The Aesthetics of Collective Identity and Activism in Toronto’s Queer and HIV/AIDS Community

By

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ABSTRACT

THE AESTHETICS OF COLLECTIVE IDENTITY AND ACTIVISM IN TORONTO’S QUEER AND HIV/AIDS COMMUNITY

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This thesis investigates the social and political impacts of art and visual culture produced in Toronto from the 1970s to the present day through changing dynamics of gay liberation, raids of gay bathhouses by the Metropolitan Toronto Police Force during “Operation Soap,” and the continuing HIV/AIDS crisis. Throughout these historic moments, visual culture was an incubator by which artists formulated the values, performative identities, and political actions that defined their activism. Beginning with a brief history of LGBTQ2S+ issues in Toronto, this thesis analyzes selected works by General Idea, Andy Fabo, Tim Jocelyn, ChromaZone Collective, Will Munro, and Kent Monkman. By performing their identities within the public sphere, these artists developed communities of support and, through intensely affective and political acts, catalyzed social change to advocate for equal rights as well as funding, medical care, and reduced stigma in the fight against HIV/AIDS.
DEDICATION

To the artists, activists, and community builders whose fierce and devoted work catalyzed social change and acceptance. They have led the way in the continued advocacy for LGBTQ2S+ issues and the fight against the HIV/AIDS crisis. Whether their histories are contained in this thesis, elsewhere, or they have yet to be written, I am deeply grateful for their work, their stories, and their lasting impact.
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Introduction

At a time when the gay liberation movement was just beginning to take hold despite rising fear and anxiety related to the spread of HIV/AIDS, then called “Gay Related Immune Deficiency” or the “Gay Cancer,” art became a vehicle through which to challenge systemic oppression. Through their diverse works, artists were able to penetrate the public sphere with their messages, identities, and, thus conveying their social neglect, outrage, and resistance in a way that could not be matched through other means. The history of art and visual culture found in publications such as *The Body Politic* and *File Megazine*, as well as archival materials such as posters and ephemera, illustrate the integral role that cultural activities played in the development of queer identities and the response to the HIV/AIDS crisis in Toronto in the late 1970s as well as contemporary queer issues of the present day. Artworks such as Andy Fabo’s *The Craft of the Contaminated*, which appropriates imagery from Théodore Géricault’s renowned 1818-19 painting, *The Raft of the Medusa*, and General Idea’s *AIDS* series which copies its form from Robert Indiana’s *LOVE* works, demonstrate the range of visual experiences and messages embodied by queer visual culture in the service of sexual liberation and solidarity during the HIV/AIDS crisis.

Throughout this historic moment, visual culture was an incubator by which artists formulated the values, performative identities, and political actions that defined their activism. At one of the most exciting and inventive times for Toronto art production, intense social and political debates were also occurring, fueling the creation of influential works that developed new and freeing concepts of the affective and embodied dimensions of the queer community.
Toronto artists brought their ideas, emotions, and passions to the public in ways that political and social projects and discussions could not have achieved on their own. By performing their identities in the public sphere, these artists developed representation and acceptance through intensely emotional and political acts in a process of carefully, but confidently elaborating upon social norms to achieve acceptance and equality.

Moreover, the impact of Toronto-based artists has not been adequately considered within social and art historical discourses. Though Canada is often regarded as a progressive country in its queer and HIV/AIDS policies and Toronto is home to a thriving queer community, their histories are more conflicted than they appear. One of the largest cities in North America and home to one of the largest communities of queer activists, along with New York and San Francisco, Toronto’s impact on the wider LGBTQ2S+ and HIV/AIDS discourses as well as the inner workings of the local community demand attention. Simultaneously undergoing an explosion of artistic and cultural development and a shift away from sober modernism towards more politically engaged art, the artistic community in Toronto was uniquely poised to participate in the socio-political concerns that were spreading throughout the city and around the world in the 1970s and 80s.

This thesis analyzes works in the historic context of the queer liberation movement and the HIV/AIDS crisis in order to demonstrate how this history has played an integral role in the building of communities and in socio-political advocacy. Toronto’s unique queer visual history is woven into the social fabric of the city, demanding reflection and a careful consideration of these images and their meanings within both historical and contemporary contexts. The strategic oppression of Toronto’s queer community perpetrated through the 1981 bathhouse raids, known
as “Operation Soap,” the more recent police raid of a local club’s lesbian night on September 15, 2000, and an undercover police operation at Marie Curtis Park in Etobicoke to lure gay men and trans people to proposition them for sex in order to lay charges in 2016, demonstrate the persistence of these issues throughout the past forty years. Given this recurrence of violent institutionalized attacks against Toronto’s queer community, in contrast to recent apologies from the Canadian government and the Toronto Police Service for their past persecution of the LGBTQ2S+ community, a localized queer art history is more relevant than ever.¹

The history developed within this thesis demonstrates the success of artists in forging political solidarities and working together as communities in elaborating more liberatory identities. As Toronto’s cultural scene flourished in the 1970s and 1980s, artists used their practices to develop a community and perform their identities within public space in acts of socio-political resistance. Although research has focused on the development of these issues within New York City and other locations across the United States, little work has been done regarding the same issues in Toronto, or even more broadly in Canada. Since the late 1990s, a time which many generally consider the end of the HIV/AIDS crisis and the queer movement, research has failed to adequately consider the critical issues of queerness and the HIV/AIDS crisis that developed through the 1970s and 1980s or to recognize the lasting impacts of these issues in contemporary society.

¹ The Toronto Police Service has operated under that name since the amalgamation of the City of Toronto in 1988. From 1957 until the early 1990s, they were known as the Metropolitan Toronto Police Force and, during a brief period in the 1990s, as the Metropolitan Toronto Police Service. In an attempt to balance consistency and accuracy, I use the terms contemporary to the periods being discussed throughout this thesis.
Several more recent texts have begun to consider the events of the HIV/AIDS crisis and LGBTQ2S+ issues in Toronto, as well as across Canada, however they generally focus on larger issues and events as well as the work of grassroots organizations.\(^2\) None of these texts consider the art and visual culture of the period as a catalyst or contributor in the formation of LGBTQ2S+ identity and the HIV/AIDS crisis in a meaningful way. Each suggests however, that by looking to the past and the events of the 1970s and 80s, we can then consider our current socio-political situation and look to the future, continuing the activism and identity-formation that was, and remains, critical to the queer and HIV/AIDS communities which still face stigma, discrimination, and violence at alarmingly disproportionate levels. This thesis will amend this gap in scholarship by considering the art and visual culture produced in Toronto from the 1970s to the present day through a lens that examines the social and political impacts of visual culture on the gay liberation movement and the HIV/AIDS crisis.

In Chapter 1, I will provide a brief history of the gay liberation movement in Canada with a particular focus on changing relationships between the gay community and the Metropolitan Toronto Police Force during the legalization of homosexuality in 1969 and the bathhouse raids of 1978-1981, as well as the HIV/AIDS crisis in a Canadian context and the grassroots activism that fought for access to medical treatment, funding, and reducing stigma. Next, I examine the development of politically engaged art in Toronto and the intersections between gay liberation, the bathhouse raids, and the HIV/AIDS crisis in the production of activist artistic projects.

Through an analysis of theory developed largely over the past 50 years, I then lay the groundwork for my thesis, beginning with an overview of theories of the HIV/AIDS crisis and the process of othering that was at the core of social, medical, and political responses to the crisis. In an analysis of the work of Jack Halberstam and John Paul Ricco, among others, I continue with a consideration of queerness in failure and representation as well as the integral nature of community and public space in relation to queer issues. Finally, an examination centered on the work of Douglas Crimp provides an overview of activist HIV/AIDS art produced in New York City and a theoretical basis for the impacts of activist art and cultural productions with which to consider the specific context of Toronto-based artworks in the period.

In Chapter 2, my analysis will consider the work of General Idea, a Toronto-based collective active from 1967 to 1994 that included three Canadian artists, Felix Partz, Jorge Zontal, and AA Bronson. Through their artworks concerning queer identity and HIV/AIDS issues, I illustrate the performative identities and activist messages that were consistently at play in their conceptual works. Within campy, colourful, and seemingly upbeat imagery, General Idea conveyed a range of ideas, affects, and concepts to a public that was initially opposed to their ideals and their very identities. Pioneers of the HIV/AIDS art movement in Canada as well as more widely around the world, General Idea’s work served as a critical foundation from which other artists could build an incredibly diverse range of productions that illustrated the full spectrum of cultural responses and interventions in these critical issues. Finally, I will consider the work of Bronson, produced following Partz and Zontal’s deaths from AIDS-related complications, leaving him as the only surviving member of the collective and with a new connection to the terrible realities of the crisis as well as the loneliness of surviving.
In Chapter 3, I will analyze artworks that more explicitly display homosexual intimacy and the HIV/AIDS crisis, largely in the work of Andy Fabo, a victim of the Metropolitan Toronto Police Force raid of The Barracks bathhouse and founding member of the ChromaZone Collective. An artist-run gallery space and community of artists, ChromaZone served as an inclusive space at a critical point in Toronto’s artistic development by supporting a diverse group of artists and providing space for exhibitions that would otherwise not have been created. This chapter will also consider Fabo’s partner, Tim Jocelyn, a Toronto-based textile artist who died of AIDS-related complications in 1986. Through intensely personal and provocative images, Fabo and Jocelyn depicted the struggle of living in a homophobic and prejudiced society during the gay liberation movement and HIV/AIDS crisis in Toronto. By performing their identities and visualizing the societal abandonment felt by gay men and those with HIV/AIDS, Fabo and Jocelyn opened the eyes of the public to striking and affective images that connected deeply with viewers. Through community and an engaged artistic practice, these artists were particularly influential in the development of representation, acceptance, and equality not only within Toronto’s art scene, but throughout the public.

Chapter 4 will consider more recent expressions of the continuing HIV/AIDS crisis and prejudice towards same-sex practices and bathhouses through the work of Will Munro. An activist, club promoter, artist, and community builder, Munro was an impressive voice for Toronto’s queer community from his time at OCAD until his untimely death from brain cancer in 2010. Exploring the politics of identity and queerness through an encyclopedic knowledge of queer culture, Munro’s multi-media works embraced the community’s past and its resonance within our current society as he worked to build a community that embraced all identities and brought Toronto’s queer community out of the Church and Wellesley “gay ghetto.”
Together, this thesis will develop an understanding of the development of LGBTQ2S+ identity and responses to the HIV/AIDS crisis in Toronto as facilitated through visual art and culture. Building upon examinations of art produced in New York dealing with these issues, my thesis will demonstrate the unique artistic developments of Toronto in the 1970s and 80s that contributed to the formation of queer community and played an integral role in activism and social change. Through an analysis centred on the specific issues and events of Toronto and their associated local artistic responses, a renewed understanding of this critical period for queer Canadians and Torontonians will enable queer activists an integral perspective to continue in the fight for equality and the continuing HIV/AIDS crisis. By connecting these pivotal moments with more recent developments in contemporary art and theory, such as the work of Kent Monkman, a path forward which recognizes our collective history will be established at a time when interest in queer issues and the HIV/AIDS crisis is beginning to wane despite continued stigma, discrimination, and systemic inequalities.

It was through these communities of artists that rights, representation, and public acknowledgement was achieved, allowing for celebrations like Toronto Pride, one of the largest annual pride events in the world. Only by recognizing the unique agency of community cultural production in public space can we reflect on the specific conflicts that characterize Toronto’s queer history and the role of visual culture in redefining social bonds.
Chapter 1:
Literature Review

The Gay Community and the Metropolitan Toronto Police Force

When Britain passed a law to legalize homosexuality in 1967, the Metropolitan Toronto Police Force denounced the changes, arguing that crime could be traced to homosexuality and that such legalization would result in increased violence and the corruption of youth.³ At the annual conference of the Canadian Association of Police Chiefs, members voted against endorsing criminal code changes related to homosexuality in Canada, fearing that such changes would “lead to depravity, blackmail, robbery, and murder.”⁴ While the Progressive Conservative and Créditiste Parties also opposed these changes and even argued that society needed protection from homosexuals who were sick and required treatment rather than legal recognition, the Liberal and New Democratic Parties supported the legal reform which was first encouraged by Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau.⁵ Liberal MP Robert Kaplan stated that homosexuality: “… is a form of sexual perversion which arouses a sense of horror in most people. But many Canadians feel an equal sense of horror about the present treatment of homosexuals in this country,”⁶ noting the discriminatory treatment experienced by queer individuals across the nation.

³ Arnold Bruner, Out of the Closet: Study of Relations between the Homosexual Community and the Police (Toronto: [s.n.], 1981), 3.
⁴ Bruner, 4.
⁶ Kinsman, 168.
While the criminal code reform that was eventually achieved in 1969 was a step forward in the liberation of queer individuals and the fight for equality, many took issue with the specific nature of the reforms. Further, a general ambiguity within the updated criminal code failed to provide precise definitions for terms such as “private,” “public,” and “gross indecency,” one of the more common charges issued against homosexuals, allowed for the police and courts to continue to unfairly target homosexuals. It became clear that while some reform had been made regarding homosexuality in the criminal code, the partial nature of the reform which left charges related to “buggery,” gross indecency, and bawdy-houses in the legal code allowed for an increased, rather than decreased policing of homosexuals.

By the 1970s, relations between the gay community and the Metropolitan Toronto Police Force were tense as allegations of systemic homophobia within the police force and targeted arrests and attacks against the gay community by the police themselves spread widely through the queer community and mainstream media. While homosexual acts committed in private between two consenting people who were over the age of twenty-one had been deemed legal by changes to the Criminal Code of Canada in 1969, homophobia remained prevalent and the passing of criminal code reform did little to protect the gay and lesbian community. Targeted attacks by the police against the gay community continued, including verbal harassment from officers on numerous occasions, a targeting of gay bars and clubs, and cases of entrapment and

7 Bruner, 22-23.
9 Kinsman, 171-172.
surveillance of washrooms frequented by gay men in order to pursue charges of gross indecency.\textsuperscript{10}

In the latter half of the 1970s, the situation escalated as Toronto police officers began coordinated raids of the city’s gay press offices and bathhouses, resulting in arrests, abuse, and intimidation of the gay community. In a raid of the offices of Toronto’s most prominent gay publication, \textit{The Body Politic}, on December 30, 1977, alleging the distribution of “immoral, indecent, and scurrilous” material through the mail, the Metropolitan Toronto Police Force began what would be a long-standing practice of coordinated and often unfair raids of local queer establishments.\textsuperscript{11} Sporadic raids occurred between 1978 and 1979 before police action intensified and culminated in the 1981 bathhouse raids, a six-month investigation referred to as “Operation Soap.”

On the night of February 5, 1981, approximately 200 plainclothes and uniformed officers, armed with hammers and crowbars, raided four of Toronto’s five gay bathhouses, causing an estimated $35,000 in damages and charging roughly 300 men under the Criminal Code of Canada with being found in a common bawdy-house.\textsuperscript{12} Eyewitness accounts alleged extreme use of force by officers, including using hammers and crowbars to break doors off of lockers, smash mirrors, tear mattresses, and break down doors, as well as utter homophobic slurs and refuse to provide information to those under arrest.\textsuperscript{13} One man, charged as a found-in during Operation

\begin{footnotes}
\end{footnotes}
Soap at The Barracks, a Queen Street West bathhouse that had been raided in previous years, recalled to a *Body Politic* reporter, “I was in a room with someone and I heard a noise. I got up to open the door but it burst open and a guy in plain clothes pushed in and shoved me up against the wall, my face pushed hard into the wall. My nose was lacerated and bloodied. The cop kept punching me in the lower back and pulling my hair and saying ‘You’re disgusting, faggot. Look at this dirty place.’”¹⁴ A clearly articulated attack on Toronto’s gay community, the bathhouse raids of 1981 sparked an intense response in the form of mass protests and calls for a public inquiry into the actions of the Metropolitan Toronto Police Force against the gay community.¹⁵

Decades of homophobic and vindictive attacks by the police force against Toronto’s gay community had finally caused an already tense relationship to reach its breaking point, a moment in which liberation, respect, and equality for queer Torontonians became a matter of survival.

Many in Toronto’s gay community viewed the raids as a directed and malicious attack, with some relating it to the Stonewall riots in New York and George Hislop, part-owner of The Barracks, referred to it as “the gay equivalent of ‘Crystal Night in Germany.’”¹⁶ The bathhouses were an essential element of gay culture in Toronto, and elsewhere as well, in that they allowed gay men to develop community and meet one another without fear of attack or homophobia. Social prejudice prevents gay men from meeting, whether for sex or friendship, in many public locations because of the potential to be outing and the risk of danger incurred by going to someone’s home where they would be alone.¹⁷

Arnold Bruner’s *Out of the Closet: Study of the*

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¹⁴ Jackson and Persky, eds., 276.
¹⁶ Jackson and Persky, *Flaunting It!*, 274.
Relations Between the Homosexual Community and the Police, a report commissioned by the Mayor and City Council of Toronto following the 1981 raids, stresses the safety of bathhouses, stating that “a homosexual man who picks up a stranger in a bar is always at risk. The stranger may be more interested in violence, robbery or blackmail than in sex. [...] The bathhouse provides an opportunity for sex in the privacy of a small room or cubicle, and each participant can go his own way afterwards.”

Public response to the raids, both by the gay community and members of the general public, was fierce, particularly the night following the 1981 raids, in which over 1500 protesters met in the heart of Toronto’s gay ghetto at the corner of Yonge and Wellesley. Together, they marched to Metropolitan Toronto Police Force 52 division, followed by the Ontario Legislature, blocking streets and damaging police cars along the way. Archival footage captured by the Canadian Broadcast Corporation during the protest illustrates the immense number of gay men who gathered and passionately fought for their rights, chanting “Gay rights now!,” “Fuck you 52!,” and “No more raids!” as they clashed with police officers. Fighting for respect, equal treatment under the law, and an independent review of police action during the raids, the protesters made a strong political and social statement in response to years of homophobic attacks.

18 Bruner, 58.
19 Jackson and Persky, Flaunting It!, 274-275.
Following the first raid at The Barracks on December 9, 1978, members of Toronto’s gay activist community, including Tom Warner, Peter Maloney, Brent Hawkes, Brian Mossop, George Smith, and Michael Lynch, came together to form the Right to Privacy Committee (RTPC).\(^{21}\) Actively working to support establishments that catered to gay men including bathhouses, the committee publicly intervened in debates with the Metropolitan Toronto Police Force by attending Police Commission meetings and advocating for a permanent gay liaison committee in order to ensure the rights of the gay community in public and private settings.\(^{22}\)

Through visual media, such as a poster featuring a nude male turning towards the viewer, looking down, and provocatively asking “Is your ass covered?,” the RTPC aimed to garner public support and the funds necessary to continue their work (fig. 1.1). Through a suggestive and, to some, indecent image showing the bare buttocks of a man attending a gay bathhouse, the committee appealed to their target audience of fellow gay men who were fearful of police victimization while further demonstrating their right to free speech and the injustice of police censorship of so-called indecent images in gay publications.

In July 1981, Mayor Arthur Eggleton and the members of Toronto City Council asked Arnold Bruner to produce a report analyzing the relationship between the homosexual community and the Metropolitan Toronto Police Force as well as providing recommendations to improve that relationship. Through town hall meetings and consultations with a number of groups within the gay community, including the RTPC, Bruner came to a series of sixteen recommendations to resolve the differences between these groups and to ensure fair and

\(^{21}\) Tim McCaskell, *Queer Progress*, 104.

\(^{22}\) McCaskell, 105.
Fig. 1.1 Right to Privacy Committee, *Is your Ass Covered?*, c. 1978.
equitable treatment of homosexuals by the police force.\footnote{Bruner, \textit{Out of the Closet}, 175-180.} The RTPC prepared their own brief, along with the Lesbian and Gay History Group of Toronto, which they presented to Bruner during the development of his report, recounting a detailed history of conflicts between the Metropolitan Toronto Police Force and the gay community and providing their own recommendations to resolve these conflicts. The events included in the brief demonstrate the numerous ways in which the police targeted the gay community, and the malice with which they did so.\footnote{Lesbian and Gay History Group of Toronto, \textit{A History of the Relationship between the Gay Community and the Metropolitan Toronto Police} (Toronto: Lesbian and Gay History Group, 1981), 6-17.}

The Canadian HIV/AIDS Crisis and a Local, Toronto Response

By the early 1980s, the attention of gay activists and their opponents were drawn away from issues of liberation and basic human rights as the HIV/AIDS crisis took hold of international attention. Soon after the first cases of HIV/AIDS, then referred to as Gay Related Immune Deficiency (GRID), or the “Gay Cancer,” were discovered in the United States in major cities such as New York and San Francisco, activists mobilized in Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver. Grassroots organizations and the gay press took their survival into their own hands in the face of inaction by government and medical officials, working to solve their own problems, develop a supportive community, and force those in power to recognize their struggle and the importance of dealing with the HIV/AIDS crisis. Gran Fury, an American collective, and General Idea
became the first artists to respond visually to the crisis, playing an integral role in the initial stages of the activism and laying a groundwork for other artists to build upon as the struggle for treatment, research, care, and the elimination of stigma continued for decades.  

It is now believed that the first death resulting from AIDS occurred in the United States in 1978, while the first Canadian who succumbed to the illness was a man from Windsor, Ontario in 1979. By 1982, at least 11 Canadians had died from AIDS related complications and American HIV/AIDS diagnoses numbered in the hundreds. In the summer of 1981, the first American media reports of the spread of a rare cancer known as Kaposi’s Sarcoma among gay men began to surface, with Canadian media following suit in 1982 as they covered the spread of the “gay cancer.” Public discourse quickly identified gay men as the source of this mysterious illness, scapegoating an already marginalized population and denouncing the liberated sexuality that had only recently been achieved. Communities with HIV/AIDS were isolated from the larger community as they were labeled as a threat and the spread of misinformation made it nearly impossible to promote responsible prevention of the illness. Traditional media published sensationalized stories that contributed to this alienation and harmed those most at risk of

27 Warner, Never Going back, 161-163.
28 Warner, 161.
29 Warner, 161.
contracting AIDS, such as the story of Gaëten Dugas, an Air Canada flight attendant who was deemed “patient zero” and the cause of much of the early spread of HIV/AIDS despite a lack of sufficient evidence to support those claims.  

Initial government responses to the crisis were similarly flawed, as officials failed to take the crisis seriously despite mounting evidence that the disease required a strong national policy. The Canadian Government’s first action came in the formation of an ad hoc task force on AIDS under the Department of Health and Welfare Canada in May of 1983, two years after the Centers for Disease Control recognized the threat of AIDS in the United States.  

The committee, however, included only scientists and doctors, leaving out any representatives of high-risk groups or those diagnosed with the disease. The Canadian Red Cross and the Canadian Blood Committee were represented on the task force, however it was largely their inaction and failure to seriously consider the potential spread of AIDS that led to the contamination of the nation’s blood supply and a full ban on blood donations from men who have sex with men. A national scandal that further marginalized and stigmatized the gay community, the effects of the contamination can still be felt to this day despite the reduction of the ban on blood donations to 12 months, a move that many still feel is inadequate and continues to mark gay men as a threat to the “innocent” public.

Faced with a lack of urgency by the government and medical groups, grassroots organizations and activists took action themselves through campaigns, protests, disseminating

32 McCaskell, Queer Progress, 190.
33 McCaskell, 190-191.
accurate information, fighting for access to treatment, and lobbying for change. Among the first gay and lesbian publications in Canada with distribution across North America, *The Body Politic* was among the first of any news organizations to publish an article about what came to be known as HIV/AIDS in September 1981. Rather than fueling the narrative of a gay cancer like most American publications, however, *The Body Politic* strongly supported liberation and the use of safer-sex practices rather than a regression to the shame and hidden-sexuality that was prominent prior to the gay liberation movement. Organizations like the AIDS Committee of Toronto (ACT) were formed to advocate for the HIV/AIDS community, composed largely of those who were most active in the gay liberation movement and who were therefore already experienced with community activism. Also supporting both safer sex and liberation, ACT advocated against the closing of Toronto bathhouses, something that had been done in San Francisco and which was being called for in many major cities across North America, recognizing that the bathhouses could instead be used as critical sites for education and that closing them would only push homosexual sex back underground. HIV/AIDS groups produced explicit educational materials regarding safer sex practices, even eroticizing these practices and making them seem fun through street vernacular rather than clinical terms to appeal more to their target audience.

Eventually, government support grew, and funding and attention began to be directed towards grassroots AIDS organizations, but, as this occurred, these groups lost their activist potential as they were incorporated into existing government systems, resulting in the formation

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35 Orsini, Hindmarch, and Gagnon, 3.
37 McCaskell, *Queer Progress*, 201.
of new organizations. Through increased government funding for AIDS organizations, these groups moved away from the gay and lesbian liberation organizations that had been their foundation, and instead increased partnerships with health and social service organizations and professionals. As a result, their missions turned away from the needs of gay men with AIDS and queer advocacy, instead working towards research and education, prevention strategies, and fundraising that ultimately resulted in subdued advocacy and a rejection of radical activism.\(^3^9\)

With increased funding came a reduced autonomy for the organizations that now had to meet professional standards and at times effectively faced censorship that opposed more explicit public outreach materials.\(^4^0\)

As Foucault argues in his discussions of discourse and power in *The History of Sexuality*, “discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy.”\(^4^1\) The discourses which we recognize as defining this crisis, and the gay liberation movement as well, can thus be seen as a part of the power structures that sought to counter gay liberation and AIDS activism, yet produced a narrative through which activists and grassroots organizations could assert their own discourse and power. For Foucault, power is not a static entity that is held or controlled by any singular institution or individual, but rather a matrix of interconnected force relations that produces power.\(^4^2\) As such, the competing interests and discourses of not only social

\(^3^9\) Warner, 251.
\(^4^2\) Foucault, 92-95.
conservatives and queer grassroots organizations, but also government organizations and a shift away from radical activism reveal the narratives of power and relations that controlled public perceptions of HIV/AIDS and outreach programming in the period.

In the late 1980s, liberation activists again came together, this time in the formation of militant groups whose activism and support for treatment pushed for the largest gains in HIV/AIDS policy and public perception to date. First modelled by the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) in New York, this activist response quickly came to Toronto in the formation of AIDS Action Now! (AAN!) in 1987. Following the formation of AAN!, a feature in NOW, a Toronto weekly publication stated, “Like no other patients before them, people with AIDS are organizing against a cumbersome health system to prolong their own lives,” demonstrating the revolutionary impact of AAN! and the extreme difficulty faced by people with AIDS when navigating Canada’s health care system. Together, AAN! and Montreal’s Action SIDA led a demonstration at the 1988 National Conference on AIDS in Toronto, carrying banners stating “EPP = DEATH” and burning an effigy of Jake Epp, Minister of National Health and Welfare, who had ignored calls for a national AIDS strategy (fig. 1.2-3).

Embarrassing the Mulroney Government and Minister Epp, AAN! and Action SIDA achieved their goal when shortly after the demonstration, Epp announced $129 million in federal funding over 5 years in what would eventually become a national AIDS strategy.

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44 McCaskell, Queer Progress, 247.
following year, the International AIDS Conference was held in Montreal, and Prime Minister Brian Mulroney spoke publicly of AIDS for the first time, nearly ten years after the first Canadian death related to the disease.\textsuperscript{47} AAN! continued their activism however, storming the stage prior to Mulroney’s speech to read a list of demands and when Mulroney was finally able to speak, an hour later than scheduled, AAN! members stood and turned their backs to him, denouncing his years of inaction and strategic ignorance.\textsuperscript{48}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Fig_1.2}
\caption{AIDS Action Now! Demonstration, 1988.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{47} Orsini, Hindmarch, and Gagnon, “Introduction,” 11.  
\textsuperscript{48} Orsini, Hindmarch, and Gagnon, 11.
As Gary Kinsman, a notable Canadian AIDS activist argues, “the HIV/AIDS crisis is very much a bringing together of social relations. This is far more than the story of a virus and very much about social organization, including the social construction of knowledge about what came to be called AIDS and HIV.”\(^{49}\) Through the activism of AIDS organizations and the dissemination of knowledge through the queer press, gay men built communities that could counter those who put them at risk and fight for their very own survival and acceptance.

\[\text{Fig. 1.3 AIDS Action Now! Demonstration, 1988.}\]

\(^{49}\) Kinsman, “AIDS Activism,” 312.
When Art Gets Political

David Wojnarowicz, a prominent activist artist and writer whose work spoke to issues of class, race, sexuality, globalization and the HIV/AIDS crisis, produced a series of photographs in 1978-9 in which his friends stand in various locations around New York City wearing a mask of the writer Arthur Rimbaud who was a major influence on Wojnarowicz’s work. In one of the photographs, the figure stands before a wall, spray-painted with the text “THE SILENCE OF MARCEL DUCHAMP IS OVERRATED,” appropriating the title of one of Joseph Beuys’ “actions” from 1964, asserting the role of the artist as a contributor to social dialogue (fig. 1.4). For Beuys and for Wojnarowicz, art had the power to change society for the better and to ignore that potential, and responsibility, as an artist, was shameful.

Fig. 1.4 David Wojnarowicz, Arthur Rimbaud in New York, 1978-9.
Toronto: Tributes + Tributaries, 1971-1989, an exhibition curated by Wanda Nanibush at the Art Gallery of Ontario from September 2016-May 2017, is one of few recent exhibitions that have included issues of gay liberation and the HIV/AIDS crisis in a Canadian context. Considering these issues, along with those of other marginalized and forgotten groups, Toronto: Tributes and Tributaries opened with a work composed of nine prints, Art is Political by Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge, a Canadian artist duo and couple originally from Toronto who were working in New York at the time of this work’s creation (fig. 1.5). Presented together, the nine prints depict steel minimalist forms spelling out the title of the work as Condé and Beveridge pose in the foreground of each print. In the introduction to the catalog, Nanibush states that “the work shows a movement from minimalism into collective action that informed many artists’ shifts at the time … and captures the way the 1970s art scene challenged the separation of art and

Fig. 1.5 Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge, Art is Political, 1975.
society and art and politics.” By politicizing the modern, minimalist art that was popular at the
time, while placing themselves front and centre as integral to the production of their art, Condé
and Beveridge countered the common narrative of the art world and clearly asserted that art is, in
fact, inherently political.

Exhibited as part of Condé and Beveridge’s 1976 Art Gallery of Ontario exhibition, ...It’s
Still Privileged Art (fig. 1.6), the artists aimed to encourage a new movement of political art that
would adequately consider the most important issues of the time. The catalogue and artist book
that accompanied the exhibition reads more as a manifesto than an essay, stating: “We have been
taught to think practically—the cult of objectivity—but not to think about the ideology behind
what we do. Art is art, politics is politics. But art about art, pure art without real content, without
social relations or a social ideology is bullshit.” Condé and Beveridge argue that so-called
apolitical art is a false concept, as any “apolitical” art supports the status quo and must therefore
have political impact. For the artists, “In our society power is not exercised by violent means.
We police ourselves through culture—through self-expression at the expense of social
expression … Art has become a crucial social weapon for the maintenance of those in power …
Art must become responsible for its politics!” Exhibiting work unlike anything they had
produced before, Condé and Beveridge used ...It’s Still Privileged Art to launch their new,
politically engaged practice which would grow to include a wide range of social issues,

50 Wanda Nanibush, ed., Toronto: Tributes and Tributaries (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario,
2018), 14.
51 Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge, ...It’s still Privileged Art (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario,
1976), 12.
52 Condé and Beveridge, 36.
particularly the rights of workers. The exhibition was not well received, however, referred to even as a disaster by *The Globe and Mail*’s critic, as viewers and critics questioned whether their work was really art at all and not merely propaganda given its political message and minimalist forms.\(^{53}\) Despite this, ...*It’s Still Privileged Art* succeeded in stirring up controversy in a debate that would ultimately achieve its goal of spurring the production of activist, political art that envisioned an improved society rather than propping up the status quo that was failing those most at risk and most marginalized from the general public.

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\(^{53}\) Peter White, “Art has to wait for more Important Business,” *Globe and Mail*, January 8, 1977, 33, ProQuest.
Bridging the Gap: From Art to Social Activism

At the peak of the HIV/AIDS crisis and the related inaction, stigma, homophobia, and prejudice, Douglas Crimp’s seminal text, “AIDS: Cultural Analysis, Cultural Activism,” demonstrated the integral role that New York City art played in a distinct and powerful cultural response. Rather than merely an emotive reflection on the crisis or a means through which to raise needed funds for research and care, Crimp argues that the work of artists like Gran Fury played an active role in the activism and work of the AIDS crisis. For Crimp, the HIV/AIDS crisis, queer identity, and art co-defined one another in a way that no other medium could. Without the visual culture, writing, and media that depicted and came to represent the HIV/AIDS crisis in the minds of society, the disease would largely have ceased to exist in the public consciousness. Crimp calls for a recognition of the role of visual culture and representations in the development of HIV/AIDS as both a medical pandemic and social phenomenon that relied on images, narratives, and emotions to be understood and spread through society.

My analysis builds upon the work of Crimp and other theorists who have considered the art and cultural productions in New York and other major cities during this period in order to develop an understanding of artworks produced in the 1970s and 80s, as well as more recently, in relation to the local body politic. I build upon the pioneering queer theories and art histories developed by Judith Butler, Michel Foucault, John Paul Ricco, and Jack Halberstam to examine crucial moments in Toronto’s queer history. Just as Ricco has considered the integration of queer

sex within public spaces as acts of defiance and advocacy, my own research examines queer identity and the HIV/AIDS crisis through community and public space.55

This thesis builds upon a foundation of feminist, critical race studies, and queer theories that have been developed primarily over the past 50 years to demonstrate the oppression faced by these marginalized and threatened communities while proposing intersectional analyses of these issues. I contextualize the artworks analyzed through theories that examine the HIV/AIDS crisis, particularly in the public and media responses to the crisis and the process of othering that played a critical role in its development, through the work of Ronald Frankenberg, Sander Gilman, Simon Watney, Michel Foucault, and Paula Treichler. By incorporating concepts of failure, representation, and the familial bonds of queerness through the work of Jack Halberstam, Judith Butler, Linda Nochlin, and Eric Clark, I elaborate the specific issues of queer individuals in familial and public circles that produce further inequalities while examining the affective dimensions of visual culture in changing public perceptions and building supportive queer communities. The intersections of the politics of communities and the existence of marginalized groups in public spaces is thus revealed and further considered as the work of Jean-Luc Nancy, John Schwarzmantel, Eric Clarke, and John Paul Ricco develop an understanding of the struggles of representation and acceptance that are central to queer and HIV/AIDS issues and which become critical in the understanding and dissemination of activist visual culture. I employ their theories of the development of community, both as internal and external politics, to examine the challenges of LGBTQ2S+ and HIV+ groups with regards to community formation and public representation. Through this, I illustrate the impact that visual culture and the

communities that surround artists play in their success and survival. Finally, by looking to previous analyses of the role of cultural productions related to queer issues and the HIV/AIDS crisis as well as the potential of activist art through Ricco, Rob Baker, Nina Felshin, Richard Meyer, and Douglas Crimp, I form an understanding of the potential for similar Toronto-based cultural productions to support marginalized communities, change public perceptions, and participate in an activist exchange of ideas and values.

HIV/AIDS Theory and the Concept of Othering

The period from 1981 to 1991 is often recognized as the first wave of the AIDS crisis, a decade in which response focused significantly on how to stop, or at the very least slow, the transmission of the epidemic. In his analysis of the second half of this decade which centres on the 1988 *London Declaration on AIDS Prevention*, anthropologist Ronald Frankenberg considers the declaration’s focus on ensuring health education and information to slow the spread of HIV, while recognizing social and cultural patterns of affected groups to protect them from discrimination and stigmatization.\(^{56}\) Demonstrating an international focus on human rights and dignity early on, the declaration also proposed a critical reconsideration of the AIDS crisis: that it was not a single, worldwide epidemic, but rather formed through three epidemics, those being HIV infection; discrimination and stigmatization; and AIDS.\(^{57}\) Frankenberg’s analysis of the HIV/AIDS crisis makes a critical intervention in reading the crisis geographically, medically,


\(^{57}\) Frankenberg, 23.
politically, and socially to reveal a network of separate, yet interconnected factors which, together, form the social and political responses to AIDS of the late 1980s and early 1990s. Further, Frankenberg comments on critical issues such as the assigning of “risk groups” rather than “risk behaviours,” which marked homosexuals, drug-users, and African populations as deviant “others,” a reality that would define the crisis and turn “risk groups” into “guilt groups.”\textsuperscript{58} Finally, Frankenberg acknowledges that the social response to AIDS can also be seen as positive, in the ways that it highlighted the racism, sexual oppression, and widespread inequalities present within our societies and by illustrating the critical response to the crisis.\textsuperscript{59} As a result, Frankenberg’s interdisciplinary and intersectional analysis highlights not only the failings of medicine, politics, and society at the peak of the crisis, but also the gaps which could be bridged through engaged cultural production.

Historian Sander Gilman’s analysis of media representations of those with sexually transmitted infections throughout history consists largely of an examination of images of people with AIDS (PWAs) and depictions of syphilitics in early print culture. Gilman demonstrates that these images not only presented their subjects as diseased, but marked them as “others,” particularly through sexual deviancy.\textsuperscript{60} For Gilman, this process of othering those with syphilis and AIDS served not only to stigmatize those who were deviant and an apparent risk to the population, but also to create a false sense of security for the general public by asserting their own supposed safety from infection. While media images of those with syphilis portrayed

\textsuperscript{58} Frankenberg, 26-27, 35.  
\textsuperscript{59} Frankenberg, 37.  
women as the source of the disease that victimized men, depictions of PWAs embraced the trope of an isolated and melancholic homosexual male that marked the figure as both the victim and cause of his own illness.\(^1\) Simon Watney also recognizes the role of media and politics in the stigmatization and discrimination of the AIDS crisis. His analysis, however, places the root of the misinformation, misrepresentation, and politically motivated nature of the AIDS crisis in the home, where negative views of homosexuality were initially formed due to the impossibility for homosexual relationships to fit within a traditional family archetype.\(^2\) Given the pre-existing prejudice and othering of homosexual men, Watney argues that it was all too easy for homosexuality to become scapegoated as the cause of the spread of AIDS.

By considering Michel Foucault’s analysis of the state and criminality in *Discipline and Punish*, it becomes evident that while media images and the prejudice of the archetypal family defined the HIV/AIDS crisis, the political events of the period compounded the stigmatization and othering that was already occurring in the public sphere. Police opposition to the legalization of homosexuality, the bathhouse raids, and the criminalization of HIV/AIDS can all be related back to the role of the state and judicial system working in opposition to the gay community during this period. For Foucault:

> The criminal is designated as the enemy of all, whom it is in the best interest of all to track down, falls outside the pact, disqualifies himself as a citizen and emerges, bearing within him as it were, a wild fragment of nature, he appears as a villain, a monster, a

\(^{61}\) Gilman, 98-99.

madman, perhaps, a sick, and, before long, ‘abnormal’ individual. It is such that, one day, he will belong to a scientific objectification and to the ‘treatment’ that is correlative to it.63

Through repeated social, political, and judicial attacks, homosexuals and PWAs were identified as criminals and a threat to the general population by government and judicial actions, and inactions, that suggested a need to control and treat these supposedly deviant groups.

While revealing findings similar to Gilman, Frankenberg, and Foucault regarding the public aspects of AIDS, Paula Treichler makes a critical addition to our understanding of the crisis. Through an emphasis on the language and discourse of medicine and science, Treichler calls for an intervention at the linguistic site of this conceptualization of AIDS so that we might understand the factors which influenced the disease and its public reception.64 As Treichler argues, “until we understand AIDS as both a material and a linguistic reality—a duality inherent in all linguistic entities but extraordinarily exaggerated and potential deadly in the case of AIDS—we cannot begin to read the story of this illness accurately or formulate intelligent interventions.”65 The AIDS epidemic must be considered not merely with regards to the disease itself, but through each of the separate, yet interconnected elements that, together, formed the social, political, and medical elements of this crisis.

65 Treichler, 40.
Queerness in Failure and Representation

Linda Nochlin, pioneering feminist art historian, is most well-known for her influential analysis of gender struggles within the art world, proposing a feminist lens through which to consider our art historical narratives and theories. This intervention in the traditional canon of art history spurred examinations of female artists in ways that had never been possible before, recognizing the specific struggles of female artists and further stimulating a deeper analysis of the work of all marginalized groups that took institutionalized oppression and inequality into account. Of particular importance in Nochlin’s study, and my own, is her discussion of the ways in which the framing of societal issues and discrimination can play an active role in those issues, stating that a poverty problem or a woman problem relies on a particular group forming these matters as such, rather than as a wealth problem or as a man problem.66 The same critical examination of queer issues and HIV/AIDS can produce a scenario in which the tables are turned on a commonly accepted standard. When considering the experiences of queer individuals as well as the social response to the AIDS pandemic, acknowledging the groups who held and exerted power during these crises reveals a new critical lens through which to consider these issues.

Judith Butler demonstrated an advancement of feminist theory, particularly through her incorporation of race and queer theories into a single analysis in “Gender is Burning: Questions of Appropriation and Subversion.” Critically examining the iconic film Paris is Burning, which

documents the lives of gender non-conforming people of colour and drag queens in New York City, Butler discusses the implications of racial, gendered, and queer issues, particularly in the impact of the film’s white, lesbian director, Jennie Livingston, whose gaze, at times, presents an ethnographic picture.67 Butler responds to bell hooks’ analysis of Paris is Burning, which illustrates racial biases and inequalities that are inherently a part of the film through the cinematic masking of Livingston’s identity.68 While agreeing with hooks’ position that the film maintains the role of a colonialist white saviour for people of colour, Butler notes the failure of hooks’ study to take into consideration the film’s depiction of the drag ball “houses” in relation to queer drag artists.69 A central element of Paris is Burning, the film illustrates the “houses,” or groups of drag queens and transgender individuals led by a “mother,” which Butler relates to the resignification of the family by queer individuals to build their own communities of support.70 This representation of LGBTQ2S+ individuals developing groups outside of traditional family units, which Butler recognizes, demonstrates the importance of self-formed communities in bonding, mutual support, and the creation of self-identity for queer individuals.

Queer theorist Jack Halberstam also discusses gay culture and the drag scene in his text, The Queer Art of Failure, which examines typical concepts of queerness and failure in society. Halberstam argues that queer individuals often inherently fall within a societal concept of failure due to their inability to meet standards of family, gender, and performance.71 Through a

68 bell hooks, Black Looks: Race and Representation (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 151.
69 Butler, Bodies that Matter, 92.
70 Butler, 94-95.
consideration of literature and art, Halberstam reveals that despite this inherent failure of queer individuals who contradict gender boundaries, or the archetypal family, theory and culture tend to ignore this negativity. Rather, queer theory often focuses on the gay male camp canon, ignoring the antisocial negativity that is inherently tied to queerness.\textsuperscript{72} While gay culture has accepted some level of antisocial negativity in representations, the majority of the gay archive presents indifference, dismissal, ironic distancing, and camp, rather than a more realistic and productive concept of queerness.\textsuperscript{73} For Halberstam, queer theory should focus on embracing failure as part of queerness rather than trying to meet or change societal perceptions and, in doing so, a political negativity centering on anger, shock, and realism can produce a clearer representation of queer communities that supports sociopolitical change and acceptance.\textsuperscript{74} In relation to the AIDS pandemic and queer activist artistic practice, Halberstam’s criticism of the gay male camp canon indicates the importance of representations that are not only positive, but which also depict the negative, angry, and unruly reality of these issues in order to shock viewers and incite change.

In the development of diverse, affective artworks and the creation of supportive queer communities, Toronto-based artists have embraced the activist potential of their work to challenge oppression and stigma surrounding the LGBTQ2S+ community and the HIV/AIDS crisis. In the production of inclusive works that represented the range of identities marginalized from society in affective and honest ways, artists and their communities played an integral role in

\textsuperscript{72} Halberstam, 110.
\textsuperscript{73} Halberstam, 109-110.
\textsuperscript{74} Halberstam, 110.
not only supporting one another, but in spreading a message of acceptance and a recognition of diverse communities with equally diverse needs around the world.

In “Reflections on Queer Studies and Queer Pedagogy,” Halberstam asserts that the inherent interdisciplinary nature of queer studies and its inability to centre distinctly as a social science or a humanity is to its benefit, allowing for study in sociology, literature, history, and anthropology, as well as gender and ethnic studies.75 Existing outside of the strict structure of institutional disciplines, Queer studies allows for a reorganization of power and knowledge that produces fruitful analyses of difference that might otherwise be repressed through canonical bodies of knowledge.76 While this thesis revolves around the art and visual culture related to queer liberation and the HIV/AIDS crisis in Toronto, the theories and modes of analysis which form the basis of this study are rooted in a multi-disciplinary approach that draws from a wide range of sources and objects of analysis. Building upon previous analyses that have revealed the influential role of the gay and lesbian press, AIDS posters, and activism, both across North America and in more focused studies of areas like New York and Toronto, this thesis applies these theories and methods of analysis to demonstrate the same critical attention and consideration that must be paid to the role of art and visual culture in this pivotal period for queer Torontonians.77

76 Halberstam, 362.
Further, Halberstam argues that the recent grouping of various queer groups such as gay men, lesbians, transgender individuals, and all members of the LGBTQ2S+ spectrum limits the potential for a full analysis of any one of the individual groups. Particularly when considering queer history, breaking up analyses of gay men and lesbians, or of lesbians and transgender women, for example, provides the opportunity for a more wholesome consideration of the specific needs and circumstances surrounding each group. Given this, as well as the nature of queer identity during the 1970s and 80s which largely categorized members as either gay men or lesbians, and with a particular focus on the struggles of gay men rather than women, my own analysis centers on the impacts of art on liberation and the HIV/AIDS crisis in relation to the gay male community. While many of these theories and issues apply to all members across the LGBTQ2S+ spectrum, an analysis that attempts to consider each identity simultaneously would be an act of disservice to nearly all of them. Further, given the recent development of “LGBTQ2S+” in queer studies and popular culture as a shorthand to include all sexual and gender minorities, the majority of my analysis focuses on and employs terms such as gay and queer that were most commonly used in the period discussed.

Community and Public Space

In his text, The Inoperative Community, Jean-Luc Nancy argues for a reconsideration of commonly accepted ideas of the changing nature of community through time and suggests a new


78 Halberstam, “Reflections on Queer Studies,” 363.
understanding of the ways in which communities are formed and developed. Nancy begins by stating that “the gravest and most painful testimony of the modern world, the one that possibly involves all other testimonies to which this epoch must answer … is the testimony of the dissolution, the dislocation, or the conflagration of community,” before arguing that despite the assertion of other theorists, community has not been lost at all and there is merely an illusion of a lost community.  

For Nancy, there is always community, and yet it does not function in the way that many would assume. Community is formed through communication, but it is not work, rather it is “the unworking of work that is social, economic, technical, and institutional,” it is done through the sacred, the “unleashing of passions,” that connect the members of the group. Nancy argues that community is best defined as an “incompletion,” developed through the act of sharing which is always incomplete and in a continuous process. Turning to the concept of political communities, Nancy demonstrates that a political community maintains this incompletion, yet it is “consciously undergoing the experience of its sharing,” through an engagement and communication with a purpose. Further, a community as communication implies writing, of the desire to change the relations between one person and those around them.

Building upon Nancy’s concept of community, Schwarzmantel develops a contemporary model of political community that expands upon Nancy’s concise analysis. Schwarzmantel notes

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80 Nancy, 31-32.
81 Nancy, 40-41.
82 Nancy, 41.
that Nancy’s concept of community relies upon a “being-in-common,” rather than a “common
being,” in that diversity and difference are not denied, but recognized through mutual respect and
a shared understanding.83 Rather than a fusion of individuals into a homogenous unit, community
is an exposure of singularities, a recognition and acceptance of individual difference.84 Given
this analysis, Schwarzmantel states that the challenge for contemporary democratic politics “is to
create and develop institutions through which this communication and ‘mutual interpellation of
singularities’ can take place.”85 There must be a reciprocal exchange of ideas through
communication that incorporates and acknowledges diversity in order for effective political
community to develop.

Through a sound consideration of the integration of the queer community with the larger
public, Eric Clarke reveals the struggles and benefits of this synthesis. Recognizing that much of
gay and lesbian liberation activism and politics have sought inclusion by suggesting that queer
people are “just like everyone else,” Clarke reveals that this has left the queer community with a
“phantom normalcy” which neither reflects reality nor works to adequately serve their unique
needs.86 As a result, the queer community is expected to adhere to heteronormative standards of
family and life and keep homoerotics in the private sphere, conforming to societal standards
which were the source of their otherness in the first place.87 For Clarke, the realities of entering

83 John Schwarzmantel, “Community as Communication: Jean-Luc Nancy and ‘Being-in-
Common,’” Political Studies 55, no. 2 (June 2007): 460, 462, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-
9248.2007.00625.x.
84 Schwarzmantel, 462.
85 Schwarzmantel, 472.
86 Eric Clarke, Virtuous Vice: Homoeroticism and the Public Sphere (Durham, NC: Duke
87 Clarke, 5, 9.
the public sphere often require a sanitization that defeats the purpose of achieving social acceptance, suggesting that queer communities should avoid attempting to meet heteronormative ideals, similar to Halberstam’s assertions around queer failure. Communities and cultural productions must instead depict the full range of queerness, retaining their identities while fighting to secure social acceptance that resists a homogenization of culture and identity.

John Paul Ricco’s *The Logic of the Lure* seeks to recast queer sociality and sexuality within a contemporary idea of ethics and aesthetics as he considers the impact that art has in these discussions. In the concluding chapter of his text, Ricco discusses his concept of “queer sex space theory” which combines traditional queer space theories that examine areas and communities of LGBTQ2S+ groups with an openness to queer sexuality and sexual practices. While academic writers of queer theory in the early 1990s largely ignored the pro-sex movement that advocated for safer sex rather than banning public sex spaces, Ricco argues that members of the queer community were writing about these issues within their own publications. Academic “queer space” theory discounts these pro-sex practices and fails to recognize their place in queer communities and in their research and analysis.

Through his analysis, Ricco demonstrates the separation between the academic community of queer theorists and those whose lived experiences exist in actual queer communities. Ricco argues that queer theory must exist both within the academic sphere and in the queer community itself to allow queer communities to form their own theory. Through this analysis, it becomes evident that contemporary research cannot rely upon academic theory or community experience,

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89 Ricco, 141.
but a conscious reading of both together to consider the realities of these crises. By combining traditional queer theory with cultural material and lived experience, a more detailed understanding of queer identity and the AIDS crisis can be examined so that all experiences and viewpoints are considered.

Cultural Productions and the Impact of Activist Art

Through an analysis of medieval concepts of language and homosexuality, as well as contemporary artistic responses to these themes, Ricco, in addition to his theories surrounding queer space, also plays a key role in bridging the gap between intersecting concepts of queerness, AIDS, images, language, and disease. Ricco demonstrates that negative societal views of homosexuality and masturbation are rooted in medieval concepts and that contemporary issues related to the AIDS crisis, including same-sex interactions, needle sharing, and transmission through blood, have blurred boundaries both in language and in body that have long been accepted as impenetrable.  

Through an analysis of contemporary art, Ricco uncovers the ties that exist between language, disease, and virus that demonstrate the need to consider the social, political, and medical discourses that largely combine to form the concept of AIDS as an illness. Building upon Treichler’s argument, Ricco states that terms and language must be recognized for their impact on these critical issues of identity, sexuality, and boundaries, calling

91 Ricco, 76.
for “a politics of representation which will articulate the queerness of identities and the boundaries which inscribe them, as it re-inscribes them in ways which enact or perform a queering of meanings, definitions, and hence control.”

Through a defining, and re-defining of boundaries, identity and language can be better understood and the impacts of each can be recognized in the formation of public and social conceptions of sexuality and AIDS.

Rob Baker’s *The Art of AIDS* examines representations of AIDS in cultural arts including theatre, film, music, and visual art. Through an interdisciplinary analysis, Baker acknowledges the ways that the arts have responded to the AIDS crisis both publicly and privately to express the community’s anger, hope, and despair. In particular, Baker recognizes the power of public presence and interaction with non-queer individuals in order to encourage empathy and understanding across communities. Baker’s broad analysis illustrates how the diverse responses to the crisis are related, both challenging and reinforcing each other while bringing critical issues to the surface. Baker reveals the depth and power of cultural representations of the AIDS crisis as well as the calls to arms that often exist within these works. Baker’s text develops a clear method through which to consider the societal impact of these public representations of the epidemic, even if he often fails to consider the true activist potential that they hold to inspire social, political, and medical progress or inspire members of the communities that they depict.

Nina Felshin’s introduction to *But is it Art?* outlines the practical requirements and potential impacts of activist art that emerged in the mid-1970s, reaching widespread attention by the 1990s. Applicable to a wide range of potential subjects, this analysis of activist art provides a

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92 Ricco, 77.
critical understanding through which more specific artistic practices can be unpacked. Felshin recognizes the ties that bring together activism, media, public space and interaction, and conceptual artistic practices within this general term of activist art. Felshin also highlights the frequent use of collaborative practices in activism to distance the individual from the campaign in favour of a group identity. Collectives such as General Idea and ChromaZone, which will be a focus of my study, have used this method to their advantage as they sought community gains while avoiding individual authorship or identity.

“This is to Enrage you: Gran Fury and the Graphics of AIDS Activism,” by Richard Meyer examines the activist art of Gran Fury, a group of artists born from the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, or ACT UP, movement in New York. Meyer’s critical analysis of the group’s advertisement-inspired art and social activist roots illustrates the successes and failures of this influential collective. By affirming queer desire and sexuality while challenging mass misinformation of the public, Gran Fury achieved public works whose impact was felt across North America and western Europe. Through political messages subtly placed in visually pleasing, but sometimes jarring, billboards and installations, Gran Fury and ACT UP advocated for access to medication, reducing stigma, and urged political action on an impressive scale during the HIV/AIDS crisis, yet Meyer’s analysis also critically engages with moments in which

95 Felshin, 11.
their message failed to meet its target. Meyer’s reading of these activist artworks demonstrates the issues at play within this narrative that can be grasped through a critical reading and acknowledgment of societal beliefs.

Douglas Crimp is among the most important researchers on the AIDS crisis, particularly regarding activist art and visual culture. In his text, *Melancholia and Moralism*, Crimp argues that it is often assumed that artists and other creators of visual culture could only participate in critical issues like the AIDS crisis by raising money for scientific research or through expressing human emotions and suffering. Rather, Crimp states that “AIDS does not exist apart from the practices that conceptualize it, represent it, and respond to it.” The fact is that without the visual culture, literature, and media that depicted and came to represent the reality of the AIDS crisis for many people, the disease would largely have ceased to exist in the public consciousness. Further, Crimp asserts that “AIDS intersects with and requires a critical rethinking of all of culture: of language and representation, science and medicine, health and illness, sex and death, the public and private realms.” Through Crimp’s analysis we can begin to see the need to consider the broad impacts of the AIDS crisis and its associated visual culture to fully understand this period as well as the realities of PWAs and queer individuals.

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97 Meyer, 69-70. Generally, more controversial images resulted in a loss of the original intended meanings, suggesting that although provocative images can attract a larger response, they may be less effective in achieving their goals of educating the public and encouraging solidarity.
99 Crimp, 29.
100 Crimp, 41.
Conclusion
Following the trajectory of feminist and queer theorists, the study of queer communities and the AIDS crisis has revealed critical information about the groups who suffered most through social and political trauma during the 1970s, 80s, and 90s. While research has recently considered the relationships between social perceptions, the media, visual culture, community, and queer and HIV/AIDS issues, the interactions and impacts of these communities has often been neglected. Queer identity and the AIDS epidemic are formed not through simple terms, but through a diverse system of language, media, social norms, medical practice, political discourse, community, and cultural productions. Building upon these ideas, the power of queer and HIV+ artistic communities in terms of self-identification, public activism, and representation must be considered within this larger discussion, particularly in an often-ignored context of Toronto’s growing queer and artistic communities.
Chapter 2:
General Idea: Counter-Normative Images

Introduction

Throughout their nearly thirty-year practice, Canadian artist collective General Idea, comprised of AA Bronson, Felix Partz, and Jorge Zontal, consistently intervened on traditional norms of gender and sexuality. Through the inclusion of subtle and overt references to femininity, queerness, AIDS, and other social issues, General Idea responded to the events going on around them such as the unequal treatment of homosexuality under the law in the police raid of the offices of The Body Politic and often critiqued social structures like beauty pageants and the very concept of queerness through parody and camp. Co-opting and repurposing popular techniques and formats of mass media such as television, performance, magazines, and posters, General Idea used subversive tactics to counter the media’s traditional family values that generally opposed gender and sexual diversity and vilified those with HIV/AIDS.

FILE Megazine (published 1972-1989 by General Idea) is just one example of the group’s appropriation of traditional media, an aspect of the collective’s practice that will continue to be important throughout this chapter. In the “Glamour” issue of FILE, General Idea recounted the myth of their foundation and laid out the goals of their collective, stating:

We wanted to be famous, glamourous, and rich. That is to say we wanted to be artists and knew that if we were famous and glamourous we could say we were artists and we would be. We never felt that we had to produce great art to be great artists. We knew great art did not bring glamour and fame … We knew that if we were famous and glamourous we
could say we were artists and we would be. We did and we are. We are famous, glamorous artists.¹⁰¹

Unconventional artists, to say the least, the nature of General Idea is quickly grasped through this myth as the cheeky, bold, and subversive format of their practice is clearly laid out in the narrative that critiques not only fame and glamour, but also the art market and media world that General Idea was so deeply tied to and relied upon for success.

Their belief in copying art as a lifestyle in order to produce their own successful works is also highlighted in the “Glamour” issue, as they continue: “We knew Glamour was artificial. We knew that in order to be glamourous we had to become plagiarists, intellectual parasites. We moved in on history and occupied images, emptying them of meaning, reducing them to shells. We filled these shells with Glamour, the creampuff innocence of idiots.”¹⁰² General Idea copied the format of *Life* magazine in producing *FILE Megazine* to insert their own counter-cultural ideas and views into conventional media streams while also accepting submissions from other artists and the public, providing readers the opportunity to take part in their disruption of the traditional media landscape. By using common mail-art practices in their modified magazine format, the group argued that they could operate as a “parasite within the world of magazine distribution.”¹⁰³ Their goal was that unsuspecting buyers might be fooled by the copycat editions

¹⁰² “Glamour,” 22.
of Life and be drawn into the artist-produced publication. Throughout their practice, General Idea took pre-existing media, schemas, symbols, and images, and recreated them, infecting them with their own unique brand of subversive cultural criticism. Stealing an already popular basic form, while shifting its meanings to produce counter-cultural and subversive critiques of society, General Idea co-opted the systems that influence and maintain our common culture.

In this chapter, I will analyse the development of General Idea’s work, beginning with early pieces that critiqued issues of gender and sexuality before examining their works which shifted focus towards the AIDS crisis, just as the attention of the gay community and activists had through the 1980s. In these works, the role of General Idea as pioneers in Canada’s gay liberation and HIV/AIDS activist art movements comes forth in their ability to use the very mediums that suppressed queer and HIV+ individuals to critique these structures, advocating for acceptance and equality for these marginalized and oppressed groups. While favouring campy aesthetics and subtly hidden messages, the impact of General Idea’s work was a critical step in the development of Toronto-based activist art and played an important role in the distribution of positive LGBTQ2S+ and HIV/AIDS messages through traditional media methods.

FILE was initially so similar in appearance to LIFE that in 1976, Time/Life Corporation pursued legal action against General Idea, suing them for copyright infringement due to File’s use of white block lettering on a red parallelogram. The lawsuit was settled in 1977 when General Idea agreed to change the logo and format of their publication. See Bayer, “Uncovering the Roots,” 102.
Camp, Poodles, and Queering Representation

From the very beginning of their practice as a loosely formed group working in downtown Toronto in 1969, General Idea’s work was heavily informed by the sensibility of camp. AA Bronson recalls reading Susan Sontag’s influential article “Notes on Camp,” which lays out a comprehensive definition of what she deemed an aesthetic sensibility, rather than an idea, that is centred on artifice and exaggeration. Concerned with texture, decoration, and style, the constructed and invented nature of camp aesthetic is evident in General Idea’s work, as well as the concept of “Being-as-Playing-a-Role,” or life itself as a theatre for production and acting. Throughout their work and the format of their artistic practice, General Idea adhered to these ideas, particularly in their tendency to conceive of themselves as faux pop culture icons and their “performance” of cultural activities upon a metaphorical stage. While certainly artists in their own right, General Idea can often best be described as actors “playing the role” of the artist through an illusionary “artistic persona.” Sontag further argues that camp is concerned with style over content, and thus apolitical, while also asserting an inherent link between camp aesthetic and homosexuality because “homosexuals have pinned down their integration into society on promoting the aesthetic sense.” Sontag’s notes, however, are not always true to all forms of camp, and some of her assertions, particularly around sexuality have drawn criticism.

108 Decter, 16.
109 Sontag, “Notes on Camp,” 54, 64.
over the years. Throughout their career, General Idea repeatedly drew upon camp sensibility, and yet an element of political engagement remained just below the surface. To return to Condé and Beveridge, General Idea seem to have been similarly in their practice, finding that, as Condé and Beveridge stated: “we mistakenly believed that [art about art] was ‘objective’, that it transcended ideology, that it existed in the world as a thing in itself.” As General Idea and Condé and Beveridge demonstrate, politically disengaged art is not actually apolitical given that it supports the dominant political and social ideals of its period, thus inherently making a political statement. Through their homosexuality and the nature of their collective, sociopolitical statements were often present in General Idea’s artworks, and as their practice developed, their statements grew stronger and more overt.

General Idea’s early career is largely characterized by the development of the “Miss General Idea” pageants, a series of events and artworks that satirized beauty pageants through elaborate myths and narratives. At the same time, poodles were introduced in their works, ultimately becoming one of the most recognizable images associated with the group, particularly through their Mondo Cane Kama Sutra series (figs. 2.1-2). Mondo Cane Kama Sutra is composed of ten paintings, each featuring three poodles in yellow, orange, and pink DayGlo fluorescent paint on a black background. Appropriating from Frank Stella’s protractor series, General Idea modified the sober abstraction of Stella’s coloured forms to include the forms of campy, bright poodles engaged in a range of sexual positions. A symbol of femininity, excess, and fashion, the poodle was used as a visual representation of the group members themselves,

110 Conde and Beveridge, ...It’s Still privileged Art, 12.
111 Condé and Beveridge, 12.
emphasizing their homosexuality and working relationship as a three-part collective. Elisabeth Libovici writes that until the mid-1980s, General Idea’s sexuality was not mentioned in publications, whether artistic or homosexual, and so their identity had not entered the public sphere in any overt way.\textsuperscript{113} Despite including queer references and imagery on the covers of \textit{FILE Megazine} and in their art, critics and writers ignored these cues. Bronson stated that even when they first began exhibiting their \textit{Mondo Cane} works, people ignored the sexual undertones and focused on the paintings merely as representations of the group’s collaboration.\textsuperscript{114}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Fig_2_1.png}
\caption{Fig. 2.1 General Idea, \textit{Mondo Cane Kama Sutra} (Installation view), 1984.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{113} Libovici, “Gender Trouple,” 88.
\textsuperscript{114} Alvin Li, “Larger than Life: AA Bronson and Alvin Li in Conversation,” \textit{Ran Dian}, May 12, 2018, \url{http://www.randian-online.com(np feature/larger-than-life-aa-bronson-and-alvin-li-in-conversation/}. 51
At the time, sexuality was rarely included explicitly in art, yet General Idea wanted their homosexuality to be public, to become a statement that there were gay artists working and that they could exist as such in the public sphere. As a result, General Idea was forced to “make it more and more explicit” so that their sexuality would be directly referenced. In the 1970s, gay artists were generally limited to men who painted or photographed nude men, and following a public statement of their sexuality they would often be excluded from galleries and exhibitions. As Bronson states, “it was kind of the kiss of death to be called a gay artist within the art world at large.” General Idea sought a public recognition and understanding of their

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115 Libovici, “Gender Trouple,” 88.
116 Li, “Larger than Life.”
117 Li, “Larger than Life.”
sexuality at a time when homosexuality was still unacceptable to many. Using a trio of poodles, they subtly, at first, introduced the concept of their homosexuality through the form of the poodle and the sex acts in which they were often engaged which became more overt as their practice developed and the poodles became more directly associated with the artists themselves. By increasing the presence of themes of homosexuality in their work, General Idea forced a public discourse of their practice to also include queer issues if their art was to be covered in the media or discussed within art historical discourses. Through this simple, and subtle act of employing the poodle’s symbolism, General Idea began a process, both in their own practice and in the art world more generally, that contributed to an increased representation for queer identities in media and discourses that had previously excluded them.

*P is for Poodle* (fig. 2.3), meshes both General Idea’s foundational myth of a search for glamour and campy homosexuality in a hilariously unusual self-portrait. Before a standard photography background of a cloudy, blue sky, Bronson, Partz, and Zontal are arranged in a triangle, dressed as poodles in suits. Through this work, General Idea referenced the tripartite nature of their collective and the “relationship triangle,” an excess to the heteronormative couple, that was a focus for outsiders when considering their work and homosexuality. In a more direct way, General Idea applied the schema of the poodle to their own identities to produce a relationship that helped to further their attempts at making their homosexuality a critical part of the public discourse surrounding their work. In this photograph, the artists’ pale yellow, blue, and pink suits, along with heavy eye makeup and furry hats adorned with long, hanging ears, produce an image “so bad, it’s good.” The work is a clear manifestation of camp sensibility, and yet the underlying narrative of the work suggests political engagement and, I argue, even agency.
Given Judith Butler’s concept of performativity as well as J.L. Austin’s speech acts, General Idea’s poodle works can be read as perlocutionary acts which speak through their performance in the public sphere. In Butler’s article, “Performative Agency,” she outlines four conclusions regarding performativity:

first, that performativity seeks to counter a certain kind of positivism according to which we might begin with already delimited understandings of what gender, the state, and the
economy are. Secondly, performativity works, when it works, to counter a certain metaphysical presumption about culturally constructed categories and to draw our attention to the diverse mechanisms of that construction. Thirdly, performativity starts to describe a set of processes that produce ontological effects, that is, that work to bring into being certain kinds of realities or, fourthly, that lead to certain kinds of socially binding consequences.\textsuperscript{118}

As Butler explains, Austin’s perlocutionary acts include “those utterances from which effects follow only when certain other kinds of conditions are in place,” and therefore they are not instantaneous, but rely on a specific environment and processes to be in place.\textsuperscript{119} Artworks, although not acts of speech in the literal sense, work in quite the same way in performing certain norms and ideas in public space. General Idea’s \textit{Mondo Cane Kama Sutra} and \textit{P is for Poodle} force us to question our assumptions of gender and sexuality through the performance of queerness embodied by the poodles in a way that brings about a new reality. Altering our expected knowledge of gender and sexuality, General Idea subtly introduces a new experience that changes societal norms in the queer and effeminate poodle form. In this way, General Idea’s poodle works can be seen as performing the collective’s homosexual identities within a heteronormative space, expanding society’s concepts of sexuality, countering our perceptions of inherent definitions of acceptable behaviours or sexualities and producing a reality in which homosexuality is acknowledged.

\textsuperscript{119} Butler, 147.
Gülsüm Baydar argues that space itself is discursive and the production of spaces can participate in a performativity which, for Butler, would produce the effective reality that it performs. By existing outside of the heteropatriarchal matrix, General Idea’s works both produce a counter-cultural space and perform their realities within that space, resulting in perlocutionary acts of homosexual agency that affect the public. Baydar further asserts that a recognition of the historical determinations that defined public and private spaces reveals the practices that marginalized queer sexualities and provides us the opportunity to consider alternative categories. As with the feminist motto “the personal is political,” a blurring of these spaces allows for a public and political performance of what might have been considered private affairs. As Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau’s iconic statement that “there’s no place for the state in the bedrooms of the nation … what’s done in private between adults doesn’t concern the Criminal Code” suggests, while changes were being made to expand rules related to homosexuality, distinct separations between these acts in private and public spaces remained critical. At a moment in which homosexuality was defined by the Criminal Code as legal only if practiced in private between two consenting adults, General Idea’s poodle trio works counteract these ideals, publicly asserting their sexuality in a playful, but nevertheless politically charged manner.

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121 Baydar, 704.
122 Baydar, 702-3.
While General Idea’s early attempts to bring attention to their sexuality in a public way resulted in failure, a concept that Butler argues is an inherent part of performance that is not to be ignored, through increasingly overt references and a consistent repetition of imagery, and thus, speech acts, their identities were eventually recognised publicly.124 According to Butler, “norms are in the process of being elaborated, adapted for new purposes, and their continuing life, even their adaptability depends on the inventiveness by which they are produced time and time again,” and so through the continual re-envisioning of societal norms and homosexuality, General Idea contributed to a re-thinking of queerness in the public sphere.125 For Baydar, liberation for queer communities can be produced not only though critiquing normative practices, but also through the performance of alternative subjects and sexualities that are often silenced, an element which is inherent in *Mondo Cane Kama Sutra* and *P is for Poodle*.126

Further, Butler’s critique of Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality* reveals the subjectivation and resistance that is at play in the elaboration of queer identities. For Foucault, the subject is slowly produced through a process of being repeatedly defined, as with the othering and criminalisation of homosexuality, however the production of the subject also creates the possibility for a “reverse-discourse” which normalises the subject.127 The term which frames and produces the subject does so only while simultaneously participating in the de-constitution of that same subject, and so it can be seen that power structures themselves provide the opportunity for the normalisation of a subject.128 In this way, General Idea’s positive

125 Butler, 154.
128 Butler, 99.
reassertion of their own sexuality, an identity criminalised by the police and judicial system, participated in the reverse-discourse of subjectivation towards a depathologization and acceptance of queer identities. Through the depiction of their homosexuality, as well as their three-part relationship, General Idea performed their sexuality in the public sphere in a countercultural act. In doing so, they forced an acknowledgment of their homosexuality by the media and the public, which contributed to a redefining of societal norms at a time when homosexuality was largely unaccepted in society, and actively opposed by the Metropolitan Toronto Police Force.

Fig. 2.4 Ellis Wiley, VW Beetle Driving past the Isaacs Gallery on Yonge Street, north of Cumberland Street, ca. 1970. [The Fiesta, featuring red neon signage and a stacked “restaurant” sign that rises above its entrance, can be seen behind the beetle.]
Coming Together at The Fiesta

General Idea were also an instrumental part of the development of a creative and supportive community in uptown Toronto in the 1980s through The Fiesta (fig. 2.4), a restaurant opened by fashionista and frequent model for General Idea’s works, Sandy Stagg. Located between the Isaacs Gallery and the Carmen Lamanna Gallery, which represented General Idea at the time, on Yonge Street, The Fiesta quickly became, as AA Bronson describes, “the centre for a community that saw itself as ‘uptown’, so a little more glamourous than the Queen West scene. It was populated by artists, musicians, and other creative types as well as a generous serving of youngish uptown fags who identified with new wave music.”¹²⁹ General Idea would often hold parties at The Fiesta following their openings at Carmen Lamanna and even premiered their video Test Tube, which takes place at the Colour Bar Lounge, the fictional cocktail bar of the Miss General Idea Pavilion, at the restaurant in 1980.¹³⁰ The walls of The Fiesta even featured many of General Idea’s works, providing a cultural backdrop for the music, conversations, and meetings that would take place there.¹³¹ Spaces like these defined the communities that frequented them, and served as important gathering places for those who lived outside of the normative standards of society, whether queer, punk, creative, or otherwise, even in recent years, as will be discussed in chapter 4 of this thesis. By coming together in a place where they felt they were stakeholders, members of Toronto’s queer community were able to develop support

¹²⁹ AA Bronson, email message to author, January 24, 2019.
¹³⁰ AA Bronson, email message to author, January 24, 2019.
¹³¹ Ian Young, “A Wiff of the Monster: Encounters with Scott Symons,” in Queers were Here: Heroes and Icons of Queer Canada, ed. Robin Ganev and RJ Gilmour (Windsor, ON: Biblioasis, 2016).
systems and activist potential that would become increasingly important in the face of the HIV/AIDS crisis and continued oppression for queer individuals.

Injecting the World with an Image Virus

Some time in the mid-1980s, while eating breakfast together in Toronto, General Idea came upon the concept of transforming Robert Indiana’s famous *LOVE* (fig. 2.5) sculpture and paintings into a symbol of the crisis that was facing the queer community and quickly spreading around the world, by replacing the letters L-O-V-E with A-I-D-S. A provocative concept that was clearly in poor taste, at least at first glance, the idea was one which fit perfectly in the collective’s

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practice through examinations of the myth of the artist, the commodification of art, and the appropriation of pre-existing formats. In this case, an artwork which had become so iconic to have entered every realm of American popular culture. The concept remained just that, however, until they expanded their practice to New York in 1986 and in the following year were invited by their gallery, Koury Wingate (previously International With Monument), to contribute to the first Art Against AIDS exhibition, a fundraiser for the American Foundation for AIDS Research (amfAR) (fig. 2.6).  

Featuring the work of over 500 artists across 70 New York City galleries, the Sotheby’s-sponsored exhibition provided an opportunity for visual artists to support desperately needed AIDS research through funding and an awareness campaign that would fill gallery spaces across the city. The exhibition also provided General Idea with the prime context in which to launch their Imagevirus campaign.

Produced as a six-foot by six-foot painted canvas depicting the letters A-I-D-S, stacked in two rows in red over a green and blue background, AIDS (fig. 2.7) became their first work in what would become the larger Imagevirus campaign, and spurred a focus on the HIV/AIDS crisis that would persist until the end of General Idea in 1994. Although the work didn’t sell during the exhibition’s June-December run, it was a turning point in General Idea’s career, both in the realization that their practice as it was based in Toronto failed to have the same success in New York where audiences were not interested in “history lessons,” and with the understanding that a single painting in a New York gallery was not enough of a statement.  

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133 Smith, General Idea, 14.  
134 Bordowitz, General Idea, 75.  

61
Fig. 2.6 amfAR, *Art Against AIDS*, 1987.
required repetition in order to be successful; it needed to spread, ideally beyond the control of the artists themselves until it became a part of culture itself that spread as Indiana’s LOVE had.\textsuperscript{135}

\begin{figure}[h!]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{AIDS.png}
\caption{Fig. 2.7 General Idea, AIDS, 1987.}
\end{figure}

Through the remainder of 1987, General Idea exhibited two sets of *AIDS* paintings and installed the first *AIDS* posters in New York, prior to an exhibition of illuminated *AIDS* logos in the storefront window of the New Museum for Contemporary Art (fig. 2.8) and the distribution of posters in San Francisco, Berlin, and Toronto in the following year. In 1989, the *AIDS* logo was displayed on the Spectacolor Board in Times Square and three thousand posters were installed on New York City subway cars (figs. 2.9-10), allowing the *Imagevirus* to travel to every corner of the city, reaching every demographic and community. In less than two years, General Idea had taken their *Imagevirus* from a single *AIDS* painting meant to raise funds for amfAR and distributed it in an international campaign of HIV/AIDS awareness.

Fig. 2.8 General Idea, *An Installation by General Idea*, 1988-1989, The New Museum.
Fig. 2.9 General Idea, *Imagevirus* (Times Square), 1989.

Fig. 2.10 General Idea, *AIDS* (New York City subway), 1989.
Douglas Crimp’s analyses of the impacts surrounding the visual culture of the HIV/AIDS crisis reveal the critical role that images, and messages, played in the public sphere to raise awareness, educate people on risk and prevention, and encourage action. While Crimp recognises that the failure of government organizations to take AIDS seriously forced grassroots groups to fundraise for AIDS research and service, an area where artists were especially helpful through programs such as Art Against AIDS, he also argues that the role of art is much greater than mere fundraising. For Crimp, “raising money is the most passive response of cultural practitioners to social crisis, a response that perpetuates the idea that art itself has no social function (aside from being a commodity), that there is no such thing as an engaged, activist aesthetic practice.” Crimp and Adam Rolston’s AIDS Demo Graphics traces the visual history of AIDS activism in New York and serves as a handbook for artists seeking to use art as a political tool. The text, however, focuses solely on the activities of ACT UP and, therefore, largely the work of artist collective Gran Fury who were instrumental in the formation of ACT UP’s visual identity and message. Crimp and Rolston’s analysis makes an important argument in asserting the unique placement of activist AIDS art not in the artist’s studio, but in the public, liberating the work from the isolation of most artistic production in favour of grounding itself in the collective knowledge and social spheres which define the crisis. In the production of Imagevirus, General Idea did just that by spreading their works outside of the studio, and even beyond traditional gallery spaces and into public view.

Crimp’s argument that politically engaged artistic practice can be achieve socio-political influence centres on an analysis of ACT UP and Gran Fury’s 1987 window exhibition at the New Museum of Contemporary Art, *Let the Record Show…* (figs. 2.11-12), which articulated the negative statements regarding AIDS by those in power and the silence of President Ronald Reagan. The clear and direct political statements of the exhibition, which were on display to thousands of passersby on Broadway, were most visible in the form of Gran Fury’s

![Image](image_url)

Fig. 2.11 ACT UP and Gran Fury, *Let the Record Show* (Installation), 1987-88, The New Museum.
SILENCE=DEATH logo, as well as ACT UP’s slogan “Act Up, Fight Back, Fight AIDS.” Crimp asserts that the collective nature of the production of the exhibition as well as the direct intention by its creators as an act of AIDS activism epitomises the engaged art practice that could be successful in fighting AIDS. Only one year later however, General Idea’s AIDS works would fill those same windows in a different, yet equally important marker in the development of engaged aesthetic practice against HIV/AIDS.

Fig. 2.12 ACT UP and Gran Fury, Let the Record Show... (Installation detail), 1987-88, The New Museum.

Despite the massive impact of General Idea’s *Imagevirus* spreading throughout communities, it was controversial, particularly among New York activists. Many viewed the newcomers to the New York scene as HIV negative men who were attempting to capitalize on the relevance of the HIV/AIDS crisis through what they viewed as politically disengaged works and artists who were separate from the larger activist community.\(^{139}\) Bronson has stated, however, that given the fact that they were Canadian citizens living and working in New York, General Idea was unable to participate in the militant activism that characterized protests without risking arrest and deportation.\(^{140}\) Further, the AIDS works were seen by some as supporting the notion that queer love was the cause of HIV/AIDS, a statement embraced by right-wing groups and politicians who viewed AIDS as divine punishment for homosexuality.\(^{141}\) General Idea’s argument, which they hoped was more successful, relied on the idea that AIDS encourages love in a community, that it can lead to support and coming together.\(^{142}\)

![Kissing Doesn’t Kill: Greed and Indifference Do.](image)

**Fig. 2.13** ACT UP and Gran Fury, *Kissing Doesn’t Kill*, c. 1989.

\(^{139}\) Decter, “Inject the Public Domain,” 98.

\(^{140}\) Bordowitz, *General Idea*, 74.

\(^{141}\) Decter, “Inject the Public Domain,” 99.

\(^{142}\) Decter, 99.
During the peak of the crisis, as well as today, AIDS activists and scholars often consider the work of Gran Fury as the greatest artistic influence in reducing stigma, fighting for funding and rights, and educating the public due to the direct nature of their campaigns. Further, their close ties with ACT UP New York and other grassroots HIV/AIDS organizations across North America helped to broaden their reach. Among the most famous of Gran Fury’s works is their bus advertisement, *Kissing Doesn’t Kill* (fig. 2.13), which exemplified their strategies in appropriating media and advertising imagery in order to direct attention to the HIV/AIDS crisis while also affirming queer desire.\(^{143}\) Depicting three interracial couples kissing, one gay, one lesbian, and one heterosexual, the work’s tagline reads: “Kissing Doesn’t Kill: Greed and Indifference Do,” in a bold statement of support for the sexuality of queer communities and of the root cause of the crisis, “corporate greed, government inaction, and public indifference.” Gran Fury’s works also often met controversy, in their case, for the overt sexual and critical nature of their works which could be seen as too intense for some groups. AmfAR refused to commission *Kissing Doesn't Kill*, citing issues with the work’s referencing of “corporate greed” given their reliance on corporate donations.\(^{144}\) Works featuring male genitalia were criticized by lesbian members of ACT UP and the Vatican opposed a work that features the Pope and criticizes the Catholic Church’s rhetoric on AIDS (figs. 2.14-15).\(^{145}\)

\(^{143}\) Meyer, “This is to Enrage You,” 52.
\(^{144}\) Meyer, 57.
\(^{145}\) Meyer, 69-70, 74-76.
While General Idea’s *Imagevirus* appears to lack a defined political statement or educational information when compared to more overt political activism created by Gran Fury and ACT UP, the conceptual basis for General Idea’s international campaign of *AIDS* images reveals a much closer tie to the issues of HIV/AIDS than it may appear at first glance. The basis
for the distribution of General Idea’s AIDS works was the very concept of the virus itself; the thing that had caused so much sickness and death and served as a tragedy through which to scapegoat already marginalized communities who were just beginning to achieve liberation. As Gregg Bordowitz states, “AIDS is a mindless repetition, an automatic self-reproduction. Emotionless, without conscience or consciousness, inhuman. A force of nature. … The virus is perceived as an ideal form, like a pure idea.” Building upon the writings of William S. Burroughs whose works incorporating viral themes became a fascination and source material for the members of General Idea, the first AIDS works transformed through repeated creation and distribution into the Imagevirus campaign.

Varying the medium used to match its public location—paintings, wallpaper, and sculptures for the art world, posters, stickers, and visual culture of all types for the streets—General Idea ensured that viewers would see the images as anything else that they would encounter in those same spaces while using their art world glamour and success to insert their images into the wider public sphere. As their public works filled streets and public transportation in cities around the world, their more traditional artworks filled galleries, and continue to do so even today, in an exhibition at the Art Gallery of Ontario (fig. 2.16). In this exhibition, as with many featuring the collective’s Imagevirus works, several AIDS paintings are exhibited in a small gallery in which matching AIDS wallpaper covers all available wall space from floor to ceiling. At the Art Gallery of Ontario, the wallpaper extends to adjacent walls as well, covering a large expanse that runs along a hallway, as well as around the main elevators.

146 Bordowitz, General Idea, 11-12.
147 Bordowitz, 12-13.
covering every available inch of space and leaving only signage and buttons visible (figs. 2.17-18). In these exhibitions, the wallpaper serves as an extension of the paintings that pushes the *Imagevirus* outside of their frames, and infects the sterile, white-cube gallery space, leaving no area untouched.

Fig. 2.16 General Idea, *AIDS* (Installation view), 1988, Art Gallery of Ontario, 2019.
Although many activists did not recognise it at the time, General Idea’s *Imagevirus* was a political statement, albeit one that functioned, in part, through the art world structures that the
collective had been working their way through for nearly twenty years, and which simultaneously contextualised the HIV/AIDS crisis within the history of art. Through *Imagevirus*, General Idea demonstrated that artists who were working in the traditional boundaries of the art world could produce politically engaged HIV/AIDS activist art, as Crimp and Rolston suggested, rather than only those like Gran Fury and ACT UP who were working directly within the affected communities. Just as gay liberation activists pivoted to employ their skills and strengths in the face of a new mode of oppression in the quickly spreading HIV/AIDS crisis, General Idea did the same in the production of *Imagevirus*; they made a pop art-inspired, postmodern aesthetic virus.

Analysis of media health campaigns, particularly those that aired on television, has demonstrated that viewers are most likely to respond well to strictly fact-based advertisements and public service announcements. Campaigns which featured narratives reliant upon emotional response were less likely to encourage viewers to change their actions, such as using condoms or getting tested for the virus in the case of HIV/AIDS. A brief survey of AIDS posters produced during the 1980s and 1990s reveals, however, that while those produced by grassroots organizations such as Gran Fury, ACT UP, and the AIDS Committee of Toronto (figs. 2.19-20) include facts and provocative images to both attract attention and educate, those produced by major health organizations like the Toronto Department of Public Health and the World Health Organization (figs. 2.21-22) often rely upon less direct messages and imagery.

151 Baggaley, 112.
Fig. 2.19 The AIDS Committee of Toronto, *Which of these..... will give you AIDS?*, 1987.
Fig. 2.20 AIDS Committee of Toronto, *Oral Sex*, 1988.
Fig 2.21 Toronto Star, *Poster Campaign: Posters on TTC shelters are part of a campaign to increase awareness about AIDS*, 1987.
Fig. 2.22 World Health Organization, *Sida: Un effort mondial le vaincra* (AIDS: A Worldwide Effort Will Stop It), c. 1988.
Linda Hunter’s analysis of AIDS posters directed at women in Ontario revealed similar findings, stating that: “governmental posters targeting women focus less on sexuality and less on communication around safer sex than posters produced by the AIDS committee of Toronto targeting men and women.”¹⁵² Campaigns produced by government organizations were often required to be approved by larger media organizations who feared the potential negative impact caused by more direct and potentially offensive campaigns, leading them to use safer images and softer language despite data which demonstrated the inefficiency of such advertisements.¹⁵³ As a result, it becomes clear that posters and other aspects of visual culture from pin-back buttons, to t-shirts, to placards produced by grassroots organizations can be understood as largely more effective in both the education and prevention of HIV/AIDS.

Considering these findings related to HIV/AIDS and public health campaigns, General Idea’s Imagevirus can be seen not necessarily as a direct tool in the education and prevention of HIV/AIDS, but as an important part of a wider awareness campaign that crossed international borders and impacted people from all walks of life. The greatest impact of early HIV/AIDS campaigns was in familiarising the public with AIDS which could make them more open to further education and changing perceptions.¹⁵⁴ In a 1991 interview with Joshua Decter, Bronson and Partz stated:

¹⁵³ Baggaley, “Media Health Campaigning,” 110, 116; Baggaley describes in particular, a Canadian media campaign that was vetoed by broadcasters because it described condoms as “your best protection” against AIDS, rather than as a means of reducing risk, see Baggaley, 110.
¹⁵⁴ Baggaley, 112.
AAB: We want to make the word AIDS normal. AIDS is sort of playing the part that cancer did in the 1960s. By keeping the word visible, it had a normalising effect that will hopefully play a part in normalising people’s relationship to the disease – to make it something that can be dealt with as a disease rather than a set of moral or ethical issues.

Felix Partz: It is just like an advertising campaign, like seeing a repetition of billboard advertising imagery. It’s not an individual billboard that sells: it’s in the repetition of the product image. The image becomes entrenched in the mind, so when you walk into the supermarket you have been prepared to want a particular product.

AAB: They create a familiarity.¹⁵⁵

The less offensive nature of General Idea’s Imagevirus allowed for the appropriated advertisement-style works to enter traditional gallery spaces as well as transit systems and city streets without fear of censorship that would have limited their distribution. While the AIDS paintings, posters, sculptures, and objects of visual culture did not offer viewers direct facts or calls to action, they participated in a distinct, positive distribution of the HIV/AIDS crisis in the public sphere, countering negative rhetoric and an immediate, adverse reaction amongst viewers.

Paula Treichler’s assertion that AIDS must be understood as “both a material and a linguistic reality,”¹⁵⁶ is also critical to the Imagevirus works given their textual nature and the role that they played in attempting to normalize HIV/AIDS and the language that surrounds it. Given the immediate tie between the unexplained illness and homosexuality, biomedical officials

¹⁵⁶ Treichler, “AIDS, Homophobia, and Biomedical discourse,” 40.
and politicians resisted implementing an immediate response to AIDS, which left much of the progress to gay men who had gained experience in public advocacy and had recently been able to live openly through the gay liberation movement.\textsuperscript{157} Treichler also compiled a list of characterizations of AIDS pulled from various media sources to illustrate the range of viewpoints and misinformation spread throughout the public. Phrases such as “a gay plague, probably emanating from San Francisco,” “a disease that turns fruit into vegetables,” and “the price paid for intercourse,” demonstrate the political and social aspects of the language used around HIV/AIDS, despite the lack of factual basis or understanding.\textsuperscript{158} In works like the \textit{Imagevirus} campaign, the larger narrative of HIV/AIDS shifts towards a more positive association with the virus through a direct use of language. Rather than presenting a negative connotation or stigma, \textit{Imagevirus} separates the word itself from the shame and hate that surrounds it in a consistent statement of the realities of the HIV/AIDS crisis and of the community of love that was an unrecognized part of it.

Ronald Frankenberg states that “If disease is a biological disturbance of the individual body which leads to social disruption within the body politic, a common human reaction is to turn it back on the biological,” an assertion that the spread of disease inherently urges a response that searches for a group deserving of such an illness or whose actions have caused it.\textsuperscript{159} Social groups are easy to connect to these issues through their visible characteristics, and so the boundaries between biological disease and social sickness, life and death, revealing the inability

\textsuperscript{157} Treichler, 51, 60.
\textsuperscript{158} Treichler, 32-33.
\textsuperscript{159} Frankenberg, “One Epidemic or three?” 34-35.
of us to control our own mortality.\textsuperscript{160} General Idea’s \textit{Imagevirus} works thus not only distinguish
the crisis from the shame and hate that surrounded it through the language of AIDS, but also
separated itself from the guilt groups who bore the social cost. By infecting the public sphere
with a repeated image that confronted viewers with the simple statement of “AIDS,” General
Idea produced a virus that had no individual target or risk group but attacked all entities equally.
Frankenberg asserts that: “Since HIV does not necessarily infect the politically least powerful,
there can be no guarantee that those most likely to be infected would be those most likely to be
confined or expelled.”\textsuperscript{161} \textit{Imagevirus} reveals the central nature of the virus itself, which is
indiscriminate, yet socially constructed through guilt groups, in a way that emphasizes the
multiple epidemics that constitute the crisis.

The \textit{Imagevirus} campaign participated in another elaboration of social norms, slowly,
again and again, in which the multiplication and dissemination of images performed a series of
perlocutionary acts to change social beliefs and standards, this time with respect to the
HIV/AIDS crisis. By means of an approachable image situated within the canon of art history
that was then injected into the public realm, \textit{Imagevirus} played an important role in
demonstrating the ability for politically engaged artistic practice to bridge the gap between the
traditional art world and the activist, public sphere in a massive campaign of acceptance and
love. By repeatedly confronting art dealers, curators, critics, and the general public of all
backgrounds with distinct and positive affirmations of AIDS, General Idea participated in the

\textsuperscript{160} Frankenberg, 35.
\textsuperscript{161} Frankenberg, 36.
slow development of a more positive societal conception of the virus that had marginalized those most at risk in our society.

AA Bronson: Loss and Activism Post-General Idea

In 1989, Partz was diagnosed HIV-positive, a year before Zontal received the same diagnosis. General Idea continued their practice, particularly focusing on the HIV/AIDS crisis and large-scale works that confronted prominent issues such as access to medication and stigma. Continuing to advocate through their own identities in the public sphere, Partz and Zontal both publicly disclosed their HIV status, a significant statement considering the public perceptions and stigma associated with the disease. In 1993, Bronson and Zontal returned to Toronto, living together once again while Bronson cared for Partz and Zontal as their illness progressed. Zontal died of AIDS-related causes shortly after his fiftieth birthday, on February 3, 1994. Just more than four months later, Partz passed away on June 5, 1994. With their deaths, General Idea ceased to exist. Without the participation of Partz and Zontal, Bronson was unable to continue their work, however the persistence of the Imagevirus campaign for more than twenty years following their deaths allowed their practice to continue to be reimagined and reintegrated into contemporary culture. After working with General Idea for twenty-five years, Bronson was uncertain how to move forward, stating that he needed to learn how to be an independent artist again.

162 Smith, General Idea, 15.
163 Li, “Larger than Life.”
Bronson’s first independent work after the end of General Idea was produced three years following the deaths of Partz and Zontal. *Untitled (for General Idea)* (fig. 2.23) maintains many of the conceptual elements that formed the basis of the group’s work yet is a departure from the projects that the collective had been most known for. Three empty metal chairs sit in a row, each with a cushion: one green, one red, and one blue. Somber in tone, the work instantly calls to mind the collective through the colours pulled from the most famous of their *AIDS* works. The chairs celebrate the group while also signifying the end of an era in that the seats remain empty. Marking the end of General Idea’s practice and the renewal of Bronson’s independent career, *Untitled (for General Idea)* serves as an important point in the transition Bronson faced as he
coped with the end of all that was familiar for him and the struggle of being the sole survivor of the group.

The deaths of Partz and Zontal were again confronted in the production of three works that mark the end of General Idea and illustrate Bronson’s own experience of loss and survivorship. *Jorge, February 3, 1994* (fig. 2.24) is a set of three sepia photographs that Bronson took of Zontal shortly before his death. Bronson stated that “Jorge’s father had been a survivor of Auschwitz, and he had the idea that he looked exactly as his father had on the day of his release. He wanted to document that similarity, that family similarity of genetics and disaster.”

![Fig. 2.24 AA Bronson, Jorge, February 3, 1994, 1994.](https://thejewishmuseum.org/collection/27790-jorge-february-3-1994)

Fig. 2.24 AA Bronson, *Jorge, February 3, 1994*, 1994.

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*Felix, June 5, 1994* (fig. 2.25) is a billboard-sized photograph taken in the hours following Partz’s death. His remote, a tape recorder, and a pack of cigarettes lay beside him on the bed as though he is awaiting visitors in his home. Candidly illustrating the effects of HIV/AIDS and the illnesses and suffering that can come along with it, *Felix* also serves as a marker of the artist’s legacy and a farewell to him, one of Bronson’s closest friends. Calling to mind Felix Gonzales-Torres’ *Untitled* (fig. 2.26), Bronson’s work presents a similar tribute to a lost loved one. But where in the Gonzalez-Torres work the bed is empty, the body is not absent in *Felix*. Rather, the life and legacy of the artist as well as the pain and suffering of AIDS-related complications are directly present and confront the viewer as the juxtaposition of life and death are so clearly articulated.

Fig. 2.25 AA Bronson, *Felix, June 5, 1994*, 1994.
Fig. 2.26 Felix Gonzalez-Torres, *Untitled*, 1991.

*AA Bronson, August 22, 2000* (fig. 2.27) is composed of a life-sized, full-length, nude portrait of the artist, eyes closed and arms at his side. The photograph, taken by Arne Stevenson, is adhered to the top of a large, black box. An open and vulnerable self-portrait, the work appears as though it is a sarcophagus, becoming the final work in Bronson’s tribute to his friends and partners as well as the end of General Idea. Losing those closest to him, as well as a part of himself, Bronson conveys the loss of identity and struggle to cope with survivorship that comes with these events.
Fig. 2.27 AA Bronson, *AA Bronson, August 22, 2000, 2000.*

Together, the works signify the range of issues and emotional responses that are related to living with HIV/AIDS, dying from AIDS related complications, and surviving after the loss of those closest to you at the hands of a virus which has been stigmatised and prejudiced by society, and avoided by political and medical groups for more than a decade. Through images that depicted the impacts of the crisis, the vitality of those with AIDS, and the loss of others and of self, Bronson presents a more complete picture of HIV/AIDS. In 1988, members of ACT UP protested an exhibition, Nicholas Nixon’s *Pictures of People* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, which featured many photographs of people with AIDS (PWAs). The protestors passed out fliers that stated:
We believe that the representation of people with AIDS affects not only how viewers will perceive PWAs outside the museum, but, ultimately, crucial issues of AIDS funding, legislation, and education. In portraying PWAs as people to be pitied or feared, as people alone and lonely, we believe that this show perpetuates general misconceptions about AIDS without addressing the realities of those of us living every day with this crisis as PWAs and people who love PWAs.\footnote{Crimp, \textit{Melancholia and Moralism}, 87.}

ACT UP recognised the power that images held in their fight against HIV/AIDS and the immense negative impact that the wrong images could cause. In producing three works depicting honest images of the HIV/AIDS crisis from multiple perspectives, Bronson demonstrates a practice that is respectful of PWAs and the crisis that faced the queer community. Emotional, yet without seeking pity or causing panic, \textit{Felix, Jorge,} and AA Bronson, accurately and effectively convey a range of issues and realities that demonstrate the seriousness of the crisis at hand to viewers while assuring them that all hope was not lost.

\textbf{Conclusion}

Through a depiction of their homosexuality in \textit{Mondo Cane Kama Sutra} and \textit{P is for Poodle}, among other works, General Idea performed their homosexuality in a public sphere that was unaccepting of their identity and often ignored it outright. By producing more explicit images of their sexuality, the collective slowly, but effectively contributed to a redefining of social norms by forcing the media and the public to recognise and accept their identity. As the HIV/AIDS
crisis began to develop, General Idea’s attention was pulled away from gay liberation and towards a growing crisis that stigmatised those already most at risk within our communities and threatened the lives of countless individuals around the world as a result of a lack of government funding and inaction by the medical community. In the distribution of their *Imagevirus* in both gallery and public spaces of North America and Europe, the artists played a crucial role in spreading awareness among hundreds of thousands of people who viewed the campaign. Through a repetition of advertisement-style images, General Idea primed each of them to change their perceptions of the virus and become more open to communities who had been stigmatised and outcast from society. Processing the loss of his partners, AA Bronson was forced to cope with the end of General Idea and start anew as a solo artist. Through *Untitled (for General Idea)* and his photographs *Felix, June 5, 1994; Jorge, February 3, 1994; and AA Bronson, August 22, 2000*; Bronson effectively demonstrated the realities and human impacts of the HIV/AIDS crisis from a deeply personal perspective that would resonate with viewers around the world.

When considering art that deals with queer issues, it is important to also recognise the type of representation being offered and the implications of that representation. In *The Queer Art of Failure*, Jack Halberstam asserts that queer individuals are often deemed failures by society because of their inability to adhere to social norms such as traditional families and immoral conduct. Further, queer culture has a tendency to adhere to a “gay camp canon,” and so through a “short list of favored canonical writers, the gay male archive binds itself to a narrow range of affective responses.” As a result, it often fails to represent or respond to critical issues in a more serious and effective way. While General Idea’s *Mondo Cane* and *P is for Poodle*...
employ camp humour and a subversive homosexual undertone to bring their identity to the public and the *Imagevirus* campaign used art historical canon to spread awareness of HIV/AIDS, the possibilities for agency and political influence can be limited in this type of work. As Halberstam argues, by incorporating more diverse subjects and references, cultural acts have the potential to produce an equally diverse range of emotional and affective responses including despair, loneliness, and rage. Now turning to an examination of the work of Andy Fabo and Tim Jocelyn, we can witness an approach to resolving queer issues in Toronto that incorporates more personal and affective images in an elaboration of subjectivation, queer intimacy, and the realities of the HIV/AIDS crisis.
Chapter 3: 
Andy Fabo, Tim Jocelyn, and ChromaZone: Trauma and Community

Introduction

Through the course of the 1970s, an identifiable gay community began to form in Toronto despite attempts by the police and much of greater society to keep its members in the closet. As George Hislop recalls in the documentary, *Track Two — Enough is Enough*, it had been police policy to go after individuals in parks and washrooms throughout the city and, through entrapment, acted as agents provocateurs to arrest gay men on deceptive charges.\(^{168}\) Continuing this practice into the late 1970s, the police became anxious of the growing homosexual community that was rallying around a number of organizations, including The Body Politic Collective, a group of gay and lesbian men and women who produced *The Body Politic* magazine from 1971-1987. By the time The Body Politic Collective founded the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives in 1973 (now The ArQuives) and the magazine’s reach grew across North America, it could no longer be played off as merely a small collection of radical individuals.\(^{169}\) The Metropolitan Toronto Police Force’s raid of the offices of *The Body Politic* magazine in 1977 was the first of many attacks on the city’s gay community and aimed to counter a community that was becoming more cohesive and publicly visible in their fight for rights, representation, and acceptance.

\(^{169}\) Hislop, *Track Two*. 

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The bathhouse raids of 1978, 1979, and 1981 continued the police’s militaristic attacks on the gay community and those places which were entirely theirs, spaces that were meant to allow them relative security and safety from abuse and homophobia. The first bathhouse raid in Toronto occurred on December 9, 1978. That night, plainclothes police officers raided The Barracks, which they alleged was a common bawdy house, and charged twenty-three men as found-ins and five men, including artist Andy Fabo, as keepers.\textsuperscript{170} In this chapter, I will elaborate upon some of the realities of these state-ordered attacks on Toronto’s sites of gay organization through a Foucauldian analysis of images and artworks focusing on the police’s surveillance and punishment of the city’s gay community. Further, an analysis of the work of Tim Jocelyn, Fabo’s partner and co-founder of the ChromaZone collection, reveals the ability for textile-based works to illustrate the struggles of queer identity and the need for collaborative practices that support inclusive communities. Through both Jocelyn and Fabo’s work, an examination of the emotive and affective potential of artistic responses to the HIV/AIDS crisis reveals the immense potential of diverse mediums and narratives to connect with viewers in an elaboration of societal norms and activist response.

The Criminalization of the Gay Community and the Metropolitan Police Force

As the February 1979 cover of The Body Politic (fig. 3.1) demonstrates, the first of the bathhouse raids was seen as a continuation of the police’s attack on its offices and one of a number of coordinated threats that were impacting the gay community at the time. In the cover image, a young man attempts to cover his nude body with a towel as a police officer confronts him during

\textsuperscript{170} Jackson and Persky, \textit{Flaunting it!}, 274-75.
Fig. 3.1 The Body Politic (Cover), February 1979.
a raid, illustrating the humiliation of the attacks and the misconduct of the city’s officers. Surrounding the image, various headlines demonstrate that while the raid of The Barracks and community response to it was a critical issue for the gay liberation movement, they were still facing the implications of the raid of *The Body Politic* and the ensuing legal battle over supposed immorality and indecency. At the same time, gay community members also feared what they believed to be a serial killer targeting gay men in the city. The fear and resilience of the emergent gay and lesbian community in the face of not only their fellow citizens, but the police who were meant to protect them, yet persecuted them instead, becomes all too clear in this snapshot of queer life and culture as the 1970s came to a close in Toronto.

In his analysis of systems of discipline and punishment, Michel Foucault considers the eighteenth-century French practice of public executions. I argue that many of these theories also pertain to Metropolitan Toronto Police Force relations with the gay community and, further, that the bathhouse raids can be understood as a public corporal punishment of Toronto’s gay community as a whole. Public discourse within Toronto, and Canada more generally, during the 1970s and 80s reveals that homosexuality and the bathhouses were heavily opposed by police forces, politicians, and members of the general public.

Of the proposed changes to the Criminal Code of Canada to legalize homosexuality under specific conditions, Créditiste Party member Gérard Laprise stated: “the duty of the government should be to protect these individuals by treating their sickness like that of any person…. With the appropriate means we can control homosexuality since we recognize and admit that it is a sickness.” The legal discourse was thus underwritten with a central metaphor of sickness

(homosexuality) and immunity (identification and control of sickness) by which to consider the government’s responsibility to the gay community. Along with police opposition to the legalisation of homosexuality and the subsequent raids, the judicial system worked to expose, control, and discipline the gay community during this period. For Foucault:

the criminal designated as the enemy of all, whom it is in the interest of all to track down, falls outside the pact, disqualifies himself as a citizen and emerges, bearing within him as it were, a wild fragment of nature; he appears as a villain, a monster, a madman, perhaps, a sick and, before long, ‘abnormal’ individual. It is such that, one day, he will belong to a scientific objectification and to the treatment that is correlative to it.¹⁷²

Through repeated social, political, and judicial attacks, homosexuals were identified as criminals by various groups, including the Metropolitan Toronto Police Force, who contributed to the development of a supposed need to control and treat this deviant group.

In the raiding of bathhouses and meting out a spurious persecution of Toronto’s gay community, the police force engineered a punishment equal to an act of terror that would affirm their own power to normativize the social system as theorised in Foucault’s Discipline and Punish.¹⁷³ The raids served as public executions of members of the gay community in a symbolic sense; they held a juridico-political function that re-asserted the power of the state.¹⁷⁴ The raids not only exerted the law in acts of vengeance, but were, more precisely acts which “could suspend both law and vengeance.”¹⁷⁵ In meting out acts of physical punishment directly upon the

¹⁷² Foucault, Discipline and Punish, 101.
¹⁷³ Foucault, 49.
¹⁷⁴ Foucault, 49.
¹⁷⁵ Foucault, 53.
bodies of members of the gay community, the police strengthened their own power and further identified homosexuals as participants in an offense against the state, an act of civil war which carried with it the imperative to be met with vengeance and punishment. Through their raids, the police subjected the bodies of homosexuals, securing own role as agents of control, while constituting the community as guilty, transgressive bodies. As I argue earlier in this thesis, these acts of subjection also produced a discourse of normativity in and through the criminalization of homosexuality.

Fig. 3.2 Paul Aboud, “The Barracks,” in The Body Politic, February 1979.

176 Foucault, 57.
“The Barracks” (fig. 3.2), a cartoon published in the February 1979 issue of *The Body Politic*, criticizes the Metropolitan Toronto Police Force’s raid of The Barracks bathhouse. A police officer is seen in full uniform, turning away from a barred cell door and handcuffs hanging on the wall, one arm covering his eyes in disgust. The officer exclaims: “HOW SICK! HOW DEPRAVED! HOW CRU-ELL!,” above a caption that states: “Item: Police astounded to find cell and handcuffs in raid.” Through a satirical mirroring of the mise-en-scène of the prison, the cartoon implicates the police in a scene of homoerotic engagement, thus blurring the lines between gay criminal and law enforcement officer. For Judith Butler, a reading of Foucault’s *History of Sexuality* and *Discipline and Punish* reveals that “the repressive function of the law is undermined precisely through becoming itself the object of erotic investment and excitation. Disciplinary apparatus fails to repress sexuality precisely because the apparatus itself is eroticized, becoming the occasion for the incitement of sexuality and, therefore, undoing its own repressive aims.”¹⁷⁷ When the discourse of power is working against a non-normative sexuality, then the subjectivation of that group requires that the sexuality be acknowledged, which in turn contributes to the very forming of that sexuality.

In attempting to persecute homosexuality, the Metropolitan Toronto Police Force validated and recognised the existence of the gay community.¹⁷⁸ Further, the police implicated themselves within the gay community through these actions, and in doing so constituted themselves in relation to homoeroticism, a scenario which “The Barracks” makes clear through the blurring of police and homoerotic paraphernalia and an officer who is not truly shocked by what he sees. In the production of “The Barracks” and other critiques of the police’s persecution

¹⁷⁸ Butler, 103.
of the gay community, *The Body Politic* participated in an eroticisation of the police in a reverse-discourse of producing and validating homosexuality and homoeroticizing the actions of those officers who most fiercely denounced the gay community. As a result, these cultural productions aided in further strengthening the identity of the gay community in Toronto and establishing homosexuality as symbiotic with normative society.

**Homoeroticizing Toronto’s Finest**

Andy Fabo, a Toronto-based artist, led Toronto’s figurative painting movement in the early 1980s, while also operating in the media of drawing, installation, and digital art since the 1970s. A founder of the ChromaZone collective, Fabo is a critical figure in Toronto’s art history. Through his early paintings, Fabo responded to his own arrest at The Barracks as well as his general feelings of despair and loneliness as a member of Toronto’s emergent gay community. In his 1980-exhibition at The Funnel in Toronto, *Self Portraits of an Alleged Keeper of a Common Bawdy House*, Fabo responded to his experience of being arrested in the 1978-raid on The Barracks. The title references the charges laid against him, which were still before the courts at the time of the exhibition. It would take three years for the court case to conclude, finding Fabo and his employers guilty under the common bawdy house laws.\(^{179}\) Fabo recalls working in “the cages,” an area near the entrance designed to look like a jail cell, when a group of men started

forcing their way into The Barracks, confusing him until he realised that they were officers dressed in civilian clothes who began what would be the first of many raids in Toronto.  

One of the works shown in the exhibition, *Mug Shot #1* (fig. 3.3), is a self-portrait that responds directly to his arrest in the style of a traditional police mugshot. Painted in black and white, Fabo is depicted in full profile from his shoulder to the top of his head, covering the majority of the canvas. Rather than meeting the viewer’s gaze, Fabo stares directly to our right, an expression of anger and defiance on his face. Through the profile mug shot form, the viewer is able to examine Fabo without meeting his gaze as they assume the position of the subjectors who have deemed him a criminal and punish him for his sexuality.

Fig. 3.3. Andy Fabo, *Mug Shot #1*, 1979.

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Along the bottom of the work, a grid with 5 squares, each a different colour, depicts each of Fabo’s fingerprints. Markers of Fabo’s identity, his fingerprints are depicted on a spectrum of colours not in a rainbow, but instead a near perfect match to the standard colour bars used in television broadcasting to adjust equipment to display videos correctly. From the rise of colour television, the bars, known as SMPTE colour bars, became incorporated into North American art, particularly in the work of British Columbia artist Michael Morris whose work influenced that of General Idea and, in turn, Fabo. For Toronto-based critic Earl Miller:

Entirely absent in Canadian art history is a history of queer abstraction that Morris arguably initiated, a history that included General Idea (whose Colour Bar Lounge, 1979, was influenced by Morris’s and Trasov’s project…). Morris’s paintings, like General Idea’s installations and paintings, blur boundaries between pictures and the public in abandonment of strict, largely heterosexual formalism. 181

In the use of this colour pattern in Mug Shot #1, Fabo nods to the queer abstraction of other artists working in the same period, the unsettling of heteronormativity in North American art, and the blurring of boundaries between mass media, art, and the public.

Richard Rhodes, an art writer and critic, characterises Fabo’s early works through their depictions of “a state of alienation, with the display of an environment that seems isolating and unaccepting,” an affective dimension that is present in Mug Shot #1. 182 Through this work, Fabo depicts the moment in which he has been identified, as Foucault would argue, as an enemy of the

state. As the acts of homosexual men were deemed inappropriate and in conflict with 
supposed social order, the police responded with an attack meant to demonstrate their 
lawlessness and abnormality. By raiding the bathhouses and arresting found-ins and keepers, 
police aimed to make an example of those captured, just as public executions were intended to 
do in the eighteenth century. The scene of arrest and judicial processing of the criminal can be 
recognised as the site at which gay people were rendered enemies of the state through processes 
of designation, or identification, and representation, like the mug shots and the finger prints 
captured by the Metropolitan Toronto Police Force.

Fabo reclaims one aspect of this scene of discipline, however, by returning to his 
mugshot, a moment of shame and guilt, and repurposing it to recover his own identity, and his 
very body. For Foucault, the prison is materialised and produced by power, and the body of the 
criminal is formed and framed by the soul, as an instrument of that power. In Mug Shot #1 
Fabo reverses the discourse produced by his arrest, to shift the power relations between himself, 
as a homosexual man, and the Metropolitan Toronto Police Force. Power is not held by any 
individual or organization, but rather spread throughout a series of force relations that, through 
discourse, produces power, however, that discourse can also serve as a point of resistance to that 
power, it “undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it.” By 
recapturing the moment of his mugshot, Fabo alters the relations that constitute the production of 
the criminal homosexual, and instead infuses the image with the heated desire of the police to

183 Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 57.
184 Foucault, 57, 101.
185 Foucault, 58.
subject him as the object of their desiring gaze, a dynamic that is elaborated in this exchange of power and control. Through his subjectivation and the exertion of control against him by the state power, Fabo repitches his own sexuality within the scene of subjectivation in order to counter the power structures that work to oppress him. Through the discourse that he produces in this work, Fabo shifts the power dynamic of his own arrest, revealing the scaffold that maintains the power and reversing the force relations at play. Foucault states that “silence and secrecy are a shelter for power,” and so, through Mug Shot #1, Fabo refuses to maintain silent, and produces a work that extends the discourse beyond that of officer and criminal, countering the narrative and power at play in a forceful assertion of his own power.

In *The Queer Art of Failure*, cultural theorist Jack Halberstam asserts that by resisting the temptation to focus on the gay male camp canon, artists would be able to produce a much wider range of affective responses through their work. Fabo is just one example of artists from this period employing a more emotionally and affectively engaged practice. As Brian Massumi asserts in “The Autonomy of Affect,” an affective response is both primal and intensely experienced by individuals through the intensity and amplification of images. The figure’s profile form and his visible anger resonate in the viewer through Mugshot #1 and, as Halberstam suggested, an affective response is produced as the viewer experiences the conflict between Fabo’s subjection and the attempts of judicial power to normativize him through punishment. The depiction of Fabo’s pain, anger, and subjectivation functions as a reclaiming of his body and identity that not only conveys his emotions and ideas, but amplifies them, resonating in the

188 Foucault, 101.
viewer as the intensity multiplies. Rather than a purely emotional response to the narrative and pain of *Mug Shot #1*, the affect produced by the image provokes a heightened response that exceeds mere empathy through the conflict presented in artistic and cultural responses to the bathhouse raids. Moving beyond surface-level criticisms and fact or emotion, the affective conflict between Fabo’s subjection in his arrest following the bathhouse raids and the dominant apparatus of representation that subjects him through his criminalisation, demonstrates the contrasting narratives which resonate with the viewer.

*Mug Shot #1* can also be related to the belief that sexual identity could be identified by physiognomy, another mode of designation of the homosexual through facial features and gestures that marked the body as gay. Rooted in the fourth and fifth centuries BCE in the work of Aristotle and Plato, physiognomy came to peak popularity in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as scientists as well as artists aimed to determine personality traits through an individual’s facial features. In the late eighteenth century, Johann Caspar Lavater published a collection of essays on physiognomy which brought the topic to popular attention. His book, *Physiognomische Fragmente*, incorporated plates contributed by Fuseli and William Blake, bringing art and physiognomy together. In his contemporary analysis of physiognomy, Richard Twine asserts that although the pseudo-science has been rejected in recent years, it persists in some form through popular culture and our conceptions of relationships between good and evil, and beautiful and ugly. For Twine, “the naturalized idea that we inevitably judge by

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191 Twine, 70-71.
192 Twine, 72.
appearance is challenged by this historicization of physiognomic perception. Contemporary assertions of truth still rely upon this physiognomic logic that allows us all too easily to mark out others and carelessly categorize them.”

The study of physiognomy has been revitalised in recent years in our believed ability to determine an individual’s sexuality simply by looking at them, a skill colloquially referred to as “gaydar.” Recent studies suggest that sexuality can be determined through a person’s facial features with at least some accuracy, although these studies are not without their critics. Most alarmingly, recent studies have attempted to use artificial intelligence (AI) to determine the sexuality of men and women depicted in photographs, with one study suggesting AI’s “gaydar” is more accurate than humans’. However, researchers from Google and Princeton have argued that the success of the study has more to do with the photography and grooming habits of gay and heterosexual men and women than it does with the physical or biological differences that constitute physiognomy. These issues raise alarm for many, particularly the LGBTQ2S+ community, given the potential for corporations, communities, and governments to employ technologies of this sort in order to target queer individuals.

193 Twine, 82.
At the dawn of the gay liberation movement and leading into the 1980s, it was common for police forces to publicly identify and shame homosexual men who were charged for committing indecent acts or for attending bathhouses. Following the discovery of an alleged homosexual prostitution ring by “Morality Inspector” George Zhukow in 1975, Ottawa Police released the names, addresses, and occupations of eighteen customers of the group, leading one of the named men to commit suicide.196 Following the 1979-raid of The Barracks, the Metropolitan Toronto Police Force called the school boards of three teachers who had been arrested in the raid to inform them of that fact.197 The recording of personal identifying information including fingerprints and likeness in a mug shot upon arrest is itself a form of physiognomy that was critical in the corporal punishment of gay men. Despite this, Fabo’s Mug Shot #1 takes the police’s power to shame and “out” him as homosexual, reinstating the only agency available to him; to performatively re-enact the scene through a self-portrait. He represents his sexuality and depicts his own identity as well as the personal and collective trauma of the Metropolitan Toronto Police Force’s raid of The Barracks. When Fabo asked the police force for copies of his mugshots and fingerprints to use in his art following his arrest, his request was denied.198 Despite this, he pursued his project by drawing and painting the events and images of his arrest in works that bring his experiences of that disturbing night to the public through an alternative sensorial lens.

197 Lesbian and Gay History Group of Toronto, A History of the Relationship, 12.
Articulating Realities of Queer Desire under the Fear of Surveillance

Fabo was among the first gay artists working openly in Toronto and prominently featured homosexuality and even explicit male nudity in his works.\textsuperscript{199} Regarding his early work, Fabo stated: “it seemed particularly important at the time for me, a gay artist, to depict the object of desire, because it was missing. And it was a pretty radical act for the time.”\textsuperscript{200} In his paintings and drawings, male nudity and homosexuality are not hidden, but rather fully displayed. Fabo advocated for social acceptance of these images while also commenting on the way in which the media’s attention to homosexuality is often drawn solely to the sex acts themselves, which in turn define gay relationships in the public sphere.\textsuperscript{201} Openly articulating both his homosexual identity and the associated sex acts without shame, Fabo demonstrates the intimacy of gay relationships and creates a powerful statement of pride both in his sexuality and in queer social relations that was unmatched by other local artists at the time.

\textit{Surveillance} (fig. 3.4) depicts two nude men embracing on a bed as a television sits on a table behind them with a self-portrait of the artist on the screen. The man lying in bed furthest from the viewer is asleep, appearing calm, yet not quite peaceful, while the other man looks directly towards the viewer, making eye contact in a subdued expression of agitation. Neither figure is fully exposed to the viewer, intimately entangled as they are. Overall, a sense of unease imbues the scene as the viewer catches the men in a private moment in which we feel as though

\textsuperscript{199} R.M. Vaughan, “I Never Wanted to be a Ghetto Artist: A Conversation with Andy Fabo” in \textit{Andy Fabo} (Toronto: Museum of Canadian Contemporary Art, 2009), 10.
\textsuperscript{200} R.M. Vaughan, 10.
\textsuperscript{201} Michael Regan, Carolyn Bell Farrell, and Emmanuel Cooper, \textit{Andy Fabo and Micah Lexier} (London: Canada House Galleries, 1992), 12.
we do not quite belong, or we are not welcome. The tension of the painting is activated by the blonde-haired figure whose side-long glance confirms that the viewer’s gaze is an intrusion.

Further, Fabo subtly includes a self-portrait on the television screen, which adds to the disquiet, as the grainy, black and white figure contrasts with the colourful rendering of the figures and the rest of the work. Expanding upon the feeling of an unexpected and unwelcome encounter, the screen calls to mind concepts of surveillance and the intersections between public and private with regards to homosexuality. Contrasting the serious and subdued image of Fabo on the screen with the colourful, figurative sensuality of the couple, the work highlights the
differences between sensational media representations of homosexuality and gay sex and the realities that exist in the lived experiences of homosexual love and sexuality.

Upon viewing Surveillance, a number of lines of vision open up between and within the work as well as with the viewers themselves. The blonde-haired figure returns the invasive gaze of the viewer, aware of his role as subject of that gaze and a player in the scene of subjectivation. The viewer also makes contact with the figure in the television screen, grainy and difficult to make out, almost an anonymous figure, yet he fails to meet their gaze. Instead, he seems to participate in watching the reclining men, taking part in the observation and subjectivation of these calm, intimate figures. As such, a triangular relationship forms as the viewer watches the man on the television, who watches the men in bed, while the blonde-haired figure eyes the viewer. A cyclical relationship of surveillance, the work provokes a conscious consideration of the subjection and watching of the gay men at leisure in a private space that has been precipitously activated as open for public surveillance by the presence of the viewer. The brown-haired figure, however, breaks this cycle. Eyes closed, he is unaware of the outsider supervision that is occurring as he sleeps, a realization he would quickly make should he awaken and open his eyes to discover the gaze of the viewer.

Canadian sociologist and gay rights activist Gary Kinsman characterizes the relationship between the Metropolitan Toronto Police Force and the gay community in the 1980s as a battle between the public and the private, stating that “the police are trying to establish that gay baths, and male sex in parks and washrooms, is public sex and therefore subject to their direct intervention. The very institutions of the gay community would thus be rendered ‘public.’”202

Laud Humphreys’ *Tearoom Trade: Impersonal Sex in Public Spaces* provides a sociological analysis of the practices of men meeting for sex in public washrooms in metropolitan centres across the United States. His pivotal analysis of a previously unrecognised area of sexuality and deviance sociology revealed the widespread practice of meeting in “tearooms” for sex as well as the ways in which this practice was critical to the safety of the homosexual community and posed little threat to the general public.\(^{203}\)

In an interview with artist and documentarian Nancy Nicol, Fabo noted the social aspects of The Barracks which separated it from other establishments in Toronto given that men would discuss art and culture while visiting the baths there. A city of punk culture in art, politics and society at the time, The Barracks was also a place of sharing ideas. In the interview, Fabo recalls “opera queens” discussing the latest shows they had seen and Jorge Zontal discussing General Idea’s latest work and exhibitions going on around Toronto and in New York.\(^{204}\) Michel Foucault even visited The Barracks himself on numerous occasions and questioned Fabo about the events of the bathhouse, the raids, and the “vehicle of control” that had entered Fabo’s life.\(^{205}\)

Bruner’s report demonstrates that Toronto’s gay community relied upon the bathhouses and other public places to meet because of societal pressures and a need for safety, and yet the police attacked these spaces in order to exert social control over a group that they felt were acting indecently.\(^{206}\) In his analysis of photographs by Robert Mapplethorpe and Sherrie Levine, queer art historian Douglas Crimp comes to the conclusion that “difference, in our culture, *is*...”


\(^{204}\) Nicol, *The Bath Raids Toronto*.

\(^{205}\) Nicol, *The Bath Raids Toronto*.

\(^{206}\) Bruner, *Out of the Closet*, 56-60.
obscenity.” For example, Mapplethorpe’s photos of homoeroticism and BDSM subculture were adamantly opposed by politicians and largely right-wing individuals, particularly American Senator Jesse Helms who opposed homosexual art and fought to prevent congressional funding for gay HIV/AIDS safe sex education. While art has included heterosexual themes and female nudity for centuries, the inclusion of sexualised male nudity and homoeroticism appeared transgressive of heteronormative standards, and thus fell into the category of obscenity or pornography. By the same token, while Fabo’s images depicted intimacy, sexuality, and nudity, their difference in using male subjects was enough for many to feel personally attacked. In _Mug Shot #1_ and _Surveillance_, the reality of this relationship between difference and obscenity is all too clear through the arrest of Fabo in the raid of The Barracks and in the public shame of homosexuality in the 1970s and 80s. Despite this, Fabo’s works seek to normalise these displays of homosexuality and nudity that reveal the many similarities to heteronormative culture in the intimacy and importance of queer sexuality.

Fabo states that “covert gay work was different back then. To make work that didn’t picture the male body back then would have been just closeted work, which there was a lot of.” Although Fabo was criticized at times for his overt images of homoerotic sexuality, he consistently broke taboos against depicting homosexuality, a practice that allowed him to be considered a vanguard artist in a movement of artists depicting queer male subjectivity. In an act of resistance to cultural norms, Fabo illustrated his own homosexuality and the Metropolitan

\[207\] Crimp, _Melancholia and Moralism_, 163.
\[208\] Crimp, 156-157.
\[209\] Vaughan, “I Never Wanted to be a Ghetto Artist,” 11.
Toronto Police Force’s attack on the gay community. Defiantly depicting gay sexual acts and male nudity, Fabo participates in a performance of elaborating norms and developing new modes of aesthetic freedom in an act of socio-political agency, as defined by Butler.\textsuperscript{211} By openly representing gay desire, leisure, and sexuality, Fabo demonstrated both the ubiquity and victimization of homosexuality in a pivotal expression of resistance to heteronormative society. Through his work, Fabo inserted his gay identity into the public sphere at a time when homosexuality was considered illegal in public spaces and indecent even in private ones. His avant-garde depictions of homosexual desire and sexuality that cast gay men in a positive light led to an increase in other artists producing openly homosexual artworks, a “coming out of the closet,” that further extended the potential impact of this gay aestheticism.

In \textit{The History of Sexuality}, Foucault asserts that nineteenth-century social controls exerted on homosexuality and other “deviant” sexual acts were achieved through psychiatry, the legal system, and discourses that sought to oppose such “perverse” actions, however this also opened up the potential for a reverse discourse that would allow homosexuality to “speak in its own behalf.”\textsuperscript{212} Through the same vocabularies and medical categories that had labelled homosexuality as deviant and perverse, homosexuals could thus demand that it be accepted as legitimate.\textsuperscript{213} In \textit{Surveillance}, Fabo once again participates in a discourse of power, but in this case he speaks back against the marginalization and supposed deviancy of homosexuality through an image that asserts the intimacy and even normalcy of queer relationships. In the embrace of the nude figures, Fabo highlights not something obscene or perverse, but rather a

\textsuperscript{211} Butler, “Performative Agency,” 154-155.
\textsuperscript{212} Foucault, \textit{The History of Sexuality}, 101.
\textsuperscript{213} Foucault, 101.
loving connection that takes place in the privacy of a bedroom, but that which also extends into the public sphere in a statement of the realities of queer bonds.

Jacques Rancière’s “Paradoxes of Political Art,” from *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, asserts the potential of the quality of dissensus to produce an opportunity for politics and aesthetics to interact. This concept of dissensus manifests itself in Fabo’s work, particularly *Surveillance*, in order to encourage a reconsideration of accepted norms. For Rancière, it is often assumed that the political nature of an aesthetic work will be recognised by the viewer and lead to a political action in response, and yet this response is not inherent.\(^{214}\) Rancière states that the politics of aesthetics:

> re-frames the world of common experience as the world of a shared impersonal experience. In this way, it aids to help create the fabric of a common experience in which new modes of constructing common objects and new possibilities may be developed that are characteristic of the ‘aesthetics of politics.’\(^{215}\)

It is an aesthetic rupture of dissensus, a break between *sense* in a visual way and *sense of understanding* the aesthetic image which results in a reaction and a reconsidering of norms and practices.\(^{216}\) Through the foregrounding of male nudity, homosexuality, and affect, Fabo’s work produces this dissensus in the viewer as they are confronted with an unexpected, private scene.

*Surveillance* and *Mug Shot #1* provoke an affectual resonance with the viewer that synthesizes both normative and gay perspective. This in turn contributed to changing social norms regarding homosexuality in Toronto. By blurring the separations between public and


\(^{215}\) Jacques Rancière, 142.

\(^{216}\) Jacques Rancière, 139.
private in the bathhouses of Toronto and the trauma of arrest, and a bedroom, Fabo produces a dissensus that reveals the critical nature of these issues for the gay community in search of rights and representation. In both works, the viewer is an ambivalent observer, and yet we are invited by Fabo into those spaces, drawn into them; the former, one of distress, and the latter, one of quiet intimacy. Yet in both, the viewer witnesses a formalization of gay representation informed by both the normative perspective and that of the gay subject. Fabo invites the viewer to witness these moments and, through them, to participate in an altering of social norms and beliefs. In *Mugshot #1*, the “deviant” gay man in search of promiscuous sex at a bathhouse becomes instead a figure who has been victimized by the police, while the men whose embrace fills *Surveillance* reveal the quiet intimacy that is also common in gay relationships rather than the “obscenity” that often defines them. The difference of homosexuality which was at first obscene in the minds of the public, thus becomes normal through a performance of counter-cultural norms in public works.

**Community Collaboration for an Inclusive Space**

In February 1981, Fabo met artist Tim Jocelyn at the Barracks; the two became quick friends, working closely together until Fabo moved into Jocelyn’s loft on the third floor of the Marvel Pant Building in 1983 and they became partners. Working mostly in craft and textiles, Jocelyn’s works drew inspiration from cultures around the world and employed a multi-disciplinary practice of fashion and art. Both Fabo and Jocelyn sought an art scene in Toronto that would accept cultural diversity and acknowledge a broader range of styles, influences, and productions. Unable to find the art scene that they desired, Fabo and Jocelyn decided to form ChromaZone, a collective and artist-run gallery that would provide community and space in which to work and
develop their practice, in September 1981. Fabo and fellow artist and ChromaZone member Sybil Goldstein state, “ChromaZone championed inclusiveness, deliberately asking the question, ‘Whose work is being left out of the galleries even though it is more than worthy of being seen or heard?’”217 The collective came to include Oliver Girling, Rae Johnson, Tony Wilson, Hans Peter Marti, Fabo, and Goldstein, although Jocelyn was a frequent collaborator. Through the five years of ChromaZone’s existence, they exhibited more than 400 artists, with Fabo and Goldstein stating, “inadvertently we exhibited many artists who were First Nations, Asian, from South America, of various Middle Eastern backgrounds, from the Caribbean, lesbian, gay, and transsexual communities out of pure enthusiasm and interest rather than any cynical adherence to a politically-correct agenda.”218

As both an artist-run gallery located at 320 Spadina Avenue, and a collective, ChromaZone provided a real space and a community for artists that was free from the constraints of council funding, dealers, or established curators. Queering the boundaries between art, craft, and culture, ChromaZone’s interdisciplinary and multimedia exhibitions and fashion shows expanded Torontonians’ perceptions of what art was or could be. As fellow artist and writer, Bonnie Devine, reflects on the political atmosphere of gay liberation and the bathhouse raids in the early 1980s along with the development of ChromaZone:

Otherness was exalted, fiercely defended, and often brilliantly argued. Along with anger, a long-simmering playfulness erupted in unlikely places. The ensuing explosion of creativity made collaborators out of ChromaZone… Neither limited to gay members nor

218 Fabo and Goldstein, “A Brief History.”
identified as a gay organization, ChromaZone reflected and embraced this spirit of collaboration, inclusion, and celebration. A new constellation, a busy nexus of cultural collision and collusion formed in Toronto, in which gay politics, high-society sophistication, and low-rent cheek butted heads and coalesced in a series of connected events announcing the beginnings of a new sensibility.219

The work of ChromaZone fostered an inclusive space for artists of all genres, styles, and backgrounds to connect and experiment together while publicly exhibiting their work at locations throughout the city.

Among ChromaZone’s most important and well-known projects is the Chromaliving exhibition (figs. 3.5-6), installed in the former Harridge’s department store’s 10,000 square foot space on the street level of the Colonnade at the centre of Bloor-Yorkville’s premiere shopping district. The exhibition, which opened on October 19, 1983 and ran for three and a half weeks, was estimated to have drawn as many as 35,000 visitors to see hundreds of works produced by 150 artists.220 Curated by Fabo and Jocelyn, the exhibition was conceived as a parody of the Canadian National Exhibition’s annual Home Show. Chromaliving presented an eclectic mix of furniture, paintings, fashion, ceramics, sculpture, and more. While General Idea sought glamour by exhibiting in the traditional galleries and asserting that they were, in fact, glamorous, ChromaZone further queered the traditional narrative of an artist in search of glamour and acceptance. The collective produced their own exhibition in which they could fill a space with whichever artists and works they wanted as they developed a community of cultural innovators

and encouraged collaboration, multi-media works, and counter-cultural productions. As Jocelyn stated, “Ultimately Chromaliving was about bringing art to life – and about what can happen when 150 artists occupy a department store.”

Fig. 3.5 Chromaliving, The Colonnade, 1983.

Fig. 3.6. Chromaliving, The Colonnade, 1983.

The Artist-Curator and the Impact of Queer Craft Art

Among the many works exhibited were notable pieces such as General Idea’s *V.B. Gown No. 1* (fig. 3.8) and *V.B. Gown No. 2*, Fabo’s *Convicts Chair and Rug* (fig. 3.8), which produced a work similar to *Mug Shot #1* on the surface of a rug, as well as works by David Buchan, Jamelie Hassan, Patrick Thibert, Fastwürms, and curator Ihor Holubiszky. Tim Jocelyn’s participation in *Chromaliving* was not limited to that of a curator as his own works, including *Kandinsky Screen* (fig. 3.9), were exhibited and several of his wearable pieces were included in the fashion show. *Constructivist Coat* (fig. 3.10), modelled by Kim Angliss for *Chromaliving*, along with *Kandinsky Screen*, demonstrate Jocelyn’s tendency to layer fabrics of different colours, textures, and styles to produce appliqué works both wearable and decorative that drew on the work of contemporary artists, Russian constructivism, and global cultures. Stuart Reid states that it was Jocelyn’s experience with the costume department of the Stratford Festival that encouraged him to consider the performative aspects of clothing. 222 Jocelyn’s designs came to take on elements of ritual, events, role-playing, and sexuality that would transform the wearer through dresses and jackets that “emblazon the wearer with dynamic swaths of colour that proclaim strength and self-assurance.” 223 In his layering of fabrics, emblems, and motifs, Jocelyn mimicked the blend of cultures and artistic practice that had influenced him from around the world and that were swirling around him in Toronto in the 1980s.

223 Reid, 53.
Fig. 3.7 General Idea, *V.B. Gown #1* (far left), 1973.

Fig. 3.8 Andy Fabo, *Convicts Chair and Rug*, 1983.
Jocelyn’s textile works also speak to the common association between “craft” art techniques and femininity, and between feminine artistic practices and gay male artists. Numerous gay male Canadian artists have worked with textiles, embracing the femininity that gay men are often urged to hide. Further, gay culture has often been tied to the clothes that men, and women, wear whether it be leather, denim, or a white T-shirt. As gay personal ads, “tribes” on gay hookup application Grindr, or the art of Tom of Finland and others quickly reveal, fashion and sexuality have always been linked as visual markers of queerness and style.224 Further, craft practices such as embroidery, quilting, macramé, and pottery are unique from most

fine arts in that they are often community-based practices. Developed through the sharing of techniques and skills, collaborative projects, and shared spaces, craft arts are rarely solitary acts. Mimicking the queer community’s own search for like individuals and a community of sharing and support, craft arts rely on shared experience and a communal development (I will return to this topic in my analysis of Will Munro’s work in Chapter 4).

A celebratory quality can be seen particularly in his early works prior to the emergence of the AIDS crisis. Jocelyn’s *Wild Boys Shorts* (figs. 3.11-12) feature appliqué silhouettes of boxers cut from black and blue silks who wear shorts and gloves cut from brightly coloured leather. The waistband loudly declares “WILD BOYS,” one word each on the front and back of the garment.
Embodying the queerness of fashion and textile production as well as the fabrics and textures, *Wild Boys Shorts* takes this queerness one step further, as it references the “fetishization of the sports garment … common in gay male iconography.”\(^\text{225}\) Directly referencing the homoerotic undertones of men’s locker rooms and contact sports, *Wild Boys* participates in a queering and resignification of these spaces that seem most threatening to many gay men as outsiders in a space of toxic masculinity, and that unsettles the hypermasculinity of these spaces as they become homoeroticized.

Homosexuality, even when it has been accepted, has been relegated largely to the private sphere where it cannot threaten the heteronormative standards of society. For Eric Clarke, the acceptance of queer sexuality within the public sphere has been hindered through the maintenance of heteronormative familial relations as well as the understanding that erotic sexuality, which shapes much of queer identity and belonging, should remain in the private sphere.\(^\text{226}\) As a result, while intimacy and sexuality have become more a part of the public sphere, only those that adhere to heteronormative standards are allowed, forcing homosexual displays of intimacy and sexuality to remain “in the closet.” Jocelyn’s *Wild Boys Shorts* highlights these dichotomies of public and private, as well as homoeroticism in a work that questions our societal norms and values. By foregrounding the homoeroticism of public experience, societal boundaries of what kinds of intimacy and interaction are appropriate in the public sphere are called into question. Bridging the gap between public sex spaces and those that are inherently homoerotic, yet transgressively so, the shorts produce an appliquéd layering of narratives and imagery that queer the most basic elements of their form.  

\(^{225}\) Reid, “The Ascent of Icarus,” 58.  
\(^{226}\) Clarke, *Virtuous Vice*, 5.
Fig. 3.11 Tim Jocelyn, *Wild Boys Shorts* (Front), 1982.

Fig. 3.12 Tim Jocelyn, *Wild Boys Shorts* (Back), 1982.
By the mid 1980s, Jocelyn’s attention was also drawn to the growing HIV/AIDS crisis both in Toronto and in New York where Fabo held a residency at the P.S. 1 Studio in 1984-85. *Cities of the Red Night* (fig. 3.13), a silk and leather banner created by Jocelyn in 1984, is one of his clearest responses to the events of the HIV/AIDS crisis and the culture surrounding it. The title of the work is drawn from William S. Burroughs’ novel of the same name published in 1981 that, despite being written prior to the advent of the HIV/AIDS crisis, bears a striking similarity to the spread of the virus and the stigmatization of queer people that occurred in the years following its release.

Burroughs’ novel describes the events of a virus infecting homosexual men, revealing the social structures that mark the queer body as toxic and paradoxically providing a mode of
empowerment for gay men in their society. As Kendra Langeteig states:

He confronts, in particular, the horror of homosexual identity, configured as disorder or toxicity of the body politic, with a vengeance. Burroughs turns culture’s alignment of the homosexual with disorder on its head by affirming this negative construction, and uses this mythic contagion as a means of empowering his queer outlaws. Although the survivalist fantasy that he promotes with his ‘epidemic’ strategy is exclusively homosexual, his virtual optimism and humor provide an alternative to the bleak prognoses that we find in the postmodern requiems for mass culture.227

The narrative painfully reveals society’s stigmatisation of queer bodies and asserts that a resistance to this narrative is possible through rebellion. Burroughs’ intense parody of the queer body politic and the infectious potential of the gay men in his story ultimately demonstrates a means through which to counter these societal beliefs.228 For Langeteig, “Burroughs exploits culture’s negative inscription of the homosexual as a means of empowerment, effecting a reversal by making the figurative (invisible inscription) comically literal which, in turn, makes society’s control machinery ironically visible.”229 Not only was Burroughs’ Cities of the Red Night a critical influence for General Idea’s Imageviruses works, Jocelyn used the text to aid him in subtly illustrating the pain and anguish that had begun to envelop the queer community.

Jocelyn’s Cities of the Red Night is a tapestry that employs many of the artist’s hallmark techniques including the layering of silks in bright and metallic colours with leather to produce

scenes of nude men engaged in wrestling and holding a bow and a javelin. Mysterious, masked figures cross the scene as silver jets fly over the city skyline that forms the background of the image cut from warm tones of red and brown that produce an uneasy and apocalyptic tone, perhaps a nod to “the arrival of the AIDS plague into the gay man’s playground in the eighties?”

All of this drama, homoeroticism, and restlessness is foregrounded by a red-headed male figure, clad only in bright red, leather briefs who poses and seems almost to look directly at the viewer despite his featureless face (fig. 3.14). Uninvolved in the events surrounding him, yet

![Image of Tim Jocelyn's Cities of the Red Night (Detail), 1984.](image)

**Fig. 3.14** Tim Jocelyn, *Cities of the Red Night* (Detail), 1984.

present within them, the figure appears as if part of a somber scene; a gay man bound up in the plague and stigma of the 1980s of which he is not truly a part. The “playground” of liberation and sex positivity shattered by the reality of the pain, suffering, and discrimination of a global health crisis demonised, ignored, and left to penetrate an already marginalized community supposedly deserving of divine punishment.

In the production of textile-based works that highlighted the oppression and liberation of gay men as well as the HIV/AIDS crisis as the pandemic spread throughout the world in the 1980s, Jocelyn used a unique medium, one that was already the reason for his success in Toronto’s art and fashion scenes, to produce a distinctly queer perspective. Simultaneously working with Fabo and the ChromaZone collective in the production of an inclusive community and artistic space, his impact on Toronto’s queer communities and the development of artist-run culture in the city was critical in this period. In turning back to the work of Andy Fabo and the appropriation of historical imagery in the service of cultural activism, I will now engage with Fabo’s clearly articulated illustrations of the severity of the HIV/AIDS crisis and the emotional response of those whom it had most deeply affected.

**Fear and Abandonment in the Face of HIV/AIDS**

In 1984, Fabo produced one of the most compelling paintings of his career, an affectively charged representation titled *Craft of the Contaminated* (fig. 3.15). Mimicking Théodore Géricault’s influential nineteenth-century painting, *The Raft of the Medusa* (fig. 3.16), Fabo’s work depicts a group of men and women stranded on a raft in a sea of serpents. The raft tips and turns in the swirling serpents as its passengers attempt to remain on the precarious vessel, some of them falling into the water as those on board try to rescue them. In Fabo’s traditional
Fig. 3.15 Andy Fabo, *Craft of the Contaminated*, 1984.
figurative painting style, the expressive brushstrokes intensely convey the struggle of the figures as they fight to survive in a way that queers the medium of painting in an almost print-like appearance. Bearing visual similarities to the traditional style of Tom Thomson and the Group of Seven who are widely recognized as Canada’s defining artists and the creators of a Canadian style of painting, as well as the inclusion of a Canadian flag and a tipi, Fabo’s work is sited in a distinctly Canadian context.

Through this work, Fabo draws parallels between the HIV/AIDS crisis and the events of the passengers of the Méduse, a French naval ship that ran aground near Mauritania due to the actions of an incompetent captain who had been appointed, despite his lack of experience, because he favoured the monarchy. More than one hundred passengers were forced to take
refuge on a simple raft on which they were alone at sea for fifteen days. The tale of the raft of the *Méduse* became popular as the mere fifteen survivors recounted the tragic and disturbing stories of their fellow passengers falling into the sea, becoming injured, starving, and resorting to cannibalism in an attempt to survive. *Craft of the Contaminated* uses these events to demonstrate the emotions and responses of those in the gay and HIV/AIDS communities at the peak of the crisis in which they had been largely ignored and abandoned by politicians, medical officials, and society. People living with HIV/AIDS had been forsaken by those whose responsibility it was to care for them, particularly among the most marginalized and forgotten in our society. Describing the work, Fabo states: “If we don’t have the where-with-all for real survival we at least have the image of survival down pat. There’s no point in arguing who of the artists here caught what from whom; etiology hardly seems to matter at this point. We are all carriers and the waves incessantly pound against our raft.” For Fabo, how the crisis came to be, what caused it, or amongst whom it was spreading was irrelevant, the stigmatisation and demonization of “risk groups” that become “guilt groups,” as Frankenberg suggested, does nothing to improve the situation or stop the spread of the virus.

Through this depiction of an abandoned shipwreck, we are reminded of the efforts of the queer and HIV/AIDS communities to fight for their own survival through the formation of organizations to advocate for increased funding and to provide support to those with HIV/AIDS through care and access to medication. Through groups like AIDS Action Now! and the AIDS Committee of Toronto, the community was able to take its survival into their own hands and

save themselves in the midst of the swirling sea of serpents that threatened their survival unless an intervention was made.\textsuperscript{232} Through the development of a queer community in Toronto and a refocusing of attention from gay liberation to the spread of HIV/AIDS, these organizations and many others intervened in social, political, and medical debates despite being ignored by many in positions of power. By working collectively, these individuals not only supported one another, but ensured progress for all people living with HIV/AIDS and created lasting change through increased funding and awareness while reducing stigma.

It is important, however, to also consider those who were further marginalized and ignored even within the queer and HIV/AIDS community as they were faced with the crisis. Dr. Alan Li, an openly gay physician, HIV/AIDS activist, and former medical director of Casey House Hospice, recalls the unique struggles faced by Toronto’s queer Asian community in the 1980s as they were isolated from the larger HIV/AIDS community.\textsuperscript{233} When seeking support, Asian men with HIV/AIDS were often further stigmatised by grassroots organizations like ACT because they were not familiar with the Asian community and did not know how to adequately respond to their unique needs. HIV+ Asian men were typically encouraged to instead seek supports in the Asian community who remained largely homophobic at the time and offered little help to the men in need.\textsuperscript{234} As a result, groups such as the Toronto Chinese Health Education Committee, Gay Asians Toronto, and the Southeast Asian Service Centre’s Vietnamese AIDS Project were formed, and in 1994 combined to establish the Asian Community AIDS Services

\textsuperscript{232} Kinsman, “AIDS Activism,” 320.
\textsuperscript{233} Nancy Nicol, “Interview with Dr. Alan Li on the AIDS Response, Racism and Barriers, and the Founding of ACAS,” The ArQuives (formerly the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives), https://vimeo.com/190133267.
\textsuperscript{234} Nicol, “Interview with Dr. Alan Li.”
(ACAS) in order to adequately serve their own communities which had been excluded from the larger groups and to provide services tailored to the unique needs of Toronto’s Asian HIV/AIDS community.\textsuperscript{235}

Throughout the HIV/AIDS crisis numerous groups including women, Indigenous communities, people of colour, and immigrant populations were further marginalized as their needs were ignored by larger organisations concerned with only the broader issues of the crisis. Through community organizations like the Asian Community AIDS Services, as well as 2 Spirited People of the First Nations and the Black Coalition for AIDS Prevention (Black CAP), these marginalized groups were able to develop community to support one another despite being excluded from larger queer and HIV/AIDS narratives. Moving forward, a conscious recognition of these groups, their unique experiences, and their untold histories are critical to ending the continuing HIV/AIDS crisis and ensuring equity for all.

Fabo’s \textit{Craft of the Contaminated} shows this abandonment experienced by some of the most marginalized groups of our society at the peak of the HIV/AIDS crisis both generally and when applied to smaller groups like the Asian community in Toronto. Uncertain of their future or whether anyone will help them in their tragic isolation, the figures work to save one another. In Fabo’s version, the slave who waves a flag to mark the sighting of land off in the distance, announcing their impending rescue and hope for survival in Géricault’s earlier work is instead replaced by a grey, modernist figure who waves a burning Canadian flag over his head. The land that he sees in the distance, however, is not truly there, but an image on a television screen. A rosy picture produced by the media to suggest that all was not truly lost and that the HIV/AIDS

\textsuperscript{235} Nicol, “Interview with Dr. Alan Li.”
crisis was not of serious concern, the television screen marks the avoidance of the media to seriously confront reality, leaving the viewer to wonder whether the passengers’ rescue or survival is a real possibility in this case. Is the land and refuge merely a mirage, or an image that misleads the figures to a false-hope for rescue from outside sources? And, reflecting thirty-five years later, we must ask whether rescue and support has ever arrived for the isolated raft of those living with HIV/AIDS.

Conclusion
By depicting their personal and collective struggles with gay liberation and the HIV/AIDS crisis in ways that alter affective reception, while simultaneously developing a community of support, Andy Fabo, Tim Jocelyn, and the ChromaZone collective demonstrated the gains that could be made through artistic practice. Both individually and as communities, they responded to their own suffering and the events surrounding them, countering traditional narratives by homoeroticizing the perpetrators of this violence against the queer community and producing politically and socially impactful art. Through gay liberation, the bathhouse raids, and the HIV/AIDS crisis, community-focused artists like Fabo, Jocelyn, and ChromaZone depicted queer subjectivity and, in so doing, altered the socio-political norms that marginalized them in order to achieve autonomy over their own bodies and spaces.

Despite the work of bold and influential artists like Fabo, Jocelyn, and ChromaZone, however, tense relations between the queer community and the Toronto Police, and a lack of recognition of the continuing HIV/AIDS crisis persist to this day. While some progress has been made, the bathhouse raids of the late 1970s and early 1980s and the peak of the HIV/AIDS crisis mark only two brief moments in a long history of issues for queer Torontonians that continues in
tense relationships, oppression, and stigma. Now, we continue as I turn my attention to more recent works by artist and community activator Will Munro whose works incorporate a diversification of Toronto communities and a recognition of the critical relationship between queerness and HIV/AIDS. Through inclusive representation and the building of a queer, punk community, Munro demonstrates the importance, as well as the potential, of artistic representations of queer intimacy and the realities of the HIV/AIDS crisis in contemporary times.
Chapter 4:  
Will Munro: An Artistic Practice of Community Building

Introduction

An artist, LGBTQ2S+ activist, and club promoter, Will Munro was a prominent member of Toronto’s queer community from the late 1990s until his death in 2010. Influenced by the punk movement, Munro’s practice combined queer and punk aesthetics both in his multi-media and textile works as well as in his role as a DJ, club promoter, and restaurant owner. More than just an artist, he was a community builder, working to develop a queer community with which he could identify, and which accepted people of all backgrounds and identities. Working in the years following gay liberation and the peak of the HIV/AIDS crisis, Munro’s frequent use of queer imagery recalls the events of the 1970s and 80s. Reminding contemporary communities of the oppression that queer individuals faced, as well as their fight for rights and representation, the work of Will Munro also recognises our current position and looks forward, to develop queer community and continue fighting for LGBTQ2S+ rights and action against HIV/AIDS.

In his analysis of homoeroticism and the public sphere, Eric Clarke argues that contemporary queer media has turned away from the overt, activist tactics of the 1970s and 80s for a more commercially viable system of assimilation of queer and mainstream cultures. More radical organizations like ACT UP, and The Body Politic, have been usurped by larger, commercial groups such as the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) and the Human Rights Campaign as well as magazines like Out and The Advocate that have largely

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236 Clarke, Virtuous Vice, 49.
congratulated cultural industries for improved representations of queer individuals while ignoring the importance of a critical consciousness towards queer representation in the public realm.\footnote{Clarke, 49.}

As Rodger Streitmatter states in \textit{Unspeakable: The Rise of the Gay and Lesbian Press in America}, a comprehensive analysis of a wide range of queer publications spanning the twentieth century, “the lesbian and gay press has published a distinct brand of journalism committed to affirming the values of the community it serves, while documenting a shocking record of society’s homophobia.”\footnote{Streitmatter, \textit{Unspeakable}, ix.} Early lesbian and gay publications operated as forums for readers to actively participate in the formation of issues, articulate the ideologies of the queer community, educate readers on legal issues, and develop readers into a unified political body.\footnote{Streitmatter, 11, 36, 42, 71.} And yet, mass media has in recent years turned the queer community into a commercially viable demographic. As Clarke argues, “This demographic, the mythically well-to-do lesbian and gay market segment, is organized as a liberal-centrist voter bloc, and known best by its supposedly superior taste, interest in fashion and music, frequent vacations, brand-name loyalty—\textit{in short, its cultivation of a consumer culture ‘lifestyle.’}”\footnote{Clarke, \textit{Virtuous Vice}, 50.} Attempting to establish a certain queer normativity, mainstream queer culture assimilates diverse communities into an overly positive and harmless group that can easily merge with mass culture.

Similarly, Halberstam states in his argument for a more radical acceptance of queer failure that it is this rejection of the dark realities of queerness that “results in the perky

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\item \footnote{Clarke, 49.}
\item \footnote{Streitmatter, \textit{Unspeakable}, ix.}
\item \footnote{Streitmatter, 11, 36, 42, 71.}
\item \footnote{Clarke, \textit{Virtuous Vice}, 50.}
\end{itemize}
depictions of lesbians in *The L Word* or the reduction of gay men in film and on TV to impossibly good-looking arbiters of taste.” In order to achieve accurate and affective representations of queerness both for queer communities and mainstream culture, the realities of oppression and liberation and the fight for funding and medical treatment in the face of HIV/AIDS must be effectively communicated and substantively interpreted. As I will show, it continues to be the activist and affectively charged depictions of queerness, largely through community interventions in visual culture and art worlds that possess the greatest potential for the further development of queer communities and the achievement of social and political change in the public sphere.

Crafting Memorials in Textiles, the AIDS Quilt, and Will Munro’s Underwear

Munro’s earliest exhibitions were largely formed of textile-based works that, much like Tim Jocelyn’s clothing items and banners, used appliquéd fabrics and embellishments of all types. Through his own banners and clothing items, Munro developed surprising patterns and compelling narratives that often depict important figures of the queer and punk movements. Possessing a truly encyclopedic knowledge of queer and punk history, Munro used his art to impart his knowledge on viewers and the communities that he was attempting to build in Toronto at the time. In the early 2000s, when the HIV/AIDS crisis was fading from public consciousness and gay liberation had been achieved in the minds of many in mainstream culture, Munro’s works emphasized the critical importance of figures like Klaus Nomi, Leigh Bowery, General

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Idea, and Andy Warhol, and the continuing HIV/AIDS crisis through appliquéd textiles, prints, and multi-media works (figs. 4.1-4).

Fig. 4.1 Will Munro, *Total Eclipse*, 2005.

Fig. 4.2 Will Munro, *Leigh Bowery*, 2005.
Fig. 4.3 Will Munro, *Dead Guys*, 2005.

Fig. 4.4 Will Munro, *untitled*, 2010.
Aside from his work in Toronto’s queer and punk communities, Munro is best known for his many works composed of men’s underwear that have been augmented and embellished—essentially queered—in countless ways. From men’s briefs appliquéd with band tees, to crocheted briefs, to mesh, sequined, and beaded underwear made from materials in all colours and patterns, Munro’s briefs are as unique as each member of the community he fostered (fig. 4.5). While sewing, embroidery, and other textile-based crafts have often been deemed feminine arts, and later tied to the work of gay men, as I discussed previously, Munro chose these media for different reasons. As Scott Treleaven suggests in his analysis of an exhibition at the Textile Museum of Canada in 2003 that featured textile works produced by queer men, “Queer culture, like all subcultures, is marked by its ability to re-appropriate or physically adapt mainstream and middle-class commodities for its own use.” While Munro stated that he was certainly influenced by feminist artists, it was never the interplay between femininity and queerness that drew him to craft, but rather the hand-made, do-it-yourself process and aesthetic of these art forms. A concept often tied to punk and queer aesthetics, the DIY process allows for Munro’s works to possess a hand-made quality, elaborating a distinctive style in his works and contributing to the multi-layered messages conveyed within. In this way, he re crafts everyday textiles to embody the diversity of communities while conveying notions of queer intimacy, punk subculture, and LGBTQ2S+ identity. Within the fabrics, decorations and forms of his works, Munro’s crafted works alter our expected interactions with fine art in an embodiment of community ideals that he holds.

Fig. 4.5 Will Munro, various underwear works, c. 2000.
The fact that Munro’s work took the form of men’s underwear and not banners, coats, or other clothing items reveals the underlying systems of masculinity and queerness, public and private that were central to his practice. For Luis Jacob, an artist and friend of Munro, the underwear was associated “with the intimate domains of masculine vulnerability, pleasure, shame, and sexual energy. To display underwear in an art gallery – in a gesture akin to ‘airing dirty laundry’ – is to endow these experiences with a public dimension.”244 Similar to Jocelyn’s fetishization and queering of male sports in *Wild Boys Shorts*, Munro’s underwear works embody the intersections of masculinity, femininity, queerness, and homoeroticism within a definitively masculine form that unsettles traditional systems of gender and sexuality.

An accessible and mass-produced form, standard underwear became the blank canvas on which an expansive range of individualities could take shape. As Emelie Chhangur and Philip Monk suggest, “Underwear was generic (clinical, sterile, repressed), but it could be exposed, individualized, and animated … if you put people in them.”245 Through the act of photographing a variety of figures wearing his creations with a polaroid camera, Munro’s embroidered, crocheted, and bedazzled underwear took on an even more personal and performative tone that brought his works to life (figs. 4.6-7). Clearly articulating the individual nature of each of his pairs of underwear, the photographs and the figures in them allow for an even greater bending of gendered and sexualised spaces and forms.

Further, Jacob explains that the underwear “suggested an anonymous collective of male gendered experience: from the exposure of gym-class change-rooms, to the mutual explorations of pubescent bodies in parents’ basements, to life as adults looking for love amidst the reality of AIDS.” Encapsulating the fear of being “outed” in the hyper-masculine setting of a locker room, the exploration and homoerotics of queer sexuality, and the permeation of HIV/AIDS throughout all aspects of queer life and sexuality in the decades following the peak of the crisis, Munro’s many underwear forms convey diverse, yet interconnected aspects of queerness. Elements that have persisted in the gay community for decades and which continue today as the LGBTQ2S+ community struggles for liberation, acceptance, and a recognition of the continuing

246 Jacob, “Where there’s a Will,” 38.
HIV/AIDS crisis. Through his creation of underwear, what are often personal garments, Munro calls to mind the collective and community-driven aspects of textile art. In the act of exhibiting these works, he brings the private into the public sphere, “outing” the realities of queer struggle for a public audience by bridging the gap between private and public space that has been at the core of gay liberation and identity politics since the legalisation of homosexuality.

Fig. 4.7 Will Munro, *untitled (polaroids)*, 2003.
In the creation of these works and the intersection of public and private that is inherently called to mind through the embellished underwear forms, Munro asserts the difference that defines homosexuality in an act that refuses to assimilate to heteronormative standards. As Eric Clarke argues, there is a flaw in attempting to achieve equality and acceptance for queer individuals through a homogenization that suggests that queers are just like everyone else. In doing so, identities that do not conform to traditional societal standards remain excluded and those that achieve acceptance have become altered in the process. In his hand-crafted underwear forms, and the models that often wear them, Munro moves homosexuality and homoeroticism from the private and into the public sphere without attempting to make the images and ideas contained within them more palatable for a heteronormative audience. In his playful and eccentric objects of queer desire and intimacy, Munro urges a new acceptance and understanding of the intricacies of queer experience.

The handmade nature of Munro’s textiles, as a collection of objects that have been carefully sewn and decorated, immediately calls to mind the AIDS quilts. Incredible memorials that have been created by communities around the world. Memorials themselves, in a sense, Munro’s underwear works and the AIDS quilts produced by community members and small groups operate in similar ways in a process of remembering, advocacy, and public acknowledgement. An exploration of these panels that act as both memorials and activist responses to the crisis and its human toll further establishes the diversity of individuals affected by HIV/AIDS and leads to a critical consideration of those marginalized within our own

247 Clarke, Virtuous Vice, 30.
communities. I therefore begin my analysis by illustrating the connections between Munro’s work and the history of AIDS Quilts.

The AIDS Memorial Quilt was first started in San Francisco in June 1987 as a group led by activist Cleve Jones sought to create a memorial for their loved ones who had died of AIDS-related complications and to put names to the thousands who had died as a result of the pandemic. At the same time, the NAMES Project Foundation was formed as an international organization to act as caretaker of the rapidly growing quilt. Early in the crisis, many who died of AIDS-related causes were not given funerals, in part because of the stigma associated with the syndrome, and also because many funeral homes and cemeteries refused to handle their remains. The quilt, each panel of which approximates the size of a casket, provides a physical representation of both the scale of the HIV/AIDS pandemic as well as a memorial that names thousands of those who died from AIDS-related complications.

The NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt was first shown at the National Mall in Washington, DC in 1987. At that time, it consisted of nearly 2000 panels (fig. 4.8). In 1989, a portion of the quilt toured through Canada and at each stop, hundreds of panels were added to the quilt, with these panels remaining in Canada to begin the Canadian AIDS Memorial Quilt, which has now accumulated more than 600 panels. A memorial to those named, who must be remembered in order to move forward and confront the impact of the HIV/AIDS crisis, but also

251 “History,” The Canadian AIDS Memorial Quilt.
to all those who died without the support and care that they deserved, panels from the Canadian quilt have been dedicated to those who died alone or cannot be named.252

Fig. 4.8 First public display of the NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt at the National Mall, Washington, D.C., 1987.

Several of the Canadian quilt’s panels, many of which are viewable online, are dedicated to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples who have been memorialized. These panels often feature a blend of Indigenous symbols and imagery that relate to the identity and community of the individual being memorialized as well as traditional LGBTQ2S+ and HIV/AIDS symbols like the rainbow flag and red ribbon (fig. 4.9). Canada’s Indigenous community is often

252 Emil Sher, “The AIDS Quilt: We Know the Names of the Famous. The AIDS Quilt is a moving testament to all the rest,” Toronto Star, November 29, 1991, ProQuest.
forgotten in discussions of the HIV/AIDS crisis, particularly in the strong focus traditionally placed on gay men as the primary demographic affect by the illness. While it is true that gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men are among the most at risk of contracting HIV (as of 2017 nearly half of reported cases of HIV in adults fell within this category), Canada’s indigenous community is disproportionately affected by the virus.\textsuperscript{253} Despite the fact that Canada’s Indigenous community makes up roughly 3% of the population, 20.1% of new HIV cases in 2017 were attributed to First Nation, Metis, and Inuit individuals.\textsuperscript{254}

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\caption{The Canadian AIDS Memorial Quilt, \textit{Frederick Haineault (C-570)}, 1998.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{254} Haddad.
In an analysis of structural determinants of Aboriginal peoples’ health, Charlotte Reading states that most Indigenous people who contracted HIV through injection drug use “report a history of violence and abuse, which is often inter-generational in nature and frequently began in foster care and/or resulted from the residential school experiences of their parents and/or grandparents.”\textsuperscript{255} A 2017 study found that of new cases of HIV among people who inject drugs in Canada, 68.1\% were indigenous,\textsuperscript{256} a proportion far greater than the relative number of Indigenous people in Canada, demonstrating the weight carried by Indigenous peoples. As Reading states however, “structural determinants are revealed as the foundation upon which successive trauma, sometimes over generations, leads to a coping through drug use and the current epidemic of HIV among Aboriginal peoples.”\textsuperscript{257} It is through this unresolved trauma that HIV/AIDS has largely affected Canada’s Indigenous population and so more work in education, prevention, testing, and treatment is desperately needed. Further, there must also be a recognition by all Canadians that the HIV/AIDS crisis remains a critical health issue that severely impacts a wide range of individuals and requires national attention.

While memorializing those lost to the AIDS crisis, the production of the AIDS Quilt deepened community bonds through the collective fabrication of individual blocks by queer individuals and allies as well as the experience of viewing the completed quilt. In a similar way, Munro’s physical creations and embellishments of underwear, as well as his photography, joined Toronto’s queer and punk communities, strengthening them and bringing them closer together.

\textsuperscript{256} Haddad, “HIV in Canada.”
\textsuperscript{257} Reading, “Structural Determinants,” 11.
Extending his artistic practice beyond the production of physical works however, Munro continued to build up Toronto’s queer and punk communities in the establishment of club nights and a restaurant outside of Toronto’s traditional Church and Wellesley gay village.

**Building a Community Hub for Punks, Queers, and Everyone Else**

Following his graduation from OCAD, Munro started Vazaleen, a monthly dance party that played a range of music including punk and rock, with, for the time, an uncommon focus on queer and female vocalists, that mainly took place at Lee’s Palace, a Toronto club far outside the typical confines of the Church and Wellesley gay village (fig. 4.10). Since the 1960s, Toronto’s gay community was centred around a subculture that thrived in the area surrounding the intersection of Church and Wellesley Streets. The district, which is home to the largest gay community in Canada, contains a collection of gay bars and clubs, the Glad Day Bookshop, the world’s oldest LGBTQ+ bookstore, and shops for queer folk that continue to serve as a hub for the LGBTQ2S+ community and the centre for annual Toronto Pride celebrations. An area that was a haven for many in the queer community, the gay village was also codified as a ghetto, a safe space for those in the community, but a way to distinctly separate the queer community from the wider public. In recent years, the queer community which was initially defined by gay men and women has grown, diversifying itself, to become the LGBTQ2S+ community. An acronym that we have come to recognize as the signifier of a spectra of varied identities.

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258 Carl Wilson, “El Mo Offers Queer Night for all the Freaks out There,” *Globe and Mail*, January 21, 2000, [https://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/el-mo-offers-queer-night-for-all-the-freaks-out-there/article25453634/](https://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/el-mo-offers-queer-night-for-all-the-freaks-out-there/article25453634/); While the club night was originally called “Vaseline,” the name was later changed due to threat of litigation, resulting in the name Vazaleen.
Fig. 4.10 Will Munro, *Vazaleen Poster*, 2000.
Munro is often credited with helping to pull the queer community out of its ghetto and developing a gathering place for an incredibly diverse crowd by all definitions. Crossing boundaries of gender, race, sexuality, music scenes, and ages, Munro’s club nights incorporated a mix of individuals and distinct points of view in a melting pot of culture and shared experience. Prior to Vazaleen, it was uncommon to see people of all identities in the LGBTQ2S+ spectrum in one establishment, along with those who did not identify on the spectrum at all.\textsuperscript{259} Drawing on the history of queer and punk movements as well as their respective icons, Munro formulated a series of events, and indeed a community, that provided acceptance and a historical education to all who attended.

It has also been noted that Vazaleen was unusual in that half of the attendants of the events were typically female thanks to Munro’s conscious inclusion of women and lesbian icons on his posters.\textsuperscript{260} Munro stated that he “wanted women to know instantly that this was their space as much as anybody else’s,” demonstrating his sincere desire to build a community where everyone was welcome and everyone was represented.\textsuperscript{261} Munro’s Vazaleen nights drew the queer community out of the Church Street gay village and provided space for an unexpected intermingling of people of all identities. Vazaleen and Munro’s other community projects were not, however, removed from his artistic practice; as Munro stated:

Vazaleen is for everybody – every body. I wanted to create an event that had more spunk, and, more important, way more crossover appeal. I try to promote queer culture and

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\textsuperscript{261} Vaughan, “Generation V.”
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queer art in a context that most people don’t consider artistic – a bar. Vazaleen is a space where all of Toronto’s conservative values can be thrown out – and that totally applies to the art world as well. At the same time, I want the parties to highlight queer rock history, to show people where the things they take for granted come from.262 As much as Vazaleen was about community, however, it was about education as well, and the act of adding himself to a lineage of queer icons.263 According to Munro, “A lot of performance art comes out of rock culture. Think about people like Little Richard and Carole Pope, who invented an entire way of presenting yourself publicly as queer. A lot of artists my age use this material, these strategies, but the have no idea of the history.”264 Vazaleen and Munro’s recognition of queer and punk history, as well as their intersections, became not only a way for him to develop a community that would suit his own interests, but to bring together a collective where people could learn from one another’s histories.

Will Munro’s Silence=Death is just one example of a physical artwork that bridges the gap between his queerness and affinity for punk while inserting himself within queer and punk canon (fig. 4.11). Using a record sleeve from Pink Floyd’s 1973 album The Dark Side of the Moon as its base, Munro’s work employs the triangle and rainbow spectrum of light as cues to homosexuality while adding Gran Fury and ACT UP New York’s “Silence=Death” logo underneath in an appropriation of queer culture that merges seamlessly with Munro’s musical interests and the punk/rock scene. First developed in 1986, Gran Fury’s Silence=Death, which combined the bold text with a pink triangle, quickly spread throughout lower Manhattan in an

264 Vaughan, “Opening Up the Y Front.”
While employing the pink triangle, the Nazi marker used to identify homosexual men in the death camps, the text rejected President Ronald Reagan’s refusal to speak publicly of the AIDS crisis and asserted that a failure to adequately recognize the crisis would lead to more deaths. The following year, Gran Fury’s image was adopted by ACT UP New York who produced a wide range of visual cultural and ephemera emblazoned with the logo including t-shirts, buttons, stickers and more posters. In his own work, Munro employs what became one of the most recognizable images produced by Gran Fury and ACT UP, and an image that came to be a visual signifier of the crisis for many in the public realm. Identifying his own work as a continuation of the activist and artistic projects of the artists that came before him, and thus introducing himself to that lineage, Munro renewed a public call

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265 Meyer, “This is to Enrage You,” 60.
266 Meyer, 61.
to seriously consider the impacts of the HIV/AIDS crisis while once again highlighting the intersections across diverse communities.

Mirroring Munro’s recognition of queer history in his physical artworks that paid homage to the likes of General Idea, the activism of ACT UP and Gran Fury, and queer and punk performers, Vazaleen was an extension that pushed these ideas into the public sphere. More than just a club event, Vazaleen was a community, carefully crafted and supported by Munro, that was an extension of his artistic practice and the product of decades of queer and punk aesthetic and history. Munro’s club events served as a relaxed and culturally focused hub in which music, art, and community blended together in an elaboration of relational aesthetics, with Munro as community facilitator.

In 2006, Munro and Lynn McNeill bought The Beaver, a diner on Queen Street West in Toronto (fig. 4.12). The Beaver quickly became a community hub, as anyone might have expected from Munro, for anyone who lived outside of the norm, whether they were queer, punk, or just different, yet existing outside of the gay ghetto. From brunch, to drag shows, to live music, to art, The Beaver became a mainstay in Queen West, even before the neighbourhood had developed into a recognised, and gentrified, cultural hub. According to Kevin Hegge, a filmmaker, DJ, and friend of Munro, “[Will] presented [The Beaver] to us as a sort of extension of what he had been doing in other atypical party spaces, but as a sort of hub for his ideas. He described it as the thing that it successfully became: a diner in the daytime and a home away from home.”

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from home for all the arty queers by night. Right from the start, it really did feel like a place that we as patrons had a type of ownership over.” Much as The Fiesta was a site for artists and creatives, largely connected to General Idea, in the Uptown district in the 1980s, The Beaver served as a centre for punks, queers, and the growing community of art-focused residents of the Queen Street West area.

Fig. 4.12 The Beaver, 1192 Queen Street West, Toronto.

In her analysis of the iconic queer film *Paris is Burning*, Judith Butler makes a critical realization regarding queer culture and the balls that serve as the focal point of the documentary. Butler notes that the development of kinship in the ball system through “houses” comprised of

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269 Sarah Liss, *Army of Lovers*, 91.
“children” led by a “mother,” is not only an organizational structure for the balls themselves, but “the social and discursive building of community, a community that binds, cares, and teaches, that shelters and enables.” As Butler recognizes, many queer individuals are marginalized in society as well as in their own families and so the development of community and a family-type structure among other queer people can be vital to their success and survival. In Jean-Luc Nancy’s considerations of community, he argues that “community is not only intimate communication between its members, but also its organic communion with its own essence…. it is made up principally of the sharing, diffusion, or impregnation of an identity by a plurality wherein each member identifies himself only through the supplementary mediation of his identification with the living body of the community.” In Vazaleen and The Beaver, Munro developed spaces in which communities operated much like families for the queer and punk outcasts of Toronto that provided support, love, and belonging in unexpected venues.

For Chhangur and Monk, “Will responded to the exclusionary ghettoism of Toronto’s gay village but also the divisions of the city’s music scene: not Church Street (i.e., queer) because he was punk; not punk because he was queer.” Munro’s work brought together two distinct groups in Toronto, the gays and lesbians who dominated the Church Street gay village and the punk crowd who existed elsewhere throughout the city, while breaking down the walls that defined the gay village itself. In hosting events like Vazaleen and operating The Beaver with McNeill, intentionally outside of Toronto’s Church Street gay ghetto, Munro worked in a similar way to produce an intersectional community to support those who had been cast out. Unable to

find a community where he truly fit in, Munro built his own, and in doing so, created a space and a community for countless others, both alike and different. The impact of these venues, produced as an extension, yet a distinct part of Munro’s artistic practice, is difficult to measure, however, it surely would have been felt by each individual who enjoyed a home away from home surrounded by those they cared about at Vazaleen events and The Beaver.

Charging the Gallery Space with Affect

A text-based work composed of bright pink neon mounted behind Plexiglass, *No Tears for the Creatures of the Night*, is a rare departure from Munro’s largely textile-based practice (fig. 4.13). Producing a work that was not made entirely by himself was uncommon for Munro, largely due to his preference for objects created solely by his own hand despite his passion for community. The neon tubing spells out the title of the work across five rows of text that glow brightly in the space, expanding beyond the borders of the work and, through the application of Plexiglass, allow for an installation that forms a cohesive work, yet can be shown independently or exhibited in combination with other works. A 2010-exhibition at Paul Petro Contemporary Art, *Will Munro: Blank Generation*, saw the neon work installed over a grid of twenty-eight editions of Munro’s *General Idea’s Poodles* silkscreen, a nod to General Idea’s *Imagevirus* wallpaper that itself blurred the boundaries of where one work began and the other ended in the gallery space (fig. 4.14).

Fig. 4.13 Will Munro, *No Tears for the Creatures of the Night*, 2005.
No Tears for the Creatures of the Night elaborates on minimalist, light-based works, however adds a literary element in the formation of a lyric from a 1978-song by America punk and new wave band Tuxedomoon. Artists like Dan Flavin embraced the potential for light to act as an artwork in its own right as abstraction and minimalism grew in popularity (fig. 4.15). In creating and exhibiting his light-based sculptures together, the boundaries of individual works begin to blur as the fluorescent tubes create tonal variations across the gallery walls,

Fig. 4.15 Dan Flavin, the nominal three (to William of Ockham), 1963.

floors, and ceilings, forming each surface into a part of the work itself. No Tears for the Creatures of the Night operates in much the same way. While the text can be read by the viewer, the form of the work queers its boundaries literally, in the pink colour which recalls associations with homosexuality and in the expanding of the work outside of its form.

Similar to General Idea’s Imagevirus, and in particular the wallpaper that is a part of that project, No Tears for the Creatures of the Night alters the gallery, projecting outside of its boundaries to cast a light on the entirety of the space. Shining outwards in every direction, the pink glow invades the sterile white of the gallery and, like the spread of AIDS illustrated in Imagevirus, affects everything that it enfolds. In an analysis of artworks and concepts of sexuality and HIV/AIDS throughout history, John Paul Ricco demonstrates the medieval roots of negative societal views of homosexuality and traces these views through to the gay liberation and HIV/AIDS crisis of the second half of the twentieth century. For Ricco, “The ‘threat’ of male-male anal penetration was (is) often cast, vis-à-vis heterosexist positions, as a loss of self through either the blurring of boundaries between two male bodies (penetration), or a parallel fear (carried over from masturbatory paranoia) of a loss of semen as a loss of self.” Contemporary discussions of homosexuality and the HIV/AIDS crisis have led to a heightened blurring of these boundaries, not only in same-sex relations, but now also needle sharing and blood transfusion that force us to conceive of these separations as dotted lines that can be crossed. In No Tears for the Creatures of the Night, the boundaries of the work formed by Plexiglass are nearly invisible, only able to be viewed under the right conditions, and even with the edges of the

275 Lawrence, 847.
276 Ricco, “Queering Boundaries,” 68.
277 Ricco, 58.
physical work visible, the light extends beyond its reaches. The work is porous, and therefore intercedes on the boundaries of perception of the viewer.

The textual nature of the work is also, of course, critical to the function of the boundaries and discourse at play. As has been argued by Paula Treichler, the language that defines and expands upon HIV/AIDS is critical to our understanding of societal responses to the crisis. As Treichler argues, “the name AIDS in part constructs the disease and helps make it intelligible. We cannot therefore look ‘through’ language to determine what AIDS ‘really’ is…. the AIDS epidemic—with its genuine potential for global devastation—is simultaneously an epidemic of a transmissible lethal disease and an epidemic of meanings or signification.”

Ricco continues his analysis of sexuality and the HIV/AIDS crisis with a turn to etymology and the use of text in artworks, recognizing that by recalling “William S. Burroughs’ famous dictum that ‘language is a virus,’ one might begin to conceive of some of the ways in which bodies are always already infected with language or discourse.” By incorporating language into his work, Munro elaborates on not only the HIV/AIDS crisis, but all “creatures of the night.” Distinct, yet open-ended, the text allows for a point of connection with the viewer and opens up a discourse in which HIV/AIDS, sexuality, and difference can be present.

Together, the light and textual form of No Tears for the Creatures of the Night produces an affectively charged space in the gallery. Derek Attridge, an English literature scholar, argues that, “the artwork is not an object but an event, and that it comes into existence, again and again, always differently, each time a reader, listener or viewer experiences the arrangement of sounds

278 Treichler, “AIDS, Homophobia, and Biomedical Discourse,” 31-32.
279 Ricco, “Queering Boundaries,” 76.
or images as a work of art.”280 This production of an event is one that can generate an affective response and, I argue in the case of Not Tears for the Creatures of the Night, fills the space with an affective dimension despite the textual nature of the work. For Brian Massumi, language can interfere with the affect produced by a work, particularly in emotional language that accompanies the visual aspects of the work.281 Linguistic expression can also, however, “resonate with and amplify intensity at the price of making itself functionally redundant. When on the other hand it doubles a sequence of movements in order to add something to it in the way of meaningful progression.”282 The text-based nature of the work is not truly a complete narrative with a determined ending, but a cue for the viewer to enter into a world of thoughts and possibilities regarding those often excluded. As Attridge states:

The artist is someone who has the ability to discern what is occluded, silenced, marginalised by prevailing ways of thinking and feeling, where it is possible to find tensions and fault-lines in what is treated as merely given, and at what cost to the apparent coherence and stability of the cultural fabric, and the social, economic and political system out of which it arises, are maintained…. This experience of being given the capacity to see, if only momentarily, beyond the blinkers we normally wear (without, of course our being aware of them) is an exhilarating one, even if it can involve discomfort at the same time.283

281 Massumi, “The autonomy of affect,” 86.
282 Massumi, “The autonomy of affect,” 86.
283 Attridge, “Once more with Feeling,” 333.
Despite the nature of the work, in the glow of the light and the penetrating force of the text, the viewer experiences a pleasurable reaction, not of joy, but of an affective resonance produced in the seeing of what is often missed. A fundamentally conflicted experience, the production of affect relies on the sense of pleasure that is created through a resonance within the viewer in the acknowledgment of negative emotion and narrative. In *No Tears for the Creatures of the Night*, the text infers those both loved and lost, further realized through the diffused, pink-coloured light that is both present and absent simultaneously in the production of the work. A call to be seen, known, accepted, and felt, *No Tears for the Creatures of the Night* seeks a connection with its viewers, a matching of intensities that opens up the world outside of common experience. A marker of the queer community and the pleasure of the spaces that supported them and brought them together, the glowing light that fills the gallery space at the same time recalls the reduction of that community to a mere signifier in the colour pink.

By continuing to blend the development of community and the stains that mark queer history in Toronto, Munro elaborates upon the issues that continue to face queer individuals. By turning his attention to the direct conflicts between the gay community, public sex spaces, and the trauma of the HIV/AIDS crisis, Munro builds upon the affective tones of his work while emphasising the potential of diverse communities in overcoming these struggles.

**Exhibiting Intergenerational Connections and Queer Sex Space**

In *You Will Dance to Anything* (fig. 4.16), a Super-8 film produced by Munro, we see the artist sitting on a bed, embroidering one of his many textile-based works in a bathhouse cubicle lined with rock music posters. Referencing his own love of punk and rock music as well as the history and influence of gay culture in the music world, the posters tie the cubicle to Munro’s own
interests as well as those of the gay community and his friends and collaborators. For Jacob, “the music posters in Will’s bathhouse cubicle created an atmosphere of mainstream cultural icons connected by deep roots to subcultural traditions.” Through the setting of a bathhouse, the raids that have remained a part of Toronto’s queer history are immediately recalled, and yet Munro’s actions produce an unexpected experience for the viewer in the lack of overt sexuality that would be anticipated in the space. Combined with Munro’s embroidery, the first moments of the film work together to suggest the foundations of the queer community, Munro’s own identity, and the ways in which these communities and identities fit in larger social spheres.

Fig. 4.16 Will Munro, You Will Dance to Anything (still), 2000.

284 Jacob, “Where there’s a Will,” 40.  
285 Jacob, 40.
As Jacob recounts in the catalogue for Munro’s posthumous retrospective exhibition, the film begins with Munro working on a textile in a cubicle, when two men approach the open door. First, a young, thin man looks into the cubicle, followed by an older, clean-cut man. Munro ignores them both as he continues to work on his embroidery. Then, an older “leather daddy” type figure appears, dressed in blue jeans, a white shirt, and a leather vest and chaps. As he peers into the room, Munro immediately becomes interested, and the man enters the cubicle, closing the door behind him as the credits begin. Following the credits however, is a coda in which Munro is seen teaching the older man how to embroider. Ending the film with a tender scene of the two men embroidering together, thoughts of intimacy and an intergenerational bond are brought to the surface.

Produced at the very end of what is referred to as the second wave of the AIDS crisis, You Will Dance to Anything presents a subtle critique of common ideas of bathhouses and other queer gathering spaces. In The Logic of the Lure, Ricco elaborates on his concept of “Queer Sex Space Theory,” which is largely based on the realization that the second wave of the AIDS crisis called for safer-sex simply by discouraging sex, such as through the banning of public sex and spaces such as bathhouses.\(^{286}\) In the mid-1990s, anti-public sex writers and activists pushed for spaces for anonymous and promiscuous sex to be closed in order to slow the spread of HIV/AIDS.\(^ {287}\) These activists ignored the importance of these spaces as opportunities for gay men to safely meet and develop community, as well as the ability for these venues to act as vital sites for the dissemination of safe-sex education among some of the most at-risk individuals.\(^ {288}\)

\(^{286}\) Ricco, The Logic of the Lure, 143-144.
\(^{287}\) Ricco, 144.
\(^{288}\) Bruner, Out of the Closet, 57; Warner, Never Going Back, 301; Ricco, The Logic of the Lure, 144.
Munro, however, resituates this space commonly associated with public sex and indecency in a larger narrative of community-building both within and outside of the gay community, particularly intergenerationally, that is integral for the success of the community itself.

The bond between Munro and an older gay man illustrated in this work is also worth noting given the separation that typically exists across age demographics in the gay community. In an analysis of Foucault’s writings regarding the gay community, particularly in the Castro district of San Francisco, Whitney Davis notes the disconnect between younger and older members of the gay community. Foucault suggests that the structure of the gay community itself forbids any kind of intergenerational relationships by its very nature.\textsuperscript{289} For Foucault, the gay community of the 1980s had shifted to focus entirely on its youngest members, leaving those who were older left out and without adequate connections within the community.\textsuperscript{290} Similar to Munro’s attempts at educating queer partiers and community members about punk and queer histories to learn, grow, and move forward, You Will Dance to Anything seeks to amend the generational gap in the queer community and demonstrate the opportunity for mutually beneficial intergenerational connections. Through Munro’s excitement to meet the older man and the ensuing moment of tenderness as they embroider together, the opportunities for those within the gay community who may at first seem to have little in common to build meaningful connections becomes apparent.

Further, given Rancière’s suggestion that political art succeeds through an act of dissensus, a “re-configuration of the common experience of the sensible,” You Will Dance to Anything

\textsuperscript{289} Whitney Davis, \textit{Queer Beauty: Sexuality and Aesthetics from Winckelmann to Freud and Beyond} (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2010), 266.

\textsuperscript{290} Davis, 266-67.
Anything alters the expected experience of a bathhouse and thus produces the potential for a political response within the viewer.\textsuperscript{291} The film reconfigures an expected reality that, through Butler’s notion of performative agency, contributes to a restating of social norms that are elaborated to produce a new understanding of the relationships of gay communities and the role of bathhouses and other queer spaces in those communities.\textsuperscript{292} Thus, the subtle reality of this video reveals itself in that this same narrative of intergenerational solidarity and the connecting of individuals across cultures and identities into a larger, supportive community is present, even outside of Munro’s bathhouse and within those spaces where public sex, and not embroidery, is taking place.

Conclusion
In the production of textile and multi-media artworks as well as the conscious building of a diverse community, Munro employed key figures from the past, such as Leigh Bowery and General Idea, to highlight the history of queer and punk movements, place himself within that history, and educate those around him as they looked forward towards a more inclusive society. Through a blurring of public and private spheres, Munro brought attention to marginalized communities in unexpected and affective works. Bringing Toronto’s LGBTQ2S+ community out of the Church Street gay village and into Vazaleen club nights and The Beaver, Munro helped to develop a familial community of support that included an uncommonly wide range of identities and interests. Despite being a more contemporary artist than General Idea, Andy Fabo, or Tim

\textsuperscript{291} Rancièr, “The Paradoxes of Political Art,” 140.
\textsuperscript{292} Butler, “Performative Agency,” 154.
Jocelyn, Munro exemplifies a practice that maintains the activism and social influence of artists that came before him, often with direct references to their works, giving a continued attention to the queer and HIV/AIDS issues that affect our society in order to encourage social change and a reconsideration of the boundaries between identities and interests.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

In this thesis, I have laid out the beginnings of a Toronto-centric analysis of the implications of artistic production in the development of community, social advocacy, and formation of identity throughout the struggle for gay liberation and the HIV/AIDS crisis. Through an examination of works produced in the city from the 1970s until the early 2000s, I have employed queer, HIV/AIDS, and community-focused theory to illustrate the activist potential for personal, affective, and honest cultural productions to impact both the communities that they represent as well as society at large.

Through the early work of General Idea, Andy Fabo, and Tim Jocelyn, we can understand the critical importance of representation for gay artists at a time when homosexuality had been legalized under specific conditions in the Criminal Code of Canada yet remained fiercely opposed by members of the public and the Metropolitan Toronto Police Force. Subtly at first, before more overt assertions of the artists’ homosexuality came to the fore of their works, General Idea, Fabo, and Jocelyn employed the performative agency and affective resonance of their paintings and photographs to produce bold statements of the realities of queer intimacy, desire, and sexuality in the public sphere. As the AIDS crisis began to unfold and already marginalized groups were scapegoated as threats to a supposedly innocent public, General Idea, Fabo, and Jocelyn turned their attention to the lack of public acknowledgement and funding and increasing stigma surrounding the rapidly spreading virus. Mimicking the nature of the virus itself, their cultural productions spread throughout the contemporary art world as well as public space in an articulation of the homophobia that was central to the crisis, the struggles of those
living with HIV/AIDS, and the loneliness of survival as General Idea ceased to exist following the deaths of Felix Partz and Jorge Zontal. Finally, contemporary works produced by artist and community builder Will Munro reveal the persistence of these issues into our lives today as he tackled the oppression of queer individuals and continuing HIV/AIDS crisis through his artistic practice that included not only intricately hand-crafted textile pieces, but the conscious development of inclusive spaces and communities for LGBTQ2S+ and punk Torontonians.

Central to all of these artists as well, was the integral nature of community both in their artistic practices and in the circumstances that supported their development. Whether through formal artist collectives or open gathering spaces that allowed them to come together as stakeholders in supportive and artistic groups, queer individuals rely on and flourish through “the social and discursive building of community, a community that binds, cares, and teaches, that shelters and enables.” Through General Idea and ChromaZone, as well as communities at The Fiesta, The Barracks, The Beaver, and Will Munro’s club nights, queer artists, activists, and outcasts were able to form bonds of community and common experience that fueled belonging and activism. In the sharing of a common identity and the consistent, ongoing development of that community through common experience, queer communities grew to support one another and, through the cultural productions of artists, expanded that community’s identity and values into the public realm in a powerful statement of activism and self-affirmation.

Prior to concluding this thesis, I now turn to the work of contemporary Cree artist Kent Monkman, whose work demonstrates the role that queer activist art continues to play in creating community today. One of Canada’s most well-known Indigenous artists working today,

293 Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 95.
particularly through a major exhibition that is touring galleries across the country, Monkman is best known for creating large-scale paintings that reference art historical canon while bringing Indigenous and queer histories and contemporary issues to the forefront. From the work of the grand masters to Picasso, he uses familiar images to entice viewers and comment on the white male settler narrative of Canadian art history while introducing Indigenous issues where they have been hidden and ignored. Monkman’s work often includes performances by his alter-ego, Miss Chief Eagle Testickle, who also appears in many of his paintings. A symbol of feminine strength and power, Miss Chief also highlights the importance of two-spirit and queer identities within Indigenous cultures despite their attempted erasure by settlers. A contemporary recognition of trans and two-spirit identity within mass culture and visual representations has led to a better understanding of these identities in relation to the LGBTQ+ community, Indigenous communities, and Canadian society.

A recent study of trans people in Ontario found that Aboriginal trans individuals had the highest rate of HIV testing among all racial groups, with only 15% reporting that they had never been tested compared to 44% of non-Aboriginal white people.294 For Sarah Hunt, “higher testing rates among Aboriginal trans people could be due to campaigns for HIV testing that explicitly target, or make visible, two-spirit people.”295 Works such as Monkman’s History is Painted by the Victors alter the historical paintings that make up the canon of art history in an attempt to unsettle our traditional concepts of the uninhabited landscape, colonialism, and two-spirit identity (fig. 5.1). Based on a nineteenth century painting by popular American artist Albert

294 Sarah Hunt, “Embodying Self-Determination,” in Determinants of Indigenous Peoples’ Health in Canada: Beyond the Social, ed. Margo Greenwood, Sarah de Leeuw, Nicole Marie Lindsay, and Charlotte Reading (Toronto: Canadian Scholars’ Press, 2015), 114.
295 Hunt, 114.
Fig. 5.1 Kent Monkman, *History is Painted by the Victors*, 2013.

Fig. 5.2 Albert Bierstadt, *Mount Corcoran*, 1876-77.
Bierstadt, *Mount Corcoran* (fig. 5.2), Monkman has copied Bierstadt’s natural landscape, but has inserted the figure of Miss Chief painting at an easel. Clad only in bright red, thigh-high, high heeled boots, Miss Chief is surrounded by a band of American soldiers who have stripped off their uniforms and relax nude around the still lake. Reclining, swimming, standing, and sparring, each of the male figures are depicted in a pose copied from the work of American painter and photographer, Thomas Eakins.296

In his introductory chapter to the book *Landscape and Power*, W.J.T. Mitchell poses nine theses on landscape. Thesis number four reads: “Landscape is a natural scene mediated by culture. It is both a represented and presented space, both a signifier and a signified.”297 Mitchell argues that landscape is itself an active participant in the colonialist project, which aims to present scenes as natural and objective, while instead producing the landscape as a commodity and “as an instrument of cultural power.”298 Through this, landscapes have the power to eliminate entire cultures and peoples from the land that they depict, and to erase horrible actions perpetrated against indigenous populations from cultural memory. And yet, Monkman’s work flips the narrative of the traditional landscape. By including a strong, feminine, two-spirit figure who is surrounded by the nude soldiers at ease, Monkman calls out the historical narratives produced by settlers who invaded North America. Monkman homoeroticizes the American soldiers and destabilizes the viewer’s expected experience with the work through an unsettling of established power structures. *History is Painted by the Victors* both signals and emphasises the

298 Mitchell, 1-2.
power of Miss Chief, and Indigenous and queer individuals, within a space from which they have long been excluded.

Monkman’s critically acclaimed 2017-exhibition, *Shame and Prejudice: A Story of Resilience*, was launched as a Canada 150 project at the Art Museum at the University of Toronto and is now touring at art galleries across Canada. In *Shame and Prejudice*, Monkman’s paintings and installation works are exhibited alongside historical artefacts and artworks in an illustration of the struggle of Indigenous peoples in Canada narrated by Miss Chief. Separated into distinct sections referred to as “chapters,” Monkman, and Miss Chief, reconsider Canadian history to fill in the gaps where Indigenous narratives have been excluded in an act of rewriting the history books. From the first contact between Indigenous peoples and European settlers to residential schools and contemporary issues, Monkman’s exhibition demonstrates the long history of prejudice, abuse, and attack endured by Indigenous peoples through nine chapters organized around various themes.

Chapter Eight of the exhibition, titled “Sickness and Healing” considers the many epidemics that have spread throughout Indigenous communities, first “the European Plagues of Smallpox, influenza, and measles,” and more recently, “tuberculosis, diabetes, HIV, AIDS, FAS.” Through this Chapter, Monkman highlights the toll that exposure to illness, inter-generational trauma, access to medical care, and other systemic inequalities have had on Indigenous peoples in Canada as they face disproportionately high rates of numerous medical issues, including HIV/AIDS. *Death of the Virgin (after Caravaggio)*, one of the works exhibited

in this chapter, depicts a young girl laying in a hospital bed, surrounded by family who grieve her death, apparently by suicide (figs. 5.3-4).

Fig. 5.3 Kent Monkman, *Death of the Virgin (after Caravaggio)*, 2016.
Adapted from Caravaggio’s early seventeenth century painting of the same name (fig. 5.5), Monkman employs traditional religious iconography to illustrate the process of loss and grieving endured by many in Indigenous communities. Mimicking Caravaggio’s drapery, lighting, and figures, Monkman continues his practice of appropriating historical masterpieces, but in this case alters the image to bring it into contemporary times. For Monkman, the work illustrates the many impacts on the health and wellbeing of Indigenous communities including suicide, the murder and disappearance of Indigenous women, diabetes, HIV/AIDS.  


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the Virgin (after Caravaggio) brings to light just a few of the inequalities that face Indigenous peoples in Canada and calls for a response to the health and wellness crises that affect them at alarming rates.

Fig. 5.5 Caravaggio, *Death of the Virgin*, 1601-1605/06.
Through his works, Monkman demonstrates a unique ability to blend subversive and overt commentary with historical references in order to rewrite history to include the marginalized and forgotten while looking forward to a better future for the queer and Indigenous communities that he depicts. While looking back to past injustices and the visual systems that both supported them and now bring them to light, Monkman paints a path forward in which marginalized groups receive the care and attention that they deserve yet has been kept from them for decades. By drawing viewers in through images that seem almost familiar to them, until they take a closer look, he slowly encourages a rethinking of our Canadian history and of the issues that persist to this day.

Despite advances both in legal systems and social acceptance for queer Canadians, as well as the development of medicines, organizations, and funding for HIV/AIDS, there remains much work to be done. LGBTQ2S+ issues have faded from the public consciousness since high-profile events such as the bathhouse raids and the legalization of gay marriage while better treatment and reduced transmission of HIV/AIDS since the 1990s has led to a similar lack of attention from society. However, LGBTQ2S+ individuals remain marginalised by society and events such as a police raid of a Toronto bar’s lesbian night in 2000, a serial killer targeting gay men in Toronto from 2010-2018, and a relationship between Toronto’s queer community and the police that remains strained. Meanwhile, HIV/AIDS continues to impact Canada’s queer community as well as other marginalised groups like Indigenous Canadians and access to critical preventative treatment such as pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) has been slow to reach individuals who need it most. As of 2016, an estimated 63,110 Canadians were HIV+, with
roughly 14% remaining unaware of their status, while HIV/AIDS is anticipated to become the deadliest global pandemic since the Black Death.\footnote{301)

Over the course of the past fifty years, queer communities and grassroots organizations have achieved massive gains by advocating for their own rights, and those of other marginalised groups as well, to ensure their survival. A lack of attention in recent years despite a persistence of these issues demands a revitalisation of LGBTQ2S+ and HIV/AIDS activism to continue the legacy of those who made such important progress for these marginalized groups. As the core of this thesis demonstrates, visual culture that succeeds not only in art galleries, but in public spaces and in the development of supportive communities, has a unique potential to participate in the performance and creation of more liberatory identities, and to encourage socio-political action in the face of crisis.

While this thesis presents an initial analysis of the socio-political and community impacts of activist art created by Toronto-based artists surrounding the gay liberation movement and the HIV/AIDS crisis, there is much more to examine. It is my hope that this study will encourage further research in community development and activism through arts in Toronto and more broadly across Canada. The issues that face queer and HIV+ Canadians have been sorely neglected and a deeper analysis of these moments in our past and present situation will certainly be of benefit as we move forward. Further, this analysis has been limited by the lack of diversity of artists and experiences that are currently a part of our art historical canons as well as

community narratives that are heavily dominated by cisgender white homosexual men and have
pushed marginalized groups to the periphery of these issues and associated communities.

This thesis presents only a small portion of the narratives, perspectives, and activism that
form a comprehensive understanding of the struggles for gay liberation and the HIV/AIDS crisis
in Toronto, however, I argue that it is an important first step in this critical area of queer history
and presents an analysis of the larger issues and themes of the period. Research concerning the
groups and individuals that are missing from our collective histories needs to be pursued,
particularly in the immense impact of marginalized groups such as Indigenous, female, black,
immigrant, lesbian, and transgender populations who have been left out of the stories that guide
our knowledge of these movements and who deserve the same recognition as the other key
figures in our history. While there is currently little information available regarding these groups
and the role that they played in the advancement of the LGBTQ2S+ community, the HIV/AIDS
crisis, their own unique struggles, and their stories must be uncovered and shared as we continue
to fight for acceptance, equality, and an end to the HIV/AIDS crisis.

In an article documenting the arts community in Toronto, Luis Jacob states: “Historical
continuity is the Achilles heel of Toronto artmaking. More precisely, the absence in this city of a
sense of historical continuity renders the act of making art into a poignant but self-defeating
gesture.”\textsuperscript{302} It is critical that art and visual culture play a part in the path forward towards
increased acceptance, equality, medical treatment, and reduced stigma, but it must also
acknowledge the affective and influential work completed by artists like General Idea, Andy
Fabo, Tim Jocelyn, and Will Munro in order to be most effective. Like Kent Monkman, a new

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generation of Toronto-based artists must turn their attention to the inequalities and marginalized groups that remain and, by looking to the pioneers of politically-engaged and activist artistic practice in Toronto, lead the way towards a more accepting, just, and equal society.
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