

Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Repository

3-27-2020 12:30 PM

Another Possibility: HIV and the Contemporary Moment

Matthew Halse, *The University of Western Ontario*

Supervisor: Franke, Mark F. N., *The University of Western Ontario*

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree
in Theory and Criticism

© Matthew Halse 2020

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/etd>



Part of the [Political Theory Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Halse, Matthew, "Another Possibility: HIV and the Contemporary Moment" (2020). *Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Repository*. 6983.

<https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/etd/6983>

This Dissertation/Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Scholarship@Western. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Repository by an authorized administrator of Scholarship@Western. For more information, please contact wlsadmin@uwo.ca.

Abstract

“Another Possibility: HIV and the Contemporary Moment” addresses possibilities for political participation and HIV activism in a post-antiretroviral world. With advancing medical technologies rendering viral loads undetectable for HIV positive persons and with increasingly prevalent use of pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) as prevention technique for HIV negative persons comes the opportunity for a renewed understanding of the epidemic. Against the grain of nostalgic framings of activism prompted by the immanence of death, this dissertation outlines possibilities for new forms of political participation because of, not in spite of, the becoming-chronic of HIV.

Global movements including U=U (Undetectable = Untransmittable) messaging, referring to the impossibility of transmitting the virus after suppression, and PrEP activism, referring to a medication which prevents HIV negative people from acquiring the virus, provide opportunities for rethinking relationalities between queer bodies. While queer theory is currently wrestling with those relations in sexual terms, this dissertation asks how U=U and PrEP change who is, or more accurately who can be, invited to HIV political participation in the queer North American context. How does undetectability change how queer bodies are imagined—against a historical backdrop of toxicity—in a broader political context and across lines of serostatus? How might participation be understood in a dawning era of ‘gay normalcy’? Termed ‘living before a virus,’ I outline the political implications of reversing the traditional logic of HIV: pill consumption *before* transmission, and the admission of potential viral presence during sex without fear. These two ideas, unimaginable until recently, not only re-place queer bodies in new form(s) of relation, but in obligation to each other ‘before a virus.’

Translating that obligation, however, into a political project is no easy feat. Opportunities for activism presented by U=U and PrEP are dulled by rising economic precarity and a queer political agenda working in tandem with neoliberal economics. “Another Possibility,” within contexts of mass media and the attention economy, the becoming-chronic of HIV, and emergent medical technologies attempts to locate opportunities for participation within the realm of uncertainty. In essence: how does the unknowability of HIV—when HIV is no longer a death sentence, when diverse bodies experience HIV, when media attention to HIV is deliberately confusing, when queer bodies are capitalized—actually lend itself to activism?

“Another Possibility” draws strongly from the work of Jean-Luc Nancy (“The Intruder,” *Being Singular Plural*), Judith Butler (*Giving an Account of Oneself, Dispossession, Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*), and Lauren Berlant (*Cruel Optimism*), as well as a score of emergent young queer thinkers ready to take up the call to ‘rethink HIV.’ “Another Possibility” is deeply rooted in contemporary political theory, particularly new understandings of participation, as it intersects with queer theory, critical race theory, media theory, viral politics, studies on barebacking, performance studies including dance, and queer autobiography.

Key words: HIV, activism, queer theory, Jean-Luc Nancy, Judith Butler, antiretrovirals

Lay Summary

“Another Possibility: HIV and the Contemporary Moment” asks where there are opportunities for renewed HIV activism while taking in to account contemporary economic models, modern medical technologies, and shifting political and communications strategies. Overarchingly, this dissertation sees opportunity for political action because, not in spite, of advances in HIV science that create commonalities between HIV-negative and HIV-positive persons via a shared relationship to the virus.

Beginning with a discussion on intergenerational perceptions of HIV activism, this dissertation argues against nostalgic histories of HIV political organizing as failing to account for conditions of economic precarity and medical technologies that prevent transmission by both positive and negative people. Using theoretical models on the connectedness of bodies, I see the changing conditions of HIV—scientific, economic, as it appears on the body—to not only dispel binary notions of positive and negative but to embrace uncertainty and uncertain relationships to virality as a prompt for action.

Writers and artists considered in this dissertation include Jean-Luc Nancy, Judith Butler, Sean Strub, Hilton Als, and Felix Gozalez-Torres. Themes in this dissertation include generational memory, queer autobiography, political participation, virality, queer sex, and communications campaigns.

Acknowledgements

My deepest gratitude goes to everyone at the Theory Centre at Western University for their kindness, intellectual rigor, and support. In particular, I'd like to thank Dr Mark Franke whose ideas on movement and politics served as the catalyst of this dissertation and who has been exceptionally patient during its writing, and Melanie Caldwell who is the heartbeat of the Theory Centre in more ways than she knows.

During the writing of this dissertation I've had the privilege of working and organizing within the HIV sector across Canada and am deeply indebted to the activists who have shared space with me and who have continuously pushed for a future without HIV. The staff, volunteers, and members of AIDS Community Care Montreal gave me a home to foster this work, and I wholeheartedly dedicate my dissertation to their resilience.

Finally, these pages are for Francois and Chris, who have picked me up more times than I can count. Without their friendship, I would never be writing these words.

Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Lay Summary	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Introduction: Another Possibility.....	1
Chapter One: New Precarities: HIV and the Problem of Generational Memory	24
Chapter Two: Reading HIV	63
Chapter Three: Living Before a Virus (The Fatal, The Chronic, The Intruder)	105
Chapter Four: Against Definition: Risk and Activism in the Attention Economy	153
Chapter Five: The Difficulty of Felix Gonzalez-Torres	175
Conclusion: The Love You Remember	205
Bibliography	210
Vita – Matthew R. Halse.....	221

Introduction: Another Possibility

No, the dead are dead, which is our tragedy and their grandeur.
Edmund White

If we cannot continue our individual humanity in the collective project of humanity, if we cannot imagine a world better than this—and not by means of some spiritual opiate—this world is over. In that case, literature, which is always sent to some reader in the future, will have to renegotiate its modes of participation in human experience. If we ever find ourselves writing only for the present—which would essentially mean that tweeting is all we can do—I would feel absolutely defeated as a human being and a writer.

Teju Cole

There is a well-worn story of HIV—all true, mind you—that permeates queer culture as I know it. This story, of Kaposi’s Sarcoma and ACT UP and Reagan and RENT, has humanized an unhuman epidemic into palatable history, a story the communities I hold dear have ultimately come to accept as their own. The existence of this story, it is worth noting, is made possible only in hindsight. Now that AIDS is old enough to have a history, and now that the apex of death is long gone, we have come to focus on the work of telling this story across various media—shaped, of course, by the norms of modern queer life. The relationship between those acts of telling and the emergence of those norms as they shape our collective futures is the overarching theme of this dissertation. All this while the epidemic continues to rage globally.

What I am calling *the* story of HIV is, in actuality, a constellation of similar accounts that have molded our collective imaginations into believing that HIV activism is a thing rooted in the past: that there were once “emotional intensities provoked by the AIDS crisis,” as Debora Gould puts it, which “influenced in complicated ways lesbians’ and gay men’s political responses to the crisis by shaping how they understood themselves and their world in this moment and thus their

sense of political possibility.”¹ That that sense of possibility within the context of specific times and specific places manifested in one of the greatest feats of activism ever told justifies immense acclaim and tribute. Writes Denis Altman: “the epidemic saw a remarkable burst of creative energy, as thousands of people established organisations designed to educate, lobby, and provide care and support for people living with HIV”.²

But this story implies far more than celebrating activism. In account after account that this dissertation considers, unchecked millennial apathy becomes the target of intergenerational criticism. In the much lauded *When We Rise*, Cleve Jones laments that he “was also disturbed by the new generation of young LGBT people. They seemed apathetic and unconcerned about politics. They didn’t want to talk about AIDS and seemed content to go to clubs, get high, and shop,” and later refers to “a generation with no purpose.”³ Iterations of this sentiment are repeated in colossal numbers throughout cannon of AIDS literature, so much so that the discontinuity of activism and anger from one generation to the next has become woven into the story of AIDS itself. Cleve Jones and his contemporaries do not stop at “AIDS proved us.”⁴ We succeeded and then you failed, they say.

Much is lost in this particular version of contemporary AIDS activism. Not only is the story of HIV our shared history but it is pedagogical in nature, not in mimicry but in ethos. The political acts of yesterday have inspired me and my generation of activists who are currently leading HIV services organizations, engaging key populations, preventing new infections, and fighting for treatment access across the globe. The story of HIV serves as an educational tool to

¹ Deborah B Gould, *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP’s Fight Against AIDS* (Chicago: U Chicago P, 2009), 25-26.

² Dennis Altman, *The End of the Homosexual?* (St Lucia, Queensland: Queensland U P, 2013), 108.

³ Cleve Jones. *When We Rise: My Life in the Movement* (New York: Hachette Books, 2016), 251.

⁴ *Ibid*, 247.

teach new and emerging activists to think intersectionally about HIV as it touches issues of poverty, racism, religion, ability, and genders—even when those stories have neglected such an approach themselves. They also serve as tribute to and archive for those who have stood up for the rights of persons living with HIV since the beginning of the epidemic. Many of the names we know today—David Wojnarowicz and the Lesbian Avengers and Larry Kramer himself—we know through the repetition and pedagogy of the stories as they are told and re-told on pages and screens and stages. Further, there is an ongoing and emergent class of scholars rectifying blind spots within the canon of HIV literature, adding desperately needed accounts from the global south, from trans voices⁵, from women⁶ and from racialized communities⁷. At stake here is not simply a historical framing of the epidemic but the ways in which the future of that epidemic’s response plays out: teaching becomes learning becomes doing. What happens, though, when the story of HIV is claimed as owned by one generation and remains static as the world in which those stories are repeated evolves?

Ownership of how HIV is framed and who is it framed by is itself shaped by contemporary politics. As the narrative of HIV becomes both static and reduced to what Avram Finkelstein calls “mediated storytelling” through repetition of unquestioned and palatable narratives, those very narratives lose both their authenticity and their capacity to serve as guides

⁵ A Canadian favourite is Chase Joynt and Mike Hoolboom’s *You Only Live Twice: Sex, Death, and Transition* (Toronto: Coach House, 2016) which pairs the act of transition of one person to other’s lived experience of HIV. The two lives in the title are the lived genders before and after transition and the transition from being seronegative to seropositive respectively. Of both, Chase writes: “I couldn’t help noticing that for men and women of a certain generation, they had survived their own death” (19).

⁶ See of note Ann Cvetkovich’s *An Archive of Feeling: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham and London: Duke U P, 2003).

⁷ See of note Martin Duberman’s *Hold Tight Gently: Michael Callen, Essex Hemphill, and the Battlefield of AIDS* (New York: The New Press, 2014) and Darnell L. Moore’s *No Ashes in the Fire: Coming of Age Black and Free in America* (New York: Nation Books, 2018). Interestingly, both engage living with or being at risk of HIV through the framework(s) of family and friendship, and both are deeply informed by issues of class.

for future activism.⁸ The resurgence of recent interest in HIV, both academically and in popular culture, has become adopted by an institutionalized media landscape where “we appear to have forgotten, or have adapted to, the many ways the story of HIV/AIDS has been absorbed, colonized, and modified by institutional telling of it, an evolutionary process that has bent how we visualize the political, social, and cultural dimensions of it from its recognizable form.”⁹ Thus a byproduct of what Finkelstein terms AIDS 2.0 is a race to who owns *the* story, who was the biggest hero, and which of those stories may live on in popular media and scholarly archives. The entrenchment of HIV stories within contemporary capitalism and economic precarity is a topic I will return to several times in this dissertation; note here that Finkelstein reminds us that “while history is one of the methods of conceptualizing resistance, history is also capital, and capitalism has a way of unhinging history from the meaning of the political agency behind it.”¹⁰

Meaning, within the contexts of history generally and within HIV specifically, must be conceptualized as fluid. Not only is there no single narrative arc that can properly capture the history of an epidemic whose versions far exceed the number of infections, but the contexts by which we must frame our contemporary HIV epidemic must not become obfuscated by previous incarnations. HIV still exists. AIDS still exists. If we become reliant on static, crystalized stories of the generation of activists that precede us that do not account for how HIV operates within our contemporary world then the end of HIV will never arrive. That, for me, is one of the greatest tragedies of my generation. In our contemporary moment, we have a real need for a return to HIV activism that reflects modern medical interventions, diverse voices, and frames the epidemic within current economic and political realities. These realities are not linked solely to

⁸ Avram Finkelstein, *After Silence: A History of AIDS Through its Images* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018), 3.

⁹ Ibid, 6-7.

¹⁰ Ibid, 56-57.

HIV itself: as the epidemic rages in certain quarters, our reactions to HIV must intersect with racism, poverty, global warming, economic precarity, social networking, mass migration, drug policy changes, harm reduction techniques, social and political debates around sex work, and much more.¹¹

Writes Finkelstein: “Resistance is not a thing, or an object, or even an objective. It’s a project, and it can’t be acquired. It can only be activated, and while it dies the second we cease participation in it, it needs no endpoint to express its efficacy because it’s immediately reborn when someone else takes it up.”¹² My point thus far is that the project of resisting HIV is ongoing, and the stories that call for participation of my generation in fact defy the very logic of their telling: that yesterday’s call to action as it is currently told in fact fosters the very apathy it intends to operate against. The project of HIV is far from over, but we need to collectively know where to look and how to act.¹³ We need stories of HIV activism that speak to, not against, our contemporary political moment. *Another Possibility* is my intervention within that conversation: how can we give value to the history of AIDS while thinking and acting beyond it?

Thens and Nows

¹¹ This sentiment is echoed in an important (and recent) intervention into HIV policy debates in Canada. Writes the authors: “Social policy responses to HIV have largely failed to address the ultimate drivers of the epidemic: poverty, racism, homophobia, and other complex, intersecting forms of social exclusion and structural inequities that make some people more vulnerable to HIV. Consequently, some populations—mainly ethno-racial and sexual minorities—continue to be disproportionately affected by HIV and to experience significant challenges in accessing appropriate services and supports.” “Introduction” in Michael Orsini, Suzanne Hindmarch, and Marilou Gagnon’s *Seeing Red: HIV/AIDS and Public Policy in Canada* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2018), 4-5.

¹² *Ibid.*, xii.

¹³ David Romàn engages with this problem differently than I do. In “Not-About-AIDS,” he writes that “Given these different meanings, claims for the end of AIDS and a post-AIDS discourse might be best understood not as markers of a definitive and identifiable moment of closure but as the latest developments in the discursive history of AIDS. Both the ‘end of AIDS’ and the post-AIDS discourse participate in a larger social phenomenon that encourages us to believe that the immediate concerns facing contemporary American culture, including queer culture, are not-about-AIDS.” Could ‘end of AIDS’ discourse merely be a stage in the arc of AIDS activism? One that calls to attention the attendant issues of HIV that this dissertation invites activism to (re-)address? See David Romàn, “Not-about-AIDS” in *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* (6.1, 2000): 6.

When suffering is humanized, writes Adam Gopnik, it results in “an open acceptance of the minority unprecedented in human history.”¹⁴ The effects of rendering queer life palatable to the mainstream have long been debated in LGBT studies departments—at far greater length than can be summarized here—and have played a significant role in drawing mainstream sympathy and clout to HIV as a political issue; in the words of Douglas Crimp, the ostensible goal is to shift “the discussion of AIDS from one dominated by a punitive moralism to one directed toward combating a public health emergency.”¹⁵ Thus between Gopnik and Crimp we see a double benefit to mainstream narratives: practical support, in this case in the sense of public health funding, including prevention initiatives and support programs, and an emergent compassion made available only after blame is set aside.¹⁶

Among queer theory’s strengths over the last three decades has been a thorough thinking through, and more often than not a repudiation, of the costs to queerness, queer sex, and non-normative sexualities once such acceptance is granted by the mainstream; I pause on two such related forms of intervention to demonstrate the scope of perspectives within such debates.¹⁷ One cluster of theorists considers sexuality within the framework of neoliberal economics, or more specifically what Wendy Brown terms the economization of “heretofore noneconomic spheres and practices,” translated in this case as non-normative sexualities once beyond the reach of

¹⁴ Adam Gopnik, *At the Strangers’ Gate: Arrivals in New York* (New York and Toronto: Alfred A Knopf, 2017), 95.

¹⁵ Douglas Crimp, “Right On, Girlfriend!” in Michael Warner, ed., *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory* (Minneapolis and London: U Minnesota P, 1993), 303.

¹⁶ There has been much said about HIV and blame, though none better than Susan Sontag who writes that “descriptions of how the virus does it works continue to echo the way the illness is perceived as infiltrating society” and “A whole politics of ‘the will’—of intolerance, of paranoia, of fear of political weakness—has fastened on this disease.” From Susan Sontag’s *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors* (New York: Picador, 1988), 107 and 151.

¹⁷ Interestingly, Canadian queer theorist Terry Goldie defines Queer Theory as “an intellectual position that acclaims the ultimate instability of all received assumptions about gender and sexuality,” indicating above all else the instability of fixed positions within these debates. As I will show later in this introduction in throughout this dissertation, fixed positions about politics are a dangerous game. Terry Goldie, *queersexlife* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2008), 9.

neoliberalism.¹⁸ The idea here is that sexuality becomes subsumed under economic models whose power lies within governmental and corporate interests: radical sexuality, in these cases, becomes impossible as queer and trans folks generally and gay men specifically become invited into and regulated by capitalist markets. We only need to turn to *RuPaul's Drag Race* to see high net worth corporate sponsors tripping over themselves to capitalize on drag and vogue culture; flipping through any edition of *Out* or *The Advocate* one sees attractive men selling beer and airline tickets. I return at length to the implications of queer economic precarity within neoliberal forms of capitalism on HIV activism in my first chapter.

A second line of thought identifies the successes and pitfalls of social, as opposed to economic, assimilation. The LGBT march toward equality is paired with heterosexuality's march toward LGBT people, best captured in works like Lillian Faderman's *The Gay Revolution* whose chapters include "How Lesbians and Gays Stopped Being Sex Criminals."¹⁹ (Notice, rhetorically, the possible assumptions 'sex criminals' incurs: that social acceptability forces a line between sex and criminality, or a line between when we were criminals and when we were not, or that those very act(s) of lesbian and gay sex are criminal at all. This line of thought is echoed by Ted McCaskell, whose own writing on Canadian queer history charts "a particular trajectory, from a homophobic nation to homonationalism."²⁰) Marriage equality, the right to serve in the military, and forms of social acceptance dependent on equivocal understandings of hetero- and homosexuality ("we are all human!") dominate this discourse.

Interestingly, a recent book by Martin Duberman titled *Has the Gay Movement Failed?* identifies a definitive divide between a small number of vocal activists and academics which

¹⁸ Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (New York: Zone Books, 2015), 31.

¹⁹ Lillian Faderman, *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2015), 537-551.

²⁰ Tim McCaskell, *Queer Progress: From Homophobia to Homonationalism* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2016), 2.

denounce assimilation while acknowledging that a silent majority of contemporary gays and lesbians (the work is telling in its silence on trans rights and the opinions of gender diverse folks) who remain “grateful” at bestowed acceptance.²¹ This divide is important within the context of HIV as there is a telling distance between an emergent canon of LGBT literature, the aspirations of activists, and on-the-ground needs of LGBT folks across the global north for whom that literature and those activists ostensibly represent. Leo Bersani writes that “our insistence on having the right to marry has helped to make us more acceptable to straight people by allowing them to think that we have the same conjugal dreams as they do.”²² We do not. When it comes to queer sexuality, the difference between image portrayed and reality itself indicates that the story we tell about LGBT history and the actualities of queer sexuality are two different things. This, in itself, has major implications for the story of HIV.

Two critiques of contemporary queer and trans sexualities vis-à-vis normative publics elucidate what is at stake in such debates. Consider first Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner’s seminal essay “Sex in Public,” which pinpoints acts of radical queer sexuality against a backdrop of heteronormativity: they describe “a constellation of practices that everywhere disperses heterosexual privilege as a tacit but central organizing index of social membership.”²³ If heterosexual family units and patriotic belonging—think Uncle Sam or the desire by gays and lesbians to serve in militaries—determine the capacity of individuals to belong to the culture(s) and public(s) in which they live, then for Berlant and Warner there also exist correlative queer countercultures and counterpublics within, but not belonging to, those very places. They write:

²¹ Martin Duberman, *Has the Gay Movement Failed?* (Oakland: U California Press, 2018), 14.

²² Leo Bersani, “Shame on You” in Janet Halley, Andrew Parker, eds, *After Sex? On Writing Since Queer Theory* (Durham and London: Duke U P, 2011), 92.

²³ Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, “Sex in Public” in Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2005), 195.

By queer culture we mean a world-making project, where world, like public, differs from community or group because it necessarily includes more people than can be identified, more spaces than can be mapped beyond a few reference points, modes of feeling that can be learned rather than experienced as birthright. The queer world is a space of entrances, exits, unsystematized lines of acquaintance, projected horizons, typifying examples, alternate routes, blockages, incommensurate geographies. World making, as much in the mode of dirty talk as of print-mediated representation, is dispersed through incommensurate registers, by definition *unrealizable* as community or identity.²⁴

There is an ambiguity here pertaining to the form of queerness assumed and yet a certainty about queer countercultural existence: queer culture emerges as sometimes unintelligible, sometimes “unsystematized” narratives that at once create new worlds that are very real for the participants but very much apart from dominant publics that govern our world.²⁵ When, returning to Gopnik, acceptance indicates entering a world of normativity, Berlant and Warner indicate the existence of simultaneous, reactionary worlds. This, for the intentions of this dissertation, is the space of activism.

Leo Bersani’s “Gay Betrayals,” my second example, hinges on the paradoxes of the fight for gay assimilation. Bersani argues “that the unprecedented gay visibility of recent years has been accompanied by a willed invisibility on the part of those presumably most anxious to make themselves visible.”²⁶ In effect, the race to normalization connotes a willed invisibility (or at

²⁴ Ibid, 198. Italics theirs.

²⁵ This sentiment is echoed in various forms, including a stream of Queer Theory focused on queer temporality. Writes Judith (Jack) Halberstam: “Queer subcultures produce alternative temporalities by allowing their participants to believe that their futures can be imagined according to logics that lie outside of those paradigmatic markers of life experience—namely, birth, marriage, reproduction, and death.” Where Berlant and Warner understand the “logics” of heteronormativity in terms of narratives that make up public (and thus also constitute counterpublics), world-making in Halberstam occurs in the form of alternative senses of time and different imagined futures. Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York and London: New York U P, 2005), 2.

²⁶ Leo Bersani, “Gay Betrayals”, in *Is the Rectum a Grave? And Other Essays* (Chicago and London: U Chicago P, 2010), 37.

least a willed rendering invisible)—‘live and let live’—which dulls the various and unique attributes through which counterpublics are formed in the first place. Bersani continues:

In richly troubled fashion, queers have at once empowered and invalidated identitarian politics. And by simultaneously proclaiming pride in a gay and lesbian community and making that community essentially unidentifiable, queer thinkers have brought into sharper focus than ever before the problematic nature of what we nevertheless continue to take for granted: the very notion and value of community itself.²⁷

Consider this argument within the context of our discussion of HIV activism. As it relates to “identitarian politics,” HIV activism paradoxically requires both a tangible LGBTQ community from which that activism emerges *and*, again channeling Gopnik, an acceptance from the mainstream for which that activism gains the traction that ultimately erases the formation of a tangible LGBTQ community. A no-win situation, made worse by Bersani’s later assertion that the principal aim of homophobia is exactly this form of erasure: thus homophobia and activism through identity politics and the normalization of queerness share far too much in common. Concludes Bersani: “An acceptance, a promotion of a certain homosexual specificity may be necessary in order for us to be as dangerous culturally, and ultimately politically, as many of us would like to be.”²⁸

I wholeheartedly accept Bersani’s call for queer specificity and Warner and Berlant’s identification of queer world making projects emerging from queer and trans counterpublics and countercultures. I reject, though, that these worlds—in effect, the desire of the stories we’ve come to tell about HIV—must derive from forms of queerness and forms of activism that no longer ring true. World making, as I will later hope to show, can derive from future, yet-to-be-formed contexts: in effect, other possibilities. The dearth of available materials created by and for a newer generation of activists to this effect is telling. Our collective capacity to respond to

²⁷ Ibid, 38.

²⁸ Ibid, 39.

HIV beyond the status quo—basic service provisions, World AIDS Day events with dwindling attendance—risks extinction. While this dissertation will examine some new activity, including AIDS Action Now’s Poster Virus campaign in chapter one and the U=U Prevention Access Campaign in chapter four, the goal of *Another Possibility* is to invite participation into thinking differently.

I have mentioned two important uses for activist nostalgia within the context of HIV: to commemorate heroes and movements over the past four decades of the epidemic and to learn, within their social and political contexts, from the various actions which constitute that heroism. There is much to learn. But when arguments boil down to then-and-now versions of AIDS history, where one is clearly ‘good’ and the other insufficient, then all that remains are ideas without context or referent. For nostalgic arguments which rely on irretrievable heydays of AIDS activism, that is to say forms of activism deemed correct that current generations must relocate or reproduce, are premised on continuous, singular understandings of AIDS: that the response to an AIDS-then could respond to an AIDS-now. That is dangerously untrue. The contexts through which HIV is understood have vastly altered even within the last half-decade: through the advent of pre-exposure prophylaxis or PrEP²⁹, post-exposure prophylaxis³⁰, the U=U movement³¹, the rise of supervised injection sites, ongoing debates about the legalization of sex work, ongoing

²⁹ PrEP, often known under the brand-name Truvada, is a fixed-dose combination of emtricitabine and tenofovir which when taken properly by someone who is HIV negative prevents the acquisition of HIV. For an excellent example of PrEP activism in Canada, see the AIDS Committee of Toronto’s “PrEP School”: <http://hivnow.ca/what-is-prep/>.

³⁰ Post-Exposure Prophylaxis is a 30-day antiviral treatment taken by HIV-negative people to reduce the risk of HIV transmission after a possible exposure. See the Canadian AIDS Treatment Information Exchange’s (CATIE’s) fact-sheet on PEP: <https://www.catie.ca/fact-sheets/prevention/post-exposure-prophylaxis-pep>.

³¹ U=U, or Undetectable = Untransmittable, is a campaign endorsed by various global health authorities, governments, and community-based organizations which states that if someone who is living with HIV takes their medication daily for at least six months and maintains an undetectable viral load then they cannot pass on the virus to their partners. The U=U campaign is the subject of my fourth chapter. See the Prevention Access Campaign, which is credited with beginning the U=U movement: <https://www.preventionaccess.org/>.

debates about the legalization of drugs, and increases in trans rights both nationally and internationally.

Activism, queer world making, and non-normative sexualities as theoretical constructs and objects of academic inquiry remain pertinent to this day. However, it is their manifestation—how they emerge in the contemporary moment of HIV—that must change. Activism must exist in the realm of the possible, not in the process of a concretized past. Then and now are premises of specious comparison.

Positives and Negatives

Another set of perils in considering HIV politics must be considered: differences in calls for engagement to, from, and between HIV positive and HIV negative persons. Specifically, that is, how the call to participation manifests for or is interpreted by serodiscordant people, particularly as that invitation to participation intersects with health, policy, economics, sex, and politics.

No understanding of HIV would be complete without addressing the attendant issues that drive the epidemic today—poverty, inequality, the social determinants of health, racism—which would sadly remain intact if a cure for HIV were discovered tomorrow. Failing to address such issues in tandem to the medical epidemic of HIV would in effect fail to solve our broader understanding of HIV as a social and political problem, thus undermining any notion of cure at all.³² This is important for two reasons: first, any ambitions for HIV activism that fail to include

³² CATIE, or the Canadian AIDS Treatment Information Exchange, once again serves as the best source for a Canadian discussion on the social determinants of health, including the impact of poverty on HIV prevalence in

the attendant issues surrounding the epidemic automatically disserve affected communities. For example, an HIV services organization which does not include an anti-oppressive or anti-racist approach in its strategic plan would fail to provide and deliver programming that address the sum issues any client would experience. Second, any related narrative or history of HIV which does not include ongoing interactions with such political and economic issues not only obfuscates the realities of HIV but harms our capacity to tackle root causes, thereby inhibiting prevention efforts and access to support. This is particularly harmful in cases where social supports and access to healthcare are needed to render someone living with HIV undetectable (so that they suppress viral replication, remain healthy, and cannot pass the virus on to others). This last point is the subject of my fourth chapter.

A secondary consideration of this dissertation is the division of labour in HIV activism, particularly as divided between HIV positive and HIV negative folks. Chapter three takes up this discussion in relation to queer bodies and serostatus, specifically the relation between bodies, viruses, and medical interventions, what I've termed in that chapter 'living before a virus' as implied by the relationship between undetectability in positive bodies and pre-exposure prophylaxis in negative bodies. My call in chapter three is for a return to participatory HIV politics beyond serostatus as a result of demonstrating sero-proximity between people on treatment and those who use medical forms of prevention. To contextualize that argument, and to build a call to participation with my desire to reframe HIV narratives to instigate activism within the context of contemporary economics, it may be helpful to delineate some attendant issues in discussing labour in HIV response.

Canada. See: "The Structural Determinants of Health and Structural Interventions" in their introductory guide to HIV for clinicians: <https://www.catie.ca/en/hiv-canada/8/8-1>.

Decisions pertaining to a group of people need to be self-determined; that is, no decisions that determine the conditions of people living with HIV can be made without the direct participation and leadership of people living with HIV. This call for participation is made most overtly in what is now known as the Denver Principles which “condemned attempts to label people with AIDS as ‘victims’ and urged people with AIDS to assert control over their own healthcare.”³³ The shift from victimhood to decision-maker is important not only in relation to stigma but in terms of how HIV service organizations, public health units, and educational campaigns are run: as the popular saying goes, ‘nothing about us without us.’

While people living with HIV must assume space(s) to lead HIV response, the labour of that response should not, and must not, fall solely on the shoulders of those who are HIV positive. HIV literature vastly charts the decrease in HIV activism, particularly by HIV negative people, following the discovery of triple therapy in 1996 wherein HIV became a manageable chronic condition as opposed to a death sentence. The result, broadly speaking, has been an ignorance (or active avoidance) of HIV as a political issue by HIV negative people, and the weaning of attention given by politicians, media, and service providers to HIV as a social cause over the past two decades. This is exacerbated remarkably as HIV marginalization grows through economic disparity across two separate fronts: first, as LGBT people generally secure access to middle-class lives, folks living with or at risk of HIV become increasingly sidelined as middle-class gays and lesbians turn their political energies to issues such as marriage. Writing about HIV policy in Canada, prominent activists Suzanne Hindmarch, Michael Orsini, and Marilou Gagnon write of an “HIV/AIDS policy landscape characterized by persistent marginalization and inequity, in which we are still struggling, some thirty years into the epidemic, to meaningfully

³³ Gould, *Moving Politics*, 68.

address the ultimate drivers of HIV that leave some people and communities, through complex processes of social exclusion, more vulnerable to HIV.”³⁴ My argument here is that, again broadly speaking, one mainstream group of LGBT people is headed to economic prosperity at the cost of marginalizing another, leaving those others more vulnerable to HIV. As a result, those vulnerable to HIV or those who have contracted HIV often, though not always, become the exclusive bearers of care and activism surrounding the epidemic. Second, as HIV continues to become chronic and treatable—often without any visible signs of HIV written on the body, the subject of my second chapter—the urgency of life-or-death street activism is replaced by sluggish policy approaches requiring specific knowledge and greater time commitments. This ends up niching those activists who take up HIV’s call. We should also note that in many jurisdictions, too, access to medication for treatment and prevention is determined by formulary coverage, the availability of healthcare, co-payment programs (including in Ontario and Quebec), and clinical guidelines which further divide healthcare options provided to HIV negative people from their positive counterparts.

Most importantly, while my overarching project in *Another Possibility* is to expand the invitation for participation within HIV politics and to tailor that invitation (and those politics) to the contemporary medical and economic realities of the epidemic, ongoing stigma and the self-shattering break of an HIV diagnosis cannot be minimized. For David Caron, in his excellent *The Nearness of Others*, the bridge between positive and negative gay men is experienced differently depending on your serostatus: “When you’re HIV positive you also know what it feels like to be HIV negative. You remember it. This HIV-negative, healthy body that was once yours is still

³⁴ Hindmarch, Orsini, and Gagnon, *Seeing Red*, 335.

somehow with you or near you but no longer you, not really.”³⁵ For Caron, there is an added layer of knowledge to living with HIV insofar as you understand your body pre- and post-exposure to the virus, a level of knowledge impossible for an HIV negative person to comprehend. This gap, in part, is why policies like the Denver Principles are so crucial to HIV response. Interestingly, Caron extends that divide in knowledge across temporal lines: “When HIV-negative guys and I relate to one another, I see my past and they see their possible future.”³⁶ Though past and future are experienced within a present moment of relation in which Caron identifies a break in the relational capacity between two different bodies, *Another Possibility* approaches that moment of relation from a different angle: with the potential for exchange, not in the sense of dialogue but as possible solidarity; Caron identifies irreconcilably different temporal wavelengths where this dissertation understands that difference to place both bodies, at that moment of recognition, in relation to a virus.³⁷

The very meaning of serostatus, as previously mentioned, must be called into question as advances in HIV treatments continue to change the ways in which HIV diagnoses medically impacts bodies. Someone living with HIV today, in combination with access to proper care and

³⁵ David Caron, *The Nearness of Others: Searching for Tact and Contact in the Age of HIV* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 111.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 111.

³⁷ Finklestein has a different approach to this particular problem. He writes: In the activist community, we know everyone was at risk, and that knowledge allowed for solidarity, at least in the circles I traveled in. It was unconscionable to draw a line around any one of us, since that line was exceedingly permeable. After HIV was isolated and testing protocols developed, however, boundaries began to be fortified around the real and imagined distinctions between seropositive and seronegative, HIV positive and ARC, ARC and AIDS. Fair enough that the language around the science of HIV was in flux, but its rhetorical implications for our social affinities were crystallizing, even within activist circles. It did not take long for the primary tenet of the Denver Principles—that the interests of People with AIDS (PWAs) should be self-determined—to inadvertently solidify in the form of hierarchies that impacted the commonality that led to ACT UP in the first place: the idea that each and every one of us is living with HIV. So I watched in panic as the wall went up all around me, and although it started out as thin as a cellular membrane, it quickly toughened to sinew through constant exercise, on both sides of the viral divide.” Avram Finklestein, 189.

other quality of life factors, can expect to achieve normal life expectancy.³⁸ Further, someone living with HIV who adheres to daily medication and achieves suppression cannot pass on this virus to their partners.³⁹ Further still, someone who is HIV negative and is taking pre-exposure prophylaxis, or PrEP, greatly reduces their likelihood of seroconversion despite potential HIV exposures.⁴⁰ As such, HIV is now a chronic condition, which is to say HIV persists but it is something ‘lived with’ as opposed to ‘lived in spite of.’

Herein lies the crux of my doctoral project. If, as writes Avram Finkelstein, “HIV/AIDS slowly began transitioning into a muted version of its former self and the world began seeing it as a part of the past,”⁴¹ and if the story of that past is being applied to contemporary HIV politics, and if political action continues to be essential to ending HIV as a global epidemic, then the ongoing project of HIV activism requires an invitation to participation contextualized through, not in spite of, the contemporary moment. This is precisely why intergenerational criticisms are detrimental to HIV politics, and why social interventions which isolate HIV from economic issues and the social determinants of health are not only unhelpful but will fail in their goal of ending HIV.

³⁸ REALIZE, a Canadian non-profit working at the intersections of HIV, aging, and rehabilitation, is the Canadian authority on aging well with HIV. See: <https://www.realizecanada.org/en/our-work/hiv-and-aging/aging-with-hiv/>.

³⁹ The PARTNER Study is a large-scale European multi-site study of condomless sex between serodiscordant couples where the HIV-positive partner is on antiretroviral therapy and has maintained viral suppression. The study concludes: “Among serodifferent heterosexual and MSM couples in which the HIV-positive partner was using suppressive ART and who reported condomless sex, during median follow-up of 1.3 years per couple, there were no documented cases of within-couple HIV transmission (upper 95% confidence limit, 0.30/100 couple-years of follow-up). Additional longer-term follow-up is necessary to provide more precise estimates of risk.” Though other studies have reached the same conclusion, the PARTNER study is widely regarded as the authoritative basis of U=U. See Allison J Rodger, Valentina Cambiano, and Tina Bruun, et al., in *JAMA* 316.2 (2016): 171-181.

⁴⁰ PrEP advocacy in Canada is extremely strong and has often been combined with treatment advocacy, not least by the Gay Men’s Sexual Health (GMSH)’s “The Sex You Want Campaign” who write “PrEP is a daily pill that can stop HIV from establishing itself in the body. It’s really exciting because it’s another way for HIV-negative guys to prevent HIV while having the sex they want.” See: <https://thesexyouwant.ca/prep/>.

⁴¹ Finkelstein, 203.

Another Possibility

Summing up HIV into palatable narratives forecloses the possibility of our ending the epidemic. Because no narrative can include the multitude of individual experiences generated by the epidemic, and because the changing course of the epidemic has occurred itself within changing political and economic spheres, the story that we've come to tell ourselves about HIV has come to serve a version of the past at the expense of an HIV-free future. Black activist Darnell Moore writes that "our humanity is illuminated by our brokenness as much as it is by our capacity to put ourselves back together over and over again."⁴² What would it mean, this dissertation asks, to constantly rebuild our HIV activism based on place and person and context?

It is not lost on me that the writing of this dissertation risks the very forms of blindness of which I accuse static understandings of HIV. Writes Francisco Cantu: "there is the naivety that so often grips people who are young and idealistic, causing us to overestimate ourselves and underestimate institutions of power, allowing us to believe that we might work to change them from within, that by witnessing the violence they perpetuate, we might learn to subvert it without participating in it ourselves."⁴³ That (naïve) idealism—the youth part is sadly fleeting—brought me to HIV activism in the first place: a desire to foster political activation among HIV-negative gay men and to (re-)center HIV narratives within my LGBTQ communities. In the years it took to write *Another Possibility*, I have served in LGBT groups, academic institutions, led an HIV services organization, and worked on behalf of HIV pharma. I've been fortunate to have a widespread and, occasionally, unique view of HIV in Canada. But in many ways, this

⁴² Darnell L Moore, *No Ashes in the Fire: Coming of Age Black and Free in America* (New York: Nation Books, 2018), dedication page.

⁴³ Francisco Cantu, *The Line Becomes a River* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2018), 251.

dissertation has served as a grappling with the limits of my own work, both from personal and professional perspectives, including my own doubts about the forms of activism I and others have assumed. *Another Possibility* is equally an academic and an individual grappling with rethinking what HIV actually means. The goal here is to understand HIV as a moving target with indefinite ways of understanding how it impacts lives and policies and bodies in a way that we remain, always, critical of contemporary approaches.

My biggest learning in the intervening years since I began working in the field of HIV is that political acts, themselves sometimes but not always acts of resistance, are intangible. No policy put in place, no funds secured, no minds changed can be viewed as milestones. Instead, we must understand each act as having already occurred within a given context that has come to pass. Activism is an ongoing project, a proactive process that dreams of other possibilities of thinking, acting, governing, and being. Each achievement—though they should be celebrated—exists in a political context now past. This is why no static story of HIV can exist; this is why economic and political realities must constantly be re-evaluated. Writes Finkelstein: “Resistance is not a thing, or an object, or even an objective. It’s a project, and it can’t be acquired. It can only be activated, and while it dies the second we cease participation in it, it needs no endpoint to express its efficacy because it’s immediately reborn when someone else takes it up.”⁴⁴ Someone may take it up, but they must in my opinion take it up within the new world they have created.

The title of this dissertation, *Another Possibility*, is inspired by an essay of the same title by philosopher Catherine Malabou. “There is another possibility”: Malabou reads Jacques Derrida’s final words as a phrase conjugatable into every tense. To adopt this sentence at face value in validation not only of queer health and activism but of ‘living with’ HIV would be both

⁴⁴ Finkelstein, xiii.

simplistic and entirely correct. Malabou goes on to extract possibility (in all of its meanings) from Derrida's texts in homage to her former teacher, but the beauty of her essay and her gift to queer theory lies in its basic promise:

There is another possibility. In the future, it signifies: another order of things may come, even if one can't 'see it coming.' The other possibility is the absolute arrival. Derrida also gives the name 'promise' to this 'arrival.'

There is another possibility. In the past it signifies: that which has been, all of our history, could have happened otherwise. A wholly other possibility could have guided time. Other events could have occurred that would have constituted another tradition. This concept of possibility is not that of the possible, which is connected to necessity or actuality in the history of philosophy. The wholly other possibility would be that which no other category could correspond to, neither the necessary nor the actual nor even the impossible.⁴⁵

Both "of things may come" and "could have happened otherwise" signify not corrective action—a past that needn't be had we done things differently or a future that arrives through changes we may now assume—but a wholly other realm dissociated from the tangible world. Aligned with our discussion of queer world making, and placed beside Michael O'Rourke's imperative that "the bringing into being of roguish queer worlds won't wait," Malabou gives us our definition of possibility: something that we cannot see coming but may eventually emerge.⁴⁶ From this also derives my understanding of activism which forms the basis of my overarching project. Activism is not housekeeping; it does not serve to repair a broken world. Activism thinks of the otherwise. Activism invites participation that will reshape its form with each new voice. Activism may engage with contemporary conditions, but it looks far beyond them to what each activist cannot yet see. Yet.

This project begins with a discussion of intergenerational tensions within HIV activism, drawing out the stakes of both intergenerational criticism(s) and how young activists may dream

⁴⁵ Catherine Malabou, "Another Possibility" in *Research in Phenomenology* (2006: 36): 115-116.

⁴⁶ Michael O'Rourke, *Queer Insists* (New York: Punctum, 2014), 26.

of better worlds yet to come. (Of that note, ‘better worlds’ cannot simply connote cure. That world must include the eradication of the social and political drivers of HIV including but not limited to poverty, the criminalization of drugs, racism, sex stigma, and access to food, housing, and healthcare.) In “New Precarities: HIV and the Problem of Generational Memory,” I begin to evaluate the changing economic contexts in which HIV exists to demonstrate not only the need to pivot the ways in which HIV activism manifests itself but how we might go about intersecting such activism with discussion of precarity, gender, and class.

My second chapter, “Reading HIV,” backtracks to historically chart the terms in which folks living with HIV, through autobiography, have used to describe themselves, HIV treatment, and the course of the epidemic. My argument here is twofold: that HIV is intractably linked to self-subjectivity and how those senses of self have changed over time is ultimately linked to how we may re-frame our politics. Further, and perhaps more importantly, autobiography allows us to center the voices of people living with HIV in our discussion. This chapter equally challenges static portrayals of HIV—the risk in considering autobiography since autobiography by definition considers a single viewpoint from a single moment in time—through parsing personal experience with what Lee Edelman terms the resistance of HIV to writing. He argues:

“AIDS”... resists our attempts to inscribe it as a manageable subject of writing—exceeding and eluding the medical, sociological, political, or literary discourses that variously attempt to confront or engage it—to the extent that as an historical phenomenon in the so-called Western democracies it has itself taken shape—has been given shape—as that which writes or articulates another subject altogether: a subject whose content is suggested but not exhausted by reference to “male homosexuality.” The discursive field of “AIDS” thus unfolds as a landscape of displacements, and given those displacements and the slipperiness of the subject, every effort to resist ideological enforcement in one place carries with it the threat of resowing the seeds of ideological coercion in another.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Lee Edelman. *Homographesis* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 94.

Tracing displacements and considering HIV as a ‘slippery’ subject permits individual perspective such as autobiography and individual stories of activism mentioned above while at the same time acknowledging HIV as a subject whose reach far exceeds our grasp. This in part confronts narratives which assume to be *the* narrative of HIV, but fails to answer how individuals may confront the virus in productive ways.

Chapter three, “Living Before a Virus,” takes up that call. With certain caveats, I consider sexual risk taking, the becoming-chronic of HIV, and medical interventions to demonstrate how queer male bodies, regardless of serostatus, must engage with HIV. From the shared medicines of PrEP and HIV treatment to shared sexual risks, I bend commonalities of HIV across lines of serostatus to create an open call for HIV political participation. If calls to action in “Living Before a Virus” are medically created, then chapter four, “Against Definition: Risk and Activism in the Attention Economy,” extends those calls through theories of protest and assembly. Rooted in the widespread U=U campaign, currently running in 97 countries at the time of this writing, and with substantive consideration to Judith Butler’s most recent work on theories of assembly, I argue in this chapter against a return to HIV protest from the beginning of the epidemic—that to which intergenerational criticisms long to have returned—in favour of a call to intersectional forms of HIV activism across divisions of sexualities and geographies.

Finally, in chapter five, the work of Felix Gonzalez-Torres, known best for his work *Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)* (1991), serves as my strongest example of the form of participatory politics this dissertation longs for. Gonzalez-Torres’s artistic installations create openings, I argue, for HIV activism not only across lines of identity and geography but within given economic and political contexts. Most importantly, Gonzalez-Torres actively encourages his participants to blend the artist’s own experiences (Ross, for example, was his lover who died

of AIDS) with their own dreams of a better future—participants take and eat from a pile of candy totaling Ross’s body weight, experiencing Ross in ways they see fit. The work of Gonzalez-Torres actively prohibits definitive readings and serves as a guidepost to the forms of activism that, I hope, will end HIV.

Having defined activism as a form of possibility, this dissertation weaves through potential invitations to HIV responses—in the plural in the absence of a single, proper form of politics. I haven’t always been sure of why, or where, my own activism took genesis. Early in my coming out, I read Edmund White’s *The Farewell Symphony* from which the quote that begins this introduction derives. Named after Haydn’s 45th symphony, in which each player snuffs out their candle and exits leaving but a single violinist on stage, White’s novel leaves its speaker living after losing all his friends. He writes: “the dead are dead, which is our tragedy and their grandeur.” HIV narratives honour that grandeur. HIV activism asks of tragedy: what are we going to do about it?

Chapter One: New Precarities: HIV and the Problem of Generational Memory

Queers are queer because we recognize that we have survived our own deaths.

Peggy Phelan

Though the mutual imbrication of HIV and queer ontology is difficult to overemphasize, it may ultimately prove impossible to locate: this not only in the service of an argument of HIV's vast diffusion into our queer cultural imaginary, but additionally in acknowledgement of the significance of HIV as always already moving, one step beyond our intellectual grasp. The ubiquity of the epidemic is such that, whether acknowledged or not, HIV has come to redefine and redetermine the very meaning of queerness itself—in our approaches to sex, healthcare, our lobbying efforts, our capacity to celebrate our victories and to experience our common mourning. If we accept Peggy Phelan's assertion as true, then we might understand HIV as paradoxically intrinsic to 'queer' but also that which queer has come to surpass, subsumed in our collective imaginations as a virus once fatal but now chronic, though as incomplete transcendence, failing to fully leave the past behind. While this chapter, in part, attempts to trace the histories and processes of that determination, and while we must equally understand the meaning(s) of HIV, and thus the meaning(s) of queer, to continuously exceed our capacity for comprehension, my project here involves a second important assertion: that the conditions of possibility given to such meanings have changed as of late. We need to think HIV anew.

Peripatetic as it is, queer being (and being queer) must now account for generations removed from the epicenter of the AIDS crisis, those who have only known HIV —and its histories of activism, stigma, solidarity, art, politics, affective registers, iconography, heroic acts, and instabilities—in its treatable, albeit never curable, state. The “history of AIDS” in the context of the global north has undergone rapid change, including advancements in highly active

antiretroviral therapy (HAART), post exposure prophylaxis (PEP), and pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) which have—to varying extents—given new possibilities to persons both living with and at risk for HIV and consequently altered what I’ll call the queer sexual imagination.⁴⁸ I’ll return to the impact of HAART and PEP on queer corporeality, relationality, and movement in later chapters. The sociocultural context through which queers come to understand themselves as such has radically changed over the course of the epidemic. If, as Christopher Reed and Christopher Castiglia write, the “history of AIDS in the United States and the history of queer theory in the academy overlap almost exactly,” then a certain amount of re-conceiving is indeed warranted.⁴⁹ The discourse of HIV must keep up with our capacity, in cultural studies, queer theory, and elsewhere, to understand the present moment, for an accurate conception of each is dependent on the other.

This new set of possibilities, however, makes several demands of queer theoretical thought that, I contend, have gone problematically unacknowledged. The emergence of a *history* of HIV, or more accurately an *ongoing history*, provides an opportunity for rethinking the multitudinous intersections of queer memory, ontology, politics, and activism, and has proven fertile ground for debating the relationship between the virus and how we ought to frame the nebulous contours of queerness itself. Most overtly, the link between acts of memorialization and acts of contemporary activism have come to the forefront of queer academic discussion. A recent spate of texts has attempted to frame the tensions between HIV in its historical and present registers, most notably Sarah Schulman’s *The Gentrification of the Mind*, Reed and Castiglia’s *If Memory Serves*, and Lucas Hilderbrand’s laudable if underutilized essay “Retroactivism.”

⁴⁸ PEP, PrEP, and HAART are accounted for in my third chapter.

⁴⁹ Christopher Reed and Christopher Castiglia, *If Memory Serves: Gay Men, AIDS, and the Promise of the Queer Past* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 145.

Schulman states this temporal divide most overtly: “We still have to work every day to assert the obvious, that in fact, there are two distinctly different kinds of AIDS that are not over” namely an “AIDS of the past” and “ongoing AIDS. Neither is over, although they are treated quite differently in the present moment.”⁵⁰ That we must “work” to assert “the obvious” distinction between both AIDS models is particularly telling. Though temporally divided, conceiving any distinction between the *pastness* and *presentness* of HIV becomes relatively impossible through their dialectical coalescence, yet the conditions through which we understand each are seemingly worlds apart. AIDS histories—and I use the term broadly here to include social and political histories, memorials, autobiographies, museum archives, photographs, fictional representations, oral testimony—must overcome waning memory and the impossibility of recreating the affective registers of fear, anger, compassion, and confusion frequently emblemizing early AIDS response, while contemporary activist mandates often (and inevitably) become informed by the traumatic political issues confronted in the heyday of the crisis irregardless of their translatability to our current political milieu.⁵¹ So too does the political intention of each text shape their contextualization: calls for reemerging radical activism (in Schulman), revitalized queer sexual culture (in Castiglia and Reed), or adaptations of historical memory relatable to younger generations (in Hilderbrand) render their similar referents—ACT UP, political demonstrations,

⁵⁰ Sarah Schulman, *The Gentrification of the Mind: Witness to a Lost Imagination* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University California Press, 2012), 42.

⁵¹ The affective registers of HIV response are best theorized by Deborah B. Gould, who in *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP's Fight Against AIDS* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009) considers shifts in affective modes throughout the course of the epidemic—fear, anger, mourning—which in turn compel different forms of activism. She notes the “emotional intensities provoked by the AIDS crisis, the multiple and often ambivalent affective states it stirred, influenced in complicated ways lesbians’ and gay men’s political response to the crisis by shaping how they understand themselves and their world in this moment and thus their sense of political possibility” (25-26). For a specifically Canadian perspective, see Tom Warner, *Never Going Back: A History of Queer Activism in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002).

community initiatives—in such ways that they often appear to be confronting distinguishable events.

Two important caveats frame my discussion of generational memory. My goal here is not to reshape the parameters of queer or to establish a definitive or primary articulation of my generation, but to forward other possible ways of thinking about HIV within queerness and the queerness of HIV in the twenty-first century. Second, my relationship to trauma theory so often invoked in considerations of HIV and queer subjectivity is oblique at best; this despite the extent to which trauma theory alternatively informs, impedes, and may even account for the nostalgic inflections rife in each of the texts here considered. This is not to invalidate such studies—precisely the opposite—but to focus my attention on the effects of nostalgia in relation to the future of queer politics. Sidestepped too is a far deeper, possibly far more traumatic, antagonistic relationship between queer being and being queer in an oppressive, heterocentric world, even in the increasingly ‘liberalized’ global north from which I write. While the impact of such oppression(s) continues to inform queer ontology—most notably through rhetorics of gay shame⁵²—I’m largely bypassing such issues in favour of debates occurring within academic circles generally and queer theory specifically. Drawing on my initial assumption that the framing of HIV is correlative to the framing of ‘queer’ and my contention that this relationship is in continuous flux, I argue that the complexities of our political and historical present are such that any disjunction(s) between generational perspectives must be understood through changing conditions of precarity and vulnerability. In theorizing these differing conditions, most notably through the work of Lauren Berlant and Judith Butler, I aim to articulate both the unique set of

⁵² Tremendous and differing work on gay shame has emerged in recent years. See for example Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge: Harvard U P, 2009), or David Halperin and Valerie Traub, eds., *Gay Shame* (Chicago: Chicago U P, 2009).

HIV-related challenges facing younger queers today, and through this recognition, how debates surrounding generational memory may productively serve queer politics in the present. The texts I here engage each, at least on the surface, long for a passing-down of queer memory that has become inoperative, either by apathy or trauma or assimilation or neglect. I demonstrate how futile these contentions are, and hope to show that the very relations between younger generations of queers and our common historical knowledge must be renegotiated. As HIV becomes chronic, it can neither be surpassed nor thought of in the same manner as our forebearers. After establishing the theoretical and political stakes of intersecting generational memory and queer ontology, this chapter charts the (differing, competing) political terrains of the aforementioned models of queer HIV response in the global north to demonstrate the aporetic impact of a generational divide: that if the legacies of AIDS remain untranslatable to the condition of an emergent, younger generation of queers, they will be maintained only as the inarticulate residue of profound historical trauma forever losing their political efficacy, models of communitarianism, and the heroic legacies we so desperately require.

The Cruellest Optimism

My argument both depends upon and problematizes queer theory's ongoing and historical relation(s) to the discourse of HIV, though it must be emphasized that the ongoing archive of queer theoretical thought that informs my project is significantly varied as it is difficult to define. I take my cue from Michael O'Rourke, for whom "queer thinking's allure is its openness, its promissory nature" that leads him to affirm the "far-from-dead politics of queer theory, that

queer theory is radical democracy, that queer theory is justice, is all about futurity and hope.”⁵³ This sentiment is echoed by José Esteban Muñoz, whose work aligns with queerness “by its idealist trajectory; indeed it is the work of not settling for the present, of asking and looking beyond the here and now.”⁵⁴ So too do I draw from theorists whose understanding of queer is notably more subversive, anti-regulatory, and anti-normative; Jasbir Puar, for example, asks if we can “keep our senses open to emergent and unknown forms of belonging, connectivity, intimacy, the unintentional and indeterminate slippages and productivities of domination, to signal a futurity of affective politics.”⁵⁵ This openness to the possibility of living, engaging, and being otherwise—regardless of its divergent formulations, whether that promissory possibility coexists with the present or emerges only in the potential of the future—gives the broadest-of-broad category of queerness its social resonance, its texture of difference. But while that difference has perhaps always been conditioned by constant risk, new precarities affecting queer being and queer bodies have recently emerged, most specifically surrounding the body-with-HIV. My goal in this section is to consider the theoretical models for articulating this emergence, and to evaluate the normalization of HIV in tandem to the normalization of ‘queer.’

My project here involves mapping the constitutive and regulatory conditions through which the body-with-HIV emerges as such in and through a post-AIDS generation. Judith Butler reminds us that “conditions do not ‘act’ the way that individual agents do, but no agent acts without them. They are presupposed in what we do, but it would be a mistake to personify them

⁵³ Michael O’Rourke, “The Afterlives of Queer Theory,” *continent*. 1.2 (2011): 103 and 108.

⁵⁴ José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2009), 28.

⁵⁵ Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007), xxviii.

as if they acted in the place of us.”⁵⁶ In identifying these conditions, even loosely theorized, even open to continuous difference, I do not dare to speak on behalf of specific instantiations of being HIV positive or at risk of HIV, which may or may not emerge from the political, cultural, social, and medical terrains I am attempting to delineate. Moreover, a uniquely ‘young’ emergence, even conceived in its continuous displacement and as always already shifting, cannot ‘do justice’ to our understanding of the intersection of HIV and contemporary queer politics; thus a certain temporal tension must come to inform our theoretical framework. To speak of a younger generation or the conditions of possibility through which that generation becomes intelligible is not to disassociate or negate the experiences of previous generations. Essential here is our understanding of the informative space between the contemporary and the historical, the tension between present witnessing and cultural memory. Butler in conversation with Athena Athanasiou writes that

There are powerful desires and histories that act upon us as we seek to craft a history of desire for ourselves, to emerge in bodily forms partially given and partially crafted. Acted upon, yet acting, the “we” who we are is caught always precisely there, at the nexus of temporal demands from the past and the future.⁵⁷

Therefore my project must equally map how work in queer theory has conceived of HIV throughout the course of the epidemic and how the temporal tensions between nostalgic renderings of AIDS activism, despite my contention of their *direct* inapplicability, inform contemporary political models. In fact this may begin with the terms generation and generational which become intentionally muddled in queer circles: queer generations are culturally not genetically produced, geographically contingent, and highly variegated through class, race, access to queer spaces, expressions of gender, local and national media representation, and

⁵⁶ Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London and New York: Verso, 2004), 11.

⁵⁷ Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou. *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2013), 53.

political climates. Sara Ahmed notes the lexical similarity between familial and familiar and suggests “that inheritance can be rethought in terms of what we receive from others, as our ‘point of arrival ’into the familial social order.”⁵⁸ Not-quite-familial, which is not to preclude queer families of all sorts, the familiar is inherited from one generation to the next, and though the affects, institutions, and ways of being are changed by those they become inherited by, histories become traceable across (queer) generational lines. Gayle Rubin terms this the geologies of queer studies and locates “queer knowledges in sedimented layers.”⁵⁹ The geologic metaphor, for Rubin, is important because it “pull[s] our focus away from the present” which is itself “a blip” in time, but a blip that is creating its own historical mark, becoming-history in the process of its actualization.⁶⁰ A twofold theoretical project emerges: conceiving of the current moment as it sediments, and measuring its relation to the sedimented layers upon which it rests. My decision to mark those layers as pre- and post-AIDS generations—which is not ignore the ongoing, unending history of AIDS—locates the boundaries between those geologic eras at the advancement of antiretroviral technologies and the mainstreaming of contemporary North American queer politics. These layers, too, mark us as family.

What then are the conditions of emergence of a younger queer generation? Referencing our present moment, Butler refers to “the regulatory constitution of sexuality,” that is, the dual forces of regulatory ideals and constitutive social fictions which shape our understandings of sexuality, gender, and (more implicitly in their work) sexualized bodies.⁶¹ For Butler and Athanasiou, as for Lauren Berlant in *Cruel Optimism*, the historical present is marked by the

⁵⁸Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), 125.

⁵⁹ Gayle Rubin, “Geologies of Queer Studies: It’s Déjà Vu All Over Again,” *Deviations: A Gayle Rubin Reader* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 354.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 355.

⁶¹ Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou. *Dispossession*, 45.

certainty of precarity simultaneously formed and enacted through capitalism, continuous modes of crisis, and the fantasmatic promise of happiness. It is through these contemporary valences that we may understand queer bodies in their position in and relation to the normative is continuously renegotiated; we may ultimately reject or subvert these models, but the emergence of who we are and our relation to the world are premised upon them. In Athanasiou's words, "the disruption of the conceptual transition between constitution and regulation is a way to suggest... that the means through which gender and sexuality are regulated can be also the condition of possibility for their emergence."⁶² The always present forces which render queer bodies intelligible inherently contain a paradoxical relationship to regulatory mechanisms: that regulatory mechanisms which come to constitute themselves as dominant through the exclusion of abjected bodies, equally mark those abjected bodies as sites for thinking differently, or what I'll elaborate elsewhere as world-making bodies. On the one hand, defining the conditions of emergence of a generation requires identifying those regulatory mechanisms. On the other, regulatory failings must be considered. It is through the inability to totally suppress nonnormative or unregulated sexualities that the queer emerges, and where I locate the potential for a renewed understanding of HIV. Further, the precarity of precariousness itself marks the possibility for thinking otherwise—that is, outside of regulated life—which instead of perpetuating the normative also marks its potential for downfall. Berlant writes that "the aesthetic and political point seems to be, in all cases, that the drama of adjustment to a pervasive atmosphere of unexpected precarity makes certain situations exemplary laboratories for sensing contemporary life in new idioms of affective realism."⁶³

⁶² Ibid, 46.

⁶³ Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham and London: Duke U P, 2011), 54.

Queer culture, generally speaking, has shifted massively within the last decade. To take one important example, cruising—a queer cultural and behavioral marker emphasized by each of the writers this chapter considers, without exception—has moved from bars, to online websites, to geo-locatable cellphone applications, and has radically altered the ways in which gay men meet, set up sexual encounters, and even come to understand themselves as sexual beings. So too have the relationships between queer culture and commodity culture, media representation, and state recognition changed dramatically. Queer marginalization (for some) has eased through neoliberal acceptance; specific gay and lesbian figures have risen to national and international media prominence; state recognized gay marriage is currently becoming legally encoded at a dizzying rate. While queer theorists have widely questioned what is lost or detracted for queer persons and culture within these processes, and which instantiations and embodiments of queer are given social ascension and which continue to be excluded, Berlant poignantly considers the ramifications of queer inclusion within what she calls the “crisis-intensified historical present” and “slow-death crisis-scandal management.”⁶⁴ For Berlant, the precarity of the present is characterizable in interrelated modes of cruel optimism, perpetual crisis, and the slow death that the banalization of crisis, continuously escalating security, and the quotidian potential for economic collapse brings with it: “Under a regime of crisis ordinariness, life feels truncated, more like desperately doggy paddling than like a magnificent swim out to the horizon.”⁶⁵ We might even link cruel optimism—“a relation of cruel optimism exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing”⁶⁶—to the very promise of social and political acceptance recently bestowed upon queers: the good life assured by inclusion within a world

⁶⁴ Ibid, 53 and 102.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 117.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 1.

governed in the service of capitalism but which never quite manifests itself, a happiness that is always already deferred. As the final examples in this chapter will show, this acceptance, this promise of the good life is concomitant with new forms of economic precarity, continuous social competition and class jockeying, and increasing attunement and subsumption to mainstream fads. The ‘good life’ promised to younger generations transforms them into what Berlant calls the “precariat,” a generation whose “affective imaginary” must perpetually adapt “to a *sense* of precarity [which] dramatizes the situation of the present.”⁶⁷ The promise of the good life has historically excluded queers. Inclusion has become, now, only demonstrated via sponsorship of pride events or commercial practices: ‘you know we accept you because you appear in our ads.’ If the conditions of emergence of the precariat for the mainstream and for queers sound the same, it is because they are often indiscernibly similar. This has come at the cost of village culture, political activism, communitarian solidarity, and social defiance emphasized, below, as the heroic legacies of AIDS response in the first two decades of the epidemic. Though I’m speaking in very broad terms here, I do so to emphasize the immediate difference in queer being at the moment of this (normative) acceptance’s deliverance, though, compared to the conditions of queerness at the beginning of the epidemic.⁶⁸

The cruel optimism of social acceptance further leaves its indelible mark upon how HIV is imagined by a younger generation of queers. Roger Hallas best describes this recent affective shift:

⁶⁷ Ibid, 195, original emphasis.

⁶⁸ This difference manifests itself in surprising ways. Consider, for example, a rise in gay conservatism as outlined by Paul Robinson: “The new gay conservatism represents a generational shift. All of its adepts were born within a few years of 1960s. They are thus a full generation younger than the men and women who authored the Gay Liberation movement—the so-called Stonewall generation. There is more of a hint of Oedipal revolt in their disparaging of the radicalism of their elders, whom they patronize as good-willed but foolish, not heroic pioneers, as the Stonewallers like to see themselves.” Paul Robinson, *Queer Wars: The New Gay Right and its Critics* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 3.

This “anticipatory” loss of an authentic and meaningful life inscribes gay male subjectivity with indelible traces of loss and nostalgia. The repeated and varied reinscription of such traces by the experience of the AIDS epidemic has profoundly shaped gay structures of feeling over the past twenty-five years. Even during those two and a half decades, gay structures of feeling have transformed as the epidemic among gay men has evolved from the dire crisis of the early 1980s through the years of activist empowerment to the current muted optimism emerging from the arrival of effective antiretroviral drug combinations.⁶⁹

The rhetoric of Hallas’s analysis is telling: “muted optimism” contrasts anxieties that once provoked “activist empowerment.” Like my own position, Hallas understands these generational particularities to break at the “arrival” of antiretrovirals which hold the reproduction of HIV in arrest and remove immanent certainty of death. The development of antiretroviral therapies instigates a restructuring of how younger queers both *feel* about and in turn *act* in relation to an epidemic that they have not known in its apex firsthand. “Muted optimism” signals a new, if uncertain, way of approaching queer being. “Muted optimism,” like “cruel optimism,” depends upon a promise as-yet-unfulfilled, but represents a different reading of the potentiality of younger queers. Where I sense in Hallas an emphasis is on forms of outrage and expression lost in that act of muting, I read into Hallas’s conceptualization of the epidemic as it surpasses thirty years a sense of possibility of re-formulating our response within our contemporary political context. The space between muted and cruel is rife with possibilities for rethinking HIV. Notoriously absent from current queer politics is a uniquely younger generational perspective; by both apathy resultant from the cruel optimism of acceptance and exclusion from the cannon of both AIDS literature and queer theoretical thought, younger queers have been told that they do not have, or cannot provide, a unique understanding of a virus that continues to shape our ontological self-understanding. In any case, we are maybe too consumed with our economic

⁶⁹ Roger Hallas, *Reframing Bodies: AIDS, Bearing Witness, and the Queer Moving Image* (Durham and London: Duke U P, 2009), 188.

precarity to think of much else. How do we shape our thinking (and feeling, and acting) around HIV in and through an era of ceaseless precarity? How do we surmount the cruelty inherent in the promise of optimism? How can we mobilize the interrelated natures of HIV and queer being in the service of both? Could a rethinking of HIV spawn increased activism, solidarity, and community-building? Could giving voice to younger generations provide the energy required to fight for new treatments, increased access to medication, decreased stigma, equitable dissemination of antiretrovirals in developing nations, further research, the elimination of restrictions to AIDS foreign aid, prison reform, better social services, needle exchanges, empowered non-profit groups, access to post-exposure prophylactics, safer sex campaigns, media representation for persons-with-HIV, the elimination of state sanctioned restrictions barring the donation of blood, and a national memorial for our dead? My optimistic hope is ‘yes.’

Generally speaking, contentions over contemporary renderings of HIV within queer theoretical thought operate along two lines: debates surrounding the newfound social character of HIV-as-chronic, and the structure(s) of possible activism that queer communities and their allies ought to assume. Though characterizing any singular work as adhering to a single position on or in relation to either axis would be unfair—there is a certain uneasiness in each of the texts considered, a tangible process of ‘figuring it out’—there is a unifying sentiment that at stake is a loss of our capacity to be, act, and feel queer. Importantly, adapting queer thought to account for a younger generation does not imply an act of forgetting. Kathryn Bond Stockton, combining AIDS memory with histories of slavery, notes that “We know the dead live, for they reside, with strange intermittence, behind our eyes, in the room of our brain. We wonder how they breathe inside us, at the length of such an intimate remove. Really, the dead are a cybernetic problem. Alive in the virtual world of ideas—we think of them often—they pose a problem of storage and

transfer. And they do spread.”⁷⁰ Notice the productive paradoxes here: to be cybernetic, the legacies of the dead are given life “inside us,” neither subsumed or folded into our being—despite the common adage, the dead are not ‘a part of us’—but neither are they removed from our capacity to think, imagine, and be. AIDS is the trauma queers must bear, and any politics that promises otherwise serves nothing other than the cruelest optimism. How the “virtual world of ideas” adapts to persistent trauma is worth examining, for the persistence of trauma, and perhaps more importantly, the evolution it takes, speaks volumes about generational transference. What follows are two models of generational conversation within recent queer texts, whose problematics I identify in the service of honoring, memorializing, and occasionally bridging pre- and post-epidemic queer experience. But as Bond Stockton reminds us, problems of storage, transfer, and spread keeps understanding AIDS just beyond our intellectual and imaginative reach.

Traumatized Theories

I turn now to acts of imaginative reach: what are the barriers to transferences of generational memory? As I will eventually show, this question upon which so much has been written is founded on a specious premise that such a transfer *can actually occur*. As I have already said, the nature of HIV and the conditions through which ‘queer ’is interpolated are on the move.

Accounting for disjunctures and discontinuities in attempts to theorize HIV—along with its multifarious impacts on community, the body, activism, the political—is no easy task.

⁷⁰ Kathryn Bond Stockton, *Beautiful Bottom, Beautiful Shame: Where 'Black Meets 'Queer'* (London and Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 180.

Generational discordance, conceptualized through shifts in affective precarity above, impacts academic formulations of quotidian queer life, embodiment, cultural production, and the affective registers of HIV. This impact reverberates at the level of queer theoretical thought, ultimately calling into question queer theory's role in exploring, and occasionally arbitrating, the relationship between generational memory and queer ontology. For Elizabeth Grosz, theory-as-concept (as opposed to Deleuzian theories-of-concept) becomes tasked with surpassing the stultifying present in favour of the present's unravelling potential: "Unlike identity politics, which affirms what we are and what we know, the concept, theory, is never about us, who we are. It affirms only what we can become, extracted as it is from the events which move us beyond ourselves."⁷¹ Grosz's employment of "extracted" is knotty, though, for it implies an intentioned coalescence of forces which simultaneously remove *and* move, a reflexive double action much like Peggy Phelan's recognition of survival made available only in the act of surviving. To theorize, for Grosz, is to have one eye on what's extracted with the other trained on the space made available for thought, permitting otherwise impossible forms of engagement: "To focus on the subject at the cost of focusing on the forces that make up the world is to lose the capacity to see beyond the subject, to engage with the world, to make the real."⁷² I read into Grosz's *doing* of theory a sense of aspiration, a 'making' of the real that is also a making differently, a thinking otherwise. To see beyond the subject is in part to imagine fashioning the subject into what it can be: theory as practice as opposed to theory removed from practice. Rethinking HIV is a re-engagement with our world.

⁷¹ Elizabeth Grosz, *Becoming Undone: Darwinian Reflections on Life, Politics and Art* (Durham and London: Duke U P, 2011), 81.

⁷² *Ibid*, 84.

But for some queer writers, the “real” itself is what prevents such reflexivity. For example, several theorists, most notably Lee Edelman, have attempted in their respective projects to do without conceptual futurity and thus jettison the conditions of the now from which it is given genesis. Edelman conceives of “the need for an ongoing counterproject... that’s willing to forgo the privilege of social recognition and so is willing to break the compact binding the image of the human to a social order speciously conflated with kinship and collectivity, the compact adduced to foreclose dissent from reproductive futurism by assuming the ontologized identity of futurism and sociality itself.”⁷³ Imagining an institutionalized and violently subjugating historical present in similar terms to Butler and Athanasiou, Edelman’s rejection of the social, its futural promise(s), and thus his embrace of negativity is emblemized through the sinthomosexual, recurrent in both “Ever After” and *No Future*. Sinthomosexuality, itself a “word without a future,”⁷⁴ draws upon the unfettered possibility of Lacanian *jouissance* by “denying the appeal of fantasy, refusing the promise of futurity that mends each tear, however mean, in reality’s dress with threats of meaning” inherent in our everyday—akin to eternal promise of the ‘good life’ in Berlant—to lay bare “fantasy turned inside out, the seams of its costume exposing reality’s seamless as mere seeming.”⁷⁵ The sinthomosexual, in refusing to participate in a self-serving symbolic order whose acceptance is given only at the cost of forms of sexuality, sexual expression, and diversity on which queerness relies, must then accept the possibility of its own erasure, the foreclosing of a future in any sense, as a condition of its being. In constructing such a subject, Edelman both appeals to and sees beyond the conditions of, say, homonormativity, or queers subsumed (or aspiring to be subsumed) into the recognized politics

⁷³ Lee Edelman, “Ever After: History, Negativity, and the Social,” in *After Sex: On Writing Since Queer Theory*, edited by Janet Halley and Andrew Parker (Durham and London: Duke U P, 2011), 114.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 33.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 35.

of capitalism; his beyond, however, is a void emergent from the “particularity of the stubbornly nonidentical.”⁷⁶

I pause on Edelman’s work not merely as a counterstance to my own sense of futurity—that is, my overt attempt to formulate a sense of queer futurity within this dissertation as a site for a different kind of politics, to imagine a future in which living with a virus becomes a site for communal engagement *despite* the promise of a future made possible by antiretrovirals—but also because Edelman’s formulation of the sinthomosexual quintessentially exhibits the generational disjunction my project attempts to suture. Edelman writes:

Futurism thus generates generational succession, temporality, and narrative sequence, not toward the end of enabling change, but, instead, of perpetuating sameness, of turning back time to assure repetition—or to assure a logic of resemblance (more precisely: a logic of metamorphicity) in the service of representation and, by extension, of desire.⁷⁷

What Edelman terms “metamorphicity,” here, is not a turning into the other, but the generational expectation that the other will, in the future, in turn become an elder. In HIV, I have hope to show, as in queer families, this is not the case. Subscription to the logic of futurism is to procure assurances that, generationally, the forms of representation and desire through which we come to understand ourselves will forever perpetuate and remain selfsame. But while I share with Edelman’s model his astute critique of complacency-under-the-guise-of-normalcy, I’d like to extend his understanding of how “succession” operates in relation to adaptive forms of radical queer politics. Bearing in mind that to speak generationally of queer culture is not filial but cultural, I turn to David Halperin’s *How to be Gay* as a model of queer generational memory—and an increasingly prevalent trend in queer theoretical thought and contemporary politics—that I find deeply alarming.

⁷⁶ Lee Edelman, “Ever After,” 117.

⁷⁷ Lee Edelman, *No Future*, 60.

How to be Gay takes as its operative premise that “[g]ayness... is not a state or condition. It’s a mode of perception, an attitude, an ethos: in short, it is a practice.”⁷⁸ As practice, gayness in its specificities—locatable and reproducible perceptions, attitudes, enjoyments—becomes in turn learnable and transferable, a form of subjectivity beyond the usual identitarian marker that ‘gay ’ often represents. Halperin argues that “so long as we cling to the notion that gayness is reducible to same-sex sexual object-choice... then the persistence of gay culture will remain a perpetual embarrassment, as well as an insoluble analytic puzzle.”⁷⁹ Embarrassment in this context refers not only to pervading, generalizable tropes of gay shame, but relatedly to the sidelining of camp culture, musicals, and other forms of gay practice which have lent homosexual males a cultural referent for self understanding.⁸⁰ Surmounting gayness as identity in favour of subjectivity, moreover, connotes a form of generational memory that is not only traceable—I can find, to take one of Halperin’s examples, some of Judy Garland in Rufus Wainwright—but also serves as a measure of just-how-gay-one-is, or more specifically, just-how-gay-one-ought-to-be. Gay culture becomes tangible, something students (literally, in *How to be Gay*, those taking Halperin’s course of the same name, but also, I take it, younger queers) can be “introduced to... for the first time and given an opportunity to get to know, understand, experience, and identify with.”⁸¹ To be properly gay is, in some way, to be taught to be gay, and Halperin attempts to chart how this form of teaching has a historicity from which contemporary gays may find subjective affinity.⁸²

⁷⁸ David Halperin, *How to be Gay* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 2012), 13.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 61.

⁸⁰ Halperin charts hundreds of examples. Take, for instance, the Broadway musical which “can serve as a figural representation as well as powerful expression of gay desire. Everything depends on *the content of its form*, on *the meaning of its style*.” (105; original emphasis)

⁸¹ David Halperin, *How to be Gay*, 19.

⁸² This argument is extended in Halperin’s earlier work, *How to do the History of Homosexuality*. In that text, he turns to “historicism” to locate histories of homosexuality which antecede our current queer practices: “to live in the

But as gay identity becomes socioculturally displaced by the (intentionally) nebulous ‘queer’, Halperin begins to worry that the form(s) of gay subjectivity that have served as stalwart markers of the gay community through, for example, gay liberation, the Stonewall Riots, and the AIDS crisis will fade: “And when gay liberation has done its work, what then? Will gay male culture... wither away? Will it lose its appeal? Will gay men of the future be unable to understand, except in a kind of pitying, embarrassed way, why their forebears who lived in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries found so much meaning, so much delight in heterosexual cultural forms that excluded them, at least insofar as such forms contained no explicit representations of gay men or gay male life?”⁸³ Like my analyses of Berlant, above, and Sarah Schulman, below, Halperin locates the genesis of this shift in how being queer and queer being are conceived in processes of urban gentrification, in “the invention of the internet” (433), and as a result of the AIDS epidemic. While Halperin explicitly portends to attach the “culture of pre-Stonewall gay men by connecting it with such post-Stonewall developments as the queer and transgender movements,” he emphasizes both how his project is “deeply gay positive” and that forms of contemporary queerness are, in fact, a breaking away from specifically gay (male) culture, often aligning with a heteronormative world indifferent to its cause.⁸⁴ Putting aside Halperin’s link between contemporary queerness in its complicit relation to heteronormativity—and which I’ve framed as emerging *through* heteronormativity and its attendant modes of precarity—I question the presupposed continuity of Halperin’s generational model: that despite differences in context, there exists an always already learnable form of homosexuality to which

past is indeed to inhabit simultaneously a multitude of historical worlds.” Ignoring such antecedents for Halperin is tantamount to “a new cultural chauvinism” and imposes “a new and more insidious universalism, to make contemporary life... the measure of all things.” See David Halperin, *How to do the History of Homosexuality* (Chicago: U Chicago P, 2002), 21.

⁸³ David Halperin, *How to be Gay*, 432.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 64.

we must attach ourselves. For Halperin, the uniqueness of being gay can only remain as such within the confines of a certain cannon, which becomes knowable only by accessing a communal pool of knowledge: a shared set of texts, behaviours, and affective registers. Displaced focus upon this reservoir of social and political knowledge coincides with the receding of AIDS activism and thus demands a re-exploration of the history of homosexuality as to revitalize what is in the process of escaping our grasp. Replacing older forms of gay male sociality with, for example, virtual dating sites and mobile apps, along with an increasing allegiance between gay male culture and contemporary commodity culture, comes at the cost of our very liberation, according to Halperin:

In short, the emergence of a dispersed, virtual community and the disappearance of a queer public sphere, along with the loss of a couple of generations of gay men to AIDS, has removed many of the conditions necessary for the maintenance of gay liberation—for consciousness-raising, cultural and political ferment, and the cross-generational transmission of queer values.⁸⁵

Reversing this removal, of course, implies a return to the continuity of gay subjectivity as outlined by Halperin's own (generational?) taste. Halperin imposes a singular mode of 'gay' which perhaps ignores other sexual orientations and genders in both degree and kind, contingent upon a continuity of generations in which values are passed on, much as in the very heterosexual familial model he critiques, and also demanded regardless of changing circumstances, political alignment, geographic location, class position, or other shifting determinants specific to life in the twenty-first century. Moreover, the alienation of younger queers from what Halperin perceives as gay culture fails to account for the loss of his unspecified form of activism and the deteriorating conditions of gay liberation. Halperin's generational model imposes definitive parameters through which queer ontology might be understood to the detriment of our potential

⁸⁵ Ibid, 440.

for self- and gender-expression, our capacity to self-define, and most importantly, the capacity for articulating our own needs. Granted that a certain culture has faded with time, but the question remains: whose culture is it anyways?

Halperin's model implies a collectivity that, despite its best intentions, I can neither know nor assume to be a part of.⁸⁶ Emphasizing this aporia, Christopher Castiglia and Christopher Reed identify the manner in which disjunctions between older and younger queers occurs not through direct (in)experience of the crisis whereby younger generations have lacked the presence to fully understand the affective, cultural, and political impact of AIDS, but through the traumatic impact of AIDS upon the progression of queer thought. They posit "a collective, generational trauma, which is not the advent of AIDS itself (which was arguably more traumatic for the first wave of critics) but the unremembering of that first traumatic shock of AIDS and the subsequent desire to purchase health through strategic unremembering. Traumatized theories, to put it simply, produce post-traumatized theories."⁸⁷ However, the perpetuation of trauma within queer theory, for Castiglia and Reed, is not to discount queer theory's potential impact, but instead becomes telling of how queer theory might *become* impactful in its re-thinkability; that is, how queer theory might serve as a barometer (in both the sense of pertinent example and mechanism of evaluation) of the historical present. They write of an

urge a return of/to memory as a means to resolve queer theory's persistent melancholy, to reanimate its connections with the social and rhetorical innovations of previous generations of gay and lesbian thinkers (or with a current generation that still identifies with that past), and to integrate those generations' materialist critiques into the abstracted domain of academic theory. A more direct reckoning with the past and with

⁸⁶ Halperin is hardly alone in imagining a unifying queer culture. Consider, as a second example, Patrick Moore's *Beyond Shame*, in which tells us that "to move forward, we must look back. When we become integrated with our past, we are more able to deal with the problems at hand, because we approach them not as a band of lost boys or isolated 'men who have sex with men' but as a community joined together by a common heritage." See Patrick Moore, *Beyond Shame: Reclaiming the Abandoned History of Radical Gay Sexuality* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004), 189.

⁸⁷ Christopher Castiglia and Christopher Reed, *If Memory Serves*, 148.

our desires for pastness might, we hope, produce more nuanced and self-critical forms of engagement with the present and our traumatized desires for transformed social and sexual opportunities, for queer world-making.⁸⁸

Castiglia and Reed imagine the possibility of reorganizing presentness and pastness as paradoxically (and concurrently) enjoined and disconnected. On the one hand, forms of historical memory are potentially drawn from and linked to the present as means of escape from its melancholic, listless and assimilationist registers, and as a means of informing contemporary understandings of queer while, on the other hand, simultaneously transforming those models as uniquely present substantiations of what queer ought to be: a rather queer model of theoretical repetition with a difference. In short, “reckoning” with the queer past acts as a means of escape and transformation. This division between experiences (of older and younger generations) is, in my view, profitably unstable. While I will differ from their critical framework, I’d like to better understand such instability, and how it might come to inform my own discussion of the queer politics of HIV, by elaborating upon the relationship Castiglia and Reed draw between ‘trauma’ and ‘unremembering’ which provides the impetus for their own generational concerns.

Castiglia and Reed understand a distancing of the queer past and the perpetual process of reformulating historical memory, “unremembering,” as both politically strategic and a byproduct of AIDS trauma. They call attention to the erasure of the pre-AIDS queer sexual past as a means of political assimilation—or more precisely, the rendering of queer culture as more palatable to the mainstream—which has occurred at the costs of queer (sexual) authenticity, the capacity to think beyond the confines of the present, and forms of communitarianism made available to post-liberation queer communities both before and during the epidemic. They write that “[t]he sexual past was relentlessly reconfigured as a site of infectious irresponsibility rather than valued for

⁸⁸ Ibid, 148.

generating and maintaining the systems of cultural communication and care that proved the best—often the only—response to disease, backlash, and death.”⁸⁹ Importantly, reconfiguration is not an effect (‘reconfigured’) but imagined *as process*, a becoming-institutionalized, becoming-historicized that omits the intentionally provocative “street activism and public sex cultures” of previous queer generations, which were initially recast by the “psychic disruption and unmanageable *jouissance*” of queer theory’s so-called antisocial turn—they are here referring to Leo Bersani’s famous “Is the Rectum a Grave?”—and increasingly prevalent in newer academic texts.⁹⁰ Of a younger generation of writers, Castiglia and Reed write that

younger critics began calling those very social and affective states *in the future*, making futurity the displaced location of the past. When critics did look backward, it was often to critique the beliefs and cultural models possible (forms now often dismissed as “identity politics” or “homonormativity”). While the instantiations of these trends offer incisive analyses of queer textuality and culture, collectively they unwittingly participate in the unremembering begun by conservative forces with whom few queer theorists would willingly be allied.⁹¹

Like Edelman, Castiglia and Reed are here calling into question forms of thought premised upon empty promises of payoff or redemption, which even since the recent writing of *If Memory Serves* have manifested in such global (and occasionally only marginally queer) campaigns such as the “It Gets Better” project spearheaded by sex-advice columnist Dan Savage.⁹² In translating the potentiality of queerness to the future—emblemized by José Esteban Muñoz’s opening statement to his *Cruising Utopia* that “[q]ueerness is not yet here. Queerness is an ideality” (1)—Castiglia and Reed consider what elements of queer history have been ultimately displaced or lost: “De-generational unremembering is not simply an assault on the past or an attempt at

⁸⁹ Ibid, 3.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 8.

⁹¹ Ibid, 8-9.

⁹² See <http://itgetsbetter.org>. President Obama famously included a video to the project’s extensive collection, in which contributors create videos reminding bullied youth that, despite the pains of growing up gay, the daily traumas of a queer childhood will pass: “it gets better.”

prophylactic protection of the future, then; it is, above all, an aggressive assault on possibilities for the queer present.”⁹³

While I draw from and admire Castiglia and Reed’s theoretical resistance to the assimilationist impulse prevailing in contemporary queer media, politics, cultural institutions, and activism, I once again voice apprehension to their model of memory contingent upon linear generational models. Like Halperin, Castiglia and Reed envisage the queer past through a particular (and personal) lens, one which emphasizes “companionship based on sexual pleasure”⁹⁴ and “codes of intimacy and the models of communal preservation that contrast the abstemious and individuating ways of life developed in the eighties.”⁹⁵ My contention is that such forms of companionship are based on social models that have come to pass, a process of passing I grant is integral to Castiglia and Reed’s overarching point, but which fail to account for our contemporary political needs. The nature of queer relationships has changed, and are perhaps ‘liberated’ now in terms of our capacities for expression, for intermixing homo- and heterosexuals within a friend group, and across lines of gender. My point is that the conditions of possibility for queer life are (now) broader than Castiglia and Reed let on, regardless of how they manifest. If the potency of queerness lies within its subversive potential, then conceptualizations of queer must remain forever shifting. Castiglia and Reed counter this sentiment, in questioning “the value of countermemory for younger queers coming of age in a post-AIDS era” by rationalizing memory’s ability to serve not through its literal reenactment but as the basis for cultural formation, adaptation, and ontological meaning-making.⁹⁶ They write that “memory is not a transparent re-creation of the past but an imaginative combination of criticism and

⁹³ Castiglia and Reed, *If Memory Serves*, 9.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 53.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 80.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 63.

invention that allows us to wrestle ideals from the losses of the past in order to contemplate them, imaginatively, as possibilities in the present and options for the future.”⁹⁷ Generational memory in this context, though differently from Halperin’s model, thus serves a pedagogical role, and I do not disregard the present demand for queer role models beyond our increasingly institutionalized and commodified culture. My point, though, is that generational models which presume linearity—one generational teaches the next—fail the constituents they attempt to inform. Our collective need to rethink HIV must be equipped to mobilize HIV activism and political resistance to equally counter the forces of homogeneity acting upon younger queers. Engage with our context. The loss of one sexual culture does not preclude the emergence of another, but ignoring the conditions of the now only acts in the service of our common detriment and the zero-sum game of aspiring to that which cannot work. In terms of HIV, this means activism(s) high in fervor and low in impact. After approaching the problematics of acts of reflexive memory—a battle over of the memorialization of AIDS that I’ve termed ‘a politics of hindsight’—the remainder of this chapter attempts to engage other possibilities to putting queer memory to productive use, to imagine an increasingly dialogic generational relationship.

A Politics of Hindsight

I have thus far considered texts which emphasize transferences of values from older to younger generations, with particular focus on how value systems have become interrupted, ultimately suggesting changing sociocultural circumstances rather than strict incapacity or perceived apathy. Other generational discourses wrestle with which affective tonalities, political

⁹⁷ Ibid, 191.

messages, and social histories ought to assume prominence in our collective imaginations. Reparative revisions to historical understanding are common in theoretical work—important examples include feminist thought and postcolonial studies—and, in this vein, attention to voices lost over the course of the epidemic has understandably become a central focus in AIDS literature. The task of such reparative work must also overcome the waning of memory as much as the loss of (queer) experience through death. Like *How to be Gay* and *If Memory Serves*, the texts to which I now turn—*The Gentrification of the Mind* and “Retroactivism”—mourn the passing of fervent AIDS activism and a lost culture of sexual possibility, but the manner in which they access generational memory differs significantly. If Halperin posits a gayness that transcends historical eras, Sarah Schulman and Lucas Hilderbrand’s respective projects operate on the assumption of complete generational disjuncture, which is to say that their conceptualizations of the present moment understand its complete difference from the past. They are projects dependent on looking back, evaluating history by questioning which aspects of queer culture become jettisoned and which maintained over the course of the ongoing epidemic. There is a political project here far beyond a sharing of perspectives. The politics of hindsight speaks not only to the study of queer history, but also the comparative relationship between present and past generations.

Such is the project adopted by the novelist and activist Schulman, founder of the ACT UP Oral History Project, who writes that “no true, accurate, complex, deeply felt and accountable engagement with the AIDS crisis has become integrated into the American self-perception. It put those of us who do know what happened in the awkward position of trying to remember what we used to know in a world that officially knows none of it.”⁹⁸ As a method of bridging the needs of

⁹⁸ Sarah Schulman, *The Gentrification of the Mind*, 70.

the here and now, the legacies of a then, and the tension between both temporal poles, Schulman relies on acts of hindsight as concomitantly instructive and disciplinary: to correct gaps in knowledge supposedly resulting in apathy and inaction. The politics of hindsight is what I call the insistence on historicized politics in the present, a model which insists upon what was to create what is. It is important to note, however, that the politics of hindsight is only made possible as such in the act of looking back, in the experience of post-experience in which affects and actions can be cognitively processed; my point will be that the politics of hindsight is an impossible model for understanding current conditions of queer life.

Anxieties over generational discordance and the perceived apathy of younger queers play out in Schulman's *The Gentrification of the Mind: Witness to a Lost Imagination*, in which Schulman mourns losses of AIDS activism, what she describes as authentic artistic practices, and the absence of a nationally recognized AIDS memorial. *Gentrification* begins with Schulman's recounting of an ACT UP reunion attended in part by a group of younger queers:

...the two worlds were not mixing. Before me I saw two distinctly different experiences, separated by the gulf of action fueled by suffering on one hand, and the threat of pacifying assimilation on the other. When the ACT UPers were in *their* twenties, they were dying. And the replacements for the dead, these young, were on the road to normalcy. The young had the choice to live quietly because of the bold fury of the old. In the rare cases when the old have done the right thing, this is as it should be. And somehow, the presence of the young showed that they understood this, that someone had done something right and yet *these* ones were curious, attracted, intrigued by the potential of living for more than LGBT domesticity as their fate. Maybe they too would like to change the world.⁹⁹

The overt generational divides—"worlds not mixing," "different experiences," "suffering" versus "assimilation," "bold fury" versus "live quietly"—are mitigated by the possibility of an informative otherwise: that the specific and by no means representational members of the younger generation may realize, and wish to change, their political ambivalence. Schulman

⁹⁹ Ibid, 6.

questions both how the process of that ambivalence has come to be and how it may be ultimately circumvented: like Halperin and Berlant, Schulman points to processes of gentrification and the commercialization of queer culture as instigating declines of political fervour: “Gentrification culture was a twentieth-century, fin de siècle rendition of bourgeois values. It defined truth telling as antisocial instead of as a requirement for decency.”¹⁰⁰ Gentrification—it must be added that Schulman particularly references New York City’s Lower East Side, but many writers have voiced similar concerns for other queer-centered neighbourhoods¹⁰¹—is a process of homogenization, an act of establishing unified (and commodity-oriented) expectations for living, and which serve to establish an ethos of placation masked as civility. Schulman writes: “There is something inherently stupid about gentrified thinking. It’s a dumbing down and smoothing over of what people are actually like. It’s a social position rooted in received wisdom, with aesthetic blindly selected from the presorted offerings of marketing and without information or awareness about the structures that create its own delusional sense of infallibility.”¹⁰²

That this “dumbing down and smoothing over” occurs in tandem to (and has a profound impact on our understanding of) AIDS is integral to both Schulman’s conception of social change and my own reading of the generational divide which opens her book. The younger queers’ capacity to “change the world” is politically charged insofar as the desires through which

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 72.

¹⁰¹ See, for example, Samuel Delany’s excellent *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1999), which includes discussion on how AIDS has become a tool for shutting down spaces of public sex, thus paving the way for corporatized commercial venues and office towers. For Delany, this process of gentrification emerges at the cost of queer sexual possibility: “As, in the name of ‘safety,’ society dismantles the various institutions that promote interclass communication, attempts to critique the way such institutions functioned in the past to promote their happier sides are often seen as, at best, nostalgia for an outmoded past and, at worst, a pernicious glorification of everything dangerous: unsafe sex, neighborhoods filled with undesirables (read ‘unsafe characters’), promiscuity, an attack on the family and the stable social structure, and dangerous, noncommitted, ‘unsafe’ relationships—that is, psychologically ‘dangerous’ relations, though the danger is rarely specified in any way other than to suggest its failure to conform to the ideal bourgeois marriage” (122).

¹⁰² Sarah Schulman, *The Gentrification of the Mind*, 51.

that change emerges are filtered through Schulman's generational lens and an economic understanding premised on generational change. That is, first, at stake in the assimilation of a younger generation is the devaluation of an older generation, its values, and its archive of memory, and second, the incommensurability of experience across generational lines becomes exacerbated by the changing social circumstances through which each generation understands themselves: the older "ACT UPers" witness their erasure from history while "the young" witness their perceived loss of activist energy and solidarity. A two-sided disinheritance. Each generation understands this change only in relation, through the other. And yet, despite this divide, consensus *must* emerge in order to resist subjection to gentrification, processes of normalization, and assimilation. Schulman continues:

As we become conscious about the gentrified mind, the value of accountability must return to our vocabulary and become our greatest tactic for change. Pretending that AIDS is not happening and never happened, so that we don't have to be accountable, destroys our integrity and therefore our future. Ignoring the reality that our cities cannot produce liberating ideas for the future from a place of homogeneity keeps us from being truthful about our inherent responsibilities to each other. For in the end, all this self-deception and replacing, this prioritizing and marginalizing, this smoothing over and pushing out, all of this profoundly affects how we think. That then creates what we think we feel.¹⁰³

Gentrification *as process* directly influences queer thought and queer affect. Schulman's act of hindsight attempts to undo "this smoothing over," to ruffle national memory and queer amnesia, to seek inclusion of AIDS in all its difficult, socially undigestible, politically subversive reaches.

Lucas Hilderbrand's essay, "Retroactivism," is premised upon his "nostalgic admiration for ACT UP," a longing for the "resistant, nonviolent tactics, postmodern wit, and fabulous design" of the group made legible only through intergenerational contact.¹⁰⁴ Like Schulman, Hilderbrand affectively conceives of ACT UP not in its specific instantiations—direct actions,

¹⁰³ Ibid, 52.

¹⁰⁴ Lucas Hilderbrand, "Retroactivism," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 12.2 (2006): 303.

local chapters, individual accounts of activism—but as a metaphor for collective possibility: “ACT UP was a retrospective discovery for me that epitomized what I wanted the gay community to be.”¹⁰⁵ And like Schulman, Hilderbrand correlates the affective determination of ACT UP with queer potentiality and futurity; in other words, the history of the organization generationally passed down instigates both immanent thought and unrealized becoming, both of which must be conceived dialectically in their simultaneity. The nostalgic impulse *for* ACT UP cannot be translated as a demand for ACT UP’s resurgence but must, paradoxically, both emerge from *and* be understood through what he terms “the lens of intergenerational nostalgia” (307). Nostalgia, interestingly, brings the younger Hilderbrand into contact with the processes of historicization and memorialization previously decried as lacking.

Intergenerational contact, even on an affective level, gives genesis to the possibility for contemporary direct action that has been transformed by that very act of contact. Thus nostalgia as the mechanism so lamented by Schulman as being absented from direct political action becomes, as (what he terms) retroactivism a mode of queer potentiality, a redetermination of queer politics in general. Like the retrovirus, memory’s effect on present action is continually adaptive but also historically grounded. Hilderbrand writes on his watching of *Fight Back, Fight AIDS*, a famous AIDS documentary:

Whereas most AIDS scholars personally experienced the epidemic’s traumatic effects on the gay community, I did not, and the disparity of our experiences surely shapes our perspectives on what will be remembered. I am arguing for a more complicated history of the movement that acknowledges this affective spectrum and its potential implication for subsequent generations.

¹⁰⁵ Hilderbrand, “Retroactivism,” 305. This perhaps unique approach to the conception of history not only affectively ties Hilderbrand to ACT UP, but gives that affective ethos a veracity unobtainable through mere empirical fact: “Although all of these projects offer incomplete, even skewed versions of AIDS activist history, I get excited by the way they distill ACT UP into intense moments; the sensationalism seems to capture the energy of the group more than comprehensive accounts of facts ever could” (306).

and

With the distance of time and mediation, we can see that we have lost not only lives but also queer forms of radicalism; in this way, the memory of AIDS's impact is not only traumatic but also potentially enlivening for the formation of a radical queer community. For me, there is also a fetishistic disavowal in watching *Fight Back, Fight AIDS*: intellectually, I know very well that I cannot experience these past moments, but all the same I want to believe in the possibility of living vicariously through the video.¹⁰⁶

The immeasurable gulf between Hilderbrand and his immediately preceding generation of activists represents for him, paradoxically, the cause and effect of AIDS trauma. The loss of a generation exacerbates the “disparity” between experiences in concomitance with that disparity's informing potential: the magnitude of that gulf—between being young and gay and vulnerable in 1985 and being young and gay and vulnerable in 2006, the time of Hilderbrand's writing—enables Hilderbrand's act of “living vicariously.” To live vicariously, one must live simultaneously in the space between past and present, constantly moving between the two. Herein lies my own project's opening. Hilderbrand, perhaps unwittingly, allows us to look at the past, to fight for and maintain the activism and legacies each of the writers here considered wish to alternatively re-enact, maintain, memorialize, and reflect upon, all-the-while creating a space for younger voices, imaginative hypothesization, and the perpetuation of queerness's capacity to fluctuate, subvert, and expand.

My affinity for the political aims of each of the projects thus far considered is difficult to understate. In a time where HIV has become (questionably) manageable and gay politics (overly) sanitized, the waning richness of queer culture is at stake. But, as I hope to have made clear, the theoretical apparatus put forward in considering this loss fails to consider the specificities of a queer generation only now emerging, and often problematically so. More accurately, space needs to be left open for those specificities to emerge; the conditions of possibility made available for

¹⁰⁶ Lucas Hilderbrand, “Retroactivism,” 307 and 308.

future world-making. Processes of gentrification, loss of AIDS memory, and the precarious promise of the good life attempt—formidably—to foreclose a world in which younger queers come into their own, however that may be. How is HIV activism even possible when we cannot be ourselves? It becomes our job, collectively, to resist those forces. Establishing the parameters of gayness, for example, or the demand that younger queers mimic the forms of activism enacted by previous generations at best provides specious advice for living, being, queering. If “we have survived our own deaths,” then it is time to ask how queerness might emerge differently; to think of the possible otherwise to current forms of living. Surpassing our own deaths means surpassing HIV-as-death: again, it is time to think HIV anew.

Moving Forward, Looking Backward

A younger generation of writers, thinkers, activists, and artists are waiting in the wings and producing work that negotiates AIDS memory and queer being within the context of our contemporary political climate, perhaps answering the calls of the generation hardest hit by the virus in vastly unexpected ways. I close this chapter by considering two works: a pseudo-history that captures the uncertainties of a (queer) generation and a community project that visibly reenacts AIDS memory in pedestrian spaces. (An in-depth model of participation comes in the form of my fifth chapter where I consider the work of Felix Gonzalez-Torres.) These works have fostered much of my own investment in generational memory as much as they have informed and transformed my personal, changing relationship to the epidemic. Though my analysis of these voices is fleeting, it is my hope that their inclusion within the scope of AIDS literature pushes the perimeters of queer thought in continuous extension, a valuation of younger

perspectives which augment the whole of our understanding of HIV. Moving forward while looking backward is not, however, novel to queer thought: like Benjamin's angel of history, Heather Love's "feeling backward," or Gayle Rubin's queer geology, the act of hindsight can also be an act of moving on, but a moving on that cannot fail to look back. The queer present is an ongoing process. The following writers serve to emphasize just how important that ongoingness is to queer being.

Choire Sicha's *Very Recent History: An Entirely Factual Account of a Year (C. AD 2009)* chronicles the friendships, economic turbulences, careers, and sex lives of a group of young gay men around New York City. However, *Very Recent History* is far from a historical document in the traditional sense, though Sicha maintains that all of the events in the book are true, including the dialogue. Only the names have been changed. Sicha interweaves the daily banalities of these young men against a back drop of perpetual precarity: of finding the right job, apartment, boyfriend, of staying fashionable, and maintaining the attention and interest of like individuals also in pursuit of social ascension. Precarity, in sum, defines how these friends act, think about themselves and others, and function socially. New York, as very backdrop of *Very Recent History*, promises its denizens continuous possibility: "The City was a rich place—in a sense, the richest place in the whole country—and so its economy, where the contagion had started, was damaged but not devastated. Still, it was quiet panic."¹⁰⁷ Much like Hallas's sense of muted optimism, John, who predominates the narrative focus, must balance his panic—of maintaining a corporate job in which staff are regularly let go, for example, or of paying the ballooning interest on his student debt—with an outward sense of quiet, a public persona giving the impression that all will be well. John does this by stashing unpaid bills out of sight, and through the continuous

¹⁰⁷ Choire Sicha, *Very Recent History: An Entirely Factual Account of a Year (c. AD 2009) in a Large City* (New York: Harper, 2014), 10.

use of Adderall (“The pills were a stand-in; they were a crutch, a goad, a spark plug, a fix, an idea”¹⁰⁸). It can safely be argued that John subscribes to Berlant’s logic of the good life and slow death: he maintains a job he does not value, he maintains friendships often only for social mobility. Both because of and within these conditions, John and his friends formulate a world of endless cheap drinks, the securing of invitations to fashionable parties, and perpetual cruising in what is, by Sicha, an obvious attempt to provide in equal parts solace for the broken promises of success—excitements assuaging the banalities of the everyday, and the possibility of “a spark plug,” of difference, or of the creation of something new. Every hit of boys, or drugs, or drinks in this way is simultaneously a getting-by and the never-quite-fulfilled potential of escape.

Informing the contours of this environment is HIV (though unnamed as such, paralleling The City which becomes a pointed stand-in for New York), whose history is given near the beginning of the text:

There was something missing and no one quite knew what it was. There was an absence that people didn’t really think about very much, or at all.

This was about fifty years since people began to understand how a virus “lived” and “ate” and “reproduced,” and a hundred years since even the existence of a virus had become even remotely understood. So the first of the documented lentivirus plagues—the so-called “slow” viruses—took people by surprise. It took a while for people to catch on; these viruses were more than seven million, or so, years old.

The City was a big place, so two thousand deaths right away was not much to notice. The total number of deaths was ten times that five years later.

The number of dead had doubled three years later, and by then, there were estimated to be ten million people alive with this virus around the world. Once again the number of deaths in the City doubled within eight years. Around the country, more than half a million people died.

The winter that Chad and Diego met, there were only about a hundred thousand people with this virus in the City—almost exactly the same as the number of City residents who had died so far.

[...] So we know from these numbers that some people were missing.

Say three hundred thousand men, minimum, disappeared—nearly all at once, in the long view—in that country.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 162.

Say at least fifty thousand men disappeared from the City over the course of John's life.¹⁰⁹

I'm particularly drawn to Sicha's formulation of history: like a newsfeed, these short paragraphs update their informational content chronologically, paragraph by paragraph, so that by the time John's friend Chad will meet his boyfriend Diego, the epidemic has worked its way into large numbers of their social network; by the time John's life span is considered, three hundred thousand have seroconverted. These forms of history are commonplace in AIDS literature. The difference, here, is that instead of calls for mourning or militancy, to borrow the terms of traditional AIDS response made famous by Douglas Crimp, Sicha emphasizes a nebulous absence ("something missing") which both troubles and informs John, Chad, and Diego's young existence. HIV, in this rendering, is a precarity without name or form: an invitation, I argue, to thought, to which John must amalgamate his own experience. HIV has a history and a presence, but one which refuses definition: men have "disappeared." Where did they go? What did they take with them? What was left behind?

Consider an episode where John thinks about the aftermath of sex without a condom, an event which haunts John's thoughts and his interactions with others in a series of passages. Unlike Hilderbrand's emphasis on radical communitarian politics engendered by HIV, the possibility of seroconversion is framed within the context of (a muted) personal responsibility.

They talked about having sex without condoms—and Chad had done this too—but Chad would plead with John: Please don't do that again. He couldn't bear the idea of something so bad, and so unnecessary, happening to John. Chad worried about John all the time but also he tried not to.¹¹⁰
and

The thing about not thinking about a bad thing was that when you tried not to think about it, then all you could do was think about it, until, finally, the brain slipped, and

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 53-54.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 146.

then you succeeded, you actually didn't think about it anymore, except that didn't last forever. Then a moment would come when you'd sit up in bed in a horror in the dark, and you couldn't help but think about it. But then you'd try to comfort yourself back to sleep, and then you'd forget again.¹¹¹

HIV is “so bad,” “so unnecessary,” yet only an uncomfortable thought, something that can be forgotten, however temporarily. The history of the immense costs experienced by gay communities over the course of the epidemic—the “disappeared”—becomes an individual burden, an individual precarity. HIV's correlative relationship to queer being is made blatantly apparent in the lives of these young men; missing from this equation, however, is *how* to respond to the changing epidemic. Sicha's point is not solely an increasing ambivalence toward communitarian activism in favour of personal wellbeing, but instead a commentary on the conditions which have created that ambivalence: overtly, there is an atmosphere of tension in which bad thoughts are ruminated upon in the dead of the night, implicitly there are the costs of medication and treatments that John cannot afford (healthcare bills are already piled in his drawer). Under this rubric, forgetting pointedly becomes the only solution.

To label John's reaction apathetic is overly simplistic, which is not to say incorrect, but what John's unease does is provide an opportunity for the forms of thinking differently I have repeatedly called for. There is an opportunity, here, to translate the triumphs of queer AIDS response through the contemporary context which John emblemizes. This process of translation, I argue, is integral to maintaining the relevance of queer generational memory. In literal terms, there is an opening to thinking and, Chad hopes, acting that is conducive to who John is and how John understands himself from one moment to the next. Later in this dissertation, I will show how this sense of constant movement in activism serves as the only way to create an inclusive end to HIV. I close with one example of an artistic endeavour that bridges

¹¹¹ Ibid, 161.

this divide. The Pin Button Project, run through the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives in Toronto, is both an archive of queer history and a multi-platform visual exhibition that features, quite literally, stories of queer activism through the display of pin buttons. (Pin buttons, usually small and circular, continue to be created by activist groups and distributed at Pride festivals and other gatherings.¹¹² Founding curator William Craddock aptly describes pin buttons as “older social media.”¹¹³ Some buttons represent AIDS action groups, others have slogans made famous over the course of gay liberation: for example, “Gay is Good” and “The Moral Majority is Neither.”) The project’s footprint includes an interactive website, a gallery exhibition in 2013, and a large-scale mural near the intersection of Church and Wellesley in the heart of Toronto’s gay village. Each of these instantiations is built around generational contact. For example, on the website, users are able to access historical information on and post their reactions to each of the buttons. The information gathered mixes memories of the buttons from those active in the community during the heyday of activism with reaction from a predominantly younger viewership. The mural project features scannable weblinks in which users can download information and oral history testimonies for each of the buttons on display: Craddock says that “the idea was that I could connect younger people with older people... I asked people to share stories, but also to ask questions.” Craddock notes how the overwhelmingly younger generations’ use of cellphone technology to access web links on the mural places that younger, mostly queer audience in communication with the histories and stories of their forebears. But because the younger viewers are able to respond in kind, they are given the capacity to think about the material for themselves and formulate their own opinions, reactions, and testimony.

¹¹² Pin buttons have played an interesting role in the history of activism. The Pin Button Project maintains an online presence, which contains photos from the gallery exhibition as well as a large collection of pin button images. See pinbuttons.ca.

¹¹³ All quotations from William Craddock are from an in-person interview, 25 January 2014, Toronto.

Craddock understands this approach as rectifying both a dearth of historical understanding by younger queers, but also a lack of outreach to younger generations by queer organizations. I asked Craddock how organizations, queer communities, and queers themselves can bridge the burgeoning generational divide: “You bridge it using the methods and modes of communication of knowledge transmission that the people who need the knowledge use to get it; we live in a superficial time where striking news is in the headlines one day and forgotten the next. There are so many different people to reach out to and the gaps are created for different reasons. The bridges that need to be made need to tend to those individual reasons.” This is the call the Pin Button Project attempts to answer.

My project, here, is perhaps itself a form of cruel optimism. For as soon as the conditions of emergence do emerge, as soon as the possibility of understanding HIV becomes intelligible to queer theory’s gaze, that emergence and intelligibility become immediately displaced. Intuition, for Grosz, “is an emergent and imprecise movement of simplicity that erupts by negating the old, resisting the temptations of intellect to understand the new in terms of the language and concepts of the old... rejecting old systems and methods in order to bring about a new thought, a new way of seeing, a new possibility for understanding the real differently.”¹¹⁴ The real of queer culture and the real of HIV demand new possibilities for doing, thinking, being as to preserve the richness of our history, and to do justice to those who refused idleness in the face of mass death. Queer ontology must be thought *through* the conditions upon which younger queers emerge, even if this act undoes the conditions established by a previous generation, even if our ambition seeks to radically negate what lays before us. Giving voice to new sets of anxieties and providing

¹¹⁴ Elizabeth Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, 48.

a platform from which younger queers can think about themselves and their community's history are examples of that very form of queer engagement, and represent the initial steps required for working toward effective HIV activism. There are many more forms of engagement waiting to be found. We require, desperately, the preservation of queer memory. But everything is lost if we do so at the cost of who we've become.

Chapter Two: Reading HIV

Never stop selving.

Jean-Luc Nancy

In the opening pages of his *On Touching—Jean Luc Nancy*, Jacques Derrida gives us a problem I find impossible to ignore: “If two gazes come into contact,” he writes, “the one with the other, the question will always be whether they are stroking or striking each other—and where the difference would lie”.¹¹⁵ The resonance of this question—stroking, striking—lies not in the connotative poles of affection and violence, nor with any latent productivity such confrontation may possess, but instead of whether or not there is in fact any difference between the two at all. For the conditions of possibility, I argue, intrinsic to both stroking and striking lie in the mutual recognition of both gazes: two respective ‘I’s and two respective ‘you’s that mutually constitute a relation, the “point where the origin of its possibility is dawning.”¹¹⁶ As such, Derrida proposes not a problem of contact between “two gazes,” but instead a problem far deeper: a tension between touching-as-recognition, touching-as-relation, touching-as-aggression. The question of touch, for Derrida, is a question beyond what is immediately perceived or felt; it is a question for which Derrida can only resort to “*storytelling*, admitting to failure and renunciation.”¹¹⁷ This chapter, in part, attempts to engage with the roots of Derrida’s story, to question the irreconcilability of the difference between stroking and striking, and to locate the narrative space between the two. In which ways can we rethink the betweenness of bodies? Is the simultaneity of affection and violence inevitable? What are the social and political limits of

¹¹⁵ Jacques Derrida, *On Touching—Jean-Luc Nancy*, trans. Christine Irizarry (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 2.

¹¹⁶ Jacques Derrida, *On Touching—Jean-Luc Nancy*, 3.

¹¹⁷ Jacques Derrida, *On Touching—Jean-Luc Nancy*, 7.

contact? How might we articulate these processes of betweenness in language? How can I come to know myself through my relation to you?

There are few examples of the confluence of violence and affection in the act of looking as acute as the social, charitable, political, and ontological processes of what I'll call reading HIV. My specific focus is to consider the tensions Derrida lays before us in relation to the Human Immunodeficiency Virus, while also allowing the processes of reading HIV to speak back to broader categories of bodies, being, visibility, vulnerability, and situatedness. My goal here is to develop a theoretical framework for articulating the changing conditions of emergence for bodies with HIV as understood in plural relation; that is, the social, cultural, and political discourses through which HIV is recognized, evaluated, represented, and disseminated throughout our collective imaginations. I write in the service of better understanding an epidemic which continues to shape queer culture as we know it, to work toward translating HIV discourse to meet the needs of emergent generations of queers in the global north and to consider changing medical conditions as bodies with HIV are read as to better equip a generation of activists to end the epidemic. Subsequent chapters will consider these changing conditions of emergence—which include advances in HIV medicine and the normalization of gay politics—in specific relation to movement, protest, citizenship, and the politics of sexual culture respectively. I here take up several of the problems I outline in my first chapter as under-theorized through a series of intentionally situation specific questions modifying those above; I here focus on the changing sociopolitical conditions of HIV to which queer activism and queer politics must adaptively respond. How is the body-with-HIV known and read in relation to other bodies? How does reading the body-with-HIV in plural relation disseminate, positively and negatively, sociocultural understandings of HIV? How do shifts in the social and political discourses of HIV

subvert definitive readings of the body-with-HIV? These questions very much hinge upon tensions between the corporeal, the visual, and the vulnerable, as much as the social production of knowledge of the queer body.

In approaching these questions, I take up Jean-Luc Nancy's politics of exscription and his post-Heideggerian singular plural along with Judith Butler's processes of giving relational accounts of oneself and the other before engaging in a more specific discussion of queer vulnerability. I attempt to extract from Nancy a process of continually reading, writing, and learning from other bodies in plural relation, a constant imperative to bear witness to the other from which we equally derive knowledge of ourselves. In exscripting the physical body of the other we also construct a body of knowledge, one that is continuously adapted, renegotiated, and forever changing in unexpected ways. From Butler, I isolate the urgency and authority of remaining accountable to the other, but also of our inability to fully do so in language. There is a politics of relationality, here, which can never be completed, and must be rethought in perpetuity. In turning to the body-with-HIV, I consider this need for continuous rethinking in relation to the changing nomenclature of HIV—terms like undetectable made available through advancements in antiretroviral and post-exposure prophylaxis therapies—as well as the evolving image of the body-with-HIV resultant from the changing medical-social conditions of the epidemic.

Much of what follows depends on the (plural) connections and spaces between the visible, the readable, the writeable, and the sayable: what connects what we see, say, and articulate as such? What gets lost within this process? The very forms of rethinking HIV depend upon such translation.

Gregg Bordowitz writes that “AIDS was for many an unspeakable disease until it proliferated into a massive, visible crisis.”¹¹⁸ Bordowitz is referring to the becoming articulable of AIDS at the beginning of epidemic, its visibility concomitant with its dissemination within language, and more broadly, our collective social imagination. We must now turn our attention to the changing forms of visibility which render AIDS speakable—and thus representable—in our current historical moment. These changes include the social representability of the body-with-HIV, and shifts in how we have come to read queer bodies in their vulnerability. To perform this task, I provide a reading of Sean Strub’s *Body Counts*, to demonstrate a historicity of reading bodies-with-HIV through to the tracing of erasure of HIV on queer bodies with access to antiretrovirals. Reading queer bodies has often been a technique for the perpetuation of social violence, scrutiny, or exclusion. But it is also a mode of thought whereby the queer body, or more specifically the body-with-HIV, can come into its own, can become a site for thinking otherwise. To read HIV, here, is an attempt to both think of its lasting impact on queer bodies, sexualities, and communities, but also, in identifying the vast changes in which HIV is read and articulated between bodies, to reformulate our response to a virus that will continue to shape in unknown ways our own sense of selves.

Bodies of Meaning

¹¹⁸ Gregg Bordowitz, *General Idea: Imagevirus* (London: Afterall Books, 2010), 6.

“The body,” writes Nancy, “is the architectonic of sense.”¹¹⁹ Sense, in Nancy’s work, is both *to sense* and, in the words of Francis Fischer, the “pursuit of meaning”¹²⁰: “the question of sense [*sens*] which has become not simply the question but the ordeal [*l’épreuve*] of Jean-Luc Nancy’s text.”¹²¹ What’s important, though, about Nancy’s deployment of sense (and its multivalent meanings), is that, even at the very limit of sense—“the death of God or of History or of Man would be the mark of this arrival”¹²²—Nancy refuses to give up thinking about this very limit: sense may have achievable limits, but there exists always the possibility of thinking *beyond* sense, beyond the articulable limit of sense. It is this beyond where meaning—of writing, of bodies, of being—is located. Returning again to Fischer: “The limit carries us into this place: to be touched there by every sense would be the ordeal of a thinking proper to our times.”¹²³ Notice, again, that “touched there” has the double valency of the physicality of presence and, second, an affective and compelling connotation: to be “touched” is both to be *here* and to be moved, affectively, to an elsewhere. (The elsewhere and the otherwise are points on which this chapter will continuously focus). This is why, for Fischer, Nancy’s texts are sites of thought. Intrinsic to my own project, moreover, is that to discuss Nancy is to perpetually discuss a doubleness of meaning, a doubleness that can only exist in concomitance, and must not be thought of as either distinct or unitary. To discuss Nancy’s work, we must touch upon the *in between*, the constant tension of terms where, in fact, meaning is located.

¹¹⁹ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus* (New York : Fordham U P, 2008), 25.

¹²⁰ *Ibid*, 33.

¹²¹ *Ibid*, 32.

¹²² *Ibid*, 33.

¹²³ *Ibid*, 33.

There are two implications to Nancy's conception of the body that again must be comprehended in simultaneity. There is, first, the body as we empirically know and experience: the body of flesh, the body in which we inhabit. This, perhaps, is the medicalized body-with-HIV, measurable bodies with measurable needs. Second, however, there is the body that is *more than the sum of its parts*, the body for and by which our existence is both known and located: "Existence: bodies are existence, the very act of ex-istence, *being*."¹²⁴ This conception of *bodyness* and of embodiment, we might say, is the intangible surplus of the corporeal self. More importantly, though, it is this gap, this space between these two conceptions of the body where Nancy locates our potentiality—as bodies, as beings. Nancy writes:

Bodies aren't some kind of fullness or filled space (space is filled everywhere): they are *open* space, implying, in some sense, a space more properly *spacious* than spacial, what could also be called a *place*. Bodies are places of existence, and nothing exists without a place, a *there*, a "here," a "here is," for a *this*. The body-place isn't full or empty, since it doesn't have an outside or an inside, any more than it has parts, a totality, functions, or finality.... Yet it is a skin, variously folded, refolded, unfolded, multiplied, invaginated, exogastrulated, orificed, evasive, evaded, stretched, relaxed, excited, distressed, tied, untied. In these and thousands of other ways, the body *makes room* for existence (no "a priori forms of intuition" here, no "table of categories": the transcendental resides in an indefinite modification and spacious modulation of skin).¹²⁵

To better understand the tension between the "here," "there," and "a this," we must understand the double valency (yet another!) of "corpus." Corpus is both the body proper, and a body of knowledge—or, more specifically, a body of writing. It is through this writing that the body is "being exscribed."¹²⁶ To exscribe is to perform a reading that is also a writing. Fischer emphasizes the ways in which "Nancy insists upon the fact that the written makes bodies,

¹²⁴ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus* 19.

¹²⁵ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus* 15.

¹²⁶ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus*, 19.

touches bodies” (35). Excription, which resonates with Derridean graphicity, is meant to imply a tracing of the body waiting to be read—in academic life, at least, we insert ourselves into texts, we deconstructively locate their tensions and hidden meanings—and that bodies render visible their environs, circumstances, and selves. As such, bodies are “here” in front of us, but also “a this” to be found and made available to and for exegesis. Further, in the passage above, we must understand that this tension between here, there, and this is what permits the body to ‘make room’ for existence. The body exceeds being a full or empty “body-place” in favour of (simultaneously) being an (and in) excess of its own corporeality: folded, refolded, unfolded, multiplied. It is in these acts, excripted on the body, forming a corpus and being formed by a corpus, that the body becomes the site in which meaning finds its genesis and where meaning becomes read and understood as such. This process, what I’ve called the ‘more than’ of corporeality, is ever elusive: “indefinite modification and spacious modulation.”

Sense. Touch. Body. Corpus. For the purposes of my current project, the duplicities of meaning that I have outlined thus far—the body as here and there, corpus as written text and embodiment, touching as presence and movement, sense in its affective and connotative registers—imply a secondary meaning, one which lies beyond Nancy’s overarching project. That because the body is always already a site of meaning *and* un-locatable insofar as it is never, with any permanence, *here*, there is no possibility of establishing a normative sense of the body: in Nancy’s conception of corpus, there is neither a totalizing singular identity nor singular interpretative method by which to measure bodies, their worth, or their sociopolitical standing.¹²⁷

¹²⁷ Though unstated as such, this remains integral to Nancy’s political leanings: Nancy resists both the hierarchicalization *and* democratization of bodies in any assimilable form. Because bodies are neither contained or possessed, Nancy is able to write against practices that limit, imprison, and demonize refugees. In one of my

Put bluntly, we must think corporeality through its informative differences, its other possibilities. The tensions by which Nancy's, and Derrida's, ultimately deconstructive approach to the corpus call into question make way for a political argument emphasizing the social, political, and cultural importance of bodily difference and relationality made singularly possible, paradoxically, by the impossibilities of understanding bodies in either totalization or stasis.¹²⁸ Thus in *Bodies that Matter*, a text we might consider the authority on the sociopolitical resonance—or what I've called the “more than”—of material bodies, Judith Butler reminds us “how a gendered matrix is at work in the constitution of materiality.”¹²⁹ For Butler, the materiality of bodies “is in part determined by the negotiation of sexual difference” and that, more broadly, “matter has a history (indeed more than one).”¹³⁰ Because, as we know, some histories gain dominance (and become the foundational discourses by which we construct our social, political, and cultural imaginations) while other histories get left by the cultural wayside, Butler compels us to consider the inherent tension between these two poles; she considers “how bodies which fail to materialize provide the necessary ‘outside,’ if not the necessary support, for the bodies which, in materializing the norm, qualify as bodies that matter.”¹³¹ The political task

favourite lines, Nancy writes: “This earth is anything but a sharing of humanity. It is a world that does not even manage to constitute a world; it is a world lacking in world, and lacking in the meaning of world. It is an enumeration that brings to light the sheer number and proliferation of these various poles of attraction and repulsion. It is an endless list, and everything happens in such a way that one is reduced to keeping accounts but never taking the final toll. It is a litany, a prayer of pure sorrow and loss, the plea that falls from the lips of millions of refugees everyday: whether they be deportees, people besieged, those who are mutilated, people who starve, who are raped, ostracized, excluded, exiled, expelled” (*BSP* xiii). As such, the opening of bodies gives rise to the possibility of compassion, of mutual (inter)connection.

¹²⁸ By stasis, I mean both unmoving and unchanging. The body, for each of the thinkers in this essay (Butler, Nancy, Derrida), is a body in constant motion *and* a body in constant change.

¹²⁹

Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), 32.

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, 29.

¹³¹ *Ibid*, 16.

that Butler demands of us is a refashioning and refiguring of both this outside and the resultant norms which qualify bodies as in- and out-side of sociopolitical acceptance: this in the service of “illuminating the violent and contingent boundaries of that normative regime” as to preclude the possibility of that violence.¹³² It must be noted, before continuing, that “queer” represents an ultimately denigrated social term: “the term ‘queer ’has operated as one linguistic practice whose purpose has been the shaming of the subject it names or, rather, the producing of a subject *through* that shaming interpellation.”¹³³ While HIV has historically exacerbated this shaming interpellation, my attempts at opening HIV to its informative otherwise participates in the subversion of discriminatory appellations.

I bring Butler and Nancy into conversation for two reasons. First, both thinkers emphasize the un-totalizable nature of bodies, and second, although differently in each, bodies in their openness are sites of meaning—meaning which comes into being in their iterability *and* readability. Both write against any possibility of a rigid construction of bodies for fear of the subjection and inherent harm of a singular, and therefore dominant, discourse: displacement of gender and sexuality for Butler and political assimilation for Nancy. Where Butler differs from Nancy is in her emphasis on how such rigid interpretations of the materiality of the corpus come into being, namely the constructed nature of meaning and the influence of social conditions. In fact, the predominant thesis of *Bodies that Matter* might be stated as follows: “What I would propose in place of these conceptions of construction is a return to the notion of matter, not as site or surface, but as *a process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect*

¹³² Ibid, 53.

¹³³ Ibid, 226.

of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter.”¹³⁴ Again, like Nancy, Butler posits that the “site or surface” of the body only gains resonance by virtue of being larger than the sum of its parts: the meaning of the body supersedes its materiality. We might even say the crux of this passage is located in “we call”: we name, we construct language—as much as language constructs our coming to understand ourselves—we build structures of meaning (to again channel Derrida), and it is only through the resultant naming that we can approach any understanding of the corpus.

Between the “I” and “You” and “One”

If the meaning of bodies is decipherable only through translating the inner tensions exscribed on the body-as-site-of-meaning, then the interpretative potential of bodies—that is, the possibility of reading such exscription—is solely made possible through relation. In short, it takes multiple bodies to understand *the* body as such: Nancy writes of plural relation that “Existence is *with*: otherwise nothing exists.”¹³⁵ This “with,” I hope to show in the ensuing section, both makes manifest and complicates our sense of selves, bodies, and relationality. This is a “with” deeply rooted in the more-than of the corpus.

Nancy writes: “That which exists, whatever this might be, coexists because it exists. The co-implication of existing [*l’exister*] is the sharing of the world. A world is not something external to existence; it is not an extrinsic addition to other existences; the world is the coexistence that puts these existences together.”¹³⁶ If the world is the site of the coexistence upon

¹³⁴ Ibid, 9. Original emphasis.

¹³⁵ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural* (Stanford: Stanford U P, 2000), 4.

¹³⁶ Ibid, 29.

which our own (singular) existence is bound—making our being, by definition, only singular in the plural—then, equally, the condition of our being is predicated upon our “sharing.” As such, in Nancy’s thinking, we are never singular, but in perpetual *with*, never singularly singular but singular plural; put otherwise, we are never isolated or inward looking, but always external to ourselves in relation. We are always beyond an “I” insofar as “I” is equally conditioned by its relation to a “you.” Nancy continues:

...the “with” is the exact contemporary of its terms; it is, in fact, their contemporaneity. “With” is the sharing of time-space; it is the at-the-same-time-in-the-same-place as itself, in itself, shattered. It is the instant scaling back of the principle of identity: Being is at the same time in the same place only on the condition of the spacing of an indefinite plurality of singularities. Being is with Being; it does not ever recover itself, but it is near to itself, beside itself, in touch with itself, its very self, in the paradox of that proximity where distancing [*éloignement*] and strangeness are revealed. We are each time and other, each time with others.¹³⁷

There are two important elements to be taken from this passage. First, that being, in its inability to “recover itself,” to grasp (in both senses: knowing and holding) the more-than of the “I”—to weave both Nancy’s and my own terms—is in constant escape of its own self. That is, not only can the “I” never know itself as a singular “I,” but in its *witness*, the “I” can never be whole. This concept will be integral to my ensuing discussion of queer autobiography. Second, the “paradox of that proximity” reveals a second unknowingness: no matter how close we are to other beings, no matter the proximity of the spacing between bodies, the other is always already foreign to us. The “you,” too, escapes our knowledge.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, 35.

¹³⁸ Which Butler engages with in her *Prekarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (Brooklyn: Verso, 2004). “Despite my affinity for the term relationality, we may need other language to approach the issue that concerns us, a way of thinking about how we are not only constituted by our relations but also dispossessed by them as well” (24).

If, then, the “I” and the “you” remain forever foreign, then how might we describe relationality? How is this *with*, at its most fundamental level, even possible? How do reading and exscription condition this ‘we’ specifically in the politically rife terrain of reading HIV? How can we articulate such relationality when the contours of that which is relational cannot fully be articulated, particularly across lines of serostatus? How do we bridge changing forms of difference body-to-body which yet remain selfsame *as* difference? We must not forget that the foreignness of bodies to which Nancy constantly gestures, and the otherness of bodies in Butler’s sociopolitical model, are equally conditioned by their closeness. Both the measure and form of this closeness is termed spacing. Spacing, in short, is how we come to understand bodies. Meaning, and the bodies upon which meaning is exscribed, is strictly located *between* “I” and “you”; in, rather, *the space* between “I” and “you.”

The spacing of the body—wherein the paradox of proximity is located—equally presents a problem of narrativization. (Remember Derrida’s question of “storytelling.”) We must ask how we can relate what we have come to know about ourselves and the other through our mutual relation, and conversely, what becomes intangible or inarticulable in doing so. And, relating to my overarching project, how do shifts in vulnerability for the body-with-HIV affect our understanding of plural relationality? Nancy and Butler continue to inform my theoretical framework. Nancy, in *Being Singular Plural*, writes:

Undoubtedly, the *with* as such is not presentable. I have already said so, but I have to insist upon it. The *with* is not “unpresentable” like some remote or withdrawn presence, or like an Other. If there is a subject only with other subjects, the “with” itself is not a subject. The “with” is or constitutes the mark of unity/disunity, which in itself does not designate unity or disunity as that fixed substance which would undergird it; the “with” is not the sign of a reality, or even an “intersubjective dimension.” It really is, “in truth,” a mark drawn out over the void, which crosses it and underlines it at the same time, thereby constituting the drawing apart [*traction*] and drawing together [*tension*] of the

void. As such, it also constitutes the traction and tension, repulsion/attraction, of the “between”-us. The “with” stays between us, and we stay between us: just us, but only [as] the interval between us.¹³⁹

Our being is contingent upon a simultaneous coming together and disavowal of plurality, what John Paul Ricco, later in this chapter, will refer to as a decision occurring within a particular scene. As I transition from my generalized understanding of relationality and narrativity to an increasingly specific focus on the shifting nature of HIV, my desire becomes to problematize this “with,” to show not only how it is always already changing, but how such change must reflect back upon queer being and queer politics. Because the “with” is the mark of “unity/disunity” of the singular plural, and thus the mark over the void or interval between persons, it contains within it a certain unarticulable element. The issue becomes determining the contours of that element: we can know only that the unarticulable exists in the between-space of beings. Any presentability of this relation is uniquely rendered in relation, and as such, Nancy’s demands we be accountable to each other beings *as well as* the totality of beings to which we each belong; we are accountable to both the other we face and the multitude. (Keep this in mind for my third and fifth chapters where I discuss the obligations between positive and negative bodies.) This inarticulability represents a point of ethics, but how we become accountable to the other remains to be seen. The triple valence of accountable, however, as something explicable, as something quantifiable, as something to which responsibility is given requires further probing, for which I hope to bridge my discussions of spacing and the sociopolitical contexts of its materialization.

The possibility of providing a personal account of one’s action—and, semantically, the more abstracted “one” should here be noted—is most famously theorized in Butler’s *Giving an*

¹³⁹ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, 62.

Account of Oneself in which Butler takes the “I” and problematizes its ability to fully articulate itself-as-“I” within a given social milieu: “The ‘I’ is always to some extent dispossessed by the social conditions of its emergence.”¹⁴⁰ Butler’s central premise is that no self understanding is possible for the “I” when considered in isolation: first, the “I” is a product of a given set of sociocultural circumstances informing the language with which it is able to articulate an account of itself and inform the values by which it, as “I”/self, is measured, and second, that because the existence of the self precedes the self’s ability to master the language—itsself constructed within a sociopolitical nexus of power—through which the “I” is able to give an account of itself¹⁴¹. These norms which both constrain and form the possibility of giving an account of the self are, by and large, the governing norms, re-contextualized, which determine the social, political, and cultural valuations of bodies as analyzed in *Bodies that Matter*. This is important because the double limitation imposed on giving an account of oneself—the limits of language, the limits imposed by normativity—play a decisive role in how we come to understand the spacing of bodies; and, moreover, the more-than parsed from *Bodies that Matter* becomes the mechanism by which we relate *and* come to know ourselves. Paradoxically this mechanism equally functions as that by which we become strangers to ourselves. Butler writes:

The opacity of the subject may be a consequence of its being conceived as a relational being, one whose early and primary relations are not always available to conscious knowledge. Moments of unknowingness about oneself tend to emerge in contexts of relations to others, suggesting that these relations call upon primary forms of relationality that are not always available to explicit and reflective thematization. If we are formed in the context of relations that become partially irrecoverable to us, then that

¹⁴⁰ Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham U P, 2005), 8.

¹⁴¹ This latter context is a result of our lived experience that either eludes or precedes language: at the level of the psyche and in childhood. This context allows Butler to engage with psychoanalytic thought in relation to social discourse.

opacity seems built into our formation and follows from our status as beings who are formed in relations of dependency.¹⁴²

To reiterate, this “opacity” is an opacity both to the accounting “I” and the receiving “you.” What I would like to take from this passage, however, are the forms of relationality that “are not always available to explicit and reflective thematization.” These moments of unknowingness, which can emerge as moments of uncertainty (offering, perhaps, a glimmer of a hope of recognition), are systemically linked to the conditions of our “formation,” or put more broadly, the social environs from which we originate. Our being products of our social milieu—a milieu already shown to (re-)produce restrictive social norms which govern meaning—negatively impacts our ability to give an account of ourselves. We, in fact, socially perpetuate our blindness.

HIV is a conversation made possible by the opening up of bodies, by grasping the process of exscription in its sociopolitical registers. And there are few examples as resonant as the body-with-HIV upon which we have exacted our social blindness in all its violence.

Reading HIV: Autobiographical Scenes

In my first chapter, I argued that the changing conditions of precarity and precariousness as articulated by Butler and Lauren Berlant demand a renewed understanding of the body-with-HIV located within its contemporary sociopolitical milieu.¹⁴³ I also argued that this understanding is in constant motion and static representations, by definition, disserve the HIV

¹⁴² Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, 20.

¹⁴³ In a roundtable entitled “Precarity Talk,” Isabell Lorey best parses out the differences between these terms: “I use the term “precarity” (*Prekarität*) as a category of order that denotes social positionings of insecurity and hierarchization, which accompanies processes of Othering. [...] [P]recariosness (*Prekärsein*) [is] a relational condition of social being that cannot be avoided.” See Jasbir Puar, “Precarity Talk: A Virtual Roundtable with Lauren Berlant, Judith Butler, Bojana Cvejić, Isabell Lorey, Jasbir Puar, and Ana Vujanović,” *TDR: The Drama Review* 56.4 (Winter 2012): 163-177.

community. In working toward the goal of activism, I propose charting the exscripted vulnerability of the body-with-HIV over the course of the epidemic, with emphasis on how such changing conditions renegotiate how the body-with-HIV is read in plural relation and their attendant influence on political praxis.

Reading the body-with-HIV is best understood through the testimonial acts of bearing witness that have come to define AIDS memoirs. Since the very beginning of the epidemic, memoirs have played a significant role in the dissemination of information (safer sex, resistance techniques, educating queer and heterosexual publics alike about the virus), memorialization of persons who have died from AIDS related illnesses, and framing acts of communitarianism, protest, and activism both for historical posterity and in critique of the specific historical circumstances from which they have developed. Further, as AIDS enters a fourth decade of existence, a recent increase in the number of such memoirs indicate a desire to reflect upon and occasionally lay claim to the emergence of an 'AIDS history'; memoirs provide opportunities for historically marginalized voices to be heard and to regain a position within our communal cultural memory. Jason Tougaw emphasizes that AIDS memoirs "are written as alternatives to silence, to combat the terrifying effects of the epidemic. As testimonies, these memoirs are engaged in the autobiographical act of bearing witness to a collective trauma: speaking for a group of people who have shared a traumatic experience."¹⁴⁴ Memoirs do not just speak for a collective, I add, but also to and with that very collective: somewhere between the act of writing, reading, and bearing witness, AIDS memoirs blur the boundaries between self and audience, the body being recorded with the body of knowledge being accrued. Tougaw understands this as a

¹⁴⁴ Jason Tougaw, "Testimony and the Subjects of AIDS Memoirs," in *Extremities: Trauma, Testimony, and Community*, ed. Nancy K. Miller and Jason Tougaw (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 167.

relational issue: “To be effective as testimony, the narrativization of trauma, however, must alter the speaking subject’s relation to an audience, and by extension, it must also alter social relations in general, opening up the possibility for the culture to accommodate the trauma that compels the testimony.”¹⁴⁵ The relation between the speaking subject and audience (“social relations”) must be thought of along two intersecting lines: first, we have the act of creating narrative, which I have above indicated requires discussion of the conditions of possibility for self understanding, and second, we have a process of translation between that narrativization and its resultant social accommodation.

Integral to understanding these two processes is the differentiation between witnessing and bearing witness, most aptly described by Roger Hallas, a film theorist who specializes in AIDS videography, a medium which incorporates a wealth of autobiographical detail, as follows:

Bearing witness involves an address to an other; it occurs only in a framework of relationality, in which the testimonial act is itself witnessed by another. In its address to an other, be that of an analyst, a jury, or an audience, bearing witness affirms the reality of the event witnessed; moreover, it produces its “truth.” Grounded in this structure of relationality, the act of bearing witness in legal, religious, and psychoanalytic discourses necessitates the bodily copresence of the witness and his or her addressee. Indeed, the witness requires an other as witness to hear the testimony, to be present to the speaking body of the witness.

and

To *witness* requires one’s physical presence at the event. To *bear witness* (to testify) to that event also requires the physical presence of the selfsame witness at the moment of enunciation. Such reciprocal presences of the body produce the truth value of this particular speech act. In bearing witness to trauma, the alignment of these two corporeal presences in the singular body of the testifying witness provides the necessary

¹⁴⁵ Jason Tougaw, 171. Tougaw equally notes the political impact of AIDS testimony contained within the rupture of social relations, writing that memoirs are “speech acts meant to sway government policy, rally AIDS communities, and make sense of an epidemic which defies explanation” (167). Note that there are, in fact, many ruptures here: political, within the queer community, and between queer communities and broader (predominantly heterosexual) publics.

enunciative condition for the listener to sense—both cognitively and affectively—the magnitude of the event.¹⁴⁶

What I take from Hallas's observations is how "copresence," analogous to Nancy's plural relation, is not only a form of mutual affirmation of being between individuals, but a mutually shared yet independently created narrative: the story of copresence, enacted through the testimony intrinsic to bearing witness, requires individual narration dependent on the reciprocity of presence: again, "such reciprocal presences of the body produce the truth value of this particular speech act." The "I" and the "you" can only *describe* their relation in the face of one another at the "selfsame" moment of crisis. HIV, or more accurately reading HIV, thus requires a copresence in the moment of the event. This is what makes AIDS memoirs so uniquely valuable (and incredibly powerful): they are documents which bear witness to the evolution of the body-with-HIV, testimonies which archive the crisis whose claims to legitimacy derive from original presence. To read the body-with-HIV in such a way is not to produce a historical or contingent opinion, but rather to produce "a truth that locates the subject and his or her experience relationally and historically."¹⁴⁷

The ethics of bearing witness to the corporeality of HIV—alternatively reading or exscripting the body-with-HIV—was (and to a lesser degree, is) the subject of much academic and activist debate especially early in the epidemic, and includes the social and political repercussions of AIDS photography, media portrayals, and their resultant impact on how bodies-with-HIV are culturally imagined. Susan Sontag writes that "as one can become habituated to

¹⁴⁶ Roger Hallas, *Reframing Bodies*, 10, 11.

¹⁴⁷ Roger Hallas, *Reframing Bodies*, 12.

horror in real life, one can become habituated to the horror of certain images.”¹⁴⁸ Such habituation, in the context of AIDS representation, can manifest through uncritical, uncontextualized, and repetitive images of illness—for example, the use of sunken cheeks, bodily wasting, Kaposi’s sarcoma as metonymical stand-ins of the disease—which both banalize and homogenize the effects of the virus, and by focusing on the traumatic consequences of HIV while sidelining its social and political conditions, including prevention strategies and social stigma. Douglas Crimp, in his “Portraits of People with AIDS,” a response to New York’s Museum of Modern Art’s “Pictures of People” exhibit given as a talk at the University of Western Ontario, critiques any attempt to render the corporeal effects of AIDS that includes “the reinforcement of hopelessness” by not addressing “the politics of AIDS, the mostly deliberate failure of public policy at every level of government to stem the course of the epidemic, to fund biomedical research into effective treatments, provide adequate healthcare and housing, and conduct massive and ongoing preventive education campaigns.”¹⁴⁹ Such images, under the specious guise of sympathy, fetishize the deterioration of the body, link AIDS with immanent death, invade personal privacy, and marry viewer and photographer as they together reduce persons with AIDS to a depersonalized social trope. Crimp’s point is threefold: first, that no honest representation can be detached from social circumstance, and by extension, the product of distancing is the risk of habituation; second, that reading the body-with-HIV without contextualizing information is an act of victimizing; and third, that images of (gay men with) AIDS “as desperately ill, as either grotesquely disfigured or as having wasted to fleshless,

¹⁴⁸ Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Picador, 2003), 82.

¹⁴⁹ Douglas Crimp, “Portraits of People with AIDS” in *Melancholia and Moralism: Essays on AIDS and Queer Politics* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: The MIT Press, 2002), 91.

ethereal bodies” are “*phobic* images, images of the terror of imagining the person with AIDS as still sexual.”¹⁵⁰ The excription of the body-with-HIV must account for (and be accounted through) queer sexuality, desire, and like Derrida’s account of Nancy, the gaze-as-touch.

As mentioned in my first chapter, as AIDS has entered a fourth decade of existence, a spate of texts have attempted to alternatively chronicle, (re-)frame, or emphasize in hindsight certain elements of the epidemic’s newfound historicity. Where in my initial discussion I problematized how anxieties of generational apathy manifested in these works, I now consider a recent queer autobiography as operative example of the changing conditions through which the body-with-HIV can be read as such, as history of corporeal change. What this text gives us is analysis of the development and production of political agendas constructed through readings of the body-with-HIV—his own and those that surround him through which he in turn comes to understand himself—and ultimately his renegotiating and re-imagining his own relationships to HIV through these very processes. My goal is to translate this discussion into a possible answer to the political questions with which my first chapter closes; Julian Gill-Peterson, an emerging queer scholar, asks how to “not flee from the responsibility of the politics of the epidemic in the contemporary endemic moment.”¹⁵¹ Roger Hallas echoes this imperative in relation to queer media: “Thus one of the principal challenges for queer media in the third decade of the pandemic has become how to reframe the archive of AIDS cultural activism in ways that generate new acts of bearing witness to the present moment of AIDS and the ongoing historical trauma and crisis it

¹⁵⁰ Douglas Crimp, “Portraits,” 106. Original emphasis.

¹⁵¹ Julian Gill-Peterson, “Haunting the Queer Spaces of AIDS: Remembering ACT UP/NEW YORK and an Ethics for an Endemic,” *GLQ: A Journal of Gay and Lesbian Studies* 19.3 (2013): 291.

constitutes.”¹⁵² Gill-Peterson and Hallas each recognize a process of translation between historical and present-day action contingent upon differing but interdependent responsibilities to each temporal period. With this in mind, reading HIV through queer autobiography contains the double project of recognizing historicized bodies-with-HIV in their moment of crisis and allowing that moment to transform the potential of the next.

Sean Strub is the founder of *POZ* magazine and the first openly HIV positive person to run for federal office in the United States. *Body Counts: A Memoir of Politics, Sex, AIDS, and Survival* interweaves his activism with his participation in state and federal politics. *Body Counts* begins with a vignette of Strub’s participation in the (now infamous) ACT UP protest against Cardinal O’Connor at St. Patrick’s Cathedral in New York City. As Strub, who is inside the church blending with the parishioners in contrast to thousands of protestors outside, goes to take communion, he issues his “political statement” to the surprised “small, dark-skinned priest”:

This is the moment—my moment to confront the Church—when instead of repeating “the body of Christ” as expected, I am to make my political statement. But I have not prepared one. When I rehearsed this moment in my mind, I imagined I might break into tears or erupt in rage because no slogan—in fact, no words at all—seemed adequate.

“May the Lord bless the man I love, who died a year ago this week,” I hear myself say. My voice begins as a tremble but finishes strong. Police standing a few feet away are ready to intervene, watching to see how the priest reacts. His hand jerks slightly, but he looks me in the eye and gives me the wafer.

With my heart pounding, I walk back to my pew. My mind is fixed on bodies, but not the body of Christ. I think of Michael’s body and the agonizing brain infection that turned his last days into a kind of crucifixion. I think of the bodies of the protestors carried out on stretchers and those chanting outside, many struggling to survive. I think of my own body, and wonder how much longer it will last.¹⁵³

¹⁵² Roger Hallas, *Reframing Bodies*, 243.

¹⁵³ Sean Strub, *Body Counts: A Memoir of Politics, Sex, AIDS, and Survival* (New York: Scribner, 2014), 3.

Though Strub is clearly placing a series of bodies in juxtaposition to one another—literal and metaphorical bodies, bodies living and dead—my interest here is the relationship between that juxtaposition and Strub’s ability to both take ownership of the event by articulating his protest statement. This act over ownership and the conditions of possibility for Strub to give an account of his condition are a product of the process I’ve been labeling reading HIV. The activism which occurs in this scene is contingent upon the confrontation of perspectives and power differentials. Thus the political intensity of the moment is augmented by overlapping lines of vision and presence: Strub reading the priest for acknowledgment of his words, the priest reading Strub perhaps in evaluation of Strub’s sincerity or to judge the volatility of his protest action, the mutual excription between the police officers and Strub emphasizing the risks and limits to Strub’s freedom and personal safety, the copresence of the police and the priest which blur the lines between church and state, the copresence of Strub and his fellow activists each executing their own acts of rebellion, the memory of Michael’s body as imaginatively viewed by Strub, Strub’s reading of the wafer both as metonymical extension of Christ and of the religious childhood he has clearly left behind, and the eyes of the parishioners compelled to bear witness to ACT UP’s protest. While Strub knows that he *must* speak in the face of the priest, it is interesting that he does not know what to say until he is *with* the priest: something in the mutual process of recognition and relation of communion prompts Strub to relate his desire to “bless the man I love, who died a year ago this week.” This act of blessing stands in stark contrast to the myriad of other protest statements occurring in the church, most notably invectives against the cardinal which brand him a murderer. Strub cannot know himself until that pivotal moment of contact, a contact transformative across temporalities: a present-time Strub whose sense of future

activism has been changed through the unknowingness of exposure, and a past understanding of Michael now understood through the valence of crucifixion. (I wonder how the ephemerality of this relation has changed the priest?) This nexus of relationalities is ultimately empowering to Strub; the passage ends with his assertion: “I am exultant, in a state that feels like grace, certain that if I am to die of AIDS, I will die as a fighter, not as a victim.”¹⁵⁴

Butler writes that “[e]xposure, like the operation of the norm, constitutes the conditions of my own emergence as a reflective being, one with memory, one who might be said to have a story to tell”¹⁵⁵ In (briefly) outlining the various exposures—without conflating the differences between exposure and excription whereby the latter is perhaps the registering of the former, and ‘emergence’ is the incitement of this process—I am attempting to establish the position/relation from which Strub’s speech act emerges and is read as such; or put differently, the way in which HIV is both read, declared, and understood in relation. The myriad of relations outlined above pivot on serostatus—which is not to say seropositivity or seronegativity, for it is in actuality the divide between these two which separates the space of protest—which in turn becomes both the instigation to and subject of reflection for all involved. HIV provokes reading. The various reactions involved, including Strub’s own, are demonstrative of the extent of this provocation: the vulnerability of HIV is that which is read on the body, but irrevocably alters the sense of relation upon which being is understood as such. Yet thus far in Strub’s account, this vulnerability, apart from the declarative statement Strub utters, has not yet been made visible: it is not visually apparent to the priest that Strub himself is living with HIV. Though not strictly speaking a disclosure of seropositivity—he has yet to develop symptoms—Strub’s solidarity with

¹⁵⁴ Sean Strub, *Body Counts*, 3.

¹⁵⁵ Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, 39.

ACT UP allows his body to be interpreted as seropositive, a vulnerability for which relinquishes a good deal of autonomy: he is at the mercy of the priest and the police officer's reading of that vulnerability, or more accurately, the perceived threat posed by vulnerability. Nonetheless, HIV, even as supposition, becomes the contingent vulnerability upon which knowledge of the (and by the) bodies in relation is constructed. This sentiment is echoed by Paula Treichler, who writes that "whatever else it may be, AIDS is a story, or multiple stories, and read to a surprising extent from a text that does not exist: the body of the male homosexual."¹⁵⁶ While Treichler echoes my own imbrication of ontological relationality and the corporeality of HIV, I hope to make clear that I am calling into contention her disavowal of the existence of "the body of the male homosexual," for the Nancian body and my own body-with-HIV is always double: a material body before me and a body of sense, both socioculturally and politically fabricated yet both fundamentally real.

The cutaneous, lymphatic or mucosal lesions known as Kaposi's Sarcoma, understood as an AIDS defining illness at the beginning of the epidemic, became arguably the single most socially visible marker of AIDS prior to advanced antiretroviral therapy. Strub writes that: "When I got KS in 1994, it changed my social experience of AIDS. KS's scarlet mark—with its eerie evocation of a stigmatic's holy wound—announced my illness to all; I no longer had any control over when and to whom it was disclosed."¹⁵⁷ Strub's delineation of AIDS as having social and medical strata is in line with much early AIDS criticism, which include Treichler's assertion that "the AIDS epidemic is simultaneously an epidemic of transmissible lethal disease

¹⁵⁶ Paula A. Treichler, *How to Have Theory in an Epidemic: Cultural Chronicles of AIDS* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1999), 19.

¹⁵⁷ Sean Strub, *Body Counts*, 315.

and an epidemic of meanings or significations.”¹⁵⁸ In fact, Strub’s comparison between the lesion and stigmata is particularly apt, for religious (and military) metaphors make up a great deal of the metaphorical systems of signification through which the epidemic has historically been understood. (I will demonstrate the shifting structure of these systems in a later section.)

Susan Sontag famously attempts to distance illness from metaphorical language in her companion works *Illness as Metaphor* and *AIDS and Its Metaphors*, the latter having been written a decade following the former in response to pervasively stigmatizing language deployed early in the epidemic by the “guardians of public morals.”¹⁵⁹ Metaphors of ‘plague’, ‘invasion’, ‘war’ (against AIDS, against the body), and ‘pollution’ permeate AIDS discourse in such a way that promulgate “First World political paranoia,” leading Sontag to conclude that “a whole politics of ‘the will’—of intolerance, of paranoia, of fear of political weakness—has fastened on this disease.”¹⁶⁰ The fear which prompts such metaphorical comparisons, for Sontag, collectively distance us from the disease itself thereby maligning bodies and populations in need. Important to my current discussion is the manner in which the production of metaphorical language centers on the exscripted vulnerability of the body; such metaphors are produced out of the fear of what has been read. Sontag ultimately states: “AIDS seems to foster ominous fantasies about a disease that is a marker of both individual and social vulnerabilities.”¹⁶¹ If vulnerability leads to language which at its core purposefully distances itself from that which it signifies, then it is no wonder that the increased visibility of vulnerability experienced by Strub is found to negatively impact his “social experience of AIDS.”

¹⁵⁸ Paula A. Treichler, *How to Have Theory in an Epidemic*, 11.

¹⁵⁹ Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and its Metaphors* (New York: Picador, 1977 and 1988), 149.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 151.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid*, 153.

Which is to say a social experience akin to social death, where experience turns on the blending of the social and the medical in public discourse. Strub continues to describe his “dark mark”:

Red or dark purple KS lesions inspired the same visceral dread as buboes, the blisterlike lymph nodes heralding the bubonic plague in the fourteenth century. The only difference was that with KS, people on the street stopped short of running from you. Instead, you were considered the walking dead. Frequently, your presence evoked fear and anger, whether you were seated in a restaurant, sniffing a cantaloupe at the grocery, or reaching to press a button on an elevator.¹⁶²

The spacing between Strub and such angered or fearing bodies is informed by a corpus of knowledge containing vast histories of medical stigma. The impossibility contained within the metaphor “walking dead” is particularly telling, as its rhetorical agency is given only (judgmentally) through a living body’s relation to and reading of the illness of another. “Walking dead” is contingent upon a socially and historically informed relationality, much in the vein of my discussion of Butler above, whereby the metaphorical structures imposed on our understanding of illness as identified by Sontag influences readings of “red or dark” lesions. But rather than understand the metaphor of “walking dead” to connote a vast system of social distortion or contortion in the process I’ve termed reading HIV, I want to point out what is at play here is far more insidious than mere metaphorical or rhetorical judgement: reading HIV, first, depends upon a blurring of the scientific and the political understandings of bodies-with-HIV, but second, it equally depends upon the blurring of bodies-with and bodies-without the virus.

¹⁶² Sean Strub, *Body Counts*, 315.

Of the former, I've already mentioned Sontag's contention that metaphor always already creates a space between concrete understanding, or what we might understand as the 'real,' and the illness itself. Lee Edelman, in "The Plague of Discourse," further argues that the "tendentious figurality" of AIDS discourse interplays with the figurality of scientific discourse.¹⁶³ He writes that "the metaphoric flights of fancy that are at work in scientific discourse of "AIDS"... have no literal warrant in "nature." Reverse transcriptase and immune defense systems are metaphoric designations that determine the way we understand the operations of the body; they are tropological readings that metastasize the metabolic by infecting it with a strain of metaphor that can appear so natural, so intrinsic to our way of thinking, that we mistake it for the literal truth of the body, as if our rhetorical immune system had ceased to operate properly, or as if the virus of metaphor had mutated so successfully as to evade the antibodies that would permit us to distinguish the inside from the outside, the proper from the improper."¹⁶⁴ Edelman calls attention to the metaphoric structure of the scientific understanding we so often take as fact (or as 'real'). He demonstrates a reciprocal relationship between, on the one hand, the shared metaphorical structure of the social and medical understanding of AIDS in tension with collective perceptions that one is constructed and the other fictive, and on the other hand, the impact of this divide on readings of the body. Which leads me to my latter point: that the metaphorical structures which undergird reading HIV prophylactically attempt to separate bodies based on serostatus while simultaneously calling our attention to the impossibility of such efforts. If in Nancy we ontologically recognize our simultaneously shared and individual mortality in our plural relation,

¹⁶³ Lee Edelman, *Homographesis: Essays in Gay Literary and Cultural Theory* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), 92.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 91.

KS in Strub's passage above serves as perhaps the extreme example of exscription: the unavoidable mark through which we recognize the immanence of our own death. Social interventions—which include metaphorical structures of understanding HIV, but also interrelated issues of stigma, legislative and judicially imposed barriers, and accounts of physical violence—which mitigate the relationship between serodiscordant bodies, often understood in their power imbalance, attempt to weaken the recognition of death by *all* bodies. By reading HIV through language evoking immanent mortality, the very immanence of that mortality becomes solely located (and thus displaced) onto the body-with-HIV; that is, the mortality that we share becomes fictively understood as metaphorically attached *only* to *some* bodies. But vulnerability is always shared. Nancy puts it best: “Language is the element of the with *as such*: it is the space of its declaration. In turn, this declaration as such refers to everyone and to no one, refers to the world and to its coexistence.... Death as such, [like] birth as such, takes place as language: it takes place in and through the being-with-one-another.”¹⁶⁵

Shifting Queer Vulnerability

The relationship I've woven between mortality, vulnerability, visibility, and giving account begins to reorganize at the advent of what is colloquially known as the cocktail, better stated as antiretroviral therapy which inhibits the reproduction of HIV and creates viral suppression known as undetectability: “antiretroviral-therapy could reduce the virus to

¹⁶⁵ Jean Luc-Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, 88-89.

undetectable levels and make people with HIV vastly less infectious.”¹⁶⁶ Undetectable, it should be noted, has become a ubiquitous term in queer culture, denoting the imperceptibility of the virus to viral load tests so long as antiretrovirals are routinely taken. Strub refers to this as a form of Lazarus effect. Upon taking antiretrovirals his Kaposi’s Sarcoma lesions began to fade and his mobility improved. Strub began to regain a sense of his own life, and an increased confidence in both his capacity to manage his health and in what might be vaguely labeled medical progress: “I knew my own health was improving, but it was incremental, with good days and bad.”¹⁶⁷ While certain physical markers in the technology’s early days implied the use of antiretrovirals and therefore the presence of HIV—such as redistribution of lipids—antiretrovirals in general provided a renewed sense of vitality in the queer community and on the queer body.

Consider, for example, the space between the following two passages, temporally located before and after Strub’s use of antiretroviral therapy: “The epidemic, and the specter of my own death, was a constant presence, precluding any long-term plans beyond the next demonstration, fund-raiser, or funeral” and later:

My planning window, which had for years been steadily shrinking, started to expand. I had a renewed sense of energy and expectation. I felt confident making plans a few weeks and, soon, a few months into the future. Eventually, I could think about the following spring or summer. It was exciting but tentative. Every day I wondered, Is this the day my treatment will stop working?

The stress of recovery was particular. Many of my relationships were shaped by the expectation that I wouldn’t be around much longer. As my expectations for the future grew, the perspective of others changed on the same schedule. In February 1997, *The New York Times* profiled what had come to be called the “Lazarus Syndrome,” the experience of people with HIV who had been “brought back from the dead” by the new

¹⁶⁶ Sean Strub, *Body Counts*, 336. I will consider the ramifications of this statement to queer sexuality in my fifth chapter.

¹⁶⁷ Sean Strub, *Body Counts*, 363.

treatments. Many who had been confined to bed could walk; others were returning to work. It was spectacular.¹⁶⁸

These passages speak to my chapter heading, where I've used the term "queer vulnerability" instead of a more specific focus on the body-with-HIV. Two broad arguments may immediately defend this decision, both contingent upon the mutual imbrication of queer and HIV: the lexical association between queer and AIDS traction early in the epidemic in which AIDS becomes read as a gay disease, and second, in recent years, the concomitance of visible queer mainstream political participation with the imperceptibility of HIV symptoms. However, Strub's rendering of being "brought back from the dead" with its disidentification from "the walking dead" (above) provides a more nuanced relation between 'queer' and 'HIV': to be brought back, to return, even to participate in the spectacular requires a renewal of plural relation which requires seeing an existing body anew.¹⁶⁹ What could be queerer than corporeal transformation?

Also of note in these two passages is the method by which Strub understands this renegotiation of relationality in terms of social productivity: planning, working, expectations. The film critic B. Ruby Rich best characterizes antiretrovirals as "reliev[ing] the panic and fatalities of the 1980s and early 1990s. As the death sentences of the past transmuted into longer-term chronic illness with a more benign prognosis for many LGBT communities, longevity

¹⁶⁸ Sean Strub, *Body Counts*, 363.

¹⁶⁹ I intentionally use disidentification as opposed to misidentification (and the anti-assimilationist mode it implies) in the vein of José Esteban Muñoz, who understands disidentification to negotiate "strategies of resistance *within* the flux of discourse and power" (19). He writes: "Disidentification is about recycling and rethinking encoded meaning. The process of disidentification scrambles and reconstructs the encoded message of a cultural text in a fashion that both exposes the encoded messages' s universalizing and exclusionary machinations and recircuits its workings to account for, include, and empower minority identities and identifications. Thus, disidentification is a step further than cracking open the code of the majority; it proceeds to use this code as raw material for representing a disempowered politics or positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture" (31). Essentially, Strub subverts the constellations of meaning linking walking/dead from within the dominant sociocultural structure who (harmfully) deployed them in the first place. See José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

allowed for a focus on matters other than survival.”¹⁷⁰ This sociality is emphasized in the term “spectacular” and its connotation of publicness and wonderment. These “matters,” as Strub indicates, include folding the body-with-HIV back into the realm of the social from which such bodies were systematically removed. This re-folding demands, however, a renegotiation of queer ontology, exscription, and giving account unthinkable in the years and months preceding antiretroviral therapies, perhaps enlightening the new set of stresses Strub attaches to “recovery.”

Bearing in mind the effects of antiretrovirals on Strub’s sense of sense, futurity, and community, I would like to use the remainder of this chapter to ask a series of questions that I argue become tantamount to the ongoing relevance of queer theoretical thought and the sustainability of a particularly queer politics. If, as writes Susan Sontag, “AIDS is a clinical construction, an inference,” and if, in my understanding, that inference erringly displaces recognition of our shared mortality, then what are the social, cultural, rhetorical, and political consequences of medical progress which defers the readability of AIDS vulnerability?¹⁷¹ How do we account, in acts of giving account, for the decreased visibility of HIV? Such questions scrutinize the opposition between the readable and the invisible, and acts of exscription and erasure. I will attempt to parse a distinction between the making invisible and tracing invisibility during the remainder of this chapter.

Tracing the Invisible

¹⁷⁰ B. Ruby Rich, *New Queer Cinema: The Director’s Cut* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013), 261. In conjunction with many of the assertions of my own project, it is interesting to note that Rich understands antiretrovirals in tandem to the decreased political fervency of the New Queer Cinema genre.

¹⁷¹ Susan Sontag, *Illness*, 108.

I am attempting to map an invisibility intentionally rendered as such, tracing the trace of HIV as it retreats medically and socially from visibility. This is in no way to undermine or attempt to disqualify the victory of antiretrovirals. Instead it is to question our assumptions about such technologies and their inevitable rhetorical and imaginative links to so called progress. Thinking differently—as critique, as imagining other possibilities—strengthens our collective ability to move forward, however that may be. “Tracing erasure” may require some contextualization, for which I suggest sketching two differing models that have continued and will continue to shape my understanding of the impact of antiretroviral technologies on queer ontology. Both owe much theoretical debt to the Derridean trace, Heideggerian being-in-the-world, and the problematization of political representation inherent in performance.

I have already demonstrated that part and parcel to Nancian relationality is a paradox of proximity: the shared betweenness of bodies is that through which bodies must simultaneously come to understand themselves in their singularity. It is through this spacing that that process of exscription—the reading and writing of material bodies and bodies of knowledge—comes to occur. John Paul Ricco’s recent analysis of spacing, *The Decision Between Us*, is a study “dedicated to thinking decision as space, specifically as the spacing of shared-separation that is sustained in and as ethical and aesthetic exposition and presentation, or what I will refer to as the scene.”¹⁷² These scenes, which have resonated throughout my discussion of Strub’s autobiography, contain within them an ethics of spaciality and a spaciality of ethics; that is, a locatable relationality of bodies founded upon accountability. Though Ricco calls upon artistic practice to demonstrate the confluence of such ethics with aesthetic formulation, I draw from his

¹⁷² John Paul Ricco, *The Decision Between Us: Art and Ethics in the Time of Scenes* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 2.

analysis the *risk* taken in the erasure of vulnerability.¹⁷³ Speaking of Nancy's sense of shared finitude, Ricco writes that "according to Nancy, to be exposed toward-the-world, and therefore to partake in its sense, is to be exposed to the incommensurability of the world, experienced as the shared naked exposure to the force of finitude (including in the form of pain, suffering, intrusion—including the intrusion that is life and that is death)... Existence is precisely the risk we take in living."¹⁷⁴ Mortal exposure and shared finitude, I have shown, serve as the basis of my bridging Nancy's work with queer theoretical thought. What Ricco adds to this discussion is the richness of the term 'risk': to risk is to incur exposure purposefully, to place ourselves at a potential loss, it is a failure potentially redeemable in profit. The risk of exposure is the risk undertaken by Strub at the cathedral: that discoveries through reading the body-with-HIV will provide political payoff. The risk of exposure is the risk undertaken when Strub attempts, post-antiretroviral, to expand his "planning window," to see beyond the ostracization of death to renewed sociality.

The risk of living is put to its ultimate test in the act of erasure. Ricco analyses at length Robert Rauschenberg's *Erased de Kooning Drawing* (1953) in which Rauschenberg, quite literally, erases a de Kooning work, effecting a "retreat of image that is the condition that enables any image to be registered."¹⁷⁵ Ricco traces this retreat as a form of drawing, put in (my own) Nancian terms as exscripting the trace of what once was. Ricco refers to this process as "a performative undoing."¹⁷⁶ He writes: "Drawing is then to be understood as inscriptive amnesia,

¹⁷³ I will return to my analysis of Ricco's deployment of aesthetics in my dissertation's conclusion.

¹⁷⁴ John Paul Ricco, *The Decision Between Us*, 13.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 25.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 33.

the forgetting, and the getting over, of erasure. Ironically, then, erasing is the remembering of this absence within drawing; it is what helps drawing remember its own forgetting, not only what drawing forgets, but speaking ontologically, what drawing is—namely, an inscriptive forgetting.”¹⁷⁷ To remember the absence is to trace such absence, to draw in and through the retreat of drawing. Like spacing or proximity, “inscriptive forgetting” can operate solely through its paradoxical nature, solely as an impossibility that *must* be possible. For Ricco, as for Nancy and myself, it is approaching the moment of impossibility that ontological understanding depends upon. Language may fail us here, but we must trace the retreat that is also a coming.

Which leads me to the work of Peggy Phelan. In *Unmarked*, Phelan considers the political consequences of marking the unmarked: “that which is not ‘really’ there, that which cannot be surveyed within the boundaries of the putative real.”¹⁷⁸ Phelan problematizes the politics of representation, which attempt to mark marginalized peoples, practices, beliefs, and modes of being omitted from academic and political sight, what traditional leftist politics would call the disenfranchised. Phelan, in the opening pages of *Unmarked*, demands other possible ways of thinking through this often invoked mode of anti-oppressive work: “I am not suggesting that continued invisibility is the ‘proper’ political agenda for the disenfranchised, but rather the binary between the power of visibility and the impotency of invisibility is falsifying. There is real power in remaining unmarked; and there are serious limitations to visual representation as a political goal.”¹⁷⁹ Phelan questions the underlying assumption that visibility is tantamount to cultural and political power; conversely she questions whether invisibility equates

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, 33-34.

¹⁷⁸ Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 1.

¹⁷⁹ Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked*, 6.

powerlessness.¹⁸⁰ These assumptions—which, again, too often provide the premise of leftist political praxis—mirror the explanations for the decreased activism of younger queers I problematized in my first chapter: namely that decreased visibility and the normalization of HIV are contributing factors toward generational apathy and the suspension of HIV activism as a political priority for queer communities. Phelan thus turns her attention to the “immateriality [of] the unmarked” which “shows itself through the negative and through disappearance. I am speaking here of an *active* vanishing, a deliberate and conscious refusal to take the payoff of visibility.”¹⁸¹

Ricco’s aesthetic tracing of erasure and Phelan’s politics of invisibility speak directly toward the shifting nature of queer vulnerability that my analysis of Strub’s autobiography brings to the fore. The making invisible of HIV—literally, the receding of symptoms—carries with it, I argue, a political heft as yet untheorized. I return to Strub’s account of post-antiretroviral politics:

Years ago, combating stigma was a primary focus of AIDS activism, but since the introduction of combination therapy it became sidelined as an issue, rather than addressed as a fundamental obstacle to ending the epidemic.

Effective treatment for HIV has also contributed to the stubborn persistence of stigma. Until 1996, it was widely assumed that all of us with AIDS were going to die. The “general public,” no matter how they felt about homosexuality, injection drug use, or other contentious issues, had come a long way toward compassion for people with HIV. Our community showed that we were fighters rather than victims, creating services, demanding resources and respect, taking care of our sick, dying with dignity.

Yet, as it became widely understood that new treatments enable us to live much longer, we increasingly became defined not by our expected death but by our potential to infect others, as “viral vectors.” As we lived longer, the criminal justice and public health systems have come to view us, even define us, as inherently dangerous.¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰ Phelan jokingly adds: “If representational visibility equals power, then almost-naked young white women should be running Western culture” (10).

¹⁸¹ Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked*, 19.

¹⁸² Sean Strub, *Body Counts*, 396.

The retreat of visible symptoms resultant from antiretrovirals, Strub asserts, in no way implies a retreat from socially manifested fear. Instead, the manifestation of fear so too becomes hidden from view, codified in law and medical scrutiny. Whereas opportunistic infections such as Kaposi's Sarcoma or side effects such as wasting were the initial determinants of HIV read on queer bodies from which such bodies became feared and blamed objects, the retreat of KS, for example, ultimately extends the perceived danger of, and thus the need to regulate, HIV to all queer bodies. We also fear what we cannot see. While the pervasiveness of fear as well as metaphors of contamination have continued to plague queer bodies before *and* after antiretroviral therapies, what remains unspoken is how the production of fear in conjunction of HIV must be politically mobilized under these new circumstances; as Douglas Crimp states, "the rhetorics we employ must be faithful to our situation *at this moment* rather than what seemed true and useful last time we set to work."¹⁸³

The conditions of articulation of such circumstances are made, in part, available by what I've called a tracing of the invisible: establishing the theoretical circumstances through which the body-with-HIV is read in plural relation. I've already shown that fear not only remains but surreptitiously expands once HIV is not overtly read on the queer body. We fear the trace of what is left behind. But better understanding the body-with-HIV in plural relation also returns us to our discussion of (the particularities of) queer autobiography. Roger Hallas speaks of the "the intersubjective dynamics of bearing witness" thus turning his attention to "the transformed imperatives of autobiography for queer AIDS since the development of combination

¹⁸³ Quoted in Roger Hallas, *Reframing Bodies*, 105.

[antiretroviral] therapies and the emergence of a global AIDS activist movement.”¹⁸⁴ For Hallas, antiretroviral therapies risk privatizing HIV, transposing the epidemic from being publicly read to privately known. It is this shift that Strub understands queer bodies to become read as always already medically dangerous. In answer to these problems, Hallas identifies the manner in which the videographers he studies de-privatize the experience of HIV in order to provoke relationality between viewer and body-with-HIV, thereby equally provoking political affinity and support. He writes that if “autobiographical testimony remains framed as the intimate revelation of the private, it comes to bear witness only to universally identifiable human conditions, such as suffering, survival, or mortality. The social and political aspects that distinguish HIV-related disease from other illnesses fall out and with them, so too does the imperative placed on the viewer to transform consciousness and to effect change.”¹⁸⁵ This transformation comes at the cost of making public what has become erased—justly—by medical progress. What I find interesting is that the capacity to bear witness in a way that is politically productive uses the same universalizing framework of the transposed and publicly manifested fear outlined by Strub: re-invigorating political participation and re-invigorating bigoted sentiment rely on the same forms of tracing invisibility. In my Derridean terms: the simultaneity of stroking and striking. This possibly reflects the lexical ambivalence of the term ‘undetectable’: which implies the safety of non-transmission as well as unseen lurking, ‘undetectable’ cannot shake the connotation of laying-in-wait. In both cases, rediscovering the public relevance of HIV—which is not to say that HIV had become irrelevant as a political cause, just that the decreased exscriptability of HIV in turn decreases public HIV discourse—hinges on the simultaneousness of making what has

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, 32 and 114.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid, 115-116.

been rendered invisible visible *and* maintaining its invisibility; that is, emphasizing the continued presence of HIV because of, not in spite of, its visual withdrawal.

I hope to have made the link between visibility and ontological reading explicitly clear. My analysis of the sociopolitical conditions which inform the conditions of possibility for Nancian spacing makes clear that a certain reunderstanding of queer relationality is thus necessitated as the rhetoric of HIV shifts. If the totality of the body exceeds the sum of its parts, no clear cut answers are available to us as to how, in Nancy's terms, the *partes extra partes* of the body-with-HIV can be understood anew. To conclude this chapter, I'd like to think about how antiretrovirals have not only altered queer relationality, but forever changed the association between relationality and accountability. Beginning with a critical contention over Nancy's work, I'd like to think about ongoing productive tensions between changing situations and changing ontologies, or more specifically, the new political alliance of undetectability and accountability.

Giving Accounts, Remaining Accountable

In his "Being Beyond Politics, with Jean-Luc Nancy," Martin Crowley attempts to temper critical concerns with Nancy's work that Nancy prioritizes broader ontological issues—bodies, sense, plurality, being-with—over situation specific political issues, which in terms of my own project, place at stake the use of Nancy's broad ontological categories for situation specific political problems: Crowley argues instead that "the claims of ontology and politics, or existence and situatedness, may be thought of as equiprimordial, as pressing on each other from the very

start.”¹⁸⁶ Throughout this chapter, I have attempted to draw ontological processes of exscription, reading, and giving account in parallel to autobiographical testimony of what I’ve termed reading HIV with the ambition of demonstrating the shifting conditions of vulnerability through which HIV is made continuously knowable and articulable. Crowley’s statement prompts discussion, however, on what I see as the tension between the ongoing process of relation enacted continuously through our being and the continuous displacement and difference of the situation or location of its enactment. That is to say, a tension between unchanging being-with and the changing specifics through which that process is derived. “Every existence arrives in a determined context.”¹⁸⁷ The determined contexts above, including St. Patrick’s cathedral, are meant as both specific historical instantiations of reading HIV and synecdochic extensions of HIV’s mitigation of relational being. This is not to say that all examples speak to the truths of the epidemic. Instead, instances of reading HIV are openings for political thought: for translating the reading of HIV into sociopolitical understandings, into doings. What is copresence and the renewed exscription of HIV asking us to do?

The opening up of bodies through which my reading of Nancy’s work depends is transcribed, by Crowley and others, into an opportunity for political action. By rooting his ontology in the materiality of bodies, Nancy, in Anne O’Byrne’s terms, “provides us with an ontology in motion.”¹⁸⁸ This motion finds genesis in bodies in their constant change—Nancy writes in *Corpus* that bodies are “always about to leave, on the verge of a movement, a fall, a

¹⁸⁶ Martin Crowley, “Being Beyond Politics, with Jean-Luc Nancy,” *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences* 22.2 (Spring/Summer 2014), 123.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 136.

¹⁸⁸ Anne O’Byrne, “Nancy’s Materialist Ontology,” in *Jean-Luc Nancy and Plural Thinking: Expositions of World, Ontology, Politics, and Sense*, ed. Peter Gratton and Marie-Eve Morin (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012), 79.

gap, a dislocation”—but also because bodies are forever beginning and ending in their natality and mortality, processes which we must constant recognize in our mutual relation.¹⁸⁹ (The body-with-HIV in motion is the subject of my third chapter.) O’Byrne writes: “This is a materialism that shows us thought moving to and beyond its limit in matter in a way that eventually allows us—singular, plural, corporeal, natal beings—to emerge *as* sense.”¹⁹⁰ Sense, in Nancy, “is the movement of being-*toward*, or being as *coming* into presence or again as transivity, as passage to presence—and therewith a passage *of* presence.”¹⁹¹ Crowley attempts to turn this double movement of sense (toward the world, toward the ontological self) into a form of political praxis in which exposure to the world and to bodies in plural relation implies continuous renegotiation, much as in the form of plurality between bodies in relation I’ve outlined above. “In all their strong, collective self-identification, political groups and actions are constitutively opened beyond themselves; this opening is itself opened to such groups and actions, including to the strength of their collectivity.”¹⁹² Collectivity is determined by foreclosing totalizing foreclosure itself, being open to continuous difference.

Strub frames this form of continuous renegotiation through his political aspirations. Recognizing how queer vulnerability becomes read as pervasively dangerous in the (heterosexual) judicial and (heterosexual) medical world, Strub founded the Sero Project, which “has helped rekindle the people with HIV self-empowerment movement, begun more than three decades ago, bringing young people are those who have been criminalized or are incarcerated, as

¹⁸⁹ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus*, 33.

¹⁹⁰ O’Byrne, “Nancy’s Materialist Ontology,” 81.

¹⁹¹ Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, trans. Jeffrey S. Librett (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 12.

¹⁹² Crowley, “Being Beyond Politics, with Jean-Luc Nancy,” 139.

well as transgender women, into policy debates and activism, shining a spotlight on stigma.”¹⁹³ The project of decriminalization emerges from open discussion of the fear made available by invisibility without precluding our collective responsibility to mobilize invisibility in productive ways. Bridging history with the new realities of HIV, Strub always includes a “plug for the Denver Principles,” a historic moment in HIV activism in which persons living with AIDS are recognized as intrinsically important to HIV policy initiatives, into his speeches, community acts, and individual political participation.¹⁹⁴ Like my call for intergenerational participation (from my first chapter), Strub incorporates younger voices into his work, while acknowledging that “many of us long-term survivors are the first to cast stones against the younger generation who ‘should have known better’.”¹⁹⁵ Sero utilizes the discourses of invisibility I’ve outlined above to combat not only social stigma which itself searches for the erasure of HIV, but criminalization of non-disclosure; they have recently produced a short documentary entitled “HIV is Not a Crime.”¹⁹⁶ The basis for this work is grounded in histories of AIDS service organizations but adapted based on reinterpreting the needs of the body-with-HIV.

Strub has effectively moved with the moving nature of queer relationality, mobilized the social ramifications of HIV’s perpetual exscription in the service of persons living with HIV within our current historical moment. Strub recognizes what Nancy terms the body’s capacity “to never stop *selving*,” to never stop reinterpreting and remaking itself anew.¹⁹⁷ HIV has changed—is changing—and thus so have the social and political implications of its relationality with other

¹⁹³ Sean Strub, *Body Counts*, 396.

¹⁹⁴ Sean Strub, *Body Counts*, 391. The Denver Principles can be found on the UNAIDS website: http://data.unaids.org/pub/externaldocument/2007/gipa1983denverprinciples_en.pdf.

¹⁹⁵ Sean Strub, *Body Counts*, 396.

¹⁹⁶ <http://seroproject.com/videos/>

¹⁹⁷ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus*, 113.

bodies, regardless of serostatus. Responding to adapting situational needs of HIV requires rethinking the body-with-HIV in perpetuity. At our current historical junction, that rethinking requires a tracing of the retreat of visible symptoms. But continued political mobilization requires our preparedness for whatever arrives tomorrow. “Because *sense* has no origin, because *being-without-origin and coming-to-be-extended, being created, or weighing—such, indeed, is ‘sense.’*”¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁸ Ibid, 95.

Chapter Three: Living Before a Virus (The Fatal, The Chronic, The Intruder)

An intruder is in me, and I am becoming a stranger to myself.
Jean-Luc Nancy

In 1996, the year in which highly active antiretroviral therapy (HAART) was introduced at the 11th International Conference on AIDS in Vancouver, William Haver posits two divergent statements that have changed the way queer theory thinks about HIV. He argues, first, that “there is always, with respect to the object, something *more* to be said, *nothing* has been, or can definitely be said. This does not mean we cannot, least of all that we should not, think and talk about AIDS; but it does mean that such a thinking must *always also be something other* than a subject thinking about an object,” and second, that we have “become persuaded that AIDS belongs to the normative rather than the extraordinary, that AIDS is chronic rather than a crisis.”¹⁹⁹ On first glance, the logic of the latter seems to belie the former: that the rendering chronic of AIDS for which we have become persuaded marks AIDS—as a virus, as an epidemic, as a political issue—radically thinkable in the quotidian. In detaching AIDS from immanent death, it would appear we have made positive the inherent negativity of the virus: living *with* HIV, as the nomenclature dictates. This chapter is prompted by the inadequacies of the

¹⁹⁹ William Haver, *The Body of this Death: Historicity and Sociality in the Time of AIDS* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 4 and 2. Original emphasis.

relationship between death and cure, a space whose very indeterminacy becomes that through which we must understand the contemporary emergence of queer bodies. In our current historical moment we are experiencing what Eric Cazdyn refers to as a “paradigm shift in which the older notion of cure has been replaced by a newer notion of ‘management’” or, put in the terms of this project, an age in which HIV has entered the chronic.²⁰⁰

Haver’s comments speak to a problem thus far elusive to queer thought: that despite increasingly effective antiretroviral technologies, that despite political normalization through acceptance and media representation, that despite seropositive diagnoses no longer being death sentences, the human immunodeficiency virus will forever remain unthinkable. This is why, both in my project and in Haver’s writing, we must always think the otherwise of the current moment, what I have termed HIV’s other possibility. We must remember that the chronic does not lead to what David Caron refers to as “the uncontaminated,” with its valences of purity, cure, and social redemption. Caron writes that what “defines the uncontaminated isn’t its current status but the capacity to lose it, its susceptibility to infection. As an HIV-positive person, the fact of my contamination will never change.”²⁰¹ The chronic, no matter how effective the medication, does not produce queer bodies dissociated from the virus; the chronic is not a narrative of absolution or reclamation. Continuing my previous claim of HIV’s centrality to queer political life, I consider the HIV as originary to our becoming queer, regardless of serostatus. HIV, that is, precedes both who we are and who we will become. No-body—no queer body—may claim a

²⁰⁰ Eric Cazdyn, *The Already Dead: The New Time of Politics, Culture, and Illness* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012), 9.

²⁰¹ David Caron, *The Nearness of Others: Searching for Tact and Contact in the Age of HIV* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 27.

space immune to HIV. The becoming-chronic of HIV, in this light, is not (merely) a deferment of mortality, but a rethinking of death and death's place in our collective politics. My argument counters specious notions of sovereignty and sustenance, not in an effort to undermine medical progress or the choosing of life over death, but to remind us of our continuous vulnerability, to keep us on our toes, to remind ourselves that *it* may never be over, and to embrace the potentiality of our non-sovereignty. Such logic is buttressed by what Derrida refers to as "learning to live finally," that is, a politics of life in which "learning to live should mean learning to die, learning to take into account, so as to accept, absolute mortality."²⁰² Learning to die, for Derrida, does not mean *dying*, but recognizing our own mortality and its power over our capacity to live. We are, after all, "all survivors who have been granted a temporary reprieve."²⁰³

The chronic places queer bodies in a vastly differently relationship to the virus, including our capacity for response. This chapter partly works against unified notions of *living with* HIV, both in what cultural studies has come to term lived experience and as a broader category of that which affects queer life. Questioning *living with* in no way attempts to diminish or negate the experience of persons living with HIV. Instead, questioning *living with* attempts to free bodies-with-HIV from the stultifying understanding of HIV as acceptably quotidian. What follows is equally an engagement with the changing conditions of HIV as with HIV's intrinsic relationship to queer theoretical thought. I've argued for the necessity of rethinking and reevaluating both as part of my overarching project of conceptualizing HIV in the contemporary moment. I resume where I left off in my first chapter—my critique of the way in which HIV and politics are evoked

²⁰² Jacques Derrida, *Learning to Live Finally: An Interview with Jean Birnbaum*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Hoboken, New Jersey: Melville House Publishing, 2007), 24.

²⁰³ Ibid.

by David Halperin, Sarah Schulman and others as necessitating a knowledge transfer from one generation to the next—to find in recent queer works both a reiteration of the impossibility of that transfer and instances of thinking HIV anew in a post-antiretroviral world. Further, my work here follows my second chapter’s analysis of the retreating visuality of AIDS and the impact of undetectability on queer relationality by turning to the (potential) political implications of imperceptibility that the chronic has come to imply. My point is that *living with* insufficiently describes the relationship between the (ontological) body-with-HIV and the virus itself. Though much academic rhetoric posits *living with* as the sole ontological model for understanding seropositive subjectivity, I here mine queer writing—theory, life writing, cinema, and art—to broadly outline three temporal formulas that, broadly speaking, have become recurrent in HIV discourse: the future anterior, the chronic, and the originary intruder. No single mode, though, should be taken as definitive or predefined, but instead as tropes molded to meet the political messaging of their author. The future anterior and the chronic represent, respectively, the historical transition pre- and post-antiretroviral, though this break is far from clear cut as much of queer theoretical work has attempted to show. In turning to the originary through a reading of Jean-Luc Nancy’s fascinating essay “The Intruder,” I wish to further develop an underutilized third model for thinking the body-with-HIV. This model will recur in my concluding chapter on the deferment of a cure, pre-exposure prophylaxis, and shared duty.

Thus my work here is divided into three parts, each based on a temporal model of thought. The will-have-been provides the historical stakes of HIV’s symbolic (and potentially symbiotic) connection to death, one so strong it has seemed to have already occurred. This is the history upon which current writing on HIV is founded. The chronic possesses the ironic characteristic of being that which queer activism has most demanded and most feared: life saving

technologies simultaneously inviting queer bodies to join the ranks of quotidian normalcy. The originary intruder is my counter model for (re)thinking HIV, a model which embraces the precarity by and for all queer bodies that we have collectively eschewed.

The Politics of the Will-Have-Been

Various iterations of the future anterior have become something of a trope in HIV literature, particularly in earlier works where the metonymic relationship between seropositivity and death is strongest. The future anterior in my understanding is a temporal framework now rarely seen, but which maintains a lasting resonance in the collective queer social imagination. Predominantly employed in French (*futur antérieur*), the future anterior or future perfect describes a future action that will have already occurred: the will have been. Tim Dean, who ultimately breaks with the logic of the future anterior in his theoretical work and to whom I'll return momentarily, best defines the logic of the tense in relation to 'certainty,' writing that "[t]he future anterior is exemplified in a gesture that imagines 'what I shall have been for what I am becoming'—a gesture, in other words, that eclipses the uncertainties of the present by anticipating a future self with the capacity to retrospectively view its former state from a safe distance."²⁰⁴ Translated to HIV literature, the uncertainty which becomes eclipsed is the possibility of life, an impossible yet ontologically guiding knowing given birth by the sheer hopelessness of the early days of the epidemic. This knowingness of a future death—a knowingness both immediate and consuming—becomes so certain that one acts as if death will

²⁰⁴ Tim Dean, "Bareback Time," in *Queer Times, Queer Becomings*, eds. E.L. McCallum and Mikko Tuhkanen (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011), 84.

have already happened: one lives, as the title of Paul Monette's famous memoir has it, "on borrowed time."²⁰⁵ Living in the will have been of death, however, becomes interpreted differently for many writers. One of Monette's earliest discoveries is the importance of living immediately, of satisfying your life's ambitions quickly before you become unable to do so: "Live now, in other words, sobered and alert."²⁰⁶ To live in the now, I argue, becomes the defining trait of the future anterior, for the processing of death *before* its literal occurrence opens up a space for action (politically, but also a space for quotidian living) that a death sentence would often preclude. Early AIDS writing is filled with fervent action made possible by a refusal to allow mourning to overcome the subject recently diagnosed: death is experienced and as such processed so that when its literal instantiation arrives it is as though it has already happened. My point is that the future anterior creates a time between diagnosis and death otherwise unthinkable. This is not to say that all subjects experience AIDS in this way, but to mark the future anterior as an overriding and overarching trope in queer literature pre-cocktail, as my examples below will show. What is interesting about this phenomenon in queer art, writing, and scholarship—which connotes, it must be mentioned, a profound resilience on the part of such writers and artists—is that the history of activism made possible by the future anterior is one in which that very activism hopes to overcome: the immediate reconciliation with death is a means of reappropriating that time to work, collectively, on solutions to, in fact, stave off death. Dwelling in the future anterior is, in short, a means to an end to such dwelling. While this chapter's main focus is on the chronic and its problematic political influence on queer culture, I'd

²⁰⁵ Paul Monette, *Borrowed Time: An AIDS Memoir* (Orlando: Harcourt, 1988).

²⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 33.

like to outline two films that will demonstrate the lasting impact the future anterior, as a mindset, has had on queer culture, and to measure just how far we have come.

Canadian video artist Richard Fung's autobiographical work serves as an excellent example in this regard, particularly his *Sea in the Blood* (2000) and *Fighting Chance* (1990). *Sea in the Blood*, on the surface, is an exploration of two blood born infections: his sister Nan's death from thalassemia which, narratively, appears to both anticipate and be put into conversation his partner Tim's HIV status. Beginning with a series of red-tinted underwater shots of Fung and Tim swimming—shots which contrast later bright blue images of Fung swimming with Nan as children—*Sea in the Blood* incorporates a wide variety of travel snapshots, family interviews, floating text, segments of medical educational filmstrips, and voiceovers narrated by Fung himself organized not chronologically but thematically, so that the video seemingly merges comparable events regardless of when they actually occurred. We experience Fung's six month adventure through Turkey and Nepal in relation to his family's immigration to Toronto from Trinidad, images of Richard and Nan playing in their childhood home. Blood conditions (thalassemia, HIV) are revealed through water imagery: "the rose tinted waters dilute and refract the blood of heredity: the blood that carries illness, the blood that can cause distress, and the blood of intimacy."²⁰⁷ The net result is that the love Fung clearly has for Tim has already begun through his love for his sister, and her death makes visible Tim's illness long before its diagnosis. Fung says in a voiceover that "Nan's eventual death was a fact I was born into, like mangos in July.... I saw it in detail: me by her side, her soul taken to heaven by angels," while blurred text

²⁰⁷ Nayan Shah, "Undertow," *Mangoes in July: The Work of Richard Fung*, eds. Helen Lee and Kemi Sakamoto (Toronto: Insomniac Press, 2002), 103.

from what we later discover is an email appears on screen: “I grew up with death in the house.” Mere foreshadowing or affective anticipation does not do justice to the narrative Fung establishes, for the futures which await Nan and Tim, through their intertwining histories and asynchronous structure, have already been imagined before becoming actualized. Herein lies the peculiar and resonant beauty which makes *Sea in the Blood* so unbelievably powerful: that death, in its preemptive occurrence, is beside the point. Having been done with long before its arrival, death must give way to life, to forms of living rooted in a presentness without futurity.

Lily Cho best describes this temporal framework in her article “Future Perfect Loss,” in which Fung’s collages render a “vision of proleptic loss” which, integral to the future perfect/future anterior tense, names the anticipation for or representation to something as existing before it ever does.²⁰⁸ Notably for Cho, Fung’s use of images from both his childhood and his travels with Tim, and his inclusion of family interviews, transforms his racialized melancholia into an affective ground for political action; that is, the experience of past loss—in this case, of Fung’s experience of family, of reproduction, of immigration, of ethnicity—becomes the basis for sorting through his anticipated loss of Tim. Notably for Cho, Fung’s use of images from both his childhood and his travels with Tim, and his inclusion of family interviews, transforms his racialized melancholia into an affective ground for political action; that is, the experience of past loss—in this case, of Fung’s experience of family, of reproduction, of immigration, of ethnicity—becomes the basis for not only sorting through his anticipated loss of Tim but as impetus for politically motivated video work, not to mention Tim’s own participation in public protest. Past loss becomes informative insofar as it allows Fung to process the immanence of

²⁰⁸ Lily Cho, “Future Perfect Loss: Richard Fung’s *Sea in the Blood*,” *Screen* 49.4 (Winter 2008): 427.

future grief: not only does Nan's death from genetic thalassemia, a form of blood poisoning, link her to other siblings who likewise died before Fung was born, but Nan's death prepares Fung for Tim's own passing, which has yet to come. Cho writes that "the homology between Tim's (AIDS) diagnosis and Nan's is not only a fluke of illnesses which touch those whom Fung loves, it also concerns the confluence of love and loss as the possible preemption of a future which is to come."²⁰⁹ Cho's sense of political engagement emerges through the affective resonances made possible through the past, in which subjects may work "to transform the conditions of the future perfect."²¹⁰ I take this to mean not an aversion of immanent death, but a allowance for our capacity to shape how the future becomes received: to make the most of the now, perhaps, not by appreciating the present but by making it count, by placing the present in the service of whatever has already revealed itself as coming next. Bear in mind that the future anterior is not prophetic but proleptic, not psychic but an affective feeling of the future unfolding in the present, thus Fung's (and Cho's, and our own) capacity to mobilize our feelings of future loss as present action. Though anticipation does not resolve grief—of loss, but also of seropositivity, displacement, racial melancholia—the action that it may affectively generate may equally include room for creating community, solidarity, preparation, and a preemptive understanding of situations not yet happened. With Nan's death behind him, and the possibility of Tim's to come, Fung renews his activist energies by participating in the famous high jacking of the Fifth International AIDS Conference in Montréal; Katherine Lawless links this "revolutionary moment in HIV/AIDS activism" to the previously felt effects of "revolutionary decolonization" Fung

²⁰⁹ Ibid, 430.

²¹⁰ Ibid, 432.

experiences through Nan's death.²¹¹ Like Derrida, quoted above, a death preemptively experienced forces a relearning to live finally. Nan's is not only a fluke of illnesses that touch those whom Fung loves, "it also concerns the confluence of love and loss as the possible preemption of a future which is to come."²¹²

An alternative framing of the future anterior is found in Greg Araki's 1992 film *The Living End*, which follows Luke and Jon in a *Thelma and Louise*-esque road trip following Jon's recent HIV positive test result and Luke's inability to bide by the law. Both are young and good looking. Jon has an artistic side: his apartment is filled with art house cinema posters, a pamphlet by legendary queer director Derek Jarman, his friends are musicians and painters, he smokes joints while writing an article on "the death of cinema." Luke is the rebel: he wears ripped jeans, a leather jacket, and is first seen spray painting 'fuck the world' on a wall—clearly not his first time doing so. The cinematic trope of gay victim far from applies to these boys; here they are seizing control of what remains of their lives. (B. Ruby Rich, in her landmark essay on the New Queer Cinema, wrote that Luke and Jon "could be characters out of a porn flick, the stud and the john, in a renegotiated terrain."²¹³) We meet Jon as he is getting "the results from his first AIDS test," which he declares in his voice recorded journal as marking "the first day of the rest of my life." Despite the doctor's attempt at solace that "as you're probably aware, many people live perfectly normal lives for years and years," Jon's stunned reaction doesn't comprehend the news as a form of continuation or living with, but instead decides that he has no "idea what the fuck

²¹¹ Katherine B. Lawless, "(Re)Circulating Foreign Bodies: Richard Fung's *Sea in the Blood*," *Feminist Media Studies* 12.1 (2012): 128.

²¹² Lily Cho, "Future Perfect Loss," 430.

²¹³ B. Ruby Rich, *New Queer Cinema: The Directors Cut* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013), 27.

I'm going to do." Jon immediately decides that his life as it was by definition must be over. His symbolic death does not last long, though, for he almost immediately decides to "live fast, die young, and leave a beautiful corpse."

The logic of the future anterior here emerges, at minimum, as a post-HIV, post-death shot at freedom; Luke and Jon do not merely think they are going to die, but base their actions on a death that has already arrived. Luke and Jon meet as Luke is running from the law: Luke kills three gay bashers about to give him "cosmetic surgery" with their baseball bats. Jon picks Luke up in flight, and ends up hiding out in Jon's apartment, where it doesn't take long for them to share both their bodies and their recently diagnosed serostatuses. In fact, Jon can't even say the word AIDS, but their shared status is intuited by Luke, who says "it's really not big deal. Welcome to the club, partner." And later, Luke again: "It's not like I want to live forever, and get old and fat and die in this ugly stupid world anyways. I mean, we're victims of a sexual revolution.... There may be millions of us walking around with this thing inside of us, this time bomb ticking, making our futures finite, suddenly I realize, we got nothin 'to lose. Fuck work, fuck the system, fuck everything. Don't you get it? We're totally free." What ensues is a shopping spree which leads to a road trip into the unknown, up the coast of California. While maxing out credit cards and depleting savings accounts, Jon and Luke are able to expend what's left of themselves only through logic of a death already passed.

The Living End may depict the interim between metaphorical and literal death as giving genesis to a fun-filled letting go of the normative and rule based-quotidian, but both the social conditions which frame AIDS are grim at best. AIDS is clearly figured as a punishment for homosexuality, a death penalty for a generation of young gay men induced by an older

generation's "sexual revolution" and a straight world who refuses to come to their aid; "Kill fags" summarizes public sentiment encapsulated as a graffiti tag in a public toilet. By the logic of the future anterior, however, Luke and Jon have little time for mourning, not caring about public reaction or civic obedience. Says Luke: "What do you say we go to Washington and blow Bush's brains out.... Or better yet, we can hold him at gun point, inject him with a syringe filled with our blood. How much you want to bet they'd have a magic cure by tomorrow?" This, of course, is an allusion to David Wojnarowicz's photograph "Hujar Dead," which is a photograph taken moments after the artist Peter Hujar's death superimposed with a lengthy text: "And I'm carrying this rage like a blood-filled egg and there's a thin line between the inside and the outside a thin line between thought and action and that line is simply made up of blood and muscle and bone and I'm waking up more and more from the daydreams of tipping Amazonian blowdarts in 'infected blood' and spitting them at the exposed necklines of certain politicians."²¹⁴ Importantly, and despite this antagonistic backdrop, Araki's framing of post-diagnosis sex debunks any irreconcilability between bodies-with-HIV and their capacity for eroticism; Araki seems to channel Ann Cvetkovich who affirms her desire for "the sexual cultures that AIDS threatened to be acknowledged as both an achievement and a potential loss."²¹⁵ Despite a legion of (campily

²¹⁴ This is an often quoted passage from Wojnarowicz's work. For a detailed analysis of the piece as well as its contextualization in Wojnarowicz's life, see Cynthia Carr, *Fire in the Belly: The Life and Times of David Wojnarowicz* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 301-304.

²¹⁵ Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feeling: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), 5. This sentiment is more famously echoed by Douglas Crimp, who in "Portraits of People with AIDS," writes of Stashu Kybartas's video *Danny* that *Danny* formulates "the relationship between artist and subject not as one of empathy or identification, but as one of explicit sexual desire, a desire that simultaneously accounts for Kybartas's subjective investment in the project and celebrates Danny's own sense of gay identity and hard-won sexual freedom." Crimp's point, of course, is that explicit renderings of persons with HIV as sexual are both radical and far too rare, to say the least. See Douglas Crimp, *Melancholia and Moralism: Essays on AIDS and Queer Politics* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press), 101.

rendered) antigay forces, including proselytizers reading aloud from their bibles, and skinheads reminding Jon and Luke of the inevitability of AIDS, Jon and Luke fuck their way across the state.

Luke and Jon experience very little surprise as Jon begins to get sick, a sickness reminiscent of PCP pneumonia but unnamed as such. Jon, explicitly declaring that he knows what happens after death, is already prepared for the inevitable. They spend a great deal of time talking about what happens when one dies—“I’ve heard death is a lot like cumming”—and with very little uncertainty. But make no mistake, AIDS and death are simultaneously revered and feared. As Jon’s conditions deteriorates, Luke decides in his own way to take matters into his own hands, and the viewer cannot help but be witness to Luke’s bravado tinged with panic. He ties Jon up, raping him with a gun in his mouth, which fails to go off. The film abruptly ends with Jon, now untied, reaching out to Luke (in forgiveness only a preemptive death makes possible?) as the screen goes black. A final screen caption follows the credits, dedicated the film to Craig Lee “and the hundreds of thousands who’ve died and the hundreds of thousands who will die because of a big white house full republican (sic) fuckheads.” What I find interesting about *The Living End*’s relationship to an AIDS diagnosis is the manner in which the diagnosis allows Jon and Luke to take matters of mortality into their own hands, which given the forcefulness of both characters combined with their precarious financial and social situation, is meant to be seen as both emancipating and heart breaking. One is simultaneously entrapped into and liberated by the future anterior, and Jon and Luke are bound to make the most of it.

Living in the will-have-been, and its varied deployments within queer art, film, writing, and theory, serves as a mechanism for tackling the uncertainties of HIV—both in terms of how an individual body might manifest opportunistic infections and, more broadly, the ways in which

a community might come together in response—by experiencing and thus surmounting death as a mechanism of survival. In fact, the earliest mentions of *living with* HIV account for living immanently in the face of death, of mobilizing mourning in the service of militancy, to channel the title of Douglas Crimp’s famous essay. Paul Monette writes that “In the seventh year we have reached at least a second generation, perhaps a third, and each with a better shot at holding ground. *Living with AIDS* is a rallying cry now, and the men of ’85 were the first division to hum a few bars.”²¹⁶ The extent to which queer writers early in the epidemic have experienced their metaphoric death prior to their literal as signified by the future anterior may indeed vary, and certainly “living with” carries with it an equally varied series of particular connotations. My point, however, is that early queer writing on HIV deploys ‘living with’ as a mechanism for surpassing a death metaphorically experienced as a means for (re)experiencing life, for making room for a politics and activism which demand that such a death need not be experienced by others. The future anterior is a mode of finding life and of creating political confrontation, of giving voice to death before voice itself becomes extinguished. Of the latter, like the ACT UP die-ins, in which participants throw themselves on the ground in imitation of death and “hold cardboard tombstones with slogans such as I DIED FOR THE SINS OF THE FDA; AZT ISN’T ENOUGH ’KILLED BY THE SYSTEM, or I GOT THE PLACEBO, accompanied by the image of bloody red handprints,” the enactment of death becomes an instigation to thought, a forced confrontation with the epidemic.²¹⁷

²¹⁶ Paul Monette, *Borrowed Time*, 142.

²¹⁷ David Gere, *How to Make Dances in an Epidemic: Tracking Choreography in the Age of AIDS* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 68-69.

In yet another iteration of the future anterior at play, Steven Bruhm identifies in the work of dancer and choreographer Bill T. Jones the temporal structures of “earlier moments [that] follow later ones” as the piece’s dancer imagines the immanence of his own death.²¹⁸ Importantly, however, for Bruhm is how this earlier structure becomes supplanted with the advent of the cocktail, which “has reinvented the infected body as one of suspended animation; it encourages the HIV subject to move forward with narrative futurity, but also with the consciousness of potential collapse.”²¹⁹ The temporal disjunction between the work of Jones and the new temporal order glossed by Bruhm is telling: “As the rate of HIV-related deaths slows, and as we continue to adjust our lives to a protease-inhibited culture, we have come to understand enough about how HIV has re-choreographed our bodies, our relationships, and our selves.”²²⁰ The fervency of a politics founded on death has slowly given way to a politics founded on the maintenance of life; Luke and Jon would now be unimaginable as characters, and die-in activists, who partly achieved what they were looking for, would today appear hyperbolic. Bodies-with-HIV have once again been re-choreographed, albeit precariously. I now turn to the changes to which we’ve adjusted in “a protease-inhibited culture” (with its play on the inhibited reproduction of a virus, the inhibitions which continue to plague queer culture, and a reference to the protease inhibitor class of drugs), in order to identify how the temporal changes of antiretrovirals have altered the queer political landscape.

The Chronic

²¹⁸ Steven Bruhm, “Still Here: Choreography, Temporality, AIDS,” in *Queer Times, Queer Becomings*, ed. E.L. McCallum and Mikko Tuhkanen (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011), 328.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Steven Bruhm, “Still Here”, 326.

As a condition for the “depoliticization of queer sex in the 1990s,” Michael Warner describes in *The Trouble with Normal* the “changed nature of the AIDS epidemic, from one understood as crisis to one understood as a chronic, manageable problem.”²²¹ Dennis Altman echoes this sentiment, emphasizing how protease inhibitors “promised to turn AIDS into a chronic rather than a life-threatening condition, and suddenly there was a sharp decline in the death notices in gay papers across the rich world.”²²² Likewise, AIDS activist Elizabeth Pisani pseudosarcastically refers to antiretrovirals as “the holiest cow in the herd... an unqualified Good Thing, because it acts as effective HIV prevention as well as keeping people alive.”²²³ Or, finally, Lauren Berlant writes of the changing conditions of the historical present as “people report a shift between the death sentence of AIDS and the invention of the AIDS cocktail that turned fated life back into an ellipsis, a time marked by pill- and test-taking, and other things, the usual.”²²⁴ These writers, in varying contexts, understand life with HIV as becoming-sustainable, however delicately so. The effects of antiretrovirals have been well documented in queer writing: rapid declines in narratives of corporeal wasting and decay²²⁵, the end of political funerals²²⁶, the

²²¹Michael Warner, *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999), 76.

²²² Dennis Altman, *The End of the Homosexual?* (St Lucia, Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 2013), 120.

²²³ Elizabeth Pisani, *The Wisdom of Whores: Bureaucrats, Brothels and the Business of AIDS* (Toronto: Penguin Group, 2008), 161-162. Pisani’s contention with antiretroviral treatments is that they displace activist and public health energies from prevention to treatment.

²²⁴ Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 58.

²²⁵ See Peggy Phelan’s excellent reading of *Silverlake Life: The View from Here*, in *Mourning Sex: Performing Public Memories* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997), 153-173.

²²⁶ See David Gere, *How to Make Dances in an Epidemic: Tracking Choreography in the Age of AIDS* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004) 160-168.

changing nature of HIV-shame²²⁷, and more positively, a return to normalcy for those once on death's door²²⁸ often framed as a return to habitual quotidian life.²²⁹ The chronic has justly been heralded as life giving, alternatively framed as prolongation, a second chance, or a gift not to be squandered. Though I question the cultural and political orientation of HIV toward to the chronic below—which is not to question whether antiretrovirals should be accessed—recent life writings by those who have lived through the apex of the epidemic testify to how powerful these affective tendencies can be. And many persons living with HIV in our contemporary moment take a great deal of solace knowing the prevalence of—and in Canada easy access to—single pill regimens.

Modern antiretroviral therapies, which prevent the replication of the virus and reduce copies of HIV to undetectable levels, have advanced in leaps and bounds, and are widely available to Canadians living with HIV. Antiretroviral therapies are drug combinations, often prescribed to meet the unique needs of the person living with HIV, including efficacy (how well does it work?), durability (how long has it been proven to work?), and tolerability (how easy it is

²²⁷ See Leo Bersani, "Shame on You" in *After Sex? On Writing Since Queer Theory*, eds. Janet Halley and Andrew Parker (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 91-109. This essay is notable for linking shame with recent increases in the practice of barebacking, which Bersani condemns wholeheartedly.

²²⁸ One of the funniest accounts in fiction of recuperation post-antiretrovirals I've come across is Greg Kearney's *The Desperates* (Toronto: Cormorant Books, 2013), in which central character Edmund must comically renegotiate contemporary gay life, drugs, and a comparatively dim party scene:

He's going out. Yet. On the town, to the village, to bar hop, to tile a bottle of water against his breastbone and stand around, sway and bop a bit and stand around. Sure, these stand-around outings were only ever stultifying for Edmund, back in the day. But it's a new day, and he's on drugs.

As he manically swipes through his closet for a flattering shirt, delighting in the scraping sound of hangers moving on the metal rod, he tries to convince himself that times may very well have changed for the better since he last went out on the town. People may have become more playful; the epidemic may have worn away at gay men in a good way, rendering them more open, more empathetic, sweeter. Maybe? Possibly. Probably not. He picks out a black corduroy shift that goes nearly to his knees. He can blouse it out around his belt, concealing his tummy. (50)

²²⁹ This is famously rendered in Gregg Bordowitz's film *Habit*, in which he "reflects on his daily life as a long-time HIV survivor in an era of globalized AIDS pandemic" (193). See Ann Cvetkovich, *Depression: A Public Feeling* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012), 193-197.

to take?).²³⁰ Further, people living with HIV on HAART maintain a higher level of CD4+ cells, creating a stronger immune system capable of fighting off opportunistic infections. There are a wide variety of antiretroviral therapies available in Canada, all of which are taken daily for the person living with HIV's life, often requiring doses at routine times. People taking HAART must continually monitor their viral load and CD4+ count. Though "with proper treatment and care, newly diagnosed people with HIV can live out something close to a full, natural lifespan," HAART treatments carry with them a gamut of uncertainties, including side effects, toxicities, and drug resistances.²³¹ Much of AIDS service work, in Canada and abroad, is dedicated to helping persons living with HIV through this process, so that they might achieve "something close" to normal health.

Conceptually, the chronic is best articulated by Eric Cazdyn's *The Already Dead: The New Time of Politics, Culture, and Illness*, where he draws upon his own relationship to life saving medication that he takes daily, keeping his rare form of leukemia at bay. The daily management required by the chronic is broadly analogous to Berlant's slow death theorized in *Cruel Optimism*, a temporal form contingent upon the prolongation of the present as to further its continuation: the chronic shifts "how we think about and *feel* time."²³² The chronic mimics increased globalization and the stranglehold of capitalism on our contemporary moment, prompting daily consumption and short term focus which drive our buy-buy-buy, pay-cheque-to-pay-cheque cultural demands. The chronic is a dulling of the acute, it is a shift in focus from cure

²³⁰ Information taken from CATIE (Canadian AIDS Treatment Information Exchange) 's *Managing Your Health: A Guide for People Living with HIV*, 4th ed (2009), 135.

²³¹ CATIE, *Managing Your Health*, 302. For information on drug resistances, see Carol Major, "Resistance Assistance: The Ins and Outs of HIV Drug Resistance Testing," *The Positive Side* (Fall/Winter 2005), accessed 24 August 2014, <http://www.catie.ca/en/positiveside/fallwinter-2005/resistance-assistance>.

²³² Cazdyn, *The Already Dead*, 14. Original emphasis.

to preservation of the status quo. But the ongoingness of the present within the chronic is inescapable, for failure to adhere to medical regimens (or, to prolong the social implications of Cazdyn's argument, to opt out of the labour market, for examples) implies death. Thus acceptance of the chronic implies an indefinite subscription: once the chronic always the chronic.

The epistemic relationship between Cazdyn and Berlant is particularly striking as Cazdyn develops 'the chronic' in parallel to 'the already dead,' which takes the blurred relationship between life and death to its logical extreme. Cazdyn writes that "the already dead refuse... either to die or to be alive until these categories can be remade to accommodate the unique and new existence the already dead experience."²³³ I invoke this admittedly extreme example in my introduction to Cazdyn's work not in the suggestion that antiretrovirals and other life sustaining medication produce a refusal of death incommensurable with an acceptance of life—that is, a simultaneous death which refuses to come and a life which cannot be lived—but to demonstrate that, in Cazdyn's understanding, the future anterior and its implications of being-towards-death cannot be fully abandoned. Cazdyn goes on to write that

The already dead are exposed to a logic that of crisis, which is homologous to how crisis functions within capitalism. This also requires a form of awareness that lends itself to an astute economic analysis: one cannot forget that one has cancer, HIV, or a formerly terminal disease, however much life is normalized, just as one cannot forget that capitalism is always in crisis, however much day-to-day political-economic life is normalized.²³⁴

No matter how outwardly stable the chronic becomes, no matter how advanced the medicine, one cannot forget the presence of the virus, which lives on as long as the body does too. This is echoed by Kathryn Bond Stockton, who in discussing the "switchpoints" between AIDS

²³³ Ibid, 198.

²³⁴ Ibid, 199.

memory, histories of slavery, and affective debasement, invokes what she terms “a viral mode of memory—a viral gothic—as a result of uncontrollable transmissions from the dead; dead ones invading through fluids exchanged; the dead reproducing themselves in the brain; and mothers, through their memories, suffering dramatic collapses in immunity.”²³⁵ AIDS, even in its unthinkability, is equally unforgettable.

The management required of the chronic and the form(s) of awareness iterated by Cazdyn are prevalent in a wide variety of queer writings and cultural productions. It is worth noting how the chronic roughly correlates to queer theory’s temporal turn, beginning in the mid-2000s and includes writers such as Lee Edelman, Elizabeth Freeman, Judith Jack Halberstam, José Esteban Muñoz, Heather Love, Carla Freccero and others.²³⁶ This cluster of texts, like Cazdyn’s understanding of the chronic, responds to the changing (or, perhaps, intensifying) relationship between queer bodies, temporality, and capitalist culture I outlined in my first chapter. Though each of these writers mobilize queer history and futurity in vastly different relations to the present, they share in common a desire to disrupt a stultifying present. Elizabeth Freeman, for example, argues that “queer temporalities... are points of resistance to this temporal order that, in turn, propose other possibilities for living in relation to indeterminately past, present, and future

²³⁵ Kathryn Bond Stockton, *The Queer Child, or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century* (Durham and London: Duke U P, 2009), 37.

²³⁶ See: Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004); Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010); Halberstam, *In A Queer Time and Place* (cited above); José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2009); Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 2007); Carla Freccero, *Queer/Early/Modern* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005). For an excellent discussion on the temporal turn in queer theory, see Carolyn Dinshaw, Lee Edelman, Roderick A. Ferguson, Carla Freccero, Elizabeth Freeman, Judith Halberstam, Annamarie Jagose, Christopher Nealon, Nguyen Tan Hoang, “Theorizing Queer Temporalities: A Roundtable Discussion,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 13.2-3 (2007): 177-195.

others: that is, of living historically.”²³⁷ For Freeman, queer time by definition is disruptive to normative, methodical arrangement of time: queer subjects bend time, create temporal dissonance. For Halberstam, queer time disrupts the expectations imposed on life progression, including the disruption of marriage and traditional family. Halberstam understands queer disruption to occur through temporal “rapid bursts,” moments of acceleration and excitement created by and for queerness: “Within the life cycle of the Western human subject, long periods of stability are considered to be desirable, and people who live in rapid bursts (drug addicts, for example) are characterized as immature and even dangerous.”²³⁸ I mention these examples to both situate large swathes of queer theory as attempting to subvert the methodic time of the chronic—which, I hope, will support my ensuing discussion of the intruder—but also to make clear the always already escapability of the normative’s drudgery. This vein of thought is what I have in mind when I argue that the chronic is equally what queer activism and queer thought have most feared.

What makes the becoming-chronic of HIV particularly unique is the manner in which access to medication was communally fought for through protest and other forms of collective action. In combination with the moralized and sexualized nature of managing HIV—which is not to mention the shifting legality of nondisclosure laws, a particularly hot topic in Canada—antiretroviral medication requires continuous social and political navigation, once again demonstrating HIV as resonating well beyond the usual logic of symptom-medication-cure. Take, for example, David Caron’s recent *The Nearness of Others: Searching for Tact and Contact in the Age of HIV*, which employs equal parts autobiography and theory to explore living

²³⁷ Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds*, xxii.

²³⁸ Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, 4.

with HIV in a post-antiretroviral world. A predominant vein of thought in this (captivating) work is the author's unfolding understanding of his seropositivity against a backdrop of social—which is not to say always intentional—ignorance. “Thoughts of HIV,” he writes, “remain largely structured by a polarized discourse of normality and pathologization—you have it or you don't, you're sick or you're not—that makes it impossible for many to understand being HIV positive as having a disease but without being ill.”²³⁹ For Caron, the becoming-chronic of HIV places seropositivity in a grey area between health (“without being ill”) and illness as emblemized as being-with a virus (“being HIV positive”). Caron's framing of the social intersected with individual health is important, for not only does it fall against a backdrop of HIV's long history of socially produced stigma, but he emphasizes the manner in which the chronic gets us to rethink the terminal on a sociopolitical level. In essence, the chronic deconstructs the notion of ‘the end,’ of individual fatality.

This most poignantly emerges during Caron's discussion of his subsequent undetectability, meaning a viral load below levels of transmissibility resulting from successful adherence to antiretroviral therapy. Undetectable has become a pervasive term in the queer community, and beyond its scientific literality, is often deployed to emphasize the body-with-HIV's relative health. This is most apparent in gay mobile applications (like Grindr, Scruff, Hornet) and online chat sites (like Manhunt), all of which are enormously prevalent in the gay male community, and all of which provide forums for declaring oneself undetectable, and its

²³⁹ David Caron, *The Nearness of Others*, 249.

myriad of connotations.²⁴⁰ Interestingly, Caron outlines several (theoretical) issues with *being* undetectable, perceiving a divide between undetectability as medically signifying the becoming-chronic of HIV while lamenting a social sphere yet unable to make such a connection:

“Undetectable” is impossible to disclose as such. To begin with, admitting undetectability sounds like a contradiction in terms. To state that your viral load is undetectable makes *you* detectable. You’ve blown your cover. At a more complex level, *undetectable* is the third term rendered speakable as a third term in discourses of HIV that the positive-negative dichotomy so tightly frames. If I choose to respond to the question “What is your status?” with “Undetectable,” I intend the word to mean “You can’t get HIV from me.” Yet because one cannot disclose nothing, I know that my interlocutor will understand “undetectable” as meaning something other than “HIV negative” and will, in all likelihood, resignify it as “HIV positive,” since this is the only other “HIV negative” is supposed to have. “Undetectable” is meaningless within a system in which meaning is believed to be produced by a strictly binary opposition rather than by a multiple play of differences.²⁴¹

If we take the “positive-negative dichotomy” as correlative to sick-healthy, for Caron undetectable provides insufficient displacement from the former category so long as social structures predicated upon strict “binary opposition” continue to dominate HIV discourse. And though he seems to disavow the category of undetectability far more than other writers (including Sean Strub, who finds undetectability to alter the “risk/reward equation” of sex), I find in this passage a sense of possibility for re-understanding HIV in its newfound “play of differences.”²⁴² Later in this chapter, I will show how the binaries of serostatus are deconstructed, specifically in the academic domain now known as porn studies, but for the moment, I would like to think through Caron’s call to action.

²⁴⁰ Such connotations tend to conflict, depending on context: in recent years, ‘undetectable’ has signaled a willingness to bareback *and* a tendency to take care of oneself, an openness to risk *and* a declaration of relative health.

²⁴¹ David Caron, *The Nearness of Others*, 184.

²⁴² Sean Strub, *Body Counts: A Memoir of Politics, Sex, AIDS, and Survival* (New York: Scribner, 2014), 336.

Caron's comments occur within a discussion of disclosure, a (sometimes legislatively forced) admission premised on a change in serostatus: disclosure is a speech act whereby one emerges as a body-with-HIV from either the presumption of seronegativity or a tacit ambiguity frequently understood as part of queer cruising culture. The certainty Caron lends the disconnect between what undetectability *is* (a viral load so low that the virus cannot be passed on) and what undetectability *represents* (a continued marking of the body-with-HIV as positive) is telling insofar as it demonstrates the chronic's instability: the chronic may make us rethink the immanence of death, but death can never quite be so easily forgotten. This divide is emblemized by disclosure, such that Caron rebrands the process "dysclosure" to demonstrate the inherent lack of equality between speaker and interlocutor: dysclosure exposes "the inherent dysfunction of confessional disclosure... in the hope that, even though we cannot escape the police, it might help us think of ways to harness some of the emancipatory potential of the act of speaking out."²⁴³ Dysclosure may thus pertain "to survival more than to life," but the emancipatory quality of the act is dependent upon a certain tact-ful (as in, both requiring contact and sensitivity) encounter.²⁴⁴ This is important because it appears that it is the representation of undetectability (and not the being undetectable) that Caron is attempting to subvert. To disclose and create such tact-ful encounters ultimately renders HIV as normative, as something *lived with*: "If the experience of HIV is a social one, then it is premised on disclosure, that is, on the externalizing of something kept inside until then."²⁴⁵ Dysclosure both calls out and attempts to rectify a power imbalance. Dysclosure becomes the mechanism by which the social perception of

²⁴³ David Caron, *The Nearness of Others*, 181.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Ibid, 166.

undetectability catches up with medical reality: *more* tact may in fact mean dysclosure becomes disclosure. Caron writes that “dysclosure messes up all sorts of limits,” and my sneaking suspicion, though Caron does not say as much, is that such limits are messed up in tandem to the equalization and normalization of the two parties, the dyscloser and his interlocutor.

This in no way criticizes the painful lived experience of disclosure that Caron writes of so eloquently, or the ongoing forms of stigma which makes him wish to see his seropositivity rendered socially and medically chronic. I do, however, want to delineate what the chronic may imply politically, with a broad goal of articulating what the becoming-chronic of HIV implies for all queer bodies. To do so, I must return to Cazdyn’s understanding of the chronic as it relates to the revolutionary. The chronic is heavily imbricated in the capitalist mode of daily sustenance I outlined vis-à-vis the work of Lauren Berlant in my first chapter: the habitual grind, the 9-5, the “living precarity of this historical present.”²⁴⁶ Berlant writes that “[s]low death prospers not in traumatic events, as discrete time-framed phenomena like military encounters and genocides can appear to do, but in temporally labile environments whose qualities and whose contours in time and space are often identified with the presentness of ordinariness itself”²⁴⁷ The ordinariness of HIV represents a temporal act of slowing down, countering Halberstam’s rapid bursts of time from which the queer is derived. My point is simple: what is fought for and hard won in the name of health and dignity may force the relinquishing of a marginality we hold dear. *The Living End* showed us what is gained when we embrace an end already arrived. I now ask a question I feel has been neglected for reasons of, to borrow Caron’s term, tact: what do we give up when we give up death?

²⁴⁶ Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 196.

²⁴⁷ Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 100.

The Chronic and the Revolutionary

For Cazdyn, at stake in the management of symptoms and the staying of immanent death is our capacity for thinking radical difference and revolution, to imagine a world beyond capitalism, which depends on banal crisis in its very functioning. Cazdyn writes:

The idea and desire we call “cure,” and the idea and desire we call “revolution” are inextricably tied to each other, and today both these categories are in freefall. A productive freefall, no doubt, and one that opens up new progressive possibilities, from life-saving medications to new social movements to the most ingenious aesthetic interventions. But there are crucial limitations as well, limitations that turn on a reluctance to engage the central question of radical change and what this reluctance means for imagining alternative futures and, more important, acting in the present.²⁴⁸

Recognizing that “revolution and cure are not just about politics and medicine, but shape the more general ways we imagine, understand, and act in the world,” Cazdyn delineates a set of problems undermining perceptions of medical progress.²⁴⁹ To prolong life is to double-down on the present, to draw out our mortality. The history of philosophy has pointed to the multifaceted ways in which death revolutionizes the potentiality of life. Here, however, we must ask the not-quite-inverse: what is potentially foreclosed in the deferment of death? How does living with the chronic, as opposed to dying from the fatal, shape our capacities for social and political engagement? What are the crucial differences between prolonging life and prolonging death, and how do they mitigate our being with each other, our relationality? Again, posing these questions in no way argues against life sustaining (and life changing) medical technologies. Asking them recognizes, however, the ethical imperative to question contemporary political processes and to

²⁴⁸ Cazdyn, *The Already Dead*, 15.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 61.

always already contemplate their possible otherwise. Cazdyn's understanding of praxis, it should be noted, is not merely "a synonym for practice," but "denotes the ceaseless movement between thinking, understanding, experimenting, acting, and changing."²⁵⁰

Cazdyn's work should be linked both to Berlant's sense of cruel optimism and to the disjunct between medical and social undetectability in Caron. First, like Berlant's consideration of slow death, Cazdyn understands the capitalist focus on quotidian crisis as occurring at the expense of the future: "Rethinking the meaning of crisis not only affects our temporal experience of the present, but also colonizes and preempts claims upon the future."²⁵¹ This is not to say that the chronic forces an unwillingness to consider the future, or to dream of what it might hold, but that the effort required to maintain the chronic—particularly when framed as crisis management, of the pure effort needed to keep up the status quo—preempts any possibility of doing so. Cazdyn's argument is clearly located well within the discourses of biopower and state control insofar as the (mandated) perpetuation of crisis management is, in fact, control over bare life. Second, in relation to Caron, Cazdyn's understanding of "preemptive medicine," by which he means "trying to fix the crisis" of an illness "before the development of advancements in medical research and without simultaneously engaging the social structures in which such advancements exist only produces a crisis of another kind—a crisis that is sure to spread not only greater injustices and violence but... greater threats to human health itself, especially in the form of mental illness and the biological maladies caused by environmental damage."²⁵² Not only does the chronic dismantle dreaming of a utopian future, but risks perpetuating the attendant social

²⁵⁰ Ibid, 31.

²⁵¹ Ibid, 4.

²⁵² Ibid, 131.

crises of mental illness, stigma, and unequal access to medication. (Case in point: place my discussion of the North America and Western European epidemic against the backdrop of the African epidemic. Access to the very processes which I am critiquing, or more accurately asking more of, are otherwise unfathomable within the African context. Access to antiretrovirals remain one of the most significant forms of global inequality today.)

The becoming-chronic of HIV has undoubtedly impacted community organization, lobbying, and activism, as well as shifted the focus of AIDS service organizations and hospice services. That HIV activism has sharply declined in the wake of antiretroviral therapy is a frequent topic of discussion (and lament) in queer writing. “Once HIV became a largely manageable condition,” writes Dennis Altman, “at least for those with access to appropriate resources, and as positive people began playing an increasing role in AIDS organisations, the centrality of AIDS as an organising trope for the gay community declined.”²⁵³ For Alexandra Juhasz, when the possibility of death is removed, an amnesia and ambivalence are set in motion which ultimately impact our community’s most vulnerable members: she reminds us “what amnesia looks like, sounds like, and means in daily life for those of us who survived as well as for new generations of at-risk gay youth of color who were never reminded that others fought, lived, and died before them.”²⁵⁴ The three characteristics of the chronic I’ve attempted to emphasize—removal of the immediacy of death, the focus on the quotidian, the perpetuation of social inequality—are each clearly entangled, and result in the loss of a queer cultural response to a problem clearly ongoing. The form and character of that response must change to reflect the new realities of HIV, but a response is demanded nonetheless. The victims of our silence are

²⁵³ Dennis Altman, *The End of the Homosexual?*, 150.

²⁵⁴ Alexandra Juhasz, “Forgetting ACT UP,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 98.1 (February 2012): 72.

many. We must locate an alternative model for thinking through (with?) antiretrovirals and perhaps the increasing possibility of a cure that is equally grounded in communal response.

Intrusions, Intruders, Hosts

I have thus far summarized the two temporal, ontological, and political models through which HIV has been conceptualized in queer writings since the beginning of the epidemic, loosely categorized as pre- and post-access to antiretrovirals. Though my analyses far from do justice to the wealth of theoretical thought to which the virus has given genesis, we have seemingly remained loyal to the various iterations of the future anterior and the chronic as archetypes for intellectual response. I now turn to what some may see as a more radical alternative, the possibility that HIV, from the moment of its emergence, is and was an intruder always already present. HIV, regardless of serostatus is the constant companion for queer bodies and subjects. It is my contention that this model, referring directly to Nancy's seminal essay "The Intruder," diverges from the framework of *living with* to what I will call *living before* a virus: *living before* a virus presupposes our collective need to fight back, to be in this together, and to productively and communally subsume the negativity of HIV into our modes of living. *Living before* a virus presupposes the unthinkability of HIV as much as it does the imperative to try. *Living before* a virus suggests that no one may claim a space immune to HIV.

John Paul Ricco writes: "Being-unto-death, as an (the) existential predicament, is all the more exacerbated by and materialized as the irresolvability that is AIDS. The historicity of AIDS is the time of the immemorial and imminent, the not yet and the no longer, prior to and in the

wake of, at once.”²⁵⁵ The constellation of temporalities Ricco presents is indicative of a history which intrudes yet is always already present, irresolvable because it is paradoxically both strange and entirely known. This is the aporetic impact of AIDS to which I now turn. For, in Ricco’s words, “this is what it might mean to think of one’s place in the time of AIDS as being at the limit in the midst of it all, an unavoidable blind spot or *aporia*, conditioned by the untimeliness of AIDS.”²⁵⁶ To be untimely here is not to be out of time, but to become evacuated from the logical order of a lifetime and normative life-time. My paralleling of *living before* a virus and the rhetoric of the so-called temporal turn in queer theory is explicitly intentional. The untimeliness of AIDS, along with the untimeliness of queer temporality, has been seen by some as equally marginalizing and challenging; continuing my discussion, above, which outlines a queer understanding of time that subverts the normative of the chronic, we might turn to Nishant Shahani, who outlines “a queer challenge to linear time [which] plays an important role in offering a discursive challenge to the logic of heteronormativity.”²⁵⁷ Judith Jack Halberstam concurs with this sentiment: “Queer time... offers an alternative framework for the theorization of disqualified and anticannonical knowledges of queer practices.”²⁵⁸ AIDS, across the history of queer thought, has often been posited as a rupture with time (quotidian) and as a defining feature of our time (era), whereby the task of theory becomes to think of the relationship between these two seemingly incongruent clauses: to be untimely and well situated within *the* time of a specific era. Alexander Düttmann, interestingly, responds to the untimeliness of AIDS so characterized

²⁵⁵ Jean Paul Ricco, *The Logic of the Lure*, 37.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Nishant Shahani, “‘If not this, what?’ *Time out of Joint* and the Politics of Queer Utopia,” *Extrapolation* 53.1 (2012): 84.

²⁵⁸ Carolin Dinshaw, et al. “Theorizing Queer Temporalities: A Roundtable Discussion,” *GLQ: A Journal of Gay and Lesbian Studies* 13.2-3 (2007): 182.

by early AIDS writing, which he will call a form of ontological dis-unity, by emphasizing the inadequacies of both living in the future anterior and its connotative sense of loss *and* the pervading sense of returning to forms of normalcy suggested by the chronic: “if it is correct that anxiety about AIDS and the anger caused by AIDS can be traced back to loss of the time one has to live, to the destruction of a meaningful, unified coherence in which living and dying have their time, then one can respond to their reactive character neither by positing as permanent the mourning of the loss—of one’s own living and dying—nor by attempting to restore the Being-one of time and constituting a subject with AIDS.”²⁵⁹ A new form of subjectivity, for Düttmann, must be identified, one in which the subject is both the marker of and witness to AIDS, is always already marginalized, but which rejects his position of mourning in favour of being “at odds with AIDS.” Düttmann’s call creates an opening for thinking HIV beyond binaries of life/death and health/sickness which only speciously answer Ricco’s sense of the irresolvability of living with the virus.

Ricco, as a scholar of Jean-Luc Nancy, is most certainly writing with the French philosopher’s “The Intruder” in mind, a text written in reflection of Nancy’s own heart transplant surgery and the ensuing long recovery. Nancy’s short essay is a grappling with “personal contingency” as it “intersects with the contingency of technological history”; that is, his diagnosis necessitating a transplant and a long battle with cancer resultant from immunosuppressant drugs becomes mediated equally through the emergence of medical technologies which prolong his life, the possibility of their not working, and the chance of

²⁵⁹ Alexander García Düttmann, *At Odds With AIDS: Thinking and Talking about a Virus*, trans. Peter Gilgen and Conrad Scott-Curtis (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 5.

different, ameliorated technologies “twenty years hence.”²⁶⁰ Such temporal anxieties parallel my arguments from this dissertation’s second chapter, in which antiretrovirals (and other HIV medications, including those which proved ill-effective from the beginning of the epidemic) place the body-with-HIV in ambiguous relation to death, rehabilitation, and cure. I extract from Nancy’s essay two important themes worth considering within this ongoing discussion: first, the temporal and corporeal confusion(s) inherent in the act of viral intrusions, and second the political implications of understanding such an intrusion as originary.

The condition which led to the failure of his heart as much as the foreign heart transplanted into his body blurs the line, for Nancy, between that which is (corporeally) his own and that which has externally arrived: “If my own heart was failing me, to what degree was it ‘mine,’ my ‘own’ organ?”²⁶¹ In this sense, what Anne O’Byrne has outlined as Nancy’s “politics founded on recognition” is extended to the self, a form of self-touching—to modify the terms of my second chapter: stroking, striking—that is as much an act of connection as it is of division.²⁶² Nancy recollects the beginnings of his condition as a series of flutterings whose severity is made knowable only in hindsight. Much in the same way as any form of disorder or viral infection, such fluttering instigates a process of self-reflection and self-analysis that seeks to delineate what is properly ‘mine’ and what has intruded within the body. This boundary is increasingly blurred in two ways: first, that the intruder (whether condition, virus, or bacteria) has claimed what was once properly ‘my own’ and, second, for Nancy, a looming suspicion that that which is labeled intruder has actually preceded the intruded. He writes:

²⁶⁰ All three quotes from Jean-Luc Nancy, “The Intruder,” 162. Chapter Five of this dissertation tackles the question of living under the looming possibility of a cure.

²⁶¹ Jean-Luc Nancy, “The Intruder,” 162.

²⁶² Anne O’Byrne, “The Politics of Intrusion,” *CR: The New Centennial Review* 2.3 (Fall 2002), 175.

It became strange to me, intruding by defection: almost by rejection if not by dejection. I had this heart at the tip of my tongue, like improper food. Rather like heartburn, but gently. A gentle sliding separated me from myself. I was there, it was summertime, we had to wait, something broke away from me, or this thing surged up inside of me, where nothing had been before: nothing but the 'proper 'immersion inside me of a 'myself ' never identified as this body, still less as this heart, suddenly watching itself.²⁶³

We can only know ourselves in separation from ourselves. The artful simultaneity between a beautiful and gradual loss of health ("gentle sliding") and the violence of illness as rupture ("this thing surged up") underlines the self-shattering difficulty of this point: to be ill is to watch the self break from the self that is, in fact, *still the self*. We become a stranger to ourselves as we play host to a stranger, yet "this strangeness binds me to myself."²⁶⁴ That which we are not, or perhaps more accurately that which we are not supposed to be, becomes precisely who we are. A breaking away that is, in fact, a becoming. Nancy refers to this in terms of an emergent space ("incision's opening") between "me and me."²⁶⁵

However, though often unannounced and unexpected, this new becoming for Nancy contains within itself the possibility that it has always already been. For Nancy, intrusion is originary. The intruder may not be made (tangibly) manifest, but the possibility of his intrusion is always already there, as such rendering his presence as preceding actualization. (A resemblance between the Nancian intruder and the Derridean host here becomes palpable.) That which is located within the self yet intrudes the self carries specific implications of (auto)immunity: the autoimmune system allows a body to "tolerate the stranger," but should it fail, the stranger renders the immunodeficient "a stranger to himself."²⁶⁶ That which is latent in

²⁶³ Jean-Luc Nancy, "The Intruder," 163.

²⁶⁴ Ibid, 163.

²⁶⁵ Ibid, 168.

²⁶⁶ Ibid, 167.

the body becomes strange *during* the process of immunosuppression, thus making the stranger preexist the act of making strange. The paradox through which my ensuing political model of the intruder derives is that the intruder's strangeness must be known, in fact, to be strange: "something of the stranger has to intrude, or else he loses his strangeness."²⁶⁷ The conditions of latency have here been shifted to include an uncomfortable knowingness: strange and stranger in this way must include their alternative meanings of unsettling, surprising, and difficult to understand.

Translated to my topic at hand, HIV and the host of opportunistic infections so feared by queer bodies may be understood as latent, looming not only in their potential emergence until seroconversion or late stages of the syndrome but folded into the subject's very queerness. The HIV test shows the antibodies to a body's reaction to what would have already been present. This model of thinking HIV has been rampantly taken up by the religious right, in governmental condemnation, and seemingly benign daily acts of stigma. It is the root of the metaphorical allegiance between queer bodies and the potential for disease. But rarely has it been backed by queer thinkers and activists as a tool for thinking HIV differently, especially as a method of negotiating a benign, sanitized political climate. This is not an avowal of what many queer theorists have referred to as gay shame, though many interventions exist that outline the political possibilities of doing just so.²⁶⁸ Instead, I am calling for an embrace of HIV (of what I'll continue to refer to as queer negativity, below) cleaved from socially imposed shame, discussed in my second chapter. This model of thought does not ignore, but instead counters, shame. I ask: what

²⁶⁷ Ibid, 161.

²⁶⁸ See *Gay Shame*, David M. Halperin and Valerie Traub, eds. (London and Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009). Halperin argues that "the only kind of gay pride that is enduring is a gay pride that does not forget its origins in shame, that is still powered by the transformative energies that spring from experiences in shame" (44).

are the potential political consequences of embracing the link between queer bodies and the potential for illness? Such a question broadens the human immunodeficiency virus as originary intruder to all queer bodies, regardless of serostatus. The social structures linking HIV to all queer bodies are already in place. Might we utilize them for political action, or as a method of community building?

Such questions blur the differences in kind between conditions understood as genetic, environmental, and in the case of AIDS (as the acronym plainly states) acquired. Further, they trouble what Ricco refers to as “the normalizing logics of relationality that demand either being-with or being-without,” which in my own reading unproductively pit bodies-with-HIV against those without, shaping response to the epidemic as contingent upon the presence of the virus.²⁶⁹ Conceptualizing HIV as the familiar-stranger, as originary-intruder through a Nancian lens radically undermines the banalization of Cazdyn’s formulation of the chronic without disavowing the antiretrovirals—or often the push for access to antiretrovirals—our community has fought so hard to attain. I call this model of thought living *before* a virus, a form of living, working, and activism predicated on the presence of a virus whether literally manifested or not. Part of the emphasis on AIDS activism lost in the mid 1990s at the dawn of antiretroviral technologies is our collective capacity to share in the trauma of an epidemic: to literally have each others’ back regardless of serostatus, to work collectively in the service of one another. Understanding ourselves as living collectively before a virus not only co-opts a rhetoric of fear and alienation imposed upon our bodies by decades of bigotry, but may serve as a catalyst for renewed political participation.

²⁶⁹ Jean Paul Ricco, *The Logic of the Lure*, 35.

Viral Politics

Some queer thinkers have begun the project of formulating a politics predicated on HIV activism which accepts, and often embraces, the presence of the virus within the community—that is, regardless of any individual’s serostatus but contingent upon identifying as queer, thus mobilizing political representations of the virus for activist gain. Artist and academic Zach Blas politically mobilizes the virus and the viral along two intersecting lines: a viral politics of action and a viral politics based on affect. I quote Blas at length:

What a virus is and does cannot only be extracted into the qualifier viral just as the qualities of the viral cannot be reduced to the virus. To think the virus and the viral is to engage in their continuous states of flux, transformation, and movements toward and between as well as diversions away from one another, attending to the fact that there is some kind of recognition or identification process that binds or links the virus and viral together for the human. The virus is difficult to conceptualize not only because it can exist in so many material substrates and is constantly changing but also because the virus has historically produced different generations of itself that operate in greater or lesser degrees of complexity, in both biological and computational forms. Thus, a dizzying array of viralities have emerged and continue to rapidly proliferate; the viral has indeed gone viral.

The viral emphasizes a break, or rupture, between fiction and reality that is hazy, fluid, unstable. Imitations of the virus, commonly labeled “viral,” are more like creative openings into fictions or poetics of the virus. These framings of the virus are unhuman, and unhuman politics is a framing for the examination of the overlappings, differences, and irreducibilities—mediations—of the virus and the viral.²⁷⁰

A viral politics is always already plural: *viralities*. Such a politics embraces simultaneously a multitude of viewpoints and subjectivities yet is irreducible from its context: you cannot isolate a viral politics from the body in which it participates. A viral politics demonstrates that a body has never been whole, is always already fragmented; we are made to feel the changing context in which the virus is found. The viral does not necessarily represent our capacity to respond

²⁷⁰ Zach Blas, “Virus, Viral,” *WSQ: Women’s Studies Quarterly* 40.1-2 (Spring/Summer 2012): 30. Blas refers to the “unhuman politics” emerging in our time as “a swarm of viral hype” (29).

politically, for it can be enacted as a means of control or subjection; viral capitalisms, for example, “highlight the ‘infectious ’nature of [a] multiplicitous, morphing control process.”²⁷¹ But whether in its action/movement or the affective change it instigates, a viral politics frames the mutating social effects of the unhuman *within* the human, a framing that Blas actively invites us to pursue.

Like Nancy’s intruder, the virus is a stranger whose strangeness is predicated on being known, or later in my argument, possible. Either way the foreignness of a virus mirrors the foreignness of bodies. In Nancy’s “Strange Foreign Bodies,” the foreignness of the body “makes bodies”: “In the *foreign body*, body—in general—takes on all its connotations of exclusion: a body is what separates itself.”²⁷² The double entendre in Nancy’s title, of course, indicates that that which is foreign to us makes us foreign to ourselves. My own reading of Nancy understands separation not as detachment but a becoming-new: the viral intruder, as originary, creating what will have become. By contrast, Blas theorizes the virus (which produces, for Blas, the politically active viral) itself, its affective dimensions. He asks how “does the virus affect and how is it affected in different symbiotic encounters?”²⁷³ Blas is advancing towards what we might call the phenomenology of the virus. My own project is located somewhere between Nancy’s originary intruder and Blas’s manifestations of the viral. If HIV—the virus itself—remains latent in queer bodies, becomes the subject of constant search and introspection, makes its strangeness known only following seroconversion, and renders queer bodies paradoxically foreign to themselves and

²⁷¹ Ibid, 32.

²⁷² Jean-Luc Nancy, “Strange Foreign Bodies,” in *Corpus II: Writings on Sexuality*, trans. Anne O’Byrne (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 83.

²⁷³ Zach Blas, “Virus, Viral,” 35.

precisely who they will have become, then a viral politics of HIV demands an understanding that *all queer bodies exist in a state of latency*. Which is *not* to say that all queer bodies are seropositive, or despite Blas's example below, should be unconcerned about seropositivity. But communal latency, in my understanding, with its connotations of presence and expectancy, both shares the burden of seropositivity within the entirety of the community, and may yet serve as an instigation to communal action.

After decades of rejecting AIDS-as-death, AIDS-as-queer, and AIDS-as-a-fact-of-life, this prescription is understandably not easy to swallow. The viral politics I suggest may, in fact, work only *because* of advancements in antiretroviral technologies giving genesis to the very problem of complacency a viral politics attempts to address. Tom Roach tackles such problems in his recent *Friendship as a Way of Life: Foucault, AIDS, and the Politics of Shared Estrangement*, where he modifies Agambian bare life to meet the needs of AIDS activism.²⁷⁴ In combination with Foucault's famous essay of the same name and the philosopher's theorization of biopower, Roach links the "death inherent in *zoē*" as potentially "transformed from individual morbidity to collective potentiality."²⁷⁵ He writes that "In a radical abandonment to finitude... there is not choice but to live deliberately or die trying: In overcoming the fear of death, we become most dangerous, most creative, or both at once" and "Only when death is understood as immanent to life does a progressive politics of living have a chance."²⁷⁶ Roach turns to artist

²⁷⁴ *Zoē*, for Agamben, "expressed the simple fact of living common to all living beings" (1), which has entered the realm of the political: "In any case... the entry of *zoē* into the sphere of the *polis*—the politicization of bare life as such—constitutes the decisive event of modernity and signals a radical transformation of the political-philosophical categories of classical thought" (4). See Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

²⁷⁵ Tom Roach, *Friendship as a Way of Life: Foucault, AIDS, and the Politics of Shared Estrangement* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012), 146.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 136.

David Wojnarowicz's autobiographical *Close to the Knives* and the public political protests of ACT UP, which respectively transform "naked life's morbidity into a politics of constituent potentiality."²⁷⁷ What stands out, however, in Roach's argument is that shared finitude, or a mutually constituted politics of bare life, does not form the basis for communal relation. Instead, for Roach, queer friendship is based on what he calls an ethics of discomfort, or the "impermanence of the self and the friend" magnified by AIDS.²⁷⁸ (This model applies to queer friendships across serostatus, as opposed to, for example, Roach's analysis of Guibert or my own of Paul Monette, who understand "a radical, ontological being-in-common" in friendships among those living with HIV.²⁷⁹) Discomfort and estrangement as constituent of an unrelatable relation—the "finitude of friendship" becomes so "unavoidable" in the time of AIDS—forces a working-toward and in the service of each other otherwise unthinkable.²⁸⁰ When queer friendship is understood through mutual estrangement, not only is an entirely new approach to each other required, not only is finitude (of life, of friendship) the basis of queer relationality, but the conditions for welcoming the strangeness of the stranger become established. As in Nancy's *The Inoperative Community*, a certain solidarity is made possible in recognition of our unsharable singularity. In Roach's model, estrangement forces queer bodies to actively work together by creating forms of activism operating upon shared difference: "a radical abandonment to finitude, a becoming-friend of finitude, through which one intuits and enacts the anarchical common-ness

²⁷⁷ Ibid, 147.

²⁷⁸ Ibid, 57.

²⁷⁹ Ibid, 57.

²⁸⁰ Ibid, 55.

seething in the infinite distance between singularities.”²⁸¹ Roach is clearly drawing from a temporal framework similar to the future anterior, and his supportive examples are all pre-cocktail. This chapter wonders how we might marshal this radicality without recourse to immediate finitude, how we can transform Roach’s project into the age of antiretrovirals.

Before returning to finally outline the politics of living before a virus, I wish to take up Blas’s operative example of barebacking as a form of viral ascesis. Barebacking, or the purposeful omission of condoms in defiance of discourses of safe(r) sex, has become a hot topic in queer theory in recent years, and though it is not my intention here to add to that particular conversation within this limited space, the relationship between barebacking practices and virality must be acknowledged. This is nowhere truer than in Tim Dean’s seminal *Unlimited Intimacy: Reflections on the Subculture of Barebacking* and his subsequent reflective essay “Bareback Time.” So too, porn video maker Paul Morris and porn scholar Susanna Paasonen have reflected on this trend in queer thought in their conversation entitled “Risk and Utopia.” Dean, in particular, reflects on the practice of bug chasing, in which barebacking participants purposefully acquire HIV, or, once having acquired, reenact the acquisition at the level of fantasy. Dean writes that “Bug chasers replace one story about the queer future with another. In place of the stock narrative about inevitable sickness and death, they have invented a story about kinship and life—a different version of the queer future to which HIV transmission nevertheless remains central.”²⁸² This passage is particular important as Dean frames bug chasers as bypassing any attempts at transforming the future anterior (or, more broadly, a future eclipsed by

²⁸¹ Ibid, 137. He refers to this as “ontologically differentiated homo-ness” (136).

²⁸² Tim Dean, *Unlimited Intimacy: Reflections on the Subculture of Barebacking* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 69. Tellingly, the section from this this passage is taken is entitled “How to do Thing with HIV.”

mortality) into the chronic, as the normative story of HIV would do, in favour of living with the virus as welcomed intruder. Blas refers to this process as an “invention of viral ascesis that stylizes the virus.... Bug chasing brings the otherness of the virus closer to the human by making it more familiar to human perceptual registers.”²⁸³ It is difficult to not read Blas’s characterization of the symbiotic relation between virus and human—a welcoming host, a welcomed intruder—without reflecting on Nancy’s essay. Bug chasing, taken literally, implies a negative body welcoming a virus: this is *living before* a virus taken, perhaps, at its most literal.

Paul Morris, director and producer of the infamous porn house Treasure Island Media, adopts this model of relation to HIV—a co-existence with an originary intruder—as his working method. Morris, known for assuming a scholarly and critical relationship to his own work and to the production of pornography in general, chooses “to define gayness as perhaps diseased and without doubt incurable, in our blood, and the result of our being wildly and specifically who we are.”²⁸⁴ The very gayness upon which Morris’s sense of self pivots and that which frames his films is dependent on the presence of the virus-as-originary to that very gayness: he writes earlier that, in spite of “gay culture” continuing “to become sillier and weaker,” “a gay man who doesn’t have a virus in his blood is no longer a complete gay man. Without the sense of separateness the virus enables, he lacks entirely and becomes all too easily a social ancillary to heterosexuality and straight society.”²⁸⁵ Once again, the chronic is understood in Morris’s implicit logic as dividing the body from the virus, a form of *living with* contingent upon the maintenance of that separation. Morris likens such a stance to complicity with the normative, to maintaining a

²⁸³ Zach Blas, “Virus, Viral,” 37.

²⁸⁴ Paul Morris and Susanna Paasonen, “Risk and Utopia: A Dialogue on Pornography,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 20.3 (2014): 220.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, “Risk and Utopia,” 218.

distinction to broader publics and lifestyles he finds oppressive and, ultimately, silly and weak. Reflecting Cazdyn's inverse relationship between the chronic and social change, Morris sees his work, which lives in "symbiosis with a virus," as "necessary and revolutionary."²⁸⁶

Morris's position is sure to bristle many queer HIV activists, and the relationship between barebacking and responsibility has been debated at length in queer media, in queer academic publications, and in the blogosphere for quite some time now. I cite Dean, Blas, and Morris not in support of their views, but because their positions and analyses have a great deal to say about being before a virus. To *live with*, as we've seen, is to develop medical technologies which prioritize life and health in co-existence with the virus, and contain with it the inherent hope that social acceptance will soon follow. Morris's version of an originary intruder—to continue to blend Nancy's nomenclature with Morris's ideas—depends upon a virus latent within us all, and for Dean, creates a form of shared kinship between queer bodies. I am not advocating, and cannot advocate, for Morris's call for universal seropositivity. But I can find tremendous value in treating queer bodies as if their queerness is dependent on proximity to the virus, perhaps even understanding HIV as the break or rupture with the normative upon which a viral politics is based. There is something uniquely democratic in understanding queer bodies as living before a virus. In what remains, I'd like to consider the political import of living before a virus as a mechanism for reinvigorating our community's sense of shared activism.

²⁸⁶ Ibid, 217-218. For a comparative (and interesting) take on Morris's understanding of gayness and coexistence with a virus, see Francisco Ibáñez-Carrasco, "Rehab for the Unrepentant," in *Why are Faggots so Afraid of Faggots? Flaming Challenges to Masculinity, Objectification, and the Desire to Conform*, ed. Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore (Oakland, Edenborough, and Baltimore: AK Press, 2012), 97-103.

Being Before

A viral politics gives us our backdrop for what it means to live before a virus. Christopher Nealon, in the same roundtable discussion from which Halberstam is quoted above, asks “what is the texture of the time brought by the AIDS cocktail?”²⁸⁷ Living before a virus and queer temporality must be thought hand in hand; living before a virus requires us to live in the time of shared unknowingness. Though many of my prescriptives for *living before* a virus have been built in to my reactions to the chronic and the intruder respectively, I would like to conclude by explicitly outlining several issues which must be negotiated if we are to effectively circumvent our submission to the ambivalences the chronic has instilled within our community. These issues become all the more pressing as pre-exposure prophylaxis becomes increasingly available, which not only sees HIV negative and HIV positive bodies taking antiretrovirals—the same means to different ends—but, like in treatment, forces queer bodies to confront HIV on a daily basis as pills are taken. In a very real way, PrEP has extended ‘the chronic’ to negative bodies in yet-unthought ways: being HIV negative may now require mechanisms of daily routine. Because *living before* by necessity has a reactive relationship to the chronic, I’d like to frame the political use of *living before* in terms of my three contentions with the politics of the chronic: the prolongation of life (and thus the omission of death within our collective orientation), the rendering daily of crisis, and ongoing social inequalities.

First, the metonymic relationship between our sex and our deaths overcome by our activism must not be forgotten. For Cazdyn, a return to the possibility of death marks a return to the possibility for revolutionary thought. He writes: “Death is the pure form of radical change,

²⁸⁷ Carolyn Dinshaw, “Theorizing Queer Temporalities,” 192.

and once our deaths are taken away from us in the name of the chronic then so is our capacity to imagine other radical possibilities, such as cure and revolution. Our right to die... is our right to dream—and live in—a radically different present than the one we now inhabit.”²⁸⁸ This does not advocate for death, per se, but its incorporation into who we are, an acknowledgment of death’s latency within our very beings, like a virus laying in wait. The allure of this line of thought is the (forced) capacity of living with an unknowingness that is death, a perpetual embrace, perhaps, of living with negativity in line with Lee Edelman, who in conversation with Lauren Berlant argues that “what we know of ourselves as desiring subjects remains fixed... to the unknowable frame in which all such knowing occurs.”²⁸⁹ This sense of unknowingness is linked to what Berlant and Edelman term the unbearable. Berlant and Edelman are writing in the service of sex evacuated from discourses of optimism or any promise of redemption in favour of an understanding of sex and sexual relationality which must negotiate a constant possibility of rupture or of self-shattering. Edelman in particular locates the queer within this framing of sex as “the structuring incoherences that queer the self as the center of consciousness, and so of a pseudo-sovereignty, remain unavailable to the subject except in rare moments of traumatic encounter, moments when the potential for shock gets activated by the nearness of the unbearable, which is to say, of our own enjoyment: the enjoyment ‘we’ never own.”²⁹⁰ The distance between Berlant and Edelman’s formulation of sex and the traumatic is not so far from Dean’s as it may appear: both versions (one intentional, one ambivalent) allow for a proximity to the traumatic to re-enter the way in which sex is conceived, performed, and idealized.

²⁸⁸ Eric Cazdyn, *The Already Dead*, 7.

²⁸⁹ Lauren Berlant and Lee Edelman, *Sex, Or the Unbearable* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014), 63-64. *Sex* is structured as a series of dialogues on living with negativity, non-sovereignty, and the unbearable contradictions of sex.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 9.

Queer sexuality has been so shaped by the fear of a virus that we have been shaken from the kind of sexual world making through which queerness has been historically defined. This does not mean we should, as Morris's subjects do, omit condoms if not by our own choosing, but we must relinquish our fear of *living with* a virus in our sexual practices. Berlant and Michael Warner begin to approach this form of queer counterpublic / queer sexuality in their famous "Sex in Public," in which they intertwine the "inventiveness of queer world making and of the queer world's fragility."²⁹¹ For Berlant and Warner, publicly mediated intimate life must be done away with in order for queer worlds to be labeled as such: the cultivated "collective ethos of safer sex" post-liberation, post-AIDS has, perhaps via the neoliberal influence of marriage, become so sanitized that queer world making has seemingly become extinguished.²⁹² And so too has our capacity to join together in activism, in fighting for sexual freedom *and* HIV prevention—again made more so by the widespread availability of biotechnological prevent methods. To live before a virus is to embrace both. In the "special case" of AIDS, the messiness (or in Berlant's work with Edelman, the unbearability) of queer sexual life must coexist with the "critical practical knowledge that allows such relations to count as intimate, to not be empty release or transgression but a common language of self-cultivation, shared knowledge, and the exchange of inwardness."²⁹³ To live before a virus, queer sexuality must reclaim our capacity to judge what is appropriately named as intimate, which will involve a far greater degree of risk than the sanitized versions of sex and sexuality available to us—in media, in public forums of debate, in classroom conversations, in the realm of the 'respectable'—today.

²⁹¹ Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, "Sex in Public" in Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002), 199.

²⁹² *Ibid*, 191.

²⁹³ *Ibid*, 202.

Second, overcoming day-to-day crisis management requires a profound shift in the way(s) in which we frame the medical successes of HIV treatment. This presents the additional problem of learning to live finally, and develop a temporally unconstrained sense of activism emblemized by the intruder model without negating the daily maintenance antiretrovirals have come to represent, and without disservice to activist legacies who made way for such hard won advancements. I here differ from Berlant's theorization of crisis ordinariness, which attempts to push against the limits of the quotidian to make life *just a little bit* better. Making (daily) life better, as odd as it may sound, is not my priority. I dream of a community kept on its toes, ready for anger, and possessive of an uneasiness toward anything upon which we may become dependent. Living before a virus hinges on an unknowingness of what comes next, and as such forces a preparedness and adaptivity jettisoned in queer activism since the heyday of HIV. When HIV becomes about negotiating daily routines successfully, we lose the affective potential to instigate change and to think of new possibilities for living, being, and queering. I turn to performance studies to think through this particular problem in the next chapter of this dissertation. My central concern, for now, however, is that when HIV becomes about the quotidian, it is left only to persons with HIV to take up the burden of the cause, and precludes a community able to stand up for what's right, to dream bigger, and to give voice to those yet unheard.

Thus, finally, in my discussion of Zach Blas's article above, I identified the possibility for a politics predicated on communal latency, a sharing of the virus across literal status; the utopian wish would here be a resumption of HIV as a collective issue. Derrida, for example, writes that "the virus (which belongs neither to life nor to death) may *always already* have broken into any 'intersubjective' trajectory. And given its spacial and temporal dimensions, its structures of

relays and delays, no human being is ever safe from AIDS. This possibility is thus installed at the heart of the social bond as intersubjectivity.”²⁹⁴ This collectivity is intrinsic to reinserting HIV preventions, anti-opression measures, and research advocacy back into our collective agenda; Gregg Bordowicz, in his writings on his video activism, writes that “the most significant challenge to the movement is coalition building, because the AIDS epidemic has engendered a community of people who cannot afford *not* to recognize themselves as a community and to act as one.”²⁹⁵ The only form of coalition building—particularly in our current historical moment of a vastly more diverse, in all senses of the term, queer community—is one conceived with shared difference and continuous divergence, much in line with Blas’s sense of viral politics. We, in the queer community, have become myopically dependent on formalized, institutionalized service organizations and lobby groups that we have forgotten how to organically help, relate, and advocate for one another. Barry Adam, in answering his own question of “how might we create a collectivity that we would want to belong to?” dreams not only of a sense of “mutual recognition, commonality” as a basis for (re-)establishing the parameters of queer life in the global north, but following a Cuban model of queer collectivity, imagines queer social life without formal venues, mandates, paid leaders, and lip-service to neoliberal expectations.²⁹⁶ Removing structure in favour of what I see to be an unknowing obligation to one another—unknowing insofar as both the form and recipient of that obligation are undefined—engenders, in Adam’s terms, “strong ties

²⁹⁴ Jacques Derrida, “The Rhetoric of Drugs,” *Points...: Interviews, 1984-1994*, ed. Elisabeth Weber, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 251.

²⁹⁵ Gregg Bordowitz, *The AIDS Crisis is Ridiculous and Other Writings, 1986-2003* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2004), 39.

²⁹⁶ Barry D. Adam, “How Might We Create a Collectivity That We Would Want to Belong To?,” in *Gay Shame*, eds. David M. Halperin and Valerie Traub (London and Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 306-307.

of mutual obligation.”²⁹⁷ This sense of community will be further discussed in this dissertation's conclusion.

As such, living before a virus requires a certain sense of unknowing, whether that means rethinking queer ontology through radical negativity, or re-approaching our collective bodies as virally latent. This requires the paradoxical task of forgetting what we've collectively learned about ourselves and our capacity to incite change as to ultimately know ourselves that much better. The chronic has speciously taught us that we can know HIV; Haver reminds that such epistemic wisdom will forever remain impossible. We must (re-)adapt and (re-)respond to HIV in the context of our current historical moment. To live before a virus is to become, once again, strangers to ourselves.

²⁹⁷ Ibid, 307.

Chapter Four: Against Definition: Risk and Activism in the Attention Economy

Precarity is the condition of being vulnerable to others. Unpredictable encounters transform us: we are not in control, even of ourselves. Unable to rely on a stable structure of community, we are thrown into shifting assemblages, which remake us as well as others. We can't rely on the status quo; everything is in flux, including our ability to survive.

Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing²⁹⁸

Cure is inextricably linked to hope.

Eli Clare²⁹⁹

“Protest is not enough,” assert Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri early in *Assembly*, “Social movements also have to enact a lasting social transformation.... We must train our eyes to recognize how the movements have the potential to redefine fundamental social relations so that they strive not to take power as it is but to take power differently, to achieve a fundamentally new, democratic society and, crucially, to produce new subjectivities.”³⁰⁰ The emergence of queer subjects with and without HIV has changed dramatically in the last decade through shifting political ecosystems and improved medical technologies, both of which intersect to shape the biopolitical ecosystem through which HIV has become understood and articulated. To ‘take power differently’ requires, however, an activist political response that keeps up with, and exceeds, those changes. Like Hardt and Negri, this chapter argues for forms of HIV activism which achieve forms of ‘new’ and ‘democratic’ benefits to not only imagining an end to the epidemic but, while HIV exists in our communities, equity across lines of serostatus. However, as will be demonstrated by examples here and in my fifth chapter, those benefits must be

²⁹⁸ Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton U P, 2015), 20.

²⁹⁹ Eli Clare, *Brilliant Imperfection: Grappling with Cure* (Durham and London: Duke U P, 2017), 10.

³⁰⁰ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Assembly* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), xii-xiv.

adaptive to definitions of power, activism, messaging, and health yet-unthought. This chapter argues for an HIV public constituted against static definition.

HIV is an epidemic that can be ended without a cure. We know that to have an undetectable viral load means that a person living with HIV cannot pass the virus on to their sexual partners. Further, our collective knowledge(s) of prevention, including the value of sexual health education, condoms, pre-exposure prophylaxis, clean needles, and the political and social ramifications of legalizing sex work and drug use, if executed, could ultimately stop transmission. And while we also know that addressing social determinants of health and ending endemic barriers to care including poverty and systemic oppressions must occur if the dream of ending HIV without cure were to be realized, we must collectively question why we have *not* achieved viral suppression and prevention globally. Thus far, this dissertation has argued that new ways of being-together through shared relationality to a virus contains within that being-together a renewed sense of HIV activism in *doing something* about that virus. Activism, or more specifically an invitation to activism, must be born within yet resist neoliberal economic contexts of precarious living. In what follows, and within those contexts, I ask how invitations to activism might manifest to productively resist where and how activism has thus far been inhibited—including apathy, imbalances of power, the mainstreaming of queer politics, and impediments to information which could stop HIV acquisition.

However, I have largely ignored the risk of de-personalized responses to an ongoing epidemic. That is, I have considered activism broadly as a combined effort which must take into account intersecting worldviews and subjectivities but which produces a collective invitation to action. This approach risks a utopian world view of uncontested solidarity with a certain naiveté that one person's approach to HIV, both personally in terms of lived experience and collectively

within their political participation, satisfies the constellation of individual needs which in sum constitute what I have elsewhere called the HIV public. This risk is compounded by a dearth of intersectional scholarship on HIV which largely consists of work which either engages with HIV politics generally or is only specific to a single community. What's more, this segregation by population approach is further exemplified by government funding for on-the-ground responses which parcel out the duties inherent in HIV response in autonomous grants to separated communities.³⁰¹

The constitution of an HIV public, or later in this chapter 'a people,' is the subject to which I now turn, questioning by who and for whom is the call to HIV activism derived. We must ask where the balance between individual need and collective responsibility lies. How does an HIV public (a people, an assembly, a multitude) emerge against the shifting political situations and medical technologies which have centered earlier chapters? How do differing subjectivities within what constitutes an HIV public know each other? How might they serve each other despite differing immediate needs, sociocultural backgrounds, and intersecting political realities? In effect: who is HIV activism for?

This conversation merges two lines of theoretical thought bridged by the immediate needs of HIV activists and people living with HIV across the global north within the context of a continued epidemic. Much work has recently been published outlining how that which Judith Butler calls a people or that which Hardt and Negri have termed assembly—"the power of coming together and acting politically in concert"—manifests for political gain. Other work has

³⁰¹ This includes the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria (www.theglobalfund.org) and the Public Health Agency of Canada's Community Action Fund (<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/funding-opportunities/hiv-hepatitis-community-action-fund-next-steps.html>). For a response on the insufficiencies of the Community Action Fund, see the Canadian AIDS Society's response: <https://www.cdn aids.ca/public-health-agency-of-canada-cutting-funding-to-canadian-aids-service-organizations/>.

considered how the capitalization of time and the competition for our attention(s), labeled the attention economy, impacts how assemblies (and activists, and their demands) are seen, heard, and listened to in western cultures. For the latter conversation, I turn to Jenny Oddell who not only enables varied forms of activism to shine through endless diversions, advertising, and twenty-four hour cable news, but further understand that act of shining through as itself resistance.

My argument in “Living Before a Virus” hinged on a mutual, shared unknowingness between queer bodies living with HIV while also acknowledging those taking pre-exposure prophylaxis—now invisible actions, both positioned before HIV-as-virus—which link those queer bodies into mutual duty, and thus mutual invitation, to activism. Grounded in a widespread communications campaign, U=U, previously discussed in earlier chapters, my focus here becomes to challenge us to mobilize that invitation into action. Specifically, I argue that if the indeterminacy of what constitutes a people mirrors the indeterminacy between queer bodies upon which HIV activism is predicated, and if the indeterminacy of each is the mechanism by which both become articulable, then effective HIV activism within the attention economy must resist all forms of definition. That is, the only concrete action made available to us, in effect, is to resist concrete thought and predefined actions if we are to react to the shifting nature of HIV. We must draw from the diverse needs of diverse people in their individual relations to that ambiguity, which is an argument I’ll carry through to my fifth and final chapter which finds examples of this phenomenon in the work of artist Felix Gonzalez-Torres. This dissertation, in sum, lands on political and communication strategies which refuse definitions of HIV or clear-cut methods of conducting HIV politics. This is a refusal of static political strategies defined by others which, from their articulation, fail to serve anyone but those making that articulation. Instead, let us

model HIV activism on the same vulnerability, unknowingness, relationship to the virus, and potential to fail upon which we have, in previous chapters, defined HIV itself, letting only the duty to be vulnerable to each other dictate, and make articulable, the path forward.

Vulnerability and Communication

In my third chapter, I argued that emergent HIV medical technologies—improving antiretrovirals and the rise of pre-exposure prophylaxis—provide mutual touchpoints of vulnerability and relationality between queer bodies across lines of serostatus. Through that overlap, I argued, queer bodies have both an obligation to each other and an opportunity to serve that obligation via an invitation to HIV activism. In effect, living before a virus opens up the possibility of mutual care and community as well providing a call to HIV politics. However, a caveat to my argument was that the barrier of HIV related-stigma—including serophobia, sex-negativity, and the stigma of drug use among others—precludes full understanding between HIV negative and HIV positive bodies despite taking, sometimes, the same medication and both maintaining some form of orientation to the virus. While this is definitively true based on extensive testimonies of seropositive people³⁰², in fact, Joshua Pocius argues that to some activists HIV-related stigmas carry through to PrEP as indicating “a future in which fear of HIV transmission is coded as historical,” further problematizing the manner in which stigma

³⁰² For the impact of HIV-related stigma on activism, see Sarah Schulman and Jim Hubbard, *United in Feeling: A History of ACT UP*. The film can be viewed for free at unitedinanger.com. The film is based on oral accounts of ACT UP which can be read online: actuporalhistory.org.

divides—across temporalities, even—seronegative and seropositive bodies.³⁰³ Stigma is widely regarded as the predominant barrier to care, and in the Canadian context, often the driver of the epidemic particularly within indigenous populations whose intersecting forms of stigma include racism, poverty, drug use, and serostatus within and without first nations communities where social services and access to care differ wildly.³⁰⁴

There is no single or unifying conceptualization of stigma that adequately represents the unique lived experiences of people living with HIV, and there are no single methods of measuring the destructive impact stigma has played within individual lives, though methods have been developed including the Canadian Stigma Index.³⁰⁵ Stigma, including self-stigma, is arguably the most important HIV issue in Canada and often serves as the principle worry for people living with HIV post-diagnosis. But stigma as an overarching concept premised on collective vulnerability has had the paradoxical property of rallying divergent communities affected by HIV into common political goals. While not stated explicitly, I argue that this is also the overarching purpose of Prevention Access Campaign's Undetectable = Untransmittable (U=U) campaign which asserts that “people living with HIV can feel confident that if they have an undetectable viral load and take their medications as prescribed, they will not pass on HIV to sexual partners.”³⁰⁶ The campaign, founded by Executive Director Bruce Richman, is based on a

³⁰³ Joshua Pocius. “Of Bodies, Borders, and Barebacking: The Geocorpographies of HIV” in Holly Randell-Moon and Ryan Tippet, eds., *Security, Race, Biopower: Essays on Technology and Corporeality* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016), 24.

³⁰⁴ For one of the best interventions in Canadian indigenous HIV policy as it relates to stigma, see Tracey Prentice (et al) “Good Medicine: Decolonizing HIV Policy for Indigenous Women in Canada” in Suzanne Hindmarch, Michael Orsini, and Marilou Gagnon, eds., *Seeing Red: HIV/AIDS and Public Policy in Canada* (Toronto: U Toronto P, 2018), 235-256.

³⁰⁵ See stigmaindex.org. There are many chapters in Canada with a centralized body out of St Michael's Hospital in Toronto lead by researcher Dr Sean Rourke. They have produced “The Positive Effect” at pozeffect.ca, which provides a united voice of the various HIV Stigma Index projects as well as serves as an online community for people living with HIV in Canada who have experienced stigma.

³⁰⁶ See Prevention Access Campaign, U=U, <https://www.preventionaccess.org/undetectable>. Last accessed August 4, 2019.

consensus statement endorsed by local public health units, HIV services organizations, health care professionals and scientists working in the field of HIV, which serves as a tool for public health education, prevention, government relations, and a rallying cry for activists.

Relaying the significance of U=U, as a social movement, is difficult to understate, though how it has been taken up by specific organizations and governments falls far outside the purview of these pages. The history of the movement, while surely a milestone in HIV activism, cannot yet be measured with any accuracy. However, as writes known HIV activist John McCullagh, U=U is “powerful knowledge” that has “fundamentally changed what it means to live with HIV. It has opened up social, sexual and reproductive choices we would never have thought possible. It helps raise awareness of the reality of HIV today, and works to dispel the negative, stigmatizing judgments about people with HIV, promoting acceptance and inclusivity.”³⁰⁷ The simple knowledge of not being able to pass on the virus, for McCullagh and hosts of others, has served as a platform for eliminating the worry from which fear of bodies with HIV is built.

My concerns here, are specifically, the mechanisms through which U=U has mobilized varied HIV-publics with equally varied political agendas. More broadly still, we must ask what happens to HIV activism when collective worries surrounding transmission are pacified. Fundamentally speaking, U=U is a conversation about risk, specifically informing the sexual lives of folks living with HIV but, perhaps more importantly, generally mediating the historical perceptions of disease and contagion held by broader society in relation to seropositive people. I argue, though, that at play within this widespread campaign is an interesting, if problematic, demarcation of HIV publics in which the invitation to HIV politics is expanded across lines of serostatus—much like the call to action in my third chapter—but demarcated along (again,

³⁰⁷ John McCullagh, “Undetectable Equals Untransmittable: New Possibilities for People Living With HIV,” *InMagazine*, September-October 2019, 13.

problematic) lines of perceived safety. ‘Perceived’ safety requires nuance within this discussion: there is no doubt, through the PARTNER study and others, that U=U is fact and that people living with HIV on effective treatment cannot pass on the virus sexually.³⁰⁸ But stigma exceeds the rational mind, and hardened associations with disease do not dissipate overnight.

U=U is but one intervention within a shifting landscape of HIV activism, informed by and in turn informing the landscape of HIV medicine, changing economics, and, specifically considered here, how such shifts impact what it means to communicate politically. There is an irony to the U=U campaign that cannot go unnoticed in that the entire movement is nothing but a re-framing, though scientifically driven and using new communications technologies, of the very same becoming-chronic of HIV that previous generations of activists have lamented as causing HIV-related political apathy. My argument in these pages is that shared vulnerability, like in “Living Before a Virus,” is the impetus to shared activism that allows activists to congregate around a shared message and, ultimately, work towards a shared political goal. To understand these processes currently at the forefront of HIV activist discussions globally, we must parse two lines of thought before returning to the campaign itself: first, the touchpoints between vulnerability, hope, and assembly, and second, given the media-driven quality of U=U, how a constituted people might communicate their vulnerability in our contemporary capitalist moment.

³⁰⁸ As mentioned in my introduction, the PARTNER Study is a large-scale European multi-site study of condomless sex between serodiscordant couples where the HIV-positive partner is on antiretroviral therapy and has maintained viral suppression. The study concludes: “Among serodifferent heterosexual and MSM couples in which the HIV-positive partner was using suppressive ART and who reported condomless sex, during median follow-up of 1.3 years per couple, there were no documented cases of within-couple HIV transmission (upper 95% confidence limit, 0.30/100 couple-years of follow-up). Additional longer-term follow-up is necessary to provide more precise estimates of risk.” Though other studies have reached the same conclusion, the PARTNER study is widely regarded as the authoritative basis of U=U. See Allison J Rodger, Valentina Cambiano, and Tina Bruun, et al., in *JAMA* 316.2 (2016): 171-181.

The Collective is Personal

As previously demonstrated (in my second chapter) through Jean-Luc Nancy's *Being Singular Plural*, we are constituted as subjects only in relation to one another, a reading augmented by Judith Butler's later work on the politics of assembly. In *Precarious Life*, Butler writes that "each of us is constituted politically in part by virtue of the social vulnerability of our bodies—as a site of desire and physical vulnerability, as a site of publicity at once assertive and exposed. Loss and vulnerability seem to follow from our being socially constituted bodies, attached to others, at risk of losing those attachments, exposed to others, at risk of violence by virtue of that exposure."³⁰⁹ 'Publicity' is in itself an interesting choice of words, for to be public in Butler's understanding is both a risky exposure by which one is seen and potentially the target of violence but, conversely, that act of being seen is both the mechanism by which each body is constituted as body *and* an advertised assertion of being in a given place at a given time. If we continue that logic to activist terms, to activate for a cause is to expose oneself as being against a political grain—an exposure which risks suppression in a myriad of ways—as to simultaneously assert that presence for political gain.

(Shared vulnerability, too, is the basis of our understandings of health and immunity. The virus, metaphorically and literally, dissolves individual boundaries into amalgamated collectivities premised on risk. Writes Eula Biss: "We are protected not so much by our own skin, but by what is beyond it. The boundaries between our bodies begin to dissolve here,"³¹⁰ and later, "immunity is a public space."³¹¹ In fact, more broadly, and as demonstrated in my second

³⁰⁹ Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London and New York: Verso, 2004), 20.

³¹⁰ Eula Biss, *On Immunity: An Inoculation* (Minneapolis: Graywolf, 2014), 20

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, 95.

chapter, health is often communicated through our exposure to others which concomitantly poses the constant risk of judgement. Think of a phrase that often begins encounters: ‘you look well’.)

My reading of Butler carries through to her (even later) *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* wherein she defines ‘a people’ in remarkably similar terms. Butler claims that “it is also true that every determination of ‘the people’ includes an act of demarcation that draws a line... and that line immediately becomes a contentious border.”³¹² Like individual bodies, the people, as collective, come into being at the moment of their exposure, an exposure which simultaneously demarcates them as an identifiable entity. In this way, perhaps, *the* people can simultaneously be interpolated as *those* people in the creation of a dividing border, a judgement which simultaneously delineates them from us and poses a risk to the activist minority (which can be ‘them’ or ‘us’ again depending on your perspective) through the potential, again, for violence. This of course plays on a triple interpretation (on my part) of “contentious border,” which (1) provides potential ground for alienation between ‘us’ and ‘them,’ (2) can be contentiously shifting and porous depending on sociopolitical contexts, and (3) changes the nature of those found within and without that border the moment that border comes into being. Of this last point, the moment individuals are collectively termed ‘people’ the nature through which the shift from singular to plural occurs, to borrow Nancy’s terms, is a moment of transformation: what leads the collection of singulars to be called a plural no longer exists the moment that plural is articulated.

As Butlerian ‘the people’ take form, the capacity of activists to make a claim—in this case, that undetectable is untransmittable—exists only at the moment where they become collectively identifiable. However, as we know, any collection of individuals represented by

³¹² Judith Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, (Cambridge: Harvard U P, 2015), 5.

activism is in constant shift with ever-changing politics, and thus a persistent risk from the collective is exclusion of those requiring the message or articulation or demarcation of the very border that potentially leaves them stranded. (For this, we may turn to Žižek and Rancière’s part-with-no-part for an answer³¹³.) Butler mitigates this potential violence insofar as the process, by definition, is ongoing: “the persistent exclusion forces us back into the process of naming and renaming, of renewing what we mean by ‘the people’ and what various people mean when they invoke that term.”³¹⁴ In this sense, the people are not static but a constituted entity that is made and unmade ad infinitum.

Any form of activism that demarcates a people—those who are undetectable, those who are untransmittable—must follow this logic of constant re-becoming or risk exclusion, irrelevance, or worse, violence. Wendy Brown might call this “citizenship beyond membership,” which she uses to describe forms of citizenship which are demarcated and shift with changing economic circumstances.³¹⁵ Brown even takes our Butlerian logic further in asserting that the terrain we call democracy itself must be a shifting one lest it be “watered down”³¹⁶ into weaker “membership.”³¹⁷ So too, Charles Lee in his *Ingenious Citizenship* demands a constant reevaluation of who belongs and advocates for a series of improvised resistance(s); that is, “non-linear social change” that constantly occurs and re-occurs.³¹⁸ Lee terms this process ‘ingenious agency,’ referring to “the capacity of creatively devising and contriving different ways of

³¹³ Of which Rancierian dissensus, or the basis of politics, is established. See Steven Corcoran’s Introduction to Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On the Politics of Aesthetics* (London: Continuum, 1999), 6.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

³¹⁵ Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism’s Stealth Revolution* (Brooklyn: Zone Books, 2015), 39.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 207.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 218.

³¹⁸ Charles T. Lee, *Ingenious Citizenship: Recrafting Democracy for Social Change* (Durham and London: Duke U P, 2016), 6.

enacting oneself politically with limited tools and resources to generate change in one's immediate surroundings and even the larger social sphere."³¹⁹

Through different terms, Butler, Brown, and Lee share in common an aversion to static notions of people and their duty to civic change on both sides: a constantly renewed sense of both who constitutes the people and the conditions by which such change is imagined. This renewal—my term, not Butler's—may in fact be the crucial difference between forms of HIV activism I have previously labeled dated and which I have found to not keep up with changing political conditions. In order to make this claim, and to understand the conditions of political efficacy through which we can state U=U, we must turn the impact of precarity and neoliberal economics on the various ways in which the people (might) articulate their activist message.

Risking the Attention Economy

Another truth: the modes through which my generation communicate are not controlled by users themselves, limiting any potential for free speech through capitalist cooptation. We, as people, neither own the content nor the governance over that content however restrictive we make our privacy settings: ultimately Facebook or Instagram or Snapchat algorithms dictate the limits of acceptability and, in turn, shape the information flow of our social fabric. While the political power of social media institutions cannot be underestimated, however, political theory broadly and theories of new technologies specifically have only begun to attempt to outline how users themselves might harness that power to realize activist objectives. Thinking through Undetectable Equals Untransmittable—both in its own right but also synecdochally as an

³¹⁹ Ibid, 9.

extension of HIV activism within constituted HIV publics—requires us to turn to the paradoxes of new media which account for the changing conditions of capitalism, power, public voice, and our capacity to capture attention.

Generally speaking, activists have had to choose between avenues of protest and engagement that exist either within or without the structure of online social networks. By within I refer to forms of online engagement ranging from individual political memes to democratic online communities which foster discussion aimed at concrete social action with likeminded individuals. By without I mean certain activists and academics, several of whom I discussed in this dissertation's introduction, who call for a return to street activism for which, not coincidentally, HIV activism has historically been known. These two polls are not mutually exclusive, with many sociologists pointing to the ways in which Twitter in particular has augmented the capacity to organize street-based demonstrations.³²⁰

The use of social media, mixed media, or digital communication strategies are largely understood in terms of efficiency whereby messages are diffused at increasingly frequent rates with improved technologies. John Jost (et al), in attempting to empirically evaluate social media as a tool for protest points to a paradox in recent sociological studies whereby, on one hand, “social media provides an efficient vehicle for the rapid transmission of information about planned events and political developments thereby facilitating the organization of protest activity,” while on the other it “provides extraordinary opportunities for governmental authorities

³²⁰ Interestingly, Zeynep Tufekci writes of the important symbiosis between human and technological networks in order for information to be quickly disseminated for political mobilization purposes. “Technology can help movements coordinate and organize, but if corresponding network internalities are neglected, technology can lead to movements that scale up while missing essential pillars of support.” Zeynep Tufekci, *Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest* (New Haven and London: Yale U P, 2017), 76.

to detect and suppress protest activity” that may actually be directed at them in the first place.³²¹

We can thus surmise parallel phenomena: speedy responses to information in which protest is generated and, concomitantly, the capacity for that protest to be suppressed via the very same information.

There are connections to be made between networked publics and crowds: both are premised on encounters between humans with the obvious major difference(s) of possible anonymity during online interactions. An online interaction does not require those who write (or post, or speak, or act) to know if or when their material will be engaged. But when online communication mechanisms frequented by activists exchange information—exactly the kind of online culture this chapter takes into account—I contend that the interactions resemble crowd culture, an examination of which will inform both our discussion on the constitution of HIV publics and modes of activism and communication which call those publics into being.

There are advantages to operating in the collective, even when the agents within that operation do not know they are members of a constituted public. James Surowiecki, referencing the wisdom of crowds in a book of the same name, argues that diversity of opinion, decentralized leadership, independence between individual agents, and aggregated ideas (whereby ideas are collected from individual agents finding likeminded positions, differentiated by mob behavior in which groups think with an individual mind) improve collective intelligence: “when our imperfect judgements are aggregated in the right way, our collective intelligence is often excellent.”³²² These criteria are based on the important distinction that the group’s components, what I’ve called individual actors, are not homogenous which would ultimately risk group-think

³²¹ John T. Jost (et al), “How Social Media Facilitates Political Protest: Information, Motivation, and Social Network” in *Advances in Political Psychology* 39.1 (2018): 86.

³²² James Surowiecki, *The Wisdom of Crowds* (Anchor: New York, 2005), Xiv. For mob behavior, see Surowiecki 257.

mentality and the illusion of invulnerability that comes with being surrounded by people who think exactly as you do. I take from Surowiecki two distinctly important factors in building a public capable of making decisions: (1) that a sum of individual ideas which, when collected, create a consensus equally informed by their overlap as their divergence and (2) the importance of forward-looking decisions which account for emerging or changing conditions within the group. The latter, resonating well with the arguments made in my introduction to this dissertation, equally serves as a caution against viewing limited experience as debilitating. Surowiecki writes that “bringing new members into the organization even if they’re less experienced and less capable actually makes the group smarter simply because what little the new members do know is not redundant with what everyone else knows.”³²³

The attention economy, in a very literal sense, is the economization and capitalization of our attention spans. Time we speciously label as leisure becomes monetized at alarming rates: ‘non-work’ activities like catching up with friends within the context of social media platforms is measured in click-rates and advertising space; sports tournaments are no longer measured in athletic performance but in corporate share of voice; even the most progressive articles—the bedrock of activist information sharing—are measured and promoted by how many times they are shared on various platforms. For many, increased technological demands on our lives and the capitalization of our attention has resulted in a perceived loss of genuine social interaction, which I interpret as a loss of interactions unmitigated by commercial interest. This is stated best by Jenny Odell who writes that “the convenience of limitless connectivity has nearly paved over the nuances of in-person conversation, cutting away so much information and context in the process. In an endless cycle where communication is stunted and time is money, there are few

³²³ Ibid, 31.

moments to slip away and fewer ways to find each other.”³²⁴ In certain respects, the ‘time is money’ paradigm applied to ‘finding each other’ is an extension of our work days which have become both more competitive and impacted by increasing precarity in terms of job security.³²⁵ For Odell, ‘time is money’ has been extended within a capitalist paradigm to personal branding and image, including for activists and community-based personalities who have found employment in activism, fear-mongering using 24-news cycles, what she has termed “the invasive logic of *commercial* social media and its financial incentive to keep us in a profitable state of anxiety, envy, and distraction. It is furthermore the cult of individuality and personal branding that grow out of such platforms and affect the way we think about our offline selves and the places where we actually live.”³²⁶

Odell’s project is one of resistance positioned from within the attention economy. Reminiscent of Dennis Altman and Jonathan Symons’s definition of queer activism—“activism, like development, is an adaptive process in which interventions are most likely to be successful if they are led by local activists and serve to amplify existing progressive political forces”³²⁷—Odell positions herself in situ, participating in (local) acts that are impossible to economically coopt. She writes of “‘resistance-in-place’: To resist in place is to make oneself into a shape that cannot so easily be appropriated by a capitalist value system. To do this means refusing the frame of reference.”³²⁸ Examples of this form of refusal for Odell are nature-based and include activities as simple as reading in a garden or refusing productivity in the pursuit of pleasure,

³²⁴ Jenny Odell, *How to Do Nothing: Resisting the Attention Economy* (Brooklyn and London: Melville House, 2019) X.

³²⁵ As discussed in my first chapter, for an in-depth analysis of the impacts of economic and employment precarity on queer lives, see Lauren Berlant’s *Cruel Optimism*.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, xii.

³²⁷ Denis Altman and Jonathan Symons, *Queer Wars: The New Global Polarization over Gay Rights* (Cambridge: Polity, 2016), 151.

³²⁸ Odell, *How to Do Nothing*, xvi.

including contemplation. The inverse is also true: Odell clearly achieves pleasure in the pursuit of refusing productive, in the sense of that which is produced and capitalized, labour.

The parallels between a movement like U=U and Odell's form of resistance are clear. To be undetectable and thus untransmittable is to adapt the articulation of what it means to be HIV positive into modern scientific thinking, but it is also from a communications standpoint to promote acts of resistance which circumvent a state that sees HIV-positive bodies as commodities within a legal system and healthcare system whose economic outputs are, in effect, based on control. For the first time in the epidemic, bodies living with HIV are able to declare themselves autonomous from those processes and resist-in-place not only to maintain autonomy but to prevent their bodies becoming commodities within a de-humanizing system. U=U resists the criminalization of HIV: if, as writes Trevor Hoppe, "stigma and ignorance often serve as invisible hands in guiding the wheel as lawmakers draft statutes and authorities determine how they are applied," then U=U resists-in-place by framing a body-with-HIV that undermines stigma with science and, through the logic of being undetectable, invalidates the laws that capitalize on the criminalization of a virus.³²⁹ So too, U=U resists disability activist Eli Clare's assertion that diagnosis "holds history and creates baselines. It predicts the future and shapes all sorts of decisions. It unleashes political and cultural forces."³³⁰ As a pronouncement of illness, a diagnosis is an entrance into a healthcare system that regulates bodies based on their capacity for infection and bodily function. As a mechanism of communicating intransmissibility and normative-function, U=U resists-in-place the elements of healthcare which understand people living with HIV as products with predictable futures, which is not to say bodies-with-HIV leave the healthcare system but they no longer can be seen as without agency or as products of

³²⁹ Trevor Hoppe, *Punishing Disease: HIV and the Criminalization of Sickness* (Oakland: U California P, 2018), 8.

³³⁰ Eli Clare, *Brilliant Imperfection: Grappling with Cure* (Durham and London: Duke U P, 2017), 41.

sickness with predictable futures that need to be worked on. If healthcare is a market, or even if the judicial system is a market, U=U forces what Odell later calls ‘standing apart’: “to stand apart is to take the view of the outsider without leaving, always oriented toward what it is you would have left. It means not fleeing your enemy, but knowing your enemy, which turns out not to be the world—*contemptus mundi*—but the channels through which you encounter it day by day.”³³¹ Finally, there is also the simple fact of a communications campaign, one with global reach, that can adapt to the attention economy: in the streets, on t-shirts, but also across social media platforms all while retaining its own autonomy. The science of U=U is not for sale.

What is clear within these various discussions is that adaptive messaging is essential to activist relevancy. What remains, though, is to make clear that communications structures which demarcate HIV publics, to achieve relevancy, must adapt to changing conditions that cannot yet be known without acceptance of the status quo. Activist publics, activist messaging, and activist decision making must be predicated on imagining other possibilities; writes Surowiecki: “truly successful decision making, of course, demands more than just a picture of the world as it is. It demands in addition a picture of the world as it will (or at least as it may) be. Any decision-making mechanism therefore has to be good under conditions of uncertainty. And what is more uncertain than the future?”³³² If U=U, as a movement, scientific principle, and activist communication structure, is the mechanism by which we will advance HIV politics into an HIV-free future, what are the conditions by which U=U must be articulable to make it continuously relevant? Playing on my original question: for whom does U=U serve?

Hope and HIV Futures

³³¹ Odell, *How to Do Nothing*, 61.

³³² Surowiecki, *The Wisdom of Crowds*, 11.

U=U within the context of an ongoing epidemic represents a refreshing antithesis to forms of adversarial activism which place various bodies living with HIV in opposition. The movement represents, in part, many tenets of thinking through and acting upon what I've termed the other possibilities of HIV response, all the while considering the conditions by which HIV continues to impact diverse communities. To be undetectable and unable to pass on the virus shatters, in a profound way, common misconceptions about HIV: stigmas shared by a generalized mainstream public and directed toward seropositive people, but also shared by the constellation of communities of people living with HIV with varied and complex intersecting identities. Undetectability is a bridge across lines of serostatus not just because being undetectable negates the risk of sexual contact but because, both literally and within the queer popular imagination, it changes the ways in which queer health is perceived. But while U=U, or the achievement of undetectability, may give ample reason for hope it is neither cure nor end to the epidemic. I'll end my discussion on undetectability with its relations to hope and activism for that very end before, in my fifth chapter, turning to question what undetectability and unknowingness ask of HIV activists.

I share Rebecca Solnit's view that hope is insufficient on its own, that hope requires work, and more importantly that hope is located in the space of uncertainty.³³³ She writes, at length:

Hope is not a door, but a sense that there might be a door at some point, some way out of the problems of the present moment even before that way is found or followed.

³³³ This is the premise of Solnit's *Hope in the Dark* which acts as part history of activism, part call for embracing the uncertain work required of activism. Solnit disparages forms of activism that are either complacent insofar as they simply wish for ends as opposed to actively participating in means and forms of activism which fail to celebrate the minor victories. See Rebecca Solnit, *Hope in the Dark: Untold Histories, Wild Possibilities* (Edinburgh and London: Canongate, 2005/2016 (3rd ed)).

Sometimes radicals settle for excoriating the wall for being so large, so solid, so blank, so without hinges, knobs, keyholes, rather than seeking a door, or they trudge through a door looking for a new wall. [...] The only story many leftists know is how to tell the story that is the underside of the dominant culture's story, more often than the stuff that never makes it to the news, and all news has a bias in favour of suddenness, violence, and disaster that overlooks groundswells, sea changes, and alternatives, the forms in which popular power most often manifests itself. Their gloomy premise is that the powers that be are not telling you the whole truth, but the truth they tell is also incomplete. They conceive of the truth as pure bad news, appoint themselves the deliverers of it, and keep telling it over and over.³³⁴

Activism, as I hope to have made clear, is an act of working towards.³³⁵ HIV apathy is often not a case of queer publics not caring about HIV, but a failure to work toward common goals that would, ultimately, prevent transmission, promote access to care, and end the epidemic. This is part and parcel with the objectives of the attention economy who aims, as I've hoped to show, draw us away from improving the social fabric of queer life. To parallel Solnit's terms, sensing a door implies willful engagement (and often, resistance) to the forces which deny our capacity to join forces and recognize HIV-positive bodies in spite of, not because of, barriers to communication posed by the attention economy and the divisions within the HIV community, including intergenerational divisions, which demarcate some queer bodies as within or without the capacity to organize, advocate, protest, or create change.

My point is that there is an unknowingness to HIV activism that must be congruent, and embraced, with the unknowingness of bodies and the unknowingness of who and when a people are demarcated. U=U offers a model, the first of its kind, that acts as a touchpoint between bodies across identitarian lines or even serostatus—"can't pass it on"—while simultaneously

³³⁴ Ibid, 22.

³³⁵ This is shared by Frances Westley, Brenda Zimmerman, and Michael Quinn Paton who in *Getting to Maybe* write that "in any social innovation something radically new occurs and assumes that, for this to happen, there must be, first and foremost, a belief that intractable problems can be solved. It assumes there must be an individual or group of individuals poised and ready to act—but these do not have to be perfect people." See Frances Westley, Brenda Zimmerman, and Michael Quinn Paton, *Getting to Maybe: How the World is Changed* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2007), 6.

offering a proactive model of health that falls outside institutional, capitalist, or legal claims over such bodies. That's a lot to ask of one message. But it does provide us, as queer men, as activists, with a tool that accounts for and resists claims on bodies with HIV that negatively impact our communities, and more, to mark those communities as a people whose message is shared in their emergence as such. U=U is a call to action to resist-in-place against stigma and other forces which serve as a detriment to our sexualities and healthy relationships between queer bodies, and which take us further from ending HIV.

We cannot, however, stop there. The message of U=U does not account for the social determinants of health nor for the conditions by which someone becomes undetectable, including access to care, support, and community, nor does it address intersecting social and political conditions, including poverty, through which HIV thrives. However, and perhaps most importantly, we can find joy in reaching an alternative—and there must exist more—to the pessimism and dated tactics that have consumed our activism. For Lynne Segal, fighting against pervasive and isolating individualism promoted by late capitalism prioritizes locating opportunities for collective joy, those “moments and those spaces in public life where collective energy binds us together in ways that transcend our personal worries.”³³⁶ To transcend our individual worries (and identities, lived experiences, stigmas) does not mean, in Segal's view or my own, ignoring that which makes us unique but instead paves the way to joy in placing our collectives selves against individual agendas.

We do not know the extent to which folks can or will become undetectable, and how HIV-negative gay men will organize around the changing conditions of serodiscordance. That hope is as yet unknown, but U=U provides hope in the sense of a duty amongst HIV publics and,

³³⁶ Lynne Segal, *Radical Happiness: Moments of Collective Joy*, (Brooklyn and London: Verso, 2017), 25.

beyond that, between HIV publics and the non-queer world. Pre-determined paths, for activism, are a sense of control. When “control is replaced by a toleration of ambiguity,”³³⁷ as write Frances Westley, Brenda Zimmerman, and Michael Quinn Paton, the fundamental nature of power shifts. Solnit writes that when “you recognize uncertainty, you recognize that you may be able to influence the outcomes.”³³⁸ Which is exactly the point.

³³⁷ Frances Westley, Brenda Zimmerman, and Michael Quinn Paton, *Getting to Maybe*, 20.

³³⁸ Rebecca Solnit, *Hope in the Dark*, xii.

Chapter Five: The Difficulty of Felix Gonzalez-Torres

In Gonzalez-Torres's ideal world, people do not endure alone; they survive in pairs, as part of loving couples who age together, no longer in danger of premature separation caused by incurable and inexplicable disease. Here, bodily fulfillment refers to being in love, to existing in a state of togetherness, to constituting a community of two.

Nancy Spector

I was losing the most important thing in my life—Ross, with whom I had the first real home, ever. So why not punish myself even more so that, in a way, the pain would be less? This is how I started letting the work go. Letting it just disappear. People don't realize how strange it is when you make your work and you put it out to be seen and say, simply, "take me." You watch them take pieces of the work—pieces of yourself—and start going out the door. And you feel like saying, "excuse me, but that is mine. Bring it back."

Felix Gonzales-Torres

Two clocks, basic in design with their white backgrounds and black type-face, stand adjacent, ticking in unison, until one battery dies leaving the other to continue alone.

A carpet of wrapped candies is placed on a gallery floor, a rectangle of translucent silver objects we are invited to take, one by one, until the floor is exposed and the space is empty.

Two lightbulbs with intertwining cords hang together, until one burns out and shines for the other.

A stack of robin's egg blue paper casts its hue against a wall, until a final viewer takes the final page and the wall returns to white.

The simple elegance of Felix Gonzalez-Torres's minimalist sculptures and photographs have become increasingly taken up within queer academic writing, and his understated themes of memory, loss, and community have served as important catalysts for discussion within AIDS

discourse. From Patrick Moore, who understands Gonzalez-Torres as perpetuating a legacy of radical queer sexuality while conforming to and confronting an increasingly institutionalized art world to Josh Takano Chambers-Letson who thinks of acts of sharing—taking candy and single leaf papers until the work becomes exhausted which makes up so much of Gonzalez-Torres’s artistic method—in terms of a strategic viral politics, theorists have identified the artist as a source of queer possibility: of working against a social imagination that would rather forget the love shared between two (dying) men, of creating forums for participating in activism and radical politics, of archiving our collective struggle with and against AIDS. This chapter actively works against such readings, not in the hope of negation, but in the service of emphasizing the roles of unsharability, difficulty, and incommensurability in contemporary HIV politics as methods for rethinking our collective response to the virus.

While this chapter serves as a sustained discussion of Felix Gonzalez-Torres, whose art has fascinated me throughout my adult life, it also serves as the culmination of my previous four chapters. In parallel to my first chapter, within Felix Gonzalez-Torres’s work I understand a strategic updating of memory to meet the needs of an emergent generation of queers; as with my second chapter, work like Gonzalez-Torres’s *Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)*, which I will discuss at length, renews our capacity to visually render HIV within a fine balance of histories of wasting, mourning, and death and the possibilities of hope, change, and renewal. Building on my aspirations toward a shared, preemptive politics of seropositivity in my third chapter, and my discussion of assembly and unknowingness in my fourth chapter, this chapter will use work like *Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)* as a central example of how we might understand HIV in the contemporary moment as demanding an impossible form of participation: a sharing of what we cannot possibly give and a form of community premised on non-understanding and non-

sharing. Felix Gonzalez-Torres provides context for both exemplifying and extending these arguments.

I concur in this chapter, however, with Christopher Castiglia and Christopher Reed, who locate within the artist's overarching project an "imaginative idealism"³³⁹; that is, in this case, a temporal connectivity between our shared queer past—though not, as in Lucas Hilderbrand's essay from my first chapter, necessarily one experienced first hand—informing a politically rife present and the utopian possibility of a liberated future. "Generating combinations of projections and recollections," they write, "Gonzalez-Torres's art allows viewers to experience the past, with all the attendant experiences of loss, while maintaining their *presentness*. From the interface between past and present comes his art's potential for critique and idealism, each moment in time showing but also supplementing the limitations of the other. Gonzalez-Torres's art shows how intrinsically the movement from spectatorship to speculation, from vision to visionary, relies on the elision of temporal success and its fictions of progress."³⁴⁰ Likewise, I share with Castiglia and Reed, as José Muñoz would too, a fervent hope in an informative possible otherwise: that the present may be informed by new forms of being and doing and thinking which may yet give birth to a better tomorrow. While I have maintained a certain skepticism for projects which leave that past unquestioned, and which ignore other possibilities for today in favour of whatever may emerge tomorrow at the cost of omitting new sociomedical conditions through which HIV must now be understood, we may safely say that the difficulty of hope has sustained much of this dissertation. Such hope informs our shared reading of the work of Gonzalez-Torres, in whom

³³⁹ Christopher Castiglia and Christopher Reed, *If Memory Serves: Gay Men, AIDS, and the Promise of the Queer Past* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 177.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 187. Original emphasis.

Castiglia and Reed find “the basis for a transformative queer politics of the ideal.”³⁴¹ Though my own reading of Gonzalez-Torres pivots on themes of inoperativity, difficulty, and willfullness, this, too, is performed in the service of both my own restlessness and longing for change, to remember what I cannot, and share in the unsharability of an ongoing epidemic.

Beginning with a sustained discussion of difficulty, willingness, and participatory spectatorship—the theoretical backbones of this chapter—in the pages that follow I argue that Gonzalez-Torres demands of his viewers participation in what is intrinsically unsharable: to partake in a virus that belongs to the body of another. The artist demands us to partake in what we cannot know. This may be surprising to some critics of the artist’s work who identify acts of sharing as the prolonging of memory—as do Castiglia and Reed—or an act of sharing mourning within collectivity, what has been labelled “the poignant beauty of this fragile, artificial ecology.”³⁴² A direct analogy is made between the work discussed in this chapter—*Untitled (Portrait of Ross in LA)* and *Untitled (Placebo)*—and a viral politics based on incommensurability. To participate in the difficulty of Felix Gonzalez-Torres, in this sense, is to extend participation in HIV politics beyond the limits of serostatus, and to think HIV well beyond the confines of a stultifying here and now. In this chapter, I make the case for a return to difficulty in HIV politics and the politics of HIV.

The Work of Difficulty

My goal in this section is to think through what I’ll call the work of difficulty—to immediately knit the discourses of affect and participation—through reference to the work of

³⁴¹ Ibid, 188.

³⁴² James E. Rondeau, “Untitled (Last Light), 1993,” *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies* 25.1 (1999), 84.

Jennifer Doyle specifically in discussion with AIDS art more generally.³⁴³ By ‘AIDS art’ I do not mean critical engagement with artists who are HIV positive, as many critics have done, but art whose engagement depends upon, foregrounds, or makes allusion to the epidemic. Though Doyle’s work provides only cursory links to AIDS art, including discussions of David Wojnarowicz and Ron Athey, her focus on “work that feels emotionally sincere or real and that produces a dense field of affect around it even as it seems to dismantle the mechanisms through which emotion is produced and consumed,” first, parallels many of the central tenets of AIDS art insofar as affect is often produced both by and in relation to that which the art or artists attempts to subvert; that is, its affect emerges from stigma or hate or indifference that it ultimately attempts to eradicate. Second, Doyle’s thinking lends itself to theorizing affective shifts dependent on equally changing sociopolitical contexts on which my overarching project is (loosely) based.³⁴⁴ Further, Doyle’s work is groundbreaking insofar as she aims to discuss difficult work as aesthetic objects without solely focussing on their social, cultural, or political statements.³⁴⁵ Difficulty, in this way, does not represent a troubling affective state that intentionally leads us to a specific concept or method of activist change, but instead renders the witness a participant, demarcates difficulty as a potential realm for thought and negotiation, and establishes difficult art objects *as* objects worthy of art historical study. The object is prioritized

³⁴³ Doyle writes that “The more a work looks like a relationship, the more important the place of affect and emotion may be to critical engagement with it.” Interestingly, Doyle bridges affect with the work itself, as opposed to the work’s sociopolitical resonances. See Jennifer Doyle, *Hold it Against Me: Difficulty and Emotion in Contemporary Art* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013), 89.

³⁴⁴ Jennifer Doyle, *Hold it Against Me: Difficulty and Emotion in Contemporary Art* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013), xi.

³⁴⁵ This sentiment is echoed by Claire Bishop, discussed later in this chapter. Bishop contends that we live in “an ethically charged climate in which participatory and socially engaged art has become largely exempt from art criticism: emphasis is continually shifted away from the disruptive *specificity* of a given practice and onto a *generalised* set of ethical precepts.” See Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London and New York: Verso, 2012), 23. Original emphasis.

over the social. Doyle establishes this latter objective as returning a sense of challenge to the work: *how* and *why* a work produces difficulty demands our attention.³⁴⁶

Although my treatment of Gonzalez-Torres's work removes it from the conditions of its emergence—specifically, the 1990s boom in AIDS art—I would be remiss to not acknowledge the art scene in which Gonzalez-Torres participated. According to Christopher Reed's monographic survey *Art and Homosexuality*, AIDS “dramatically altered how art, homosexuality, and the relationship between them were understood.”³⁴⁷ Deeply informing the artistic production of East Village artists are activist circles responding to the emerging epidemic, most notably the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, or ACT UP (New York). Art and performance were integral to ACT UP's protest techniques, including in video work and what Roger Hallas elaborates as ‘performative documentaries’ (after Bill Nicols)³⁴⁸, and through the use of iconography, slogans, and banners. For example, artist David Wojnarowicz, a contemporary of Gonzalez-Torres, famous attended an ACT UP protest with the slogan “IF I DIE OF AIDS—FORGET BURIAL—JUST DROP MY BODY ON THE STEPS OF THE F.D.A.” printed on a jacket against the pink triangle icon now associated with the group.³⁴⁹ Further, through what Debra Gould calls the “shifting emotional habitus” of queer life in the late 1980s and early 1990s, “many came to see engagement in confrontational collective action as

³⁴⁶ Jennifer Doyle, *Hold it Against Me*, xvi.

³⁴⁷ Christopher Reed, *Art and Homosexuality* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 208.

³⁴⁸ Roger Hallas writes that performative documentaries “use performance not only to politically interrogate dominant AIDS representation but also to produce the embodied knowledge of experience and memory, which provides the affective ground for the intersubjective encounter of bearing witness to AIDS.” See Hallas's *Reframing Bodies: AIDS, Bearing Witness, and the Queer Moving Image* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009), 39.

³⁴⁹ See Cynthia Carr, *Fire in the Belly: The Life and Times of David Wojnarowicz* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2012), 400.

imperative, and ACT UP became the organizational space for that sort of angry militancy.”³⁵⁰ Felix Gonzalez-Torres’s work demonstrates a complex intertwining and departure from this scene: his art embodies both the mourning and, through its participatory nature, the confrontational attitude of the era, but his relationship to militancy diverges, as I will show below, from didacticism. In Gonzalez-Torres’s own words, his art includes the sentimental, “but it’s also about infiltration. It’s beautiful; people get into it. But then, the title or something, if you look really closely at the work, gives out that it’s something else.”³⁵¹ Through grappling with this “something else,” my analysis of Gonzalez-Torres’s participatory art replaces militancy by aligning Gonzalez-Torres’s *ongoing*—as in, evolving well past his lifetime—political project with the conceptual apparatus of difficulty.

In *Hold it Against Me: Difficulty and Emotion in Contemporary Art*, the principal of Doyle’s texts I consider, Doyle “seeks to return art spectatorship to the body’s sensorium—with all of its messy complicities.”³⁵² Doyle’s importance to understanding Gonzalez-Torres’s work lies in her capacity to treat difficulty in artworks as “tied to their emotional and identificatory geometries.”³⁵³ These geometries, reminiscent of Castiglia and Reed’s ecologies, as spacial and temporal forms of understanding, are contingent upon the indefinite, and sometimes inarticulable, ways in which art challenges perception, understanding, or affective stability, often leaving viewers, through their participation with the work, as unsettled or unknowing. As mentioned, this is a unique interpretive method because that challenge emanates from the art itself, and not it’s political or social milieu. Forms of participation vary, in this way, person to

³⁵⁰ Debra B. Gould, *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP’s Fight Against AIDS* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 175.

³⁵¹ Ross Bleckner and Felix Gonzales-Torres, “Felix Gonzales-Torres,” *BOMB* 51 (Spring 1995): 44.

³⁵² Jennifer Doyle and Erik Morse, “Books: Jennifer Doyle,” *Frieze* 158 (18 October 2013): np.

³⁵³ Jennifer Doyle, *Hold it Against Me*, 21.

person depending on their unique perception of the object, and no singular idea, emotion, or lesson is derived from the work. AIDS art is contingent upon these indiscernible qualities—themselves even difficult to articulate—and renders the epidemic, activism, and bodies-with-HIV as destabilized subjects, avoiding risks of reification: Doyle writes that in “the push for visibility, artists and activists were conscious of the risk of turning the ‘AIDS victim’ into a consumable object of pity and struggled overtly with the challenge of integrating subjects like sex, desire, love, and friendship into a narrative about the politics of illness, medicine, insurance, and discourse on public health.”³⁵⁴ Difficulty, as a concept, does not integrate specific narratives, but instead creates—to co-opt Doyle’s language above—an affective ‘messiness’ integral to the artistic work.

The difficulty of work like *Untitled (Portrait of Ross in LA)* depends upon ambiguity of meaning and an impossibility of full participation. (I will expand upon the former problem in the ensuing section about Gonzalez-Torres’s troubled relationship to minimalism.) *Untitled (Portrait of Ross in LA)* is a collection of candies totaling one hundred and seventy-five pounds—the candies, specifically, are Fruit Flashers with shiny red, green, blue, and yellow wrappers—representing the ideal body weight of Gonzalez-Torres’s late partner, Ross Laycock. The work, often but not always placed in the corner of the room, invites you to take a candy, and to consume a piece of this Ross of whom you know little, if anything, about. (What do you do with the wrapper? Do you best remember the taste, or the crinkle of the wrapper? Or maybe the counterintuitive act of touching the work, of taking from the work?) Specific understandings of the work pivot on personal relationships to the epidemic, but may also extend to a participant’s relationship to loss, mourning, community, sharing, or perhaps more practically their relationship

³⁵⁴ Ibid, 133.

to candy, their comfort within an institutional art gallery, or their capacity to overcome the taboo of taking what is not specifically theirs. Lane Relyea understands such work as “matchmaker art” which seeks to “establish firm ties to both its audience and its institutional setting, to bring the two into a tight, volatile relationship.”³⁵⁵ In the context of *Untitled (Portrait of Ross in LA)*, volatility is achieved both through ambiguities of meaning *and* discrepancies in knowledges between participants. Of the former, there are contesting meanings of loss (the work as elegy, of the work’s eventual disappearance) and joy (a portrait as a celebration of love, a work made from candy), of the love between two men (the intimacy required to render your lover in art) and an intimacy shared (sucking the body of another man’s lover), and of what constitutes a body itself (a portrait of a body that can never be a body). There are also competing metonymic relationships between the work and HIV (a virus passed on between lovers, and of pieces of candy shared between participants), the work and cure (the metaphor of pill as cure, the relationship between sugar and placebos), and of the work and death (a body that disappears piece by piece, a body that may be replenished and restaged at any time). Again from Lane Relyea: “Gonzalez-Torres’ art too houses an empty centre, depends for its meaning on its relationship to things outside it, and desperately pines for the viewer.”³⁵⁶

The political resonance upon which this chapter pivots manifests, in *Untitled (Portrait of Ross in LA)*, as a scene of contesting knowledges which, by definition, must coexist. As mentioned, the public nature of art institutions dictate a wide variety of experiences and relationships to the epidemic. Participants in the work, whether or not they understand who Ross is or what he represents, whether or not they take a candy, bring with them differing

³⁵⁵ Lane Relyea, “What’s Love Got to Do With It,” *Frieze*, June 9, 1994, accessed 8 October, 2014, http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/whats_love_got_to_do_with_it/.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

understandings and affective responses to the work specifically and the epidemic generally. That is, the appellation ‘participant’ may have a detached relationship to the work itself when the only criteria for participation is presence, however fleeting. Transforming our sense of this participation, however, is that the participatory practice of Gonzalez-Torres’s art requires a series of relations across experiences which may be felt as difficult because they are contradictory.

We might think of this particular reading of ‘difficulty’ through Rancièrian participation and political dissensus. Rancière writes that if “there exists a connection between art and politics, it should be cast in terms of dissensus, the very kernel of aesthetic regime: artworks can produce effects of dissensus precisely because they neither give lessons nor have any destination.”³⁵⁷ That political art produces dissensus through its refusal of didacticism is the subject of this chapter’s next section on Minimalism. Dissensus, for Rancière, is “a conflict between a sensory presentation and a way of making sense of it, or between several sensory regimes and/or ‘bodies.’”³⁵⁸ I posit that dependence on contested knowledges in *Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)* represents a form of dissensual politics insofar as the political resonance of the work exists between a sense-creating object and *differing* sense-receiving objects, viewers whose capacity for understanding vary but who understand *something* nonetheless. Claire Bishop, an eminent scholar on participatory art, refers to this “structural openness” in Rancièrian thought as “an ability to think contradiction”:

...the productive contradiction of art’s relationship to social change, which is characterised by the paradox of belief in art’s autonomy *and* in it being inextricably bound to the promise of a better world to come. While this antinomy is apparent in many avant-gard practices of last century, it seems particularly pertinent to analysing participatory art and the legitimating narratives it has attracted. In short, the aesthetic

³⁵⁷ Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics* (London and New York: Continuum, 2010), 140.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 139.

doesn't need to be sacrificed at the alter of social change, because it always already contains this ameliorative promise.³⁵⁹

The constellations of meanings evoked by the work in combination with competing relationships to the epidemic, artistic practice, queer love, and activism, far from presenting aesthetic rupture or inefficacy, creates a promissory event without specific destination, an act of willingness—again, the subject of a later section—without specific referent. When that difficulty takes on an aesthetic quality, as it does in the work of Gonzales-Torres, it produces a form of open participation not contingent upon shared values. Writes Relyea: “Like an office party flirt with no steady job, Gonzalez-Torre’s art manages to come across as both intimate and chameleon like, re-inventing itself not just from site to site but from moment to moment.”³⁶⁰ This re-invention is not merely a displacement of the art itself as it moves from gallery to gallery or shifts as the candy is consumed by participants, but also a moment to moment re-invention of ideas, an un-expressible and possibly unimaginable continuous re-articulation of the epidemic from each participant. The difficulty of Gonzalez-Torres, in this model of thought, opens up a politics of participation dependent upon what I’ve labeled incommensurability.³⁶¹

The Work of Minimalism

³⁵⁹ Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 29. Original emphasis.

³⁶⁰ Lane Relyea, “What’s Love Got to Do With It.”

³⁶¹ In a book chapter on Racièrian politics, Paul Patton emphasizes the concept of disagreement, itself the title of a work by the French philosopher. Patton writes that “Since politics occurs only at the borders of public agreement over particular ways of seeing or saying, disagreement involves a particular kind of speech situation where what is involved is not the possibility of mutual understanding, agreement or consensus, nor even the contents of what is said, but the very standing of the interlocutors.... Disagreement is the characteristic speech situation of newly emerging social movements.” See Paul Patton, “Racière’s Utopian Politics,” in Jean-Philippe Deranty and Alison Ross, eds., *Jacques Rancière and the Contemporary Scene: The Philosophy of Radical Equality* (London and New York: Continuum, 2012).

Much attention has been paid to the thematic forms of Gonzalez-Torres's work, with specific focus given to the artist's productive relationships to minimalism, conceptual art, and participatory art. Broadly speaking, Gonzalez-Torres's minimalist work can be divided into a handful of themes: candy spills, piles of loose-leaf paper, puzzles made from photographs, billboards, word portraits, strings of light, and beaded curtains. Kirk Varnedoe, the late curator of painting and sculpture at the Museum of Modern Art, best defines minimalism as "an aesthetic of reduction, based on eliminating a great many things from art: metaphor, individual touch, evident psychological or emotional expression, and even any discernible composition or style were all to be banished. But this wiping-clean-of-the-slate in turn asserted a heightened awareness of materials and a new consciousness of the relation between the viewer's body and art's elemental forms."³⁶²

As one can guess, formal criticism of Gonzalez-Torres, though extremely varied in nature, generally understands the artist as having an uncomfortable relationship to modernism, "eliminating a great many things," yes, but without jettisoning metaphor or individuality or affective resonance. In fact, Varnedoe himself closes his short piece on minimalist art by emphasizing how Gonzalez-Torres "pointedly adopted, and pointedly subverted, the 'purely abstract' forms of Minimalism in order to find a contemporary form for socially complex meanings of time and process in relation to the politics of the body and desire."³⁶³ Before turning to various recurring forms of Gonzalez-Torres's art in relation to my own discussion of difficulty, hope, and participation, I'd like to gloss some existing scholarship on the topic, which read his work for a variety of differing ends. You will note that, for each critic, division between

³⁶² Kirk Varnedoe, "Minimalism and After," *MoMA* 4.1 (January 2011), 3. Varnedoe was the Chief Curator, Department of Painting and Sculpture at the Museum of Modern Art from 1988-2001, and as such curated several of Gonzalez-Torres's works, including *Untitled (Placebo)*.

³⁶³ Kirk Varnedoe, "Minimalism and After," 5.

minimalism and participatory spectatorship in Gonzalez-Torres's work is not possible, for they are inextricably linked.

Performance theorist José Esteban Muñoz likens Gonzalez-Torres's minimalist form as depending upon “a minimalist symbolic lexicon that disidentified with minimalism's own self-referentiality. Gonzalez-Torres's minimalism evokes meaning and employed connotation, using the minimalist style to speak to a larger social order and to expanded issues of identity. His refunctioning of minimalism enabled him to rethink identity and instead opt for a disidentity.”³⁶⁴ Disidentity in Muñoz's understanding may here require unpacking, as will its relation to the Gonzalez-Torres's “minimalist style.” (Disidentity, later in this chapter, will be helpful in understanding the artist's vexed relationship to social activism and viral politics.) As a diacritical term, disidentity refers not to a rejection of identity—either as a form of politics, or a personal style, or subscription to the sociocultural meanings of one or more labels—but instead acts as a transformative force against rigid identitarian understandings: “disidentificatory performances... circulate in subcultural circuits and strive to envision and activate new social relations. These new social relations would be the blue print for minoritarian counterpublic spheres.”³⁶⁵ As such, Gonzalez-Torres uses the “symbolic lexicon” and aesthetic parameters as outlined by Varnedoe only to change them from within their predetermined and institutionalized employment. Disidentification—the term for which Muñoz is best known—is a form of survival strategy made available to marginalized communities as a method of renegotiating “a phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform

³⁶⁴ José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 165.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

to the phantasm of normative citizenship.”³⁶⁶ If the rhetoric Muñoz employs sounds reactionary, it is only in the sense that the performance of disidentification recycles the pre-existing in a transformative capacity. To disidentify, here, is thus creative.

What Gonzalez-Torres creates from reconstructing routine markers of identity so (lamentably) common in anti-oppressive artistic practice are complex “forms of representation premised on *invisibility*,” or artistic form “predicated on transparency and the everyday” which differ from other minoritarian art models invoking “exotic colors and rituals.”³⁶⁷ Gonzalez-Torres uses invisibility as a method of speaking audibly about deeply political subjects. In Muñoz’s reading, Gonzalez-Torres deploys minimalism’s thematic absence(s) to suggest, and point to, the very themes that have been evacuated. Muñoz writes that

Gonzalez-Torres’s work did not identify in clear or pronounced ways with the politics of AIDS and illness management *or* with the hyperstratification of art and the eroticized body of color. Yet, as the readings I have offered suggest, *he did exactly that*, which is to say that through his nimble practice of disidentifying with the public/private binary, he was able to perform activist politics. The negotiation between identification and counteridentification in the artist’s work is, primarily, a mode of critical performativity, one that I am identifying as tactical misrecognition of the public/private grids that structure the social.³⁶⁸

The misrecognition upon which disidentificatory performance depends allows Gonzalez-Torres to publicly air activist AIDS messages discernible to a private few able to decode the artist’s meaning. Such practice substitutes definitive, obvious markers of politics, identity, and identity politics in favour of “structures of feeling” that are accessible by all minority groups, some much more than others, but in the service of a redistribution of power and recognition. For example, in *Untitled (1991)*, a photograph of an unmade bed with two white pillows, indented by two absented heads, was placed by the artist across billboards in New York City without textual or

³⁶⁶ Ibid, 4.

³⁶⁷ Ibid, 166. Original emphasis.

³⁶⁸ Ibid, 172. Original emphasis.

iconographic explanation. For unknowing spectators, “what is suggested is nothing but a mundane image from everyday life,” while for others, particularly queer viewers, “the image is an allusion to loss, absence, and negation that blankets queer lives.”³⁶⁹ The private loss devastating queer culture is manifested in *Untitled (1991)* as public art not readily available to all, and certainly speaks to affective loss at the height of the AIDS epidemic above all, but is equally accessible to others experience of loss or loneliness or crisis or absence. Muñoz later refers to “a strategic obliquity” whereby Gonzalez-Torres’s artistic practice is predicated on connotation, which, of course, is deciphered varyingly dependent upon subject position, most notably minority groups seeking access, again varyingly, to the possibility of a transformative politics.

Simon Watney emphasizes the same vein in Gonzalez-Torres’s work in his “In Purgatory: The Work of Felix Gonzalez-Torres” while placing the artist’s practice against a backdrop of death and collective memory, what Watney will call “a wider culture of dying.”³⁷⁰ Watney emphasizes how Gonzalez-Torres’s form refuses romanticized notions of queer life, and how its participatory nature, absence of bodies or other identifiable figures, and refusal to provide textual information represent a marked rejection of the didacticism of minority art—and queer critics—has often, though not always, come to expect. What stands out for Watney is the artist’s refusal to make heroes of people living with AIDS, and those who have died during the epidemic, without forgetting their presence: Gonzalez-Torres’s work is about memorialization, but it is done so in the service of improving the conditions of the living. The tension between a

³⁶⁹ Ibid, 170. For Muñoz, the image also blankets Latino/a lives and other at risk communities, each of whom will read the photographic billboard differently. *Untitled (1991)*, for Muñoz, is a prime example of Gonzalez-Torres’s oblique relationship to identity politics.

³⁷⁰ Simon Watney, “In Purgatory: The Work of Felix Gonzalez-Torres,” in *Felix Gonzalez-Torres*, ed. Julie Ault (Göttingen: Steidl, 2006), 334.

refusal to teach and a refusal to remain silent is intrinsic to the absence of bodies which in turn paradoxically highlights the very bodies intentionally evacuated. The politics of Gonzalez-Torres's work is here differentiated from politics of representation, giving voice to competing discourses and potential meanings:

Rather he has stepped away from contestation which is directly grounded on the bodies of people with AIDS and their representations. Instead, he has constantly drawn attention to the discursive formations which frame policy and practice in relation to the everyday lives of gay men in the AIDS epidemic. He sets out and reenacts discursive contradiction and conflicts, and his work to a greater or lesser extent involves situations of tension between rival and conflicting potential meanings. In this respect, his work does not offer the closure of meaning that has been widely understood as one marker of "political art" in the twentieth century. While his work is focused with extraordinary conceptual precision, he is never simply didactic.³⁷¹

I take from Watney's important reading a valuation of viewership contingent upon a contradictory platform for participation: Gonzalez-Torres's art invites open-ended meaning through contestation. Watney takes on critics who accuse Gonzalez-Torres of providing insufficient (direct) teaching on and about AIDS by identifying how work that is "never simply didactic" forces an immediate relation to the work. We may not like the lesson learned, and the lesson itself may have little or nothing to do with HIV, but the participatory connection between viewer and art is so much stronger as a result. Gonzalez-Torres himself concurs: he hints in an interview with queer artist Ross Bleckner that forced didacticism precludes inclusive participation, that his efforts are "about inclusion, about being inclusive. Because everyone can relate to it. It doesn't have to be someone who is HIV positive. I do have a problem... with direct representation, of what's expected from us."³⁷²

³⁷¹ Simon Watney, "In Purgatory," 336-337.

³⁷² Ross Bleckner and Felix Gonzalez-Torres, "Felix Gonzalez-Torres," *BOMB* 51 (Spring 1995), 47. Gonzalez-Torres's ensuing comments about the political efficacy of avoiding direct representation are often quoted in relation to the so-called art wars of the 1990s: "What I'm trying to say is that we cannot give the powers that be what they want, what they are expecting from us. Some homophobic senator is going to have a very hard time trying to explain

The participatory nature of Gonzalez-Torres's work, for critic Christopher Ho, derives from the artist's negotiation of form which plays on tensions between conceptual art and feminist work: the former historically buttressing institutional and capitalist production, or at least occurring within their general frameworks, and the latter which critiques those very systems of thought, power, and production. As such, Ho frames Gonzalez-Torres as creating conceptual work which equally serves as a queer critique of the concept. This is done through the artist's capacity to introduce "a sensate receiving subject" and to carve "a space for critical distance... posed as it is against the ever-expanding phantasmagoria of commodity culture, the enervation modern experience fosters."³⁷³ Against the backdrop of commodity culture, Gonzalez-Torres creates conceptual work capable of critique by virtue of its receiving an audience, of its being an impetus for thought: Ho refers to this as work which "prompts the viewers imaginative faculty."³⁷⁴ As I hope to later show, however, I think it unfair to overly emphasize any collaborative effort between artist and audience, for there are in fact two overlapping processes relating form and participation at play: there is the use of conceptual art and minimalism outlined by Ho which serve as what we might call internal commentary on the state of art specifically and the sociopolitical and economic conditions of the art viewer's world more generally, and secondly, there is the participatory invitation to those very spectators which disrupts the systems critiqued by the artist thus carrying out the artist's own internal commentary which equally

to his constituency that my work is homoerotic or pornographic, but if I were to do a performance with HIV blood—that's what he wants, that's what the rags expect because they can sensationalize that, and that's what's disappointing. Some of the work I make is more effective because it's dangerous. We both [Ross Bleckner and Felix Gonzalez-Torres] make work that looks like something else but it's not that. We're infiltrating that look. And that's the problem I have with the sensational, literal pieces. I'm Brechtian about the way I deal with the work. I want some distance. We need our own space to think and digest what we see. And we also have to trust the viewer and trust the power of the object. And the power is in simple things. I like the kind of clarity that that brings to thought. It keeps thought from being opaque" (47).

³⁷³ Christopher Ho, "Within and Beyond: Felix Gonzalez-Torres's 'Crowd,'" *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 23.1 (January 2001), 13.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.* Original emphasis.

instigates a potentially second realm of critique. Ho writes: “Paving the way for much art of the 90s, [Gonzalez-Torres] takes a purely *spacial* mode of critique, which stipulates that subversion must involve participation and that unveiling must come from within rather from a detached and elevated vantage... and augments it to a *temporal* dimension [which poses] a radically disruptive potential.”³⁷⁵ My point is that we must not forget that the difficulty of Felix Gonzalez-Torres’s art—the difficulty which for me serves as an invitation to political engagement—may include a disruptive refusal on the part of the viewer: to *not* eat the candy, to refuse (willingly or unwillingly through non-understanding) the metaphoric connotations of placebo, body, or virus. Or, what’s more, to not care at all.

Finally, bell hooks best sums up what my reading of this critical literature shares, what I’ve striven to identify within these acts of criticism. She writes that

Gonzalez-Torres insists in his work that beauty is not best expressed or contained in the enduring art object; rather in the moment of experience, of human interaction, the object is merely a mirror, giving a glimpse that is also a shadow of what was once real, present, concrete. It is this invitation to enter a world of shadows that his work extends.³⁷⁶

To enter his world of shadows is to participate in a scene of contestation, and to accept the scene of occlusions that shadows produce. In what follows, I argue that participation in and through Gonzalez-Torres’s work is only possible in and through the difficulty of that participation.

Untitled (Placebo) and Willfulness

My third objective in providing a contemporary reading of Felix Gonzalez-Torres—following themes of incommensurability and an openness only the rejection of didacticism

³⁷⁵ Christopher Ho, “Within and Beyond,” 2.

³⁷⁶ bell hooks, “Submissive Beauty: New Modes of Contestation,” in *Felix Gonzalez-Torres*, ed. Julie Ault (Göttingen: Steidl, 2006), 177.

provides—is a politics of willfulness predicated on absence. As argued in my third chapter, queer theory in the global north has experienced a (productive) theorization of negativity made available only in a post-antiretroviral world. My final reading of difficulty in Gonzalez-Torres’s collected work hinges on the potential for embracing negativity, absence, and incommensurability without necessarily jettisoning optimism—minus, as Berlant would have it, cruelty.

Willfulness has recently emerged in queer scholarship through the work of Sara Ahmed, who in combination with feminist thought and critical race theory, returns willfulness to the concept of the will. That is, Ahmed suggests that willfulness—accused, in our capitalist, regulated world, of being tantamount to deviancy³⁷⁷—is itself reclaimable through being willful, enabling queer and racialized subjects to think beyond normative logic. She writes that “willing is how we end up deviating from the right path, as well as the means for directing ourselves along that path. Perhaps if we follow the will we might in turn leave this path, we might even wander away from the path of the willing subject. A queer history of the will might allow the will to wander away from such a subject.”³⁷⁸ (It may be helpful to note that this line of thought emerges from her previous work in *Queer Phenomenology* which considers normative orientation as inherently ‘straightened.’³⁷⁹) The willing subject, in the act of willing, is creative insofar as such a subject deviates from that which they are normatively oriented, necessitating the creation of their own (thought?) path. In deviating through willfulness, and thus becoming a

³⁷⁷ For example, Ahmed writes immediately at the beginning of her text that “if authority assumes the right to turn a wish into a command, then willfulness is a diagnosis of the failure to comply with those whose authority is given.” See Sara Ahmed, *Willful Subjects* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014), 1.

³⁷⁸ Sara Ahmed, *Willful Subjects*, 8-9.

³⁷⁹ See Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006). In *Queer Phenomenology*, Ahmed writes that “Bodies become straight by tending toward straight objects, such that they acquire their “direction” and even their tendencies as an effect of this “tending toward.” Sexual orientations are also performative: in directing one’s desire toward certain others and not other others, bodies in turn acquire their shape.” (86)

willful deviant, the willful subject opens up willfulness to becoming a politics of resistance. Ahmed writes that willfulness “could be thought of as political art, a practical craft that is acquired through involvement in political struggle, whether that struggle is a struggle to exist or to transform an existence. Willfulness might be thought of as becoming crafty.”³⁸⁰

When collectively aspired to and acquired, willfulness becomes disobedience, a wandering away from regulatory mechanisms, social expectations, and quotidian stasis: “A history of disobedience could be thought of as a history of willful ears, of ears that block the message of the justice of the law, of ears that hear a right as wrong. To hear a wrong is to hear wrongly; it is to be willing to be heard as in the wrong.”³⁸¹ Willfulness also becomes a form of thinking differently, of disobeying common understanding in search of other possibilities for understanding politics, relationality, and ontology. Pertinent to my present discussion of Gonzalez-Torres is that, by definition, collectively willfulness can only be collective insofar as a group becomes individually willful; that is, the willfulness of each member of the collective must be a personal willfulness and cannot be determined by group mandate. Thus, a politics of willfulness permits contesting forms of will, of knowledges and believes which may not always comply with one another while travelling in the same direction.

Like *Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)*, *Untitled (Placebo)* is a collection of candy, this time in silver cellophane and shaped as a huge carpet across the gallery floor. As with the former piece, *Untitled (Placebo)* invites viewers to take candy from the work until the work has effectively disappeared. The work is comprised of approximately 40,000 individual candies with an ideal weight of 1200 pounds. The placebo, suggested in the title’s parenthetical aside, as

³⁸⁰ Sara Ahmed, *Willful Subjects*, 133. Ahmed explains this reclamation of willfulness as such: “Feminist, queer, and antiracist histories can be thought of as histories who are willing to be willful, who are willing to turn a diagnosis into an act of self-description” (134).

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 137.

concept and literal pill, possesses a vexed relationship to queer activism throughout the epidemic. Placebos, or treatments without any medical therapeutic efficacy, are used in medical research as a control function to compare research groups: a group receiving treatment and a group who only thinks they are. At the epidemic's apex, to give a placebo—admittedly once standard practice in medical research—was to knowingly allow an HIV positive person to die, this in the face of fervent activism demanding drug treatments and research funding allocations. In Randy Shilt's (in)famous *And the Band Played On*, for example, it is emphasized that while “only through such controlled experiments could science really, and relatively rapidly, determine whether a drug actually did hold promise as an AIDS treatment” and that such “scientific principles... were difficult to explain to patients facing a death sentence.”³⁸²

Nancy Spector, moreover, outlines a secondary connotation: that placebo “is derived from the medieval Latin ‘placere,’ ‘to please.’”³⁸³ In this second sense, we may think of the pleasurable effect as specious: a sense of hope ultimately negated by the progression of the syndrome. Finally, Robert Storr echoes both of the sentiments when he writes that *Untitled (Placebo)* “is imbued with a terrible fatality, accented by the literal meaning of the title, which suggests that one is being offered a pill that does nothing but make false promises in place of one which might actually cure or alleviate disease.”³⁸⁴

My own reading of *Untitled (Placebo)* differs from standard readings of the work; the politics of *Untitled (Placebo)* is not about what is given—candy, a sharing of a body, a sharing of pleasure, the possibility of a cure—but what is taken away. Spector writes that the piece, in

³⁸² Randy Shilts, *And the Band Played On: Politics, People, and the AIDS Epidemic* (New York: St Martin's, 1987), 496.

³⁸³ Nancy Spector, *Felix Gonzales-Torres* (Guggenheim Museum: New York, 1995), 106.

³⁸⁴ Robert Storr, “When This You See Remember Me,” in *Felix Gonzalez-Torres*, ed. Julie Ault (Göttingen: Steidl, 2006), 6.

keeping with my discussion of Ahmed's willfulness, deviates from the 'straight' norm: Gonzalez-Torres's art postures as "'straight' art. But once it lures you in, various subtexts unfold, speaking of homoerotic desire and homophobia, questioning concepts of originality and authenticity in art, and weaving together the realms of the public and the private.... what you think you see is not necessarily what you get."³⁸⁵ The 'not' here, I think, doesn't reflect a giving of something else—something beyond what you think you see—but instead a giving of a 'not' as not. The 'not' is the giving of a negation. A placebo is a giving of an unsuspected absence. But in *Untitled (Placebo)* that absence is not a death but an opening to act or interpret. By sharing this 'not,' I posit, Gonzalez-Torres mobilizes both our capacity to be willful—we will that the placebo is a cure—and the negation of that willfulness as to perpetuate that act of willing.

But first: as mentioned, instantiations of willing differ across participants, and vary based on such factors as sexuality, serostatus, and first hand knowledge of the epidemic. Remember that Gonzalez-Torres is working against a backdrop of desperation, activism, hope, and the social emergence of HIV support networks and service organizations, best chronicled in both Debora Gould's aforementioned *Moving Politics* but also in our Canadian context in Tom Warner's *Never Going Back: A History of Queer Activism in Canada*.³⁸⁶ Warner, in particular, charts the dizzying pace with which AIDS service organizations emerged in Canada, including grass-roots advocacy for drug trials, notably "forcing Health and Welfare Canada to approve a new drug, AZT, for use."³⁸⁷ Within this historically situated political context and through the work's parenthetical title, we may safely assume that willfulness here, at least in part, contains a relationship to both restoration—of the wasting body, of a queer sexual life now lost—and more

³⁸⁵ Nancy Spector, *Felix Gonzalez-Torres*, 106.

³⁸⁶ Tom Warner, *Never Going Back: A History of Queer Activism in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002).

³⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 251.

broadly, manageability and cure. But it is important to remember that these acts of will which work *against* loss may only occur through the loss of the work: to partake in the willfulness that is also a taking of candy, one must participate in the gradual elimination of the work. Perhaps this is what Storr means when he writes of the artist “insisting that having meant giving away.”³⁸⁸

In thinking through absence and withdrawal, I lean once again on the work of John Paul Ricco, in hopes of understanding—though here I differ from Ricco—the withdrawal of Gonzalez-Torres’s candy spills as a potential site of viral politics. Ricco, in his study of the artist through the work of Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Decision Between Us*, understands Gonzalez-Torres’s work as producing a scene of “shared separation that is the relation of those who decide to take part in the infinite withdrawal of the work’s finitude.”³⁸⁹ Shared separation, as discussed in my second chapter, is for Ricco and Nancy the condition of relationality between bodies; ontological being is simultaneously a being with and a being separated, such that our capacity to understand ourselves as being in the world is conditioned by the irreconcilability of being with others. Where in my second chapter I located this event of separation as essential to (re)understanding the body-with-HIV in our contemporary moment, the shared separation of bodies becomes, in relation to Gonzalez-Torres, the condition of being-with politics.

The temporality of *Untitled (Placebo)* is a working-toward finitude, where such a working requires an indeterminate number of participants with little or no overt relation to one another. Ricco notes that no single participant may be sure that they themselves are the first to take from the work: in a mass of candy that large, the work will appear in tact until a substantial

³⁸⁸ Robert Storr, “When This You See Remember Me,” 17.

³⁸⁹ Jean Paul Ricco, *The Decision Between Us: Art and Ethics in the Time of Scenes* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 184.

amount of placebos/candies has been removed. Further, both Ricco and Chambers-Letson point out that no single candy or sheet of paper themselves constitute ‘a work’ or ‘the work’ insofar as curatorial authenticity is only granted through possession of a certificate of authenticity signed by the artist.³⁹⁰ In this way, *Untitled (Placebo)* as it appears on the gallery floor is the sole constituted work until the final piece of candy is removed, thus ending the piece until it is remounted. Such are the conditions of participation in the work. Ricco writes that

Felix’s candy and paper installations are scenes of an infinite offering and partaking of finitude. An overflowing offering and a partaking in withdrawal that in their mutual excess are two forms of fulfillment that at the same time are the impossibility of converting finitude into finish.... If to take a piece of candy is not to take the work or even a part of it, then to partake in the work can only mean to ‘take a part’ that is not a part, and thereby to share not secondarily and through a mode of participation, but primarily and through shared separation, which, as we understand, is semantically borne by the French word *partager*, meaning ‘to share, to divide.’³⁹¹

What this means for Ricco is that participation in the work, as a mode of praxis, is a participation in the inoperativity—a Nancian term for the condition of community—of the work insofar as, first, the partaking in finitude is without condition (what participants do with the candy remains to be seen) and, second, perhaps more importantly, the work itself is workless until the varied knowledges and experiences brought to the work by participants render, in fact the work *a* work. In this latter sense, for Ricco, the work-as-work “lies not (or not only) in the presentation of the object as readymade, but also, and perhaps more subversively, in the readymade’s withdrawal and erasure.”³⁹²

³⁹⁰ Ricco writes that “The work exists at no moment prior to its withdrawal, and you can never be in any way confident that you are the first one to take a piece from the pile, or a sheet from the stack. We might say that withdrawal is a priory or originary, and that it is this that makes the work... inoperative, which is also to say already-unmade.” See Jean Paul Ricco, *The Decision Between Us*, 179.

³⁹¹ Ibid, 181.

³⁹² Ibid, 178.

Untitled (Placebo) is thus a work only insofar as it is a work of erasure. While erasure may metonymically speak to death, corporeal wasting, and the mourning of an absence, my own reading of Gonzalez-Torres places within this space the possibility of political participation which maintains its relevancy even in our contemporary historical moment. For Josh Takano Chambers-Letson “the spectator’s body takes on an epidemiological dimension” insofar as the work’s disappearance (in Ricco) occurs in tandem with the works dissemination in the eyes, mouths, stomachs, and pockets of its participants.³⁹³ For Chambers-Letson,

The spectator’s body becomes the carrier of contagion, contracting Gonzalez-Torres’s ideological virus through the art encounter, and carrying the virus out into the world. Thus the spectator who did not become infected by the artist’s viral agenda (and not all would) might move out into the world, spreading the infection throughout the body politic by continuing to reflect upon, engage with, and foment response to political questions posed by the artist.³⁹⁴

In Chambers-Letson’s reading, participants of the work become viral insofar as they consume the work—literally and ideologically—and take Gonzalez-Torres’s “political questions” with them into the world. While allowing for different answers through different susceptibilities to the artist’s “viral agenda,” Chambers-Letson envisions the artist as capable of “infecting the apparatuses of power, such as the living body of the law, with progressive agendas geared toward the realization of greater social justice.”³⁹⁵ This subversive act, moreover, occurs against a political scene in which art and artists were under ideological attack by the religious right, most famously by Senator Jesse Helms who legislated virulently homophobic prohibitions against the

³⁹³ Josh Takano Chambers-Letson, “Contracting Justice: The Viral Strategy of Felix Gonzalez-Torres,” *Criticism* 51.4 (Fall 2010): 562.

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 562-563.

³⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 561.

use of federal funds for AIDS materials which “promote or encourage, directly or indirectly, homosexual activities.”³⁹⁶

I appreciate Chambers-Letson’s argument which frames the artist as co-opting art and art institutions to instill his political questions in the hearts and minds of viewers. So too, I appreciate the capacity for those questions (and thus answers) to differ, allowing for the possibility of contestation and dissensus: “While meaning isn’t necessarily defined or fixed, each work carried a suggestion for meaning (often gestured to in to the parenthetical subtext or by inclusion of a specific date or image) that could be understood as the code to the ideological virus the artist embedded within the work.”³⁹⁷ Though the conceptual apparatus of difficulty as being an aesthetic category experienced individually, and through Racièrian dissensus as resultant of differing relationships to art, I ask whether it is not we, as spectators, who occupy the position of viral agent. *Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)* and *Untitled (Placebo)* are bodies without a body, images without specific referent barring what little information we are given through the parenthetical titles. It is the indeterminate willfulness of the equally indeterminate spectators which give meaning to the work. This reading depends upon understanding the work’s disappearance as given—Ricco, above, refers to its withdrawal as a priori—and thus the fluctuation of virality belongs not to the work but to its viewers. As mentioned in my third chapter, according to theorist Zach Blas, “to think the virus and the viral is to engage in their continuous state of flux, transformation, and movements toward and between as well as diversions away from one another” and, moreover, that there exists a “dizzying array of

³⁹⁶ Taken from Cynthia Carr’s excellent biography of David Wojnarowicz, who was the centre of much controversy after his video, “Fire in the Belly,” contained supposedly anti-religious imagery. See Cynthia Carr, *Fire in the Belly: The Life and Times of David Wojnarowicz* (Bloomsbury: New York, 2012), 442.

³⁹⁷ Josh Takano Chambers-Letson, “Contracting Justice,” 566.

viralities.”³⁹⁸ What if it is our dissensual willfulness which networks, overlaps, and places the meaning of the work in continual flux? This willfulness continues to act subversively (as in Chambers-Letson) insofar as it attempts to rethink the epidemic against institutional stasis, perhaps even against the becoming-chronic of HIV which I’ve argued is conducive to capitalist culture. Such questions also allow me to argue for Gonzalez-Torres’s continued relevance in the contemporary moment as the historical conditions of understanding the work are, in my paradigm, brought by the participants and not by the (historically contingent) questions posed by the artist. Storr, quoted above, writes that in “sum it is a delicate game of existential last tag in which Gonzalez-Torres and his partner appear—and disappear—as unique but intangible personas, while simultaneously playing the role of floating signifiers of the viewer’s desire and mortality.”³⁹⁹ If it is the appearance and disappearance of the artist and his lover which remains continuous, and if it is our desire and morality that are without static referent, then we must ask how might we mobilize the difficulty of *Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)* and *Untitled (Placebo)* as the conditions of HIV continue to change.

Reading Felix Gonzalez-Torres in the Age of PrEP

Sherwin Nulan—“being a somewhat cynical surgeon”—sees *Untitled (Placebo)* with different eyes: “The visitor is encouraged to take a piece of the candy and eat it, symbolic of the way we take hope into ourselves, and it is constantly being replenished. The candy is a placebo, nourishing the soul with the promise of cure even as its sweetness is a token expressing the

³⁹⁸ Zach Blas, “Virus, Viral,” *WSQ: Women’s Studies Quarterly* 40.1-2 (Spring/Summer 2012): 30.

³⁹⁹ Robert Storr, “When This You See Remember Me,” 9.

emphatic bonds between patient and healer.”⁴⁰⁰ Consumption of the candy/placebo, in Nulan’s eyes, is a willful gesture. Nulan, however, inexplicably inverts the logic of the placebo whereby what is traditionally willed is medical cure but what is taken is actually false hope in the form of sugar. Traditional logic dictates that the placebo is what kills you, not for what it contains but *what it lacks*. Nulan replaces—fills?—that lack with “a promise.” But a promise of what?

I’ve spoken occasionally in this dissertation of an unintended consequence of PrEP and its alignment with contemporary antiretroviral treatments: a renewed invitation to HIV political participation. As PrEP continues to become widespread, many activists identify a need for increased PrEP coverage on Canadian provincial formularies, meaning that the drugs will be reimbursed by government payors and accessible to folks without private insurance who tend to be among populations most impacted by HIV. In fact, many organizations, including the AIDS Committee of Toronto—Canada’s largest AIDS service organization—politically align PrEP as the fruit of AIDS activism since the beginning of the epidemic:

Throughout the history of AIDS, our community has suffered needless deaths, often because of slow government approval of HIV-related medications. But our community fought hard, and we gained access to drugs that worked. Now there’s a drug that is proven to prevent HIV infection. The time has come again to fight so that those who want it can get it.⁴⁰¹

That access to PrEP, as a tool to maintain seronegativity, against a background of positivity is further indicative of my previous argument, from chapter three, of an inter-relationality of queer bodies across lines of serostatus termed ‘living before a virus.’ Moreover, reading Gonzalez-Torres in the age of PrEP, I argue, blurs the intentions of the candy’s treatment metaphors:

⁴⁰⁰ Sherwin B. Nulan, “Artist, Heal Thyself (and Then Everybody Else),” *New York Times*, July 6, 2003.

⁴⁰¹ hivnow.ca. Campaign by the AIDS Committee of Toronto (actoronto.org). Last accessed September 13, 2015. HIV Now is a particularly interesting campaign insofar as it informs both HIV-negative and HIV-positive persons, rhetorically linking undetectability (through discussions of viral load, disclosure), PrEP, and testing services under the operative assumption that “times have changed.” Additional information can be found through the Health Initiative for Men in British Columbia at checkhimout.ca/prep.

because of the shared molecules for treatment and prevention, the purpose of allusions to HIV pills becomes substantially blurred such that HIV negative folks participating in the art are no longer simulating treatment but possibly, and more realistic to their own serostatus, simulating the act of sustaining their own negativity. There is simply no way to tell. While on the surface this seems to further differentiate between participants in the work—I take a pill one way, you another—in actuality participants in both *Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)* and *Untitled (Placebo)* engage with the very same paradox: a pill that both forces you to confront a virus the act of pill-taking keeps at bay.

This paradox is, excusing the pun, a difficult pill to swallow. Where, prior to the invention of PrEP, engaging with the candied works of Gonzalez-Torres would either represent a re-enactment of treatment for HIV positive people and an emulation of treatment for HIV negative people, ostensibly with vague goals of awareness, there is now a common call to action made available through the work via contemporary medical technologies. When paired with the fact that an increase of PrEP usage effectively results in a decrease of HIV treatment, given they can include the same pill, the result is an additional paradox in terms of being called to political action as re-enacted within the space of the gallery. Take this pill, the work seems to say, so that you do not need to take this pill. But translated to the outside world which includes social factors like stigma and inequities in healthcare, the common tensions between treatment and prevention generated by *Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)* and *Untitled (Placebo)* effectively produce a united front: we take this pill in order to keep taking these pills. This, in effect, is HIV activism at its finest: a joining together of HIV positive and HIV negative folks in a sharing of pill burden that leads, ultimately, to better health.

The very different readings of *Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)* and *Untitled (Placebo)* specifically and Gonzalez-Torres's work generally all hinge upon difficulty contained within the works' messaging premised upon an unknowability of HIV. In fact, it may be through the spectator's very remove from explicit didacticism that these works best encapsulate a (queer) political ethos; Sharon Sliwinski writes that "it is perhaps from this state of uncertainty and anguish that the dilemmas of modern political life might be best approached."⁴⁰² But rather than confusion, ambiguity in my own reading(s) creates a shared certainty of the importance of both treatment and prevention. The important question contained within both works is not 'what will you do with this candy?' but 'what would happen without it?', resulting in a shared responsibility for access. But neither that sharing nor that responsibility is articulable without relation to others accessing the work, nor is that responsibility articulable without wrestling with what I've identified as the inherent difficulty or ambiguity of political meaning. That is, the symbolic meanings of PrEP and treatment in taking the candy are only made available in the presence of the other, the ramifications of pill taking for an HIV negative participant only make sense in the presence of someone who is HIV positive, and that relationality is only made available without knowing either the status of the other or the didactic meaning of the candy itself.

The difficulty of Felix Gonzalez-Torres is that what is produced is not activist art at all, at least not in the object itself as Jennifer Doyle would have it, but its fostered activism is a production of mandatory participation. You cannot not engage, even if that choice is just walking on by. The work of Gonzalez-Torres depends upon a willfulness to accept what you do not know: the serostatus of others, the possibility of placebo, or even the possibility of disengagement that would negate any HIV political action at all. Regardless, even in the case of

⁴⁰² Sharon Sliwinski, *Human Rights in Camera* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 137.

non-action, *Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)* and *Untitled (Placebo)* require a willed response. In the artist's *New York Times* obituary, Robert Flack notes that Gonzalez-Torres offers products that "were free for the taking."⁴⁰³ Not so. The price of a candy is paid by the weight of responsibility, tacitly accepted.

Conclusion: The Love You Remember

He says: What else is there but other people?
Hilton Als

Sprawling and poetic, the autobiographical voice of Hilton Als's "Tristes Tropiques," from his collection *White Girls*, exists in a sort of no-man's land between an I and a we. Covering the intersecting topics of race, friendship, and AIDS, that voice cannot know himself—and is thus never an I—absent the impossible experience of what he refers to as twinning—never becoming a we. Neither singular or plural, to adopt Nancy's terms from my third chapter, Als's understandings of relationality, community, and subjectivity are moving targets, unfixed in both their definitions or how they are framed in language. Against the backdrop of an epidemic that can never seem to be forgotten, Als must constantly renegotiate his relationship to himself and others, constantly renegotiate his relationship to AIDS. In the years of writing this dissertation, "Tristes Tropiques" is the closest for me that a text has come to an ideal engagement with the impossibility of knowing HIV.

⁴⁰³ Roberta Smith, "Felix Gonzalez-Torres, 38, A Sculptor of Love and Loss," *New York Times*, January 11, 1996.

“Tristes Tropiques” is written in the aftermath of a friendship: two people so close they approach ‘we’—the process of twinning—before ultimately separating. Even apart, however, they are never fully two ‘I’s as their experience together informs their separate selves. In lesser hands this would be tantamount to the sum of our experiences informing our present, but with Als there is a constant uneasiness and questioning between that experience and that present. The past for Als is not tangible fact, but as in my first chapter, something which resists any form of fixed understanding just as our understanding of the present—what I’ve called the contemporary moment—is one of constant evolution. Questioning the relationship between an unfixed past and a present evolving faster than our comprehension can handle makes for shaky groundings of the self. In “Tristes Tropiques,” moving conceptions of past and present can only produce a questioning of one’s relationship to people, places, and ideas. Herein lies the magic of Als’s essay: this process of negotiation, far from producing existential angst, forms the basis of a political participation which takes nothing for granted. If you can know nothing, you must question everything. If this dissertation has danced between various relations in HIV activism—between the singular and the plural, intergenerational knowledges, bodies and viruses—Als’s essay takes my own work one step further: I condemn fixed understandings of the past and the present as disserving HIV response within shifting political and economic spheres; Als constantly addresses unfixed relations, not seeking to understand I or we or past or present but to actively chase their relationality as a form of *doing* politics. For Als, it’s neither about where you land nor unmooring static historical understandings: politics is willingly bringing yourself into constant relation.

More specifically, in Als’s writing there is a constant back and forth between the past and present of AIDS which lands at neither but perpetually seeks to re-evaluate the relationship

between both poles. Laying with a dying lover, he asks himself “what it sounded like when he said ‘we,’ as you lay in bed holding his dying in your now relatively well-ordered world of health and well-being.”⁴⁰⁴ But “dying” and “well-ordered” for Als are relative terms, where on one hand the lover is spoken about only through the vibrancy of his life and on the other the lover, in Als’s experience, has a death without dying. The lover lives on and informs each relationship, not through memory, but by Als placing his lover in relation to his shifting understanding(s) of each man who follows. “Now relatively” becomes the temporal frame through which Als understands health whereby “relatively” goes against the grain not only of contemporary understandings of wellness—you’re either sick or you’re not—but of the becoming-chronic of HIV—you’re not sick but you still are. “Relatively” throws its subject back to the apex of HIV-related deaths without ever returning there, seeking only to chase the relation between a “well-ordered” present and someone else’s dying.

As I’ve mentioned, though, “Tristes Tropiques” is less a treatise on nostalgia or temporality than a reckoning of these relationships in and through the history of HIV. Negotiating love with changing understandings of safety, love, care, and sexual health, Als engages with HIV’s impact on community not with the intent of historicizing, but I argue, with an opening-up of that history to present day action. I quote his most intense passage in full:

I was an I, an opera of feeling with a very small audience, a writer of articles about culture but with no real voice, living in a tiny one-bedroom apartment in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn, a dream of love growing ever more expansive because it was impossible, especially in the gay bars I sometimes frequented in Manhattan, where AIDS loved everyone up the wrong way, or in a way some people weren’t surprised by, particularly those gay men who were too indifferent to be sad—in any case night sweats were a part of the conversation people weren’t having in those bars, in any case, taking your closest friend in because he was shunned by his family was part of the conversation people weren’t having, still, there was this to contend with: that friend’s shirt collars getting bigger; still, there was this to contend with: his coughing and wheezing in the

⁴⁰⁴ Hilton Als, “Tristes Tropiques,” in *White Girls* (San Francisco: McSweeney’s, 2014), 18.

little room off your bedroom in Brooklyn because TB was catching, your friends didn't want you to catch it, loving a man was catching, your friends didn't want you to get it; his skin was thin as onionskin, there was a lesion, he couldn't control his shit, not to mention the grief in his eyes, you didn't want to catch that; those blue eyes filled with why? Causing one's sphincter to contract, your heart to look away, a child's question you couldn't answer, what happened to our plans, why was the future happening so fast? You didn't want to catch that, nor the bitterness of the sufferer's family after the death, nor the friends competing for a bigger slice of the death pie after the sufferer's death, you certainly didn't want to catch what it left: night sweats, but in your head, and all day, the running to a pay phone to share a joke, but that number's disconnected, your body forgets, or rushes toward *the love you remember*, but it's too late, he's closer to the earth now than you are, and you certainly don't want to catch any of that.⁴⁰⁵

The impossibility of bodily control; the impossibility of looking away from unforgettable death; the impossibility of a future quickly arriving. If you evacuate the contents of this passage—the bedroom, lesions, pay phones—what's left is a negotiation about what *to do* about HIV. Here is where Al's sense of relationality comes in: the past, present, and future of HIV are moving parts, and Al's task is to negotiate their shifting tensions as a means of moving on without forgetting under a looming imperative of having to do *something*. “A future that happens fast” isn't merely a death before its time, but given the tense of the passage, also a mining of the past for present and future responses. How can you arrive at a future contained within a love you remember?

This is the question through which *Another Possibility* was born. My generation is one that has never known death-as-dying but has lived under its specter our entire lives. When I came out to my parents as a young teenager, my mother's sole concern was HIV—not stigma, not homophobia, but safety. My generation remembers death without remembering actual death, such that our understanding of the past, like Al's, is a shifting referent. Death becomes “death,” limited, or at least changed, by each manufactured technology or learnt behavior. Education on condoms, harm reduction, PrEP, PEP, and U=U have adapted understandings of HIV with subsequent iterations, shifting my community's relationship to HIV as a whole. In effect, this

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid, 16-17. Italics mine.

dissertation has asked why it is that our present technologies of HIV—prevention and treatment—allow us to re-imagine both the past and future of HIV we cling to harmful static notions of an epidemic that disallow our activism to react to changing relationships between those temporal poles. The trauma of AIDS, particularly for a generation before my own, prevents continuity of thought: Als writes of “the same dull crud you’d see in any number of apartments occupied by men who could not move on from AIDS. In any case, moving on was a ridiculous phrase, given the enormous physical memory of your loved one being stuffed in a black garbage bag.”⁴⁰⁶ This dissertation has begun with acknowledging that trauma but barring it from governing HIV politics and activist goals in our contemporary moment; the latter half of this dissertation asks for whom and where renewed calls to political participation exist.

Als’s sense of doing politics, of constantly (what I’ve termed) chasing the relationality between past and present while imagining the future you’d like to inhabit, which is after all the purpose of activism, doesn’t solve our problems. But whether, like in chapter three, it is framing queer bodies as living before a virus regardless of serostatus, or like in chapter five, heeding an unasked question in service to a community you cannot see, both the future of HIV activism and the end of the epidemic will depend in a very real way on our capacity to move forward and re-negotiate our relationship to HIV over and over and over again. Honouring my generation’s lack of forefathers—the anonymous boys, maybe, whose “skin was thin as onionskin”—involves a duty to ask far more questions than can be answered, far more questions than our current teachings on HIV allow. For Als, and for me, the love you remember—the people, the activism—isn’t something you can point to, but a commitment to a growing and moving community that changes with each new voice. This dissertation asks us to adapt our strategies to

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid, 56.

what we cannot know, and in so doing, gives us a glimpse into what we cannot yet imagine: the possibility of moving on.

Bibliography

Adam, Barry D. "How Might We Create a Collectivity That We Would Want to Belong To?" In *Gay Shame*, 301-311. Edited by David M. Halperin and Valerie Traub. London and Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009.

Agamben, Giorgio. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen. Stanford: Stanford U P, 1998.

Ahmed, Sara. *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. Durham and London: Duke U P, 2006.

Ahmed, Sara. *Willful Subjects*. Durham and London: Duke U P, 2014.

AIDS Committee of Toronto. "PrEP School." Accessed September 1, 2019. HIVnow.ca/what-is-prep/.

Als, Hilton. "Tristes Tropiques." In *White Girls*. By Hilton Als. San Francisco: McSweeney's, 2014.

Altman, Dennis. *The End of the Homosexual?* St Lucia, Queensland: Queensland U P, 2013.

Araki, Gregg. *The Living End*. DVD. October Films: 1992.

Berlant, Lauren. *Cruel Optimism*. Durham and London : Duke U P, 2011.

Berlant, Lauren and Lee Edelman. *Sex, Or the Unbearable*. Durham and London: Duke U P, 2014.

Berlant, Lauren and Michael Warner. "Sex in Public." In *Publics and Counterpublics* by Michael Warner, 187-208. New York: Zone Books, 2005.

Bersani, Leo. *Is the Rectum a Grave? And Other Essays*. Chicago and London: U Chicago P, 2010.

Bersani, Leo. "Shame on You." In *After Sex? On Writing Since Queer Theory*. Janet Halley, Andrew Parker, eds. Durham and London: Duke U P, 2011.

Bishop, Claire. *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*. London and New York: Verso, 2012.

Biss, Eula. *On Immunity: An Inoculation*. Minneapolis: Graywolf, 2014.

Bleckner, Ross and Felix Gonzalez-Torres. "Felix Gonzalez-Torres." *BOMB* 51 (Spring 1995). <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/felix-gonzalez-torres/>.

Blas, Zach. "Virus, Viral." *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly* 40.1-2 (Spring/Summer 2012): 29-39.

Bordowitz, Gregg. *The AIDS Crisis is Ridiculous and Other Writings, 1986-2003*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2004.

Bordowitz, Gregg. *General Idea: Imagevirus*. London: Afterall Books, 2010.

Brown, Wendy. *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution*. New York: Zone Books, 2015.

Bruhm, Steven. "Still Here: Choreography, Temporality, AIDS." In *Queer Times, Queer Becomings*. Edited by E.L. McCallum and Mikko Tuhkanen. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011.

Butler, Judith. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*. New York and London: Routledge, 1993.

Butler, Judith. *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*. Cambridge: Harvard U P, 2015.

Butler, Judith. *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. London and New York: Verso, 2004.

Butler, Judith and Athena Athanasiou. *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political*. Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2013.

Canadian AIDS Treatment Information Exchange (CATIE). "Fact-sheet on PEP." Accessed August 12, 2019. <https://www.catie.ca/fact-sheets/prevention/post-exposure-prophylaxis-pep>.

Canadian AIDS Treatment Information Exchange (CATIE). *Managing Your Health: A Guide for People Living with HIV*. Toronto: 2009 (Fourth Edition).

Canadian AIDS Treatment Information Exchange (CATIE). "The Structural Determinants of Health and Structural Interventions." Accessed August 15, 2019. <https://www.catie.ca/en/hiv-canada/8/8-1>.

Cantu, Francisco. *The Line Becomes a River*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2018.

Caron, David. *The Nearness of Others: Searching for Tact and Contact in the Age of HIV*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014.

Carr, Cynthia. *Fire in the Belly: The Life and Times of David Wojnarowicz*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2014.

Cazdyn, Eric. *The Already Dead: The New Time of Politics, Culture, and Illness*. Durham and London: Duke U P, 2012.

Chambers-Letson, Josh Takano. "Contracting Justice: The Viral Strategy of Felix Gonzalez-Torres." *Criticism* 51.4 (Fall 2010): 559-587.

Cho, Lily. "Future Perfect Loss: Richard Fung's Sea in the Blood." *Screen* 49.4 (Winter 2008): 426-239.

Clare, Eli. *Brilliant Imperfection: Grappling with Cure*. Durham and London: Duke U P, 2017.

Cole, Teju. *Known and Strange Things: Essays*. New York: Random House, 2016.

Crimp, Douglas. "Portraits of People with AIDS." In *Melancholia and Moralism: Essays on AIDS and Queer Politics* by Douglas Crimp, 83-108. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: The MIT Press, 2002.

Crimp, Douglas. "Right On, Girlfriend!" In *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*. Edited by Michael Warner, 300-320. Minneapolis and London: U Minnesota P, 1993.

Crowley, Martin. "Being Beyond Politics, with Jean-Luc Nancy." *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences* 22.2 (Spring/Summer 2014): 123-145.

Cvetkovich, Ann. *An Archive of Feeling: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*. Durham and London: Duke U P, 2003.

Cvetkovich, Ann. *Depression: A Public Feeling*. Durham and London: Duke U P, 2012.

Dean, Tim. "Bareback Time." In *Queer Times, Queer Becomings*. Edited by E.L. McCallum and Mikko Tuhkanen. Albany: State U of New York P, 2011.

Dean, Tim. *Unlimited Intimacy: Reflections on the Subculture of Barebacking*. Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 2009.

Delany, Samuel. *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*. New York and London: New York U P, 1999.

Derrida, Jacques. *Learning to Live Finally: An Interview with Jean Birnbaum*. Translated by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas. Hoboken, New Jersey: Melville House Publishing, 2007.

Derrida, Jacques. *On Touching—Jean-Luc Nancy*. Translated by Christine Irizarry. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005.

Derrida, Jacques. "The Rhetoric of Drugs." In *Points...: Interviews, 1984-1994*. Edited by Elisabeth Weber, translated by Peggy Kamuf. Stanford: Stanford U P, 1995.

Dinshaw, Carolyn, Lee Edelman, Roderick A. Ferguson, Carla Freccero, Elizabeth Freeman, Judith Halberstam, Annamarie Jagose, Christopher Nealon, Nguyen Tan Hoang. "Theorizing Queer Temporalities: A Roundtable Discussion." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 13.2-3 (2007): 177-195.

Doyle, Jennifer and Erik Morse. "Books: Jennifer Doyle." *Frieze* 158 (18 October 2013). No page numbers.

Doyle, Jennifer. *Hold it Against Me: Difficulty and Emotion in Contemporary Art*. Durham and London: Duke U P, 2013.

Duberman, Martin. *Has the Gay Movement Failed?* Oakland: U California Press, 2018.

Duberman, Martin. *Hold Tight Gently: Michael Callen, Essex Hemphill, and the Battlefield of AIDS*. New York: The New Press, 2014.

Düttmann, Alexander García. *At Odds With AIDS: Thinking and Talking about a Virus*. Translated by Peter Gilgen and Conrad Scott-Curtis. Stanford: Stanford U P, 1996.

Edelman, Lee. "Ever After: History, Negativity, and the Social." In *After Sex: On Writing Since Queer Theory*. Janet Halley and Andrew Parker, eds., 110-118. Durham and London: Duke U P, 2011.

Edelman, Lee. *Homographesis*. New York: Routledge, 1994.

Edelman, Lee. *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Durham and London: Duke U P, 2004.

Faderman, Lillian. *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2015.

Finkelstein, Avram. *After Silence: A History of AIDS Through its Images*. Oakland: University of California Press, 2018.

Freccero, Carla. *Queer/Early/Modern*. Durham and London: Duke U P, 2005.

Freeman, Elizabeth. *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories*. Durham and London: Duke U P, 2010.

Gere, David. *How to Make Dances in an Epidemic: Tracking Choreography in the Age of AIDS*. Madison: U Wisconsin P, 2004.

Gill-Peterson, Julian. "Haunting the Queer Spaces of AIDS: Remembering ACT UP/NEW YORK and an Ethics for an Endemic." *GLQ: A Journal of Gay and Lesbian Studies* 19.3 (2013): 279-300.

GMSH (Gay Men's Sexual Health Ontario). "The Sex You Want." Accessed August 15, 2019. www.thesexyouwant.ca/prep.

Goldie, Terry. *queersexlife*. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2008.

Gopnik, Adam. *At the Strangers' Gate: Arrivals in New York*. New York and Toronto: Alfred A Knopf, 2017.

Gould, Deborah B. *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP's Fight Against AIDS*. Chicago: U Chicago P, 2009.

Grosz, Elizabeth. *Becoming Undone: Darwinian Reflections on Life, Politics and Art*. Durham and London: Duke U P, 2011.

Judith Halberstam. *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*. New York and London: New York U P, 2005.

Hallas, Roger. *Reframing Bodies: AIDS, Bearing Witness, and the Queer Moving Image*. Durham and London: Duke U P, 2009.

Halperin, David. *How to be Gay*. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard U P, 2012.

Halperin, David. *How to do the History of Homosexuality*. Chicago: U Chicago P, 2002.

Halperin, David and Valerie Traub, eds. *Gay Shame*. Chicago: Chicago U P, 2009.

Hardt, Michael and Antonio Negri. *Assembly*. London and New York: Oxford U P, 2017.

Haver, William. *The Body of this Death: Historicity and Sociality in the Time of AIDS*. Stanford: Stanford U P, 1996.

Hilderbrand, Lucas. "Retroactivism." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 12.2 (2006): 303-317.

Ho, Christopher. "Within and Beyond: Felix Gonzalez-Torres's 'Crowd'." *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 23.1 (January 2001): 1-17.

hooks, bell. "Submissive Beauty: New Modes of Contestation." In *Felix Gonzalez-Torres*. Edited by Julie Ault. Göttingen: Steidl, 2006.

Hoppe, Trevor. *Punishing Disease: HIV and the Criminalization of Sickness*. Oakland: U California P, 2018.

Ibáñez-Carrasco, Francisco. "Rehab for the Unrepentant." In *Why are Faggots so Afraid of Faggots? Flaming Challenges to Masculinity, Objectification, and the Desire to Conform*. Edited by Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore, 97-103. Oakland, Edenborough, and Baltimore: AK Press, 2012.

Jones, Cleve. *When We Rise: My Life in the Movement*. New York: Hachette Books, 2016.

Jost, John T., et al. "How Social Media Facilitates Political Protest: Information, Motivation, and Social Network." *Advances in Political Psychology* 39.1 (2018): 85-118.

Joynt, Chase and Mike Hoolboom. *You Only Live Twice: Sex, Death, and Transition*. Toronto: Coach House, 2016.

Juhasz, Alexandra. "Forgetting ACT UP." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 98.1 (February 2012): 69-74.

Kearney, Greg. *The Desperates*. Toronto: Cormorant Books, 2013.

Lawless, Katherine B. "(Re)Circulating Foreign Bodies: Richard Fung's Sea in the Blood." *Feminist Media Studies* 12.1 (2012): 119-132.

Lee, Charles T. *Ingenious Citizenship: Recrafting Democracy for Social Change*. Durham and London: Duke U P, 2016.

Love, Heather. *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*. Cambridge: Harvard U P, 2009.

Major, Carol. "Resistance Assistance: The Ins and Outs of HIV Drug Resistance Testing." *The Positive Side* (Fall/Winter 2005). Accessed August 24, 2014.
<http://www.catie.ca/en/positiveside/fallwinter-2005/resistance-assistance>.

- Malabou, Catherine. "Another Possibility." *Research in Phenomenology* 36 (2006): 115-129.
- McCaskell, Tim. *Queer Progress: From Homophobia to Homonationalism*. Toronto: Between the Lines, 2016.
- McCullagh, John. "Undetectable Equals Untransmittable: New Possibilities for People Living With HIV." *InMagazine* (September-October 2019).
- Monette, Paul. *Borrowed Time: An AIDS Memoir*. Orlando: Harcourt, 1988.
- Moore, Darnell L. *No Ashes in the Fire: Coming of Age Black and Free in America*. New York: Nation Books, 2018.
- Moore, Patrick. *Beyond Shame: Reclaiming the Abandoned History of Radical Gay Sexuality*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2004.
- Morris, Paul and Susanna Paasonen. "Risk and Utopia: A Dialogue on Pornography." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 20.3 (2014): 215-239.
- Muñoz, José Esteban. *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New York and London: New York University Press, 2009.
- Muñoz, José Esteban. *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.
- Nancy, Jean-Luc. *Being Singular Plural*. Translated by Robert D. Richardson and Anne O'Byrne. Stanford: Stanford U P, 2000.
- Nancy, Jean-Luc. *Corpus*. Translated by Richard A. Rand. New York: Fordham U P, 2008.
- Nancy, Jean-Luc. *The Inoperative Community*. Edited by Peter Connor. Minneapolis: U Minnesota P, 1991.
- Nancy, Jean-Luc. *The Sense of the World*. Translated by Jeffrey S. Librett. Minneapolis: U Minnesota P, 1997.
- Nancy, Jean-Luc. "Strange Foreign Bodies." In *Corpus II: Writings on Sexuality*. By Jean-Luc Nancy and translated by Anne O'Byrne. New York: Fordham U P, 2013.
- Nulan, Sherwin B. "Artist, Heal Thyself (and Then Everybody Else)." *New York Times*, July 6, 2003. <http://movies2.nytimes.com/2003/07/06/arts/design/06NULA.html>.
- O'Byrne, Anne. "Nancy's Materialist Ontology." In *Jean-Luc Nancy and Plural Thinking: Expositions of World, Ontology, Politics, and Sense*. Edited by Peter Gratton and Marie-Eve Morin, 79-94. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012.

O’Byrne, Anne. “The Politics of Intrusion.” *CR: The New Centennial Review* 2.3 (Fall 2002): 169-187.

Odell, Jenny. *How to Do Nothing: Resisting the Attention Economy*. Brooklyn and London: Melville House, 2019.

O’Rourke, Michael. *Queer Insists*. New York: Punctum, 2014.

O’Rourke, Michael. “The Afterlives of Queer Theory.” *continent*. 1.2 (2011): 102-116.

Orsini, Michael, Suzanne Hindmarch, and Marilou Gagnon. “Introduction.” In *Seeing Red: HIV/AIDS and Public Policy in Canada*. Edited by Michael Orsini, Suzanne Hindmarch, and Marilou Gagnon, 3-26. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2018.

Patton, Paul. “Racière’s Utopian Politics.” In *Jacques Rancière and the Contemporary Scene: The Philosophy of Radical Equality*. Edited by Jean-Philippe Deranty and Alison Ross. London and New York: Continuum, 2012.

Phelan, Peggy. *Mourning Sex: Performing Public Memories*. New York and London: Routledge, 1997.

Phelan, Peggy. *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*. New York and London: Routledge, 1993.

Pisani, Elizabeth. *The Wisdom of Whores: Bureaucrats, Brothels and the Business of AIDS*. Toronto: Penguin Group, 2008.

Pocius, Joshua. “Of Bodies, Borders, and Barebacking: The Geocorpographies of HIV.” In *Security, Race, Biopower: Essays on Technology and Corporeality*. Edited by Holly Randell-Moon and Ryan Tippet. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016.

Prentice, Tracey, et al. “Good Medicine: Decolonizing HIV Policy for Indigenous Women in Canada.” In *Seeing Red: HIV/AIDS and Public Policy in Canada*. Edited by Suzanne Hindmarch, Michael Orsini, and Marilou Gagnon, 235-256. Toronto: U Toronto P, 2018.

Prevention Access Campaign. Accessed August 4, 2019. Preventionaccess.org.

Puar, Jasbir K. “Precarity Talk: A Virtual Roundable with Lauren Berlant, Judith Butler, Bojana Cvejić, Isabell Lorey, Jasbir Puar, and Ana Vujanović.” *TDR: The Drama Review* 56.4 (Winter 2012): 163-177.

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

Rancière, Jacques. *Dissensus: On the Politics of Aesthetics*. London: Continuum, 1999.

- REALIZE. "Aging with HIV." Accessed August 15, 2019.
<https://www.realizecanada.org/en/our-work/hiv-and-aging/aging-with-hiv/>.
- Reed, Christopher and Christopher Castiglia. *If Memory Serves: Gay Men, AIDS, and the Promise of the Queer Past*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012.
- Relyea, Lane. "What's Love Got to Do With It." *Frieze* (June 9, 1994). Online, accessed October 2014. http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/whats_love_got_to_do_with_it/.
- Ricco, John Paul. *The Decision Between Us: Art and Ethics in the Time of Scenes*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2014.
- Ricco, John Paul. *The Logic of the Lure*. Chicago and London: U Chicago P, 2002.
- Rich, B. Ruby. *New Queer Cinema: The Director's Cut*. Durham and London: Duke U P, 2013.
- Roach, Tom. *Friendship as a Way of Life: Foucault, AIDS, and the Politics of Shared Estrangement*. Albany: State U of New York P, 2012.
- Robinson, Paul. *Queer Wars: The New Gay Right and its Critics*. Chicago and London: U Chicago P, 2005.
- Rodger, Allison J., Valentina Cambiano, and Tina Bruun, et al. "Risk of HIV transmission through condomless sex in serodifferent gay couples with the HIV-positive partner taking suppressive antiretroviral therapy (PARTNER)." *JAMA* 316.2 (2016): 171-181.
- Romàn, David. "Not-about-AIDS." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 6.1 (2000): 1-28.
- Rondeau, James E. "Untitled (Last Light), 1993." *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies* 25.1 (1999): 84.
- Rubin, Gayle. "Geologies of Queer Studies: It's Déjà Vu All Over Again," In *Deviations: A Gayle Rubin Reader* by Gayle Rubin, 347-356. Durham and London: Duke U P, 2011.
- Schulman, Sarah. *The Gentrification of the Mind: Witness to a Lost Imagination*. Berkley and Los Angeles: U California P, 2012.
- Segal, Lynne. *Radical Happiness: Moments of Collective Joy*. Brooklyn and London: Verso, 2017.
- Shah, Nayan. "Undertow." In *Mangoes in July: The Work of Richard Fung*. Edited by Helen Lee and Kemi Sakamoto. Toronto: Insomniac Press, 2002.
- Shahani, Nishant. "'If not this, what?' Time out of Joint and the Politics of Queer Utopia." *Extrapolation* 53.1 (2012): 83-108.

Shilts, Randy. *And the Band Played On: Politics, People, and the AIDS Epidemic*. New York: St Martin's, 1987.

Sicha, Choire. *Very Recent History: An Entirely Factual Account of a Year (c. AD 2009) in a Large City*. New York: Harper, 2014.

Sliwinski, Sharon. *Human Rights in Camera*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2011.

Smith, Roberta. "Felix Gonzalez-Torres, 38, A Sculptor of Love and Loss." *New York Times*, January 11, 1996. <https://www.nytimes.com/1996/01/11/nyregion/felix-gonzalez-torres-38-a-sculptor-of-love-and-loss.html>

Solnit, Rebecca. *Hope in the Dark: Untold Histories, Wild Possibilities*. Edinburgh and London: Canongate, 2005/2016.

Sontag, Susan. *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors*. New York: Picador, 1988.

Sontag, Susan. *Regarding the Pain of Others*. New York: Picador, 2003.

Spector, Nancy. *Felix Gonzales-Torres*. Guggenheim Museum: New York, 1995.

Stockton, Kathryn Bond. *Beautiful Bottom, Beautiful Shame: Where Black Meets Queer*. Durham and London: Duke U P, 2006.

Stockton, Kathryn Bond. *The Queer Child, or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century*. Durham and London: Duke U P, 2009.

Storr, Robert. "When This You See Remember Me." In *Felix Gonzalez-Torres*. Edited by Julie Ault. Göttingen: Steidl, 2006.

Strub, Sean. *Body Counts: A Memoir of Politics, Sex, AIDS, and Survival*. New York: Scribner, 2014.

Surowiecki, James. *The Wisdom of Crowds*. Anchor: New York, 2005.

Tougaw, Jason. "Testimony and the Subjects of AIDS Memoirs." In *Extremities: Trauma, Testimony, and Community*. Edited by Nancy K. Miller and Jason Tougaw, 166-185. Urbana and Chicago: U of Illinois P, 2002.

Treichler, Paula A. *How to Have Theory in an Epidemic: Cultural Chronicles of AIDS*. Durham and London: Duke U P, 1999.

Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt. *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton U P, 2015.

Tufekci, Zeynep. *Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest*. New Haven and London: Yale U P, 2017.

UNAIDS. "The Denver Principles." Accessed March 22, 2016.
http://data.unaids.org/pub/externaldocument/2007/gipa1983denverprinciples_en.pdf.

Varnedoe, Kirk. "Minimalism and After." *MoMA* 4.1 (January 2011): 2-5.

Warner, Michael. *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard U P, 1999.

Warner, Tom. *Never Going Back: A History of Queer Activism in Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002.

Watney, Simon. "In Purgatory: The Work of Felix Gonzalez-Torres." In *Felix Gonzalez-Torres*. Edited by Julie Ault. Göttingen: Steidl, 2006.

Westley, Frances, Brenda Zimmerman, and Michael Quinn Paton. *Getting to Maybe: How the World is Changed*. Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2007.

White, Edmund. *The Farewell Symphony*. New York: Vintage, 1997.

Vita – Matthew R. Halse

Education

(2020) PhD (candidate) – University of Western Ontario
Centre for the Study of Theory and Criticism

(2011) M.A. – Université de Montréal
Languages, English Department

(2009) Hon. B.A. – Concordia University
English Literature