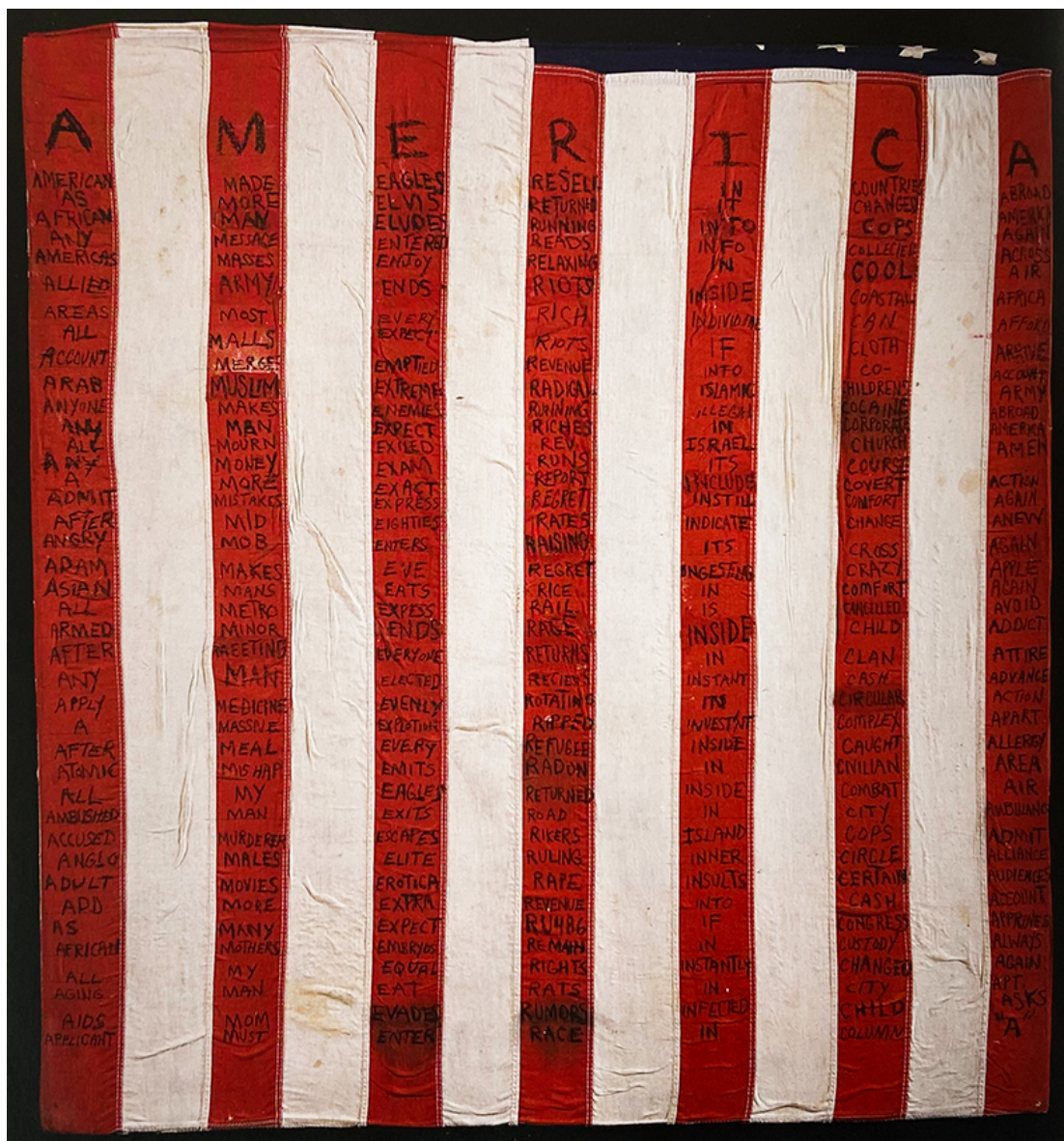


Figure 38. Willie Cole, "America I" (1993), china marker on cloth on board, 44 x 42 x 2 ¼ in.  
Source: Sims 2006: 48



Figure 39. Willie Cole, "How Do You Spell America? #2"(1993)

Source: Johnson, Steve. "AIDS Art Gets Its First major Survey,"

<https://www.chicagotribune.com/entertainment/ct-art-aids-america-exhibit-ent-1208-20161207-story.html>. Accessed 31 January, 2021.

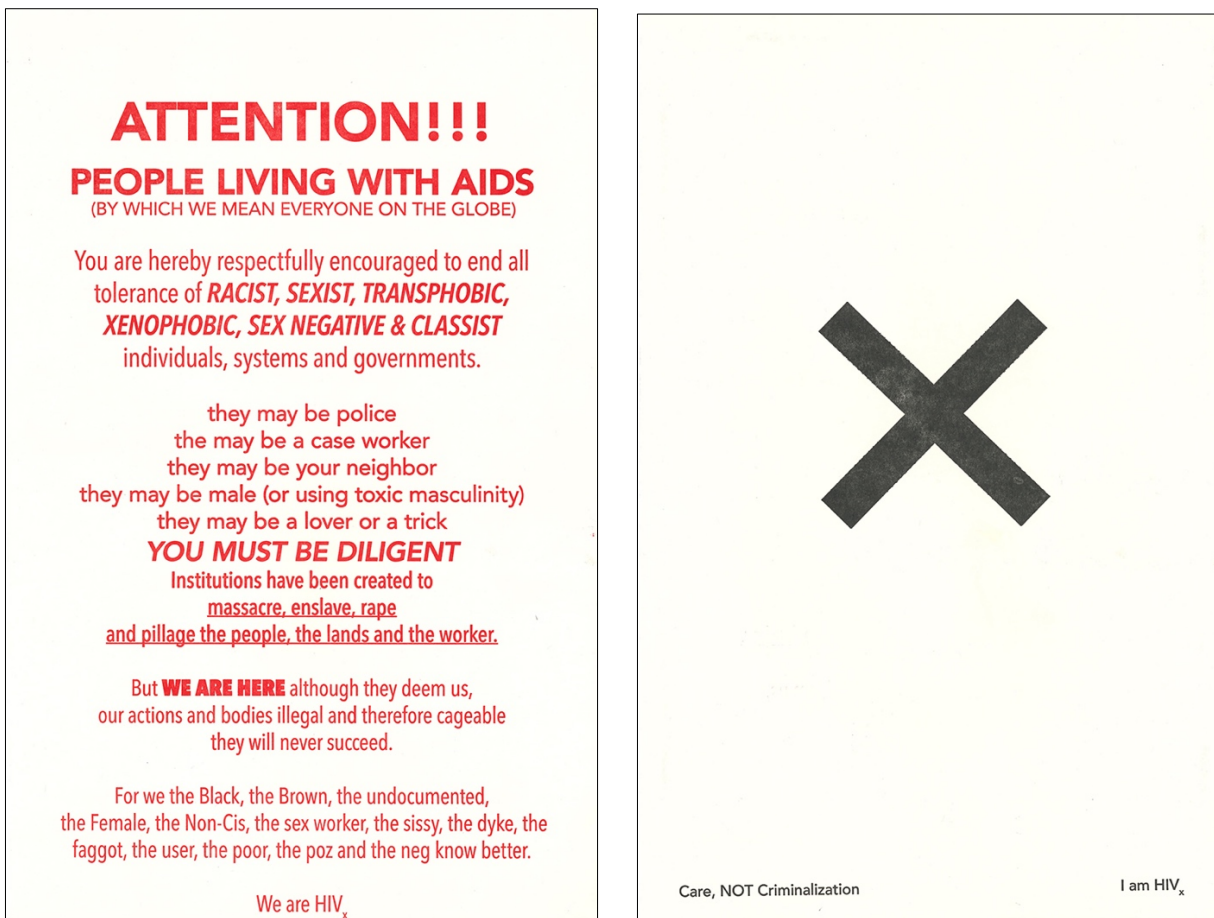


Figure 40. Charles Ryan Long and Christopher Jordan, “Decriminalizing the Status Symbol” (2018)  
 letterpress poster, edition of 750  
 Source: Courtesy of Charles Ryan Long

**CAUTION!!**

---

**COLORED PEOPLE**  
**OF BOSTON, ONE & ALL,**  
 You are hereby respectfully **CAUTIONED** and  
 advised, to avoid conversing with the  
**Watchmen and Police Officers**  
**of Boston,**  
 For since the recent **ORDER OF THE MAYOR &**  
**ALDERMEN,** they are empowered to act as  
**KIDNAPPERS**  
**AND**  
**Slave Catchers,**  
 And they have already been actually employed in  
**KIDNAPPING, CATCHING, AND KEEPING**  
**SLAVES.** Therefore, if you value your **LIBERTY,**  
 and the *Welfare of the Fugitives* among you, *Shun*  
 them in every possible manner, as so many **HOUNDS**  
 on the track of the most unfortunate of your race.

**Keep a Sharp Look Out for**  
**KIDNAPPERS,** and have  
**TOP EYE open.**

**APRIL 24, 1851.**

Figure 41. Theodore Parker, "Caution, Colored People of Boston" (1851)  
 Source: The Lost Museum Archive, <https://lostmuseum.cuny.edu/archive/caution-colored-people-of-boston>. Accessed 12 February, 2020.



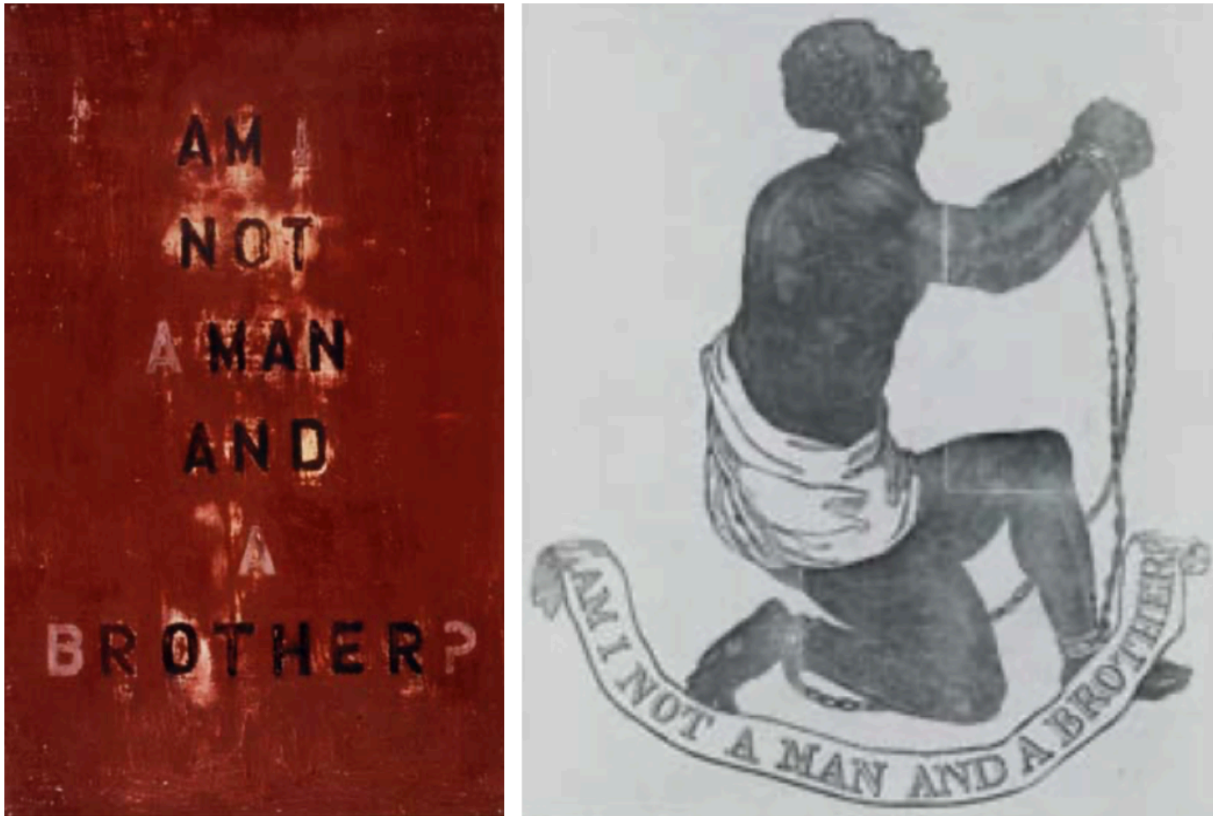


Figure 42. Glenn Ligon, "Untitled" (1989). oil on paper. 121.9 x 76.2 cm (left); Anonymous, "Am I not a Man and a Brother?" (1837), woodcut on woven paper, 26.7 x 22.8 cm. (right)  
Source: Copeland 2013: 115

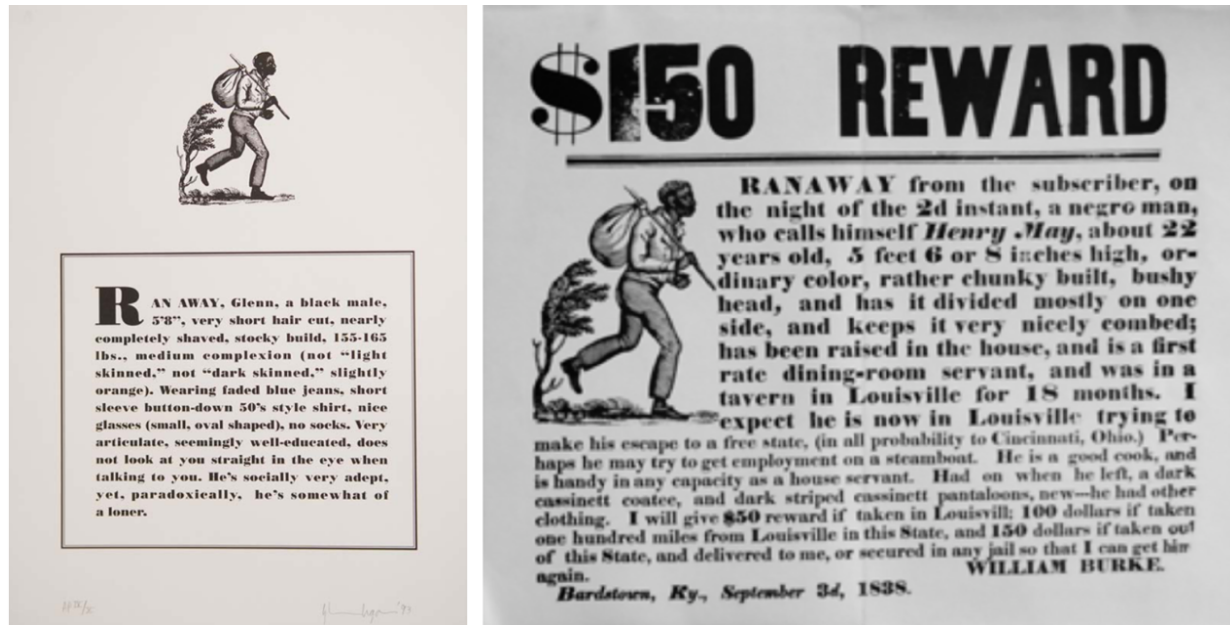


Figure 43. Glenn Ligon, "Runaways (A Loner)" (1993), lithograph, 40.6 x 30.5 cm. (left); Anonymous, runaway advertisement (1838), woodcut on paper (right)  
Source: Copeland 2013: 135-136.

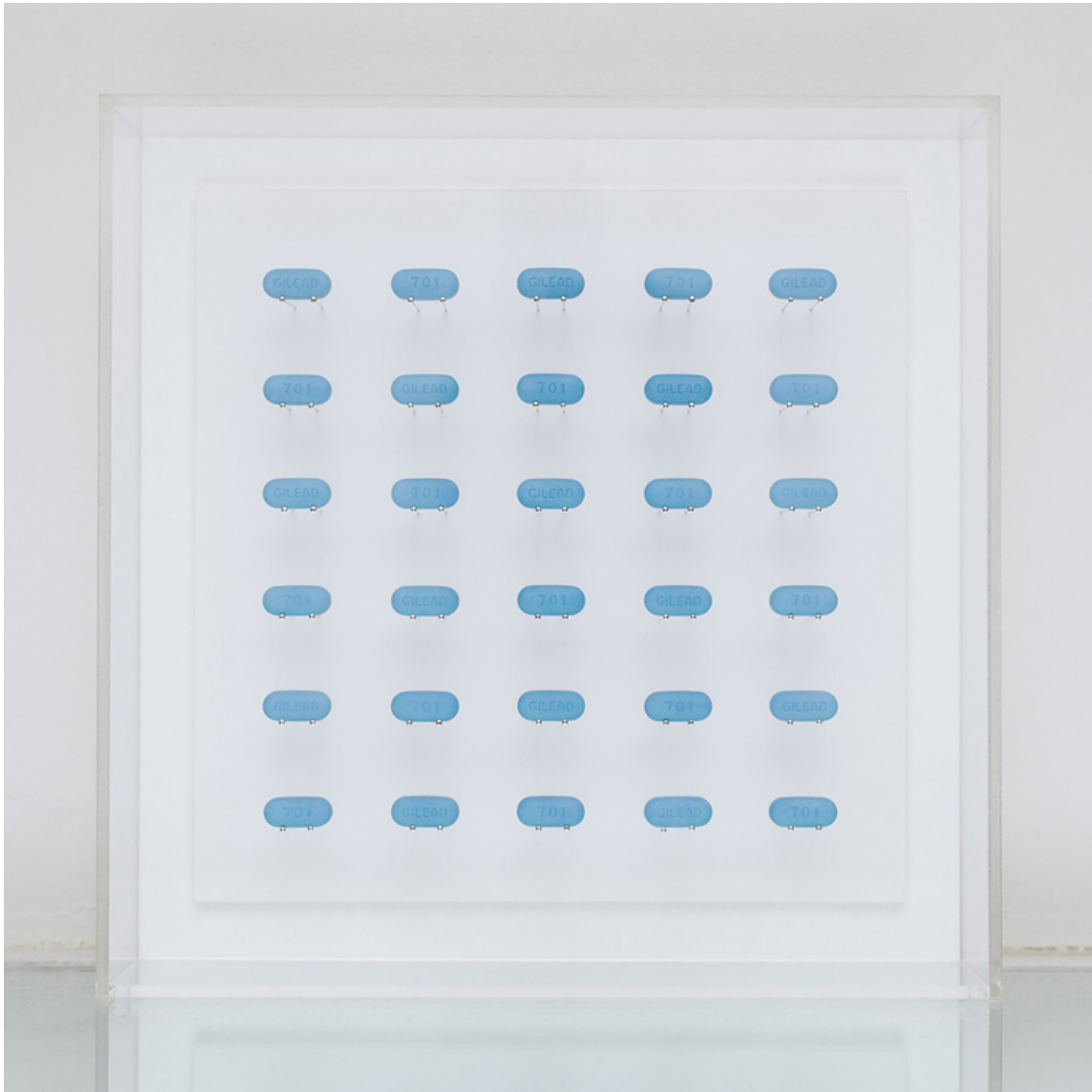


Figure 44. Luke Cheng, “Truvada Case” (2017), acrylic, pins, one month’s supply of Truvada  
Source: Cheng, Luke. “Truvada Case,” <https://www.lukecheng.co/truvada-case#0>. Accessed 9 March, 2020.

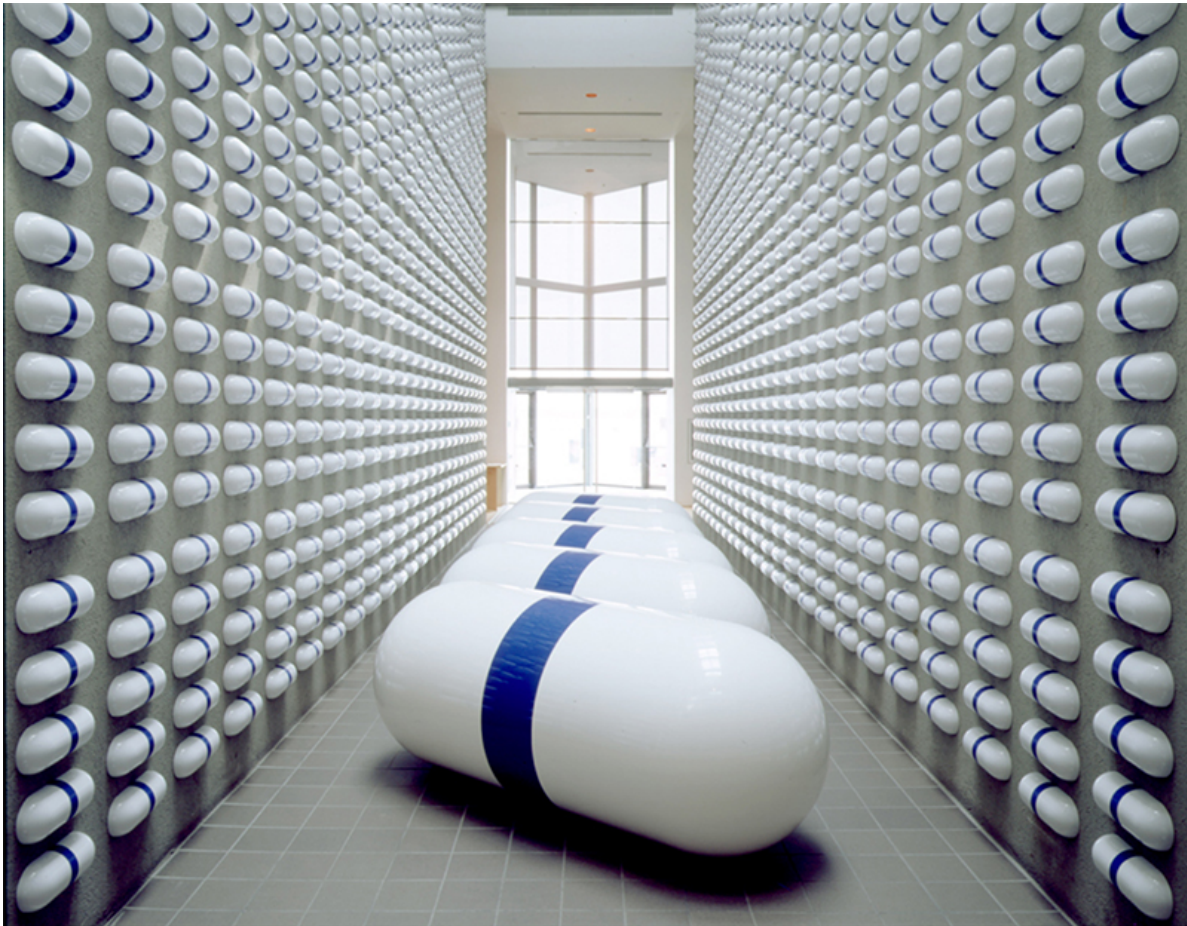


Figure 45. General Idea, “One Day of AZT” (1991), five fiberglass units, each  $33 \frac{7}{16} \times 84 \frac{1}{8} \times 33 \frac{7}{16}$ ” (on floor); “One Year of AZT” (1991), 1,825 units of vacuum-formed styrene with vinyl, each  $4 \frac{7}{8} \times 12 \frac{3}{8} \times 3$ ” (on walls)

Source: Tone, Lilian. “Bitter Pills.” Art archives,  
<http://artarchives.net/artarchives/liliantone/tonegeneralidea.html>. Accessed 13 March, 2018



Figure 46. Felix Gonzalez-Torres, “Untitled (Veterans Day Sale)” (1989), print on paper, endless copies  
22” at ideal height x 29 x 23”

Source: The Felix Gonzalez-Torres Foundation, <https://www.felixgonzalez-torresfoundation.org/works/untitled-veterans-day-sale>. Accessed 9 March, 2020.



Figure 47. Felix Gonzalez-Torres, detail of "Untitled (Memorial Day Weekend)" (1989)  
Source: The Felix Gonzalez-Torres Foundation, <https://www.felixgonzalez-torresfoundation.org/works/untitled-memorial-day-weekend>. Accessed 9 March, 2020.



Figure 48. Boston Elements, mixed-media

Source: Instagram, <https://www.instagram.com/p/Bf4A7UQFpV4/>;  
<https://www.instagram.com/p/BTKooQ2BQJN/>; <https://www.instagram.com/p/BE4ERGWrvwc/>;  
[https://www.instagram.com/p/BEfbXW\\_rv0Q/](https://www.instagram.com/p/BEfbXW_rv0Q/).  
 Accessed 9 March, 2020.



Figure 49. Ivan Lupi, “Truvadians” (2020), black Indian blotted ink line, Dr. Ph. Martin radiant concentrated watercolor, pure 24k gold leaf on 640 gsm 100% cotton Arches watercolor paper  
Source: Instagram, 18 January, 2020, <https://www.instagram.com/p/B7fFrVEnYYI/>. Accessed 9 March, 2020.



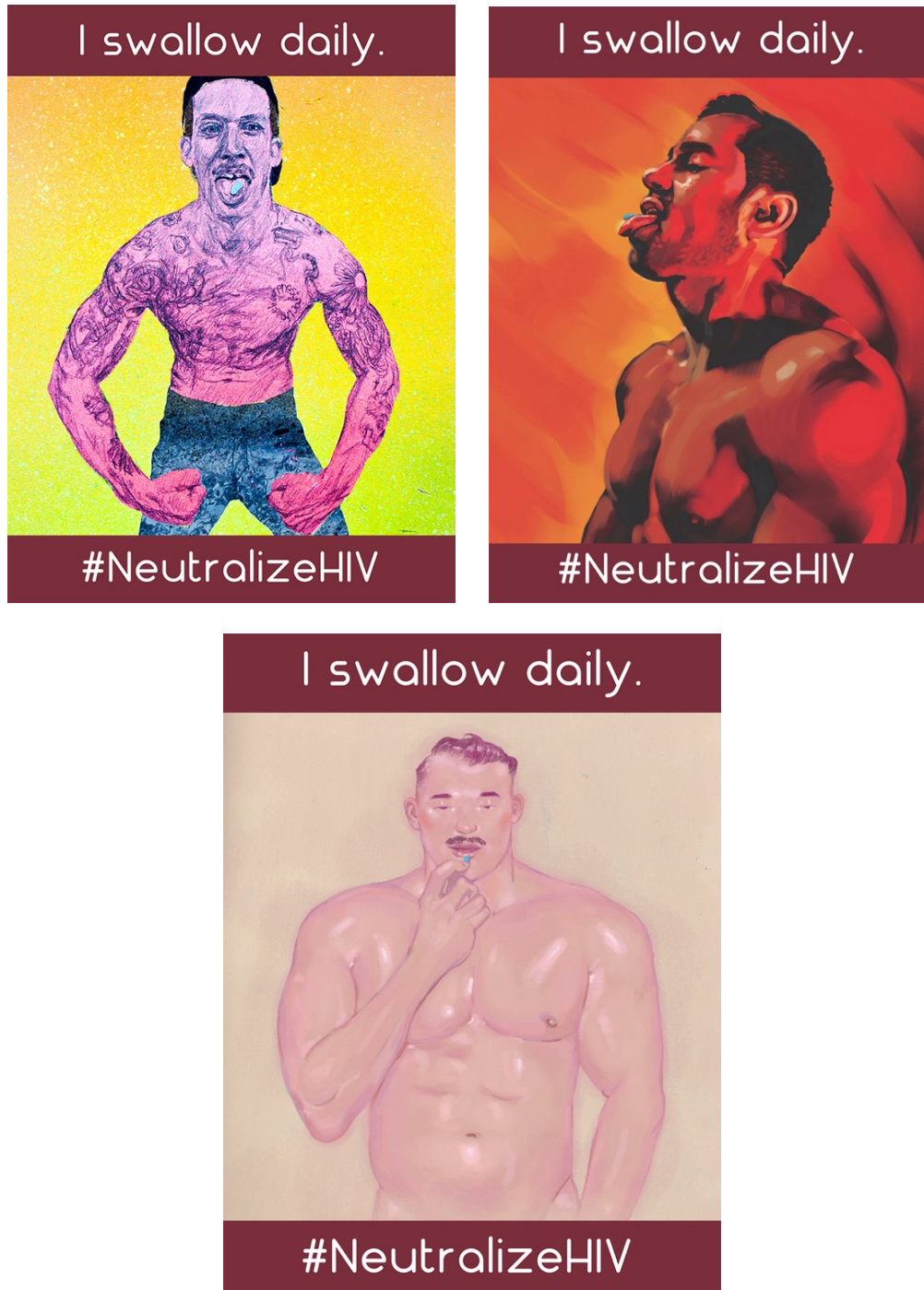


Figure 50. "I Swallow Daily" (2018) by Apicha Community Health Center: Kevin William Reed (left); Michael Ocasio (right), Justin Yoon (bottom)

Source: Apicha Community Health Center, <https://blog.apicha.org/the-meaning-behind-apicha-chcs-i-swallow-daily-campaign>. Accessed on 3 February 2020.

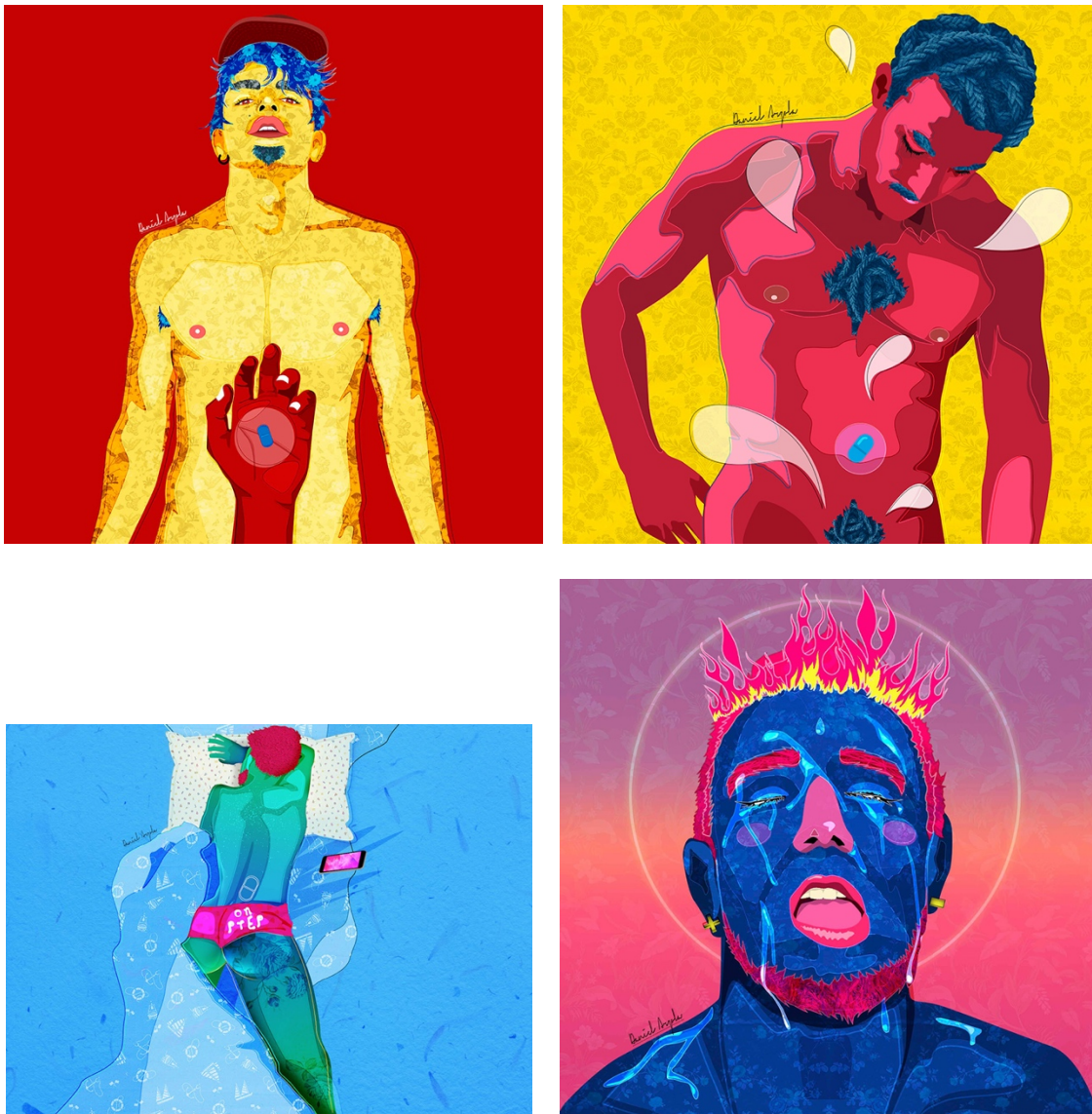


Figure 51. Daniel Arzola, “The Pleasure on PrEP” (2017)

Source: Usigli, Antón Castellanos. Sexuality Observer, <http://www.sexualityobserver.com/pleasureonprep-loosing-fears-2.htm#sthash.82B3JpRW.9rdD51Ld.dpbs>; <http://www.sexualityobserver.com/pleasureonprep-loosing-fears-2.htm#sthash.82B3JpRW.9rdD51Ld.dpbs>; <http://www.sexualityobserver.com/pleasureonprep-porn4prep.htm#sthash.ZyBtqrgu.aXbrz4gm.dpbs>; <http://www.sexualityobserver.com/pleasureonprep-gaining-confidence.htm#sthash.jeK9WIgQ.yV1UFLIC.dpbs>. Accessed 9 March, 2020.



Figure 52. Israel Macedo, “Antiretrovirals” (2014), acrylic on canvas, 31 x 24 x 4 cm each  
Source: Visual AIDS, <https://visualaids.org/artists/israel-macedo>. Accessed 9 March, 2020.

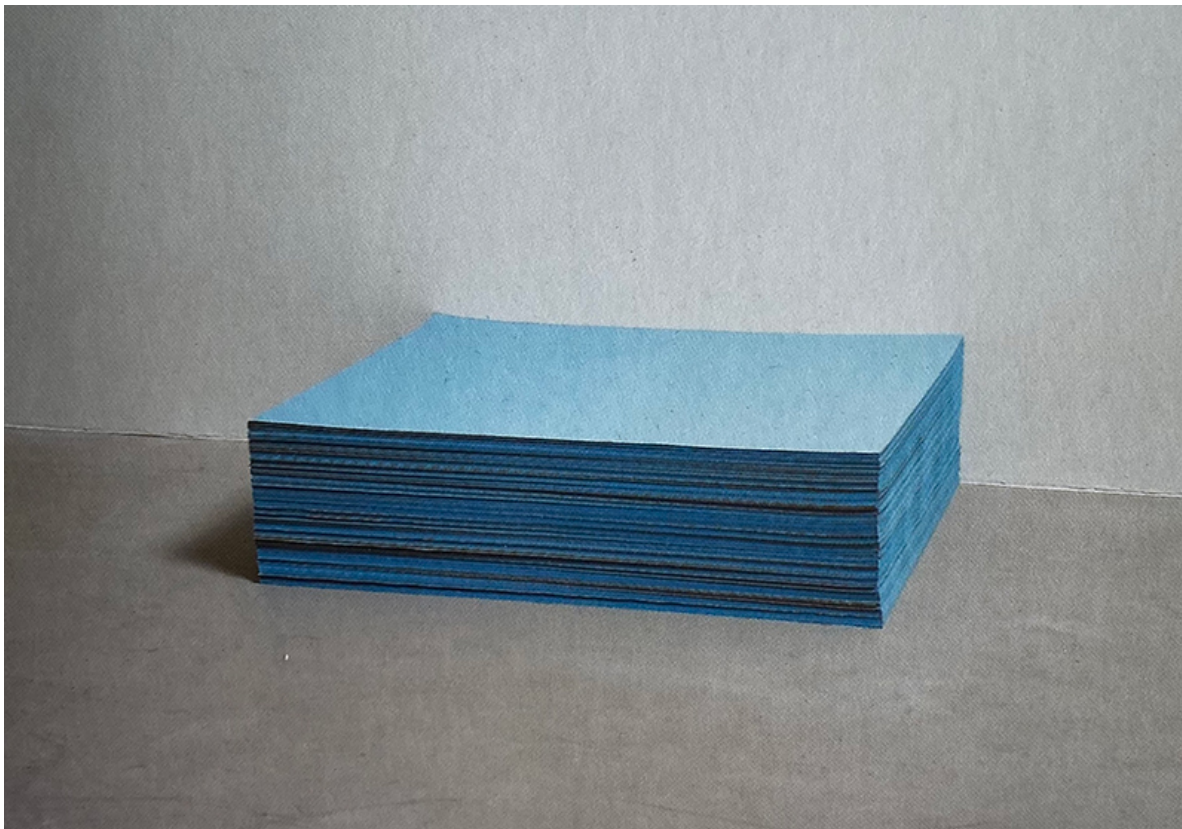


Figure 53. Felix Gonzales-Torres, "Untitled (Loveboy)" (1990), paper, endless copies  
Source: Spector 1995: 19



Figure 54. Israel Macedo, “Post Exposure Prophylaxis” (2015), print on paper, 44 x 33 cm

Source: Facebook,

<https://www.facebook.com/israelmacedo.art/photos/a.315073075219138/874919292567844/?type=3&theater>. Accessed 9 March, 2020.



Figure 55. Israel Macedo, “One per Day (Antiretrovirals)” (2015)

Source: Macedo, Israel. “Israel Macedo,” <http://www.israelmacedo.com/>. Accessed 16 March, 2018.



Figure 56. Apolo Gomez, “General PrEP” (2019), sprayed enamel on Plexiglas, 40 x 40 in.  
Source: Gomez, Apolo. “General PrEP,” <http://www.apologomez.com/#/prep/>. Accessed 9 March, 2020.

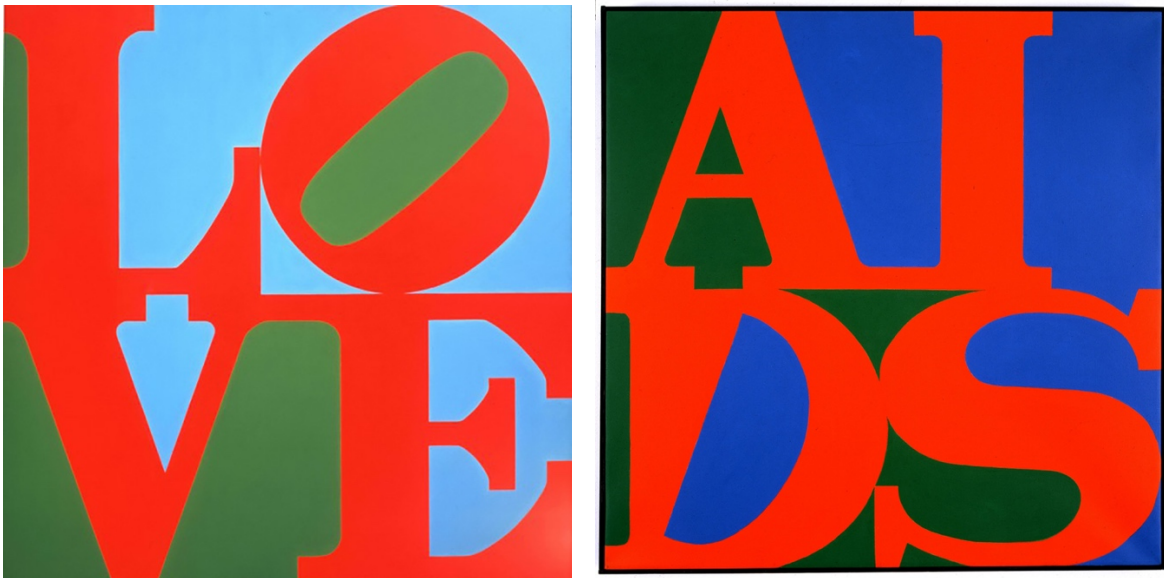


Figure 57. Robert Indiana, LOVE (1966), oil on canvas, 71.8 x 71.8” (left); General Idea, “IMAGEVIRUS” (1987), serigraph on paper, acrylic on canvas, 72 x 72” (right)  
Source: Indiana, Robert. “LOVE,” <http://robertindiana.com/works/love-5/>; Michell-Innes & Nash.  
“Michell-Innes & Nash Represents the Estate of General Idea.” <https://www.miandn.com/news/mitchell-innes-nash-represents-the-estate-of-general-idea>. Accessed 10 March, 2020.





Figure 58. Apolo Gomez, “PrEPñata” (2018),  
sprayed acrylic on papier-mâché, wax coated string, condoms  
**Source:** Gomez, Apolo. “PrEPñata,” <http://www.apologomez.com/#/prep/>. Accessed 9 March, 2020.

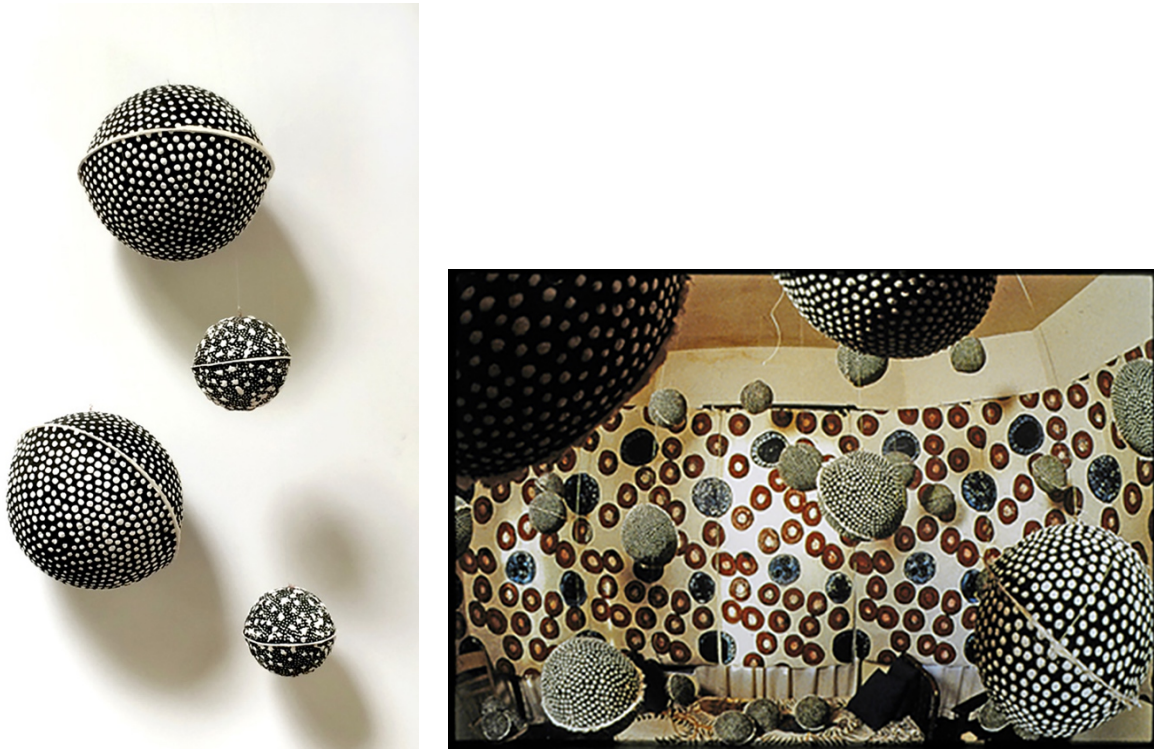


Figure 59. Eric Avery, "HIV Condom Piñata & Baby HIV" (1993),  
molded paper woodcut 8.5" diameter & 4.2" diameter  
Source: Avery, Eric. "HIV Condom Piñata & Baby HIV;" "Studio Installation of "Texas: Between Two  
Worlds,"" <https://www.ericaveryartist.com/hiv aids.html>. Accessed 9 March, 2020.



Figure 60. Felix Gonzalez-Torres, "Untitled (Loverboys)" (1991), cellophane-wrapped blue-and-white candies, endless supply, ideal weight 350 pounds  
Source: Spector 1995: 155.

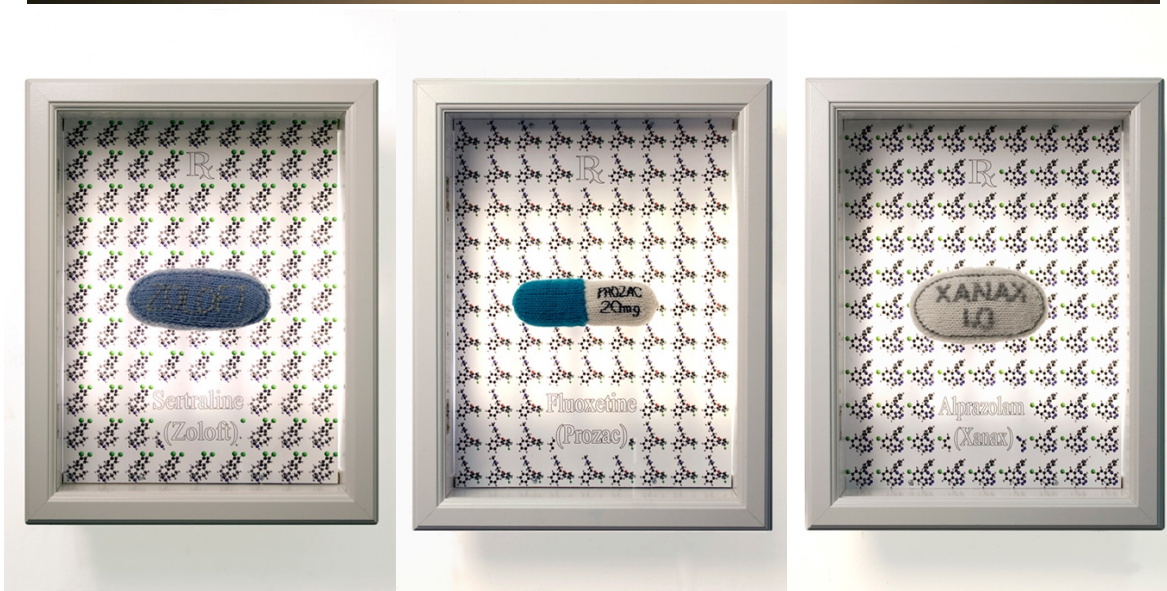


Figure 61. Ben Cuevas, “Medicine Cabinets” (2010), knit wool and silk, medicine cabinets  
 Source: Cuevas, Ben, <http://bencuevas.com/medicine-cabinets>. Accessed 9 March, 2020.



Figure 62. Ben Cuevas, “Knit PrEP” (2014), knit wool and poly-fil, 3 x 7 x 2 in.  
Source: Visual AIDS, <https://visualaids.org/artists/ben-cuevas>. Accessed 9 March, 2020



Figure 63. Sheldon Raymore as PrEPahHontoz

Source: Raymore, Sheldon. "PrEPahHontoz," <https://prepahhontoz.com/about>. Accessed 9 March, 2020.



Figure 64. Sheldon Raymore, “PrEPahHontoz Tipi Project” (2018–)  
Source: Raymore, Sheldon. “Winter Counts,” <https://prepahhontoz.com/winter-counts>. Accessed 12 March, 2020.

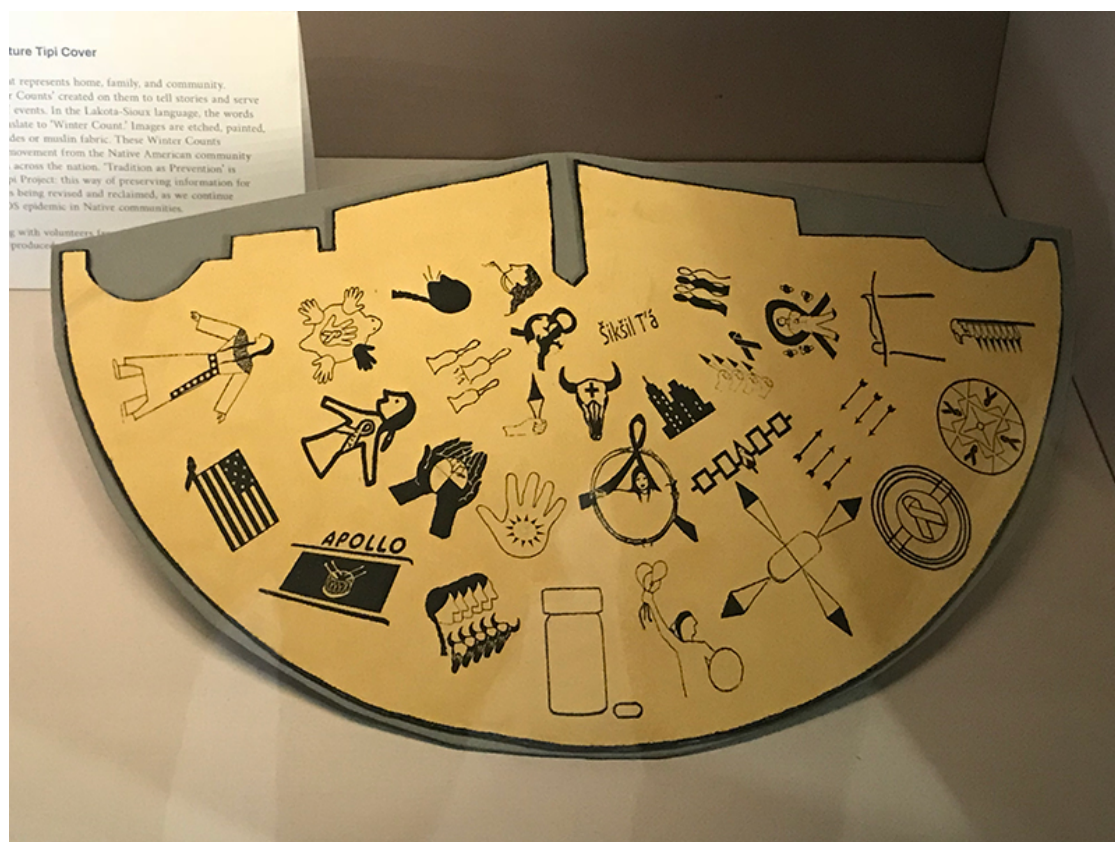


Figure 65. Sheldon Raymore, miniature tipi cover  
Image taken by me.



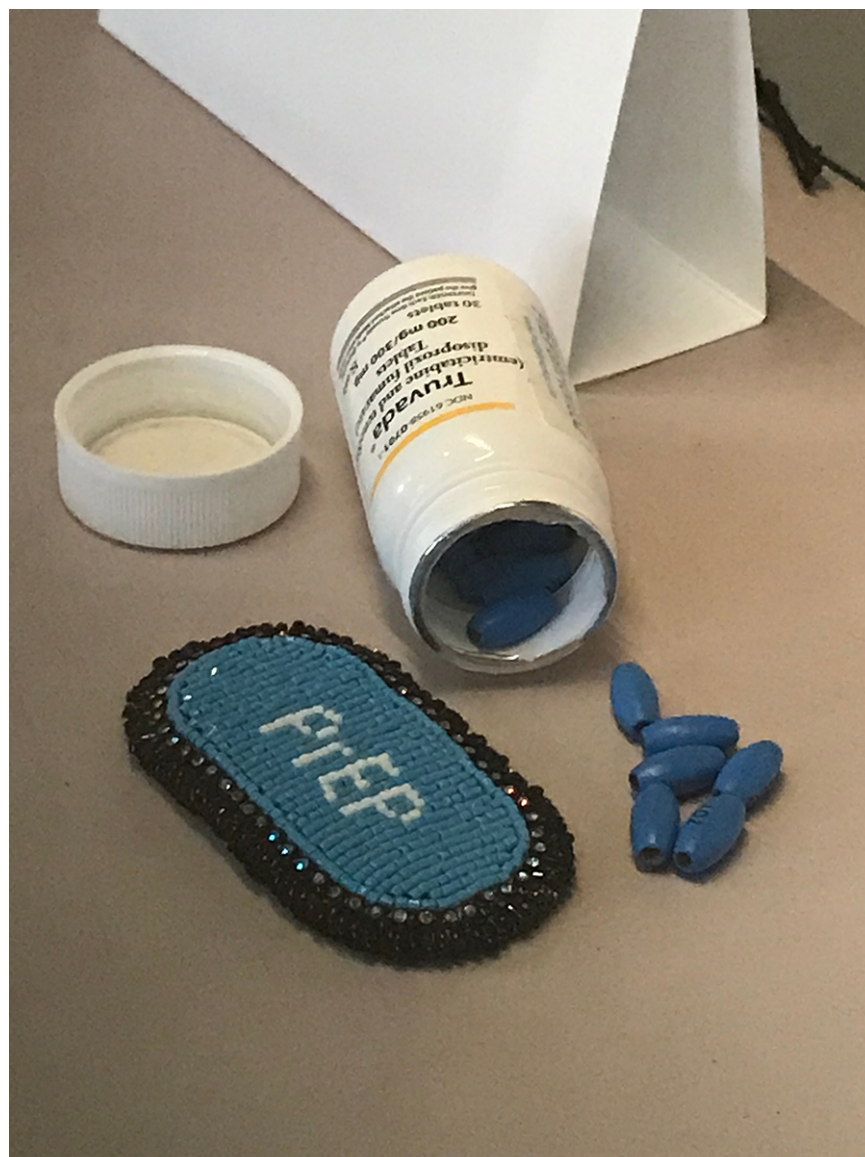


Figure 66. Sheldon Raymore, the PrEP beads  
Image taken by me.

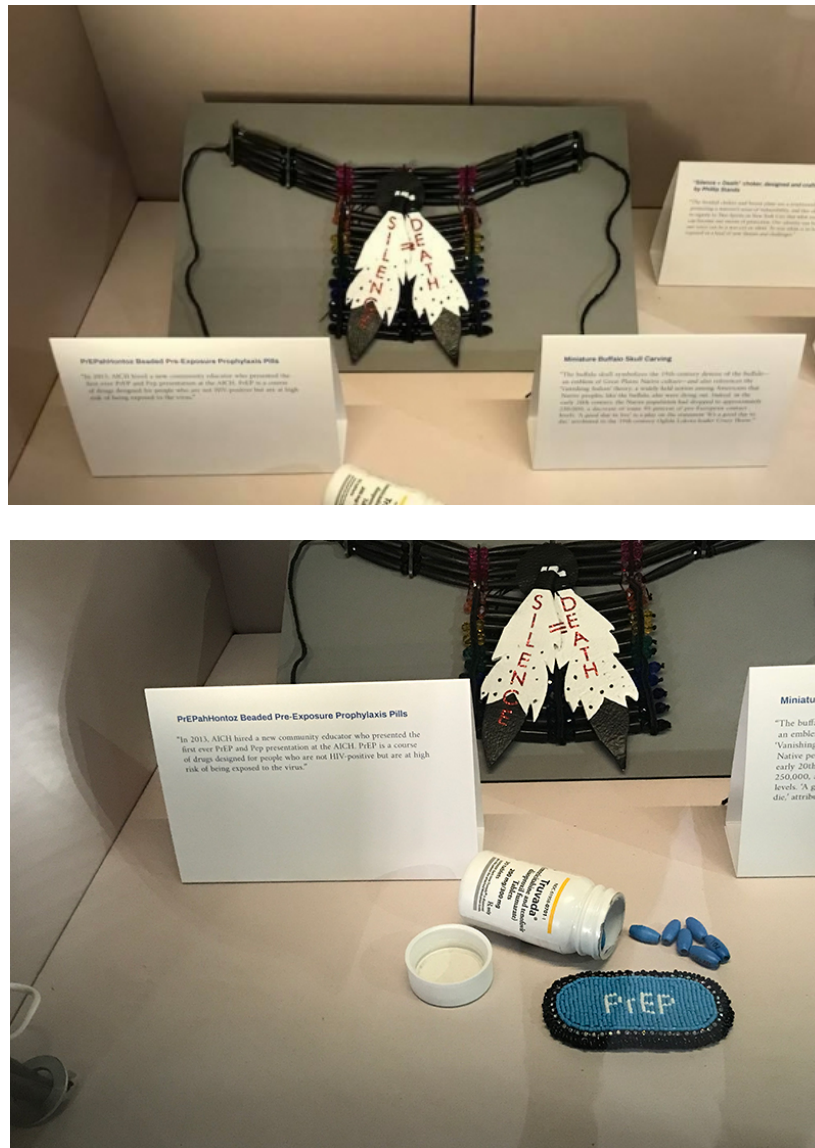


Figure 67. American Indian Community House, “Silence=Death” choker  
 Source: image taken by me; American Indian Community House, <https://aich.org/2018/09/14/american-indian-community-house-germ-city-exhibit-at-the-museum-of-the-city-of-new-york-now-through-april-28th-2019/>. Accessed 6 March, 2020.

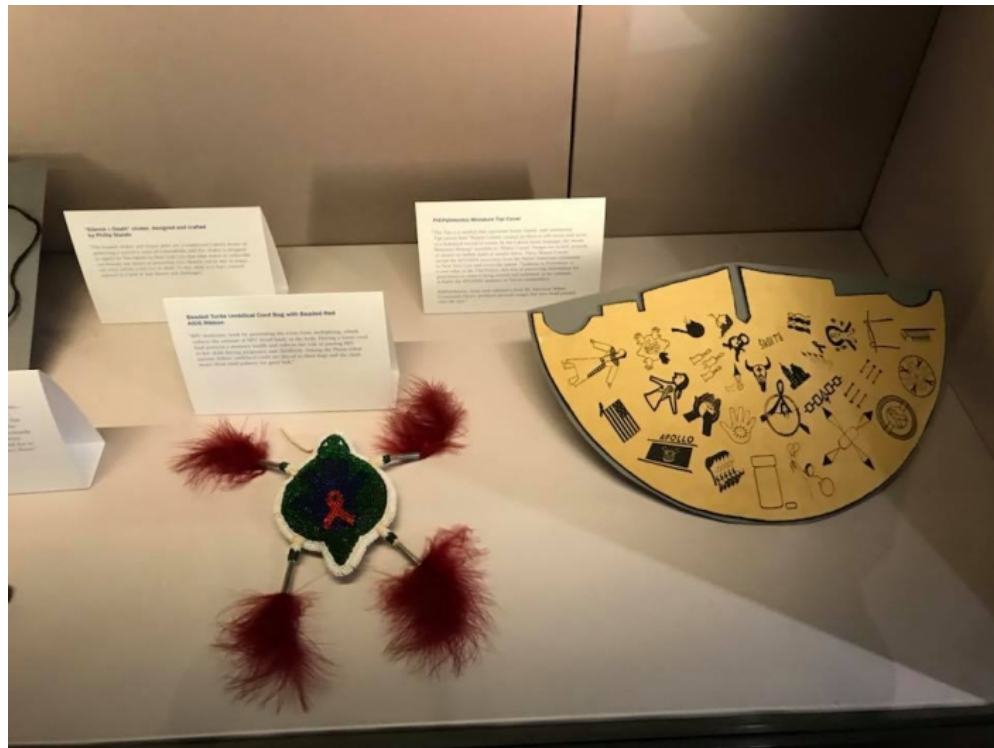


Figure 68. American Indian Community House,  
a small beaded turtle umbilical cord bag with beaded red AIDS ribbon  
Source: American Indian Community House, <https://aich.org/2018/09/14/american-indian-community-house-germ-city-exhibit-at-the-museum-of-the-city-of-new-york-now-through-april-28th-2019/>. Accessed 6 March, 2020.



Figure 69. Vincent Gagliostro and Avram Finkelstein, “Enjoy AZT” (1989),  
screen print on paper, 23 1/16 x 19 1/16 in.

Source: Cooper Hewitt, <https://collection.cooperhewitt.org/objects/18645575>. Accessed 25 March, 2020.



Figure 70. Israel Macedo, “Enjoy Truvada” (2015), cotton print, 100 x 100 cm

Source: Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/israelmacedo.art/photos/a.315073075219138/872377829488657/?type=3&theater>.

Accessed 25 March, 2020.

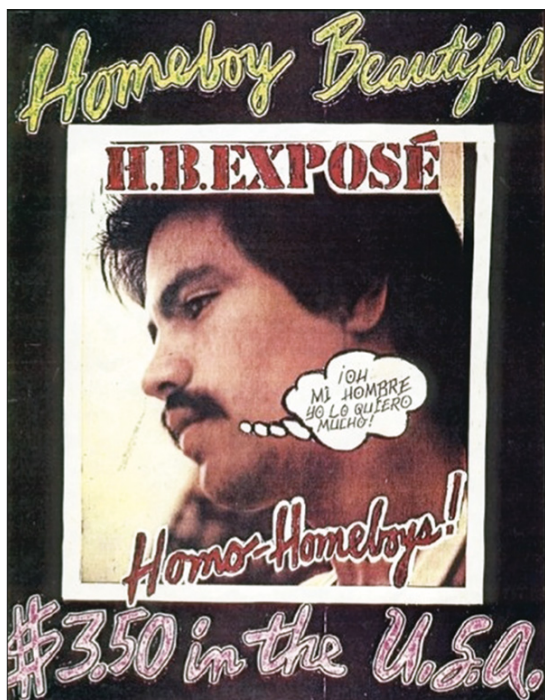
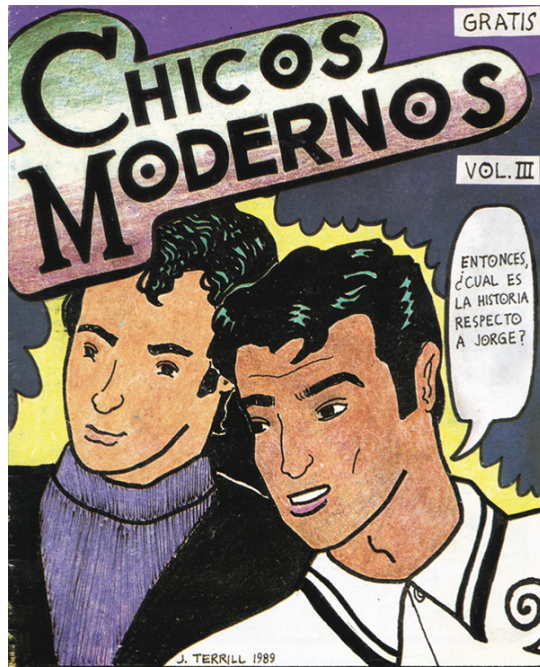


Figure 71. Joey Terrill's "maricón" aesthetics: "Chico Modernos" (1989);  
 "Homeboy Beautiful" (1978), and; "maricón" T-shirt  
 Sources: Rodríguez, Richard, T. (2011): 479, 484; Joey Terrill, <http://www.joeyterrillart.com/jt-gallery-5.html/>. Accessed 25 March, 2020.



Figure 72. Joey Terrill, "Still Life with Crixivan" (1997-98), acrylic/mixed media on canvas, 48 x 36 in.  
Source: One Archives Foundation, <https://www.onearchives.org/joey-terrill-still-life-with-crixivan/>.  
Accessed 25 March, 2020.



Figure 73. Andy Warhol, “Still-Life (Flowers)” (1950s), ballpoint ink on Manila paper,  
16 3/4 x 13 7/8 in.

Source: Tumblr, <https://huariqueje.tumblr.com/post/112402225761/still-life-flowers-andy-warhol-1950s-early>. Accessed 25 March, 2020.





Figure 74. Joey Terrill, "Forget-Me-Nots and One Week's Dose of Truvada (2012),  
mixed media on canvas, 36 x 48 in.

Source: Artfix Daily, <http://www.artfixdaily.com/artwire/release/2260-art-aids-america-groundbreaking-exhibition-debuts-at-tacoma-art-m>. Accessed 29 May, 2020.



Figure 75. PrEP memes  
Source: Word Press, <https://alittlebluepill.wordpress.com/2019/04/07/prep-in-pop-culture-memes/>.  
Accessed 25 March, 2020.

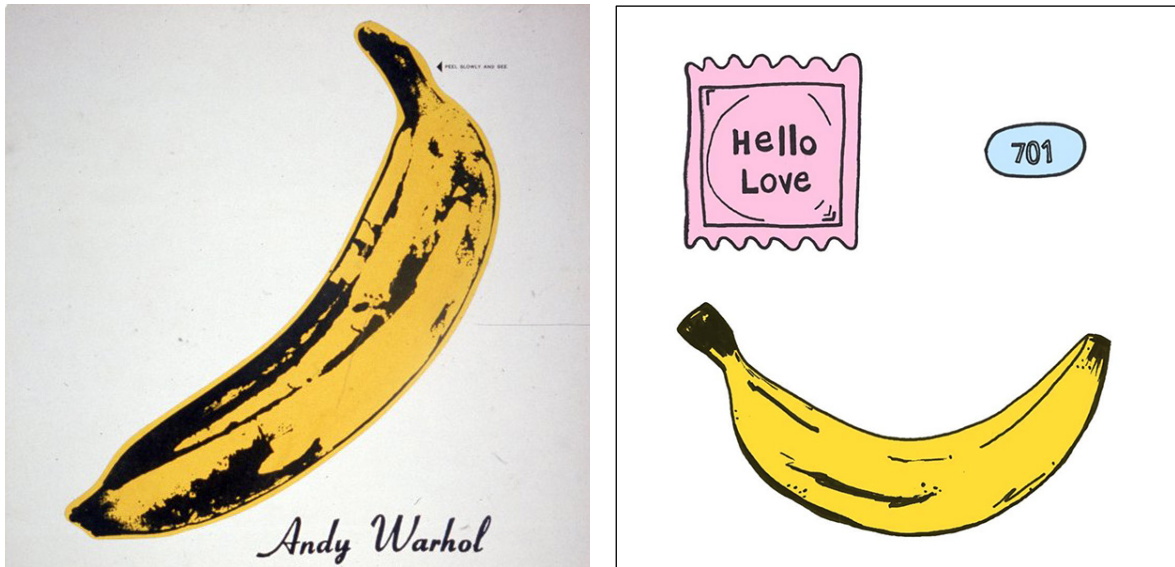


Figure 76. Andy Warhol's The Velvet Underground Album Cover (left); victor.huizar, "Untitled" (right)  
 Sources: Huff Post, [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/velvet-underground-banana\\_n\\_4170126](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/velvet-underground-banana_n_4170126); Instagram, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BfyZWenDypg/>. Accessed 25 March, 2020.



Figure 77. Andy Warhol, “Green Coca-Cola Bottles” (1962) (left) and Warhol’s influences in PrEP-based art (center and right)

Sources: Whitney Museum of America Art, <https://whitney.org/collection/works/3253>; dannywarhole. “Untitled.” February 1, 2020, Instagram, <https://www.instagram.com/p/B8BnQjPHAvk/>; iaahillyer. “Untitled.” 11 August 2018, Instagram, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BmWLz58gL19/>. Accessed 25 March, 2020.



Figure 78. askmissjai, "Colorful Slut" (2016), digital image (top);  
 Andy Warhol, "Marilyn Monroe" (1967), portfolio of 10 screen prints, 36 x 36 in. each (bottom)  
 Sources: askmissjai. "Untitled." August 2016, Instagram; Phillips, <https://www.phillips.com/detail/andy-warhol/NY010313/25>.  
 Accessed 25 March, 2020.



Figure 79. Scruff, the “Most Woof’d” section

Source: Twitter, <https://twitter.com/badboybee/status/384737432727744512>. Accessed 25 March, 2020.

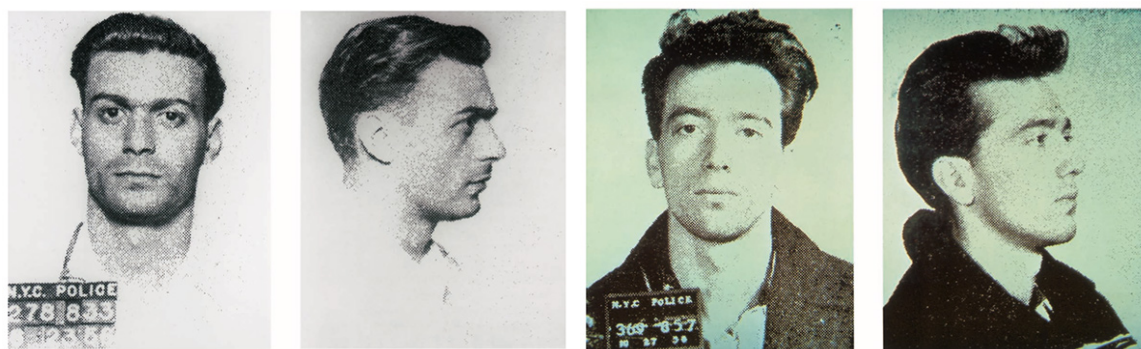


Figure 80. Andy Warhol's "Thirteen Most Wanted Men" (1964), the exterior of the New York State Pavilion at New York World's Fair (top); "Most Wanted Men", silkscreen ink on two canvases, each 122 x 101.5 cm (bottom)

Source: Shanes 2005: 56, 123.

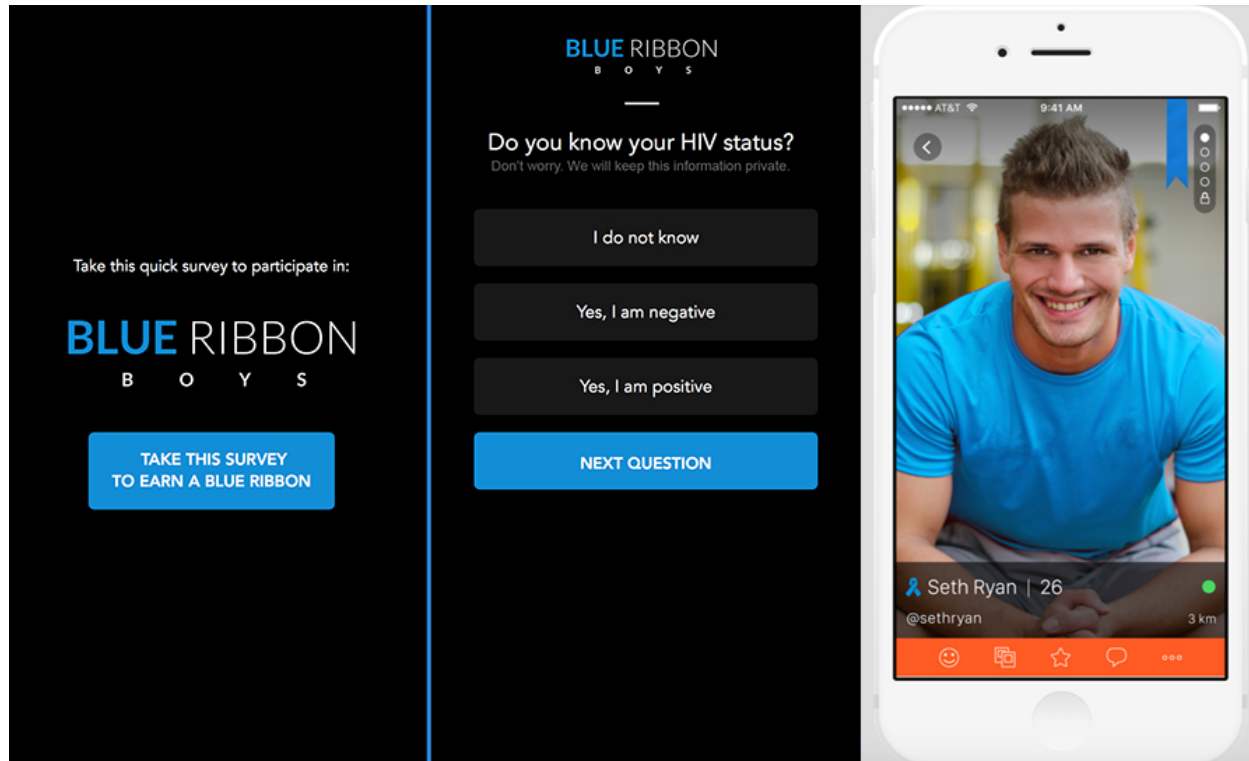


Figure 81. “Blue Ribbon Boys” on Hornet

Source: Murphy, Troy. “Global Initiative Launched on Gay App Hornet to Modernise Safe Sex Message.” 1 December 2015, Star Observer, <https://www.starobserver.com.au/news/international-news-news/global-initiative-launched-on-gay-app-hornet-to-modernise-safe-sex-message/143453>. Accessed 23 March, 2020.



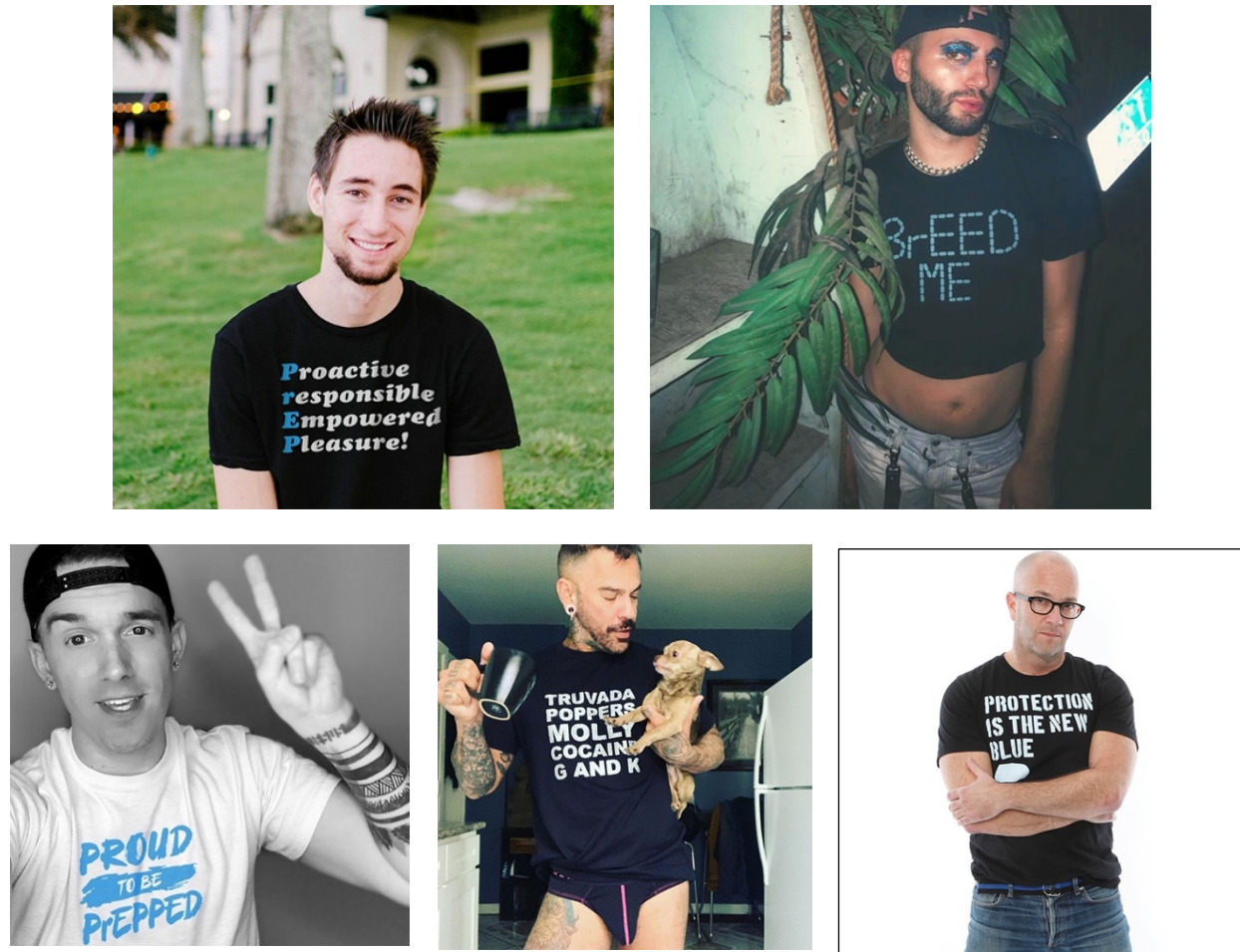


Figure 82. PrEP T-Shirts

Sources: Instagram, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BnE7YYSlwch/>;  
[https://www.instagram.com/p/Bk\\_VwFggSZN/](https://www.instagram.com/p/Bk_VwFggSZN/); <https://www.instagram.com/p/BwaIL4llKNX/>;  
<https://www.instagram.com/p/B2cJFnxBVLG/>; <https://www.instagram.com/p/-v8RazuV5G/>. Accessed  
 25 March, 2020



Figure 83. PrEP pins and cufflinks

Sources: Instagram, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BdT6XEjgRV8/>;  
<https://www.instagram.com/p/BWgI12ojG4D/>; <https://www.instagram.com/p/BWYcd6ZjAo5/>;  
<https://www.instagram.com/p/BtDC6yEA-5m/>; [https://www.instagram.com/p/vGHEZ3I\\_rS/](https://www.instagram.com/p/vGHEZ3I_rS/). Accessed  
25 March, 2020.

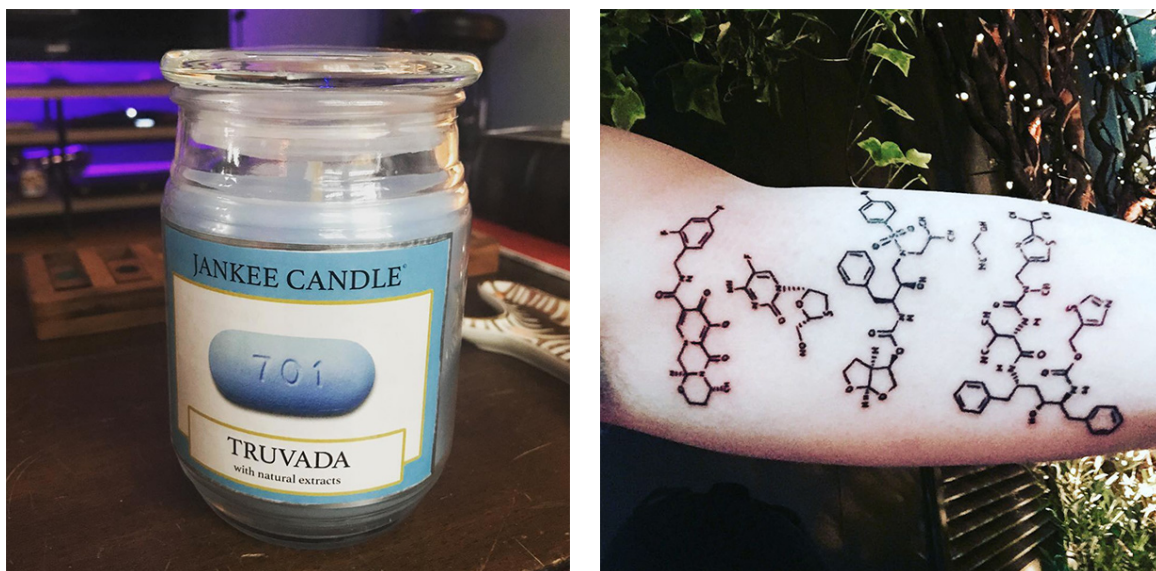


Figure 84. PrEP-scented candle and tattoo design

Sources: Instagram, <https://www.instagram.com/p/Bg7A1e1nfOz/>;  
<https://www.instagram.com/p/BHP1pPJhWRu/>. Accessed 25 March, 2020.

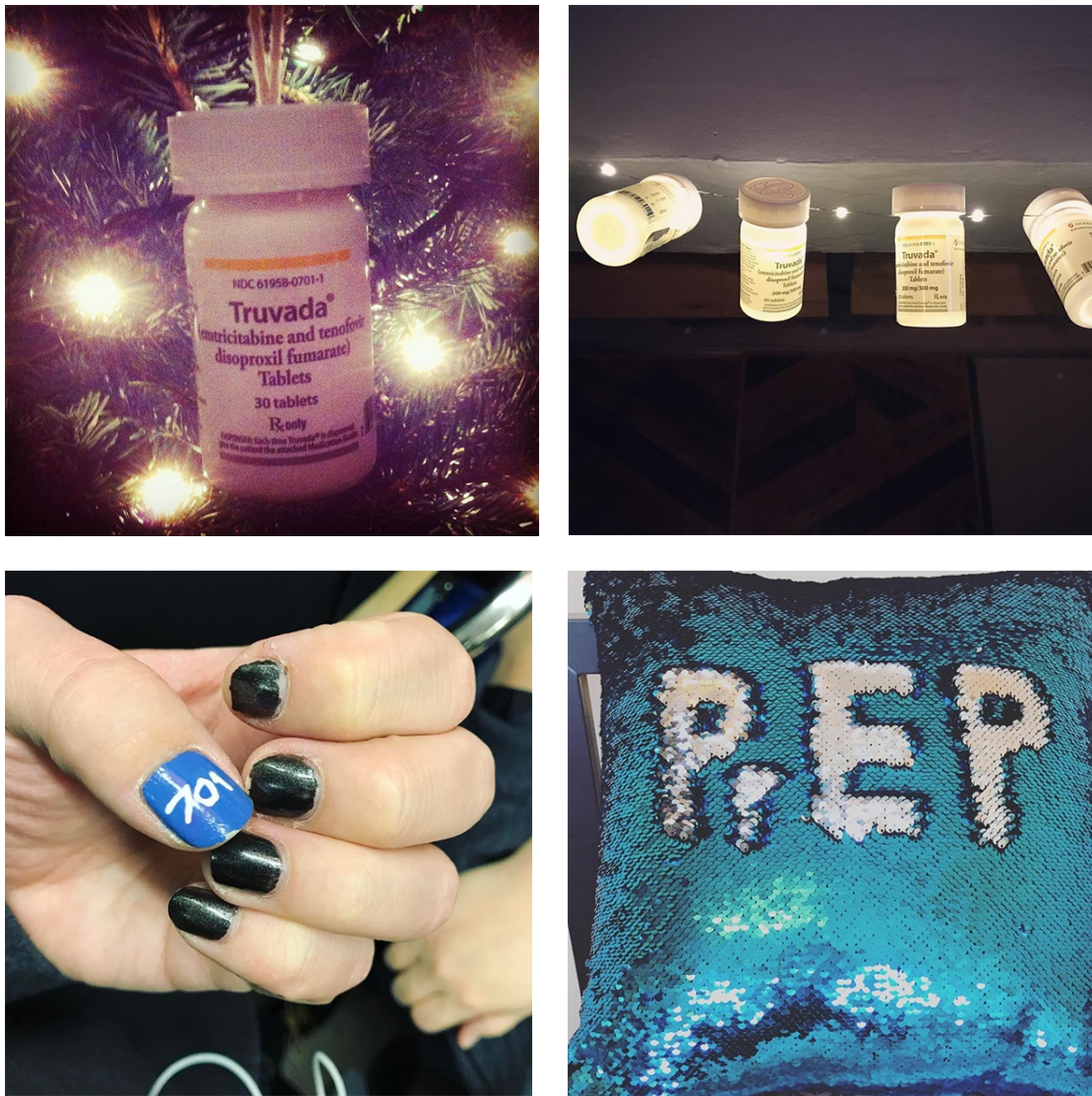


Figure 85. PrEP arts and crafts projects

Sources: Instagram, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BTbkxzdJLF/>;  
<https://www.instagram.com/p/BWxwskUhyRP/>; <https://www.instagram.com/p/BOPXU3hAfsh/>;  
<https://www.instagram.com/p/BdQP2AehfPO/>. Accessed 25 March, 2020.



Figure 86. PrEP-shaped cakes, cupcakes, and cookies

Sources: Instagram, [https://www.instagram.com/p/Bpz10\\_2gok9/](https://www.instagram.com/p/Bpz10_2gok9/);  
<https://www.instagram.com/p/BAuljV9APKt/>; <https://www.instagram.com/p/BcnmzH1IKsp/>;  
<https://www.instagram.com/p/-RqTDngPAn/>. Accessed 25 March, 2020.



Figure 87. PrEP-inspired costumes

Sources: Instagram, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BpqIXovnWKr/>;  
<https://www.instagram.com/p/BpayO-lHurJ/>; <https://www.instagram.com/p/BX6P0cLgZpi/>;  
<https://www.instagram.com/p/9g2FE0FjEo/>; <https://www.instagram.com/p/3ewtQpQP8K/>.  
 Accessed 25 March, 2020.



Figure 88. PrEP and drag

Sources: Instagram, <https://www.instagram.com/p/4pKLtrqNTW/>;  
[https://www.instagram.com/p/Be\\_YfH3FnNb/](https://www.instagram.com/p/Be_YfH3FnNb/); <https://www.instagram.com/p/BlwkOZCBTC6/>.  
 Accessed 25 March, 2020.



Figure 89. Truvada Whore advocates with the campaign's founder Adam Zeboski (far right)  
Source: South Florida Gay News, <https://southfloridagaynews.com/National/truvada-whore-the-war-escalates-with-ahf-s-anti-prep-campaign.html>. Accessed 25 March, 2020.





Figure 90. "Truvada Whore" advocates on social media

Sources: Instagram, [https://www.instagram.com/p/\\_g1-tlr97K/](https://www.instagram.com/p/_g1-tlr97K/);

<https://www.instagram.com/p/BiPaTtDA2et/>; <https://www.instagram.com/p/BfMge6jFjE4/>;

<https://www.instagram.com/p/BO5-snrjYRg/>; <https://www.instagram.com/p/BkV5XOGlusI/>;

[https://www.instagram.com/p/BJOp\\_NAAojB/](https://www.instagram.com/p/BJOp_NAAojB/); <https://www.instagram.com/p/BEtkjGKgPIi/>;

<https://www.instagram.com/p/BKoLKuQBfVO/>; <https://www.instagram.com/p/BdDQtlfjTXw/>.

Accessed 25 March, 2020.

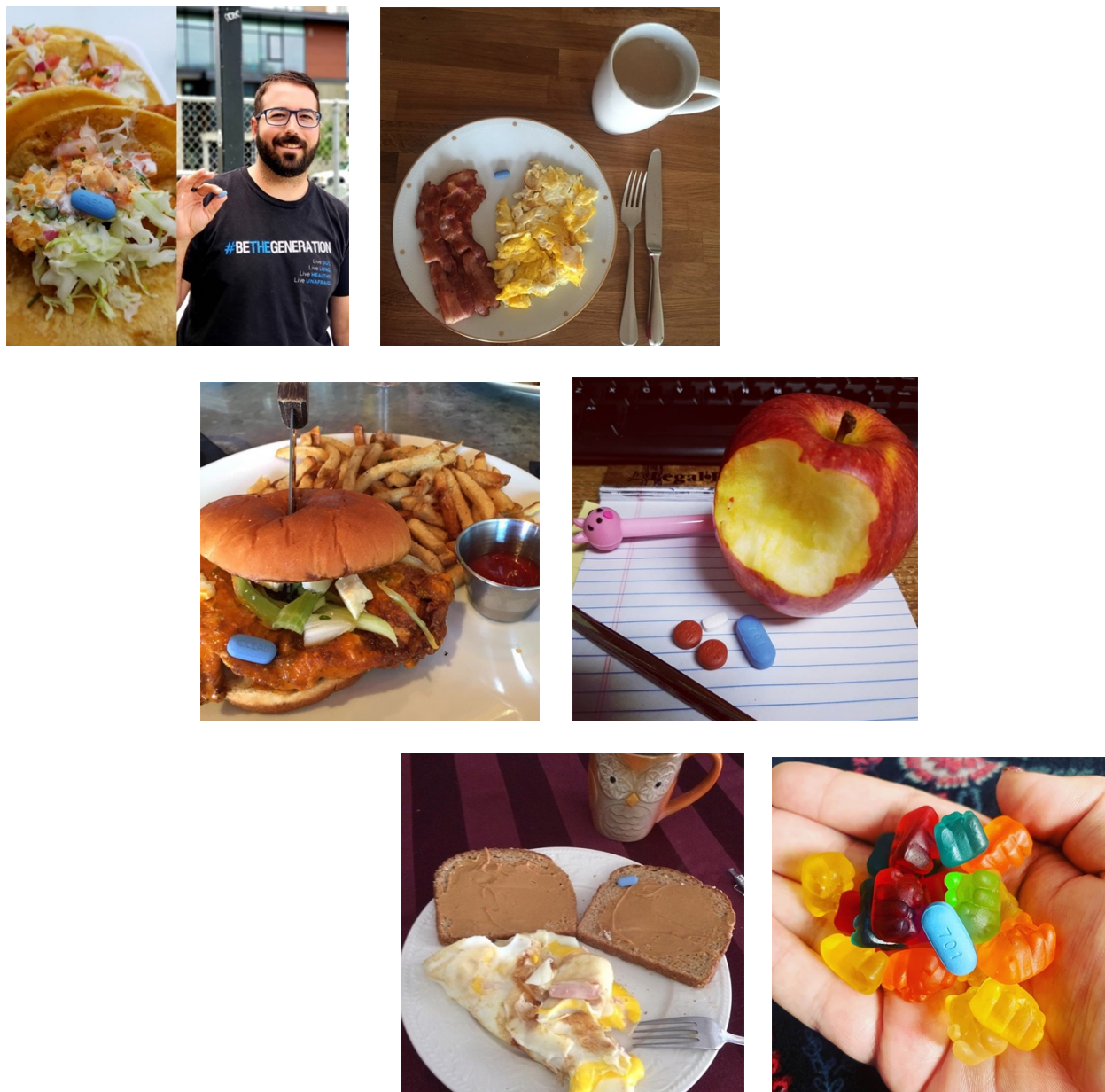


Figure 91. PrEP and food

Sources: Instagram, [https://www.instagram.com/p/BIWJy\\_kApl6/](https://www.instagram.com/p/BIWJy_kApl6/);  
<https://www.instagram.com/p/0SsgQ6xS2Y/>; <https://www.instagram.com/p/B99skkpnFlj/>;  
<https://www.instagram.com/p/7GsiP9gPLN/>; <https://www.instagram.com/p/BozORPWgsHh/>;  
<https://www.instagram.com/p/-LFrfLAPNP/>.  
 Accessed 25 March, 2020.

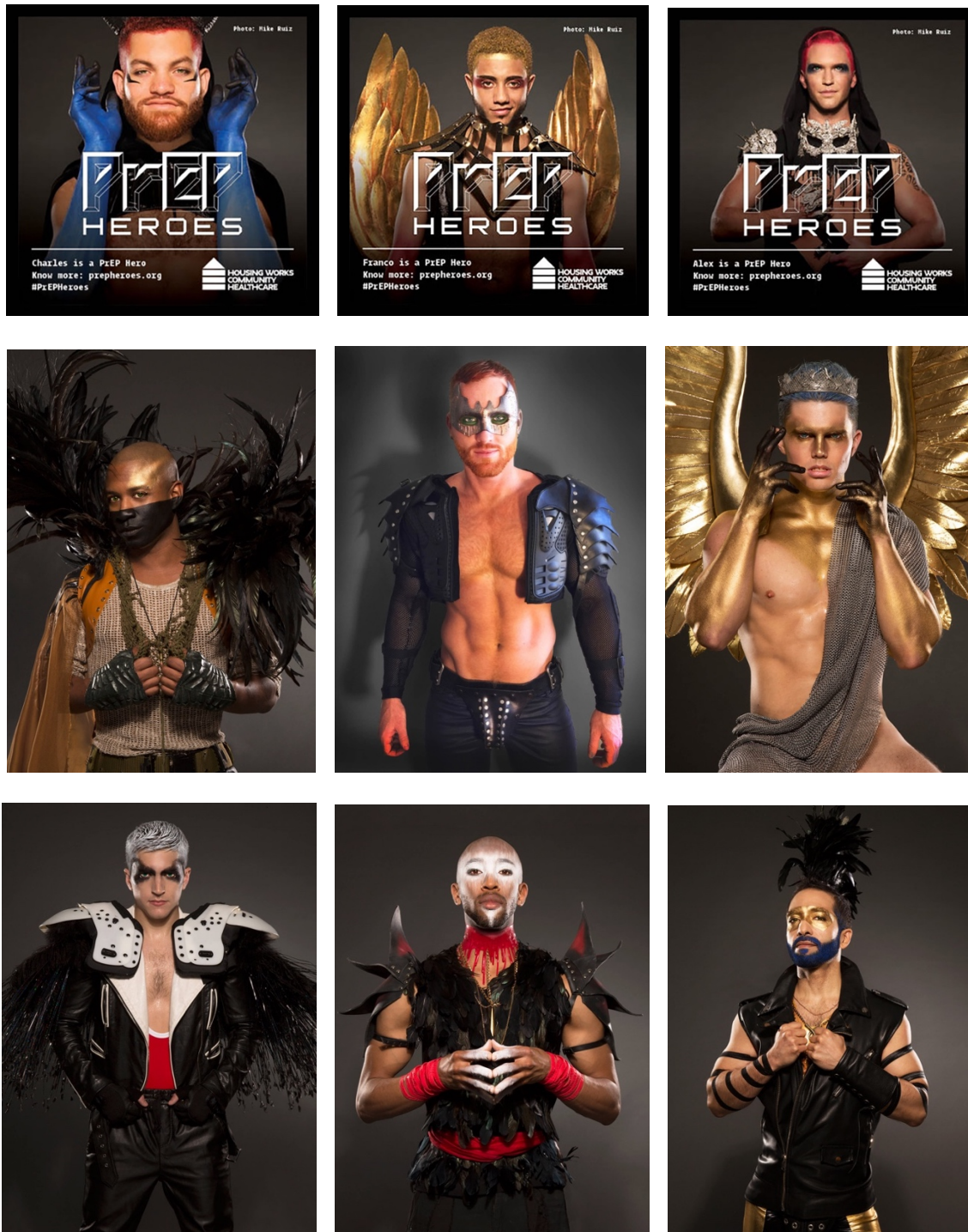


Figure 92. “PrEP Heroes” (2015) by York City’s Housing Works Community Healthcare  
 Source: PrEP Heroes, 2015, <https://prepheroes.org/>; America’s AIDS Magazine,  
<https://aumag.org/2015/07/06/prep-heroes/>. Accessed 11 February, 2020



*Top (left to right): Tyronne, Kent, Dale  
Bottom (left to right): Andy, Stephen*



*Top (left to right): Gary, Brian, John, Ney  
Bottom (center): Paul*



*Top (left to right): Eric, John, Kevin, Mike  
Bottom (left to right): Jake, Leonard*



*Top (left to right): Steve, Joe, Mike, Grant  
Middle (center): Paul Bottom (center): Blake*



*Top (left to right): John, Leonard, Todd  
Bottom (left to right): Craig, Sean*



*Top (left to right): Clifford, Joe, Daniel  
Bottom (left to right): Thomas, Eric*

Figure 93. "The Rubbermen" calendar (1990)

Source: Steve Speier – Chuck Frutchey Papers (1980-1993), San Francisco Public Library, GLC 192, AIDS Education/Safe Sex Posters, Box 5.

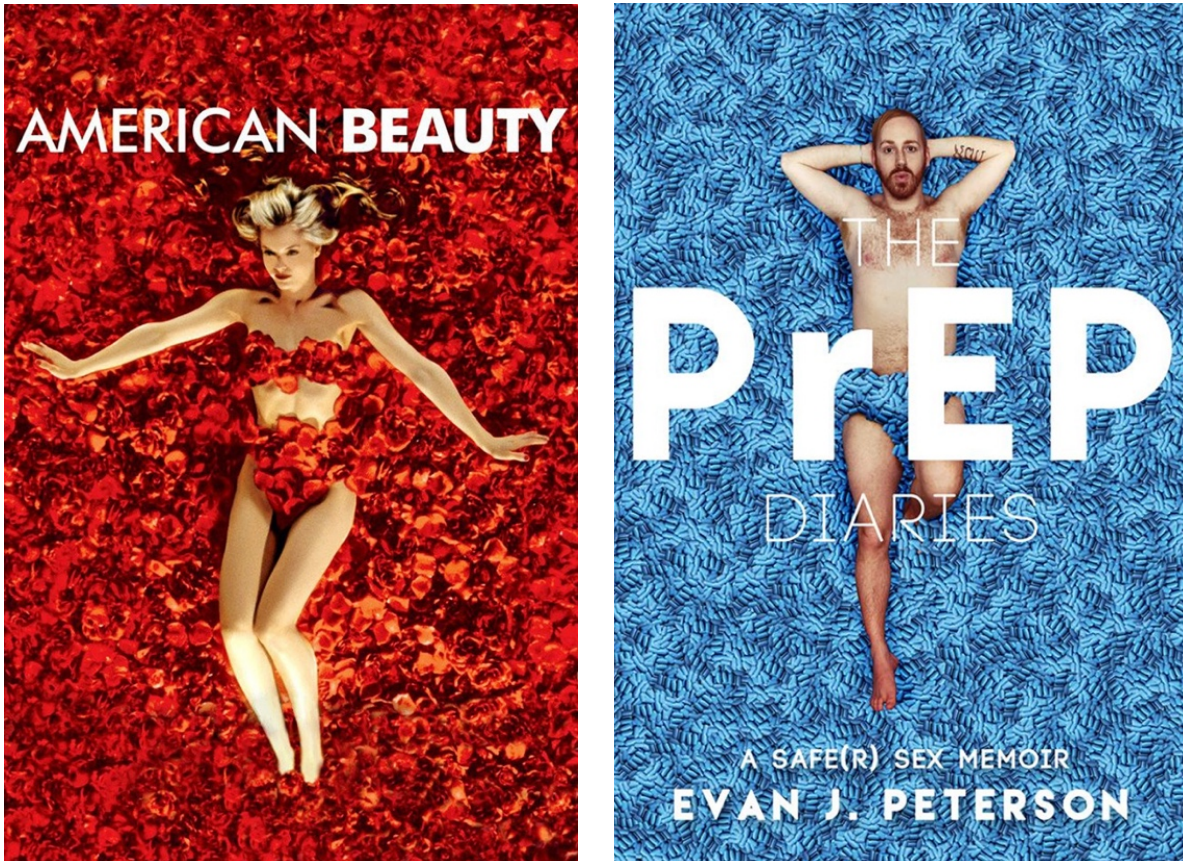


Figure 94. Mena Suvari in American Beauty (1999) (left); Evan J. Peterson on the cover of The PrEP Diaries (right)

Sources: Cinemagay.it. <https://www.cinemagay.it/film/american-beauty/>. Accessed 25 March, 2020; Peterson (2017).



Figure 95. Claudia Palazzo performing PrEP Manifesto  
Source: <https://carlosmotta.com/project/the-spit-manifesto/>. Accessed 25 January, 2021.



Figure 96. Visual AIDS, "HERE WE GO AGAIN" (2017)

Source: Facebook,

<https://www.facebook.com/visualAIDS/photos/a.10150946492590370/10158189510235370/?type=3&theater>. Accessed: 30 March, 2020

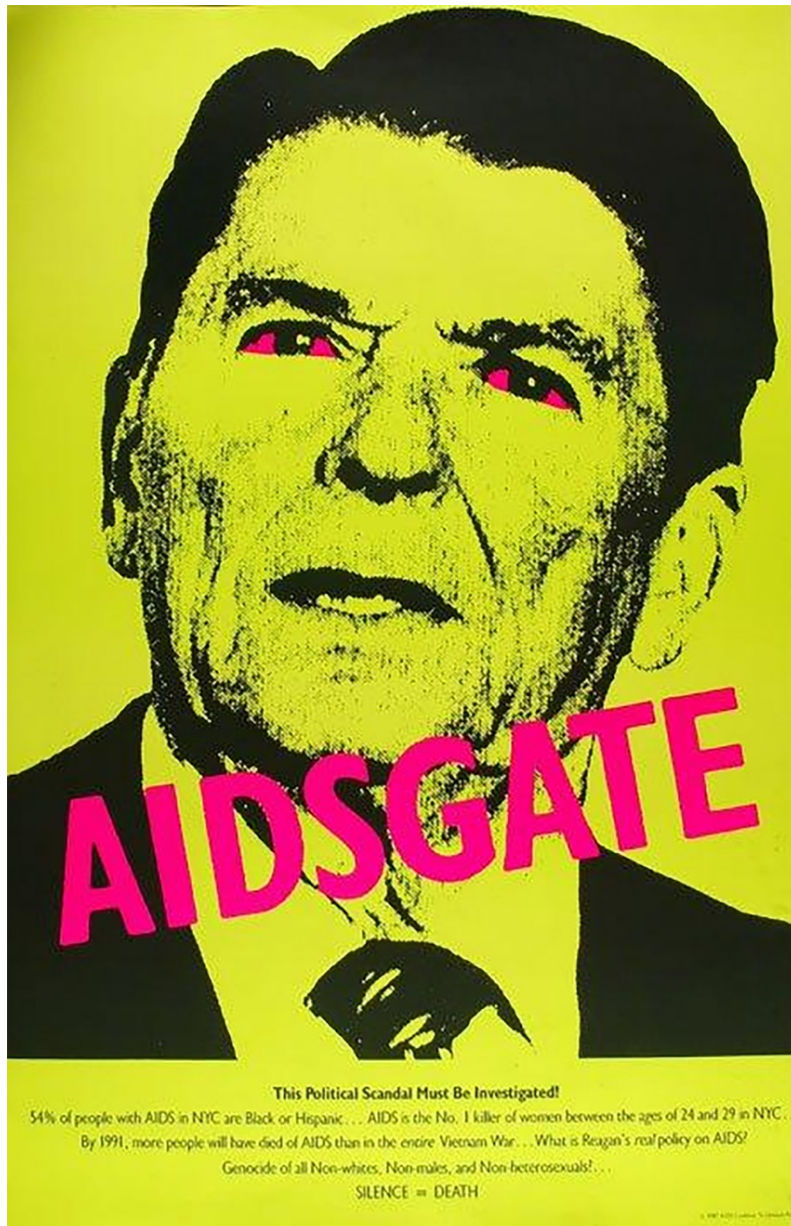


Figure 97. Silence = Death Project, “AIDSGATE” (1987), offset lithography, 34 x 22 in.  
 Source: University of California Press, <https://www.ucpress.edu/blog/31456/behind-the-iconic-protest-posters-of-the-aids-activist-movement/>. Accessed 30 March, 2020.





Figure 98. Avram Finkelstein, "HOME" (2020)

Source: Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=10220799516150443&set=a.3685286283465;>  
 Tinworks Arts, [https://www.tinworksart.org/avram-finkelstein?fbclid=IwAR36Dje-5uBH8MQWmftBdo5BJFT5SeRLqoooRbJvm9IPJHN2B9w4FU\\_mwow](https://www.tinworksart.org/avram-finkelstein?fbclid=IwAR36Dje-5uBH8MQWmftBdo5BJFT5SeRLqoooRbJvm9IPJHN2B9w4FU_mwow). Accessed 30 January, 2021.