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*Animals, Touch, and Books:*  
*Surface Matters in the HIV/AIDS Archive*

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PhD Thesis

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28 February 2019

## Declaration of Authorship

I, Aimar Arriola Olabarria, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

28 February 2019

Signed:

## Abstract

This project considers lesser-known, often overlooked cultural responses to HIV/AIDS. Almost four decades after its onset, the HIV/AIDS crisis continues to be a global phenomenon with biomedical, economic, and cultural implications. However, much of the scholarly work done as part of the ongoing ‘AIDS Crisis Revisitation’ has been dominated by cultural productions about HIV/AIDS in, mainly, the US; in contrast, the literature has systematically ignored other realities. My project responds to this urgent situation by analysing and creatively discussing selected case studies from ‘the South’, with a focus on Chile and Spain, two countries with mirroring contexts in terms of their respective political and cultural trajectories. As a specific viewpoint or critical approach to the HIV/AIDS archive, the project resorts to the notion of ‘surface’ as a driving concept. In this study surface comes to represent two things: material surface and the method of analysis known as ‘surface reading’. Central to my project is questioning the ideas of ‘a crisis’ and ‘an AIDS’ crisis. This is a task that requires a creative dialogue between different epistemic/ethical positions, a dialogue where ‘the human’ is ethically imbricated with other beings, both living and non-living, organic and non-organic. Methodologically, the project consists of two components: a theoretical dissertation and a practical, collaborative curatorial project. The dissertation is divided into three chapters, each focusing on an overlooked problematic in the AIDS archive –non-human animals, touch, and the book-object; the three lie in conceptual proximity in their figuration as surface. Among other formalizations, including seminars, workshops, and publications, the practical component has been staged three times as an exhibition in the course of the production of the thesis. Altogether, the thesis expands existing work on the HIV/AIDS archive through geography and language, culture and representation.



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## Foreword

The process of conducting this study began and ends with two potent reminders that the HIV crisis is not over. On 10 October 2014, the day of my arrival in London for the start of my doctoral studies, local newspapers reproduced statements by Nigel Farage, leader of the far right party UKIP, in which he called for people living with HIV to be banned from migrating to Britain as a ‘good start’ to controlling the UK's borders (*The Guardian*). I now see these statements as a starting point to the two-year-long fear and hate campaign culminating in the results of the Brexit referendum, which has in turn ushered the EU into the situation of political absurdity we are in today. Four and a half years later, as the deadline for my doctoral thesis approaches, I await the results of my first HIV test in more than a year. I reluctantly decided to take this test at my doctor’s insistence, after I was diagnosed with an unexpected urinary infection following a recent 'unsafe' sex experience that brought to an end a period of over a year and a half of not having any intimate contact with another body, sexual or other. The two events mark the two extremes of a time trajectory that testifies that the ‘HIV/AIDS archive’, the semiotic-material domain that this dissertation enters, is an archive always in the making.

I am HIV negative (at least, for now) but I consider myself deeply affected by the AIDS crisis. As someone socialised as male and cis, born and raised in a rural setting in the Basque country during the 1980s, the ways in which the HIV/AIDS crisis has shaped me are many. Self-identified as gay, I have found that doing work on AIDS has allowed me to retrace my political genealogy, granting me an opportunity to learn from local and global, past and ongoing struggles. I am HIV negative, but I have suffered stigma from

being associated with HIV through curatorial and academic work in such a public way. I must agree, albeit with nuances, with Élisabeth Lebovici's recent observation that 'we all live in AIDS'. Indeed, we have all been living in the HIV/AIDS crisis at least since the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, that is, since the outbreak of the crisis as we know it. But this has been a living experience with different implications to different beings. To accept Lebovici's suggestion that 'we all live in AIDS' is also to acknowledge, and here I fully embrace her claim, that for the last four decades we have been living in the era of pharmaceutical profit, in the contactless modes of sociability that inspired the virus, in a world shaped by the disguised neo-colonial policies of humanitarian aid that the pandemic brought with it, in the planet of 'AIDS art' as a new artistic 'ism'. In short, we all have been living in a particular moment in time that keeps offering us more than enough elements for the re-writing of much of the recent history of culture as we know it, yet we insist on not seeing these opportunities.

I wanted to write this foreword to share a feeling that has haunted me in the last stretch of the completion of this study: the feeling that I do not have enough presence in the project. This concern was voiced to me a year ago by one of my Upgrade examiners, who pointed to the apparent asymmetry between my practice and the written dissertation. In her view, whereas the practice, my collaborative project *AIDS Anarchive*, showed a personal commitment to the topic, the writing adopted a more distant tone; it was almost as if the two parts of the project came from a body with two different temperatures, warm inside, but cold on the surface. With this comment in mind, at times during the process of writing this thesis, I considered forcing myself to bring my personal impressions and feelings into writing, to write from the affective ups and downs entailed in engaging with the AIDS archive. After all, I know what it is to



cry in the archive, literally. And among the conditions underlying this project is the passing of Spanish artist and activist and my personal friend, Miguel Benlloch (who is the sole protagonist of Chapter 3 of this study). But something always prevented me from doing so, some invisible force that insisted that the topic demanded a writing style that was personal, but also much bigger than personal. The coldness or dryness of the dissertation, if it is indeed present, perhaps results in part from the fact that is written in a language that is not ‘mine’ – English is my third language. But any difference of ‘temperatures’ in this study could also be partly the result of my belief that different problems require different measures. And as I have been setting foot on entirely new ground for me (earning a higher research degree), I have perhaps opted to work within certain conventions, certain self-imposed limits, as when a performance artist submits herself to the rules of stage presence to hopefully create some displacement from within. So, yes, the temperature of this body of writing may be cold. But I refuse to think that I do not have a presence within this work. It may only be a question of reading this text differently, paying attention to what is on its surface without necessarily expecting to find marks of identity or subjectivity marks at every turn.

## Introduction to the thesis

### **0.1 Introduction**

This project considers lesser-known, often overlooked cultural responses to HIV/AIDS. Almost four decades after its onset, the HIV/AIDS crisis continues to be a global phenomenon with biomedical, economic, and cultural implications. However, much of the scholarly work done as part of the ongoing ‘AIDS Crisis Revisitation’ (Kerr, 2014; 2016) has been dominated by cultural productions about HIV/AIDS in, mainly, the US; in contrast, the literature has systematically ignored other realities. My project responds to this urgent situation by analysing and creatively discussing selected case studies from ‘the South’, with a focus on Chile and Spain, two countries with mirroring contexts in terms of their respective political and cultural trajectories. Central to my project is questioning the ideas of ‘a crisis’ and ‘an AIDS’ crisis. This effort entails expanding existing work on the HIV/AIDS archive through geography and language, culture and representation. This is a task that requires a creative dialogue between different epistemic/ethical positions, a dialogue where ‘the human’ is ethically imbricated with other beings, both living and non-living, organic and non-organic. Further, in order to rethink existing narratives surrounding HIV/AIDS cultures, this dialogue is critical of both Northern and Southern essentialism.

In navigating my archive, I resort to the notion of surface as a driving concept. ‘Surface’ is a ubiquitous but overlooked term in the biomedical literature on HIV/AIDS. Surface is also a crucial term in reassessing aspects of Western dualist thought as well as dominant discourses and representations of HIV/AIDS. The project is divided into three

chapters, each focusing on an overlooked topic within cultural responses to HIV/AIDS: non-human animals, the sense of touch, and the book-object. Throughout the project, I argue that all three topics lie in conceptual proximity in their figuration as surface. The general goal of my project is to expand dominant narratives around the AIDS crisis, which very often prioritise questions of identity and sexual politics; accordingly, the project's theoretical orientation seeks to begin to displace the position of 'the human' within these narratives. In regards to its theoretical perspective, this study has a cultural orientation; it incorporates the philosophical but does not anchor itself in an exclusively philosophical domain. Rather, each chapter follows the work from the last decade of a cultural theorist relevant to the main motifs discussed in each chapter, namely Ron Broglio, André Lepecki, and Leah Price, respectively. Following these theorists, in turn, leads me to consider several philosophical contributions from process philosophy and several deconstructions offered by thinkers such as Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, and Donna Haraway.

Broadening the existing cultural analysis of HIV/AIDS in geographical and epistemological terms is a task that goes beyond the possibilities of this thesis. Rather, this practice-led project adopts a situated standpoint by taking its temporal and geographical demarcation from my own ongoing collaborative curatorial project, the *AIDS Anarchive*. The *AIDS Anarchive* is an independent research and production project designed and deployed as a process of producing a counter-archive, or anarchive, of cultural responses to HIV/AIDS, attending to the practices developed in contexts of the South. Among other formalisations, including seminars, workshops, and publications, the project has been staged three times as an exhibition in the course of the production of this dissertation.

## 0.2 An Opening Remark: The HIV/AIDS Archive

I must open this introduction by clarifying what I mean by the ‘HIV / AIDS archive’, possibly the most recurrent expression throughout this study. By the ‘HIV/AIDS archive’, I do not refer to a specific collection of documents related to the AIDS crisis. The expression does not identify some particular institutional archive, hoarded in a museum or a university. The ‘AIDS archive’ does not refer either to a personal collection belonging to someone who survived through the early AIDS crisis. Rather, throughout this study, the expressions ‘HIV/AIDS archive’ and ‘AIDS archive’ refer more generally to the set of cultural responses to the HIV/AIDS crisis in the nearly four decades of the pandemic as we know it.<sup>1</sup> These responses include the aggregate of published works on the cultural analysis of HIV/AIDS during the four decades of the pandemic. In the first two decades, these works evolved from early analysis of the constructed nature of AIDS in scientific and media discourse to discussion of representation, visuality, and performativity in the 1990s.<sup>2</sup> More recent debates in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are marked by efforts to keep the legacy of the political struggles of AIDS alive as well as by growing recognition of the need to broaden the cultural analysis of HIV/AIDS in geographical and epistemological terms. The ‘HIV/AIDS archive’ in this

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<sup>1</sup> To a great extent, the focus of this project is AIDS and HIV/AIDS, rather than HIV. That is, I focus on cultural interventions from the period leading to the emergence of new combinations of retrovirals that transformed HIV from a deadly infection to a chronic disease.

<sup>2</sup> For references of some of the earlier examples of literature of the cultural analysis of HIV/AIDS, including works by Paula Treichler (1987), Simon Watney (1987), Douglas Crimp (1988), Susan Sontag (1989), and Cindy Patton (1990), among others, see the bibliography section of this study. These references are often cited and commented upon throughout my chapters. For references of some of the earliest literature on AIDS in Spanish, see Alberto Cardín’s books mentioned in the preamble of Chapter 3. See also Chilean writer Pedro Lemebel’s literary work cited in Chapter 1. For an additional early book in Spain trying to make sense of the AIDS crisis from the perspective of art, see: Juan Vicente Aliaga and José Miguel G. Cortés, eds., *De amor y rabia* (Valencia: Servicio de Publicaciones, Universidad Politécnica, 1993). This last book was analysed by Hispanist Paul Julian Smith in his book *Vision Machines: Cinema, Literature and Sexuality in Spain and Cuba, 1983-1993* (London: Verso, 1996).

study also encompasses creative responses to the pandemic such as fiction books, art exhibitions, and performances, both those produced in the first two decades of the pandemic and those that ‘revisit’ the crisis from the present. In particular, this study focuses on the HIV/AIDS archive of Chile and Spain, the two contexts most relevant to my project; the analysis of these two contexts is often in dialogue with or in opposition to the more general, dominant AIDS archive of the US and Central and North Europe.

At the proposal stage five years ago, my doctoral project aimed to take the ‘archive’ as its topic of study. My plan was to add to the ‘archival turn’ of recent humanities scholarship<sup>3</sup> through a specific inquiry into the relationship between AIDS and the archive in new geographies of research. In its present state, my study does not theorise the archive in a thematic way. Rather, it takes the HIV/AIDS archive as a framework with which to think and write as a practising curator. Existing interdisciplinary approaches to the archive, including the few that specifically address ‘AIDS archives’, generally take as a point of departure Michel Foucault’s influential concept of the archive as the discursive field that structures our way of thinking (*The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 1969), elaborated further in the interaction between the ideas set out in Jacques Derrida’s key work *Archive Fever* (1996) and cultural studies’ materialist engagement with popular culture and subcultures. For instance, Halberstam has argued for the need for ‘a nuanced theory of archives and archiving’<sup>4</sup> that could extend the notion of the archive beyond its physical and spatial connotations, a theory capable of not only remembering but also activating queer subcultural production.

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<sup>3</sup> Ann Cvetkovich has identified the ‘archival turn’ in queer artistic, activist, and scholarship work as the move to the historical space of the archive of the critical, disruptive, and inventive strategies that have characterised lesbian, gay, trans, and queer subjectivities and their productions. See: Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

<sup>4</sup> Judith ‘Jack’ Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), p. 169.

My use of the term ‘AIDS archive’ in this study follows a review essay by Daniel C. Brouwer (2012) entitled ‘Activating the AIDS Archive’ (included in a special anniversary forum on the US activist group ACT UP).<sup>5</sup> The review looked at three seminal books published in 2009 that, when taken as a whole, summarise some of the ongoing discussions that my own research seeks to contribute to: Jennifer Brier's *Infectious Ideas*; Deborah B. Gould's *Moving Politics*; and Roger Hallas's *Reframing Bodies*.<sup>6</sup> All three books pose timely questions about the definition and the constituent subject of the archive. They also each reveal some of the academic gaps that I intend to fill in my research. In her book, for example, Gould states that her goal is to ‘plumb that history [the history of the political struggles surrounding AIDS] with an eye toward opening imaginative possibilities for the present’; this statement leaves open the question of who this US-centred (AIDS) history – the one that these authors address – belongs to, who it corresponds to. My research project identifies the contextual vacuum in the existing literature on cultural production around HIV/AIDS and uses it as an opportunity to contribute to the de-centring of dominant narratives and representations on HIV.

### **0.3 Context of the Study: The AIDS Crisis Revisitation**

The specific context of this study is the current ‘AIDS Crisis Revisitation.’ This is an expression recently proposed by Theodore (ted) Kerr, artist, organiser, and writer (and

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<sup>5</sup> Daniel C. Brouwer, ‘Activating the Aids Archive (Review Essay)’, *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 98 (February 2012): pp. 109–117.

<sup>6</sup> See: Jennifer Brier, *Infectious Ideas: US Political Responses to the AIDS Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Deborah B. Gould, *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP's Fight Against AIDS* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Roger Hallas, *Reframing Bodies: AIDS, Bearing Witness, and the Queer Moving Image* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009).

former Programs Manager at Visual AIDS, New York) to designate the plethora of cultural productions that in recent years have been ‘revisiting’ the HIV/AIDS archive.<sup>7</sup> The expression characterises, in real time, a historical, present moment in which a new generation of artists, curators, and researchers, despite their serostatus, are re-engaging with the early AIDS archive in an attempt to make sense of the historical and cultural present (a historical moment in which I place myself). The expression is soon to be established as a reference term in the field of HIV/AIDS cultural analysis. It will be the basis (and title) of a book (currently in preparation) co-authored by Kerr and Alexandra Juhasz, a pioneer AIDS activist and media scholar. The term also frames the call for submissions of a forthcoming issue of *On Curating*, which will be focused on the relationship between curating and HIV/AIDS, the first of its kind to my knowledge.<sup>8</sup> Kerr has identified two waves, or moments, within this revisitation: The first, from about 2008 to 2010, took form around a set of films and documentaries that were produced in the US and gained international circulation. These films included *Address* (2010, directed by Ira Sachs), *United in Anger: A History of ACT UP* (2012, directed by Jim Hubbard), and the Oscar-nominated documentary *How to Survive a Plague* (2012, directed by David France). To this list of films Kerr adds several exhibitions, most of which took place in New York City, and a number of books, such as *Fire in the Belly: The Life and Times of David Wojnarowicz* (2013) by Cynthia Carr. All these works ‘revisited’ the political legacy of early AIDS activisms and cultural responses to HIV with the intention of reactivating that memory in the present and pointing out, among

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<sup>7</sup> See: Theodore (ted) Kerr, ‘AIDS – Based on a True Story’, *Dandelion* 7, no. 1 (Summer 2016). DOI: 10.16995/ddl.341 The expression had been introduced earlier in Theodore (ted) Kerr, ed., ‘Time Is Not A Line: Conversations, Essays, and Images about HIV/AIDS Now’, *We Who Feel Differently*, no. 3 (Fall 2014), accessed 29 April 2017. <http://wewhofeeldifferently.info/journal.php#TOP>

<sup>8</sup> See: ‘Call for Submissions: On Curating HIV/AIDS’, *Visual AIDS Blog* (October 30, 2017), accessed February 13, 2019. <https://visualaids.org/blog/call-for-submissions-on-curating-hiv-aids> The editor of the special issue, Ted Kerr, did approach my collective and encouraged us to submit a proposal, but time prevented it.

other things, that the HIV crisis is not over. And yet, as Kerr notes, this first wave of AIDS Crisis Revision is ‘both helpful and fraught’. Subsequent waves of the revisitation have expanded the scope of earlier work, and Kerr situates the second wave in 2014 with a set of films commissioned by the AIDS/art organisation Visual AIDS. These films incorporated experiences of people of colour, transgender people, people newly affected by HIV, and long-term survivors, thereby engaging – often through inter-generational work – with the historical AIDS archive while hoping to have an impact in the present.

However, despite the expansion that Kerr observes, the geopolitical framework currently offered by ‘AIDS Crisis Revisitation’, I argue, is still limited. I value Kerr’s expression as contextual and situated; it focuses on how the crisis has impacted and continues to impact, mainly, the US, which is the context he knows best. Very recently the expression has also been used to encompass examples outside the US, namely the exhibition ‘AIDS – Based on a True Story’ (Hygiene Museum, Dresden)<sup>9</sup>. But in its current usages, the expression is still limited and compounds the incorrect perception that all the AIDS crisis revisitation work currently being done comes out of the US, or more recently, Central and North Europe.<sup>10</sup> Faced with this situation, the present study

<sup>9</sup> Curated by Vladimír Čajkovac and presenting AIDS posters, art, and cultural artefacts. The basis of this exhibition was the museum’s vast international collection of AIDS prevention posters, which includes 7,000 posters from more than 100 countries. The presence of Spain and Chile in this exhibition was limited. See: *AIDS Nach einer wahren Begebenheit*, curator's website, accessed 14 February 2019. <http://www.cajkovac.com/index.php/project/201509-aids---nach-einer-wahren-begebenheit/>

<sup>10</sup> Kerr is fully committed to the need to decentre the prevailing narratives around the history of AIDS, also in geopolitical terms. Among his other projects, this commitment is evidenced by the event he and I (together with four other people doing work on AIDS) organised in The Showroom, London, in the summer of 2017. See: *Other Stories of HIV/AIDS: Culture, History, and the Ongoing Epidemic*, 24 Aug 2017, accessed, 21 February 2019. The event emphasised the need to ‘destabilize and decentre dominant narratives circulating about the history of HIV/AIDS’ (more details of the event can be found in the portfolio of practice included in this thesis). Therefore, I am confident that he would be sympathetic to the framing of my project here as both within and against current uses of the ‘AIDS crisis revisitation’ expression. In the end, my gesture of contextualising the present study in relation to the current revisitation of the AIDS crisis should be understood as an attempt to keep the conversation alive.



aims to expand the term in two ways: First, to expand the literature's geopolitical focus, the study seeks to contribute to the academic and curatorial work that is currently being done around the 'AIDS crisis revisitation'. Second, it does so through a practice-led methodology which considers selected case studies from 'the South', with a focus on Chile and Spain. Inspired by Paul B. Preciado (2012), the South here should not be understood as solely a geographic area but as 'a counter-topia'<sup>11</sup> that allows us to challenge current epistemological and geopolitical standards.

Broadening the cultural analysis of HIV/AIDS in geographical and epistemological terms is a task that goes beyond the possibilities of this thesis. Rather, this practice-led project takes a situated standpoint by taking its temporal and geographical demarcation from my own ongoing collaborative curatorial project, the *AIDS Anarchive*. I have been conducting this project together with my colleagues Nancy Garín and Linda Valdés since 2012-2013. This independent research and production project explores cultural responses to the AIDS crisis in a number of contexts from Spain and Latin America, so far with a focus on Chile and particular regions of Spain, as these are the contexts from which the three members of the collective come from and where we have lived and worked. The *AIDS Anarchive* project is therefore a situated project where research interests and personal biographies collide (full details on the practice component of the project are offered in a dedicated section in this study). My choice of Chile and Spain in this dissertation is not part of an effort to produce a comparative study of the similarities and differences that exist between the two contexts. Again, the focus on these two particular contexts is instead determined by the practical component of the project and

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<sup>11</sup> Paul B. Preciado, 'Campconceptualisms of the South. Tropicamp, performative politics and subalternity', 19–20 November 2012, presentation text of the seminar, accessed 21 February 2019. <https://www.macba.cat/en/seminar-tropicamp>

its situated nature, in which personal biographies and research interests meet. However, it is convenient to briefly outline some general conditions that prevail in Spain and Chile – determined by their common trajectory as contexts that have gone through rampant dictatorships – and the ways in which these conditions manifest themselves in the HIV/AIDS archive.

While in Spain the dictatorship was imposed by a civil war, in Chile it was established through a military coup; these distinct circumstances imply a great difference.<sup>12</sup>

However, both countries share the global conditions of so-called ‘institutional transitions’, the development of which is open to the rules and procedures established by authoritarian governments. In both cases, the exceptional conditions imposed by the dictatorship and the democratic transition were a more or less visible way of assuming the challenges of modernity, development, and the free market.<sup>13</sup> Another common element between the two contexts is the forgetfulness and silence regarding the violence exercised by the dictatorships of Franco and Pinochet, which translated into an absence of national plans of reparation and historical memory until very recent years. Likewise, some of the common conditions that characterised the end of both dictatorships and both the transition processes have also translated into Chile’s and Spain’s respective

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<sup>12</sup> González Martínez and Nicolás Marín (2010), 20-23. In this regard, the most relevant difference between Chile and Spain is that in the Chilean case, prominent leaders of the dictatorship were brought to justice. Paradoxically, Chilean claims were processed in Spanish courts, as in the notorious 1998 case against General Pinochet.

<sup>13</sup> For a comprehensive, comparative study of the recent political histories of Chile and Spain, see (only in Spanish): Carmen González Martínez and Encarna Nicolás Marín, ‘Presentación. De la dictadura a la democracia en España y Chile, nuevas perspectivas’, Special Issue, *Ayer* 3, no. 79 (2010): pp. 13–30. Pinochet’s dictatorship in Chile is now widely regarded as the laboratory for the global implementation of neoliberalism. See: Elizabeth Quay Hutchison, et al., eds., ‘VII. The Pinochet Dictatorship: Military Rule and Neoliberal Economics 433’, in *The Chile Reader: History, Culture, Politics*, pp. 433–520 (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013). In Spain, the entry into democracy was accompanied by its incorporation into NATO and later into the EU, a process that symbolically ended in 1992 with the triple celebration in the country of the Olympics in Barcelona, the European Capital of Culture festival in Madrid, and the Expo in Seville.

AIDS histories.<sup>14</sup> For example, as my own research suggests, in both contexts the responses to the AIDS crisis from the first homosexual liberation movements as well as from the traditional left were very dull; these dull responses were due to similar conditions, namely the respective experiences of a dictatorship. Thus, in Spain it was not the gay community that first reacted to the crisis. It was the anti-AIDS citizens' committees that offered the first energetic and articulated response to the early crisis. In fact, when the first news of AIDS arrived, fearing further social stigmatisation and the loss of recently acquired rights and freedom, the gay community in Spain 'looked the other way.'<sup>15</sup> As I have noted elsewhere, a recurring explanation among early gay and lesbian activists for the lukewarm early response to AIDS in Spain refers to the fatigue, both emotional and political, that the dictatorship had brought about.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, in Chile, the burden of dictatorship as a reason for the difficulty of organising early responses to AIDS has been a recurring topic in conversations and public discussions that have taken place in the context of my collaborative project *AIDS Anarchiv*e, as well as in field work that I have been able to conduct in the course of this study.<sup>17</sup>

As the histories of HIV/AIDS in Spain and Chile are intricately linked to the countries' recent political histories, despite the chronological differences, the work of revisiting

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<sup>14</sup> The first case of AIDS diagnosed in Spain was in Catalunya in 1981. The first case diagnosed in Chile was in Santiago in 1984. On the history of AIDS in Chile, see: Amelia Donoso and Victor Hugo Robles, *Sida en Chile: historias fragmentadas*, Santiago de Chile: Siempre Viva Ediciones, 2015; Óscar Contardo, 'El sida y una rara democracia', in *Raro. Una historia gay en Chile* (Santiago de Chile: Editorial Planeta Chilena, 2011), pp. 343–402.

<sup>15</sup> This reaction is described in more detail by two of the main members of LSD y La Radical Gai, the first two queer groups in Spain active in Madrid in the 1990s. I refer to both groups often throughout the study. See: Ricardo Llamas and Fefa Vila, 'Spain: Passion for Life. Una historia del movimiento de lesbianas y gays en el Estado español', in *Conciencia de un singular deseo, Estudios de lesbianas y gays en el Estado español*, comp. by Xosé M. Buxán (Barcelona: Laertes, 1997), 215.

<sup>16</sup> See subsection 'Transition As Disruption' in Aimar Arriola and Nancy Garín, 'Global Fictions, Local Struggles', *L'Internationale Online* 1 (2014), accessed 29 April 2017. [http://www.internationaleonline.org/research/politics\\_of\\_life\\_and\\_death/5\\_global\\_fictions\\_local\\_struggles\\_or\\_the\\_distribution\\_of\\_three\\_documents\\_from\\_an\\_aids\\_counter\\_archive\\_in\\_progress](http://www.internationaleonline.org/research/politics_of_life_and_death/5_global_fictions_local_struggles_or_the_distribution_of_three_documents_from_an_aids_counter_archive_in_progress)

<sup>17</sup> I made a research trip to Santiago, Chile, in the summer of 2015 funded by AHRC/CHASE.

the AIDS crisis in these two contexts has also been slow to arrive. The institutional characteristics of the respective processes of democratic transition in Spain and Chile, as well as the political consensus on which those processes were based, have been translated into the general belief, overturned only recently, that this was a ‘closed period’ to which it is not necessary to return. This belief is evidenced by the fact that, in both Spain and Chile, the critical analysis of the end of the respective dictatorships and the beginning of the democratic transitions, contemporary to the emergence of the AIDS crisis, has started only recently. As I expose in the next section, my own curatorial work over the last four years, in the context of the development of this thesis, has played a modest but important role in addressing the situation.

### 0.3.1 *The AIDS Crisis Revisitation in Spain and Chile*

The waves or stages that define the current AIDS crisis revisitation in Spain and Chile revolve around specific milestones. These milestones are in all instances publicly accessible museum exhibitions and curatorial projects (including the work of my own collective), and therefore the present academic study constitutes a significant contribution. We can place perhaps the first AIDS crisis ‘revisitation’ wave around 2005, with the publication of two essays that reported on the activity of two of the first queer groups in Spain: LSD and La Radical Gai. These two groups worked in Madrid in the 1990s and did intersectional work on AIDS.<sup>18</sup> The activist and theoretical work of several members of these two groups, in particular Sejo Carrascosa, Ricardo Llamas,

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<sup>18</sup> See: Sejo Carrascosa and Fefa Vila, ‘Geografías víricas: habitats e imágenes de coaliciones y resistencias’, in *El eje del mal es heterosexual: figuraciones, movimientos y prácticas queer*, ed. Grupo de Trabajo Queer (Madrid: Traficantes de Sueños, 2005), pp. 45–59. See also: Carmen Navarrete, María Ruido, and Fefa Vila, ‘Trastornos para devenir: entre artes y políticas feministas y queer en el Estado español’, in *Desacuerdos 2. Sobre arte políticas y esfera pública en el Estado español* (Barcelona; San Sebastián; Seville: MACBA; Arteleku; UNIA, 2005), pp. 158–187.

Javier Sáez, Paco Vidarte, and Fefa Vila, is essential for understanding the conditions in which the early queer movement in Spain emerged and that movement's involvement in the fight against AIDS and other social struggles.<sup>19</sup> A few years later, in 2010 Paul B. Preciado organised the international seminar *Sick 80s*, at MACBA, which served as a meeting point between early and current cultural analysts of the AIDS crisis, such as Cindy Patton and Michel Feher, as well as representatives of local and international HIV/AIDS activism.<sup>20</sup> This is where I first came into contact with the theoretical work of Cindy Patton, one of the earliest and most lucid analysts of the discursive constructions around AIDS; her work is referenced in the preamble of Chapter 1 of this study. This is also where Michel Feher enunciated his controversial claim about the relationship between AIDS activism and neoliberalism, which I briefly comment upon in Chapter 2.

But the real starting point of the current AIDS crisis revisitation in Spain must be placed around 2012–2013, with the celebration of a number of museum initiatives. In preparation since 2011 and inaugurated in 2013, the exhibition *Minimum Resistance* at the Reina Sofía Museum, Madrid presented – for the first time in a major museum setting – posters, publications and other ephemera by LSD and La Radical Gai. In parallel, in 2012–2013 the museum also hosted the research residency that I conducted together with my colleague Nancy Garín; this residency formally marked the beginning of my collaborative project *AIDS Anarchive*. The residency resulted in a film and video

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<sup>19</sup> Examples of works published by members of the groups also include: Ricardo Llamas, ed., *Construyendo sidentidades* (Madrid: Siglo XXI Editores, 1995); Paco Vidarte, *Ética marica* (Madrid: Egales, 2007). LSD was included in the anthology *Art and Queer Culture*, ed. Catherine Lord and Richard Meyer (London: Phaidon, 2013).

<sup>20</sup> Full details available here: *Sick 80s. The AIDS Crisis, Art and Counter-biopolitical Guerrilla*, November 26–27, 2010, MACBA, Barcelona, accessed February 10, 2019. <https://www.macba.cat/en/sick-80s-the-aids-crisis-art-and-counter-biopolitical-guerrilla> At the time Preciado was a central member of the teaching staff at MACBA's Independent Study Program where my project colleagues Nancy Garín and Linda Valdés and I had met two years before.

programme, an essay for the inaugural issue of *L'Internationale Online* (commissioned by the Reina Sofía Museum), and a seminar in UNIA International University of Andalusia, Seville that involved guests from Chile and Spain (all of these products are detailed in the portfolio of practice included as part of this study). In 2014, a group of researchers, activists, and former members of La Radical Gai and LSD – Lucas Platero, Fefa Vila, Andrés Senra, and Sejo Carrascosa – developed a research and production project boldly entitled *¿Archivo queer?*; this project accompanied and contextualised the respective archives of both groups upon their integration into the collection of the Documentation Centre of the Reina Sofía Museum.<sup>21</sup> From this moment and up to the present, the creative and museum projects revisiting the AIDS crisis in Spain have flourished. Three exhibitions and a book (2016–2018) related to my collaborative project *AIDS Anarchive* have emerged, as well as several projects by younger artists and curators. Examples include:

- A series of three exhibitions curated by Jesús Alcaide under the title *Los nombres del padre* (CAPE, Cordoba, Andalusia, 2012 [The names of the father]), in which three contemporary artists dialogue with the work of Pepe Espaliú (1955–1993), who is regarded as the ‘first’ artist in Spain to refer to AIDS in his work.<sup>22</sup>
- The research and choreography project *The Touching Community* (2015–2018)

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<sup>21</sup> This chronology and the temporal coincidence of the different projects at Reina Sofía was recently confirmed in a book dedicated to the 1980s by L'Internationale museum network. See: Jesús Carrillo, ‘AIDS, Sexual Dissidence and Biopolitical Activism’, in *The Long 1980s*, ed. Nick Aikens, Teresa Grandes, Nav Haq, Beatriz Herráez, and Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez (Amsterdam: Valiz / L'Internationale, 2018), pp. 218–224.

<sup>22</sup> See: Jesús Alcaide and Montserrat Rodríguez Garzo, *Los Nombres del Padre. En torno a Pepe Espaliú* (Madrid: Brumaria, 2015). Subsequently other projects on Espaliú by Alcaide have followed, focusing on overlooked aspects of the artist and, mainly, from a perspective of the history of art. Alcaide’s projects on Espaliú had been preceded by my individual curatorial project *Marginalia* (Arteleku, San Sebastian, 2012–2013), around the personal library of Pepe Espaliú.

by dancer Aimar Pérez Galí, in which I have acted as a research advisor and an editor, and which is the focus of my Chapter 2.

- A film (2016) by the artist duo El Palomar<sup>23</sup> based on an unpublished script by Alberto Cardín (1948–1992), who is regarded as the first public figure in Spain to have been open about his HIV status.
- The exhibition *La contrarrevolución de los caballos* [The counter-revolution of horses] (Centre Civic Can Felipa, Barcelona, 2015–2016)<sup>24</sup> curated by Marta Echaves, which looked at the 1990s through a small selection of contemporary artists and projects, including a documentary produced by *¿Archivo queer?*.
- And the collaborative project *Efecto de una fuerza aplicada bruscamente* [Effect of a force applied abruptly] (March 2018-April 2019, IVAM, Valencia) by artist Pepe Miralles, who has been doing AIDS-related art work since the 1990s and whom, on this occasion, focused on the impact of AIDS on the community of ‘men who have sex with other men’.

In Chile, existing AIDS crisis revisitation initiatives are limited to the last decade. One noteworthy difference between Spain and Chile in regards to existing work on AIDS is that, with the exception of Pedro Lemebel's literary work in the 1990s, the literature and cultural production that deals with the HIV/AIDS crisis in Chile is recent. The answer to this situation is found again in the political and social context in which AIDS appeared in Chile, that is, Pinochet's dictatorship, and in the official historical memory projects carried out in recent decades. As González and Nicolás (2010) have suggested, in Chile, unlike in Spain, the State took over the management of historical memory. And in

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<sup>23</sup> El Palomar (R. Marcos Mota y Mariokissime), *No es homosexual simplemente el homófilo sino el cegado por el falo perdido*, 2016, Video, 28 min.

<sup>24</sup> 'Caballo', horse in Spanish, referring both to the equine mammal as well as to heroine in slang.

government-funded initiatives, projects dealing with issues of sexual dissidence and cultural activism have been conspicuously absent. Possibly, the first initiative of AIDS crisis revisitation in Chile can be placed in 2012, in a round table titled ‘Cuerpo invisible: políticas del VIH/sida’ [Invisible body: politics of HIV/AIDS], organised and moderated by my current project colleague Nancy Garín and by former member of our collective and Chilean AIDS activist Fabián Crovetto.<sup>25</sup> The debate brought together members of the pioneering collective MUMS – Movement for Sexual Diversity; Guillermo Moscoso, artist and founding member of the 1990s activist group *Vivo Positivo*<sup>26</sup>; and Luisa San Marín, member of the collective LEA (Lesbianas en Acción [Lesbians in Action]), a group founded in Concepción in 1990 and one of the few in Chile doing prevention work for women. Around the same time, the important group exhibition *Perder la forma humana* [Losing the Human Form] (2012–2013, Museo Reina Sofía, Madrid) gave new relevance to the work of the activist and performance duo Yeguas del Apocalipsis, subsequently leading to the presentation of their work in the 2014 São Paulo Biennial.<sup>27</sup> Formed by anti-Pinochet activists and writers Pedro Lemebel (1952–2015) and Pancho Casas (1959), and active between 1987 and 1997, the duo is the sole protagonist of my Chapter 1. Also in 2012, Chilean writer and scholar

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<sup>25</sup> The debate took place within the framework of the seminar and programme of activities *Políticas del cuerpo\** [Politics of the Body\*] that my collective ‘Equipo re’ organised at the MAC Museum of Contemporary Art of Chile. With the aim of transferring to the Chilean context some of the intuitions about the crossroads between dictatorship and cultural activism that emerged during our research at MACBA’s PEI back in 2010, this seminar in Chile sought to explore the visual, performative, and collaborative work that represented forms of resistance ‘in and from the body’ to Pinochet’s Dictatorship and during the first years of the democratic transition. For a collective account of this initiative, including the opinions of some of the participants, see Nancy Garín, ‘Politics of the Body: Forms of Resisting’, *LatinArt.com* (1 September 2012), accessed 16 February 2019. <http://www.latinart.com/aiview.cfm?id=460>

<sup>26</sup> Guillermo Moscoso’s performance *Geno-sida* [Geno-AIDS] is referenced in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

<sup>27</sup> This exhibition, which was not focused on the AIDS crisis, was the result of a long-term research project by the Red de Conceptualismos del Sur [Network of Southern Conceptualisms] on Latin American cultural production in the 1980s. Their project concentrated on major case studies from, mainly, the Southern Cone, Brazil, México and Peru. Sponsored by the Museo Reina Sofía, and consequently premiered in Madrid, the exhibition travelled to other contexts in Latin America such as Argentina and Peru, but not to Chile. For the exhibition catalogue (available in English), see *Losing the Human Form: A Seismic Image of the 1980s in Latin America*, edited by Red de Conceptualismos del Sur (Madrid, Reina Sofía Museum, 2012).



Lina Meruane published the book *Viajes Virales* (translated into English in 2014 as *Viral Voyages: Tracing AIDS in Latin America*).<sup>28</sup> Despite focusing on literary production, Meruane provides strong reflections valid to the analysis of HIV/AIDS visual cultures in Latin America. I have already referred elsewhere to the influence of this book on my collective's work. In the context of this study, the book remains an inspiration and potent reminder of the need to open existing scholarly work on the AIDS archive in geopolitical terms and beyond a single-case, national perspective. In 2015, journalist Víctor Hugo Robles, also known as 'El Che de los Gays' [Che of the Gays] for his role as a forerunner gay activist in Chile, co-authored the first comprehensive volume on the history of AIDS in Chile, from a journalistic perspective.<sup>29</sup> From 2016 to 2018, the aforementioned Guillermo Moscoso was the subject of a retrospective exhibition that travelled through different regions of Chile.<sup>30</sup> Finally, in 2018, the young curators Gastón Muñoz and Antonia Sepúlveda organised the 10-day long exhibition *+ [Arte y cuerpo seropositivo en el Chile contemporáneo]* (10-27 October 2018, Chemistry and Pharmacy Museum, University of Chile, Santiago de Chile), focused on the experience of living with HIV today through the work of six contemporary artists (including Víctor Hugo Robles, as a representative of the earlier decades of AIDS).

The present academic study adds to all these initiatives by covering particular aspects of

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<sup>28</sup> Lina Meruane, *Viral Voyages. Tracing AIDS in Latin America* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

<sup>29</sup> Amelia Donoso and Víctor Hugo Robles, *Sida en Chile: historias fragmentadas* (Santiago de Chile: Siempre Viva Ediciones, 2015). Robles is also known for his autobiographical volume of the history of the gay movement in Chile, see: Víctor Hugo Robles, *Bandera hueca* (Santiago de Chile: Editorial Arcis; Cuarto propio, 2008).

<sup>30</sup> The exhibition was curated by Carolina Lara and toured with funds from the Chilean Ministry of Culture's National Program for the Arts (FONDART). For the exhibition catalogue (only in Spanish), see: *Guillermo Moscoso. Cuerpo, Memoria y Activismo*, Sala CAP - Casa del Arte - Universidad de Concepción, 1 September–16 October 2016 (Concepción, Chile: Universidad de Concepción, 2016).

the HIV/AIDS archive of Chile and Spain through an original practice-based methodology, which, in turn, broadens the AIDS crisis revisitation work that is being done in the more dominant contexts of the US and Central and North Europe.

#### **0.4 Surface Matters, or How to Engage Differently with the HIV/AIDS**

##### **Archive**

In this study, I explore the notion of ‘surface’ as a driving concept. In turn, my inquiry into surface also shapes the overall question of this project, which I will introduce shortly. Not a term immediately identified with HIV/AIDS, surface is nonetheless a most valuable term when reconsidering important aspects of the AIDS archive. For example, surface is a ubiquitous but overlooked term in the biomedical literature on HIV/AIDS. Thus, the term can be found in texts dealing with topics as varied as the description of topical treatments of skin infections, the prevention measures in the spread of HIV-related viruses, and the assessment of male circumcision as a cause of reduction of HIV acquisition.<sup>31</sup> The term is also present in the critical literature of the cultural production around AIDS. For example, Judith Butler’s (1990) pioneering work on gender and performativity, which at times considers HIV/AIDS-related cultural works (such as the early Latino and drag ‘ballroom’ scene in New York City), suggests that discourses around gender operate through ‘the very distinctions between the natural

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<sup>31</sup> For example, the term ‘surface’ is often present in descriptions of topical treatments of skin infections such as candidiasis. See: Stephen E. Stratton and Sarah Watstein, *The Encyclopedia of HIV and AIDS*, 3rd ed. (New York: Facts On File, Inc., 2012), p. 60. Likewise, ‘Hand washing and careful cleaning of dishes and kitchen surfaces’ is recommended as a prevention measure in the spread of HIV-related viruses such as cytomegalovirus. See: Stratton and Watstein, p. 89. Surface is also considered in the assessment of male circumcision as a cause of reduction of HIV acquisition. See: Godfrey Kigozi et al., ‘Foreskin Surface Area and HIV Acquisition in Rakai, Uganda (Size Matters)’, *AIDS: The Official Journal of the International Society* 23, no. 16 (23 October 2009): pp. 2209–2213.

and the artificial, depth and surface.’<sup>32</sup> More recently, surface has been considered in the analysis of the haptic visuality of HIV/AIDS videos and films. Drawing on phenomenology and the works of Deleuze, Laura U. Marks (2002) has considered HIV/AIDS-related ‘dying images’ disseminated ‘across *the surface of the screen*’ (emphasis mine).<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, in her analysis of the spatial politics of HIV/AIDS-related museum exhibitions, Petra Kuppers (citing Jacqueline Foertsch’s work on the representations of AIDS in the Cold War era) has noted how the process of HIV infection is often characterised as ‘a surface phenomenon’. Marks and Kuppers’ discussion of HIV/AIDS and surface within the field of visual cultures points to the narrow link between surface and the domain of the visible and the perceptible, a relationship that also traverses my study.

Throughout the chapters, in this study surface comes to represent two things: material surface and the method of analysis known as ‘surface reading’. The varied material surfaces on which this project leans span from the physicality of the bodies (human and others) that populate the AIDS archive to the photographs, touchscreens, books, and exhibition displays with which I engage in this study. In my analysis of these varied surfaces, I engage in ‘surface reading’. The debate on surface reading as a method of analysis first appeared in the field of literary studies in a volume edited by Best and Marcus (2009).<sup>34</sup> In discussing the topic, the editors responded to a particular notion of

<sup>32</sup> See Judith Butler, ‘Preface (1990)’ in *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. xxxi. Drawing on the work of Mary Douglas and Julia Kristeva, the closing sub-section of the book considers the limit and surface of bodies as politically constructed. See ‘IV. Bodily inscriptions, performative subversions’, in Butler, p. 175–193.

<sup>33</sup> Laura U. Marks, *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002). Marks’ analysis of HIV/AIDS moving images is in Chapter 6 ‘Loving a Disappearing Time’, pp. 91–110.

<sup>34</sup> Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, ‘Surface Reading: An Introduction’, in *Representations*, University of California Press (Fall 2009), pp. 1–21. Interest in the method of surface reading has recently re-emerged in the context of the branch of critical theory known as ‘thing theory’, as stated by a 2017 forum on the topic published in the Stanford blog *Arcade*. See: Sarah Wasserman, Patrick Moran (curators), ‘Thing Theory in Literary Studies’, *Arcade* blog, Stanford, last accessed 16 July 2018.

interpretation that came to be known as ‘symptomatic reading’ by inviting readers to engage with surface. Whereas symptomatic reading, a way of reading literary texts heavily rooted in psychoanalysis and Marxism, argues that ‘the most interesting aspect of a text is what it represses’, surface reading suggests attending to what is manifest in texts rather than ‘plunging into their depths’. Best and Marcus identify Fredric Jameson (1981) as one of the biggest exponents of symptomatic reading, pointing to his assertion that the role of interpretation should be to seek ‘a latent meaning behind a manifest one.’<sup>35</sup> In symptomatic reading, ‘what a text means lies in what it does not say, and thus determining meaning requires the interpreter to ‘rewrite the text in terms of a master code’. For Best and Marcus, when symptomatic readers evaluate the elements that are present in the text, the readers do so by ‘constructing them as symbolic of something latent or concealed.’ Conversely, Best and Marcus take surface to mean ‘what is evident, perceptible, apprehensible [;] what insists on being looked *at* rather than what we must train ourselves to see *through*.’<sup>36</sup>

Following the lead of Best and Marcus and more recent interest on surface reading, in this study I engage with images, gestures, and objects in the AIDS archive that persistently demand my attention *at the surface*. Symptomatic readers may have considered some of these same images, gestures, and objects in the past, but only to interrogate them about what they hide or conceal. In contrast, I put my symptomatic

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<https://arcade.stanford.edu/colloquies/thing-theory-literary-studies> Here, 'surface reading' comes to represent attentive reading, as paying ‘attention to the things in words that can resist and refuse the reader's desire for meaning.’

<sup>35</sup> Specifically, they refer to Jameson's *The Political Unconscious* (1981) as ‘the book that popularized symptomatic reading among U.S. literary critics’. See: Best and Marcus, pp. 2-3. As pointed out by Best and Marcus, the notion that sustains all forms of symptomatic reading, that is, ‘that the most significant truths are not immediately apprehensible and may be veiled or invisible’, has a long history. For example, Umberto Eco traces it back to the Gnostics in the second century CE, who declared truth as always ‘secret, deep, and mysterious’. For a brief genealogy of symptomatic reading from the Gnostics to Jameson, see Best and Marcus (2009), pp. 4-6.

<sup>36</sup> Best and Marcus, p. 9.

gaze to rest to finally pay attention to the insistence of surface. My study proposes to take the method of ‘surface reading’ out of its niche in the field of literary studies and bring it into the field of visual culture, specifically, to the analysis of the HIV/AIDS archive of Chile and Spain. In this study, I do not declare myself as having the powers to disclose the AIDS archive's ‘hidden depths’. My role here is not to ‘restore to the surface’ the ‘deep history’ that the archive represses. Rather, I propose surface reading as a way to engage with the HIV/AIDS archive differently. My defence in this section and throughout the study of surface reading as a different mode of relating to and learning from the AIDS archive resonates with a statement by Foucault about his relationship to archives (again, noted by Best and Marcus): rather than digging in, penetrating the archive for ‘relations that are secret, hidden, more silent or deeper than [...] consciousness’, Foucault describes himself as seeking ‘to define the relations on the very surface of discourse’ and ‘to make visible what is invisible only because it’s too much on the surface of things.’<sup>37</sup>

My exploration of surface in this thesis extends throughout the three chapters, each of which focuses on an overlooked motif or problematic narrative in the HIV/AIDS archive: non-human animals, the sense of touch, and the book-object, respectively. I argue throughout the study that animals, touch, and books all lie in conceptual proximity in their figuration as surface. Through these three dedicated chapters, each of these motifs provides an opportunity to revisit important aspects of the AIDS crisis as we know it and to re-describe some of the most persistent material-semiotic constructions surrounding HIV/AIDS. Each motif also helps us reassess the

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<sup>37</sup> Foucault Live: Interviews, 1961–84, ed. Sylvère Lotringer, trans. John Johnston (New York, 1989), pp. 57–58. Cited by Best and Marcus, p. 13.

surface/depth distinction so central to symptomatic reading, a concept that I address further in the following paragraphs. In fact, my overall question for this PhD is as follows: how can the rethinking of our relationship with surface contribute to producing a different kind of knowledge of the HIV/AIDS archive? To answer to this question, I take two steps. First, in the respective chapters, I expose the centrality that each of the three motifs – animals, sense of touch, and books – have in the AIDS archive, suggesting the ways in which each of these motifs has been connected, often negatively, with the field of surfaces. So, for example, via Ron Broglio (2012), who works on the crossroads between art and animal studies and serves as my main theoretical source in Chapter 1, I examine how Western thought has constructed the ‘animal Other’ as a surface being, lacking in interiority and depth. In turn, this chapter provides an opportunity to reverse this logic and engage with surface as a locus for productive thinking. In Chapter 2, drawing upon Derrida’s (2005) philosophical overview of the sense of touch, I question the traditional position of the sense of touch as the sense offering ‘the most certainty’ and, thus, as the sense most associated with notions of exteriority and surface. In Chapter 3, with Leah Price, book historian and cultural analyst, I discuss how the book-object lies in an apparently irreconcilable tension between the value of its interior (the text) and the value of its exterior (its surface as an object). By intervening in this tension, I explore how an equal appreciation of the contents and materiality of a book might become intrinsic to its many potential ‘afterlives’. As the second step towards answering my study’s question, throughout the entire study I remain alert to the danger of falling into a binary or facile distinction of the surface-depth relation. As Best and Marcus have noted, symptomatic reading often combines three sets of oppositions: present/absent, manifest/latent, and surface/depth. In this study, I am interested in rethinking the surface/depth opposition. For symptomatic

readers, what is deep is ‘fully present’, but ‘so completely covered by an opaque surface, that it can only be detected by an extreme degree of penetration or insight’; in contrast, surface is associated with ‘superficiality’ and deception, ‘with what can be perceived without close examination and, implicitly, would turn out to be false upon closer scrutiny.’ While for symptomatic reading, holding tight to the distinction between surface/depth is essential, since there is no depth without a surface to traverse, throughout the chapters of this study I focus on moments in which the emphasis on this distinction is suspended. I join Anne Anlin Cheng in her argument that the surface-depth dichotomy must be overcome, since ‘underneath surface there is only more surface.’<sup>38</sup> As Best and Marcus note, Cheng suggests that we replace the symptom, which depends on the contrast between surface and depth, with a multiplicity of surfaces understood as concealing nothing. In this study, I do precisely this by bringing together multiple instances of surface: the surface bodies of particular animal species (including humans); the literal surfaces of touchscreens, exhibition displays, and books; and the practice of description as critical analysis.

Some have pointed to the limitations of surface reading. For example, building on the works of both phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Marxist cultural theorist Raymond Williams, James Baskin (2015) has revised surface readers’ negative characterisation of symptomatic reading.<sup>39</sup> While Baskin acknowledges that surface reading brings an opportunity to reimagine and extend more traditional modes of critique, he strongly defends that all forms of cultural analysis must commit first and foremost to contextual and socio-historical analysis. Unlike Baskin, when I do note

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<sup>38</sup> Anne Anlin Cheng, ‘Skins, Tattoos, and Susceptibility’, *Representations* 108, no. 1 (Autumn 2009), pp. 98-119.

<sup>39</sup> Jason M. Baskin, ‘Soft Eyes: Marxism, Surface, and Depth’, *Mediations* 28, no. 2 (Spring 2015), pp. 5-18, accessed 4 November 2016. <http://www.mediationsjournal.org/articles/soft-eyes>

contextual or historical conditions in this study, I do not note them to shed light on the surface or on what the surface does not say. Rather, I note these conditions based on the belief that the social and historical context is already present on the surface itself. So, for example, when I refer to the political conditions of the dictatorship surrounding the work of Yeguas in Chapter 1, or to the recent austerity policies in Spain that frame Miguel Benlloch's latest performance in Chapter 3, I do not pretend to 'add context' to an image, gesture or object; those conditions are already registered in what the images, gestures, and objects themselves are saying. And when it seems that in my analysis I am practising 'close reading', a kind of inquisitive analysis at the centre of symptomatic readings, this closeness is not one that seeks for hidden meaning, but an 'intimacy' from which to engage with surface. Critics, such as Baskin, may dismiss surface reading as 'obvious' or even as unambitious due to their preference for not pursuing 'the truth'. But as Best and Marcus note, those same critics seem unable to cope with the 'slow pace', 'receptiveness', and 'fixed attention' that surface reading requires.<sup>40</sup> In this project, I surrender myself to the slowness and receptiveness that surface insistently demands from us and from our formation of responses. Surface readers are often disregarded as complacent with the status quo, accepting things 'as they are', or even accused of being short-sighted, since surface readers insist on focusing on surface instead of on looking past the surface in order to discover what is underneath it. What I ultimately suggest in this study is that the potency of surface reading, the possibilities that it offers to think and do differently, precisely lies in 'attentiveness', in the willingness of surface readers to finally pay surface the attention that it has been so urgently asking for. In the specific context of the AIDS archive, this attentiveness to surface counters previous forays into the archive in which 'reading' came to represent either mastering the archive (as in

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<sup>40</sup> Best and Marcus, p. 18.



scientific knowledge) or looking for hidden meaning in images, gestures, and objects, as was typical of 1980s and 1990s cultural criticism.

My focus in this project on surface as a driving concept and, more specifically, on the three motifs discussed in each chapter is not idiosyncratic or capricious. Rather, it is the result of engaging with my archive in an attentive manner, of being responsive first to what is already there, on the surface, temporally interrupting my symptomatic, inquisitive gaze. When I first envisaged this project, 'surface' was not present. The reigning paradigm in my project proposal for the study of cultural responses to the AIDS crisis in Spain and Chile was 'the archive'. My interest in surface arose gradually as part of the research, somewhere halfway through the process. It grew simultaneously around Best and Marcus' proposition of surface reading and in the context of my practice, in which the three motifs that convey each chapter 'emerged'. And while they are not the focus of this study, there are also personal reasons behind my interest in surface that are important to understanding some of this study's energies. Since I was little, I have been fascinated by the appearance and meanings of the surfaces that surround me, whether it was the mid-1990s pop music videos on my family's television screen or the photographs from fashion and trend magazines with which I decorated my school portfolio. Growing up as a teenager in the rural setting of the Basque country while coming to terms with my homosexuality, I was often bullied at school by my classmates, who called me 'superficial' because of what I had to say or how I looked. So at a very personal level, this study is also a way for me to grasp some of the logics by which some beings are deemed as superficial and others as deep, and to explore the possibilities of surface for thinking and doing differently, even for resisting. As Pedro

Lemebel says, ‘sometimes, minorities can use superficiality as a weapon.’<sup>41</sup> More recently, also on a personal level, I have used my engagement with surface in this study to react to the ‘semantics of the depths’ (my expression) that typically characterise the language that we use in the practice of research, which so regularly invites us to ‘excavate’, to ‘deepen’, to ‘penetrate’, to turn our interpretative apparatuses beyond surface.

However, my engagement in this study with particular surface matters in the HIV/AIDS archive of Chile and Spain will not make those matters fully readable or accessible by any means. Rather, the act of surface reading in this study offers us back some sense of how our own presence and capacity to respond to particular images, gestures, and objects might be, in turn, a means to acknowledge that everything happens in the play between surfaces, other’s and our own.

## **0.5 Theoretical perspective of the project**

My approach to the HIV/AIDS archive in this project has a cultural orientation. In that sense, the project incorporates the philosophical but does not anchor itself in an exclusively philosophical domain. Rather, each chapter follows the work of a single cultural theorist over the last decade, focusing on the work most relevant to the main motifs discussed in each chapter (which I will review more fully in the coming pages). In Chapter 1, I engage with the work of Ron Broglio (2011; 2012), who works in the intersection between art and critical animal studies. In Chapter 2, I follow leading dance

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<sup>41</sup> Original quote in Spanish: ‘A veces las minorías elaboran otras formas de desacato usando como arma la aparente superficialidad’. Cited in José Gabriel Lagos, ‘Por toda esa música que está ahí. La Diaria, Uruguay, 18 de agosto de 2009’, in *Lemebel Oral. Veinte años de entrevistas (1994-2014)*, ed. Gonzalo León, pp. 177–180 (Buenos Aires: Mansalva, 2018): p. 178.

and performance theorist André Lepecki (2006; 2016), whose influence keeps growing beyond his field. In Chapter 3, I discuss the work of Leah Price (2012), materialist literary critic and historian of the book as an object; her work on the uses of books that are beyond reading is gaining increasing recognition. The theoretical work of these three authors draws from a variety of sources, including philosophy, as is the case in particular of Broglio and Lepecki, whose thinking is imbued with the work of Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, and Donna Haraway, to mention three recurring names. Leah Price, whose work lies in the narrower fields of literary theory and the history of the book, also makes occasional incursions into philosophy, such as in her consideration of Cartesianism and Platonism – even of Derrida, albeit only momentarily – to describe long-standing, cultural attitudes surrounding reading and the division between physical and mental operations surrounding books.

Mirroring the relationship of these authors with the philosophical, in my own approach to their work I rely on philosophy to build and sustain my arguments and further extend cultural analysis. Thus, for example, Ron Broglio's ideas in Chapter 1 receive important adjustment through Deleuze. And in Chapter 2, in addition to thinking with Lepecki, I turn to Derrida's philosophical overview of the sense of touch to describe how 'touch' matters in the AIDS archive. Yet philosophy in this study is not limited to a merely 'supplementary' or 'compensation' role. When describing my relationship with the philosophical in this project, I am inspired by the words of Pedro Lemebel, Chilean writer and founding member of the collective Yeguas de Apocalipsis (my case study in Chapter 1), when he refers to his own relationship with the work of Deleuze, whose philosophical thinking Lemebel describes as 'a navigation chart, hopefully spread out,

frayed and slipped into the street, into transvestite skating, into ethnic subsistence'.<sup>42</sup> In my approach to the philosophical in this project, I am also inspired by Elizabeth Grosz's recognition that the goal of her now long-standing engagement with, again, the work of Deleuze 'is not to be in any way "faithful" to [his] oeuvre but, on the contrary, and more in keeping with its spirit, to use it, to make it work'.<sup>43</sup> Grosz's methodological approach of engaging only with those elements of the philosopher's work that are 'useful' (Grosz's own expression) inspires my own take on philosophy in this project.

In regards to its theoretical orientation, this project has a clear starting direction. The general goal of my project is to expand dominant narratives about the HIV/AIDS crisis, as these narratives are often overdetermined by questions of identity and sexual politics and thus fail to incorporate the intersectionality frequently at stake in the struggle against HIV. Following this goal, the theoretical orientation of the project seeks to begin to displace the position of 'the human' within these narratives. Thus, in general terms, the project places itself under the often-contested rubric of post-humanism.<sup>44</sup> Neither a discipline nor a cohesive theoretical framework, debates around the possibilities and limitations of the posthumanist perspective are still ongoing and cannot be reduced to a single form. For Cary Wolfe, a leading figure in the field, 'posthumanism names a historical moment in which the decentring of the human by its imbrication in technical, medical, informatic, and economic networks is increasingly impossible to ignore.'<sup>45</sup> In

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<sup>42</sup> Original quote in Spanish: '[...] Mientras que para la Academia, Deleuze es un reliquia mantenida en alcanfor, para mí es una carta de navegación, ojalá repartida, deshilada y deslizada a la calle, al patinaje travesti, a la subsistencia étnica, a las mujeres'. See: Fernando Blanco and Juan G. Gelpí, 'El desliz que desafía otros recorridos. Entrevista con Pedro Lemebel', in *Reinas de otro cielo. Modernidad y Autoritarismo en la obra de Pedro Lemebel*, ed. Fernando A. Blanco (Santiago, Chile: LOM Ediciones, 2004), p. 157.

<sup>43</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 166.

<sup>44</sup> A perspective that fits and is consistent with the Department of Visual Cultures' interest in exploring philosophical posthumanism, which, in turn, has shaped aspects of this project.

<sup>45</sup> Cary Wolfe, *What Is Posthumanism?* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), p. xv.

contrast, for HIV-positive, trans\* scholar Eva Hayward, the posthumanist perspective is still strongly invested in humanist notions.<sup>46</sup> For the purpose of my project, the posthumanist perspective serves as a form of critique that encompasses both material conditions and cultural codings, drawing on a variety of theoretical approaches: process philosophy (Deleuze), deconstruction (Haraway and Derrida), and performance studies (Lepecki), among others. However, my project does not evade ‘humanism’. It begins to take steps towards expanding existing narratives around the AIDS archive, paying attention to issues such as the presence of particular non-human animals, ‘touch’ as prosthesis, and the book-object, but it does so considering these topic’s interaction with humans. As Cary Wolfe has stated, ‘posthumanism’ does not necessarily imply a rejection or overcoming of humanism – it is not prompted by a desire of ‘philosophical purification’; instead, posthumanism is ‘coming up with better ways of thinking about many of the things philosophical humanism was interested in.’ And he adds, ‘Humanism isn’t wholly bad or wholly good; it’s a legacy and an inheritance we have to work through.’ Similarly, in this project I seek to begin de-centring dominant narratives circulating about the history of HIV/AIDS by working through the ‘legacies’ of identity and performance politics, cultural studies and even subjectivity, within the capacities and limitations of my thinking.

In this section of the introduction, I draw upon aspects of Wolfe’s genealogical description of posthumanism to introduce my theoretical approaches. A central sense of the posthumanist perspective discussed by Wolfe is its engagement with the ‘animal question’ and the more general topic of the relationship between human and non-human animals, which is at the heart of my Chapter 1. As noted by Wolfe, Jacques Derrida’s

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<sup>46</sup> Eva Hayward, ‘Cat’s Cradle: AIDS, Toxoplasmosis GondII, and Impurrrfect Love’, in *Antennae* 37 (Autumn 2016): p. 109.

late work on the animal gaze<sup>47</sup> has been instrumental in further developing the scholarly field known as critical animal studies; this field has influenced both established authors (such as Donna Haraway) as well as newer scholars (such as Ron Broglio – my main theoretical reference in Chapter 1) working within the intersection of animal studies, art, and representation. For example, Broglio has suggested that challenging the human/animal dualism requires a rethinking of the relationship between depth and surface.<sup>48</sup> As I further expose in the summary of chapters at the end of this introduction, Broglio has described the ways in which Western philosophical and cultural tradition has characterised non-human animals as inferiors that lack interiority and depth of being. By contrast, through examples of engagement with animals in contemporary art, Broglio proposes to turn the negative notion of surface into a positive and productive one. In Chapter 1, Broglio’s affirmative view on surface receives some adjustment through the process-based philosophy of Gilles Deleuze (1925–1995). Deleuze is a key contributor to the decentring of the human in philosophy. His work *Difference and Repetition* (1968) is considered by many his defining work, whereas his books *Anti-Oedipus* (1972) and *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), in collaboration with psychoanalyst Félix Guattari, have had a wider influence in fields outside philosophy, such as the performing and visual arts. Deleuze is of proven influence in the study of animal representations in the fields of art and visual culture through his well-known concept of ‘becoming animal’ (proposed together with Guattari). He also engaged with the thinking of surface in the earlier work *The Logic of Sense* (1969), which I will comment

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<sup>47</sup> See: Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, trans. David Wills (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008). Originally published as *L’animal que donc je suis* (Paris: Galilée, 2006).

<sup>48</sup> See: Ron Broglio, *Surface Encounters. Thinking with Animals and Art* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011); and Ron Broglio, ‘Thinking with Surfaces. Animals and Contemporary Art’, in *Animals and the Human Imagination: A Companion to Animal Studies*, ed. Aaron Gross and Anne Vallely (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012). Prior to Broglio, Steve Baker was the pioneering figure in the discussion of animal representations. See *The Postmodern Animal* (London: Reaktion Books, 2000).

on in Chapter 1.

Another crucial sense of the posthumanist perspective discussed by Wolfe is the ‘prosthetic’ nature of the human. For Wolfe, the posthumanist perspective insists that we acknowledge that the human and what we understand by the ‘human experience’ is fundamentally prosthetic, that is, a result of its co-evolution and interaction with various forms of technicity and materiality – forms that despite being radically ‘not-human’ have made the human what it is. As I further note in the summary of chapters, this belief is examined in Chapter 2, which is dedicated to the motif of touch and the discussion of a recent AIDS-related choreographic work. Not necessarily identified with the posthumanist perspective, dance theorist André Lepecki has made considerable efforts to show the ways in which the dancing, anatomic body is imbricated in wider forms of technicity and materiality, including non-human forms of life. For example, in his book *Singularities* (2016), Lepecki dedicates an entire chapter to discussing contemporary dance works in which the dancing body moves beyond the limits of the human via strategies linked to ‘monstrosity’ and ‘animality’. Another chapter in the same book discusses uses of ‘things’ in choreography as well as the emancipation of the dancer from subject to ‘thingness’. More relevant to my project, in his previous book *Exhausting Dance* (2005), Lepecki suggests the fundamentally prosthetic nature of choreography by showing how the foundation of dance is rooted in writing. As elaborated by Wolfe, in the work of Derrida language in the broadest sense, including the language in writing, represents the most fundamental prostheticity of all.

In recent years, the effort to advance the decentring of the human by imbrication of the

human in wider networks has come to include the world of objects. Thus, in Chapter 3, I focus on AIDS books following the theoretical propositions of Leah Price, materialist literary critic and historian of the book. At times, Price has been included in the long and somewhat diffuse list of authors who in recent years have aroused interest in the lives of objects, thing theory, and new forms of materialism.<sup>49</sup> A number of the 21st-century waves of thought centred in objects, such as ‘new materialism’ or ‘Object Oriented Ontology’, are directed towards the supposedly distinct ontology of objects, maintaining that objects exist independently of human perception and are not ontologically exhausted by their relations with humans or other objects. In an interview (Winter 2016) in which Cary Wolfe was asked about these new movements of thought and their broader relationship with the posthumanist perspective, he energetically responded that ‘ontology is a seriously misguided philosophical pursuit.’<sup>50</sup> At the risk of generalising, for Wolfe, the problem with the work of people within Object Orientated Ontology is two-fold: On the one hand, Wolfe recognises an ongoing ‘theoretical confusion’ of the issue of philosophical realism with the question of materialism (a question difficult to summarise here). On the other hand, despite recognising these authors’ commitment to anti-anthropocentric thought, for Wolfe, very often these ‘new philosophical waves’ adopt a posture of simply rejecting or overcoming humanism altogether, which he is against. Not working from a philosophical position and therefore not immediately associated with the posthumanist perspective, Price’s work focuses not on ontology but on the human-object transaction surrounding books as expressed in literature and culture. Similarly, my own focus on the book-object in this chapter does

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<sup>49</sup> As exemplified by a 2014 seminar course targeted at graduate students interested in Book, Archive, and Manuscript Studies. This list often includes, but is not limited to, Bruno Latour, Arjun Appadurai, Svetlana Alpers, Lorraine Daston, and most typically Bill Brown. See: Adriana Craciun, ‘Critical Theory: Thinking with Things’, seminar programme, University of California Riverside, Winter 2014, accessed 5 December 2018. <http://craciun.ucr.edu/teaching/critical-theory-thinking-with-things/>

<sup>50</sup> Giovanni Aloï, ‘Interview to Cary Wolfe’, *Antennae* 38 (Winter 2016), p. 5.



not centre on the ontology of objects, but on the human-object transaction surrounding books – specifically at a time when my own curatorial practice is increasingly gravitating towards doing with books.

In closing this section, I want to acknowledge the seeming contradiction of heavily relying on continental philosophy and ‘Northern theory’ to discuss case studies that in this introduction I have positioned as part of the ‘global South.’ Referring to her own methodology, Donna Haraway has said ‘the way I work is to take my own polluted inheritance [...] and try to rework it.’<sup>51</sup> In a similar manner, I intend to work through the archive of ‘Northern theory’ while avoiding an essentialist position around the production and circulation of knowledge, modestly building bridges between different theories and communities of practice. Moreover, my theoretical approach aims at establishing a circulatory system, perhaps not always obvious or visible between my literature and the case studies. For example, in Chapter 1, I call up Deleuze as a complementary perspective in a chapter dedicated to Chilean performance collective Yeguas del Apocalipsis, whose members were vivid and declared readers of Deleuze (indeed, a reading of Deleuze up and against the narrative writing of Yeguas member Pedro Lemebel could well be the subject of a separate project) – that said, it does not escape me that Lemebel may have objected to my ‘over-theorisation’ of his practice in this project by ironically calling me an ‘intelectuala’ (or a ‘bookish fagot’, in Spanish). In Chapter 2, I draw upon NY-based, Brazilian dance theorist André Lepecki as well as Derrida to discuss the work of Spanish contemporary dancer Aimar Pérez Galí; as a member of a younger generation of practitioners in Spain, where the boundaries between theory and practice continue to erode, Galí is a reader of those authors himself.

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<sup>51</sup> Donna J. Haraway, *How Like A Leaf* (New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 103.

And in Chapter 3, based on mainly Leah Price, I discuss how the work of artist Miguel Benlloch forces unexpected encounters between ideas and periods; the chapter's gesture of 'productive anachronism' is at the heart of Benlloch's own artistic spirit. As a friend and someone who knew him well, I am confident that Miguel would have been sympathetic to my strategy in Chapter 3. Through this circulatory logic I seek to establish a creative dialogue between diverse epistemic/ethical/political and practical projects as an open process.

To re-read the HIV/AIDS archive exclusively, or at least mainly, with tools from the 'South' could constitute a separate project, one that I certainly hope to develop in the future. For example, such a project could read Derrida through the theoretical and activist work of Paco Vidarte (1970–2008), founding member of the Spanish collective La Radical Gai and one of Derrida's translators into Spanish. Such a project could also read the practice of Yeguas and Miguel Benlloch through their own literary and poetic writings, to cite two examples. These and many other textual and theoretical references from the South are, of course, cited and referenced throughout the present study, but they are not the main theoretical sources. The hypothetical project, perhaps, would need to be conducted in Spanish first, not by asserting an essentialist belief of belonging or identification, but by assuming Deleuze and Guattari's suggestion that 'What can be said in one language cannot be said in another, and the totality of what can and can't be said varies necessarily with each language and with the connections between these languages.'<sup>52</sup> If not in Spanish, such a study would at the least require different time and material (and funding) conditions than the present study, as the writing exercise would

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<sup>52</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, 'What is a minor literature?', in *Kafka. Toward a Minor Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), p. 24.

include a huge task of translation, given that authors such as Vidarte, Lemebel, and Benlloch are not published in English.<sup>53</sup>

## 0.6 Methodology

Methodologically, the present study consists of two components: a theoretical dissertation and a practical, collaborative curatorial project. As already mentioned, the dissertation is divided into three chapters, each focusing on an overlooked problematic topic in the AIDS archive: non-human animals, the sense of touch, and the book-object. The practical component of the project is my collaborative, curatorial project *AIDS Anarchive*. Initiated in 2012–2013, this independent research and production project considers cultural responses to the HIV/AIDS crisis in contexts of the South, with a focus on Chile and Spain, from a collaborative standpoint. Among other formalisations, including seminars, workshops, and publications, the project has been staged three times as an exhibition in the course of the production of this dissertation. Unlike this doctoral study, the *AIDS Anarchive* project is not strictly limited to Chile and Spain as research contexts. Since its inception and throughout its development, this curatorial project has considered particular experiences from other Latin American contexts, such as Argentina, Colombia, and Guatemala, as complementary perspectives. Full details on some of these initiatives are offered in the portfolio of practice included later in this thesis.

In this study, ‘practice’ refers to curatorial practice. In this sense, the term is imbued

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<sup>53</sup> To my knowledge, Lemebel’s only book available in English is his 2001 novel *My Tender Matador* (New York: Grove Press, 2005).

with the debates traversing Goldsmiths' Department of Visual Cultures – my academic research community – around the possibilities of curatorship. Within the Department of Visual Cultures, Goldsmiths' curatorial practice is understood not as a discipline, but as a field of critical inquiry in constant formation, one that brings together activities such as 'social organising, publishing and disseminating, working with local communities and linking to institutions of education and governance.'<sup>54</sup> At the heart of this conception lies the distinction between curating and 'the curatorial' around which the department, including its Curatorial/Knowledge programme, has built part of its reputation. Thus, while curating designates professional training in a series of techniques and the skills to carry out said techniques, 'the curatorial' implies a critical perspective on the practice of curating itself.<sup>55</sup> Although I carried out my doctoral project in the specific framework of the general PhD programme at Visual Cultures, as part of the process of conducting this study I have actively participated in the specific debates within the Curatorial/Knowledge programme through my role as convenor of the programme (a two-year position which also contributed to my financial survival in London). Being close to the programme has been inspiring in many ways and has expanded my knowledge and previous experience on the different ways in which theory and practice can meet in both curatorial work and PhD work on curating. Among some of these forms of meeting are the theoretical reflection on one's practice (in which the practice becomes a 'case study') and the attempt to establish a curatorial methodology based on said theoretical reflection. For my own study, I have opted for a methodology in which the dissertation and the practice are maintained separately (an approach that is also reflected in the differentiated design and layout of the thesis, which is presented in

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<sup>54</sup> Description of the MRes Curatorial/Knowledge programme at Goldsmiths' website, accessed 21 February 2019. <https://www.gold.ac.uk/pg/mres-curatorial-knowledge/>

<sup>55</sup> See: Jean-Paul Martinon, ed., *The Curatorial. A Philosophy of Curating* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013).

two parts); this methodology is based on the belief that praxis does not situate in a lower hierarchical position with respect to the domain of theory. In the present study, the two are naturally related in many ways, with these relations exemplified most graphically by the fact that the case studies discussed in each chapter arise in the context of the practice. But the practice is not subsumed by the theory. The dissertation is not a hermeneutic of my curatorial practice. This does not mean that, in turn, I am suggesting a dichotomous distinction between theory and practice. As this project aims to prove, the relationship between theory and practice is always dynamic and cannot be reduced to a facile dualism.

My views on how theory and practice are related in my project, as well as my views of the role that the collective has played within my overall curatorial work, are detailed in the introductory statement of the practical portfolio included as part of this thesis.

## **0.7 Summary of Chapters**

This dissertation is organised around three chapters with the same internal structure. Each chapter opens with a preamble which serves to expose the centrality within the HIV/AIDS archive of the three motifs running through each chapter respectively: animals, touch, and books. The preambles have an informative and contextualising function; they offer precise historical contexts to the three motifs under consideration in regards to both the AIDS archive at large and the HIV/AIDS archives of Chile and Spain. Each preamble is followed by a theory section in which I ground and expand on the main theoretical ideas sustaining my arguments. The chapters are closed with an

analysis section of the case studies under consideration followed by the conclusions.

Chapter 1 opens with the suggestion that the AIDS archive offers the possibility of a ‘contact zone’, or a space that allows for a different kind of relation between particular people and particular non-human animals. The chapter takes as a backdrop the AIDS-animal connection, central in the early hypotheses about the ‘animal origin’ of the virus, evidencing the processes of construction of the Other at the basis of the early and ongoing discourses around HIV/AIDS. Originally introduced by Mary Louise Pratt (1991; 1992) in a linguistic context, the term ‘contact zone’ has been recently used by Ron Broglio (2011) in his book-length discussion of how surface matters in regards to animal representations. Broglio’s book and its suggestion that surface, despite its negative characterisation in Western culture, can be a site for positive thinking guides this chapter (the suggestion, at times, as noted earlier, also receives some adjustment via Deleuze). Section 1 reviews the concept of ‘contact zone’ and its typical emphasis on physicality and presence by following Broglio in the strong company of Donna Haraway. In her book *When Species Meet* (2008), Haraway had already thought about meaningful exchanges between herself and her dog in the ‘contact zone’ offered by the practice of dog training. Unlike many of the examples of actual encounters between animals and humans discussed by the two authors, in this chapter my encounter with animals takes place on the material surfaces of the photographs and touchscreens presented in my project-related exhibition *AIDS Anarchive*. I argue that this ‘second-hand’ contact produces a doubling of the ‘contact zone’ that is just as meaningful as the actual human-animal encounters registered in the images. In the chapter, these reflections do not arise in an abstract way, but rather around a particular selection of images by the Chilean artist and activist duo Yeguas del Apocalipsis (1987–1997),

formed by anti-Pinochet activists and writers Pedro Lemebel (1952–2015) and Pancho Casas (1959). My choice to focus on Yeguas here is not accidental; the duo are pioneers in addressing the HIV/AIDS crisis in Chile, and their work has gained increasing momentum in recent years, being included in many museum collections and displays.<sup>56</sup> Specifically, my analysis centres on the collectives' signature work *La refundación de la Universidad de Chile* [The Refoundation of the University of Chile], 1988, an action in which the two activists, naked and mounted on a mare, rode across the campus of the University of Chile, still under the dictatorship of Pinochet. My 'surface reading' of the images adopts a 'contact perspective' and highlights the ways in which questions of physicality and surface are integral to the images, keeping a distance from the usual interpretations of the work as a 'becoming'. In concluding, my surface reading of these images provides an occasion to acknowledge the fragility of surface which, in turn, is an opportunity to accept the limitations of what we can know, as a mode of thinking differently.

In Chapter 2, I move from reflection on 'contact' in the previous chapter to thinking about how 'touch' matters in the AIDS archive. I focus on a recent project by the Spanish artist, dancer, and choreographer Aimar Pérez Galí entitled *The Touching Community* (2015–2018). Galí's project wonders about the impact of HIV/AIDS on the dance communities of Spain and Chile as well as those of other contexts in Latin America. It does so through a dual methodology: the exploration of the technique of Contact Improvisation, in which the movement is improvised from the contact between

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<sup>56</sup> For its part, the influence of Pedro Lemebel's persona and literary work exceeds Chile and it has been an established 'object of study' for at least two decades, both in Latin America and in the US. A new documentary dedicated to his persona (*Lemebel*, 2018, directed by Joanna Reposi), has just been awarded as the Best Documentary/Essay Film in 2019 edition of the Berlinale Berlin International Film Festival.

different material surfaces, both organic (bodies) and inert (the surface of the dance floor), and the exploration of writing as the main ‘technology’ at the basis of the invention of choreography. *The Touching Community* is in itself an ‘AIDS crisis revisitation’ in the sense that it mobilises archival and new materials related mainly to the first decades of AIDS with a quarter of a century’s distance and the spirit of understanding the present. Against the background of this gesture and the chapter itself, I suggest as my opening argument that the subjective and corporal production under the neoliberal condition can be understood in parallel with the rhetoric of fear of contact brought about by the AIDS crisis. As the chapter progresses, this argument is narrowed to suggest that the possibilities offered by ‘touch’ can produce an opening to an other (this ‘other’ possibly being, as I will conclude, a community-to-come). In order to choreograph my own movements in this chapter, I mainly follow two authors. The first is Jacques Derrida; in particular, I draw upon his later philosophical work on the sense of touch. The second is dance and performance theorist André Lepecki (2006; 2016); I use aspects of his two books to ground and sustain my arguments throughout the chapter. Derrida’s work is helpful in two ways: first, it serves to introduce the various, often-disparate representations of the sense of touch present in the AIDS archive. Second, it adds to my analysis in the chapter of the non-kinetic (prosthetic) aspects at play in *The Touching Community*. At this point, the reader has likely noticed that my writing in this study is eminently descriptive; in Chapter 2, this characteristic is discussed in the context of my own engagement with surface. By paying detailed attention to aspects of Lepecki’s influential work on contemporary dance and performance (in this chapter I mainly focus on his use of the concept of ‘solipsism’), I also seek to point out what, in my opinion, is one of the biggest limitations of his project: its omission of dance and performative responses to the



ongoing HIV crisis.<sup>57</sup> As an impetus behind the chapter, I believe that it is not possible to carry out a rigorous study of the cultural responses to AIDS or to survey the performative practices of the last forty years without considering their mutual implications. This chapter modestly seeks to contribute to that task.

From noting the centrality of writing in the choreographic process in the previous chapter, Chapter 3 fully steps into the field of the material and surface qualities of the text by means of considering a specific object, one that is ubiquitous yet usually overlooked in the AIDS archive: the book-object. The chapter focuses on books circulated and accessed as physical objects rather than as books read and used in digital format, as physical books circulate and have a presence in the specific contexts of creative performances and AIDS-related exhibitions. The chapter is organised economically around two main references: the work on the history of the book by historian and analyst Leah Price and the practice of Spanish artist and cultural activist Miguel Benlloch (1956–2018), who sadly passed away during the course of the writing of this chapter. Benlloch, who I considered a dear friend, was a forerunner of gender and sexual experimentation practices in Spain from the late 1970s up to his death, with his work including some early creative responses to HIV/AIDS. This chapter constitutes the first doctoral study of aspects of Benlloch's work. Specifically, I focus on the artist's last major work (2016), *DERERUMNATURA*, a performance dealing with questions of health, disease, death, and transformation, and one which involves the embodied reading and handling of a particular book. Closely following the work of

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<sup>57</sup> Altogether, Lepecki's two books cover the performative production of the last forty years (that is, the AIDS decades) without, to my knowledge, making significant references to the AIDS crisis. Even when discussing artist Julie Tolentino's re-enactment of a work by openly HIV-positive performance artist Ron Athey in his book *Singularities* (2016), Lepecki chooses not to reference HIV.

Price, the chapter begins by arguing that books exist in an expanded field defined by their textual, material, and social lives. Drawing on disciplines such as historiography, sociology of reading, and bibliography, Price has studied different aspects of the book-object beyond, or rather, its reading value with a focus on the Victorian era. While it might seem questionable or simply anachronistic to base my analysis on AIDS books discussing ideas during the Victorian era, I suggest that, to a great extent, the radical changes that print culture underwent in this epoch still define our attitude towards books in the present. This initial argument leads me to analyse the ways in which AIDS books matter based on the three dimensions that best define our relationship with the book-object: reading, manipulation, and circulation. In my analysis, I point to the dialectic languages of exteriority and interiority, both of which have books at their centre, and suggest the ways in which a ‘surface reading’ of the book-object might help us complicate, even momentarily, the dualisms of surface and depth. From there, I move on to a second suggestion, namely that AIDS books can and do ‘survive’. The chapter closes with an unexpected foray into philosophy, featuring a brief but meaningful reflection on the Roman philosopher Lucretius and his atomistic thinking – a hidden reference in Benlloch’s performance – leading me to hope for the legacy-to-come of the work of Benlloch.

## Chapter 1: Fragile Contact: Animals in the HIV/AIDS Archive

### 1.1 Introduction

In this chapter I begin by arguing that the HIV/AIDS archive offers the possibility of a ‘contact zone’ of a different kind of relation between persons and particular animals. In the course of the chapter this argument will lead into a discussion about physicality, fragility and surface, and about how we relate to the images we find there. The chapter takes as a starting point the profusion of representations of human-animal encounters present in the AIDS archive, a profusion I only became aware of in the process of curating my thesis-related exhibition *AIDS Anarchive*. Ultimately, the chapter concerns the possibility of responding to those images. The term ‘contact zone’ – and the related expression ‘contact perspective’ – were originally introduced by Mary Louise Pratt (1992) in a linguistic context to describe areas in which two or more cultures negotiate shared histories and differences.<sup>1</sup> The term ‘contact zone’ has been more recently used by animal studies and visual cultures scholar Ron Broglio (2011) – my central theoretical source in this chapter – as well as, very importantly by Donna Haraway (2008) before him, to describe transformative, meaningful encounters between particular people and particular animals.<sup>2</sup> As I will suggest throughout the chapter, approaching particular animal representations in the AIDS archive as ‘contact zones’

1 Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes. Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, 1992). ‘Contact zone’ is the main term proposed by Pratt to describe encounters in contexts of asymmetric relations of power. ‘Contact’ perspective’ is a related expression used by Pratt in her book, although to a much lesser extent. In this chapter I will make equal use of the two expressions in order to emphasise my approach to ‘contact’ as a viewpoint or position.

2 See: Ron Broglio, *Surface Encounters. Thinking with Animals and Art* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011); and Chapter 8 in Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), pp. 205–46.

and from a ‘contact’ perspective will raise urgent questions about surface, fragility and the possibility of thinking differently.

Important to the general rethinking of surface in my project, Ron Broglio’s consideration of contact zones is in the context of his wider study of the relationship between animals and surface. In fact, my analysis in this chapter is inspired by Broglio’s suggestion that: ‘Thinking about animals means taking seriously the possibility that everything takes place *on the surface*.’<sup>3</sup> Discussed by Broglio, the Western philosophical and cultural tradition has characterised non-human animals as inferiors, lacking interiority and depth of being. By contrast, through examples of engagement with animals in contemporary art, Broglio proposes to turn the negative notion of surface into a positive and productive one. Likewise, this chapter argues for a positive and productive, yet nuanced engagement with surface. Thus, Broglio’s invitation to engage with surface, which I follow throughout the chapter, will receive occasional adjustment with philosopher Gilles Deleuze’s (1969) warning that ‘there is nothing more fragile than surface’. A name of proven influence in the study of animal representations in the fields of art and visual culture through his well-known concept of ‘becoming animal’ (proposed together with Felix Guattari), Deleuze engaged with the thinking of surface in his earlier work *Logic of Sense*. As I will briefly expose, Deleuze’s engagement with surface is in the wider context of his philosophy of immanence, which does not privilege the interiority of the subject nor establishes a hierarchical relation between

3 This is the central suggestion in Ron Broglio’s *Surface Encounters* (2011). The particular quote above appears in a chapter a year later condensing some of the main ideas from his book. See: Ron Broglio, ‘Thinking with Surfaces. Animals and Contemporary Art’, in *Animals and the Human Imagination. A Companion to Animal Studies*, ed. Aaron Gross and Anne Vallely (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012). Recently, aspects of Ron Broglio’s work on surface and animal representation have been extended by Giovanni Aloï in his study of taxidermy and contemporary art. See: Giovanni Aloï, *Natural History, Animal Surfaces, and Art in the Anthropocene* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018).

surface and depth, echoing Broglio's own attempt, I will suggest, to think alongside surface as a mode of thinking differently.

Unlike Donna Haraway's account of 'contact zones', of a different kind of relations between persons and particular animals, which arises from her direct experience of training with her dog, Cayenne, Broglio's analysis stems from engagement with images in contemporary art. That is, not from co-presence and interaction with particular animals but from an engagement with the material surfaces of canvases, photographic paper and such. Similarly, my analysis in this chapter does not arise from first-hand interaction with animals; rather it focuses on photographic images by the Chilean art and activist duo Yeguas del Apocalipsis [Mares of the Apocalypse], active between 1987 and 1997 and formed by anti-Pinochet activists and writers Pedro Lemebel (1952–2015) and Pancho Casas (1959). In doing so, my chapter puts aside ethically pressing questions about the ways in which human and non-human animals live together, offering in its place a series of reflections on surface and the images we find there. Much of my discussion will focus on the collectives' signature work *La refundación de la Universidad de Chile* [The Refoundation of the University of Chile], 1988, an action in which the two activists, naked and mounted on a mare burst onto the campus of the University of Chile, Santiago, coinciding with a student occupation of the Faculty of Arts, still under the dictatorship of Pinochet (fig. 1, gallery) – a work that I presented in documentation form in my thesis-related exhibition *AIDS Anarchive*. As I will suggest, my encounter with human-animal relations on the material surfaces of photographs and touchscreens showing the images by Yeguas, creates a double form of

‘contact zone’ that will be equally as meaningful as the actual human-animal encounters registered in the images.

All in all, this chapter is organised in three sections – a structure that will be mirrored in subsequent chapters. Section 1 serves to introduce in more detail the concept of ‘contact zone’ through its working by Broglio and Haraway. Additionally, the section will ground and expand Ron Broglio’s inspiring work on surface and animals. As I will expose, in Broglio the question of surface – and of the fragility of surface – concerns our capability to know from the Other’s perspective, as well as the possibility of thinking differently. Section 1 ends by offering some adjustment, through the philosophy of Deleuze, to Broglio’s inspiring and affirmative invitation to engage with surface. In Section 2, from the hand of both Broglio and Haraway, I move into a detailed discussion of a set of particular images of Yeguas in terms of a ‘contact zone’ and of my encounter with them at surface. Preceding the two sections, the preamble that follows serves to expose the centrality of the AIDS-animal connection, a topic that has received little academic and curatorial attention and which serves as a general backdrop to the chapter.

## **1.2 Preamble: Animals and HIV/AIDS**

This preamble seeks to offer some historical context to the AIDS-animal connection. Thus, the preamble serves as a reminder of how mainstream, intense and racist the animal and AIDS connection was, rooted in long-standing cultural attitudes surrounding the construction of ‘otherness.’ This reminder frames my overall argument in this

chapter and serves as a backdrop for my analysis of the work of Yeguas del Apocalipsis. The preamble also serves to give a sense of the ways in which asymmetrical power relations – involved in any contact zone – are not alien to the AIDS archive.<sup>4</sup> But before moving on, I would like to clarify my use of terms throughout the chapter: whereas for most of the chapter I will avoid using the concept of ‘the animal’ in favour of words that more closely designate the plurality of species that meet each other in the AIDS archive, in this preamble I will stick to the terms most commonly used in early scientific and media discourse: that is, ‘human’ and ‘animal’, showing how the very AIDS archive is criss-crossed with lines drawn between the two. As much of the literature in the field of critical animal studies has demonstrated, the concept of ‘the animal’, as distinct from the non-homogeneous animals, has served as a machine dividing humans and animals.<sup>5</sup> For example, Haraway (2008), in her account for the worlds that mundane people and animals create together, notices that ‘the odd singular words “human” and “animal” are [...] lamentably common in scientific and popular idioms and so rooted in Western philosophical premises and hierarchical chains of being’.<sup>6</sup> I myself am not exempt from the responsibility of having reproduced these premises in the course of my research. For example, the first iteration of *AIDS Anarchive*, the exhibition related to this dissertation, included a section called ‘Animal’, which gathered materials pointing to the AIDS-

4 The full unpacking of this suggestion exceeds the possibilities of this chapter, but to offer a sense: the violence with which scientific knowledge addressed its supposed authority to people with an early diagnosis of HIV/AIDS; animal testing in relation to HIV prevention; and the profit of the pharmaceutical industry with the first retroviral drugs of doubtful efficacy; these are just three of the most visible ingredients that attest to the asymmetric power relations at stake in the AIDS archive.

5 Jacques Derrida’s late work on the animal gaze has been instrumental in further developing the scholarly field known as ‘critical animal studies’, influencing both established authors as well as newer scholars working within the intersection of the animal and representation. For instance, see: Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, trans. David Wills (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008). Originally published as *L’animal que donc je suis* (Paris: Galilée, 2006). Reading this text together with Haraway’s work, Lynn Turner has discussed some key concerns in Derrida that, in turn, help to make evident the foundations of the conceptual hierarchy of man versus animal. See: Lynn Turner, ‘Critical Companions: Derrida, Haraway & Other Animals’, in Julian Wolfreys, ed., *Introducing Criticism in the 21st Century* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015).

6 Donna Haraway (2008), p. 235.

animal connection in a broad way (fig. 3 and fig. 4, gallery). To name just three, these materials included: an object label referring to a controversy by two American scientists in 1983, who insisted in placing the origin of HIV in pigs, particularly in an outbreak of swine fever in Cuba and Haiti;<sup>7</sup> covers of Yeguas co-founder Pedro Lemebel's books, such as *La esquina es mi corazón* (1995), *Loco afán: crónicas de sidario* (1996) and *De perlas y cicatrices* (1998), all rich in literary figurations of AIDS and the animal;<sup>8</sup> and a leaflet by Madrid-based, queer activist group La Radical Gai, from the 1990s, with the image of a ladybug – a signifier for homosexuals in the Spanish speaking world. This section of the exhibition had the ambition to show the profusion of representations of animals in the AIDS archive, both in the archive of scientific and media discourses as well as at the hands of selected artists and activists in Spain and Chile in whose works a critical re-signification of the link between animality and otherness is often at play.<sup>9</sup> However, this section of the *AIDS Anarchive* exhibition showed lack of precision and conceptual clarity in regards to the human/animal divide and through inaccurate use of language, reproduced the hierarchies between people and animals rooted in Western

7 As part of an alleged CIA operation to destabilise the government of Fidel Castro by destroying its livestock. See: Laurie Garret, *The Coming Plague* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1994), p. 319.

8 The covers of the different editions of these books see Lemebel posing with feathers, exotic prints and even with an alligator. In addition, references to AIDS and animals are also found in his literary work. For example, see: 'El resplandor emplumado del circo travesti' [The feathered glow of the transvestite circus] included in Lemebel's first book *La esquina es mi corazón* (Santiago, Chile: Seix Barral, 1995). In his exuberant writing, Lemebel cultivated the style of the 'chronic' (crónicas): half-fictional, half-factual critical accounts of Pinochet's Chile. Probing the variety of academic work currently being conducted on Lemebel's literary work, in the Summer of 2015 I attended the first symposium on his work after his then recent death, as part of a CHASE-funded research trip to Chile.

9 Another revealing example for the resignification of the animality-sexual otherness connection is the work of Miguel Benlloch (1956–2018). A forerunner of gender and sexual experimentation practices in Spain since the late 1970s, and a pioneer in the national history of cultural responses to the AIDS crisis, Benlloch is the sole protagonist of my Chapter 3 dedicated to the book object. For example, his series of photographs *Miguel de la O*, where the artist wears a red and black polka-dot shirt is, in my view, a double reference to the traditional flamenco outfit and the insect ladybird (a signifier for gay homosexuality in Spanish). Images available in *Anarchivo sida*, Aimar Arriola, Nancy Garin, Linda Valdés, eds. (San Sebastian: Tabakalera, 2016), p. 55. In the exhibition accompanying the book those particular images by Benlloch were placed side by side with the above-mentioned leaflet by La Radical Gai depicting a ladybird, and which denounces the splurge on celebrations that took place in Spain in 1992, such as the commemoration of the 'discovery' of America or the Olympic Games in Barcelona.



thought. In this sense, this chapter has a corrective ambition and attempts at modestly re-orienting my relation to representations of non-human animals, newly engaging with a small selection of images by Yeguas, now from a less naive and more reflective interest.

One of the most pervasive narratives since the earliest days of the HIV crisis was the hypothesis about its ‘animal origin’. The first ‘history books’ on the pandemic are full of references to monkeys, insects, swine and other species as recurrent figures in the scientific explanation of AIDS.<sup>10</sup> For instance, in *Virus*, Luc Montagnier, self-proclaimed ‘co-discoverer of HIV’, states that ‘the animal origin of the virus is far from proven’, but then tries hard to show otherwise. His book, a first-hand account of the run to discover the cause of AIDS, is rich in speculation about the various ways in which the interaction between apes and humans can be at the basis of HIV transmission, as when he suggests that: ‘People in West Africa might have become infected with HIV-2 during play with mangabey monkeys.’ Or when he says that it is ‘certain that viruses closely related to HIV existed earlier in non-human primates [than in humans]’. These and other scientific explanations about the origin of HIV were soon echoed in the media and popular culture, where talk of people in ‘Africa’ having sex with monkeys and tabloid stories about transmission through mosquito bites in distant tropical lands abounded. Proving the long connection between animals, racism and HIV, on today’s Internet it’s easy to come across jokes about the ‘animal origin’ of AIDS, as is the case of an anonymous meme with a picture of a chimpanzee and the legend ‘Sorry Bowt the Aids

10 For example, see: Mirko D. Grmek, *History of AIDS: Emergence and Origin of a Modern Pandemic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); Laurie Garret, ‘Hatari: Vinidogodogo (Danger: A Very Little Thing). The Origins of AIDS’, in *The Coming Plague. Newly Emerging Diseases in a World Out of Balance* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1994); Luc Montagnier, *Virus* (New York; London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2000), originally published in French as *Des Virus et Des Hommes* (Paris: Editions Odile Jacob, 1994).

Guyz’, referring to the hypothesis about the ‘simian’ origin of HIV – an image with which I recently came across in a pharmacology student blog.<sup>11</sup>

Notwithstanding all this, the animal-AIDS pairing has not been discussed in detail in either the field of AIDS cultural studies or in critical animal studies.<sup>12</sup> There are also few AIDS-related artists who have worked creatively on this subject, or who have included representations of animals in their work from a critical standpoint. An early exception is *Animal Love: Miasme / hyène et the valve* (1989/1992), a performance piece and related visual essay by Canadian lesbian artists Martha Fleming and Lyne Lapointe (a work that I unexpectedly came across as part of a previous curatorial project, *Marginalia*, around the personal library of the AIDS-related artist Pepe Espaliú).<sup>13</sup> Initially presented as part of the Fifth AIDS International Conference in Montreal, 1989, and subsequently reworked as a text, *Animal Love* considers AIDS in the context of a larger exploration of the ways in which animals have been historically associated with sexual otherness and fear.<sup>14</sup> Building on existing literature on the colonial identification of sexual otherness

11 See: ‘HIV, AIDS illustrated by video’, *Phartoonz*, blog entry (17 October 2015), accessed 14 December 2018. <https://www.phartoonz.com/2015/10/17/hiv-aids-illustrated-by-video/>

12 For example, in *Zoontologies* (2003), a reference collection on ‘the animal question’ edited by Cary Wolfe that includes essays from Derrida’s foundational ‘And Say the Animal Responded?’ as well as more contemporary work, this topic is absent. The AIDS-animal pairing has also been overlooked in the relatively new field of ‘queer animal studies’ and, for example, in the main reference book in the field, the 380-page anthology *Queering the Non/Human*, ‘HIV/AIDS’ is referenced only once, in a discussion on the identification between same-sex and death in the homophobic mind. Noreen Giffney and Myra J. Hird, eds. *Queering the Non/Human* (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2008), p. 64.

13 I came across xeroxed images of the work as part of the personal library of Espaliú in 2012. I will refer to the project *Marginalia* in more detail in the preamble of Chapter 3 dedicated to the book object.

14 See: Martha Fleming and Lyne Lapointe, ‘Animal Love: Miasme / hyène et the valve’, in *A Leap in the Dark*, Allan Klusaček and Ken Morrison, eds., pp. 77–84 (Montreal: Véhicule Press, 1992). The title of the work references the ‘miasmas’ as a preferred explanation for illness prior to the ‘bacteriological revolution of the late nineteenth century’. See: Steve Epstein, *Impure Science* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), p. 57. One additional, very well-known example of the AIDS-animals connection outside my Spain/Chile framework is, of course, David Wojnarowicz’s *Untitled (Buffalo)* (1988–89), one of the artist’s best-known works and perhaps one of the most haunting artistic responses to the early AIDS crisis. For example, the work graces the cover of this important reference book: *Art AIDS America*, Jonathan David Katz and Rock Hushka, eds. (Tacoma, Washington: Tacoma Art Museum with University of Washington Press, 2015. Exhibition catalogue).

and animals, Fleming and Lapointe creatively situated the homosexuality/bestiality model, AIDS research on laboratory animals, and social hierarchies between gay men and lesbian women in the same line of questioning: ‘Somewhere between The Bearded Lady and The Elephant Man, between Batman and Catwoman, between the monkey lab and the urban jungle, there is a conceptual problem whose undoing might help us truly to see AIDS and homophobia in a cultural/ecological context.’<sup>15</sup> More recently, Eva Hayward has discussed HIV and trans\* bodies in relation to non-human animals, specifically feline and microbial life.<sup>16</sup> Setting herself away from the interpretative model of posthumanism, which she argues is invested in humanist notions, Hayward considers the AIDS body among those bodies to which their ‘full humanity’ is denied.<sup>17</sup> Hayward’s example opens the door to a wider horizon of species in which this chapter does not go into: microorganisms – those animals with whom we are in relation to, whether we notice them or not.<sup>18</sup> My entry into the AIDS-animals pairing in this chapter focuses on those species limited to our perceptual space, that is, non-human animals that we can see, touch, smell and so on. I choose this focus for a quite simple reason: the presence of animals in the work of Yeguas, that I will comment on, is limited to species

The work depicts a herd of buffalo falling off a cliff to their deaths. It draws a parallel between the AIDS crisis and the mass slaughter of buffalo in North America in the nineteenth century, reminding us of the neglect and marginalisation that characterised the politics of HIV/AIDS at the time. From around the same time, a very different example is Brazilian filmmaker, Rita Moreira’s documentary film *Temporada de caça* (1988). The film explores the prevailing homophobic climate in the city of São Paulo in the late 1980s, in light of a string of murders of homosexuals and transvestites in the city in 1987, justified on the grounds of preventing the spread of AIDS. It combines documentary footage with scenes from Hollywood films, including *The Deer Hunter* starring Robert De Niro. The video’s initial sequence links the events to the animal question: the term ‘veado’ (deer or stag in Portuguese) is the most common insult in that language referring to homosexuals. The film takes on new relevance in the context of the current political crisis in Brazil following the appointment as president of Jair Bolsonaro, the extreme right-wing candidate.

15 Fleming and Lapointe, p. 77.

16 Eva Hayward, ‘Cat’s Cradle: AIDS, Toxoplasmosis GondII, and Impurrrfect Love’, in *Antennae* 37 (autumn 2016).

17 For Hayward, the category of ‘human’ is registered at a political, social and biological level to which many, specifically HIV, trans and racial bodies do not have access. See: Eva Hayward, ‘Cat’s Cradle: AIDS, Toxoplasmosis GondII, and Impurrrfect Love’, in *Antennae*, 2016, p. 110.

18 Haraway insists that we are already in a relation with other species – whether or not we know or acknowledge this. Haraway, *Companion Species*, p. 6. Throughout her book, Haraway’s use of the wider term ‘companion species’ incorporates a host of organisms beyond our perception, despite the focus on ‘domestic’ animals, mainly her dog.

that can be perceived through human senses, more specifically in this chapter, a mare and a small group of artificial birds – the latter as part of my commentary on a separate, yet related work by Yeguas in Section 2. And yet, not all species in this chapter (human and otherwise) meet each other on the same scale, as they (we) inhabit the compound worlds and changing scales of digital and printed photographs, second-hand books, xeroxed press clippings, websites, touchscreens and the material surfaces of an exhibition display.<sup>19</sup>

In framing the AIDS-animals connection in this preamble, attention to how ‘the Other’ has been discursively constructed in the early and ongoing HIV/AIDS crisis is important. For instance, Renée Sabatier’s *Blaming Others* (1988), probably the first attempt to understand why race matters in the AIDS debate, situates the human-animal divide as part of a bigger equation.<sup>20</sup> In Chapter 5, “Green Monkeys and Germ Warfare,” Sabatier illustrates how the animal-human theory within AIDS discourse and its inscription in a specific territory – Africa – are anchored in processes of blame attribution.<sup>21</sup> Modest in size but ambitious in scope, Sabatier’s book describes why the process of attributing blame particularly applies to the AIDS epidemic and suggests how the global expansion of HIV was followed by a racial and species-biased perception of

19 Adding to the dynamic relationship between surfaces and the curatorial, Jean-Louis Déotte has referred to the exhibition as a ‘surface of (re)production’. See: Jean-Louis Déotte, ‘Two Invoking Media: Radio and Exhibition’, in *The Curatorial. A Philosophy of Curating*, ed. Jean-Paul Martinon (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), p. 171. Building on the work of Walter Benjamin, Déotte has considered the exhibition alongside the radio as a surface of (re)production, that is, as both infrastructure and signification device.

20 Renée Sabatier, *Blaming Others: Prejudice, Race and Worldwide AIDS* (London: Panos Institute, 1988). Not the focus of my project, race is also crucial to an understanding of the ongoing processes of HIV criminalisation in the U.S., where HIV-positive individuals are being incarcerated for exposing another person to HIV – a process that specially targets black men. For a recent account on how anti-black racism matters in regard to attitudes surrounding HIV, see: Adam M. Geary, *Anti-Black Racism and the AIDS Epidemic: State Intimacies* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

21 In Sabatier’s chapter, the animal serves as a conduit to highlight the racial prejudices surrounding theories on animal-human infection across the history of diseases as inscribed in Africa as a contested territory.

its origins. Similarly, Cindy Patton's ground-breaking book *Inventing AIDS* (1990) reframes the question of the prejudices surrounding early AIDS knowledge in the larger perspective of colonialism and the 'nature' trope.<sup>22</sup> Patton writes: 'When the West found itself beset by a deadly little virus of unknown origin, it sought the source elsewhere.'<sup>23</sup> And adds: 'Disease in Africa is considered natural, conjured out of the primordial nought or caught from animals imagined to live side by side by Africans.'<sup>24</sup> This continuity suggested by Patton between coloniality, scientific discourse, AIDS and the production of 'the Other' takes a concrete form in the AIDS archive of Spain and Chile, as in the wide spectrum of animal figurations existing in Spanish language to refer to sexual 'deviance', often dating back to colonial times. Everyday expressions referring to homosexuals and sexual 'others' such as 'mariquita' (ladybird) or 'pájaro' (bird) are present and reworked in the practice of Yeguas and could well have been the topic of a separate chapter.<sup>25</sup> Likewise, questions of race and ethnicity are not foreign to the work of Yeguas, or even to the later, individual work of Lemebel. As it has been noted, Lemebel's writing appropriates and reformulates the discourses around the Latin American identity as a 'mestizo' identity; a cultural construction that sought to resolve as a 'harmony of the races' the wound of colonisation.<sup>26</sup> However, due to limitations of

22 Cindy Patton, *Inventing AIDS* (New York: Routledge, 1990). See, also: Cindy Patton, *Globalizing AIDS* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

23 Cindy Patton (1990), p. 83.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 82.

25 For example, queer Puerto Rican scholar La Fountain-Stokes has noted how terms such as *pato* (duck) or *pájaro* (bird) are widely used as negative signifiers for gays and lesbians in Latin America and the Caribbean, situating the use of these terms in the larger trajectory of the colonial persecution of difference. See: Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes, *Queer Ricans: Cultures and Sexualities in the Diaspora* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), p. 15. Especially, Introduction and Chapter 1, 'The Persecution of Difference'. For a brief study of the presence of birds as signifiers in Lemebel's literary work, see, Henri Billard, 'La pluma entre las plumas: La presencia de los pájaros en las crónicas urbanas de Pedro Lemebel', *Confluencia* 28, no. 1 (autumn 2012), pp. 14–19.

26 For example, see: María José Sabo, 'Un camp desde el margen: el cuerpo mestizo de Latinoamérica en la crónica de Pedro Lemebel', *RECIAL: Revista del Centro de Investigaciones de la Facultad de Filosofía y Humanidades* 5, no. 5–6 (2014).

scope, this chapter does not attempt to enter into a fuller discussion about the relationship between AIDS, race and animality in the work of Yeguas.

As noted in the introduction, my engagement with particular animals in the work of Yeguas in this chapter follows visual cultures scholar Ron Broglio's (2011) suggestion that: 'Thinking about animals means taking seriously the possibility that everything takes place *on the surface*.' As I will elaborate more fully in the coming section, following Broglio, the Western philosophical and cultural tradition has characterised non-human animals as inferiors, lacking interiority and depth of being. By contrast, through examples of artistic engagements with animals, Broglio attempts to rework the traditional, negative characterisation of surface into a productive one, while suggesting that to engage with animals is 'to think of our own fragility'.<sup>27</sup> In this chapter, Broglio's inspiring and affirmative invitation to engage with surface will receive some adjustments with Deleuze's warning that 'there is nothing more fragile than surface'. The centrality of the concept of surface in Deleuze might not be immediately obvious to the reader, which is the reason why the following section concludes with a subsection contextualising the notion of surface within the philosopher's broader lexicon.

But first, the section begins with a more detailed introduction to the concept of 'contact zone' originally proposed by Mary Louise Pratt and more recently reworked by Ron Broglio as well as Donna Haraway before him, in somehow differing ways in regards to what counts as a 'contact'.

27 Broglio is concerned with animal phenomenology as 'an impossible horizon', acknowledging human ontological incapability of transcending the limits of their own knowing. For Broglio, it is precisely the fragility of knowing that legitimised his inquiry into the animal as something other than an imposition. See: Broglio (2011), p. 55. Similarly, it is by fully embracing the limitations of my own knowing that I inquire into particular animals in the HIV/AIDS archive.

### 1.3 Section 1: Contact Zones and Fragility of Surface

The term ‘contact zone’ and the related expression ‘contact perspective’ were introduced by Mary Louise Pratt (1992) in her linguistic approach to how two or more cultures negotiate shared histories and power relations. More recently Ron Broglio has used the term ‘contact zone’ to describe human-animal encounters taking place at ‘surface’.<sup>28</sup> In the original context, Pratt’s ‘contact zones’ allude to ‘social spaces where cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they lived out in many parts of the world today’.<sup>29</sup> For Broglio, the grappling between humans and animals also forms a ‘topography’: ‘The larger world that humans and animals create in alliance with one another.’<sup>30</sup> Broglio’s use of the term echoes an earlier, yet still recent working of the term in Donna Haraway’s feminist critique of science (2008).<sup>31</sup> Haraway’s discussion on what it means to work ‘with’ (not about, or on) companion species in a ‘contact zone’ put emphasis in the physicality of encounters. Unlike Haraway’s account of contact zones that arises from the co-presence and direct experience of training together with her dog, Cayenne, Broglio’s analysis stems from an engagement with images in contemporary art; that is, ‘mediated’ by material surfaces such as canvases or paper. This marks a slightly different approach in each author to the idea of a ‘contact’, as well as to the limits of what we can know. Despite the differing approaches of Broglio and

28 Specifically, the author discusses the term ‘contact zone’ in Chapter 4 of his book, ‘Contact Zones and Living Flesh’, where he comments on the work of artist duo Olly and Suzi. See: Broglio (2011), pp. 81–100.

29 Mary Louise Pratt, ‘Arts of the Contact Zones’, *Profession* 91 (1991), pp. 33–40: 34.

30 Broglio (2011), p. 93.

31 Again, for an extensive discussion of Haraway’s working with companion species in a ‘contact zone’, see chapter 8 of *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), pp. 205–46.

Haraway to ‘contact zones,’ they concur in the need not to think about the possibility of a contact in general, but rather under particular circumstances. They also come together in recognising the possibilities and limitations of contact zones. For example, Broglio recognises the contradictions of describing in terms of a ‘contact zone’ the interaction with sharks, anacondas and other ‘dangerous’ species at the heart of the artistic work by British duo Olly and Suzi – the example of his choice for the discussion of contact zones.<sup>32</sup> Broglio acknowledges that Olly and Suzi’s inter-species artistic endeavours, in which the asymmetric power relations between persons and animals do not necessarily get undone, are probably of little ‘interest’ to the animals. And yet, at the same time, he highlights the implicit negotiation in these works. Negotiation and exchange are the basis of any contact zone, requiring that ‘the artists momentarily suspend or leave behind much of the world of culture and acquire new gestures and a different awareness of their bodies before the body of the Other’.<sup>33</sup> For Haraway, a contact zone implies more than simply awareness, more than momentarily renouncing one’s privileges; ‘it is not a one-sided affair’.<sup>34</sup> Rather, a contact zone implies a transformation of all the parts at stake through interaction and risk taking. Her discussion of the semiotic-material interactions between her dog Cayenne and herself in the practice of agility focuses on how the two are mutually constituted in and by their relations to each other, under specific conditions of mutual trust, co-presence and physicality. At yet, Haraway is not innocent either about the degree to which the mutual redoing of those involved in a contact zone can in turn redo the profound asymmetries of the power relations in which contact takes place, as when she states that ‘I would be a liar to claim that agility is a

32 In the work of these artists, the ‘contact zones’ in which humans and animals come together are quite literally the surfaces of paper and canvas where real animals such as anacondas or sharks leave their marks, produced mainly in the animal’s own environments or *Umwelts*.

33 Broglio (2011), p. 94.

34 Haraway (2008), p. 206.



utopia of equality and spontaneous nature,<sup>35</sup> acknowledging the relations of authority involved in dog training and the game of agility. Likewise, my thinking of ‘contact zones’ in this chapter is not a proposition ‘in the large’. Rather, it arises from the particular conditions offered by the work of Yeguas, a set of conditions closer to Broglio’s engagement with material surfaces such as canvases and paper, than Haraway’s direct engagement ‘with’ her dog. And yet, ‘contact’ with the work of Yeguas in the photographs and touchscreens presented as part of my own exhibition *AIDS Anarchive* will be rendered no less meaningful than the actual encounter between the mare and Yeguas, as they are an opportunity to engage with surface and respond to the images.

As already noted, Broglio’s consideration of contact zones is in the context of his wider study of the relationship between animals and surface. In Broglio, surface comes to represent two things: material surface and the possibility of thinking differently.<sup>36</sup> Broglio’s material surfaces include: canvases, paper, and ‘the visible and tactile exteriors of animal and human bodies’. On the other hand, surface in Broglio refers to the possibility of thinking differently, that is, ‘to the means of thinking and productivity removed from the interiority of the subject’. Of value for my consideration of the presence of particular animals in the work of Yeguas, Broglio has shown the way animals have been historically viewed as ‘living on the surface’.<sup>37</sup> In his commentary on the ways Western thinking has characterised non-human animals as inferiors, as pure surface, Broglio departs from the work of the philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) and his sense of animals as having a limited, ‘poor world’.<sup>38</sup> For Heidegger,

35 Ibid., p. 220.

36 Broglio (2011), p. 81.

37 Ibid., p. xvi.

38 As Broglio summarizes, Heidegger’s views on the animal world appears in his 1929–30 seminar on metaphysics in which the philosopher claims that ‘the stone is worldless; the animal is poor in world;

animals do have their own environments (*Umwelt*), although unlike humans, they are unaware of them. Heidegger draws his notion of a ‘poor animal world’ from the early twentieth-century scientist Jakob von Uexküll (1864–1944), a founding figure in ethnology and biosemiotics.<sup>39</sup> As Broglio notes of the tradition that goes from Uexküll to Heidegger: ‘The “uprightness” of humans is both physical and metaphysical, while the animal world is decidedly flat.’<sup>40</sup> Lacking interiority and depth of being and ‘poor in world,’ the animal is left on the surface. Then, the challenge for Broglio, which will resonate in this chapter, is to explore the possibility that the ‘poverty’ of the animal and its ‘living on the surface’ are productive sites for thinking differently.

Admittedly, behind Broglio’s invitation to engage surface lies a single problem: animal phenomenology. That is, the question of what is it to be an animal, not from the distanced perspective of the human gaze but ‘from the fur of the beasts themselves’.<sup>41</sup> This question in Broglio connects with the long-standing philosophical problem of ‘embodying another perspective’, with the ability to think about the Other. For Broglio, the capacity to think about those radically different from ourselves is only possible within particular parameters. To begin with, this is a thinking ‘that arises from the event, action, and encounters with the animal others’. Most artists discussed by Broglio effectively put their mind and body ‘at risk’ in real encounters with animals – unlike himself, for whom access to those encounters is mediated by images. Second, this is a thinking that emerges from engaging with surface, that is, from contact with the other’s

man is world-forming’.

39 In his work *A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans*, Uexküll describes a heterogeneity of animal worlds (what he calls *Umwelt*); each species has its own point of view and senses its surroundings differently. And yet, despite the variety of animal environments described by Uexküll, these are described as limited to ‘carriers’ or ‘marks of significance’ within which animals are ‘caught up’. (p. 87). For Uexküll, animals do not have distance from their environments, unlike humans whose verticality allow us to take distance from our environments and produce judgments.

40 Broglio (2011), p. 87.

41 *Ibid.*, p. xv.

world. Broglio claims: ‘While humans and animals live on the same earth, they occupy different worlds.’<sup>42</sup> Thus: ‘If we cannot access what it is to live from the standpoint of the beast, then our understanding of the animals and their worlds comes from contact with the surfaces of such worlds.’<sup>43</sup> For Broglio, it is in ‘the play of surfaces’, in the ‘contact zones’ between the edge of a human world and the animal world<sup>44</sup> where the possibility of encountering the Other can take place. Additionally, and important to my commentary on Yeguas in Section 2, for Broglio recognising the limitations of knowing from the Other’s perspective ‘asks us to think of our own fragility’.<sup>45</sup> This question points to the limits of our view of the world and to the partiality and instability of our claims. As Broglio notes: ‘While much of the history of philosophy has been about mastery of thought over and against the stuff of the world, fragility allows us to think otherwise, to think differently.’<sup>46</sup> In Broglio, this acceptance of fragility and the attempt to think differently are at the basis of the work by the artists discussed in his book, as well as in his own approach to them, which tries not to ‘appropriate nor assume too much – or subsume too much’.<sup>47</sup> The consideration of surface and of the ‘play of surfaces’ between the human and animal world as the one possibility of encountering ‘the Other’, as well as the recognition of the fragility of that same possibility, will lead me into my conclusions in Section 2.

In this chapter, following Broglio, I want to pursue a positive engagement with surface that in turn highlights the limitations of what I can know. In light of my overall goal of rethinking the relationship between surface and depth, I would now like to provide

42 Ibid., p. xix.

43 Ibid., p. xix.

44 Ibid., p. xxiii.

45 Ibid., p. xxii.

46 Ibid., p. xxii.

47 Ibid., p. xxiv.

some nuance or adjustment to Broglio's inspiring and affirmative approach to surface vis-à-vis Deleuze. Broglio engages with Deleuze in the closing chapters of his book, where he explores ontological questions through the lens of 'becoming'. Deleuze and Guattari's philosophical concept of becoming, and the related notion of 'becoming-animal' refer to a process of radical transformation that proceeds by influence rather than resemblance. The term is useful for Broglio to describe 'the larger world that humans and animals create in alliance with one another'. It is now rather commonplace to approach the presence of animals in 'artivism' – the compound world of art and activism – in relation to Deleuze and Guattari's notion of becoming-animal. This is certainly the case of existing readings of the images by Yeguas considered in this chapter, in which, most often, the presence of the mare is discussed through the lens of becoming.<sup>48</sup> Worthy of being pointed out, Broglio makes a momentary reference to an earlier, central work by Deleuze, *The logic of Sense*, and yet overlooks that it is precisely in this book that the philosopher commits to surface.<sup>49</sup> As I hope to show in the following subsection, Deleuze's philosophical views on surface come to reinforce and expand the connection between surface and fragility suggested by Broglio, while at the same time complicating a binary or reductive approach to the relationship between surface and depth.

### 1.3.1 '*Nothing is more fragile than the surface*'

48 For example, in the catalogue of the exhibition *Losing the Human Form* the work is described in terms of 'becoming equine or mutant'. See: Fernanda Carvajal, Ana Longoni, and Jaime Vindel (2012), p. 210.

49 In his work on surface, Broglio is committed to Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*, with a single reference to *The Logic of Sense*, more specifically, to Deleuze's distinction in the book between the verticality of Plato and Empedocles and the horizontal animality of Diogenes. See: Broglio (2011), p. 87.

Whereas Broglio has shown how animals have historically been viewed as ‘living on the surface’, in *The Logic of Sense* (1969) Gilles Deleuze affirms that: ‘Only animals are deep.’<sup>50</sup> Deleuze engaged with surface prior to turning to an exploration of the concept of ‘becoming’. This question has been described to a full extent by Daniel W. Smith in what he has called a transition in Deleuze ‘from surface to depth’;<sup>51</sup> that is, from the philosopher’s concern with the surface-depth problem in *The Logic of Sense* to his engagement with the ‘depths’ of the body without organs in *Anti-Oedipus* (1972) – and subsequently, in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980). For Deleuze, the surface of sense (or non-sense) is where ‘the denoted, the manifested, the signified’ lie. As Smith seems to suggest, the shift from the surface-depth problem to the body without organs in Deleuze is also an attempt to move beyond the level of representation, ‘to penetrate the sub-representational’ (Deleuze cited by Smith). Surface is not necessarily a central concept in Deleuze’s corpus of thought. Most often, surface is absent from the large literature of explanation and analysis of Deleuze’s key concepts.<sup>52</sup> To begin with, surface in Deleuze is related to his consideration of the terms exteriority and interiority. As noted by Jonathan Roffe, one of the underlying themes of Deleuze’s work is ‘a rejection of the

50 Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense* (London: Continuum, 2004), p. 12. Practically all my references here to *The Logic of Sense* come from section two of the book, ‘First Series of Paradoxes of Surface Effects’. Advising on how to read *The Logic of Sense*, Williams suggests that: ‘It is a book to skip and stumble through rather than methodically plod or grind.’ James Williams, *Gilles Deleuze’s Logic of Sense* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), p. 14. The book’s very structure, namely in series rather than chapters, invites the reader to navigate the book freely or even to be selective. The key concepts in *The Logic of Sense* have a ‘mobile’ quality; they resurface throughout the book under different guises. ‘Keep reading and skipping until something catches,’ Williams suggests. In my selective reading of *The Logic of Sense*, I follow this advice.

51 Daniel W. Smith, ‘From the Surface to the Depths: On the Transition from *Logic of Sense* to *Anti-Oedipus*’, *Symposium: The Canadian Journal of Continental Philosophy*, ed. Constantin V. Boundas. Continuum (2009): pp. 82–97. Smith follows Slavoj Žižek’s considerations on Deleuze in his book *Organs without Bodies: Deleuze and Consequences* (2004). Here, as summarised by Smiths, Žižek, a Lacanian himself, praises *The Logic of Sense* and dismisses *Anti-Oedipus* based on Deleuze’s distancing from Lacan in the latter.

52 For example, ‘surface’ is not a featured entry in either *The Deleuze Dictionary* or Colebrook’s *Understanding Deleuze* (2002). See, Adrian Parr, ed. *The Deleuze Dictionary* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010).

value of interiority in its various theoretical guises',<sup>53</sup> a rejection in which terms such as *outside* and *exteriority* (Roffe's terms of choice) and *surface*, I suggest, have a central role. Deleuze's use of the term interiority is related to the dominant view in Western philosophy since the time of Plato that things exist independently, with no necessary connection to anything else (as in the Cartesian 'ego cogito', where the body and the physical world are mere external contingencies). Deleuze's philosophy is a sustained critique of the view of the world in which things transcend the external world around them, a critique that is translated into an engagement with exteriority and surface.

In addition, Deleuze's views on surface in *The Logic of Sense* are connected to his consideration of Stoic thought. For Deleuze, the Stoics reversed the Platonic logic of causal relations between Idea, substance and body – each representing a different realm, in a different scale of value. As Deleuze explains, while in 'Plato, an obscure debate was raging in the depth of things, in the depth of the earth, between that which undergoes the action of the Idea and that which eludes this action' with the Stoics '*Everything now returns to the surface*'<sup>54</sup> [emphasis in the original]. And yet, in *The Logic of Sense*, Deleuze engages with surfaces but refuses to remain on the surface because of its fragility: 'Nothing is more fragile than the surface.'<sup>55</sup> Marxist thinker Alex Callinicos has pointed to Deleuze's concern regarding the instability of surface: 'The surface however, even if freed from the identity to which representation seeks to reduce it, remains only an effect, an attribute of physical states of affairs. It is a result and indeed a result which can crack, collapsing back into its foundation, or allowing this foundation

53 See: Jonathan Roffe, 'Exteriority/Interiority', in *The Deleuze Dictionary*, ed. Adrian Parr (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), p. 97. I am aware that Deleuze's thought includes trajectories that involve refinements and self-critiques to the positions elaborated in each major work. It is not the aim of my discussion to map or follow these trajectories.

54 Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense* (London: Continuum, 1995), p. 10.

55 Ibid., p. 95.

to rise to the surface.’<sup>56</sup> Nevertheless, Deleuze’s refusal to stay in the surface does not imply plunging oneself back into the depths. It is rather an invitation to shift, to slide, to provoke a minor move on the surface itself. In Deleuze, the old surface gives way to lateral sliding on the surface; depth becomes width, ‘no longer to sink, but to slide the whole length in such a way that the old depth no longer exists at all’.<sup>57</sup> Additionally, in *The Logic of Sense*, Deleuze takes on Lewis Carroll to explain a possible transition from depth to surface. In his analysis of the evolution of Alice, Carroll’s heroine, he states: ‘As one advances in the story, however, the digging and hiding gives away to lateral sliding from right to left and left to right. The animals below ground become secondary, giving away to “card figures” which have no thickness. One could say that the old depth having been spread out became width.’<sup>58</sup> For Deleuze, Alice’s adventure, ‘her climb to the surface, her disavowal of false depth’, is ‘her discovery that everything happens at the border’.<sup>59</sup> Events in Deleuze grow out of the edge, in the traffic between surface and depth. And here is, I like to think, where Deleuze can come to adjust Broglio’s inspiring, yet sometimes overly affirmative call to engage with surface.<sup>60</sup> From Deleuze’s invitation to shift, to slide, to provoke a minor move on the surface, another invitation emerges to move away from an entirely dialectical conception of the relationship between surface and depth. In fact, this possibility that begins to appear here, will be suggested again in different forms and around different cases throughout this dissertation.

56 Alex Callinicos, *Is There a Future for Marxism?* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1982), p. 26.

57 Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, p. 12.

58 *Ibid.*, pp. 11–12.

59 *Ibid.*, p. 13.

60 In his introduction, Broglio qualifies his main argument in the book by embracing the possibility that animals can also ‘live in the depth’: ‘I am not claiming that animals live *only* on the surface; indeed, biologists and ethicists continue to find a depth of thinking in the lives of animals. What will become evident in the middle chapters of this book is that such depth, if radically other than our own, remains necessarily closed off to us and that the surface of interaction between humans and animals becomes a zone for thinking such inaccessible locales that may prove to be but other surfaces yet unexposed.’ See: Broglio (2011), p. xix. And yet, his analysis throughout the book is eminently affirmative towards the possibilities of surface.

In Broglio contact zones and surface come together leading us to recognise both our own limitations to know from the Other's perspective and the fragility of surface. In the coming section, by following aspects of Broglio's work on 'contact zones', in the strong company of Haraway, a particular selection of images by Yeguas opens a discussion about physicality, surface and how we relate to the images we find there. While the images by Yeguas represent the 'contact zone' in which a particular mare and the human duo met and constituted each other in and by their relation in a joint performative action, my own encounter with the images, three decades later, in the material surfaces of photographs and touchscreens constitutes, I will suggest, a second or double form of a contact zone that is equally meaningful.

#### **1.4 Section 2: Yeguas del Apocalipsis: A Contact Zone**

Yeguas del Apocalipsis' signature work *La refundación de la Universidad de Chile* [The Refoundation of the University of Chile], 1988, is an action in which two naked male bodies – the activist duo themselves – mounted on a mare burst onto the campus of the University of Chile, Santiago, coinciding with a student occupation of the Faculty of Arts, still under the dictatorship of Pinochet (fig. 1, gallery). The duo's intention in this work was not to address the AIDS crisis; rather, it was an attempt to denounce homophobia and political repression in Pinochet's Chile. However, many other works by Yeguas, as well as the later individual work by the group's members, include overt references to HIV/AIDS, often through animal figurations. Even the very name of the duo, 'The Mares of the Apocalypse', embodied in this particular work, combines the



meaning of *yegua* [mare] in Chilean slang, in the sense of a promiscuous woman, with a dramatised reference to the AIDS pandemic.<sup>61</sup> Considering the work in the context of this study is, then, important for the opening of existing narratives around the ongoing HIV crisis. The work exists in documentation form through black-and-white images with restrictive access; images can be viewed but not copied or downloaded from the web archive dedicated to the collective ([www.yeguasdelapocalipsis.cl](http://www.yeguasdelapocalipsis.cl)).<sup>62</sup> And yet, the work has been ubiquitous in recent accounts of Latin American art and activism in the 1980s and nineties.<sup>63</sup> I myself presented images of the work in the thesis-related exhibition *AIDS Anarchive*, both in print and on a tablet device.<sup>64</sup> My analysis in this section is based on my ‘contact’ with the work on these particular material surfaces. Current descriptions of Yeguas’s *La refundación* provide limited discussion of the encounter between the activist duo and the mare at stake in the images. Often, existing

61 As declared by Lemebel: ‘...el nombre completo citaba los jinetes del apocalipsis metaforizados en una gran ópera sobre el sida’ [the full name of the collective was a citation to the riders of the apocalypse, metaphorised here as a grand opera about AIDS]. In Ángeles Mateo del Pino, ‘Cronista y malabarista. Entrevista a Pedro Lemebel’, *Cyber Humanitatis* 20 (spring 2001). Publisher: Facultad de Filosofía y Humanidades de la Universidad de Chile, accessed 16 September 2016. [http://web.uchile.cl/vignette/cyberhumanitatis/CDA/vida\\_sub\\_simple3/0,1250,PRID%253D11735%2526SCID%253D11737%2526ISID%253D436,00.html](http://web.uchile.cl/vignette/cyberhumanitatis/CDA/vida_sub_simple3/0,1250,PRID%253D11735%2526SCID%253D11737%2526ISID%253D436,00.html) Perhaps one of the most striking actions of Lemebel in relation to AIDS is the one carried out in the context of a visit to Manhattan for Pride celebrations in 1994, in which he dressed as a haloed Christ with a crown of ‘thorns’ (syringes full of supposedly infected blood) and carrying a handwritten banner, with the phrase in English: ‘Chile returns AIDS.’ As Meruane has noted, here Lemebel refers to HIV as a metaphor for U.S. imperialism, symbolically carrying AIDS back to its supposed point of origin. See: Meruane (2014), pp. 33–34.

62 Photographs of the action by Ulises Nilo and Carlos Berenguer. The final version of the web archive dedicated to the collective (available in Spanish and English) was launched in 2018. See: *Yeguas del Apocalipsis*, accessed 31 January 2019. <http://www.yeguasdelapocalipsis.cl> The website is an important resource for the study of the work of the collective. It is the result of a long-term research by Fernanda Carvajal and Alejandro de la Fuente, sponsored the Chilean national cultural fund Fondart and the commercial gallery D21 in Santiago, Chile. Quite disturbingly, in the preliminary design of the website, users were surprised with the international prohibition sign, also known as ‘no symbol’, when trying to download images by clicking on them with the right button.

63 For example, see: Juan Vicente Aliaga and José Miguel G. Cortés. *Desobediencias: cuerpos disidentes y espacios subvertidos en el arte en América Latina y España: 1960-2010* (Madrid: Egales, 2014). The work by Yeguas graces the cover of this book.

64 A preliminary version of the web site was presented in my exhibition *AIDS Anarchive* courtesy of the gallery D21, which, since approximately the death of Pedro Lemebel in 2015, manages the circulation and reproduction right of most of the archive (in close consultation to Pancho Casas, the other member of the collective, who is now based in Peru). A digital copy of the more than 800 documents that make up the website is available for consultation on-site in the Women and Gender Archive of the National Archive of Chile, Santiago.

literature describes the work as both a reference to the equestrian figure of Pedro de Valdivia (1497–1553), the Spanish conquistador founder of the city of Santiago, as well as a citation of the exhibitionist gesture of the medieval legend of Lady Godiva – who rode naked, covered only in her long hair, through the streets of Coventry to gain a remission of the oppressive taxation that her husband imposed on his tenants.<sup>65</sup> But most prominently, the work has been quite insistently described in terms of a ‘becoming animal’, a description in which little is said about the actual, mundane encounter between the equine and the Chilean activists.<sup>66</sup> In this section, I want to try a different route, an approach from a ‘contact’ perspective that accounts for my opening argument in this chapter: that the HIV/AIDS archive offers the possibility of a ‘contact zone’, of a different kind of relation between persons and particular animals. In this section, this initial argument will soon turn into a reflection on my own encounter with the images at the material surfaces of photographs and touchscreens. At the same time, my approach to the work in this section from a contact perspective allow us to pay attention to often overlooked aspects of the work. In Pratt’s original sense, ‘A “contact” perspective emphasizes how subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other [...] It treats the relations [...] in terms of co-presence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices’.<sup>67</sup> So then, what new perceptions can an approach to these particular

65 It is fair to say that, often, both references in existing literature follow descriptions that the artists themselves made of the work. For a reference to Pedro de Valdivia, see: Fernanda Carvajal, Ana Longoni, and Jaime Vindel, ‘Desnudar la opresión’, chapter subsection in *Losing the Human Form: A Seismic Image of the 1980s in Latin America* [exhibition catalogue], ed. Red de conceptualismos del sur. Reina Sofia Museum, Madrid, pp. 209–10: 209. For a reference to Lady Godiva, see, the existing description in the web archive dedicated to the collective, accessed 20 January 2019. <http://www.yeguasdelapocalipsis.cl/1988-refundacion-de-la-universidad-de-chile/>

66 See, again: Fernanda Carvajal, Ana Longoni, and Jaime Vindel (2012), p. 210. It is perhaps Haraway’s vivacious objection to Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of ‘becoming animal’ that partially explains why the model is not sufficient to me when addressing the presence of the mare in Yeguas. Deleuze and Guattari’s famous section on becoming-animal left Haraway ‘angry’, for the philosophers’ incapability to engage with actual animals, with ‘worldly forms of animality’, prioritising instead sublime forms of animality. See: *When Species Meet*, p. 27. In this chapter, the animals at the HIV/AIDS archive are equally worldly, not sublime.

67 Pratt cited by Haraway (2008), p. 216.

images by Yeguas bring from a contact perspective? What sort of positive knowledge can we get from attention to the interaction, co-presence and relations taking place in the ‘contact zone’ that is this work? Two quick answers to these questions. First, as I will show in a minute, approaching Yeguas’ *La refundación* from a contact perspective can help draw our attention to crucial aspects around animal representation, such as, for example, the ways in which questions of physicality and surface are integral to these images. Second, as I will conclude, a contact perspective will allow me to reflect on what it means to think alongside surface and how this might come to represent a different mode of thinking.

Questions of physicality and surface are integral to the images of *La refundación* by Yeguas. The number of existing photographs documenting the work is unknown to me. But the three most circulated images put the emphasis on the actual contact between the mare and the naked skin of the performers. Specifically, one of these images accentuates the rich economy of touch taking place in the ‘contact zone’ between human and non-human bodies, with the focus placed on the bare buttocks and legs of the activist duo against the body of the mare, while the performer on the back (Lemebel) holds the waist of the one in front (Casas) and the latter seeks balance by supporting his hands gently on the back of the mare. The bare bodies in these images are pointers of how the ‘animal question’ is tightly tied to human nakedness, as in Derrida’s deconstructive analysis of the exchange of gazes between his naked self and his cat. As Broglio reminds us, Derrida, in his text ‘The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)’, begins by considering the look from his cat as the point where thought begins. Derrida’s thinking here arises from a moment in which the philosopher is naked and his cat looks at him.

From that exchange of gazes, and reflecting on his own nakedness, Derrida begins to offer a reassessment of the dividing lines drawn between humans and animals. And yet, as Broglio suggests, following Haraway's exploration of actual physical contact with her dog, it is perhaps the 'physicality and surfaces of contact' of animals that is more pressing than the look from animals.<sup>68</sup> As he states: 'If for Derrida human thinking begins in the regard of the animal, to move this notion further, contact with animals provides possibility to think "with" them.'<sup>69</sup> And yet, unlike Haraway's account of exchanges between humans and animals in the contact zones offered by dog training, which arise from co-presence 'with' her dog Cayenne, my 'contact' with animals in this chapter is at 'surface level'; it takes place on the surfaces of photographs documenting the actual physical exchange between Yeguas and the mare. I was born and raised in a rural environment in which equine mammals are part of the everyday landscape. And yet, I've never ridden on a mare or any horse's back, and much less naked. And so, I remain unable to fully grasp the asymmetrical power relationships that occur between people and horses in the act of riding. Or to have a full sense of the embodied relation between the particular mare and Yeguas happening in the handful of images considered in this chapter. And still, my surface access to the contact zone between particular humans and mare in the images by Yeguas can be, I want to suggest, an equally significant opportunity to start thinking differently.

To agree that physicality is more pressing than looks, does not imply discarding or overcoming the gaze or even representation (or at least, I am reluctant to do so in this chapter). Attending to representation and iconography with regards to Yeguas, however momentary, can allow us further flesh out questions of physicality, contact and the way

68 Broglio (2011), p. 60.

69 Ibid., p. 243.

we look at images. Quite literally, the images of *La refundación* convey the figure of the urban horse, a specially connoted animal representation that raises questions about the power relations involved in horse training – not the focus of my chapter. Relevant to my interest in surface, in a lucid essay on horse training and riding, Paul Patton (2003) renders the horse body into an extensive sensory surface.<sup>70</sup> Science seems to suggest that the body of a horse is one of the most sensitive sensory surfaces.<sup>71</sup> This is exemplified by some of the dressage techniques described by Patton in his essay, such as the practice known as ‘bagging’ or ‘sacking out’, a traumatising technique that consists of reducing a horse’s sensitivity to touch by hitting it all over the body with a sack.<sup>72</sup> Opposing more severe training systems based on physical and verbal coercion, Patton describes a whole range of dressage modalities based on slight gestures and non-verbal signs – such as a gentle touch on the horse’s back or a bit of pressure on the legs as the rider is sitting on the horse – in which a different kind of contact between people and horses is at play (a softer contact that seems, at least from the photos, also present in the communication between Yeguas and the mare). According to Patton, these non-verbal signs used by humans to communicate with horses work only because they are ‘integrated within larger, somatic framework of interspecies communication’ that includes ‘touch’, ‘pressure’ and ‘body contact’.<sup>73</sup> Not unlike Haraway’s account of dog training, in which relations are built through touch and physical interaction, Patton’s essay puts an emphasis on the shock of physicality and contact, countering our cultural drive to enframe animals through the gaze. As Broglio suggests considering Haraway’s

70 Paul Patton, ‘Language, Power, and the Training of Horses’, in *Zoontologies: The Question of the Animal*, ed. Cary Wolfe (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), pp. 83–99.

71 See: Rick Parker, *Equine Science* (Boston, MA: Cengage Learning, 2012). Note the attention given to the sensory system of horses throughout the book.

72 Patton (2003), p. 84.

73 *Ibid.*, p. 89. We do not know if the mare in Yeguas is tamed or not. But in several photos documenting the work, we see glimpses of the non-verbal, somatic framework of communication described by Patton: the mare, already mounted by the duo is introduced to the University of Chile accompanied by two women who gently pull the reins while a third plays the flute; they are the poets Carmen Berenguer, Carolina Jerez and Nadia Prado.

account of the material-semiotic exchange between her dog and herself over training, ‘physicality enlivens the surface of the animal body as something other than an object enframed by human desires’.<sup>74</sup> The ways in which horses very often come to satisfy our culturally acquired desires and fantasies is exemplified by existing description of these images by Yeguas, in which the presence of the animal serves as a token for projections associated with masculinity and power.<sup>75</sup> As Patton has noted, people love horses for all kind of reasons, including their ‘infinite capacity to respond to human desires’.<sup>76</sup> Conversely, I like to think, engaging surface in these images bring us back to the real mare, not the fantasy projection of ourselves over the animal.

As I have been insistently repeating, my contact with animals in this chapter is not first-hand, but at the material surfaces of photographs and touchscreens, a lack of directness to which I now want to pay fuller attention. My access to the images of Yeguas in this chapter is by two means, as they were presented in my project-related exhibition *AIDS Anarchive*: through press clippings and other printed materials featuring the images – many of these documents date from the year of the action – and through a touchscreen with online access to the collective’s web archive, presented as part of a larger display including other materials competing for the visitor’s attention. Media studies scholar Markus Stauff (2016) has described the ways in which our attention is ‘tamed’ in the contemporary media landscape.<sup>77</sup> For Stauff, in the current ‘screen culture’ our attention is ‘framed’ and ‘tamed’ through a multiplicity of devices, across the different, yet inter-related worlds of television, social media, and the classroom. Taking this analogy between screen and taming suggested by Stauff a starting clue, while at the same time

74 Broglio (2011), pp. 60–61.

75 Again, as in the usual references to the equestrian figure of Pedro de Valdivia in relation to the work.

76 Patton (2003), p. 83.

77 Markus Stauff, ‘Taming Distraction: The Second Screen Assemblage, Television and the Classroom’, *Media and Communication* 4, no. 3 (2016). DOI: 10.17645/mac.v4i3.538

distancing myself from a reductive idea of technology as a mode of policing our attention, I am momentarily interested in thinking about the ‘contact zone’ that is a touchscreen. That a screen can be a ‘contact zone’ was suggested to me by a digital collage by Spanish artist Diego del Pozo presented in the first iteration of my project related exhibition *AIDS Anarchive* (fig. 5 and fig. 6, gallery), not far from the images of Yeguas discussed in this chapter. Part of a specially commissioned installation that aimed at visually and tactilely synthesising the starting suggestion of the exhibition that HIV/AIDS is a ‘natureculture’,<sup>78</sup> Del Pozo’s digital collage (the screenshot of the artist’s computer desk) prominently features a drawing of a hand touching a screen of a tablet device (fig. 5, lower right side, gallery). This larger collage also includes: a photograph of the process of digitising an antique book of botanical illustrations, which shows the hand of a person manipulating the book; an image of the male trans porn actor Buck Angel; and a composition alternating images of professional video camera devices and illustrations of animal fauna, among others. By pointing to this collage, a figural ‘contact zone’ where a hand touching a tablet made by drawing appears as part of a larger assembly of humans, machines and other species, I do not intend to suggest an equivalence between the screen as a ‘contact zone’ and the ethically charged encounters between people and particular animals, involving co-presence and physicality. Nor do I want to suggest that the ‘taming’ of our perception in the current screen ecology resembles the relations at stake in the often asymmetric, yet transformative ‘contact zones’ between real humans and animals. My claim here is not about sameness or resemblance. But I do want to stop and think about what is significant in the ‘contact zone’ between me and the material surfaces of photographs and screens in this chapter,

78 As Haraway has taught us, there is no nature or culture, only ‘naturecultures’, that is, a constant traffic of discourses, images and material practices between cultural and natural worlds. See, for example: Chapter 9 ‘CRITTERCAM. Compounding Eyes in Naturecultures’, in Haraway (2008), pp. 249–63.

and about whether engaging with surface, as Broglio suggests, might be a means of thinking and doing differently.

The main ‘inspiration’ behind Del Pozo’s digital collage is the concept of ‘fingery eyes’ employed by Haraway in her book *When Species Meet* (the same chapter in which contact zones are discussed).<sup>79</sup> Introduced by trans scholar and former Haraway student, Eva Hayward, the expression ‘fingery eyes’ originally described materialised modes of perception that occur in science, such as in the encounter between a recording camera and marine creatures. In Haraway, the term ‘fingery eyes’ describes tactile-optic visuality and serves to introduce the question that animate her entire book: “Whom and what do I touch when I touch my dog?” Whereas in the chapter about ‘contact zones’ the question triggers a discussion about the physicality and co-presence involved in training ‘with’ her dog, in the introduction to the book the question revolves around a different type of ‘canine’ found on her computer screen. This dog is the digital image of a burned-out redwood stump covered with vegetation that under the right photographic angle resembles a dog and which had been e-mailed to her by a friend. It is through ‘fingery eyes’ that Haraway touches the dog on the screen; these are ‘eyes’ made possible by digital cameras, computer servers, and e-mail programs in combination with her inherited ‘primate visual system’. Likewise, the ‘fingery eyes’ that allow me to ‘touch’ and engage in the present the encounter between a mare and Yeguas that took place three decades ago are made up of low and high resolution digital files, internet

79 The inspiration did not come out of the blue. Del Pozo’s project was shaped by a public Skype conversation between the artist, Donna Haraway and myself, at the initiative of consonni, an independent arts organisation in Bilbao. For details on the event, see: ‘S2. Donna Haraway, Diego del Pozo and Aimar Arriola’, 4 February 2016, accessed 23 February 2019. <https://www.consonni.org/en/actividades/2016/02/s2-donna-haraway-diego-del-pozo-and-aimar-arriola> Among other topics, the conversation addressed the use that Haraway has made in the past of the example of AIDS activism to expose her distinction between the practices of ‘representation’ and the practices of ‘articulation’. See: Donna Haraway, ‘The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/D Others’, *Cultural Studies*, ed. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula A. Treichler (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 295–337.



cables, touchscreens, and the material surfaces of an exhibition display, combined with my inherited visual perception system, which, in my particular case, is determined by my hereditary severe myopia corrected with laser surgery at the age of 18, my undergraduate education in visual arts, and the number of hours expended in front of the television as a closeted gay teenager in the late 1980s, among other important components.<sup>80</sup> Recognising here the morphology of the ‘fingery eyes’ that allow me to touch the images of Yeguas in this chapter does not mean entering into a soliloquy about the possibilities and limitations of my sensory system, of dubious interest for someone besides me. Rather, acknowledging here the compound character of my ‘curatorial vision’<sup>81</sup> points to the possibility of non-pure, yet meaningful contact zones, in which significant encounters do not require, or not always, co-presence and synchrony.

‘Fingery eyes’ also help Haraway to acknowledge the responsibility that touching the particular dog on the computer screen brings with it. ‘Visually fingering’ the dog on the screen involves, according to Haraway, ‘touching all the important ecological and political histories and struggles’ shared by people and other creatures. Our capacity for perception, Haraway suggests, forces us ‘to answer to and for those other primate beings’, both in their ordinary and ‘naturecultural’ habitats – which, if we care about what Haraway has to teach, includes computer screens, art exhibitions and archives; the

80 My earliest memory of AIDS is televisual, which partly explains my current engagement in HIV/AIDS representations as well the fact that I am conducting my PhD in Visual Cultures. Also, perhaps worth noting, my favourite recreational activity as a child was taking pictures of the caged animals – I remember the lions, lynxes and owls – in the zoo of the Artxanda amusement park, a mountain near Bilbao, with my compact analogue camera, lacking zoom and manual focus, which made most of the images show the sharply focused cage bars in the foreground and the blurry animals in the background. All these factors determine the possibilities of what I can know in this chapter.

81 ‘Curatorial vision’ is the name of a regular public programme of the Guggenheim Museum in which staff members from the curatorial and education areas offer ‘a complementary view’ (the Museum’s own phrasing) of current exhibitions. In my own experience as a staff member of the museum and as someone who would often conduct this kind of guided tour, ‘curatorial vision’ very often simply comes to represent the ability to explain the spatial organisation of an exhibition or the historical context of an artwork. I know of no reference to the perceptual dimension of the gaze of the curators in literature on the curatorial.

main habitats in this chapter. An ethical imperative, then, that of giving response, not only in the actual shared presence of particular people and animals, but in the act of looking at images. As I relate to images of Yeguas encountered at the material surfaces of photographs and digital screens, neither physicality nor my gaze are a guarantee of access to the ‘real’ encounter between the mare and the activist duo. I cannot extract from representation the complexity of the ‘contact zone’ between people and a particular animal in those images. And still, the visual registers of Yeguas, whether printed on paper or accessed on a touchscreen, become, I like to think, a doubling of a ‘contact zone’: on the one hand, they bear witness to the actual encounter between the activists and the mare, a bearing that is both a portrayal and a betrayal of an event that cannot be fully represented. On the other hand, the photographs and screens become the material surface with which I can begin to offer an answer. By engaging with surface through ‘fingery eyes’, this doubling or double form of ‘contact zone’ allows me, then, to ‘touch’ even momentarily those others – two humans and a mare – that got together three decades ago in a meaningful encounter within an asymmetrical, yet shared context of political struggle, offering me the opportunity to respond to that encounter in the present.

As a sort of digression, I would like now to very briefly comment on an additional work by Yeguas, equally connected to the AIDS archive, as a means to underline the centrality that representations of animals have in their work as well as bringing an additional perspective on surface: *Instalamos dos pajaritos, como palomas en alambritos* [We installed two little birds, like pigeons on wire], a series of photographs involving elaborated costumes, fake birds and feathers (fig. 2, gallery). The work is a series of studio photographs; a collection of highly-stylised black-and-white self-

portraits where the artists are wearing makeup and ostrich feathers and little birds are adorning their bodies.<sup>82</sup> While in the first work discussed in this chapter a particular animal – a mare – is mundanely present, in this additional work fantasy is at play. The artists’ stylised poses are reminiscent of a series of colour photographs they displayed a year earlier, titled *Lo que el sida se llevó* [Gone with the AIDS], in which the two imitate feminine Hollywood archetypes, dressed up in frocks belonging to transvestite friends from the poorest neighbourhoods of Santiago who had died of HIV/AIDS-related complications. As Marxist scholar Esther Leslie has suggested, the use of costume as spectacle suggests that non-workday, stylised clothing ‘become[s] intrinsic [to the person wearing it] not because of some notion of depth, of essence that is embodied in them, but rather precisely because of their superficiality, their overly visible presence on the surface’.<sup>83</sup> Similarly, here and elsewhere, Yeguas’ use of garnished costumes and do-it-yourself fashion, which often includes feathers and flowers, indigenous apparel, and found and borrowed clothing, became intrinsic to the superficiality of their bodies. ‘Superficiality’ in Yeguas must also be understood as a political gesture, as a way of responding to the usual gravity of thought and solemn ways of presenting oneself in public characteristic of the traditional left (patriarchal, heterocentric, stylistically uniform), forms to which members of Yeguas have responded in bold and inventive ways.<sup>84</sup> Additionally, the presence of birds in Yeguas, I want to

82 The series of photographs could be considered a follow-up to a separate performance work earlier that year: *Cuerpos Contingentes*, marking the opening of an exhibition organised by renowned visual artist Lotty Rosenfeld and writer Diamela Eltit. The only available photograph documenting the action shows Yeguas seated in a pair of wheelchairs, fully naked, only covered by what it looks like a see-through plastic or cloth covered with barbed wire and white little birds. The work is representative of the many unannounced actions or public outbreaks by Yeguas throughout their career, in the spirit of their already discussed first action, mounted on a mare.

83 See Esther Leslie, ‘Dreams for Sale’, in *Birds of Paradise: Costume as Cinematic Spectacle*, ed. Maketa Uhlirova (London: Koenig Books, 2013), p. 32.

84 For example, in response to the discrimination against homosexuality within the Chilean Marxist left, in 1986 Lemebel read his well-known manifesto ‘Hablo por mi diferencia’ [I Speak from my Difference] in the context of a clandestine meeting of leftist dissidents in the Mapocho railway station, Santiago, Chile. Around the same time, Lemebel took a highly-stylised, ironic portrait of himself with the sickle and the hammer painted on his face. An installation composed of the sound

suggest here, insists on the many existing animal figurations, specifically birds, to designate homosexuals in the Spanish language.<sup>85</sup> The practice of referring to gays and lesbians in terms of birds is evident in everyday Spanish expressions such as *tener pluma* (literally, to have feathers) used for a feminine looking, sounding or acting male, and also for a female with a masculine aspect. Not surprisingly, Pedro Lemebel's literary work is traversed by the image of the feather and subjects with 'pluma' ('pluma' in Spanish also refers to the instruments for writing or drawing with ink as well as to a writer's skills and writing style).<sup>86</sup> As already noted in the preamble, the use of these terms can be situated in the larger trajectory of the colonial persecution of difference, as suggested by Cindy Patton, and hint at the processes of the production of 'Otherness' at the heart of the AIDS archive – the unpacking of which exceeds the scope of this chapter.

Leading into my conclusions, I want to address the question of engaging with surface as way of thinking differently, which is also the question concerning the fragility of surface. This is a question I have been deferring until now and in the answering of which I will continue with Broglio and Deleuze alone. As noted earlier in the chapter, for Broglio surface comes to represent two things: material surface and the possibility of thinking differently.<sup>87</sup> But what does it mean then to think around and with surface? What is really so different about the thinking that arises from engaging surface? To think alongside surface, Broglio means thinking and doing away from the privileging of

version of the manifesto together with a lightbox of the photographic portrait are now part of the collection of the Museo Reina Sofía, Madrid. See: Pedro Lemebel, *Manifiesto. Hablo por mi diferencia (Manifesto. I Speak from my Difference)*, Reina Sofia Museum Collection online, accessed 31 January 2019. <https://www.museoreinasofia.es/en/collection/artwork/manifiesto-hablo-mi-diferencia-manifiesto-i-speak-my-difference>

85 See, again: La Fountain-Stokes (2009).

86 See, again: Lemebel, 'El resplandor emplumado del circo travesti' [The feathered glow of the transvestite circus], in *La esquina es mi corazón* (Santiago, Chile: Seix Barral, 1995).

87 Broglio (2011), p. 81.

the interiority of being, traditionally understood as separated from the contingencies of the external world. For Broglio, ‘material surfaces offer a means of thinking about humans and animals outside the hegemony of the privileged interiority of the human subject.’<sup>88</sup> Broglio’s overarching proposal states: ‘Thinking along surfaces yields a different sort of ontology from heights, depths, and interiors: it is thought without recourse to a transcendental method of valuation [...] and without privileging the interiority of the human subject[.]’<sup>89</sup> Similarly, in Broglio’s consideration of a thought that does not resort to a transcendental valuation method, we find, I want to suggest, another connection with Deleuze and his approach to surface. As already noted, surface in Deleuze appears as part of his rejection of the value of interiority, as exemplified in the privileging of the interiority of the self in Western thought. One of the ways in which this rejection by Deleuze is expressed is in his engagement with exteriority, another one is his engagement with surface. In Broglio’s engagement with and writing of (and with) art, this different kind of thinking and doing, which does not privilege the value of interiority is translated into a mode of interpretation that, first of all, is committed to surface, that is, with what things already say, without, on the other hand, assuming that all surfaces are immediately readable. Likewise, in my own thinking and doing in this chapter, I have modestly attempted a thinking and producing removed from the privileging of heights, depths, and interiors – that is, through engagement with surface –, responding to a particular set of images of Yeguas.

In addition, for Broglio to think alongside surface is also to admit the limits of what we can know. Our limitation to think ‘from’ the skin of the other confronts us with the fragility of our thinking. In Broglio’s own writing about animal encounters he attempts

88 Ibid., p. 85.

89 Ibid., p. 82.

to produce yet another encounter, which, in turn, can offer some sense of the fragility of his own thinking. Then, since we cannot ‘access’ the standpoint of ‘the other’, our understanding of their worlds can only come from contact with the surface of such worlds. And still, if we take good care of Deleuze’s warning, surface is a fragile place to stay. As I have already admitted in this chapter, I do not write from co-presence with animals, but from contact on the surface of particular images. Displayed in my own exhibition *AIDS Anarchive*, the photographic surfaces carrying the images become both presence and absence, an opening and a closure of the actual event. In that sense, the images are fragile ‘contact zones’, markers of a fragile contact that point to the limitations of what I can really know. And yet, to acknowledge the fragility of surface, does not imply plunging back in the abyss of the depths. Rather, as in Alice’s adventures, to discover surface, to engage surface and accept its fragility, is not so much to let us get caught in the depths but to acknowledge that ‘everything happens at the border’, at the edge. As we have learned in the doubling ‘contact zones’ that have populated this chapter, meaningful contacts also happen at the edge, at ‘the play of surfaces’ between particular material-semiotic worlds.

## **1.5 Conclusions**

My starting argument in this chapter has been that the HIV/AIDS archive can offer the possibility of a ‘contact zone’ between persons and particular animals. Advised by Broglio and Haraway, this is a possibility that has not been thought of in the wider sphere, but under the particular conditions offered by a selection of images by the Chilean duo Yeguas del Apocalipsis, mainly, their signature work *La refundación de la*

*Universidad de Chile*. In the course of this chapter the initial argument has led me into a discussion about physicality, fragility and surface, and about how we relate to the images we find there. My reaction in this chapter to the images of Yeguas has implied offering a sense of the shared histories and asymmetrical relations between humans and animals within the AIDS archive, as I have tried to partially unfold in the preamble of the chapter. My analysis in this chapter has not arisen from a first-hand encounter with animals, but from ‘contact’ with the material surfaces of photographs and touchscreens showing images of those encounters. This second-hand contact has produced a doubling of a ‘contact zone’, one that exposes the impossibility of fully accessing said encounter, while at the same time offering me the conditions to respond to the images (not only Broglio’s engagement with surface but Haraway’s material-semiotic understanding of perception has been helpful in this). As an important part of my analysis, I have paid attention to crucial aspects around animal representation, such as, for example, the ways in which questions of physicality and surface are integral to these images by Yeguas, which are often overlooked. These questions have been unpacked in two steps: first, I have briefly exposed existing approaches to the work of Yeguas, in order to justify my analysis from a ‘contact’ perspective. Unlike the case studies that I will discuss in subsequent chapters, the work of Yeguas has received considerable attention in recent years. Therefore, arguing for the originality of my contribution, even briefly, has been necessary. Secondly, by following aspects of Broglio’s work on animal representation (with help from other authors in the field, such as Paul Patton), my response to images of Yeguas have addressed various ways in which surface and superficiality matter in their work.

Closing the chapter, the potency of contact with surfaces that register other contacts, has led into a reflection on what we can know alongside surfaces and the limits of our own thinking. This has turned out to be the question about the fragility of surface. Thus, Broglio's inspiring and affirmative invitation to engage with the surface in this chapter has received adjustment through Deleuze's warning that 'there is nothing more fragile than surface'. This warning offers the possibility to begin thinking that transformative contacts can also happen at the limit, at the edge between particular surfaces and bodies of material-semiotic constitution. This possibility, suggested here will appear again in different moments of this study. Of important note, my analysis from a contact perspective in this chapter offers a transition door to Chapter 2, where I will approach the motif of 'touch' in the AIDS archive, in relation to a contemporary choreographic work that employs the dance technique of Contact Improvisation as a method of inquiry.



## Chapter 1: Fragile Contact: Animals in the HIV/AIDS Archive

### Gallery of Images



Figure 1. *Yeguas del Apocalipsis*, *La refundación de la universidad de Chile*, 1988. Photographic record of the action by Ulises Nilo. Courtesy Galería D21.



Figure 2. *Yeguas del Apocalipsis*, *Instalamos dos pajaritos, como palomas en alambritos*, 1990. Photographer: Pedro Marinello. Courtesy Galería D21.

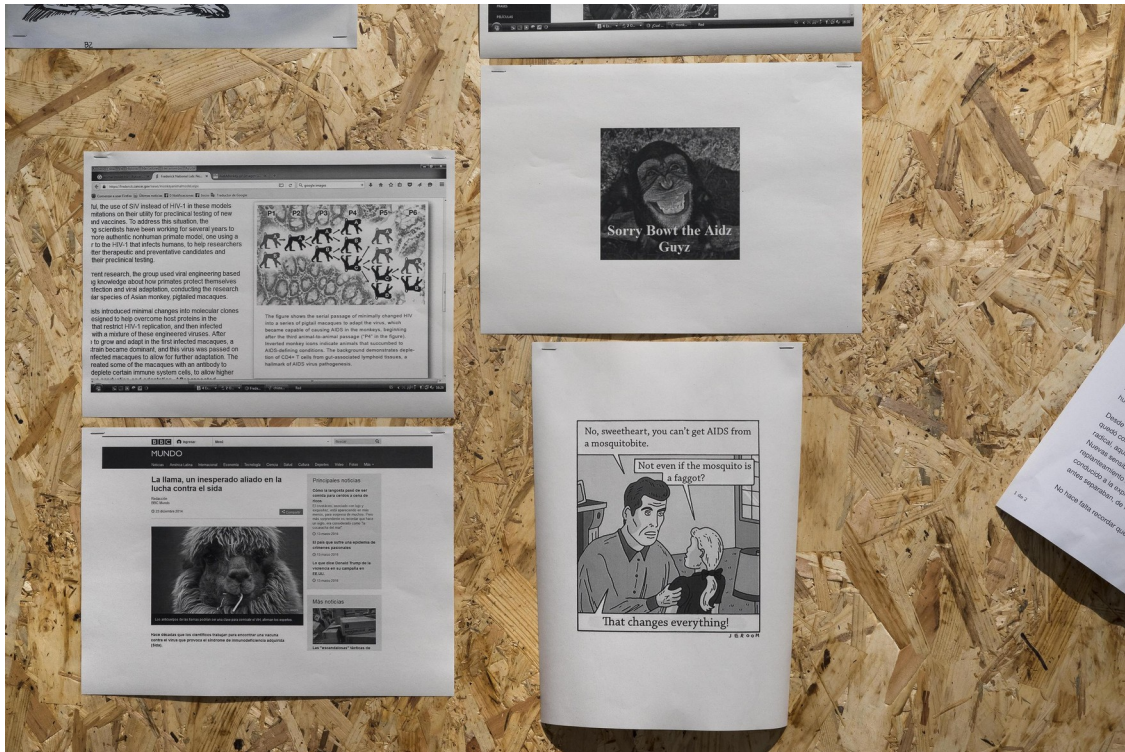


Figure 3. Documentation related to the AIDS-animal connection. *AIDS Anarchiv* exhibition, Tabakalera, San Sebastián, Spain. Installation view (detail). Photograph: © Tabakalera, 2016.



Figure 4. Covers of books by Pedro Lemebel, *AIDS Anarchiv* exhibition, Tabakalera, San Sebastián, Spain. Installation view (detail). Photograph: © Tabakalera, 2016.





Figure 5. Diego del Pozo Barriuso, *Gently revealing, caring hard, all touching...*, 2016 [detail]. Courtesy of the artist.



Figure 6. Diego del Pozo Barriuso, *Gently revealing, caring hard, all touching...*, 2016. *IDS Archive* exhibition, Tabakalera, San Sebastián, Basque Country. Installation view. Photograph: © Tabakalera, 2016.

## Chapter 2: Choreographing What Does Not Yet Exist: Touch in the HIV/AIDS Archive

### 2.1 Introduction

What animates this chapter is *touch*, a recurring motif in the HIV/AIDS archive. My use of italics here seeks to emphasise the differing and sometimes disparate aspects of how ‘touch’ is at work in the AIDS archive – as I will fully expose in the preamble of the chapter. ‘Touch’ in the AIDS archive insistently appears under various guises, be that the touching hand, the two (or more) bodies in close physical contact, or as an evocation of death.<sup>1</sup> ‘Touch’ in the AIDS archive, I will briefly conclude, also calls for the imagining of a commonality-to-come. The profusion of figures of touch is evident in the archive of cultural responses to the ongoing HIV/AIDS crisis at large, as well as the specific AIDS archive of Spain and Chile, the later the focus of my project. My starting hypothesis is that the prevalence of the motif of touch in the AIDS archive must be understood in the broader context of the subjective and somatic conditions imposed by neoliberalism. Or as dance scholar André Lepecki – my main theoretical source in this chapter – puts it in terms less maximalist, and perhaps closer to the ‘tactile’ plane in which I stand in this chapter, ‘the conditions of the situation we find ourselves in today’.<sup>2</sup> The term ‘neoliberalism’, the subject of a large number of scholarly works in the last decades, has come to represent a set of economic and governing processes since

1 The motif of touch is not only at the centre of the HIV/AIDS archive but of much of the scholarly work of recent years, as, for example, summarised by Sarah Jackson in the introduction to her book on the relationship between touching and writing. See: Sarah Jackson, *Tactile Poetics. Touch and Contemporary Writing* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015). Of interest in regards to the overall focus of this chapter towards see also: André Lepecki and Sally Banes, ed. *The Senses in Performance* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

2 André Lepecki, *Singularities: Dance in the Age of Performance* (New York: Routledge, 2016), p. 2.

the late 1970s with implications in all dimensions of life, including subjectivity and corporeality. In fact, my sustained argument in this chapter is this: in the face of the exacerbated individualism and investment on the self that is characteristic of neoliberal subjectivity – which have equal somatic implications– ‘touch’ in the HIV/AIDS archive offers the possibility of an opening to an other. This ‘other’, I will conclude, represents the imagining of a community-to-come: one that, perhaps, exceeds the domain of well-defined, self-present subjects.

In this chapter, the possibilities offered by touch to an opening to the other will become tangible in *The Touching Community*, a dance-led research and choreographic work by Spanish choreographer and performer Aimar Pérez Galí (Barcelona, 1982) that explores the so far overlooked relationship between dance and HIV in Spain and Chile, as well as other selected contexts in Latin America.<sup>3</sup> Initiated in 2015, *The Touching Community*, a project in which I have several roles,<sup>4</sup> follows the parallel, global expansion of AIDS and Contact Improvisation, the dance technique in which movement is improvised upon contact between the *surface* of two bodies or a body<sup>5</sup> and the *surface* of the floor (my emphasis). The work – formalised as a choreographic work, in which the dancer’s writing is essential, and a companion book – cites and rearranges existing and new

- 3 Pérez Galí’s *The Touching Community* is, to my knowledge, the first project dealing with the impact of AIDS in the dance communities of Spain and Latin America. In the academic field, AIDS as a theme in dance was first explored a decade ago by scholar David Gere, although limited to works produced in the US and with no attention to Contact Improvisation. See: David Gere, *How to Make Dances in an Epidemic. Tracking Choreography in the Age of AIDS* (Madison, Wisconsin The University of Wisconsin Press, 2004). Despite the focus of *The Touching Community* is on the Spanish-speaking world, the title of the work is in English. An undisclosed inspiration in the title of Pérez Galí’s work is The Carrying Society, a political art collective formed by a group of participants in late artist Pepe Espaliú’s workshop in San Sebastian, Basque Country, Spain, where his signature work *Carrying* (1992) was produced.
- 4 I play three different roles in the project: a research advisor to the project, the editor of the companion book and a member of the audience in two of the live performances of the dance piece. My analysis of the work in the chapter is informed by these three positions.
- 5 My use of the term body throughout this chapter is limited to the modern and anatomical notion of ‘body’ at the basis of the choreographic. This is a body defined by bodily-kinetic ableism. The task of radically challenging the centrality of the anatomical in both the ‘dance archive’ and the ‘AIDS archive’ would require a separate project.

materials collected by Pérez Galí during his investigation in regions of Spain and Latin America, while also including more established references to the AIDS archive at large. As I will suggest, by engaging with ‘touch’, against the backdrop of the cultural responses to HIV/AIDS past and present, *The Touching Community* re-elaborates some of the central features of subjectivity and corporeality in the current age of neoliberalism. In order to delineate what the subjective and somatic conditions imposed by neoliberalism are, in this chapter I follow a firm path that may not be immediately obvious: the path connecting the invention of choreography in the late-sixteenth century and the production of subjectivity and corporeality in the present, through the notion of ‘solipsism’. Composed by the Latin ‘solus’ (alone) and ‘ipse’ (self), solipsism is the metaphysical doctrine that I alone exist. Solipsism is of importance both to philosophy and psychology and, for example, Rene Descartes (1596–1650) made solipsism a central concern in his philosophy. Additionally, most relevant to my analysis in the chapter, solipsism is a central term in the discussion of dance’s ontology by André Lepecki. In *Exhausting Dance* (2006), Lepecki offers a detailed overview of the foundation of choreography and what he argues to be one of its privileging forms of subjectivation: the solipsist, solitary male dancer.<sup>6</sup> In his later book, *Singularities* (2016), Lepecki takes his reading of the individual male dancer a step further, leading me to suggest in this chapter a continuation between modern, solipsistic subjectivity and what he refers to as neoliberalism’s ‘recrudescence of the self’. While Lepecki uses the notion of solipsism to think about a selection of contemporary dance works featuring male dancers who appear alone on stage, in this chapter I discuss a choreographic work

6 André Lepecki, *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the Politics of Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2006). The book examines the ways in which key contemporary choreographers and performing artists since the early 1990s in Europe and the USA have transformed common beliefs around Western theatrical dance, which are often based on the association of the individual body to harmonious, coherent movement seeking to convey emotion. Especially in regards to my analysis here, see: Chapter 2, ‘Masculinity, solipsism, choreography’, pp. 19–44.

–*The Touching Community*– in which there are always two or more bodies dancing together. This apparent contradiction will be resolved in this chapter by my approach to solipsism not so much based on the physical presence of the individual dancer on stage, but on what Lepecki refers to as the ‘non-kinetic’ elements at the basis of choreographic solipsism: namely, the technology of writing (‘choreography’ literally means ‘writing of movement’) and the seclusive nature of the dance studio, which subsequently has ended up shaping the spatial conditions in which we experience contemporary dance today. As I will suggest, committing to some of the key non-kinetic, artefactual elements of the choreographic, as well as, of course, the improvised physical contact between different material surfaces (corporal and otherwise), *The Touching Community* reworks the intrinsic solipsism at the heart of the choreographic towards an opening to the other. My emphasis in this chapter on the non-kinetic, artefactual aspects involved in *The Touching Community* – writing, the use of sound-score, spatial design – also comes to emphasise the always mediated character of ‘touch’ (following Derrida’s critique to the very possibility of an un-mediated, direct touch). This emphasis should be also understood as yet another step towards the acknowledging of the many forms of materiality and ‘technicity’ (in Derrida’s vocabulary) with which humans are meshed in the HIV/AIDS archive.

This chapter is structured into two sections and a preamble. The preamble serves to expose the centrality of the motif of touch in the HIV/AIDS archive, which I will do by following some of Jacques Derrida’s (2005) main considerations on the established philosophy of touch. As Derrida warns us, considering the motif of touch involves facing an ‘endless proliferation of figures for the tangible or the tactile’,<sup>7</sup> which will

7 Jacques Derrida, *On Touching–Jean-Luc Nancy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 55. Originally published as *Le Toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 2000), the book is as

become clear in the preamble. Section 1 presents and reviews Lepecki's consideration of the concept of solipsism, while introducing my suggested continuation between modern solipsism and neoliberalism's recrudescence of the self based on a cross-reading of aspects of Lepecki's two books. The goal of this chapter is not to fully examine the social and cultural effects of neoliberalism. However, given the negative characterisation of neoliberalism on which Lepecki's views and my own are based, Section 1 will also expose some theoretical sources about what constitutes a neoliberal condition. Section 1 ends by clarifying the ways in which this chapter contributes to the general rethinking of surface that I intend to carry out in my project. In Section 2, I move into analysing relevant aspects of *The Touching Community* in order to sustain my argument that 'touch' offers the possibility of an opening to an other. In doing so, I will be equally attentive to the various ways in which surface is at play in the work.

But first, in the preamble that follows, I will ground my preliminary observations on the centrality of the motif of touch in the HIV/AIDS archive. On the one hand, the preamble makes an argument for the relevance of addressing the motif of touch as part of HIV/AIDS iconography, and points out to the few instances in which the motif has already been addressed before by others. On the other, I will show the ways in which some of the main features of what Derrida has referred to as the 'haptocentrism' or the haptocentric tradition of Western thought appear in the AIDS archive. The privileging of touch within the hierarchical arrangement of the senses, the equation between touch and the hand, and the relationship between touch and death, all discussed by Derrida in his wide-ranging overview of the philosophy of touch, are, as I shall expose, present in the AIDS archive.

much a philosophy of the sense of touch as an in-depth consideration of Nancy's *Corpus*, which challenges the work of phenomenologists such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Husserl's understanding of touch as immediate.



## 2.2 Preamble: Touch and HIV/AIDS

Touch, I would argue, is a central motif in the HIV/AIDS archive, and one that takes numerous forms. Within cultural representations of HIV/AIDS, touch is the sense that stands out with respect to the rest of the senses, and although, one could also argue that cultural production in response to the ongoing HIV crisis is eminently visual, it is representations of touch, not sight that stand out. This is the case with the HIV/AIDS archive at large and that of Spain and Chile. As my own research suggests, one of the earliest articulations between HIV/AIDS and the sense of touch can be found in a scene in *Testing the Limits* (1987), a now classic AIDS video discussed by leading cultural activist Gregg Bordowitz in the famous Douglas Crimp-edited, AIDS-themed volume of *OCTOBER*. In the scene, as Bordowitz has described it:

‘A portion of the Romanovsky & Phillips song ‘Homophobia’ is played under a series of images about ‘touch’. Shots of the Washington police wearing rubber gloves at a protest are paired with images of activists joining hands at the ACT UP civil disobedience at Federal Plaza in New York.’<sup>8</sup>

More recently, a pair of hands covered by rubber gloves were also central to Chilean artist and activist Guillermo Moscoso’s public performance *Geno-sida* (2009). Playing with the words genocide and ‘sida’ (Spanish acronym for AIDS), in the performance the artist resignifies the rite of the Catholic liturgy by stamping the phrase ‘HIV-positive’ on

8 See: Gregg Bordowitz, ‘Picture a Coalition’, in *AIDS: Cultural Analysis / Cultural Activism*, Douglas Crimp, ed., p. 193.

the pages of a Bible while wearing latex gloves (fig. 1, gallery). The performance, which took place in front of the cathedral in the city of Concepción, Chile, came in response to the then recent statements by Pope Benedict XVI on his first visit to Africa, in which he condemned the use of condoms.<sup>9</sup> Both the particular scene in *Testing the Limits*, referenced above, and the performance by Moscoso, condense the many meanings around touch traversing the HIV/AIDS archive, from questions of stigma and fear to contact, to the centrality of the hand as the privileged locus of touch.

The privileging of the touch-hand pairing is discussed by Derrida in his consideration of Kant's ideas about the five senses. For Kant, as Derrida writes, 'touch is the only sense of "immediate" external perception and thus the one bringing us the greatest certainty'.<sup>10</sup> Kant, Derrida reminds us, will assign each of the five senses to a specific bodily organ, an operation in which the sense touch is fixed in the hand and fingers.<sup>11</sup> Representations of the hand in reference to the sense of touch, often in combination with allusions to values such as solidarity and support, abound in the AIDS archive. For example, the

9 The site chosen by Moscoso also referenced a precise memory of the struggle against dictatorship in Chile, it being the place where Sebastián Acevedo, an ordinary worker, burned himself to death in 1983 to denounce the disappearance of his son and daughter at the hands of Pinochet's secret services. For a more detailed commentary as well as a video-clip of this work, see: Aimar Arriola and Nancy Garín, 'Global Fictions, Local Struggles', *L'Internationale Online* 1 (2014), accessed 29 April 2017. [http://www.internationaleonline.org/research/politics\\_of\\_life\\_and\\_death/5\\_global\\_fictions\\_local\\_struggles\\_or\\_the\\_distribution\\_of\\_three\\_documents\\_from\\_an\\_aids\\_counter\\_archive\\_in\\_progress](http://www.internationaleonline.org/research/politics_of_life_and_death/5_global_fictions_local_struggles_or_the_distribution_of_three_documents_from_an_aids_counter_archive_in_progress)

10 See, Derrida, *On Touching*, pp. 40–41. Precisely, Derrida's project is to question the very idea of an 'immediate touching', a touching without mediation.

11 A remarkable case that comes to dynamite the Kantian adscription of sense of touch to the hand, is the work of Lorenza Böttner (Punta Arenas, Chile, 1959 – Munich, Germany, 1994). The focus of a recent research and resulting exhibitions curated by Paul B. Preciado (2017–19), Böttner was an HIV positive artist who painted with her feet and mouth and who used photography, drawing and public performance as ways of building herself a body. As a transgender artist with a functionally diverse body, Böttner's work not only comes to challenge gender norms and ideas of ableism but assumptions of what 'touch' is. Preciado first showcased Böttner's work in the context of Documenta 14 (Kassel; Athens, 2017) and subsequently curated the first retrospective devoted to her work at the La Virreina Centre de la Imatge, Barcelona (7 November 2018–3 February 2019). See: Paul B. Preciado, ed., *Lorenza Böttner. Requiem for the Norm* (Barcelona: La Virreina Centre de la Imatge / Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2018. Exhibition leaflet). Between 23 February–5 May 2019 the exhibition is to be presented in the Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart. I have only come across the work of this artist in the process of completing my thesis.

striking slogan of one of the earliest AIDS charity exhibitions to take place in Spain was ‘Dale la mano, no pasa nada’ [Give him or her your hand, it’s alright]. This group exhibition opened on 1992 World AIDS Day, in San Sebastian, Basque Country, and included the work of late artist Pepe Espaliú – regarded as the first artist in Spain to address AIDS in his work –, who only two months earlier had realised his signature performance work *Carrying* in the same city.<sup>12</sup> Accentuating the fear of contact surrounding AIDS at the time, an official survey by the EU revealed that 25% of Europeans in the early 1990s were afraid of getting AIDS by shaking hands.<sup>13</sup> Not unpredictably, UNAIDS’s most recent prevention campaign, launched for 2018 World AIDS Day, the year in which Chilean authorities have re-qualified HIV as a national emergency, featured the slogan ‘Raise Your Hands Up for #HIVprevention’ alongside the illustration of an open hand.

Despite Kant’s limited ascription of the sense of touch to the hand – the human hand –, and to the fingers within the hand, author Erin Manning (2007) reminds us that we touch with our whole body. As Manning describes, we sense through our skin – our largest body organ – ‘as touch expands to an infinity of combinations of skin upon

12 Briefly commenting on this exhibition, in an essay on the attention received by Espaliú after his death, I timidly suggested a connection between the fear of contact implicit in the title of the exhibition and the immunitarian paradigm described by Italian philosopher Roberto Esposito. For Esposito, whereas the ‘common’ designates what can be shared, what is subject to the logic of communication and exchange, the ‘immune’ indicates a space of exclusion. Following Esposito, the rhetorics of immunity and the ideals of protection that shaped the AIDS early crisis produced, I suggested, zones of bodily exclusion. See: Aimar Arriola, ‘Anti-Espaliú: from Model Figure to Intertext (or, Towards a Larger Cartography of AIDS Politics in the Basque Country and Spain)’, in *Beyond Guernica and the Guggenheim: Relations Between Art and Politics from a Comparative Perspective*, Zoe Bray, ed., pp. 173–192 (Reno: The Center for Basque Studies, University of Nevada, 2015). For a recent close reading of Esposito’s analysis of immunity in the wider context of a project on Derrida’s concept of autoimmunity, see: Alice Andrews, *Autoimmunity: Deconstructing Fictions of Illness and the Terrible Future to Come*. Doctoral thesis, Goldsmiths, University of London, accessed 26 March 2018. <http://research.gold.ac.uk/6920/>

13 Antonio M. Yagüe, ‘El 25% de los europeos teme coger el SIDA por dar la mano’, *El Periódico de Catalunya*, (25 May 1990), accessed 26 March 2018. <http://www.sidastudi.org/es/registro/ff80818154a3fb9001572eae7f6d0e58?title=&signatura=&search=simple&text=mano&autor=&format=&lleng=&yearBegin=&yearEnd=&tipus=>

skin'.<sup>14</sup> References to skin (not only human) as the ultimate 'touch' organ also abound in the AIDS archive. Such is the case of the encounter between people and a particular animal (a mare) discussed in Chapter 1, as in the 'contact' between naked human bodies and the animal's surface in Chilean activist duo Yeguas del Apocalipsis. That is also the case of *The Touching Community*, as we shall see, where the Kantian ascription of the sense of touch to the hand gives way to a consideration of the whole body, the skin as the surface for the improvisation of contact. In this chapter, *The Touching Community* represents the most recent and possibly most manifest case of how touch matters in the HIV/AIDS archive.

Additionally, for Derrida touch is 'a question of life and death.'<sup>15</sup> In his commentary of Aristotle's philosophy of the living, Derrida notes that touch is the only sense of which the living being cannot do without. An animal can live without sight, hearing or taste, but it cannot survive without touch. On the contrary, as part of the same logic, animals can also die from an excess of touch. Both possibilities connect touch with the concepts of vitality and survival.<sup>16</sup> Associations between the sense of touch and life and death also abound in the AIDS archive, for example, in visual evocations of death through the motif of the 'hand stained with blood'. This is the case of a joint activist action between La Radical Gai and LSD, two of the first queer groups active in Madrid, Spain, in the mid-1990s. It consisted in the marking of the pavement of the streets surrounding the headquarters of the Spanish Ministry of Health with the activist's hand painted in red

14 Erin Manning, *Politics of Touch. Sense, Movement, Sovereignty* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), p. 59.

15 Derrida, *On Touching*, 47.

16 Significantly, Pérez Galí has described his project as an investigation into 'touch as a means for survival' (my translation). Aimar Pérez Galí, 'Manejar riesgos. Aspectos comunes entre el *Contact Improvisation* y el VIH/sida', *Paso de Gato. Revista Mexicana de Teatro* 68 (January–March 2017), pp. 78–80: 80. The centrality of the concept of survival in the AIDS archive will be further discussed in Chapter 3 of my project.

(fig. 2, gallery).<sup>17</sup> The action denounced the austerity policies of the Ministry in 1993, which affected prevention and care programmes addressing those affected by AIDS.

Furthermore, the motif of touch in the AIDS archive often appears alongside the term ‘hapticality’. This is the case of Laura U. Marks’s (2004) work on haptic or tactile visuality in regards to AIDS videos and films.<sup>18</sup> Marks’s chapter on AIDS videos and films in her book *Touch* is, to my knowledge, the first significant work on cultural responses to HIV/AIDS that fully takes into consideration the sense of touch. Marks’s overall understanding of the haptic is built on the work of both nineteenth-century art historian Alois Riegl and of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*, where the philosophers opt for the term ‘haptic’ instead of the word ‘tactile’, as a term that does not oppose touch to sight and instead serves as an invitation to consider any sense acting in proximity. Throughout the book Marks describes the haptic in phenomenological, not psychoanalytic terms. Her description of haptic visuality is based on ‘a phenomenological understanding of embodied spectatorship, which is fundamentally distinct from the Lacanian psychoanalytic model that castigates the “overclose” viewer for being stuck in an illusion’.<sup>19</sup> I myself followed Marks in a commissioned essay on British film-maker Stuart Marshall for *Afterall Journal* (2016),

17 Photo and video documentation and related poster of the action, with the slogan ‘The Ministry of Health has its hand stained with blood’, in Spanish, are now part of the Study Centre at the Reina Sofia Museum, Madrid. The poster was also included in my project-related exhibition and book *AIDS Anarchive*.

18 Laura U. Marks, *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002). In this research on haptic or tactile visuality, Marks considers experimental films in which disease and loss of the body are evoked through diminished visibility. Haptic visuality, according to Marks, has a quality of proximity to its object, with a direct effect on subject formation: it encourages the dissolution of the self into the world. Haptic visuality does not exclude the optical; rather it promotes a different engagement with vision both on the side of the producer and the viewer. For her particular analysis of HIV/AIDS-related works, see: Chapter 6, ‘Loving a Disappearing Image’, pp. 91–110. For an alternative, brief yet powerful approach to hapticality drawing on the theory and practice of the black radical tradition as it supports contemporary social and political thought, see: Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, ‘Hapticality, or Love’, in *The Undercommons*, pp. 97–99 (Wivenhoe; New York; Port Watson: Minor Compositions, 2013).

19 Marks, p. 18.

in which I focused on representations of touch in Marshall's less considered queer films from the 1980s and 1990s, including his seminal AIDS-related work *Bright Eyes*.<sup>20</sup> Marshall's visual investigation into particular periods of gay history in light of the AIDS crisis – such as the persecution of homosexuals in the Nazi period – was informed, I argued in the essay, by the desire for a political restitution of 'touch'. In this chapter, I depart from the path of phenomenological analysis of touch and the term hapticity represented by Mark in favour of an understanding of touch in terms of 'distancing' and 'mediation' closer to Derrida.<sup>21</sup>

Relevant to the purpose of this preamble, 'touch' was also at the centre of a separate work by Diego del Pozo also included in my project-related exhibition (in addition to the one by the same artist already mentioned in Chapter 1). Representing a desert island put upside down, with the bold heading *Malestar neoliberal* [Neoliberal Malaise], the work is a visual and textual diagram charting shifts of paradigm in the production of subjectivity since the consolidation of neoliberal capitalism (fig. 3, gallery). At the very

20 In the essay I aimed at foregrounding the ways in which Marshall's visual evocation of proximity, of contact between bodies, served as a means of calling upon a 'political commonality'. See: Aimar Arriola, 'Touching What Does Not Yet Exist: Stuart Marshall and the HIV/AIDS Archive', *Afterall Journal* 41 (spring/summer 2016), pp. 55–63. Others have followed Marks in order to consider AIDS films and videos in different cultural contexts. For example, see: Roger Hallas, *Reframing Bodies: AIDS, Bearing Witness, and the Queer Moving Image* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009); and Mila Zuo, 'Bodies, Blood, and Love: the "Touching" Politics of HIV/AIDS Film *Love for Life*', *Journal of Chinese Cinemas* 9:3 (2015): pp. 204–22.

21 In *On Touching*, Derrida distances himself from Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the haptic that for the philosopher participates in an idealised, immediate conception of 'proximity' and 'continuity'. Derrida's critique of haptocentric intuitionism, which is the main argument running throughout his book on touch, situates phenomenology at the centre of the problem. Derrida's overall objection to phenomenology's understanding of touch is its defence of the possibility of an 'immediate experience of touching'. What distinguishes Derrida (and Derrida's reading of Nancy) from the phenomenological approach to touching is 'an emphasis on prosthetics', on 'techné' as complication of an immediate, intuitive understanding of touch. It is not the focus of this chapter to describe Derrida's considerations on techné, but to summarise briefly: Derrida's understanding of writing as 'prosthesis' (which he also terms 'the supplement') follows Nancean 'techné'. For scholar Christopher Watkin who considers Nancy's 'techné' in the latter's deconstruction of the Christian body, 'techné' in Nancy represents 'creation' in the broadest sense, that which 'blurs the distinction between the natural and the artificial'. See: Christopher Watkin, *Difficult Atheism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), p. 85. 'Techné' in Derrida with regards to touch needs to be understood as a complication of immediate access or experience.

centre of the diagram, written in a size larger than the rest, is ‘fear of contact’ – as a result of the early myths surrounding HIV. The diagram was later published accompanying an opinion piece by Italian philosopher Franco ‘Bifo’ Berardi on subjectivity under the neoliberal condition.<sup>22</sup> In the piece, Bifo situated fear to physical contact brought by HIV/AIDS at the crux of his analysis. Reflecting on his own experience: ‘The acquired immunity deficiency syndrome jeopardised and overturned self-perception in daily common life, dissolving the community of erotic egalitarian friendship’ characteristic of the pre-HIV liberation movements of the sixties and seventies.<sup>23</sup> In fact, as I already noted in the introduction, my starting hypothesis or overarching context of this chapter is that the prevalence of the touch motif in the AIDS archive should perhaps be understood in the wake of the subjective and somatic conditions brought with it by neoliberalism. The HIV/AIDS crisis as we know it and the establishment of neoliberalism are not only two contemporary phenomena, but have important correlations, as has been suggested by Michel Feher in his analysis on the social and subjective effects of the neoliberal condition (even leading philosopher Paul B. Preciado state that ‘AIDS is the first neoliberal disease’),<sup>24</sup> as I will describe in more detail towards the end of the next section. Still, it is not the aim of this chapter to draw a firm correlation between the AIDS crisis and the neoliberal condition – a task that exceeds the possibilities of this chapter and myself –, but to explore how ‘touch’ in the context of the AIDS archive might offer the possibility of an opening to the other,

22 Franco Berardi (Bifo), ‘About Blank’, *International Errorist Magazine* (September 2016), accessed 26 March 2018. <http://www.erroristas.org/en/magazine/2016/09/11/about-blank/58> Bifo’s piece was published alongside a selection of images from my thesis-related curatorial project *AIDS Anarchiva*, at the invitation of the journal editors. Subsequently, the text was reprinted in the companion book to my thesis-related project. See: *Anarchivo sida*, Aimar Arriola, Nancy Garín and Linda Valdés, eds., (San Sebastian, Spain: Tabakalera - International Centre for Contemporary Culture, 2017), pp. 214–16.

23 Ibid.

24 Expressed in the context of the following event: Paul B. Preciado, ‘The Death of the Clinic?’, lecture in the Reina Sofía Museum, Madrid, 9 March 2013. Preciado’s claim sets a dialogue with an argument by theorist Michel Feher, summarised in pp. 23–25 of this chapter.

offering the possibility to rework, even if only momentarily, the subjective and somatic conditions imposed by neoliberalism.

In order to suggest what the subjective and somatic conditions imposed by neoliberalism are, in the next section I will dance around some of the main ideas explored by Lepecki in his two books, connecting the invention of choreography in the sixteenth century and ‘the conditions of the situation we find ourselves today’. Lepecki does not trace a direct, causal relationship between solipsism on the basis of choreography and neoliberal subjectivity and corporeality. This is rather suggested, a suggestion that emerges from the cross reading of his two books and one that I intend to force in this chapter with a purpose: to argue that in light of contemporary forms of ‘solipsism’ characteristic of neoliberal subjectivity and corporeality, ‘touch’ in the context of the HIV/AIDS archive might offer a possibility, even momentarily, of an opening to an other.

### **2.3 Section 1: Solipsism and The Neoliberal Condition**

In *Exhausting Dance* (2006) Lepecki offers a detailed overview of dance’s ontology and what he argues to be one of its privileging forms of subjectivation: solipsism.<sup>25</sup> In his chapter dedicated to solipsism, Lepecki draws a correlation between the birth of choreography, modernity’s investment in ideals of movement, and the figure of the individual male dancer on stage –associated with ideals of solitude and concentration of will. As already noted, while Lepecki uses the notion of solipsism to think about a selection of contemporary dance works featuring male dancers who appear alone on

25 See, André Lepecki, *Exhausting Dance* (2006). In regards to my analysis here, see: Chapter 2, ‘Masculinity, solipsism, choreography’, pp. 19–44.



stage,<sup>26</sup> in this chapter I discuss a choreographic work – *The Touching Community* – in which there are always two or more bodies dancing together. Lepecki’s first and main point of attention when thinking about solipsism is the presence of the individual dancer on stage, on the ways in which a single dancing body may reflect the metaphysical doctrine ‘that I alone exist’. But as part of his description of choreographic solipsism, Lepecki also reveals the fundamental role that ‘non-kinetic elements’ such as writing or the seclusive character of the dance studio have in the invention of choreography – as well as in the possibilities that solipsism may offer to reverse its seclusive logic and enact an opening to an other. In Lepecki’s own words, the works considered by him are at the same time a ‘symptom’ and a ‘re-elaboration’ of solipsism, a re-elaboration that through strategies such as the use of humour and the hyperbolisation of the figure of the individual dancer, leads solipsism to its ‘point of exhaustion’. Since *The Touching Community* does not rely on the individual presence of the dancer on stage, the focus of my analysis will be mainly on the non-kinetic elements associated with choreographic solipsism and re-elaborated in this particular work.

As part of his consideration of solipsism with regards to dance, Lepecki concentrates on a particular historical passage concerning the foundation of Western choreography: the publication of Thoinot Arbeau’s famous dance treatise *Orchesographie* (1588).<sup>27</sup> In the story, as Lepecki writes,

26 In Lepecki’s own description, the works analysed in his section on solipsism ‘all feature men moving alone in explicitly enclosed and empty spaces – empty chambers, empty studios, empty rooms, somber voids where haunted solitude, concentration of will, and precision in execution all fuse to create what can only be described as a solipsistic excess.’ Lepecki, *Exhausting Dance*, p. 19.

27 Thoinot Arbeau, *Orchesography. A Treatise in the Form of a Dialogue*, Cyril W. Beaumont, trans., (London: C. W. Beaumont, 1925) (Originally published in French in 1588). Lepecki erroneously dates the book to 1589. As I have seen in several copies of the book available in the Collection of the Museum of Performing Arts of Barcelona [Museu de les Arts Escèniques (MAE) i Centre de Documentació de l’Institut del Teatre], the date of the book is 1588.

‘...a young lawyer returns from Paris to Langres to visit his old master of “computation”. But the lawyer’s teacher, Thoinot Arbeau, is not only a mathematician but also a Jesuit priest and a dance master. Capriol, the lawyer, begs his dance master/priest/math teacher Arbeau to teach him the art of dance, so that Capriol may be able to live properly in society.’<sup>28</sup>

Considering this historical moment in the context of this chapter is important for at least two reasons: on the one hand, in this particular event Lepecki situates the invention of choreography precisely in connection to non-kinetic elements such as writing – the neologism ‘orchestographie’ literally means the writing of dance. As Lepecki notes, in the young lawyer’s desire for dance, a new project that is ‘as much kinetic as it is textual, as much social as it is subjective, as much corporeal as it is a writing project’ is established.<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, this historical passage concerning the foundation of choreography allows us, I would like to suggest, to point to a particular mode of subjectification – and corporeality – that reaches our current age and that, following Lepecki, we could call ‘solipsist’ or seclusive subjectivation. I will elaborate on this more fully in subsequent paragraphs. For now, it is important to expand some of Lepecki’s considerations about writing as part of his analysis of solipsism and its implications in this chapter. Choreography, as the writing of movement, is the establishment through writing of a series of instructions and commands to be executed by a dancer. In Lepecki’s analysis, choreography and writing go hand in hand and are ontologically tied to notions of obedience and law. The modern dancer is not the one who writes, but the one who executes the laws of movement established by the master who writes. This hierarchy between the one who writes and the one who dances, as we

28 Lepecki, *Exhausting Dance*, pp. 25–26.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 26.

will see in section 2, will be radically altered in postmodernity, when dancers ‘find’ their inner voice. In the binding of dance and writing, a new ‘technology’ emerges, one that points to the already always prosthetic character of choreography (in the sense that writing is always prosthetic, as Derrida would insist). Moreover, in this technology, this ‘machine’ (in Lepecki’s vocabulary) that merges dancing and writing together, choreography comes into being as a means to account for the non-living, as a ‘specific mode for accessing absent presences’<sup>30</sup> (as in the execution of a dance from the instructions by an author no longer living). The dancing-writing project that is choreography, Lepecki notes, gives birth to a ‘spectral-technological promise’: the possibility for the dancing body to ‘transcend presence as that which must always be present’.<sup>31</sup> In Lepecki’s description, the fusion of dance and writing in choreography gives birth to a ‘spectral technology’, a means of entering into dialogue through writing with those who are absent.

In Lepecki’s detailing of the non-kinetic elements that define choreographic solipsism, attention is also drawn to the spatial conditions in which the choreography is executed; that is, the secluded space of the dance studio. Suggested by Lepecki, the archetypal space at the core of the modern conception of the choreographic is the square room, which echoes the ‘solipsist’ nature of the dance chamber or studio. The seclusive architecture of the square dance studio will eventually define the black box stage, the archetypal scenic space at the very heart of the choreographic and in which the experience of spectatorship still takes place today. As I will recall in my description of *The Touching Community*, the non-kinetic, scenographic dimension of the

30 Ibid., p. 26.

31 Ibid.

choreographic is cited and re-elaborated in the work, through the use of a vibrant, blue square dance floor and elaborated lighting, which, from my experience as a viewer, compete for attention with the dancers.

In Lepecki's consideration of solipsism, in *Exhausting Dance* the philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein's (1889–1951) is important. In his brief but significant views on solipsism in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921), Wittgenstein situates solipsism at the centre of the metaphysical subject's relation to experience.<sup>32</sup> For Lepecki, Wittgenstein's views on solipsism offer unexpected opportunities to refigure solipsism as a type of subjectivity that privileges seclusion into a mode of subjectivation – and corporeality – that makes possible an opening to the other. In particular, Lepecki analyses Wittgenstein's considerations of solipsism located between proposition 5.6 ('The limits of my language mean the limits of my world') and proposition 5.621 ('The world and life are one'). In Lepecki's commentary on Wittgenstein, if the limits of my language and the limits of my world are one and the same, and if the foundation of choreography is ontologically linked to writing, then, to 'to inhabit and to explore language profoundly, to come into being through language, and to push its logic to its limits, is also to throw oneself right into the midst of the world'.<sup>33</sup> Lepecki is interested in Wittgenstein's views on solipsism because it offers an opportunity to transform the reason usually given for solipsism as 'seclusive subjectivity' into the possibility for a radical opening to the other. As he notes, Wittgenstein allows us to refigure common understandings of solipsism, from a mode of subjectivisation that privileges seclusion to

32 See: *Ibid.*, p. 38. As noted by Lepecki, an inspiration to his approach to Wittgenstein is visual artist Bruce Nauman, a declared reading of the philosopher. Nauman's films from the late 1960s, known as 'The Studio Works,' in which the artist appears alone in his studio rigorously performing predefined commands, are the introductory case discussed by Lepecki in his chapter on solipsism.

33 *Ibid.*, p. 38.

the radical possibility for an opening of thought and being. According to Wittgenstein scholar Jaakko Hintikka (cited by Lepecki), whereas solipsism is usually understood as the impossibility of going beyond the limits of the self, in Wittgenstein ‘solipsism is based on the exactly opposite claim that all the ordinary boundaries of myself are completely contingent’.<sup>34</sup> In Wittgenstein, the metaphysical doctrine that I alone exist gives way to a self always contained in the other. This seems to be the case of the three examples discussed by Lepecki in his chapter on solipsism – visual artist and performers Bruce Nauman, Juan Dominguez and Xavier Leroy – where solipsism is challenged in relation to different aspects of language and its structure – including the absence of it. And this is also the case of Pérez Galí’s *The Touching Community*, I would like to suggest, where the solipsistic individual male dancer not only throws himself ‘right into the midst of the world’ through touch and physical contact with other bodies, but most prominently through language, writing and the ‘discovery’ of his inner voice, as in the set of letters penned by the dancer to people who have died of complications related to AIDS, which form part of the work’s soundtrack and the core of the book I have edited as part of the project. Thus, the role of writing/voice in *The Touching Community* in my analysis of the work in the second part of the chapter will be crucial.

Additionally, important to my overarching or backdrop argument in my chapter, Lepecki’s description of the foundation of choreography and its inherent solipsist nature, allows us to point to a particular mode of subjectification and corporeality that reaches our present and to which we could refer to as ‘solipsist’ or seclusive subjectivation. As part of his description of the birth of choreography, which he situates

34 Ibid., p. 39.

in correlation with modernity, Lepecki wonders what characterises the mode of subjectification at the basis of the choreographic? On the one hand, modernity's subjectivity is embedded in permanent movement, what Peter Sloterdijk has identified as modernity's 'kinetic excess'.<sup>35</sup> Likewise, dance and choreography are ontologically grounded in individual mobility.<sup>36</sup> On the other hand, in the task of historically situating modernity, Lepecki follows those authors who periodise modernity not in terms of a particular period or a geography, but in terms of a process of subjectification.<sup>37</sup> For Lepecki, modernity as a new form of subjectivity is characterised primarily by its 'locking' 'within an experience of being severed from the world'.<sup>38</sup> In his later book, *Singularities* (2016) Lepecki takes his reading of the seclusive subjectivation at the basis of choreography, helping us to draw a connection between solipsism and neoliberal subjectivity and corporeality. *Singularities* surveys a decade of contemporary performance and choreography in light of the conditions imposed by our 'late or neo-capitalist age' (Lepecki's expression). The book analyses recent performance and choreographic practices, referred to by Lepecki as 'singularities',<sup>39</sup> in which the conditions governing neoliberalism's permeation of subjectivity and corporeality get undone, 'unconditioned'. At the heart of the book is a consideration of the dual meaning of 'performance' in the current age: referring both to the aesthetic category associated with happenings and body action that emerged, mostly in the West, since the early

35 Sloterdijk cited by Lepecki, *Exhausting Dance*, p. 9.

36 Unnoticed by Lepecki but worth mentioning with regards to the thematic orientation of this chapter is the correlation between choreography and health, between dance and ableism, a recurrent argument in the initial part of the conversation between Arbeau and Capriol. For example, see: *Orchesography*, p. 18. In reading *Orchesography*, I was shocked to learn that historically one of the functions of public choreographed dance has been to prove 'good health' and physical ableism, such as in prenuptial ceremonies. The implications of the co-relation between choreography and ableism in regards to HIV-related dance and performance would need a separate project.

37 Teresa Brennan, Harvie Ferguson and Peter Sloterdijk, et al. See: Lepecki, *Exhausting Dance*, p. 10.

38 *Ibid.*, p. 11.

39 Lepecki's use of the term singularity to refer to the dissensual practices of corporeality and subjectivity discussed in the book follows philosopher Didi-Huberman's understanding of the concept as 'multiplicity', 'complexity' and 'production of strangeness'. Didi-Huberman's use of the term is drawn from Gilles Deleuze's philosophy of immanence.

1960s, and to the ‘normative’ sense of the term associated with corporate and institutional management.<sup>40</sup> In Lepecki’s view the two senses of the term have come together under a ‘new kind of rationality’, a ‘new mode of reasoning’ that is neoliberalism:

‘Through performance, neoliberalism reifies the very purpose of life as nothing other than the ‘permanent retraining’ [Gordon 1991: p. 44] of learning how to best be in permanent self-display – an ongoing process where the subject can only find self-realisation, emotional self-assurance, and social integration through endless representations of self-performances.’<sup>41</sup>

In this situation, Lepecki writes, ‘...dance must remain vigilant and critical in regards its foundational emphasis on the person and the praising of the dancers as one of its main aesthetic traits’.<sup>42</sup> And yet, in the cases discussed by Lepecki, we do not find a denial or straightforward rejection of the solipsistic nature of choreography. Rather, the artists discussed by Lepecki operate within the conditions imposed by choreographic solipsism, that is, from a degree of acceptance of the mode of subjectivation and corporeality implied in the figure of the individual dancing body, which is then reworked from within. In those instances, solipsism is turned into a critical methodology, a method to ‘intensify critically and physically the hegemonic conditions of subjectivisation and to explode them in improbable directions’.<sup>43</sup> Similarly, in

40 In the book Lepecki also coins his now famous term ‘choreopolitics’, which introduces the idea that choreography and dance can be political while blurring the boundaries between dance and political performance. See: *Singularities*, pp. 12–14.

41 Lepecki, *Singularities*, p. 8. See also, Colin Gordon, ‘Governmental Rationality: An Introduction’, in *The Foucault Effect. Studies in Governmentality*, Graham Burchel, Colin Gordon and Peter Mille, eds., (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 44.

42 Lepecki, *Singularities*, p. 11.

43 Lepecki refers to this operation as ‘methodological solipsism’, an expression he takes from Natanson (1974). See: Lepecki, *Exhausting Dance*, p. 38.

*Singularities*, neither Lepecki nor the artists he describes place themselves in a position of exteriority in regards to the neoliberal condition, or ‘the conditions of the situation we find ourselves in today’. Lepecki phrases the urgent question for contemporary dance and performance concerning this situation thus:

‘...what are the conditions of the situation we find ourselves in today, in the extremely expanded West and its even more expanded warzones, making art, choreographing, dancing, writing books, creating work, teaching and learning and gathering and fighting and despairing and studying the situation and then returning for more fighting and more despairing, more working and more sadness than joy?’<sup>44</sup>

This is a situation, Lepecki adds, which is ‘really hostile’ to ‘those who trust the necessary opaqueness and complexity of life, those who believe in the vital importance of not having profit and self-profit as the only goal for life and its arts’.<sup>45</sup> These are a situation and a question that also resonate strongly in me, as I curate, write, work, fight and struggle to complete my thesis project with more sadness than joy. As I review a video recording of *The Touching Community*, one more time, in the solitude of my studio (an individual desk in the national library of Catalonia, a gothic interior echoing the solitude of a monastery), I am aware of the sense of seclusion and solipsism that I have come into in the course of the three years of research, while paradoxically investing myself in reading and writing on touch. Mental health issues typically associated with doing a PhD, trying to sustain an international practice-based project in pre-Brexit UK academia and simply not having enough money to pay the rent in a city like London – the heart of all networks of neoliberal influence –, where the promise of

44 Lepecki, *Singularities*, p. 2.

45 Ibid.



contact (sexual or other) is determined by having the time, cash and energy to socialise, have plunged me into a sense of isolation and despair with actual somatic implications. As I write these lines, my relationship with touch and physical contact remains complex, even leading me to (secretly) identify as asexual for most of my doctoral years in London.<sup>46</sup> At the heart of this chapter, traversing its pages in a low, almost inaudible voice, is the personal need to understand what are the affective and somatic conditions of the situation under which I/we find ourselves today are, as they become true in my body.

Still, as noted in the introduction of the chapter, it is not the goal of this chapter to examine the social and cultural effects of neoliberalism. Neither to show in full detail what the deleterious effects of neoliberalism are in terms of subjective formation and corporeality. However, given the negative characterisation of neoliberalism on which Lepecki's arguments and my own are based, in what follows I would like to briefly expose some theoretical sources about what constitutes a neoliberal condition.

### 2.3.1 *On the Neoliberal Condition*

Lepecki's unenthusiastic characterisation of neoliberalism closely follows political theorist Wendy Brown and her book *Undoing the Demos* (2015), where the author describes neoliberalism as 'a specific and normative mode of reason, of the production of the subject'.<sup>47</sup> In her book, Brown offers an analysis of the ways in which neoliberalism is undoing the meaning of democracy, political participation and

46 Looking for a change, and halfway through the writing of this chapter, I have recently joined body awareness and conscious movement classes in Barcelona, my current home.

47 Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (New York: Zone Books, 2015), p. 48.

citizenship. For Brown, any attempt to theorise the relationship between democracy and neoliberalism is hampered by the ambiguity and multiplicity of meanings of both terms.<sup>48</sup> Brown admittedly distances herself from a critique to neoliberalism and its harmful effects – intensified inequality; an ever-increasing corporate influence in state government – formulated as a ‘set of state policies’ or simply ‘a new phase of capitalism’. Rather, she follows Foucault in understanding neoliberalism as ‘an order of normative reason’ that when becoming ascendant extends to ‘every dimension of human life’.<sup>49</sup> According to Brown, this governing rationality involves what Caliskan and Callon have called the ‘economisation’ of previously non-economic spheres of life, or what Randy Martin – an author not referenced by Brown, whose thinking and writing covers both dance and finance –, called the ‘financialisation of daily life’.<sup>50</sup> Brown’s focus in her book is on the effect that neoliberalism has on democracy and she does not elaborate on its repercussions on subjectivity and corporeality. Nonetheless, her suggestion that neoliberalism in the current age governs ‘every dimension of human life’ calls for additional analysis that incorporates corporeality and subjectivity, as in fact has been attempted by a number of authors.

48 It is ‘a scholarly commonplace’, says Brown to state that neoliberalism has ‘no fixed or settled coordinates’, and that it is temporal and geographically varied ‘in its discursive formulations, policy entailments, and material practices’. See: Brown, p. 20. And yet, she identifies some foundational moments or condensation points of the neoliberal policies. Significant to my overall project, Chile is identified by Brown as the main experimentation laboratory of neoliberalism at the hands of dictator Augusto Pinochet and the Chilean economists known as the Chicago Boys. Ibid.

49 Ibid., p. 30.

50 See: Ibid., pp. 30–31. For Brown, the ‘economisation’ (or ‘financialisation’) of daily life does not necessarily involve monetisation. In other words, even if neoliberalism renders us as subjects who think and act like contemporary market subjects, it is not the accumulation of monetary capital that, in the first instance, governs our behaviour. Rather, Brown states, ‘the point is that neoliberal rationality disseminates the model of the market to all domains and activities – even where money is not at issue – and configures human beings exhaustively as market actors, always, only, and everywhere as *homo oeconomicus*’. Ibid., p. 31. See also: Randy Martin, *Financialization Of Daily Life* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002). To make justice to Martin’s outstanding contribution to both the field of dance theory and the critical theory of economics would require a separate chapter.

For instance, in a series of recent essays and lectures, Belgian philosopher Michel Feher has theorised on the implications for the subject and subjectivity of the neoliberal condition.<sup>51</sup> Broadly speaking, Feher argues that neoliberalism is, first of all, a change of economic paradigm; a change from an economy of exchange and profit to the financialised economy of speculation and credit. Such change helps us understand the transformation not only of institutions (companies and governments) but also of the subject. At the crux of this change is what Feher refers to as the ‘invested self’, a mode of subjectivity where subjects become the managers of their own portfolio seeking investment.<sup>52</sup> The most original and, perhaps also most controversial aspect of Feher’s analysis is his proposal that in order to resist the neoliberal present one must embrace it. Feher’s whole point is that neoliberalism as a new mode of governmentality requires equally new forms of resistance. Instead of resisting the neoliberal condition in a ‘frontal’ way, from a situation of exteriority, Feher explores the ‘possibility of defying neoliberalism *from within* – that is, by embracing the very condition that its discourses and practices delineate’.<sup>53</sup> An example Feher has used to illustrate what it could possibly mean to challenge the neoliberal condition ‘from within,’ is precisely AIDS activism. In a recorded lecture in MACBA in 2010, as part of a wider seminar organised by Paul B. Preciado, which I was able to attend, Feher made an admittedly controversial claim: that early AIDS activism was the first type of activism ‘adequate to the neoliberal

51 Michel Feher, ‘Self-Appreciation; or, The Aspirations of Human Capital’, *Public Culture* 21 (1) (2009), pp. 21–41; and *Rated Agency* (New York: Zone Books, 2018). See also: Michel Feher, ‘The Age of Appreciation: Lectures on the Neoliberal Condition’, eight part lecture series (2013–15), Department of Visual Cultures, Goldsmiths. <https://www.gold.ac.uk/architecture/projects/michel-feher/> Young scholar Josh Bowser has summarised some of the arguments made by Feher in the Goldsmiths lecture series, see: J. Bowser, ‘Another Speculation? Michel Feher on Neoliberalism and Resistance’, in *UoN Blogs – University of Nottingham Blogs, The Critical Moment* (22 July 2015), accessed 2 September 2018. <http://blogs.nottingham.ac.uk/criticalmoment/2015/07/22/another-speculation-michel-feher-on-neoliberalism-and-resistance/> My outline here of Feher’s main ideas follows Bowser.

52 Psychologically, the main feature of this new subject is the feeling of vulnerability to investors, the variability of self-esteem that is generated by investments that come from employers, sources of financial credit and so on.

53 See: Feher (2009), p. 21.

condition'.<sup>54</sup> For Feher, unlike the anti-authoritarian activism typical of the sixties and seventies, directed against the intrusion of the institutions of governance (the state, the family and so on) in terms of social and economic rights, AIDS activism invented new mechanisms to resist neoliberal governance from within. Two of these mechanisms noted by Feher are: firstly, the performance aspect of AIDS activism, 'an incredibly novel and effective way of showing the works of norms', and secondly, the invention of what Feher calls 'a counter-expertise',<sup>55</sup> which describes the ways in which AIDS activists confronted medical knowledge and its institutions, demanding to be part of the knowledge that was being produced around HIV positive bodies. Still, as stated earlier, it is not my intention in this chapter to expand on the correlation between the AIDS crisis and the neoliberal condition, suggested by Feher and others.<sup>56</sup> Neither is it my intention to analyse in full the tactics of early AIDS activism. And yet, Feher's views are the confirmation of why considering neoliberalism, as part of the wider context of the AIDS crisis, is relevant for any discussion about cultural responses to HIV/AIDS. Other authors, who in one way or another have focused on the subjective dimension of neoliberalism are: Lauren Berlant (2011) and her exploration of the entwined fates of cruelty and happiness under neoliberalism in the US; Maurizio Lazzarato (2013) and his take on 'affective capitalism'; Byung-Chul Han's (2017) notion of 'psychopolitics', which refers to how neoliberalism has discovered the productive force of the psyche; and Franco 'Bifo' Berardi, to whom I have already referred to in the preamble of the

54 See: Michel Feher, 'AIDS Activism, Nongovernmental Politics, And The Neoliberal Condition', conference audio recording, MACBA, Barcelona, 26 November 2010, accessed 20 September 2018. <https://www.macba.cat/es/michel-feher>

55 For Feher, a subject that is 'adequate to the neoliberal condition', as exemplified by the AIDS activist neither 'gives up institutions' nor 'puts her or his luck in the hands of the institutions', but produces a counter-movement, a counter-knowledge from within.

56 For example, Jean Comaroff and Rick Rowden, coming from the fields of decolonial studies and critical economic studies respectively, have argued in an exemplary manner how the expansion of the neoliberal model lies at the heart the AIDS pandemic. See: Rick Rowden, *The Deadly Ideas of Neoliberalism: How the IMF has Undermined Public Health and the Fight Against AIDS* (London: Zed Books, 2009); and Jean Comaroff, 'Beyond Bare Life: AIDS, (Bio)Politics, and the Neoliberal Order', *Public Culture* 19:1, Duke University Press (2007): pp. 197–219.

chapter.<sup>57</sup> While all these authors, including Feher, offer valuable resources to unpack how neoliberalism has already ‘captured subjectivity’ (to use, again an expression by Wendy Brown), they hold to a peculiar separation between subjectivity and corporeality that I find limiting to the general orientation of this chapter.<sup>58</sup> And while I do understand that the correlation between neoliberal forms of subjectivity and its corporeal and somatic counterparts is not easy to draw, just like Feher notes that ‘the correlation between financial and psychological forms of self-appreciation cannot be homogeneously established’,<sup>59</sup> at least not in a way in which they do not end up becoming vague generalities, I do find that Lepecki’s work offers some opportunities to do so. For Lepecki, the neoliberal condition permeates ‘into the very fibres of our flesh’, it is a condition that ‘snatches’ our subjectivity and our bodies. Lepecki argues that corporealities and subjectivities ‘are constantly being coproduced’,<sup>60</sup> and hence, attention to those practices that express and challenge the neoliberal condition must be placed around corporeal/subjective formations.

57 See: Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (New York: Duke University Press, 2011); Maurizio Lazzarato, ‘Art, Work and Politics in Disciplinary Societies and Societies of Security’, in *Spheres of Action*, Éric Alliez and Peter Osborne, eds., pp. 87–97 (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013); Byung-Chul Han, *Psychopolitics Neoliberalism and New Technologies of Power* (London: Verso, 2017).

58 A notable exception of this separation is the overall philosophical work on the body by Paul B. Preciado. In his book *Testo Junkie* and a plethora of related lectures and seminars, Preciado has coined the expression the ‘pharmacopornographic regime’ to refer to the model of political management of the body typical of contemporary neoliberal societies. See: Paul B. Preciado, *Testo Junkie* (New York: The Feminist Press, 2013). See also: Paul B. Preciado, ‘The Death of the Clinic?’, [lecture description] 9 March 2013, Reina Sofía Museum, Madrid. <http://www.museoreinasofia.es/en/activities/beatriz-preciado-death-clinic> In *Testo Junkie* and his philosophical work at large Preciado does address subjectivity and corporality together, suggesting that the neoliberal production of subjectivity is indeed predicated upon the management of the body. As when he states: ‘The management of subjectivity and identity is not so related to the body and the movements of the body, but much more to the very materiality of the body. The level of control has been downgraded to a molecular level.’ See: Ricky Tucker, ‘Pharmacopornography: An Interview with Beatriz Preciado’, *The Paris Review* (4 December 2013), accessed 9 February 2019. <https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2013/12/04/pharmacopornography-an-interview-with-beatriz-preciado/> To the extent to which the focus of my chapter is, indeed, on the ‘movements of the body’, and on an anatomic notion of ‘body’, in this chapter I have prioritised the work of André Lepecki. However, as I have made clear in the general introduction to my project, Preciado remains a major inspiration in my research and curatorial lives.

59 Feher (2009), p. 28.

60 Lepecki, *Singularities*, p. 6.

But what about surface in this chapter? How does this chapter contribute to the general rethinking of the relationship between surface and depth running throughout the project? Integral to my analysis of *The Touching Community* in the following section, attention to surface in this chapter is two-fold: as a ‘reading’ method and as part of my commentary of choreographic-related aspects of the work in which material surfaces are at play. Reconnecting with Best and Marcus’s proposal on the possibility of a ‘surface reading’, in which the practice of description has an outstanding place, and following Lepecki’s own use of description in *Singularities*, this chapter engages description as a mode of ‘surface reading’, as a ‘tactful’ mode of critical analysis. As noted in the general introduction to my thesis, whereas Fredric Jameson found that ‘only weak, descriptive, empirical, ideologically complicit readers attend to the surface of the text’, Best and Marcus believe that description is a powerful way to indicate what a text – or any other cultural object – already says of itself.<sup>61</sup> In what remains of the chapter I join Best and Marcus in their defence of the practice of description as a way of engaging with surface, as a mode of practicing a committed yet tactful analysis.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, as Lepecki notes, dance scholarship is crossed by a tension between ‘an imperative to describe’ and frustration that ‘description never, ever, can capture the entirety of the work described’.<sup>63</sup> His own writing in *Singularities* heavily relies on description, not as ‘a minute verbal transcription of the works’, but as a careful attention to those moments in which ‘something happens’.<sup>64</sup> My commentary of *The Touch Community* follows Lepecki: ‘Attending to the details of performance is the necessary practice of a

61 Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, ‘Surface Reading: An Introduction’, in *Representations* 108, no. 1 (autumn 2009), pp. 1–21: 5.

62 In addition to Best and Marcus, Sarah Jackson considers the possibility of a ‘tactful reading’ in the introduction to her book-length analysis of the relationships between writing and touch. See: Jackson (2015), p. 7. Summarising reading theories by Lisa McNally and Valentine Cunningham, Jackson describes ‘tactful reading’ as respectful, judicious, caring reading that does not ‘mishandle’ or ‘abuse’ the text and which, paradoxically, might require both closeness and distance. Ibid.

63 Lepecki, *Singularities*, p. 22.

64 Ibid.

responsive empiricism that attends to the micro-events that within each work, makes it work',<sup>65</sup> emphasising those moments in the work when contact between surfaces produce difference. Furthermore, attention to surface in this chapter will be also specified in my focus on those choreographic-related aspects of *The Touching Community* in which material surface is at play, bodily and otherwise. As mentioned earlier, *The Touching Community* follows the parallel, global expansion of the HIV crisis and Contact Improvisation, the dance technique in which movement is improvised based on the contact between the surface of two bodies or a body and the surface of the floor. Therefore, insofar as the chapter considers the movement produced by physical surfaces in contact, a reflection on the surface will be present. However, surface in this chapter will not be always instantly readable; not all things that are visible or palpable are immediately legible at surface level. In the coming section to engage surface is first and foremost about attentiveness. It is a call to relate to things freed from their supposed hidden meanings.

## **2.4 Section 2: Aimar Pérez Galí's *The Touching Community*: A Tactful**

### **Reading**

*The Touching Community* was initiated as a research into the global, parallel expansion of HIV/AIDS and Contact Improvisation, the dance form in which movement is improvised by contact and weight-sharing between two bodies. Pérez Galí's research does not analyse the impact of the AIDS crisis onto practitioners of Contact Improvisation; rather, it chooses Contact as an embodied method to organise new and archival materials on the impact of HIV/AIDS in the worlds of dance in Spain and

65 Ibid.

Chile, as well as a number of other contexts of Latin America.<sup>66</sup> Alternately called an ‘art-sport’, a ‘social dance’ and ‘animal play’,<sup>67</sup> Contact Improvisation was born as a dance form towards the beginning of the 1970s. Initially associated with the East and West Coast of the USA, by the mid-1980s Contact Improvisation had already expanded internationally, being also popular in Latin America and Latin Europe, including Chile and Spain.<sup>68</sup> If AIDS and video have often been regarded as globalisation’s ‘disease’ and ‘media’ respectively, Contact Improvisation could be considered their counterpart in dance.<sup>69</sup> *The Touching Community* references the ‘archive’ of Contact Improvisation in two ways: on the one hand, choreographically speaking, the work is an exercise in the improvisation of contact among four to five dancers (including Pérez Galí), who may or not may be HIV-positive, involving an elaborate sound score and a seemingly simple, solipsistic stage. On the other hand, as part of the sound score, the work includes audio excerpts from two 1972 videos by Contact Improvisation initiator, Steve Paxton.<sup>70</sup> At

66 Pérez Galí’s research is a situated, yet non-exhaustive research; methodologically, it has been developed through a series of creation residences in Catalonia, Santiago de Chile, Montevideo, Guatemala City and Mexico City, over the course of two years. These residencies have been the occasion to meet and interview local dancers as well as people close to dancers who have died due to complications related to HIV. Many of these dancers come from performing fields other than Contact Improvisation, such as classical dance, folk dance or variety shows. Therefore, a thorough investigation into the impact of AIDS in the specific community of Contact Improvisation would be pending.

67 With regards to the foundations of Contact Improvisation and its relationship to non-human mobility, a topic that could well be the subject of a separate chapter, Steve Paxton has commented: ‘Where this comes from is just human play, human exchange and animal play. It’s like horseplay or kitten play or child’s play, as well. See: Laura Cull, ‘Homo Performans’ to Interspecies Collaboration: Expanding the Concept of Performance to Include Animals’, in *Performing Animality*, Lourdes Orozco and Jennifer Parker-Starbuck, eds., (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 31.

68 For example, in 1988, Nancy Stark, the most active touring teacher, conducted a Contact workshop in Banyoles, Catalonia, Spain, a small town two hours north of Barcelona. See: Nancy Stark Smith, ‘Editor note’, *Contact Quarterly* 13 (1988), 135. By the mid and late 1970s, Steve Paxton, Nancy Stark Smith and others associated with the foundation of Contact, were already making a living from teaching and performing the dance internationally.

69 The global expansion of Contact did not come without contradictions. While the international spread of the dance through workshops and conferences produced what the practitioners themselves described as a ‘community’, it also produced an increasing divide between professional and social dancers as well as competition among teachers. For ambivalences surrounding Contact’s expansion in and out the USA, see: Cynthia J. Novack, *Sharing the Dance* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), pp. 86–89; 112–13; 196–97.

70 The two videos are *Contact at 10th & 2nd* (1983) and *Fall After Newton* (1987), available as part of the DVD *Videoda Contact Improvisation Archive: Collected Edition* (Vermont: Videoda, 2014).



both levels the work enacts, I would like to suggest, an opening to an other, which complicates dance's foundational link to questions of solitude and individual will. Choreographically, *The Touching Community* depends on the interaction of bodies willing to engage with one another, in a direction that is both playful and sensuous.<sup>71</sup> In Contact Improvisation, movement begins with the recognition of an other; the movement of the dance is initiated by a lead, a direction, an opening to which the other responds. Still, movement in the *The Touching Community* does not represent the 'kinetic excess' in which dance's foundational subjectivity is embedded, and much of the hour and a half long dance is organised around pauses, stops and still moments in which the voices and electronic effects in the sound score 'touch' the bodies of the dancers and us, the audience.

Against the ascription of specific functions to each part of the body, Contact Improvisation also complicates the 'haptocentric' association between touch and the hand (already noted in the preamble). In one of the materials referenced in *The Touching Community*, Steve Paxton reminds us that we touch with our whole body. In contact, 'senses expand into spherical space and the muscular system learns to respond to touch in any *surface* of the body' [emphasis mine].<sup>72</sup> Similarly, in *The Touching Community* the Kantian ascription of the sense of touch to the hand gives way to a consideration of the whole body, the skin as the surface for touching. In Contact Improvisation, the skin has a complete direction awareness, it is the eye with which we see, the surface through which weight is transferred. As Erin Manning writes in her

71 One important aspect of *The Touching Community* that my analysis does not address is the way in which touch and sensuality, even warmth are at work. The reason for this is more personal than academic. As noted elsewhere in the chapter, my relationship with touch remains complex as I complete the writing of this dissertation. The writing of this chapter is a first movement towards the rediscovery of the value and the pleasure of my own sense of touch.

72 Steve Paxton, *Fall After Newton* (1987), stated as part of the video.

book-length political reading of ‘touch’ in tango: ‘The surface of the body is a thinking, feeling surface. It is a gestural, linguistic, sensing skin that protects us while opening us toward and rendering us vulnerable to an other.’<sup>73</sup> And yet, as Manning reads Derrida, opening to an other is also to acknowledge the impossibility of touching. She writes: ‘What I touch is that untouchability. I negotiate that untouchability, that surface that cannot be penetrated, the unknown and (in)finite distance which separates me and you.’<sup>74</sup> On the same page, Manning concludes: ‘The surface is untouchable, yet demands to be touched.’

Much of the movement in *The Touching Community* is caused by contact of the bodies with the floor, which already signals, I would suggest, a ‘technicity’ of touch. In Steve Paxton’s own description, in *Contact Improvisation* gravity and the floor ‘are not taken for granted, but are considered as partners’.<sup>75</sup> *The Touching Community* is a work conceived for a seemingly simple dance floor: the black box stage, an archetypical scenic space at the very heart of the choreographic. A black box stage consists of a simple, somewhat unadorned performance space, usually a large square room with black walls and a flat floor. This typology of scenic space is considered by many to provide a more intimate, ‘real’ experience between audience and performers, with less emphasis being put on the artefactual aspects of stage work. And yet, although stripped down to the eyes of the viewer, technical aspects such as lighting are central in any black box experience, as is the case with *The Touching Community*.<sup>76</sup> In the work, the

73 Erin Manning (2007), p. 9.

74 Ibid., p. 11.

75 Again, Paxton as part of the voiceover in *Fall After Newton*.

76 The black box as a theatrical and performance space became popular and widespread particularly in the 1960s and 1970s. However, its origin can be placed in the avant-garde work of the Swiss stage designer and theorist Adolphe Appia (1862–1928), especially in regard to his use of light in the construction of the theatrical space. For a recent account of Appia’s innovations and his long-standing influence, see: Birgit Wiens, ‘Modular settings and “Creative Light”: The legacy of Adolphe Appia in the digital age’, *International Journal of Performance Arts and Digital Media* 6:1 (2010): pp. 25–39.

square dance floor references both the ‘solipsist’ nature of the dance studio referred to by Lepecki and the AIDS archive, with a rather recognisable reference to Derek Jarman’s film *Blue* – evident in the use of an audio extract from the film in the sound-score and especially as the formal inspiration for the *The Touching Community*’s scenographic design (fig. 4 and 5, gallery). Famously, Jarman’s final film *Blue* was created in the last years of his life, when the British filmmaker and cultural activist was struggling with AIDS-related blindness, which is ‘visualised’ in the film in the all-blue monochrome screen. At a formal and atmospheric level, *The Touching Community*’s stage floor is a direct, unequivocal reference to Jarman’s *Blue*; the dance floor, uniformly illuminated from above, is all-bright blue.<sup>77</sup> Though a common and appreciated surface in contemporary dance for providing traction and some cushioning, the blue dance floor in *The Touching Community* acts, I like to think, as technicity, as mediation, as a complication of proper touch. The four dancers, including Pérez Galí himself, sit on the floor waiting for us, the audience members to enter and occupy our seats. As we do, the bright, electric blue surface of the dance floor stands out against the pitch-black darkness of the black box room, competing for attention with the dancers. While I wait for the rest of the audience to sit down, I cannot take my eyes off the electric blue floor. The captivating effect remains back home as I look at photographs documenting the performance where, again, the blue floor stands out.

DOI: 10.1386/padm.6.1.25\_1 Similarly, lighting in *The Touching Community* does more than merely illuminate dancers. The effect was evident to me when in the presentation of the work at the Reina Sofia Museum, the artist decided to dispense with lighting due to the technical limitations of the space. Here, the performers’ bodies exposed under ambient lighting, appeared all too fleshy, too immediate.

77 In his brief but inspiring analysis of the work, Spanish early-career researcher and promising writer Eloy V. Palazón has associated the presence of blue in *The Touching Community* with science-fiction writer Samuel Delany’s description in *The Motion of Light in Water* (1988) of the blue light projected on male bodies having sex, encountered in one of his first visits to a gay sauna. See: Eloy V. Palazón, ‘La insolvencia de los cuerpos endeudados. Hacia un futuro queer’, in *La Grieta* (3 July 2017), accessed 9 February 2019. <http://lagrietaonline.com/la-insolvencia-de-los-cuerpos-endeudados-hacia-un-futuro-queer/> Palazón’s consideration of *The Touching Community* and cruising is in the context of the post PrEP, new era in HIV prevention.

‘Technicity’ as a complication of unmediated touch also comes in the work, I would like to suggest, through the use of sound, particularly of recordings of read texts, which brings us back to the role of writing in the project. Sonically, *The Touching Community* alters Contact Improvisation’s quality of a dance that is performed in silence;<sup>78</sup> the work’s elaborate sound score combines a diversity of materials, such as portions of Spanish pop songs dealing with the HIV pandemic, audio quotes from cultural figures such as artist Pepe Espaliú, Spanish AIDS activist Jesús Bravo (who is also one of non-professional dancers in the work) or Italian philosopher Roberto Esposito – sometimes in their original voice, sometimes recorded by others. But most notably, the sound score includes original letters penned by Pérez Galí – recorded in his own voice – and addressed to dancers living with HIV or deceased due to complications related to AIDS. These letters are, every now and then during the performance, answered by the voice of a ghost.<sup>79</sup> The sonic presence of the letters is complex and operates at different levels. On the one hand, the writing component of the project allows us to point to the relationship between writing and touch, to the ways in which touch can operate in a textual plane as well as in corporeal plane, a direction already explored by others to which my analysis does not extend.<sup>80</sup> On the other hand, with the incorporation of writing into the heart of the project, the work problematises the division between the one who writes and the one who dances at the basis of choreography, as described by Lepecki in his reading of Thoinot Arbeau’s *Orchesographie*. In *The Touching*

78 Contact Improvisation’s quality as a silent dance form is highlighted by Novack. See: Novack, p. 8.

79 In its invocation of the dead, Pérez Galí’s *The Touching Community* is about touch as much as it is about spectrality. The central term whereby Jacques Derrida thinks of futurity, or what is yet ‘to come’ in *Spectres of Marx*, the concept of spectrality would be an interesting and challenging alternative entry point to the work. See: Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx* (New York: Routledge, 2006). In his chapter on solipsism, Lepecki also highlights the spectral quality of the choreographic machine, see, Lepecki (2006), pp. 27–29.

80 Again, for a recent analysis of the relationship between writing and touch, see: Jackson (2015).

*Community*, Pérez Galí is both the choreographer and the dancer as well as the reading voice of his own letters. Moreover, as epistolary pieces of writing, the letters – all of which are included in the companion book to the project, *Lo tocante* – heavily rely in the first person, the ‘I-voice’, through the recorded words of Pérez Galí himself, which could, at first, be perceived as contradictory. One example:

‘Dear Jon,

I’ve been wanting to write you this letter for some time now. But maybe it was important to wait until today.’<sup>81</sup>

Or, from the same letter:

‘I was reading your words and hearing your voice. I could imagine you speaking, gesticulating, drawing circles to explain your metaphors on the effect of HIV and AIDS on society, about that “other” we always push to one side rather than learning to live and relate with “them”.’

The first-person narrative and the emphasis on the ‘I’ – in a similar way in which the I-voice operates in Jarman’s *Blue*, again, an unavoidable reference here<sup>82</sup> – could be said

81 Aimar Pérez Galí, ‘Dear Jon’, in *Anarchivo sida*, pp. 231–33.

82 Roger Hallas has examined the ways in which Jarman’s *Blue* uses the relation between visual and aural perception, in the context of a wider investigation of the capacities of film and video ‘to bear witness’ to the AIDS crisis. See: Roger Hallas, *Reframing Bodies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009). In the full chapter dedicated to *Blue*, probably the most compelling analysis within the recent literature on the work, Hallas takes on Laura U. Marks’s notion of ‘hapticality’ to describe the dynamics of embodied spectatorship engendered by *Blue*, with a focus on the use of sound in the film. See: Hallas, pp. 231–34. For Hallas, the use of specific techniques of sound recording such as close-miking enacts an effect of aural, surrounding ‘I-voice’, which ‘produces a perception of such closeness to the ear that the boundary between inside and outside the spectator’s body seems to dissolve’. But this is not a solipsistic or seclusive subjectivity, I would argue. As Hallas notes, despite of the use of I-voice, Jarman’s subjectivity in the film rendered through the close recording of his voice creates ‘an intricately complex relationality’ in which subjectivity operates in relation to an other.

to reinforce investment on the self. However, the presence of the dancer's own recorded voice here extends, I would suggest, the challenging that has been ongoing over the last century to the understanding of the Western dancer as a voiceless body, into a mode of subjectivation and corporeality that invites the other in. Whereas in classical dance, most notoriously in ballet, the breathing and physical effort of the dancer must be mute and accordingly she/he who dances does not speak, from the second half of the twentieth century and with greater emphasis after the 1960s onwards, the individual dancer on stage has been given permission for her/his voice to emerge. This is elaborated by philosopher and dance theorist Bojana Kunst (2009) in an essay tracing a relationship between the body of the dancer and its voice.<sup>83</sup> As Kunst reminds us, one of the main conventions of classical dance is 'its dancing voicelessly', where movement and negotiation with the forces of gravity must be silent. For Kunst, the absence of a voice and of spoken text – the two main codes of representation of classical dance – not only result from the 'strict discipling of the body' but are also part of a 'complex technique of subjectivisation and establishment of the early modern body'. Against the conventions of the silent dancing body, the contemporary dancer discovers the power of its inner voice and sonority. Similarly, in *The Touching Community* the dancing body not only ventures itself into writing but disputes our expectations around the dancer as a voiceless body, allowing his recorded 'I-voice' to surface. The incorporation of the I-voice in *The Touching Community* as part of a more complex sonic textuality that includes the voice of others, enables, I want to suggest, an opening to 'an other' through the technicity of writing and the amplified recorded voice of the dancer/choreographer.

83 Bojana Kunst, 'The Voice of the Dancing Body' (20 March 2009), available on Kunst's own website, accessed 25 September 2018. <https://kunstbody.wordpress.com/2009/03/20/the-voice-of-the-dancing-body/> In a previous lecture-performance and related publication, Pérez Galí himself had explored the 'discovery' of the dancing body's own voice and her/his capacity to produce discourse, departing from a genealogy of the dancer as a subaltern subject and the question: 'Can the dancer speak?'. See: Aimar Pérez Galí, *Sweating the Discourse* (Barcelona: My Other Work, 2015).

One of the ‘other’ voices included in the work is the recorded voice of legendary ACT UP New York activist Jon Greenberg (1956–1993), in a ‘touching’ lecture offered in Summer 1992 in the Basque city of San Sebastian, Spain – the only existing recording of which I had come across as part of my research and which I had shared with Pérez Galí in the process of his own research.<sup>84</sup> Greenberg’s talk is central to *The Touching Community*; not only an excerpt of its recording occupies a significant portion of the work’s soundtrack, but it was crucial for Pérez Galí’s understanding of the political potential of living with HIV/AIDS. As someone from a generation that did not live the peak of the AIDS crisis, Pérez Galí’s initial insights into the impact of AIDS on dance were determined by representations of fear of contact that persist in the collective imaginary surrounding early AIDS, leading him to the following working hypothesis: that the parallel expansion of Contact Improvisation and HIV responded to inverse logics; while the first ambioned at opening the boundaries of the self typically associated with the individual dancer through improvisation and physical contact, the rhetorics of immunity and the ideals of protection that shaped the AIDS crisis produced a space of exclusion. However, after listening to Greenberg’s recording, that hypothesis changed: HIV and contact no longer responded to an opposite logic; rather, both could be imagined as occasions to radically open up to the other, to become with the other. On the tape, Greenberg describes living with AIDS as a sort of a pedagogy, as an

84 The talk took place in Summer 1992, a year before Greenberg’s passing, in the context of a three-month workshop that late artist Pepe Espaliú taught at a local art centre. Greenberg’s talk had not been initially included in the workshop’s programme and took place almost by chance, due to the fact that he happened to be in town visiting a local friend. Twenty years later, it was also chance that brought to my hands a digitised recording of the talk, the existence of which neither I nor anyone that I know doing cultural work on HIV/AIDS was aware. Jon Greenberg is perhaps most well-known for his funeral, which was turned into an activist procession of mourning and denunciation at his own wish. Greenberg’s funeral is discussed in terms of an ‘aesthetic and choreographic arrangement’ by David Gere, in his chapter on the activist function of dance in the AIDS era. See: Gere (2004), pp. 160–68. Among other things, Greenberg was also Neil Greenberg’s brother, the notorious dancer from the NY scene and author of the AIDS-themed work *Not-About-AIDS-Dance* created in memory of Jon Greenberg after his passing.

opportunity to ‘learn from, to look at things differently, without judging’.<sup>85</sup> For Greenberg, ‘AIDS can teach us’ to ‘live without barriers’, including the barrier between the living and the dead. In his narrative of living with AIDS, the ‘breaking down’ of the body’s ‘defence system,’ the immune system designed to ‘keep out the others’, gives way to an encounter with the other.

So far, I have explored the various ways in which touch and touching matter within the HIV/AIDS archive, many of which are manifest in *The Touching Community*. My analysis up to this point has put an emphasis on how ‘touch’ in the HIV/AIDS is perhaps, an opportunity of ‘coming into contact with the other’, to use Greenberg’s expression above in which to live with HIV and to open oneself to the other are placed on a similar relational plane. Leading to my conclusions, I would like now to briefly concentrate on the second term openly expressed in the title of Pérez Galí’s project: *community*, a term that, as a ghostly presence, haunts the work from beginning to end.

In Pérez Galí’s own description of *The Touching Community*, emphasis is put equally on the two terms – touch and community; the work is described as a project that explores ‘touch and contact as a means of survival’, as well as a research into ‘a community that was built strong in a moment of great weakness’.<sup>86</sup> The community referred to by Pérez Galí is of course, the dance community of Spain and Chile as well as other Latin American contexts, irremediably affected by the HIV/AIDS crisis. A community that, in his own words, is an ‘inheritance’, a legacy that ‘allows us to better understand the past

85 Greenberg speaks from his own experience of living with AIDS – not HIV, but an advanced case of immune deficiency – and the opportunity for transformation that living with AIDS offered him.

86 Original quote in Spanish, my translation. Pérez Galí (2017), p. 80. In his previous work, Pérez Galí had imagined the communal potential of dance and the dancing bodies as a ‘sweaty community’. See: Aimar Pérez Galí (2015), pp. 50–56. Agamben is, of course, the second inspiration for the title of Pérez Galí’s work. See: Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).



to project ourselves into the future’, one that ‘passes through the skin, crosses us spherically inside out and vice versa’.<sup>87</sup> This is also, then, I would like to conclude, a community-to-come; one that embraces subjects and objects, past and present time, the living and the non-living, a community always-to-come. The archive of cultural responses to HIV/AIDS is full of meaningful moments in which the possibility of a new commonality feels more than an empty promise, moments where a hollow seems to appear that opens the possibility for a new political relationality. As in British filmmaker Stuart Marshall’s imagining of ‘a community that does not yet exist,’ a reference I have already used in the past, and which now inspires the title of this chapter, when he states that ‘AIDS offers us the possibility of building alliances that do not yet exist’.<sup>88</sup> Alliances that may allow us to alter, even momentarily, the ‘conditions of the situation we find ourselves in today’, so we can continue to make art, write books, create work, teach and learn and fight and despair, in the material-semiotic choreographies in which we are imbricated with others.

## 2.5 Conclusions

At the beginning of this chapter there was a departure hypothesis, a background murmur or general framework that situates touch, the HIV/AIDS crisis, and the consolidation of neoliberalism within a shared trajectory. This trajectory has not been explored in depth; rather, it has been suggested through the work of relevant critics of the contemporary subjective and somatic conditions under which we live in today – the neoliberal condition –, mainly Michel Feher, as the foundation on which to consider the meanings

87 Again, original quotes in Spanish. Pérez Galí (2017), p. 80.

88 See: Aimar Arriola, ‘Touching What Does Not Yet Exist: Stuart Marshall and the HIV/AIDS Archive’, *Afterall Journal* 41 (spring/summer 2016), pp. 55–63: 63.

of the sense of touch in the AIDS archive. The path taken in this chapter to describe what are the subjective and somatic effects of the neoliberal condition has been a different, and hopefully an original, path: one connecting the invention of choreography in the sixteenth century and the production of subjectivity and corporeality in the present, through the notion of 'solipsism'. This path has not been a straight line, but a movement where various bodies of literature and references have intervened, including variations and changes in orientation. In this chapter, the literature relating to solipsism has focused on André Lepecki, one of the most influential contemporary dance and performance scholars of the last decade. In fact, one of the original contributions of this chapter has been my attempt to read aspects of Lepecki's two books, *Exhausting Dance* and *Singularities*, side by side, suggesting a link between the mode of subjectification at the basis of the choreographic and the recrudescence of the self under the neoliberal condition. Another modest but important contribution of this chapter has been to extend aspects of Lepecki's theoretical work into the analysis of an HIV/AIDS-related case-study that, in my view, is still a major limitation of his work. For its part, the literature on touch in this chapter has focused on aspects of Jacques Derrida's philosophical overview of the sense of touch, which have been introduced in the preamble of the chapter and put to work in my commentary of *The Touching Community*. In particular, in this chapter I have focused on Derrida's overall objection to phenomenology's understanding of touch as an 'immediate experience' and his argument that touch is always technical, is mediation. The always mediated nature of touch in this chapter has been foregrounded by my emphasis on the artefactual aspects of *The Touching Community* – scenographic, textual, sonic, et al.

As an exercise in attentive ‘surface reading’, the writing of this chapter has been a process of learning how to respond to a variety of materials. In that process, the practice of description has had a predominant place in the chapter, in line with the defence that Best and Marcus (and also Lepecki) make of description as a way of engaging with surface, a mode of enacting a committed yet tactful reading. A recurring mode of engaging surface throughout my study, it is perhaps in this chapter where my use of description becomes most apparent. And although in this chapter ‘surface’ has not been addressed from a thematic standpoint, my analysis of *The Touching Community* has been equally attentive to the multifarious ways in which various material surfaces are at play in the work. Description as a practice of engagement with surface and critical attention to material surfaces will be further elaborated in my next chapter dedicated to the book-object. In the ways in which this chapter has pointed to the relationship between writing and choreography, it has already opened the door to considering the role of writing, and by extension of books within the AIDS archive, which will be the main motif of the coming chapter.

Chapter 2: Choreographing What Does Not Yet Exist: Touch in the HIV/AIDS Archive

Gallery of Images



Figure 1. Guillermo Moscoso, *Geno-sida*. Action realised in front of the cathedral of Concepcion, Chile, April 1, 2009. Photographer: Alvaro Pereda. Courtesy of the artist.



Figure 2. Andrés Senra, Action of La Radical Gai and LSD activist groups in front of the Spanish Ministry of Health, December 1, 1996 International AIDS Day, Madrid. Courtesy of *¿Archivo queer?*



Figure 3. Diego del Pozo Barriuso, *Todo el malestar que se pueda soportar...*, 2016, digital drawing. Courtesy of the artist.

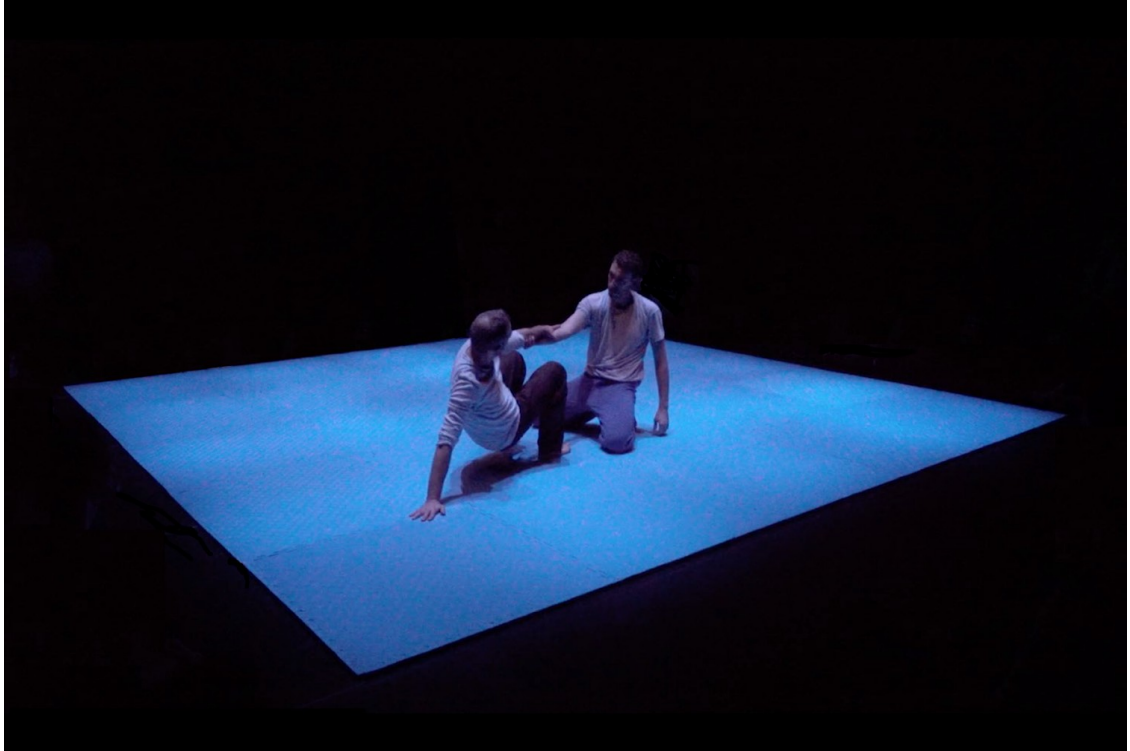


Figure 4. Aimar Pérez Galí, *The Touching Community*, 2016. Photographer: Jordi Surribas.



Figure 5. Aimar Pérez Galí, *The Touching Community*, 2016. Photographer: Jordi Surribas.

## Chapter 3: On the Nature of an Object: Books in the HIV/AIDS Archive

*In memory of Miguel Benlloch.*

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on a rather ubiquitous yet often unnoticed object in the HIV/AIDS archive: the book-object.<sup>1</sup> Writing, publishing, reading and sharing books was central to people who were living with HIV, or have been deeply impacted by it in the early days of the crisis and served as a way to build communities of education and support to survive, literally and politically in an atmosphere otherwise filled with hatred and discrimination. The emergence and spread of HIV and the proliferation of books on the topic went hand in hand, as evidenced by the veritable flood of books on HIV/AIDS published in the first two decades of the pandemic.<sup>2</sup> These books cover practically all

<sup>1</sup> In this chapter I use the term ‘book’ in the broader sense, to refer to bound, printed volumes, whose contemporary form goes back to the ancient codex. However, I fully acknowledge that the book is a heterogeneous form that historically has accommodated diverse textual contents and genres. For two comprehensive introductions to the development of the book form, see: Simon Eliot and Jonathan Rose, eds., *A Companion to the History of the Book* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2007); and David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery, eds., *An Introduction to Book History* (New York: Routledge, 2013). In a narrower sense, I use the expression ‘AIDS books’ to describe book-objects thematically connected to the HIV/AIDS crisis, or written, read and owned by people living with HIV.

<sup>2</sup> There is no consensus on which was the ‘first book’ published about AIDS, or even the first to use the word ‘AIDS’ as part of its title. Relevant to my project, the earliest and most significant book in English on cultural analysis of AIDS was Simon Watney’s *Policing Desire* (London: Comedia / Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1987). That same year Paula Treichler published her famous essay ‘AIDS, Homophobia, and Biomedical Discourse: An Epidemic of Signification’, first in a journal context and then as part of the Douglas Crimp-edited book, *AIDS: Cultural Analysis / Cultural Activism* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1988). Crimp’s volume was the first book discussing AIDS on a context of aesthetic debate and remains forever relevant. On its part, the first AIDS history book was Mirko D. Grmek, *History of AIDS: Emergence and Origin of a Modern Pandemic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990). Originally published as *Historie du sida: Début et origine d’une pandémie actuelle* (Paris: Éditions Payot & Rivages, 1989). That year another important AIDS cultural book was published: Susan Sontag’s *AIDS and Its Metaphors* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1989). This brief selection of early books on AIDS should be enough proof of the prolific book production during the first decade of the pandemic as well as of the centrality of the book-object in the HIV/AIDS archive at large.

publication genres and book types, from medical volumes to memoirs, from cultural analysis to literary works, from poetry chapbooks to art exhibition catalogues. And even today, in the century in which the book is said to have disappeared, books surrounding HIV/AIDS keep booming as part of the ongoing ‘AIDS crisis revisitation’, both in digital and printed form, as exemplified by the two books that I have edited as part of the practice component of my thesis. However, as Harvard book historian Leah Price (2009) argues in Best and Marcus’ edition on ‘surface reading’, too often critical consideration of books has been relegated to literary interpretation over books’ status as objects.<sup>3</sup> For Price, whose ‘surface reading’ of the book-object inspires this chapter, critical attention to books both in the fields of the history of the book and the sociology of reading remains heavily placed on the meaning of texts ‘at the expense of the book as a material thing’.<sup>4</sup> I argue in this chapter that this imbalanced focus is also present in the case of AIDS books. A wide range of objects in the AIDS archive such as printed T-shirts, name quilts and even condoms, to name just a few, have received critical attention from a cultural and material standpoint.<sup>5</sup> Yet analysis of HIV/AIDS books has

<sup>3</sup> Leah Price, ‘From *The History of a Book* to a “History of the Book”’, *Representations* 108, no. 1 (autumn 2009), pp. 120–38. DOI: 10.1525/rep.2009.108.1.120.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120. Price has sometimes been included in the long and somewhat diffuse list of authors who in recent years have aroused interest in thing theory, new forms of materialism and the lives of objects. Borrowing from Martin Heidegger’s dualistic categorisation of material entities as being either objects or things, ‘thing theory’ is the branch of critical theory focusing on human-object transaction as expressed in literature and culture. For an explanation on Heidegger’s distinction, see Graham Harman, ‘Heidegger on Objects and Things’, in Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel, eds., *Making Things Public* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press and Karlsruhe, Germany: ZKM/Centre for Art and Media, 2005), pp. 268–72. In relation to the study of books, thing theory was largely popularised by Bill Brown’s *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2003). A 2017 forum featured in *Arcade*, Stanford’s open access humanities site was indicative of the work currently being published in the field. See: Sarah Wasserman, Patrick Moran (curators), ‘Thing Theory in Literary Studies’, *Arcade* blog, Stanford, last accessed 16 July 2018. <https://arcade.stanford.edu/colloquies/thing-theory-literary-studies>

<sup>5</sup> Respectively, see David Gere, ‘T-shirts and Holograms: Corporeal Fetishes in AIDS Choreography, c. 1989’, *Theatre Journal* 54, no. 1 (March 2002): pp. 45–62. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/tj.2002.0015>; Gustavo Subero, ‘Preface’, *HIV in World Cultures: Three Decades of Representations* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2013), pp. xiii–xxiii; and leading AIDS-cultural analyst Paula Treichler’s ongoing research on the history of the condom, most recently: Paula Treichler, ‘When pirates feast ... who pays? Condoms, advertising and the visibility paradox, 1920s and 1930s’, *Journal of Bioethical Inquiry* 11(4), 2015: pp. 479–505. DOI: 10.1007/s11673-014-9583-7. Relevant to the overall geopolitical orientation of this study, see also Subero’s second book: Gustavo Subero. *Representations of HIV/AIDS in Contemporary Hispano-American and Caribbean Culture / Cuerpos*



been relegated to literary consideration in Spain and Chile, the two contexts relevant to my project.<sup>6</sup> The general goal of my project is to expand the dominant narratives circulating about the history of HIV/AIDS, as these narratives too often focus on subjectivity and identity at the expense of the world of objects. In line with this goal, this chapter claims the book as a vehicle to bring to the surface lesser-known realities and stories. However, this chapter does not turn the AIDS book into an entirely knowable or ‘readable’ entity, as if treating the world of objects at once as foreign and legible according to our own epistemology. Rather, ‘reading’ in this chapter will not solely imply plunging oneself into the depths of a book’s content at the expense of its material life. Instead, what is ultimately at stake in this chapter is our own capacity to summon something of the sense of how our presence before particular types of objects can offer wider sets of relation and sense.

Price’s interest in the book as object is framed within her broader scholarly interest in the history of the book. Specifically, she is interested in the changing social and cultural meanings surrounding books in Victorian Britain, as exemplified best by her 2012 book on the topic, which includes a revised version of her 2009 ‘surface reading’ essay.<sup>7</sup> In the Victorian era, according to Price, more volumes were produced, owned and circulated than ever before.<sup>8</sup> Paying attention to the technical and social transformations of the book in the Victorian era in the context of a project on cultural responses to HIV/AIDS in Spain and Chile may be considered a strange move or simply anachronistic. However, as Price suggests in her study, it is in this historical moment that print culture

*suiSIDAs* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2014).

<sup>6</sup> At the time of closing this chapter, I have not found evidence of studies that consider AIDS books as objects in either the HIV/AIDS archive at large, or in the specific contexts of Spain and Chile.

<sup>7</sup> Leah Price, *How to Do Things with Books in Victorian Britain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

and the practice of reading were immersed in a greater chain of transformations, defining our perception and present attitude towards cultural objects called ‘books’. Throughout her study, Price focuses on the three operations that best define our relationship to books: reading, manipulation and circulation. These operations do not represent separate chapters or sections in her book, but are the main running motifs in her study and, in this chapter, are the motifs that will help me to ground and sustain my argument: that books in the HIV/AIDS archive exist in an expanded relational field defined by their textual, material and social lives. This is a field nourished by uses of the book-object not limited to its reading, in which the relation between ‘text’ and ‘book’, content and container, between exteriority (a book’s surface) and interiority, is not necessarily of opposition, as I will explain. Furthermore, I will argue that such expanded fields in which AIDS books are situated attests to the many ‘afterlives’ that books can have. For Price, to consider a book’s afterlife is to acknowledge that a book’s life cycle is not simply from publication to oblivion or destruction. Rather, the uses that a book may have beyond its reading, or in the case of early HIV/AIDS books, beyond its supposed time of validity, prompt us question what we understand as the ‘lifetime’ of a book. The uninterrupted circulation to date of book-objects produced in the first decades of the AIDS crisis as well their ‘resurfacing’ in museum exhibitions and other creative responses in the current ‘AIDS crisis revisitation’ era shows us that AIDS books can and do survive. This idea will be my second running argument in this chapter.

Precisely within this expanded, relational field – where different transactions around the book-object coexist – stands Spanish artist, poet and cultural activist Miguel Benlloch’s (1954–2018) *DERERUMNATURA* (2016), his final major performance, commissioned as part of my thesis-related project *AIDS Anarchive*. This is a complex work dealing

with questions of health, disease, death and transformation; it involves the artist's body, reading aloud and the handling of an idiosyncratic book (Figs. 1 and 2, gallery). The work lies within a wider constellation of text-based works and forays into printed matter by Benlloch, including his first poetry book *Cuerpo conjugado* [Conjugated body], published in February 2018, only months prior to his death.<sup>9</sup> His book includes important, early references to the AIDS crisis in Spain. A forerunner of gender and sexual experimentation practices in Spain since the late 1970s, including a handful of early cultural responses to HIV/AIDS, and a survivor of the AIDS crisis himself, I met Miguel a decade ago.<sup>10</sup> Our relationship soon transformed from a research interest to a true friendship. For those familiar with his work, whether in Spain, Chile or Mexico, international contexts where his work has been presented, my pairing of Benlloch to the book-object might not be immediately obvious. His work is best known for the use of the body, humour and direct action as vehicles to challenge fixed identities: national, sexual and other.<sup>11</sup> But as I hope will be evident in my analysis of *DERERUMNATURA*, the materiality of the text and of language in a broad sense, and printed matter in particular, occupies a prominent place in his practice. For a project like mine, aiming to expand the hegemonic stories about the AIDS crisis as we know it, dedicating an entire

<sup>9</sup> See: Miguel Benlloch, *Cuerpo conjugado* (Úbeda, Jaen: Fundación Huerta de San Antonio, 2018). Besides being a central figure in the cultural activism of the Spanish political transition, Miguel was a friend. I began writing this chapter in spring 2018, when Miguel was suffering from a terminal liver cancer and knowing that it was more than likely that he would die before the completion of this dissertation.

<sup>10</sup> In the context of the collective research project *Social Dangerousness* (2008–09), co-directed by Paul B. Preciado as part of MACBA's Independent Studies Programme. Details available in: *Social dangerousness. Sexual minorities, language and practice in 70s and 80s Spain*, 3-6 March 2010, MACBA, accessed February 10, 2019. <https://www.macba.cat/en/social-dangerousness-sexual-minorities-language-and-practice-in-70s-and-80s-spain> This research and production project looked at cultural production in Spain in the years of the so-called democratic transition, with a focus on those practices that, due to their proximity to sexual politics and popular culture, did not have a place in the more established histories of cultural production in Spain. In a relevant way, Benlloch was one of the starting case studies strongly suggested to us by Preciado.

<sup>11</sup> For a comprehensive overview of Benlloch's practice at large (only available in Spanish), see: Mar Villaespesa, 'Querido Miguel', in *Miguel Benlloch. Acaeciò en Granada* (Granada: TRN-Laboratorio artístico transfronterizo, 2013). To date, this fully illustrated book is the only existing monograph on Benlloch's work.

chapter to a figure such as Miguel Benlloch, whose work has not had academic consideration to date, can only be deemed as urgent.

Against the profusion of references in previous chapters, this chapter is economically structured around two main sources. In Section 1, I review important aspects of Leah Price's work on the reading, handling and circulation of books, on which I build my main argument. In doing so, attention to circulation will inevitably open the question about the 'life cycle' of books, and with it my second suggestion in this chapter, namely that AIDS books can and do survive. In Section 2, I move into Benlloch's *DERERUMNATURA* to describe the expanded field in which AIDS books lie, which is defined by the relational consideration of a book's textual, material and social lives. Preceding both sections, the preamble that follows serves to introduce my choice of motif in this chapter, AIDS books, as well as to situate my interest in books and printed culture at large within my overall curatorial practice. Additionally, the end of the preamble also serves to argue the relevance of my second suggestion in the chapter, about the 'afterlife' of books and their capacity to survive, by showing the centrality that the very notion of survival has in the HIV/AIDS archive at large.

### **3.2 Preamble: Books and HIV/AIDS**

Books, in contrast to artworks, films and exhibitions, were the most prominent and often earliest forms of cultural response to AIDS in Spain and Chile. For example, Spanish intellectual, anthropologist and gay activist Alberto Cardin (1948–1992), who is regarded as the first public figure in Spain to have been open about his HIV status, co-edited the small press edition *S.I.D.A. ¿Maldición bíblica o enfermedad letal?*

[AIDS. Biblical Curse or Lethal Disease?] (1985) shortly after being diagnosed with AIDS.<sup>12</sup> In Chile, Pedro Lemebel's second book, *Loco afan: crónicas del sidario* [Mad Desire: Chronicles from the AIDS Camp]<sup>13</sup> (1996) marked the beginning of the author's international projection. But as is the case for the HIV/AIDS archive at large, the pairing of AIDS with published books in the lesser-known contexts of Spain and Chile have been only been assessed in terms of literary scrutiny. While literary analysis has certainly contributed to opening the spectrum of scholarly work on AIDS in terms of language and geography,<sup>14</sup> the absolute focus on it has obscured the fact that books have a life beyond their textual value. Although rare, there are some artists and activists who have generated exceptions to this strict literary focus; these exceptions do manage to treat books as having a life beyond their textual value. For example, Chilean artist Guillermo Moscoso, to whom I have referred in Chapter 2, used a physical bible as a performance prop in his work.<sup>15</sup> Exceptions may also include the presence of books as objects in exhibitions, such as in my own project-related exhibition *AIDS Anarchive*. In this exhibition, a selection of novels by Pedro Lemebel depicting animal figures on their covers was presented in a section dedicated to the relationship between AIDS and non-human animals. My goal in this chapter is to further engage with aspects of AIDS books

<sup>12</sup> Edited together with Armand de Fluvià, one of the founders of the first gay liberation movement in Spain at the end of the 1970s, during the final throes of the dictatorship following Franco's death in 1975. The book included a collection of early scientific and news reports from Spain and the USA, in translated form. See: Alberto Cardín and Armand de Fluvià, eds., *S.I.D.A.: ¿Maldición bíblica o enfermedad letal?* (Barcelona: Laertes, 1985). Cardín's book was followed by a second book by the author on alternative treatments for AIDS, possibly the first of its kind in the Spanish-speaking world. See: Alberto Cardín, *Sida. Enfoques alternativos* (Barcelona: Laertes, 1991). Both books are now out-of-print and in high demand on the collectors' market.

<sup>13</sup> Most recent title translation of the book as suggested by Lina Meruane. Alternatively translated as 'sidario chronicles'. See: Lina Meruane, *Viral Voyages. Tracing AIDS in Latin America* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 131. 'Sidarios' were forced AIDS camps in Fidel Castro's Cuba.

<sup>14</sup> Undoubtedly, the most recent and significant work on literary analysis of a large part of AIDS-themed literature published in Latin America, and with an influence in Spain, is the aforementioned Meruane's *Viral Voyages*.

<sup>15</sup> Outside of the specific contexts relevant to my project, the AIDS archive at large includes curious examples of the 'creative' use of books both modern and ancient. For example, as part of his work of over twenty years of experimental calligraphy and book work, in 1992 Irish calligrapher Denis Brown produced a number of AIDS-themed works on vellum. Information available at the artist's website: [http://www.quillskill.com/frameset/frameset\\_prints.html](http://www.quillskill.com/frameset/frameset_prints.html)

beyond their literary value, as particular objects in the material world with political implications.

Before proceeding any further, it may be worth clarifying that despite the apparent consensus on the ‘exceptionalism of AIDS’ in the sense that there is no precedent in modern history for such a biomedical crisis, in this chapter I am not making the case for the exceptional or uncommon character of AIDS books. Rather, one could argue that AIDS books are fairly ordinary objects, whose conventional technical production and regular materiality make them no more distinctive than books about cancer or Ebola. However, it is also true that these ordinary objects, so ordinary that they often go unnoticed in scholarly work, bear witness to extraordinary stories, both in relation to their material existence and textual lives. Thus, if I were asked to provisionally identify how AIDS books are distinct – especially the books written by those living with HIV/AIDS and their allies – I would note the following two features: the role of AIDS writing in revising the ‘AIDS text’ (an expression used by pioneering cultural critic Paula Treichler to refer to the official discourses surrounding AIDS) and the ability of AIDS books to produce a community of identification and support. In a seminal 1987 essay in which she defined AIDS as an ‘epidemic of signification’ on top of a biomedical crisis, Treichler used the expression ‘AIDS text’ to refer to the set of scientific and media discourses that shaped the early meanings and attitudes surrounding AIDS.<sup>16</sup> Treichler described AIDS as a ‘linguistic reality’ as much as a material one, the early history of which was built on the supposed authority of scientific knowledge. Facing this reality, AIDS activists and cultural analysts in the early years of the crisis understood that ‘rewriting’ the ‘AIDS text’ meant producing counter-readings

<sup>16</sup> Treichler (1987), p. 267.

to the official discourses, also in printed form. On the other hand, in her analysis of Latin American AIDS writing, Lina Meruane (2014) has suggested that the proliferation of AIDS books produced a community that came together through sharing and reading. As she puts it: ‘The sudden appearance of texts, whether locally distributed or with massive international circulation, widely read, cited, panned, or praised, helped build a corpus of reading for the beleaguered community.’<sup>17</sup> She adds: ‘It bolstered the militant brotherhood of homosexuals [and their allies, we should add] in those writings, identifying them, representing them, offering them the knowledge of a shared existence within and beyond national borders.’<sup>18</sup> To avoid addressing the question of the supposed exceptionalism of AIDS books in a frontal manner, I choose in this chapter a small selection of book-objects from the AIDS archive to argue that books exist in an extended field of meaningful bonds and relations.

This preamble provides several examples of creative uses of the book-object when the book is not limited to its reading value. These examples add to a long list of artists and curators who have addressed the issue of the book since at least the 1960s and outside the context of the AIDS archive, whether in reaction to the absolute centrality that writing and the book-object have maintained in relation to notions of history and truth within Western culture, or as a medium to present work other than the exhibition device.<sup>19</sup> Among the creative approaches to the book-object outside the AIDS archive,

<sup>17</sup> Meruane (2014), p. 41.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> In a prominent place in this genealogy would be Marcel Broodthaers’ book works, five of which were the starting point of the recent project *The Book to Come* (2015–17) by the curatorial collective Bulegoa z/b (Bilbao). Initiated together with graphic designer and Broodthaers’ collaborator Filiep Tacq, the project considered books as ‘living entities’ and took off by considering Broodthaers’ own interest in how books relate to other art forms. See: Bulegoa z/b, *The Book to Come*, project archive, accessed 27 December 2018. <http://bulegoa.org/en/the-book-to-come/> Additionally, Lucy Lippard and Seth Siegelaub, whom I consider as inspirations, are the two pioneering curators most committed to exploring the book format as an economic alternative to the exhibition in the 1960s. For a first-person account of their interest in printed matter see their respective interviews in: Hans Ulrich Obrist, *A Brief History of Curating* (Zurich: JRP Ringier, 2008). Lastly, working within and outside of the

the line of investigation most relevant to my analysis of Miguel Benlloch's work in Section 2 is the one pointing to the broader relationship between bodies and books. For example, artist Martha Fleming (who is acknowledged in Chapter 1 as co-author of the important AIDS-related performance work *Animal Love*) has produced extensive work exploring the history of the book, with particular attention to the book-body connection. This work was her postgraduate thesis and related to art practices concerning the book as object; her focus was on the practice and techniques of bookbinding in relation to cultural attitudes towards the human (anatomic) body, death and religion in the West from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century.<sup>20</sup> Given the historical relationship between books and bodies, conceptualised both as integral and coherent units, 'the body under the sign of AIDS' (using an expression by Halberstam and Livingston) – understood as a 'contaminated body', a 'techno-body', a 'queer body',<sup>21</sup> in short, a body defined by its fragmentation and not by its coherence – will find one of its manifestations in the HIV/AIDS archive. This manifestation will be evident in my discussion of Miguel Benlloch's work in Section 2, especially in those instances in which the artist's body and the book 'perform' together.

Adding to the list above, a specific past project of mine crucial to understanding my interest in this chapter on AIDS books is *Marginalia* (2012–13), a year-long research

AIDS archive, AA Bronson (an artist, publisher and founding member of General Idea) has tirelessly explored the creative and political potential of publications. For a recent interview exploring the central themes of his work, including publishing, see: Theodore (ted) Kerr, 'Oral history interview with AA Bronson', 3, 5 and 6 March 2017. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, accessed 27 December 2018. <https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-aa-bronson-17460#overview>

<sup>20</sup> Martha Fleming, 'Letters and Figures: Relationships Between the Book Object and the Human Body as Metaphor – Clues to an Epistemology of the Book' (MA Thesis in History of the Book, University of London, 1998). The historical relationship between books and bodies has been the focus of a variety of works. For example, see the essays in *The Book and the Body*, D. Frese and K. O'Brien O'Keeffe, eds., (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press 1997), a strong collection of four essays by eminent medievalists on the topic.

<sup>21</sup> Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston, eds., 'Introduction,' in *Posthuman Bodies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 3.



and curatorial project that took as a departing point the personal library of late artist Pepe Espaliú (1955–1993). As mentioned previously, he was the first artist in Spain to receive major media attention for his condition as a person living with AIDS. Housed in the now extinct Arteleku Art Centre in San Sebastián, Basque Country, the library is a heterogeneous body of several thousand books, covering everything from high theory to gardening, which had survived both Espaliú’s death and a recent flood that devastated the art centre.<sup>22</sup> My project consisted of researching into the final years of the artist’s work and inviting to four artists and collectives to produce ‘activations’ of the library, with the backdrop of the twentieth anniversary of the death of the artist and his library’s survival of the aforementioned flood.<sup>23</sup> Made obvious to me only years later, an interest in the ‘life of books’ beyond reading, in particular in the dimension of books as objects and in their circulation and afterlives in institutional infrastructures, such as libraries and archives, traversed that project and now animates this chapter.<sup>24</sup> Shortly after my project *Marginalia*, my encounter with a rather unexplored reference from the AIDS archive at large also explains my interest in the book-object in this chapter: the work of artist John Eric Broaddus (1943–1990).<sup>25</sup> His aesthetic practice was directed towards two media, his own public persona and the book-object, narrowing the relationship

<sup>22</sup> After the definitive closure of Arteleku in 2014 the Pepe Espaliú library was transferred to the art centre dedicated to the artist in his hometown, Córdoba, Andalusia.

<sup>23</sup> The results of the four artistic activations were presented in the one-day event held at Arteleku on 16 March 2013. Full details available at: <http://2013.arteleku.net/en/marginalia.html>. A year later, one of the four artistic projects, the one by Argentinean artist Antonio Gagliano, was developed into the book *El espíritu del siglo XX* [The Spirit of the Twentieth Century] (Markina-Xemein: Album, 2018). Gagliano’s initial project consisted in digitally drawing a selection of 106 documents belonging to the Espaliú library – ephemera that initially lived between the pages of the books and that in the inventory process was expunged by the institution and later damaged in the floods. The resulting book, published by my own publishing house, Album, includes the 106 digital drawings organised into three sections, alongside a specially commissioned essay by curator and essayist Valentín Roma.

<sup>24</sup> In terms of my own biography, as the son of a printer who had previously worked in a pulp mill for the production of paper, my interest in books from a young age has been technical and material before literary. Subsequently, in my curatorial work I have developed as many projects in printed format as exhibitions.

<sup>25</sup> I encountered the work of Broaddus in the context of the curatorial residency that I conducted at Visual AIDS, New York, in spring 2014 (referenced in the practice component of this thesis). More information and images by the artist are available at Visual AIDS’ Artist registry: <http://visualaids.org/artists/detail/john-eric-broaddus>

between AIDS and books in an exemplary way. In his public performances and appearances, Broaddus created one-of-a-kind costumes involving fantasy and do-it-yourself craft, a type of visual grammar that he would also transfer to his unique artist books. A 2000 documentary about his work boldly titled *Books of Survival*<sup>26</sup> is an early trigger for my second suggestion in this chapter that AIDS books can and do survive.

In describing the non-textual aspects of AIDS books, the consideration of ‘surface’ in this chapter will be important. Following Leah Price’s (2009; 2012) attention to books beyond or perhaps, in addition to, their literary value, my engagement with ‘surface’ in this chapter will be two-fold. As part of my analysis of Benlloch’s work, I will consider the surface/material aspects of books as well as their uses beyond or in addition to reading. As Price (2009) argues in the Best and Marcus edited issue on surface reading: ‘In a discipline [literary criticism] that prides itself on discerning hidden depths, superficiality shocks like a purloined letter.’<sup>27</sup> Situating herself beyond the domain of literary interpretation and responding to Best and Marcus’s invitation to engage with surface, Price reminds us that ‘reading is only one among many uses to which printed matter can be put’.<sup>28</sup> Price considers books in the wider context of ‘it-narratives’, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century fiction pieces that trace the life of a book among a series of owners. As she lists: ‘Bought, sold, exchanged, transported, displayed, defaced, stored, ignored, collected, neglected, dispersed, or discarded, books can be enlisted in a range of transactions and rituals that stretch far beyond the literary or even the linguistic.’<sup>29</sup> Price’s essay on it-narratives would be later included in her book on

<sup>26</sup> *Books of Survival: The Art of John Eric Broaddus* (2000), directed by Gabriella Mirabelli, 42 mins, colour. The documentary has had a very limited distribution. I thank Mirabelli for granting me private access to watch it online as part of my research.

<sup>27</sup> Price (2009), p. 122.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

meanings and attitudes towards books in Victorian Britain (2012), a time of unprecedented changes in the material and social life of books, which to a great extent still shape our understanding of books in the present. As I will review in Section 1, Price considers books focusing on the three operations that best define our relationship to books: reading, handling and circulation, with a particular emphasis on the latter. Her suggestion that these three modes of relating to books overlap, despite often being described as conflicting, points to the overall argument that goes through my chapter, that books in the HIV/AIDS archive exist in an expanded relational field defined by their textual, material and social lives. Additionally, attention to circulation in this chapter will inevitably open the question about the ‘life cycle’ of books, and with it my second suggestion: that AIDS books can and do survive. This is not a separate or secondary argument, but one that inevitably follows from the attention to the circulation of books.

The question of survival is also, I would like to ground in this preamble, an utterly relevant question in any discussion related to the AIDS archive. As I will detail at the end of Section 1, not only has the question of the material survival of books taken on growing importance in the discipline of the history of the book, but it has become fundamental when it comes to studying the book as an object. In addition, ‘survival’ is a central concept in AIDS cultural analysis, especially in the analysis of pre-ARV AIDS visual cultures. To state the obvious, the very term ‘survival’ is everywhere in the AIDS archive at large, most recently signalled in the title *How to Survive a Plague*, the 2012 Oscar-nominated documentary film about the early days of AIDS activism in the US.<sup>30</sup> Additionally, ‘survival’ is also a powerful literary trope with political effects within

<sup>30</sup> For the book based on the film, see: David France, *How to Survive a Plague* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2016).

AIDS writing. For instance, early responses to the pandemic such as *Surviving and Thriving with AIDS* (1987), a book written by and for people with AIDS, insisted that people could live with AIDS, not just die from it.<sup>31</sup> Yet survival is not simply a recurrent term in AIDS vocabulary. In the first two decades of the ongoing HIV/AIDS crisis, ‘to survive’, literally and politically, was the very reason for action of those living with AIDS and HIV and their allies,<sup>32</sup> a task in which bearing witness through material culture, such as books, was crucial. My suggestion that AIDS books can and do survive will traverse Section 2 of my chapter, not only when acknowledging the potential legacy of Benlloch’s work after his recent death, but also as part of my analysis of specific aspects of the work considering the actual setting where Benlloch’s *DERERUMNATURA* was premiered, the exhibition rooms of my thesis-related project *AIDS Anarchive*, where a number of early AIDS books from Spain and Chile that had happened to survive deterioration, abandonment or institutional neglect were displayed nearby.

First, in the section that follows, I will review some of the main ideas by Price on the three operations that define our relations to books: reading, handling and circulation, or the literary, material and social life of books. These three operations give shape to the extended field in which AIDS books exist in a relational manner. This is a field nourished by uses of the book-object not limited to its reading. This is also a field that attests to the many ‘afterlives’ that books can have, opening the question of the material survival of books.

<sup>31</sup> Michael Callen, editor, *Surviving and Thriving with AIDS: Hints for the Newly Diagnosed* (New York: People with AIDS Coalition, 1987).

<sup>32</sup> As AIDS cultural activist Gregg Bordowitz once suggested, if people of colour have been historically expected to take responsibility for liberation around race relations, and lesbians, gay men and women have been expected to do the same around sexual relations, people with AIDS and HIV have been ‘forced to take responsibility for their survival’. See: Gregg Bordowitz, ‘Everybody Else’s Freedom’, *Agni*, no. 31/32 (1990), pp. 53–55: 55.

### 3.3 Section 1: The Literary, Material and Social Life of Books

As already mentioned, my interest in the book-object in this chapter follows Leah Price's (2009; 2012) approach to books beyond or in addition to their textual value. One question triggers Price's study: 'What meanings do books have even, or especially, when they go unread?'<sup>33</sup> This question in Price arises in the context of the meanings and attitudes surrounding books in Victorian Britain, a time of unprecedented changes in the material and social life of books, of unparalleled disputes between textual and non-textual uses of the book-object.<sup>34</sup> For instance, this is a time when increasing levels of literacy made the book an accessible object for new positions of class and gender that might not be solely interested in the textual qualities of a book. This is also a time, as Price describes in detail, of extraordinary transformations in the materiality and look of books (such as those brought about by developments in the technique of bookbinding). Price's study focuses on the three operations relating to books that most define our relationship to the book-object: reading, handling and circulation. She shows the often-contentious relation among these three operations, describing the many ways in which they overlap. One cannot read without handling, or grab a book that has not passed through someone else's hands. As Price examines, the majority of Victorian literature favoured the theme of reading against attention to the material properties of and social transactions around books, their handling and circulation, with the exception of particular sub-genres, most notably it-narratives, nineteenth century fiction pieces that

<sup>33</sup> Price (2012), p. 2.

<sup>34</sup> Of course, non-textual uses of the book existed in times long before the Victorian era. Such is the case of the use of scrolls with scriptural texts for protection in the afterlife left in Egyptian tombs or the ritual function of highly decorated Bibles and service books as early as the fifth century. For a condensed, yet detailed, account of uses of books as physical objects throughout history, see: Rowan Watson, 'Some Non-textual Uses of Books', in *A Companion to the History of the Book*, Simon Eliot and Jonathan Rose, eds., (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2007), pp. 480–92.

trace the life of an object, often but not limited to a book,<sup>35</sup> among a series of owners and handlers.<sup>36</sup> Price's shared consideration of the three dimensions that define our relationship with books, which I will now review individually, form the expanded field in which, I argue in this chapter, AIDS books lie. Attention to the three operations, as particular stations or positions from which to consider the life of a book beyond or in addition to its text value, will also articulate my analysis of Benlloch's work in Section 2.

Price's work at large takes notice of the profuse ways in which the practice of reading (what she also refers to as 'doing something with words') is represented in Victorian literature. As she notes in regards to the Victorian novel: 'No other genre, this story goes, so inventively represents the act on which its own realization depends.'<sup>37</sup> Her study pays close attention to the ambivalence surrounding the act of reading in literary representation, from the idealised pleasure of reading to the dangers of 'absorption' or 'solipsism' for those delving into fiction reading, much of which still dominate our contemporary imaginary about reading. In Price's consideration of reading, the distinction between 'text' and 'book' is crucial, the first meaning a linguistic structure, the second a material object. For Price, the need for this distinction goes beyond the mere clarification of her use of language; rather, it points to the unequal way in which Victorians valued text over book, that is, content over container. Important in any nuanced approach to the book-object, the dynamic relationship between 'text' and

<sup>35</sup> In the development of it-narratives from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century, plots went from being structured around non-human subjects such as 'guineas, rupees, and banknotes' aimed at middle-class adults, to feature 'talking books' aimed at 'those too young, or too poor, to choose the books they owned'. Price, p. 108.

<sup>36</sup> A literary sub-genre practically inaccessible today that, according to Price, proves how much twenty-first century culture still values reading over the materiality of books. For Price's (2012) chapter-length study of it-narratives, see Chapter 4, 'It-Narrative and the Book as Agent', pp. 107–35.

<sup>37</sup> Price (2012), p. 67.

‘book’, between language and materiality, will play an important role in my analysis of Benlloch’s work in Section 2. As Price notes, Victorians ‘identified themselves as text-lovers as they distinguished themselves from book-lovers’.<sup>38</sup> In Victorian literature, ‘the text is aligned with whichever term happens to be considered superior’,<sup>39</sup> while love for the book-object was represented as a lower level of value, often associated with women, the new rich and the illiterate classes.<sup>40</sup> However, Price’s analysis does not disregard the value of the text, dedicating sustained attention throughout the study to the rich textual representations in which reading, the materiality of the book and its social life are pictured in late-nineteenth-century novels. Neither do I in this chapter, and while it is true that my emphasis is on the uses of AIDS books in addition to their text value (an issue that has not been considered before in an academic context), my analysis of Miguel Benlloch’s work in Section 2 fully acknowledges the importance that writing and the literary value of the texts have in his work. In addition, as a written work that seeks to make a significant contribution to knowledge, and therefore seeks to be read, this study already attests to the high consideration that I myself have about reading. Furthermore, the joint consideration of the textual and material dimension of a book helps us, Price suggests, to bear in mind the ways in which books differ from other non-textual objects, without necessarily advocating for a kind of ‘exceptionalism’ of the book.<sup>41</sup> Likewise, my focus on AIDS books in this chapter is not necessarily governed by a belief in the exceptional character of the book as object, not even by a curatorial

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., pp. 4–5.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>40</sup> Appreciation of text over the book-object extends to the present as Price notes, jokingly citing the campaign of the first e-reader device by Amazon – ‘The paper, glue, ink and stitching that make up the book vanish, and what remains is the author’s world’ – a dematerialising promise that seem to me hard to meet. See: Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>41</sup> In her study, Price attempts at unpacking ‘those attributes that set the book apart from other objects’, while also raising questions about what ‘set some books apart from others’. Likewise, she admits that few of the issues considered in her study of the book-object are unique to the book, suggesting that questions about the conditions of production and circulation of books are easily applicable to other objects of the material world. See: Ibid., p. 35.

fetishism towards books (despite my sustained interest in books as medium for curatorial work). Rather, as already mentioned in my preamble, my focus on the AIDS book is justified, firstly, by their status as the earliest form of cultural response to the HIV/AIDS crisis in Spain and Chile, the two contexts most relevant to my study.

The second contentious operation around books that centres Price's study is 'handling'. Under this term, Price gathers a wide range of physical operations as opposed to reading, described as fundamentally a mental operation, to which a book-object can be subjected throughout its life cycle. As Price elaborates in the final chapter of her study, 'a long literary tradition privileges mental operations over manual ones, associating handling with either the female servants who dust books, the tradesmen who tear them apart to wrap groceries, or the even more vulgar nouveaux riches who *display* them on sofa tables' (my emphasis).<sup>42</sup> Price's project is an attempt to reverse this hierarchical logic, emphasising the meanings that occur in the manipulation of books and, ultimately, in their value as physical objects. In my own discussion of AIDS books in Section 2, the act of 'displaying' books, of exhibiting them, if I stick to a vocabulary closer to curatorial practice, will be considered. Furthermore, for Price, interpreting the handling of books becomes a method of recognising their use in an extended field of relations. As she notes: 'To reconstruct the hermeneutics of handling is also to situate the book within a larger social world.'<sup>43</sup> In her analysis, this social world surpasses those class and gender domains in which the relationship with the book is determined solely by its literary value to include those transactions that, in the context of new technical developments in the production of paper, the economic deregulation around it (such as the suppression of certain taxes levied on paper) and unprecedented levels of

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 113.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 9.



literacy, the book reaches new hands. This possibility of situating the book within a ‘larger social world’ is present in my own argument in this chapter, which considers AIDS books within an expanded field of relations. In the case of Benlloch’s work, this expanded field includes performance work and curated exhibitions, both of which are more and more frequent scenarios for books in the current so-called ‘AIDS crisis revisitation’ era.

### 3.3.1 *Surviving Books*

The third and final operation encompassing books as discussed by Price, and the one that opens the way to my second suggestion in this chapter about the ‘survival capacity’ of AIDS books, is circulation. Not surprisingly, Price’s lengthy chapter dedicated to it-narratives, the aforementioned literary subgenre in which a book traces its travels among a series of owners, the focus is put on circulation, that is, on the ways in which books are sold, given, borrowed and disposed of. Attention to circulation offers Price the opportunity to attend to the life cycle of books in an expanded way. A capital concern in the study of the history of the book, Price’s understanding of the ‘life cycle’ of a book is indebted to the model for bibliography and the study of the book proposed by Thomas R. Adams and Nicolas Barker in the mid-1990s,<sup>44</sup> which put the issue of survival at the centre. Written in response to the schematic model for the history of the book presented by Robert Darnton in his ground-breaking essay ‘What is the History of Books?’ (1982), Adams and Barker inverted the focus on people and people’s attitude towards books in the Darnton model to put the book-as-object at the centre.<sup>45</sup> In his

<sup>44</sup> Thomas R. Adams and Nicolas Barker, ‘A New Model for the Study of the Book’, in *A Potencie of Life: Books in Society*, Nicolas Barker, ed., (London: British Library, 1993), p. 5–43.

<sup>45</sup> For a contextualisation of the respective models of Darnton and Adams and Barker in the context of the main theories and general themes that have developed in book history studies over the past century, see: David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery, eds., Chapter 1 ‘Theorizing the history of the

essay, Darnton had proposed a general model for analysing the ways in which books made their way into society, a ‘communication circuit’ running from the author to the publisher, the printer, the shipper, the bookseller and finally the reader. Shifting the focus from human agents to books (or to operations around the book-object), Adams and Barker identified five ‘events’ in the life of a book, which they place at the centre of their model of book history: publishing, manufacture, distribution, reception and *survival* (my emphasis). Adams and Barker critiqued Darnton’s approach to book history as too centred on explicating communication processes, overlooking the significance of books as material artefacts. Conversely, their model offered a reversal on emphasis, not a model that follows ‘how people interact with texts, but rather one that follows texts “whose sequence constitutes a system of communication”’.<sup>46</sup> Adams and Barker’s model for the study of the book has had a long-standing impact: for example, for Leah Price their model rightfully shows that ‘the book’s life neither begins at the moment of writing nor ends at the moment of reading’,<sup>47</sup> a suggestion that I acknowledge in this chapter.

Probably the main advance introduced by Adams and Barker regarding Darnton’s communication model, and certainly the most relevant in regard to my second suggestion in this chapter, is the consideration of the ‘survival’ of books as a determining factor for the study of a book’s life cycle. Adams and Barker identify three stages or types of survival: creation and initial reception (this is the case of books performing the function that originally brought them into existence); books resting without intensive use; and books discovered for collection or research. For any book

book’, in *An Introduction to Book History* (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 7–28. Especially, pp. 12–14.

<sup>46</sup> Adams and Barker (1993), p. 15. Cited in Finkelstein and McCleery (2013), p. 14.

<sup>47</sup> Price (2012), p. 151.

historian or bibliographer, the latter two stages in the ‘event’ of survival involve considering the materiality, physical form and popularity of books.<sup>48</sup> Adams and Barker’s contribution to the study of books through the emphasis on survival was acknowledged by Darnton himself in a more recent essay revisiting his original article.<sup>49</sup> As he admits, Adams and Barker’s consideration of survival makes room for the study of libraries and archives as the locus for the preservation of the life of books. However, Adams and Barker also upgraded Darnton’s communication model by considering the reworking of texts through new editions, translations and compilations, or the metamorphoses of texts through media and over time as important factors in extending the life cycle of a book. In Price, this possibility of considering the life cycle of a book in an extended sense will sometimes be specified in the expression ‘afterlife’, which suggests all those uses of the book-object beyond its reading and the extended material life of a book. For my part, the suggestion that AIDS books can and do survive follows both Adams and Barker’s attention to the material afterlives of books (their survival), as well as Price’s attention to circulation, as a particular transaction in a wider range of operations and rituals surrounding books beyond or apart from their textual value. My own curatorial practice is proof that AIDS books can and do survive, as they insistently resurge, reappear and travel from one medium to another, in a bibliographic network linking texts to books, linguistic structures to materiality, books to other books.

At this point, it is worth emphasizing that my argument about the ability of books to

<sup>48</sup> For instance, according to Adams and Barker’s model, books considered to be very precious will not be read and therefore are more likely to survive. On the other hand, books of small size will have a greater use and will tend to disappear. Predictably, a book will survive more easily if it ends up in a library or institutional archive, especially if the library or archive is governed by a principle of conservation and not mere accumulation.

<sup>49</sup> Robert Darnton, “‘What is the history of books?’ revisited”, in *Modern Intellectual History* 4(3) (2007): pp. 495–508. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S1479244307001370>

survive considers the afterlife of books circulated and accessed as physical objects rather than books read and used in digital format. This does not imply that I sustain an idealised, pre-digital vision of books, nor that I am not fully aware of the radical transformations that the current digital revolution has brought to the circulation of books and to the habits of writing and reading, exemplified by the fact that most of the literature consulted for writing this chapter has been on my computer screen.<sup>50</sup> Rather, at the background of this chapter is the conviction that distinguishing between purely print and digital objects would be counter-productive, not to say naive. In fact, much of the printed material considered in this chapter, whether those cited in the preamble or those discussed in Section 2, *are* digital in one way or another; that is, they participate in electronic and digital technologies to some extent. As Geoffrey Nunberg (1996) suggests in the introduction of his edited volume on ‘the future of the book’, which grew from a now classic conference of the same title hosted by Humberto Eco in the midst of debates about the death of the book, the application of digital technologies was never limited to how books circulate and how we access them, the screen versus paper dichotomy, but introduced radical changes in print publishing as well, as opposed to traditional offset printing.<sup>51</sup> For example, as my own research suggests, many books in the AIDS archives of Spain and Chile produced from the 1990s onward are the result of their publishers’ small presses, activist groups and the like, benefiting from the considerable cost reductions that digital printing – and Xeroxing before that – brought with them. Even Pedro Lemebel, Chilean writer and founding member of the collective

<sup>50</sup> As evidence of my commitment to the possibilities of digital culture, the first publication made in the context of my collaborative project *AIDS Anarchive* was the digital platform [www.anarchivosida.org](http://www.anarchivosida.org). Developed together with Nicolas Malevé, it gathers materials collected during the initial stages of the project. For a recent reference on the various ways in which AIDS and digital media shape each other, see: Marika Cifor and Cait McKinney, ‘HIV/AIDS and Digital Media’, Special Issue, *First Monday* (May 2020, forthcoming).

<sup>51</sup> Geoffrey Nunberg, ed., ‘Introduction’, in *The Future of the Book* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), p. 12.

Yeguas del Apocalipsis, whose books are mentioned in the preamble of this chapter and the work of the collective discussed in Chapter 1, claimed in a 2002 interview to be delighted to see his books circulated in pirated versions (initially as bound photocopies, more recently digitally scanned and printed), a widely-spread circulation practice among the middle and lower classes in Chile, even today.<sup>52</sup> I fully acknowledge that in the current intra- and inter-technological landscape, books often divide their lives between print and digital media, outliving the survival of specific media. However, a definitive exploration of the intertwined lives (and afterlives) of books in print and digital form would require more discussion than this chapter permits. Rather, in this chapter I focus on the circulation and lives of specific book-objects in a creative performance and in exhibitions and similar curatorial responses to the AIDS crisis, as two increasingly recurrent afterlives for books in the current ‘AIDS crisis revisitation’ era.

Thus, my analysis of the role of books in Miguel Benlloch’s work in the coming section focuses on his last major performance *DERERUMNATURA*, developed and presented in the context of my curatorial project *AIDS Anarchiv*.<sup>53</sup> In the work, which is twenty minutes long and structured in four well-differentiated moments, the body of the artist, self-identified as ill, transits through different states until ‘becoming’ an animal, specifically a peacock. My reading focuses on the two moments of the work involving a

<sup>52</sup> Quote in Spanish: ‘Me emociona ver mis textos en la calle, subir a un taxi y que el chofer me lo muestre – el libro, claro – en una versión pirateada. Esto permite que mis libros tengan otro recorrido, más inesperado.’ See: Pilar Morales Allende, ‘Por qué dejé el copete’, in *Lemebel Oral: 20 años de entrevistas (1994-2014)*, edited by Gonzalo León (Buenos Aires: Mansalva, 2018), pp. 124–130: 129.

<sup>53</sup> Technically speaking, the artist’s last performance was *El fantasma invidente* [The Blind Ghost], performed on 16 February 2018 during the opening night of his retrospective exhibition, *Cuerpo conjugado* [Conjugated Body, curated by Mar Villaespesa and Joaquín Vázquez], 16 February – 8 April 2018, Sala Atín Aya, ICAS, Seville. In this more casual work Benlloch walked through the three floors of the exhibition blindfolded and walking backwards. Apart from being premiered in the context of my project, *DERERUMNATURA* was performed on two additional occasions with slight variations.

book-object, in which the artist handles and reads from a song-book in front of a silent audience. As I will show, *DERERUMNATURA* lies within a wider constellation of textual works by the artist, including other books. Following Price, this constellation could be called an ‘interbibliography’, a network linking books to one another,<sup>54</sup> all of which were either produced in response to the ongoing HIV/AIDS crisis or conjure up timely questions of body and disease. In drawing this constellation and mirroring Price’s description of the three operations that define our relationship with books, I will describe the ways in which reading, handling and circulation matter in Benlloch’s work.

### **3.4 Section 2: Bibliographic Constellation: *Miguel Benlloch’s***

#### ***DERERUMNATURA***

Miguel Benlloch’s *DERERUMNATURA*<sup>55</sup> (2016) is a highly ritualised performance work, a ‘chronicle on disease and healing’ (as described by the artist), with the backdrop of his own illness, a hepatic carcinoma, and the austerity policies of Spain’s right-wing former PP government. Structured in four moments or sections, throughout the performance we see the artist transit between different states, first embodying a hospital patient with a militant attitude, who condemns the profit of transnational corporations and its effects on the sustainability of the planet. One of the most iconic moments in the work is the action of puncturing a small globe ball with surgical needles, until the artist transforms and *becomes* a peacock, through a mechanised costume with real feathers that reinforces the ‘surface’ presence of Benlloch’s body.<sup>56</sup> Between states, the artist

<sup>54</sup> Leah Price, ‘Introduction: Reading Matter’, in Leah Price, ed., *PMLA* 121, no. 1, special issue: *The History of the Book and the Idea of Literature* (January 2006), pp. 9–16: 13.

<sup>55</sup> The full title of the work in Spanish is *DERERUMNATURA: Quien canta su mal espanta* [Whoever sings frightens evil away]. According to my own correspondence with the artist, the first segment of the title, in Latin, is written capitalised and as one word. The subtitle refers to a traditional Spanish saying.

<sup>56</sup> See, again, Marxist scholar Esther Leslie’s suggested correlation between non-workday, stylised

reads and sings aloud from a book, an action that occupies two of the four sections of the performance and which will be the focus of my analysis.

In *DERERUMNATURA*, Benlloch reads aloud from a rather idiosyncratic book. It is a do-it-yourself artist book that resembles, by shape and use, a hybrid between a liturgical song-book, or hymn-book, and a medical file. In addition, formed by loose pages and cheap cardboard covers, the book includes a back and front image of a heart alongside the slogan ‘Refugees Welcome’, denouncing the barbed wire fences installed by Spain on its border with Morocco.<sup>57</sup> Interest in books, printed matter and reading in public was decisive in Benlloch’s work, especially in the last two decades. For instance, his 2002 text and related performance *Plúmbea*, presented in Torino, Italy, took as a departing point research on *Los Libros Plúmbeos del Sacromonte* (The Lead Books of Sacromonte) a series of texts inscribed on circular lead leaves discovered in Granada, Spain, between 1595 and 1606, now considered to be sixteenth-century forgeries (I will come back to Benlloch’s interest in circularity and hence, in circulation, later in the chapter). More recently, the act of reading in public structured Benlloch’s work *El detective* [The Detective], 2012, in which the artist reads an autobiographical text aloud in an hour long, conference format performance, which includes reflections on his growing up as a homosexual in Franco’s Spain and the memory of people close to him

clothing and superficiality. See: Esther Leslie, ‘Dreams for Sale’, in *Birds of Paradise: Costume as Cinematic Spectacle*, Maketa Uhlirova, ed., (London: Koenig Books, 2013), p. 32. The dramatic finale in which Benlloch ‘becomes’ a peacock, could well be the subject of a separate chapter.

<sup>57</sup> To raise the issue of immigration and undocumented people in the context of a discussion about printed matter, inevitably conjures up Jacques Derrida’s take on the ‘sans-papiers’, meaning both ‘paperless’ and ‘without legal (paper) identity’, as discussed in the first essay in *Paper Machine*, his book on the future of the book. See: Jacques Derrida, ‘Machines and the “Undocumented Person”’, in *Paper Machine* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), pp. 1–3. Derrida’s rich propositions on the book, which span his career, could well have been an alternative route to the book-object in this chapter. As when, for example, thinking about the future of the book and the supposed substitution of formats, he states: ‘There is, there will therefore be, as always, the coexistence and structural survival of past models at the moment when genesis gives rise to new possibilities.’ Derrida (2005), p. 16. However, I have opted to focus on the cultural approach to the book-object represented by Leah Price, which, in addition, is situated within an academic debate about surface.

that were affected by AIDS. More recently, the song-book featured in *DERERUMNATURA* (specifically, the two texts read from it during the performance) provided the blueprint or raw material for Benlloch's own first poetry book *Cuerpo conjugado* [Conjugated body], published in February 2018, in the context of his first retrospective exhibition, only few months before his death.<sup>58</sup> This interest in the materiality of the written word adds to his long commitment to writing and the communicative and narrative value of the texts, as exemplified by his early collaborations with the literary magazine *Olvidos de Granada* in the 1980s, which included opinion articles on topics such as the state control and regulation of the sexual and affective life of individuals in post-Franco Spain.<sup>59</sup> All in all, in Benlloch the differentiated appreciation between the textual and the material quality of books described by Price, gives way to a more nuanced understanding of 'the text' that acknowledges both its literary and material value. In *DERERUMNATURA*, 'reading' comes to represent both the appreciation of the literary or informational value of a text (its content), as well as its material conditions, exploring the phonetic and affective dimension of words in the act of reading aloud.<sup>60</sup> With regard to the reading value of texts, the poems read during the performance were later included by the artist in his first anthology of poems, reinforcing the importance of the textual value of writing,

<sup>58</sup> Miguel Benlloch, *Cuerpo conjugado* [Conjugated Body, curated by Mar Villaespesa and Joaquín Vázquez], 16 February – 8 April 2018, Sala Atín Aya, ICAS, Seville. Divided into three floors, the exhibition ran through Benlloch's practice chronologically, placing special emphasis on his work in collaboration with others. Among other materials, the exhibition included a showcase related to my collaborations with the artist. The exhibition was highlighted by Paul B. Preciado among his choice of the eight best exhibitions of 2018. See: 'Las exposiciones del año: artistas y comisarios seleccionan sus favoritas', *Babelia-El País* (18 December 2018), accessed 19 December 2019. [https://elpais.com/cultura/2018/12/17/babelia/1545041905\\_671515.html](https://elpais.com/cultura/2018/12/17/babelia/1545041905_671515.html) The opening weekend of the exhibition included a seminar on the practice of Benlloch, where, among others, Preciado himself and my own collective, Equipo re, participated. At the time of closing this chapter, it is scheduled that the exhibition *Cuerpo conjugado* will be presented at the CentroCentro cultural centre in Madrid in the summer of 2019.

<sup>59</sup> Villaespesa (2013), p. 7.

<sup>60</sup> Reading aloud, reciting in public, even singing has been a distinct feature of Benlloch's work since his first 'official' performance in the art world, a 1992 collaboration with performance-art pioneer James Lee Byars, which consisted in singing verses from 'María de la O' (a popular flamenco song) from the inside of a giant golden sphere, conceived by Byars.



especially poetry, within his work in general. In regard to the material dimension of reading, in *DERERUMNATURA*, Benlloch reads, or I should probably say, sings from the book's pages, in a monophonic tone close to the solemn style of a Gregorian chant. Considering it with Price in mind, here reading also means 'doing something with the words', even 'doing things to the words', either by exploring the phonetics and sonority of words spoken in public or by experimenting with the graphic and visual dimension of words, as elsewhere in Benlloch.

As an additional example of Benlloch's commitment to both the textual and material value of language, let's take the work *Sida da* [AIDS gives] (1984/5?) by Las Pekinesas, Benlloch's collective in the 1980s; my own research suggests that this work marked possibly the earliest performance work in response to the AIDS crisis in Spain ever recorded on video.<sup>61</sup> The tape shows an audience gathered to witness an action in the basement of a bar, Planta Baja, the epicentre of the counter-culture in the city of Granada since the early 1980s. In front of the audience, three bodies with cardboard carnival masks are on stage passing a microphone to each other while reciting amusing puns with the word 'sida' (AIDS in Spanish). Emphasising the phonics and linguistic malleability of the word 'sida', here Benlloch and Las Pekinesas seem to point to the textual and discursive dimension of the 'AIDS text', to the ways in which HIV is a 'crisis of signification' that asks to be continually rewritten, to use Treichler's two expressions again. A few years later, in 1990, Benlloch produced a graphic sequel to this work, in the visual poem of the same title, *Sida da*, the first of the series *Epigramas*

<sup>61</sup> For a fuller commentary and images on the work, see: Aimar Arriola and Nancy Garin, 'Global Fictions, Local Struggles (or the distribution of three documents from an AIDS counter-archive in progress)', *L'Internationale Online* 1 (2014), accessed 5 December 2018. [http://www.internationaleonline.org/research/politics\\_of\\_life\\_and\\_death/5\\_global\\_fictions\\_local\\_struggles\\_or\\_the\\_distribution\\_of\\_three\\_documents\\_from\\_an\\_aids\\_counter\\_archive\\_in\\_progress](http://www.internationaleonline.org/research/politics_of_life_and_death/5_global_fictions_local_struggles_or_the_distribution_of_three_documents_from_an_aids_counter_archive_in_progress)

*contra la guerra* [Epigrams Against War], 1990–2018 (Fig. 3, gallery).<sup>62</sup> This series is made of a collection of visual compositions based on words that designate territories under armed conflicts, such as Iraq, Bosnia, Chechnya, Rwanda, Congo or Palestine. Significantly, the series starts with ‘sida’, as if AIDS was a war territory, perhaps picking up the recurring slogan in the early years of the pandemic that ‘AIDS is a war’.<sup>63</sup> The visual poem, composed of a simple yet telling typography, incorporates two question marks, as if Benlloch wanted to question the certainties and consensus around HIV/AIDS, in a use of punctuation that is more expressive, or even performative, than functional.<sup>64</sup> The poem ‘survived’ through time in Benlloch’s own computer but did not see the light of day until recently, at least, to my knowledge, when it was printed and displayed in poster format in the artist’s first retrospective exhibition, as well as in the aforementioned book of poems published for the occasion. In this sequence from spoken word to text as image, from staged body to book, from book to exhibition, the hierarchical distinction between text and book noted by Price gives way to an exploration of the material quality of language in which a single text is subjected to a chain of transformations.

Benlloch’s acts of reading in *DERERUMNATURA* inevitably involve the handling of the book. In the opening section, his reading/singing from the book is preceded by a slow, ceremonious act of presenting the object to the public in gloved hands, adding yet one

<sup>62</sup> Apart from offering continuation to his own performance of the late 1980s, Benlloch’s 1990 visual poem also references a very popular TV campaign launched by the Ministry of Health of Spain coinciding with 1987 World AIDS Day, with the slogan ‘Si da. No da’ and which comically listed the practices by which HIV can and cannot be transmitted.

<sup>63</sup> For example, the slogan ‘El sida es una guerra’ [AIDS is a war] was used by Act Up-Barcelona as the title for a text.

<sup>64</sup> For an in-depth, original study of punctuation from the perspective of its political and artistic use, see: Jennifer DeVere Brody, *Punctuation: Art, Politics, and Play* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008). The book is a cultural reading of punctuation, including questions marks, dots, ellipses, hyphens and colons, which raises important questions about race, gender and identity politics, including insights into HIV-related art such as the dance of Bill T. Jones and his collaboration with artist Keith Haring.

more image to the list of representations of glove-covered hands present in the HIV/AIDS archive, discussed in my previous chapter.<sup>65</sup> At the premiere of the performance, where I was present, Benlloch entered the exhibition gallery dressed in a hospital gown while holding the book in front of his body, at the same time playing a bird-shape whistle in an undisclosed reference to the ‘marea blanca’ (white tide), the 2013 sonorous protests of medical professionals and healthcare users against the austerity policies in the Spanish public health system. Facing the audience, he then changes the blowing of the whistle for singing, in the very same monotonous tone already described, and recites some verses by heart. Simultaneously, Benlloch slightly raises his arms and rotates his trunk to present the book to the audience, in a gesture that mimics the reverential display of the Bible in the hands of the priest within Catholic liturgy,<sup>66</sup> while at the same time pointing to the overall relationship between books and bodies suggested in the preamble to this chapter. He then opens the book for the first time and reads or sings from it. As Price notes, the reading and handling of a book very often go hand in hand, diluting the long cultural tradition that privileges mental operations (reading, studying) over physical operations (‘doing things with the book-object’). Among the physical operations around books represented in Victorian literature and listed by Price are, among others: dusting books, the use of book pages to wrap food and displaying books. In her consideration of ‘displaying’ as a particular instance of a physical operation surrounding books, Price analyses examples as varied as the use of inert or empty books as decorative items, the ‘social display’ of books (as in the act

<sup>65</sup> Not elaborated by Price in detail, the relationship between books and the senses, including touch, take significant attention in particular moments of her study, as when she suggests: ‘Hearing joins sight among the senses that books are not supposed to stimulate’; unlike touch, omnipresent in any process of handling. Price (2012), p. 31.

<sup>66</sup> As part of her consideration of the book-object, Price devotes considerable attention to bibles, including their non-textual uses, such as when bibles are kissed, touched or displayed during the Catholic liturgy. For instance, see: Price (2012), pp. 40, 160. A related type of book studied by Price, resonant to Benlloch’s songbook, is the hymnbook. See: Price (2012), pp. 109, 119–20, 209, 231, 241.

of walking through an urban park or the streets of a city with a book in your hand) or the showcase of the latest literary novelties in the window of a book-store.

To the acts of displaying physical books listed above, Benlloch's *DERERUMNATURA* offers an additional instance of book display: the displaying of books in contemporary performance and art exhibition settings. In two very precise moments of the work, corresponding to the transition from one section to another, the artist momentarily closes the song-book and leaves it on a small wooden base, which is part of exhibition design, in the company of two additional objects: the aforementioned globe and the bird-shaped whistle (Figs. 4 and 5, gallery). On closer inspection, this gesture of putting a closed book to a rest on a base, apparently banal and practically unnoticed by the audience, echoes, I want to suggest, the presence of the ten books presented as closed objects in different areas of the exhibition, included for the significance of their covers and their material capacity to bear witness to the HIV/AIDS crisis in Spain and Chile (Fig. 6, gallery). As noted by Price, in literary representation a closed book is often a synonym for 'unread'<sup>67</sup> or signifies illegibility, as well as, conversely, excessive love for a book, as in the bibliomaniac who cares so much for the book as to leave it untouched. As already mentioned, Benlloch's *DERERUMNATURA* was commissioned and premiered in the context of my project-related exhibition in Tabakalera, San Sebastian. At the artist's request, the performance was carried out in the exhibition halls, not far from the 'Animal' section where documentation of other actions by Benlloch was presented alongside a precise selection of books, convened mainly for the significance of their cover images. Unlike a separate selection of books presented in the adjacent reading room, which included a bibliography relevant to the themes of the exhibition

<sup>67</sup> Price (2012), p. 70.

that was accessible for consultation yet secured with metallic wire, the half dozen books included in the exhibition itself were displayed as closed objects, fixed to the wooden surfaces of the exhibition device, as if asking to be ‘judged by their covers’. Suggested by Price throughout her study, attention to the exteriority of books, such as their binding or their covers, is the defining sign of the change of attitude towards books at the end of the nineteenth century. Relevant for my general rethinking of surface throughout the dissertation, this is also the time, according to Price, where a new tension or competence was established around the interior and exterior of the book.<sup>68</sup> In the Victorian era, the language of interiority and exteriority surrounding books came to signify differently: ‘Cover and content, authenticity and appearance; the language of insides and outsides makes any consciousness of the book’s material qualities signify moral shallowness. Leather bindings rub off on their skin-deep owners.’<sup>69</sup> In Price’s study, acknowledging the exterior material qualities of books, or even their covers, becomes a way of reversing that logic. Similarly, the presence of closed books displayed in an HIV/AIDS-related exhibition could well represent an opportunity to reassess the relation of the inner life of books to the exterior world, between depth and surface.

Insides and outsides of books, exteriority and interiority, surface and depth; the dichotomies mapped onto the book-object are not easy to dilute. Whereas notions of interiority and depth of being are firmly associated with reading and literacy as markers of cultural and social status, but also as guarantors of personality and subjectivity,<sup>70</sup> the language of exteriority places a strong emphasis on the material qualities of a book, on

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>70</sup> For example, this is suggested by Patricia Crain when she concludes that literacy has been historically considered ‘as part and parcel of modern constructions of personality, subjectivity, and interiority’. See: Patricia Crain, eds., ‘New Histories of Literacy’, in *A Companion to the History of the Book*, Simon Eliot and Jonathan Rose (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2007), pp. 467–79: 477.

its 'outsides.' In the dialectic between exterior and interior, between surface and depth, in which lies the book-object, interiority is irremediably associated with the book's contents, its textual value, whereas exteriority and surface call for the material and apparent qualities of a book. But, how do we move away then from the binary oppositions inscribed in the book-object, rooted in long-standing cultural attitudes surrounding print culture and reading? I certainly cannot offer a definitive answer to the problem. But perhaps we could start by trying to recognise both the textual and material aspects of AIDS books, moving away from the dichotomy between surface and depth to embrace a more nuanced consideration of their relationship. After all, as Price suggested, it is unlikely that we can read a book without handling it, or even without noticing its material, external qualities. In my own commentary on the work of Benlloch in this section, attention fluctuates between one end and the other, describing in detail the materiality of the book in relation to his performance, but also pointing to the meanings that reading from inside the book, from its contents, may produce. Whereas my emphasis is placed on the material and apparent qualities of books, there is also an attempt to find some sense of the textual meaning and context of books. Thus, if the book-object does not undo, at least it complicates, even for a moment, the dualisms of the inside and the outside, depth and surface.

As a complex work involving reading and printed matter, among other important topics to which I do not dedicate full attention in this chapter,<sup>71</sup> *DERERUMNATURA* lies within a bibliographic constellation of references in which circulation and circularity are crucial. In fact, the two are central notions in Benlloch's work at large. The circulatory logic of his practice is not limited to the dissemination of his own texts and the

<sup>71</sup> Such as the cuts in the Spanish public health service referenced in the work and the overall role that political commentary has in his work.

documentation of his work in printed or digital format, but is the very basis of his artistic-political ethos. To begin with, both the circular and spherical form are central to his plastic and visual grammar, a result in part of his interest in oriental philosophies and practices such as dervish dances, which have also influenced many of his live actions that include a body, his own, rotating on its axis. Yet Benlloch's commitment to circularity and circulation is not limited to an aesthetic concern; his interest in circulation also translates into political questioning, such as his commitment to the copyleft movement in Spain (with a performance on the topic as early as in 1996),<sup>72</sup> as well as in his activism in favour of the free movement of people and against the recent migratory policies of the European Union. For its part, the circulatory dimension of *DERERUMNATURA* is underlined by the coming together of disparate references within the work, as well as by the many 'afterlives' that the textual materials referenced in the work are already having; *DERERUMNATURA* was the starting point of a set of future adaptations and new works disseminated through various digital and printed media, including two books. Thus, the two texts read/sung by Benlloch in *DERERUMNATURA* now exist as part of his book of poems, *Cuerpo conjugado*, published under a creative commons license shortly before his death, copies of which are currently circulating in an expanded distribution network that includes bookstores, exhibitions and personal copies travelling among friends, from hand to hand. Likewise, the performance was followed by a commissioned text by the artist documenting the work,<sup>73</sup> published in the book *AIDS Anarchiv*, the physical and PDF circulation of which is creating links among people and organisations doing work on HIV/AIDS, as well as those interested

<sup>72</sup> For the performance *Tránsito* [Transit], as part of the larger programme in favour of free culture *La isla del copyright* [The Copyright Island], see: Villaespesa (2013), p. 21.

<sup>73</sup> The text took the form of a 'chronicle' about the disease, a story about Benlloch's own battle against liver carcinoma. In this sense, it is not a commentary on the performance work, but an additional component of the project. For the English version of the text, see: Miguel Benlloch, 'Dererumnatura. A Chronicle of Disease and recovery', in *Anarchivo sida*, Aimar Arriola, Nancy Garín and Linda Valdés, eds., (San Sebastian: Tabakalera, 2016), pp. 225–30.

in broader questions about archives, performance and the curatorial. More recently, a copy of the book *AIDS Anarchive* was displayed as object in Benlloch's first ever retrospective exhibition, *Cuerpo conjugado*. Completing this bibliographical constellation, Benlloch's retrospective was accompanied by the publication of his poetry anthology debut, which includes for the first time the text read/sung in *DEREREUMNATURA*'s opening segment alongside the afore-mentioned HIV/AIDS-related visual poem 'Sida da'. Finally, up to the moment of writing this chapter, that visual poem is presented in yet a new exhibition resulting from my curatorial project *AIDS Anarchive* (November 2018–April 2019), presented at MACBA's Study Centre, Barcelona, facing a wall-size selection of AIDS books that includes both Benlloch's poetry anthology and the book *AIDS Anarchive* (Fig. 7, gallery). Mirroring Adams and Barker's model for the study of the life cycle of a book, both materially and in renewed uses, this chain of metamorphoses of texts through media and over time shows that AIDS-related print culture can and does survive. Furthermore, if as suggested by Price, circulation can shape not only relations between persons and books, but also between different persons including the living and the dead, such as in the bonds created by books in circulation among 'physically absent or socially distant others who touched the same object',<sup>74</sup> the present and future circulation of Benlloch's work will turn his practice into a relational constellation always open to the construction of new bonds.

In leading to my conclusions, I would like to briefly acknowledge the main bibliographic reference behind Benlloch's *DERERUMNATURA*, and a rather notable object in the history of printed matter: the first-century BC didactic poem 'On the Nature of Things', by the Roman poet and philosopher Titus 'Lucretius' Carus, a work

<sup>74</sup> Price (2012), p. 177.



whose name in Latin is referenced by Benlloch in the title of his performance and which I have also chosen to paraphrase as the title of my chapter. The poem, divided into six untitled books, explores Epicurean physics through poetic language and metaphors. In the work, Lucretius explores the principles of atomism, explanations of sensation and thought, and the development of the world and its phenomena.<sup>75</sup> Lucretius's book remains unacknowledged by Benlloch throughout his performance, apart from the Latin title, and I never had a chance to discuss it with the artist during his life. I would like to suggest that *DERERUMNATURA* establishes a rather interesting dialogue with Lucretius's atomist materialism, expressed both in ideas on the body as a divisible and eternal matter embodied by Benlloch in the performance as well as in the 'tactile' relationship he establishes with a series of objects, including the song-book.<sup>76</sup> In addition, the name of Lucretius's book inspired me in choosing the title for this chapter. In my paraphrase of Lucretius's title, 'thing' gives way to 'object'. This replacement of words does not suggest that the terms are interchangeable. Price suggests that the emphasis on the life of books as objects in it-narratives has prefigured contemporary interest in material culture and, in particular, in the world of 'things'.<sup>77</sup> Nonetheless, things and objects respond to distinct ontologies and philosophical traditions.<sup>78</sup> Rather,

<sup>75</sup> For a recent explanation of Lucretius, see Emma Woolerton's series of articles introducing and interpreting *De Rerum Natura*: Emma Woolerton, 'Lucretius' (Parts 1-6)', *The Guardian*, January-March 2013, accessed 28 December 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/jan/21/lucretius-de-rerum-natura-poem>. For a scholarly analysis of Lucretius, see: Monica R. Gale, ed., *Oxford Readings in Classical Studies: Lucretius* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>76</sup> As Argentinian writer Pablo Maurette has recently suggested in his meditations on the sense of touch (2018), which includes a chapter dedicated to Lucretius's poem, for the Roman poet the fundamental element of existence and perception was the sense of touch. See: Pablo Maurette, *The Forgotten Sense. Meditations on Touch* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2018).

<sup>77</sup> As she notes: 'To the extent that eighteenth-century it-narrative could be made to prefigure anything at all, its telos was no longer nineteenth-century fiction but twenty-first-century "thing theory".' Price (2012), p. 108.

<sup>78</sup> Debates around the distinction between objects and things, most of which go back to Martin Heidegger's views on the two, are ongoing and cannot be reduced to a single form. For references for some of these debates, see footnote 3. For example, taking as clue the progressive presence of objects and the interaction of the dancer with objects in contemporary dance, André Lepecki suggests a distinction between objects and things: whereas, objects are subjected to their subordination to the intention, will and subjectivity of the dancer, things 'escape instrumental reason', are 'fugitives in their constitution'. See: André Lepecki, 'Moving as some "thing" (or, some things want to run', in

the exchange of words in the title points to the two foci of this chapter: the status of the book as object, as an ordinary material artefact often overlooked in the HIV/AIDS archive, and the meanings that are established in our relationship with its material surface. Whereas ‘things’ in Lucretius’s title refers to ‘the entire world around us’ (as has been noted by Woolerton),<sup>79</sup> the ‘object’ in this chapter is rather concrete, albeit not necessarily extraordinary or exceptional: the AIDS book. As for ‘nature’, in Lucretius, in addition to being a formal writing resource,<sup>80</sup> the term refers to the innate or essential qualities of that which he is considering: ‘the nature of the entire world around us’. Infinitely more modest in ambition, my chapter looks at the book-object in the specific context of the HIV/AIDS archive, pointing to some of its distinct qualities without necessarily arguing for its exceptionalism and, above all, to the relationships we establish with it.

Furthermore, I would like to suggest in concluding that what connects Lucretius’s book, Benlloch’s forays into printed matter and practically all books in the HIV/AIDS archive is their status as surviving objects. As Maurette recently suggested, the history of Lucretius’s book is also the history of its efforts to survive, being the subject of endless attempts at censorship, detention and destruction, as Lucretius’s immanent view of the world was considered by many a threat, and the book was deemed an anti-clerical

*Singularities.* Given that in this chapter books remain under the influence of selfhood, subjectivity, authorial handling and intention, without necessarily falling into a strictly dualistic approach to the relationship between objects and subjects, my focus on the term ‘object’ is pertinent.

<sup>79</sup> The title of Lucretius’s book has been variously translated as ‘The nature of things’, ‘On the nature of things’ and ‘On the nature of the universe’, pointing to the poet’s ambition in the book of explaining the qualities of the ‘entire world’. See: Emma Woolerton, ‘Lucretius, part 1’, *The Guardian*, 21 January 2013, accessed 28 December 2018.

<sup>80</sup> The formulas ‘On Nature’ and ‘On the nature of’ are widespread title forms among Lucretius’s contemporaries, even tracing back to the poem by Empedocles ‘On Nature’. In fact, as Lucretius scholar David Sedley has noted, the formula is so widespread among fifth-century BC authors that it has been suspected of being a standard title assigned to their works by later scholars. See: David Sedley, ‘The Empedoclean Opening’, in Monica R. Gale, ed., *Oxford Readings in Classical Studies: Lucretius* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 48:87, 73.

manifesto by the Catholic church.<sup>81</sup> As a ‘surviving’ object, Lucretius’s atomistic manifesto was able to reach Benlloch centuries later and inspire his work as well as help him navigate, per my guess, his imminent death, since Lucretius’s book is also a lesson about the pointlessness of fearing death and the afterlife. The books linked to the cultural history of AIDS in Spain and Chile in the 1980s and the 1990s have similarly been able to reach us in the present, saved from recycling, loss or destruction (as in the case of the floods that affected the library of the artist Pepe Espaliú) or have simply resurfaced in the second-hand shop and Internet markets. Much in the same way, Benlloch’s books, textual works, and other forays into print culture, have materialised in different media and been subjected to uses including, but not limited to, reading and hence will now survive his recent death.

### **3.5 Conclusions**

In this chapter I have aimed to advance an argument about the physical life of books in the HIV/AIDS archive beyond, or in addition to, the books’ textual value at a moment in which my own curatorial practice increasingly leans towards formats that exceed or complement the exhibition format, such as publishing. Attending to the three operations that best define our relationship to the book-object – reading, handling and circulation – as proposed by Price, I have argued that books in the HIV/AIDS archive exist in an expanded relational field defined by their textual, material and social lives. This relational field arises from the dynamic, non-competitive relationship between reading,

<sup>81</sup> Maurette’s research takes as its starting point an event that, according to the author, would determine the future of Western science and culture: a meeting of the Catholic Church in the summer of 1549 in which it was discussed which new books would engross the infamous catalogue of forbidden books, known as the ‘Index librorum prohibitorum’. In that meeting in 1549, someone suggested adding Lucretius’s book to the list, but this objection was finally overturned because Lucretius’s ‘pagan mythologies’ were ultimately considered harmless.

handling and circulation, and from the equally dynamic relationship between ‘text’ and ‘book’, exterior and interior, depth and surface. Thus, in the course of this chapter, AIDS books – ordinary objects bearing witness to extraordinary lives – have offered an opportunity to, if not entirely dilute, at least nuance the dichotomy between surface and depth. This opportunity has been expressed in my analysis of the role of the book-object in Benlloch’s work, attentive to his work’s material qualities and contents. Even so, in this chapter the AIDS book has not been turned into a fully readable object, offering a sense of how our presence before particular types of objects can produce knowledge differently, that is, without treating the world of objects as either alien or entirely knowable. Throughout the chapter, my argument has closely followed Price’s own attention to how reading, handling and circulation are depicted and narrated in Victorian novels at a time of great transformations of the book-object that partly explain our relationship with physical books today, and to the ways in which the three operations cannot be thought of as existing independently. This interconnection, I have suggested, stands at the heart of Benlloch’s *DERERUMNATURA*, the artist’s final major performance. In this chapter, I have strived to avoid generalisation and the temptation to produce a totalising diagnosis that could apply to any book in the AIDS archive of Chile and Spain. Thus, I have chosen to focus on the presence of a single book: a rather idiosyncratic song-book in Benlloch’s last work, a pioneer in the national history of cultural responses to the AIDS crisis in Spain and a fundamental figure in the production of other stories of HIV/AIDS. This complex work lies within a wider constellation of textual works and forays into printed matter by the artist, which, in sum, could lead us to question what we understand as the life cycle of a book.

Furthermore, following Price’s attention to the circulation of books and their potential

afterlives, I have argued that AIDS books can and do survive, both physically and in the hybrid forms that continue to be introduced by the digital revolution. I made this suggestion by considering the many ‘afterlives’ that AIDS books prove to have in the current ‘AIDS crisis revisitation’ era. These afterlives are evidenced by the books’ presence as quarter-century-old objects in curatorial responses to the HIV/AIDS crisis such as in my own exhibition, *AIDS Anarchive*. This potent feeling about the capacity for the survival of books has been manifested in the chapter through its outline of how established models for the study of books enables us to recognise the survival of books (Adams and Barker) and in the urgent call to acknowledge the legacy-to-come of Miguel Benlloch’s work, to which I have been committed for over a decade. Written in the months between the worsening of his disease and Benlloch’s death, as I struggled with his imminent loss as well as feeling some emotional relief, this chapter has not only been an analysis of important aspects of Benlloch’s work related to the AIDS crisis and print culture but also a tribute to a friend.

## Chapter 3: On the Nature of an Object: Books in the HIV/AIDS Archive

### Gallery of Images

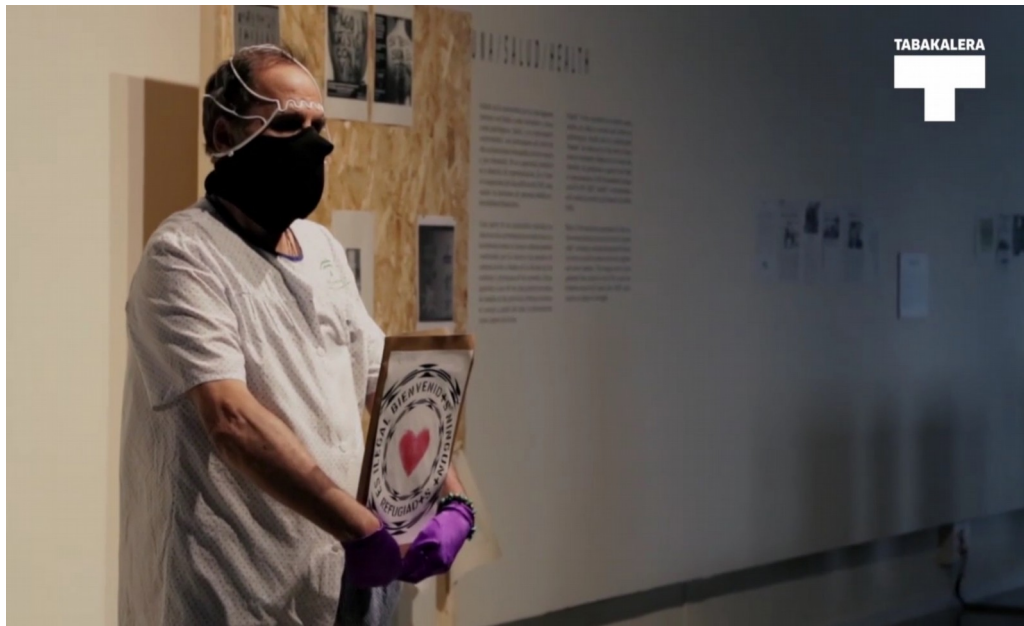


Figure 1. Miguel Benlloch, *DERERUMNATURA*, 2016, Tabakalera, San Sebastian, Basque Country, video documentation of the performance. Stills: © Tabakalera, 2016.

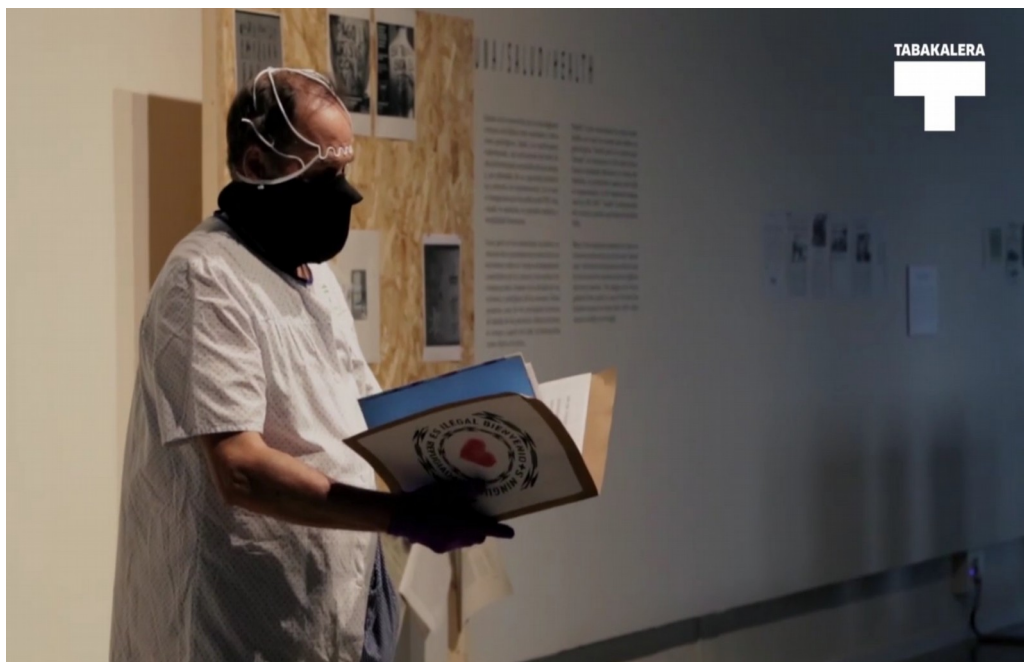


Figure 2. Miguel Benlloch, *DERERUMNATURA*, 2016, Tabakalera, San Sebastián, Basque Country, video documentation of the performance. Stills: © Tabakalera, 2016.

**SI DA DA**  
**SI DA DAS?**  
**SI NO DA NO**  
**DAS?**

Figure 3. Miguel Benlloch, *Si da da*, 1990, visual poem, from the series *Epigrams Against War* (1990-2018).



Figure 4. Miguel Benlloch, *DERERUMNATURA*, 2016, Tabakalera, San Sebastian, Basque Country, video documentation of the performance. Stills: © Tabakalera, 2016.



Figure 5. Miguel Benlloch, *DERERUMNATURA*, 2016, Tabakalera, San Sebastián, Basque Country, video documentation of the performance. Stills: © Tabakalera, 2016.





Figure 6. *AIDS Anarchve* exhibition, Tabakalera, San Sebastián, Basque Country. Installation view (detail) © Tabakalera, 2016.



Figure 7. *AIDS Anarchve* exhibition, MACBA Barcelona. Installation view (detail) © Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA), 2018.

## Conclusions

### 4.1 Introduction

From the perspective of a practising curator, this dissertation considers lesser-known, often overlooked cultural responses to HIV/AIDS from Spain and Chile. This study has as its main context the ongoing ‘AIDS Crisis Revisitation’ (Kerr, 2014; 2016), a term that is being used to characterise the current effort of a new generation of researchers and practitioners to re-evaluate the political legacy of the AIDS archive through the lens of the present. At the core of this study is the fact that too often, this work privileges experiences from, mainly, the US and Central and North Europe, ignoring other realities. This study has responded to this urgent situation by analysing selected case studies from the HIV/AIDS archive of Chile and Spain; it has emphasised the historical and cultural aspects specific to these contexts and the burning theoretical and philosophical questions that these aspects generate. In this study, the ‘AIDS archive’ has not referred to a particular collection of documents, either personal or institutional, but to the sum of published and creative works of cultural analysis of HIV/AIDS in the four decades of the pandemic.

My study has made at least three significant contributions towards destabilising existing knowledge on the AIDS archive:

First, the project delved into two research geographies, Spain and Chile, that are systematically omitted in the ongoing AIDS crisis revisitation, which has been largely

defined by US and North and Euro-centric geopolitical standards. By doing so, my study has broadened the current research ground for future academics and curators interested in doing HIV/AIDS crisis revisitation work.

Second, by focusing on previously unexplored research samples from Spain and Chile, two countries with mirroring contexts in terms of their respective political and cultural trajectories, this study has identified social and historical conditions that call into question the very idea of ‘a crisis’, ‘an AIDS’. The result thus confirms once and for all that the AIDS crisis is not a homogeneous reality. Among the particular conditions emphasised by my study, three contribute to this shift in thought significantly: the juncture between AIDS and dictatorial contexts (i.e. the space in which the work by both Yeguas and Miguel Benlloch developed); the regional character of overlooked responses to the AIDS crisis (e.g. Andalusia, the ‘south’ of southern Europe, which is the general context of Benlloch’s heretofore overlooked practice); and the importance of considering languages other than English as a difference that is played out in my chosen contexts.

A third contribution of this study to work on AIDS is the study’s proposed methodology. Currently, the vast majority of AIDS crisis revisitation projects being conducted are either academic (disciplinary) or entirely creative with little to no engagement with theory. If, as I suggest in the introduction to the practical component of this project, the dialogue between theory and practice, between intellectual work and cultural activism, is constitutive of the AIDS archive, by combining theory and practice in one study, this project has offered a new methodology for academic and curatorial work on HIV/AIDS.

One of the impetuses behind this study is the need to begin rethinking the position that ‘the human’ occupies within the known stories of AIDS; indeed, this need is expressed in the theoretical sources of my project. Conclusively decentring the human/subjectivity/identity crux common in AIDS cultural analysis is a task that goes beyond the scope of this thesis. However, the study has offered an additional stance to the vibrant work that a number of authors working in the crossroads of culture, humanities, and biomedicine (Hayward, Rosengarten) are currently doing on HIV/AIDS from a perspective that assumes the interdependence of the human with other realities (organic, prosthetic, inanimate, and so forth). Many current studies that have addressed HIV/AIDS from a ‘posthumanist’ perspective focus on the so-called ‘post-AIDS horizon’, that is, on the changing meanings of HIV after the emergence of antiretroviral drugs in 1996; nonetheless, the central status of the ‘human’, and the subjectivity and identity politics in the narratives surrounding the first two decades of the pandemic, has remained intact. By investigating materiality and surface in the context of a project that revisits earlier AIDS cultural interventions, this study has begun to expose some of the conditions within which people are imbricated with other beings (such as non-human animals), technologies (such as writing), or objects (such as books) in the AIDS archive.

Methodologically, the project consists of two components: a theoretical dissertation and a practical, collaborative curatorial project – the project *AIDS Anarchive*. The dissertation has been structured around three chapters, each focusing on an overlooked problematic topic in the AIDS archive – animals, touch, and books. Each of these topics have represented an original re-entry point into the HIV/AIDS archive, allowing me to revisit and re-describe from a cultural and philosophical standpoint key aspects of the visual and discursive dimension of the HIV crisis. This work has not been done in

general or abstract terms, but around three particular case studies connected to my practical project.

In addressing and connecting the three topics – animals, touch, and books – with each other, this study has taken the notion of ‘surface’ as a driving concept. Though ‘surface’ is not a term immediately associated with the cultural responses to HIV/AIDS, this study has shown the varied and, sometimes, unexpected ways in which surface is at play in the AIDS archive. Surface has also shaped the overall question that has traversed the whole study, about the ways in which reconsidering our relationship to surface might offer a renewed knowledge of the AIDS archive and even a mode of thinking differently. To answer this question I have engaged in an exercise of ‘surface reading’, that is, in a mode of analysis that is attentive to what is manifested in an image, a gesture or an object, without immediately wanting to ‘plunge into its depths’. This surface reading approach has suggested how the three topics – animals, touch, and books – lie in conceptual proximity in their figuration as surface. As this study has exposed, non-human animals, the sense of touch, and the book-object have all been traditionally rendered as ‘surface matters’, thought of as realities falling within exteriority and surface. Animals, as I have exposed in Chapter 1 (following Broglio), have been historically viewed as ‘living on the surface’, lacking interiority and depth of being. As I have noted in Chapter 2, in the hierarchical arrangement of the senses (proposed by Kant, discussed by Derrida), the sense of touch is valued as the sense that brings us the greatest certainty, as we tend to rely on notions of exteriority, surface, and ‘immediate’ perception. Finally, the book-object, when appreciated beyond or in addition to its reading value, has been historically reviled as pure exteriority, as material surface (as Chapter 3 has outlined by drawing upon Leah Price’s work). Faced with this

succession of disputing meanings, my study concludes proposing a double movement around surface: on the one hand, it proposes the need to challenge views on surface characterised as something fundamentally negative, turning engagement with surface as a mode of productive thinking.

In this sense, my project has to be understood, above all, as a firm commitment to surface matters and surface reading. On the other hand, throughout the study, I have remained alert to the danger of falling into a facile distinction of the surface-depth opposition that is at the heart of symptomatic reading. Instead, the study has replaced the contrast between surface and depth with a multiplicity of surfaces understood as concealing nothing.

Moreover, the examination of the notion of surface carried out in the theoretical dissertation has also had an impact on the practice, establishing a mutual dialogue. Namely, in the foundation and early initiatives of the practice, emphasis was put on explanatory depth. I initially focused on the necessity of dissecting the cultural contexts in which the considered cases were inserted; at this point, the practice showed only limited or poor engagement with the material and aesthetic value of the archive. This weakness is exemplified, for example, in the profusion of explanatory labels accompanying the exhibited archive. However, in more recent actions, such as in the edition and production of the book *Lo tocante*, a stronger engagement with materiality and surface has emerged; evidence of that engagement includes the attention paid to the materiality of the book and to the role that the gesture plays in public presentations. This evolution in my understanding of surface has transformed into a desire to continue thinking about and performing curatorial practice from a position that embraces both

surface reading and material surface.

All in all, I hope that my commitment in this study to surface reading may inspire other researchers and curators doing AIDS crisis revisitation work, no matter their context.

Symptomatic analysis, which states that the meaning of things lies in what they do not say, has largely determined existing, north-bound cultural analysis of the AIDS archive. By distancing itself from the hegemony of symptomatic analysis, this study has found that a new approach to the AIDS archive is only possible if we shift our interpretative gazes into modes of analysis and practice based on attentiveness and receptiveness. In doing so, this study sets a precedent for other practitioners doing work on HIV/AIDS. It prompts others to begin relating to images, gestures, and objects in the AIDS archive in creative ways that do not seek to master the archive or interrogate it for always hidden meanings.

## **4.2 Summary of chapters**

Chapter 1 has introduced one of the most persistent narratives in the first decade of the AIDS crisis: the hypothesis about its animal origin. Taking as a general backdrop the AIDS–animal connection, which as I have suggested is built on long-term cultural assumptions about the construction of ‘otherness’, this chapter analyses a particular set of images of the first action (1988) by the Chilean art and activism duo Yeguas del Apocalipsis, which includes the presence of a mare. Yeguas has been the subject of a growing number of academic and curatorial works in the last decade. Still, the work of the duo tends to be missing in the dominant narratives around the cultural responses to the AIDS crisis as we know it. Whereas existing approaches to the work quite often rely

on the notion of ‘becoming animal’, this chapter has taken an alternative route, reflecting on the images in terms of a ‘contact zone’. This term – and the related expression ‘contact perspective’ – was initially introduced by Mary Louise Pratt (1991; 1992) to refer to encounters between different cultures in asymmetric contexts of power relations. My analysis has followed the more recent use of the term by Donna Haraway and, after her, by Ron Broglio to describe significant exchanges between people and animals. Following both authors, engaging the images by Yeguas from the perspective of a ‘contact zone’ allows me to highlight aspects of the work that are usually overlooked, such as the way in which questions of physicality and surface are at stake. As the chapter progresses, the consideration of the images of Yeguas from a contact perspective also allows me to address my own contact with the images. Unlike an actual encounter between people and particular animals (such as that described by Haraway, based on her own experience in dog training, or that in the works by the artists discussed by Broglio), my encounter with animals in this chapter is second-hand; that is, on the material surfaces of photographs and touchscreens showing images by Yeguas.. Acknowledging this leads me to adjust my initial argument that the HIV/AIDS archive offers the possibility of a ‘contact zone’, or the possibility of a different kind of relationship between persons and particular animals; indeed, I come to claim instead that my contact with the images produces in many ways a doubling of a ‘contact zone’. As I have argued, this doubling or double form of a ‘contact zone’ exposes the impossibility of fully accessing the event represented in the images, while at the same time offering me the conditions to respond to and for the images.

At the heart of Chapter 1 is the conviction, following Ron Broglio, that engaging animal representation means taking ‘surface’ seriously. To the extent to which this chapter has



engaged with particular material surfaces and the ways in which we relate to the images we find there, the chapter adds to Broglio's argument that surfaces can be a place for productive thinking. The second general goal of the project was to rethink our relationship with the field of surfaces and, more specifically, the relationship between surface and depth; in relation to this goal, the chapter has further offered some adjustment to Broglio with Deleuze's (1969) important warning that 'there is nothing more fragile than surface.' In making this adjustment, the chapter has paved the way for us to start moving away from an entirely dialectical conception of the relationship between surface and depth.

In Chapter 2, I move from thinking about and with 'contact zones' in Chapter 1 to considering the implications of 'touch' in the AIDS archive. Specifically, I analyse a recent choreographic work by dancer and choreographer Aimar Pérez Galí. The work analysed addresses the impact of HIV/AIDS on the dance communities of Spain and Chile through, precisely, 'contact' as a method. In this chapter, I have not always moved in a linear way. Rather, per the principles of Contact Improvisation, I have followed my own unexpected movements and changes of direction. The chapter has situated as an initial or overarching hypothesis that the profusion of representations of the sense of touch in the HIV/AIDS archive takes place in the wider context of the subjective and somatic conditions brought about by neoliberalism. In responding to this hypothesis, the philosophical overview of Derrida around the sense of touch and the theoretical contributions of authors like Wendy Brown and Michel Feher on what constitutes a neoliberal condition have been essential, respectively. This hypothesis or starting intuition is quickly narrowed down and expressed in a new way, thereby creating an original entry point into studying the subjective and somatic conditions imposed by

neoliberalism: the invention of choreography in the late sixteenth century is connected to the production of subjectivity and corporeality in the present, specifically through the notion of ‘solipsism’. Philosophically, solipsism is the belief that only the self can be known to exist. Following the theoretical work of André Lepecki – my main source in this chapter – I have shown how solipsism is at the basis of the invention of choreography, often relying on the individual presence of the dancer on stage. Additionally, the solipsist dimension of choreography is ontologically linked to non-kinetic forces: namely, the technology of writing (choreography literally meaning ‘writing of movement’) and the seclusive nature of the dance studio. Since *The Touching Community* does not rely on the individual presence of a dancer on stage (the work always involves at least two or more dancers), my approach to solipsism in the chapter is, precisely, through the non-kinetic, artefactual elements of choreography. But unlike the ideals of solitude and concentration of will with which solipsism is associated, Lepecki, by following Wittgenstein’s considerations of the relationship between solipsism and language, proposes that choreographic solipsism may be a way of opening up to an other. In my chapter, I follow Lepecki’s considerations on solipsism and writing to suggest that ‘touch’ in the context of the AIDS archive also offers a possible opening to an other. As I have described in detail, *The Touching Community* is a work that uses and articulates some of the main non-kinetic elements and forces that are intrinsic to choreography: the technology of writing and the solipsist nature of the dance stage, with its sober scenography and lighting. Its use of these non-kinetic elements aims to suggest that ‘touch’ in the AIDS archive offers the possibility for an opening to an other. In concluding, the chapter has suggested that this ‘other’ in the AIDS archive calls for a ‘community to come’, a community that embraces subjects and objects, past and present time, the living and the non-living. My emphasis in this

chapter on the ‘prosthetic’ aspects involved in *The Touching Community* – namely lighting, spatial design, and the use of the soundscore – have also been a way of emphasising the always mediated character of ‘touch’ (following Derrida's critique to the very possibility of a un-mediated, direct touch). This emphasis is also intended as a reminder of the many various forms of materiality and technicity with which ‘the human’ is coupled in the HIV/AIDS archive.

In discussing some of these couplings, attention to surface in Chapter 2 has been essential, as in my commentary of the material surfaces – bodies, dance floors – at stake in *The Touching Community*. Surface in this chapter has also come into play in my use of description as a practice of critical reading, something manifest in my writing style throughout all chapters, but especially highlighted in this chapter. In Chapter 1, I initiated an effort to gradually distance myself from a dialectical consideration of the relationship between surface and depth; in Chapter 2, this movement translates into engagement with description as a mode of critical analysis (as proposed by Best and Marcus, as well as Lepecki).

My discussion of Pérez Galí's project *The Touching Community* in Chapter 2 pointed to the relationship between writing and choreography. Thus, even prior to Chapter 3, the study had already opened the door to consider the role of writing, and by extension, the role of printed matter within the set of cultural responses to the HIV/AIDS crisis.

Chapter 3 took this consideration a step further by focusing on a rather ordinary object in the AIDS archive: the book-object. As I have exposed, in Spain and Chile, the most relevant contexts for my project, books appear at the top of the type of cultural

responses that AIDS received, which constitutes books as a necessary material of study. Following the important considerations on the book-object by historian Leah Price (2012), Chapter 3 argues that the books in the AIDS archive lie in an extended field defined by reading, handling, and circulation, that is, by the books' textual, material, and social value. Price has been occasionally associated with the field of 'thing theory'. However, her work is more anchored in questions of material culture and human-object transactions, as expressed in literature and culture. As I have noted, my own orientation in this chapter lies closer to the realm of 'objects', that is, mundane material objects under the influence of intention; and yet, I do not necessarily fall into a strict dualistic approach to the relationship between objects and subjects. To put my argument forward, in this chapter, I have analysed the latest major performance work by the late Miguel Benlloch (1956-2018), a Spanish artist and activist. Benlloch produced this work in the context of my *AIDS Anarchive* project, and my study in turn now provides what constitutes the first academic work devoted to his practice. A fundamental name in understanding the homosexual and anti-Franco liberation struggles in Spain, Benlloch is also a pioneer in the national cultural responses to AIDS, even though recognition of his role is still rare. By focusing on two precise moments of the performance, in which the artist reads/sings from a book, I have explored the ways in which reading, handling, and circulation matter in the work. Specifically, the section dedicated to the 'handling' of the book as a performance prop has provided unexpected resonances with Chapter 2 and the ways in which touch matters in the AIDS archive. Additionally, in this chapter I have suggested that AIDS books can and do survive, attending to the many 'afterlives' that books have in their circulation through time and different media, both physical and digital (although, as I have noted, my study has been focused on physical objects rather than books read and used in digital format). To make this suggestion, I have followed

the awakening to the importance of the material survival of books in the last decades in the field of book history (first crystallised around debates about the ‘life cycle’ of books by Adams and Barker in the 1990s). The impetus behind my suggestion about the capacity of AIDS books to survive has been twofold: on the one hand, the centrality that, historically, questions of survival have had in the AIDS archive at large; on the other hand, the urge to imagine a prosperous ‘afterlife’ and sufficient recognition for Benlloch's work after his recent passing.

Chapter 3 overall extends further the consideration of the notion of ‘surface’, and of the dichotomy between surface and depth, that runs throughout the project. To begin with, I point out how Price’s study of the book-object represents a case of ‘surface reading’, in the sense that it shows what books can say as objects, in addition to their literary value. My own analysis in the chapter has attempted to enact a ‘surface reading’ of AIDS books as objects; rather than turning them into a fully readable objects, I try to offer a sense of how our presence before particular types of objects can produce knowledge. The chapter also pays attention to the location where the premiere of Benlloch's performance took place: my exhibition *AIDS Anarchive*, which included closed books exhibited as objects. Thus, a portion of my analysis has led me to consider as well the ways in which a closed book signifies and might even come to complicate the dualisms of the inside and the outside, depth and surface, often associated with books.

### **4.3 Summary of the practice component of the thesis**

The practical component of my thesis is the collaborative project *AIDS Anarchive*,

carried out in the context of my research collective 'Equipo re' alongside Nancy Garín and Linda Valdés. This collaborative project started formally in 2012-2013. But it has been in the years corresponding to my doctoral thesis that it has intensified, with the celebration of a set of public initiatives (detailed in the practical portfolio included as part of the thesis). These initiatives have included three exhibitions, several public engagement initiatives, and the edition and publication of two books. Practice in my project has been a two-way process in which writing and practice are mutually informed. The process of developing the practice has been, mainly, a process of discovery. When I first envisaged this project, the three motifs or figures that animate each of the three chapters – animals, touch, and books – were not present. It has been in the context of the practice, in parallel with the theoretical research, that the three motifs have emerged. For example, it was during the process of preparing the first of these exhibitions, back in 2015, that I became aware of the profusion of representations of animals in the AIDS archive of Spain and Chile. It was in the process of navigating the archive that my gaze and that of the animals crossed (as in the cross of gazes between Derrida and his cat, but in my case mediated by the material surfaces of photographs and computer screens). Around the same time, it was during the process of organising the programme of the performances that would accompany the exhibition in its first presentation that conversations with Aimar Pérez Galí, who would soon begin his choreographic work *The Touching Community*, began to take place. It has also been in the context of the practice, in the separate processes involved in the production of the books *AIDS Anarchive* (2016) and *Lo tocante* (2018), where I have gained additional awareness of the ways in which books have a life in addition to their reading value.

Moreover, the practice has also been the context in which to confirm, first hand, the

ways in which cultural responses to AIDS in the lesser-known contexts of Spain and Chile are very often absent in the dominant narratives surrounding the ongoing HIV crisis. This was the case with the public engagement event held at The Showroom, London, the only practical component developed in Britain and specifically in English. It was here, at the heart of the global networks of influence, that I confirmed that representation of cultural responses to AIDS from Spain and Chile are not only missing, but also have the potential to reach the widest audience.

#### **4.4 Limitations of the project**

This study has followed a sequence of chapters structured around three figures or motifs: animals, touch, and books. Each of these motifs represents aspects of the AIDS archive that had not been sufficiently discussed. And yet, inevitably, due to the scope of the project, there remain elements of the three motifs I have not ventured into, or that I have only ventured into briefly. For example, in Chapter 1, devoted to the relationship between AIDS and animals, I focused on species limited to our perceptual space, thus leaving out the rich world of microorganisms (which in recent years has been subject to vibrant academic work, as noted in the preamble of the chapter). Also due to limitations of scope, questions of race and ethnicity that are important to understanding the animal-AIDS theory in early AIDS discourse are not developed as part of my analysis of cases, although I contextualise and briefly discuss the question in the preamble of the chapter. Chapter 2 has focused on the motif of touch and, in coherence with the rest of the project, has had an eminently cultural approach. A great limitation of this chapter, also due to scope, is that my understanding of ‘the body’ is limited to an anatomical sense of

it, determined by the very invention of choreography. Of important note, originally Chapter 2 was choreographed in a different way. Initially, I had intended to expand my discussion of Lepecki's ideas on solipsism with a commentary on Derrida's views on the phenomenology of Husserl, in which surface and solipsism go hand in hand.<sup>82</sup>

Undoubtedly, including Derrida's considerations on solipsism and surface would have helped me raise important questions for the rethinking of surface-depth relations running throughout my project. However, this inclusion would have shifted my emphasis from a cultural critique of contemporary solipsism to a phenomenological analysis of touch and thereby disrupted the coherence of the chapter. Chapter 3 is economically organised around the work of literary scholar Leah Price on the reading, handling, and circulation of books. As noted in the chapter, due to limitations of scope, my analysis considers only AIDS books circulated and accessed as physical objects. Books read and used in digital format are not considered. An analysis of the radical transformations that the ongoing digital revolution has brought to the life of AIDS books and to the habits of writing and reading could be the focus of a separate chapter.

Additionally, again due to limitations of scope and space, each chapter addresses only a single case study. Many other possibilities of practices and experiences equally under-represented in the known histories of AIDS, or represented under limited critical readings, have been left out, as is the case of the work of Guillermo Moscoso in Chile or Pepe Espaliú in Spain. However, many of these and other cases are referenced and contextualised across the preambles of the chapters.

<sup>82</sup> Derrida's commentary on solipsism in regards to both touch and surface appears as part of his discussion of the phenomenology of Husserl (1913). See: *On Touching*, Chapter 8, "Tangent II," pages 175-78.



Also, of important note, despite the fact that a considerable portion of the HIV/AIDS literature in the last decade (mainly in the US and the UK) has been aimed at making sense of the biomedical, economic, and social changes brought about by PrEP (the Pre-Exposure Prophylactic prevention pill<sup>83</sup>), my project has a pre-PrEP lens. This is so for two reasons: firstly, the focus of my dissertation is on historical cultural interventions around HIV/AIDS in Spain and Chile (that is, pre-PrEP), which still are very often missing in existing stories around AIDS. Second, PrEP – now an established ‘object’ of cultural analysis in the US and the UK – is not yet a preponderant cultural reality in Chile or in Spain. In both contexts, PrEP remains in legal limbo, and its respective Ministries of Health have not yet approved the implementation of this prophylaxis method.

Finally, in relation to the practice component of the project, due to budget constraints and the current political climate, the most visible aspects of the practice – such as the curated exhibitions or the public engagement activities – have taken place mainly in Spain. In Chile, the intervention has been limited to fieldwork and the distribution of the two books published as part of the practice. This issue is addressed more fully at the end of the practice portfolio of the project.

#### **4.5 Opportunities for future development**

This doctoral thesis has created a basis for the future development of my curatorial and research practice in several different directions. One direction is offered by the overall

<sup>83</sup> For example, see, Mike and Rosergarten, 2010; 2013.

theme explored in the project: the cultural responses to AIDS in Spain and Chile. Exploring this theme further would make an important contribution to the ongoing conversation in different parts of the world about the implications of the current ‘AIDS crisis revisitation’. A second potential direction can be found in the ways in which theory and practice connect to each other in this study. These connections open an opportunity to continue exploring the possibilities of practice-based research. Last but not least, as a particular direction towards which this thesis could be further developed, the present study sets a precedent for a fuller study of the concept of surface and surface reading as mode of analysis.

In particular, my study offers at least four opportunities for future development:

1/ Disseminating my theoretical dissertation, either partially or in full in published form. So far, no part of my written thesis has been published, except for an early, condensed version of my literature review published in *Afterall Journal* (2016) as part of a commissioned essay on British activist and film-maker Stuart Marshall’s AIDS-related works. Given the centrality that publishing and printed matter have in my project it only makes sense that the results of my work should have a life in print. Thus, I intend to actively seek opportunities for publishing both in the academic context and in other frameworks closer to curating and visual culture. For example, the arts organisation and publisher *consonni* (based in Bilbao but operating both in Spain and Latin America) has already expressed an interest in publishing aspects of the work – particularly, those dealing with the concept of surface.

2/ Expanding the research on cultural response to HIV/AIDS in geographical terms. My written thesis and the practical component of the project have a clear focus on Spain and Chile. The visibility gained by the *AIDS Anarchive* is already creating opportunities to expand the research and the practice into other contexts. At the time of writing these lines, my collective is in talks to present a new exhibition in Quito, Ecuador, and we may conduct a research residency in Bogotá, Colombia, both in 2020. Equally, there is a growing interest in expanding research to Latin Europe, mainly Italy and Portugal. Thus, a possibility to develop a series of workshops in Rome in collaboration with the Academy of Spain in Rome and the MACRO Contemporary Art Museum has recently arisen. These opportunities would allow me to expand some of the central ideas of the dissertation to these contexts.

3/ Conducting a fuller research into the notion of surface. Surface in this study has not been the central concern, but a ‘driving’ concept. And as such, it has ‘mobilised’ my interest in exploring additional aspects of the relationship between surface and depth, for example, in regards to exhibition making (an aspect only suggested in this study). Over the course of my doctoral years, I have conducted a small number of side initiatives (mainly in the form of workshops) that are neither included nor referenced in the current study; through these initiatives, I have speculated on the implications of engaging with surface from a curatorial perspective. These side initiatives, inconclusive in nature and conducted in contexts such as the X Central American Biennial (San José, Costa Rica, 2016), Bar Projects (Barcelona 2017), and Centro Huarte (Huarte, Spain, 2018), already point towards a direction in which the present study could be extended outside the *AIDS Anarchive* project. A precedent worth considering in pursuing such

work would be 'The Surface Studies Network' run by Rebecca Coleman (Sociology, Goldsmiths, University of London) and Liz Oakley-Brown (English and Creative Writing, Lancaster University), who were especially active from 2013 to 2014. Also, very importantly, further extending my consideration of surface and the surface-depth dichotomy, would allow me to expand the notion of 'the body' that has been at stake in this project, challenging medical knowledge and anatomical notions of the body at the heart of the AIDS archive.

4/ Lastly, the development of this practice-based academic study has also opened the door to the possibility of expanding the contexts of my practice. Prior to the development of this study, my background was in curating and museum work, not academia. In this sense, this doctorate project may mark the transition to a career path that combines curating with teaching and research in or around academia.

Aimar Arriola Olabarria

***Practice Component  
of the Thesis***

# Introduction

The following introduces you to an 'archive of an archive', a portfolio containing selected documentation on my collaborative project, the *AIDS Anarchive*, presented here as the practical component of my PhD. The portfolio is organised chronologically and summarises the development of the project since it began in 2012–2013. This portfolio is complemented with a physical folder, submitted separately, that includes printed versions of this documentation and other materials. Furthermore, this introduction serves as a statement about my curatorial practice, which may offer a sense of my practice within and beyond the written thesis.

It is not easy to reflect on one's practice. I often feel that I lack the vocabulary to discuss what I do. However, I was recently given the opportunity to talk about my curatorial work in an interview for a book on curating in Spain (to be published by the arts organisation *consonni*, currently in preparation). A central question in the interview surrounded the role that collaboration plays in my practice. This question is particularly important in relation to the collaborative project *AIDS Anarchive*, which I have been working on for over six years with my colleagues Nancy Garín and Linda Valdés. Considering collaboration is also important in discussing my curatorial background at large. My first projects as an independent curator were in the context of *Espacio Abisal*, an artist-run, collaborative space in Bilbao with which I was involved in the mid 2000s. *Abisal* was initiated at the end of the 1990s as a critical response to the arrival of the Guggenheim Museum, where I also worked as an assistant curator for almost a decade, including during my years at *Abisal*. Working at both *Abisal* and the Guggenheim simultaneously forced me to wrestle with many contradictions, and the resulting strain ultimately led me to resign from the Guggenheim to focus on my independent work. As I reflect on this experience, I can confirm that my inclination to collaborative work is, consciously or not, a response to the exacerbated individualism and competitiveness that governs such a museum across the board.

In the interview mentioned above, I referred to my curatorial work as a practice of 'making with', an expression that I modestly borrow, again, from Donna Haraway (2016). For Haraway, to 'make with' is to establish non-instrumental, ethical relations with that which surrounds you. To live 'with the world' and not 'in the world' is an opposition suggested by Haraway that summarises the ethical implications of 'making with'.

Transferred to cultural work, making or doing 'with' would imply, in my view, working from a position of reciprocity and support. Considering the concept in the context of my collective, the spirit and implications of 'doing with' extend to all aspects of what we do. For example, in the exhibitions that we have organised as part of the *AIDS Anarchive*, participating artists and collectives are always paid a fee, and whenever possible, we choose not to incur superfluous production costs (such as building walls) so as to redistribute the available budget among participants. These funds have allowed grass-root collectives to invest in the digitising and keeping of their own archives. Additionally, we consider ourselves more than just a curatorial or research group. The three of us met ten years ago in the context of MACBA's Independent Studies Program. Since we started working together, the 'collective' has transformed into a life structure, where affects and work converge. I do not aim to present the collective as an egalitarian utopia of disinterested collaboration. Over the years, we have faced dissent and frustration, misunderstandings, and complex feelings. As much as we have celebrated our joint work, we have had to deal with moments of personal insecurity, unequal workload, or disparate public recognition. But we have worked through these challenges together, with honesty and mutual trust, admitting divergence and emendation.

Within the collective, roles are not explicitly formulated or demarcated and tend to overlap, which is reflected in our reluctance to identify the contributions that each of the three members make to the project. However, I aim to describe briefly what each of us contributes to the work. Coming from very different backgrounds, Linda, Nancy, and I each bring something unique into the project. Independent journalist and researcher Nancy Garín (Chile, 1972) grew up in exile in Colombia and Argentina during Pinochet's regime. Raised in a Marxist household, Nancy's interest in the HIV/AIDS archive is largely connected to ongoing questions of historical memory and social justice. Linda Valdés (Chile, 1980), a museum public programme coordinator with a background in graphic design, is particularly interested in topics of education and mediation in regard to the AIDS archive. Finally, as a Basque practising curator initially trained as a visual artist, I am interested in questions of representation and visibility, as well as in the specificities of the curatorial. I am also the only member in the group doing doctoral work.

In the development of the *AIDS Anarchive*, the three members of the group have not always worked at once, and the different formalisations of the project have implied different degrees of authorship. Nancy

and I conducted the research residency at Reina Sofía Museum, Madrid, in 2012–2013, marking the beginning of the project. A year later, as a representative of the group, I travelled to New York for a curatorial research residency at Visual AIDS before starting my PhD at Goldsmiths. In the last three years, while I have been based in London, Nancy and Linda have done occasional presentations of the project in Spain without me. However, the curation of the exhibitions of the project in San Sebastian, Madrid, and Barcelona has been collaborative, each partner contributing something unique. The materials included in the portfolio demonstrate the alternation between the individual and the collective throughout the project.

A number of initiatives included in this portfolio are public-engagement activities, which points to how I conceive the connection between theory and practice. In my project, practice is not an after-thought or an illustration of a thinking previously produced through writing. Rather, practice is a two-way process in which writing and practice are mutually informed. There are many definitions of public engagement and public engagement research. In my view, public engagement implies moving away from the old model of disseminating research to embracing a more dynamic model of dialogue and exchange. 'Engagement' is, by definition, a two-way process, involving interaction and listening, with the goal of generating mutual benefit. The ways in which my thinking has benefited from interactions with different publics is varied and not always easy to account for. Sometimes, by simply sharing the research, I have regained motivation and even deepened my passion for this project, which has been a long-term and complex undertaking. Other times, by sharing the work within a community of common interest (as in the case of the event held at The Showroom), I have had my ideas challenged and opened myself up to new perspectives.

In a different sense, there is a historical dimension specific to the AIDS archive in the way in which theory and practice connect in my project. It seeks to keep alive the question about the role of cultural analysis in times of urgency. This question was key for early AIDS activists who also happened to be academics, such as Douglas Crimp or Paula Treichler in the US, or Paco Vidarte, member of La Radical Gai in Madrid – the early queer collective referenced in this portfolio. Treichler, for instance, has pointed to tensions between analysis and activism, and to tensions between theory and practice, all of which have traversed responses to the AIDS crisis in its first two decades (in



the seminal book *How to Have Theory in an Epidemic*, 1999). An inspiring quote from Stuart Hall (included in the book's prologue) expresses the challenges of conducting intellectual work in the context of the HIV crisis:

"AIDS is one of the questions which urgently brings before us our marginality as critical intellectuals in making real effects in the world." Hall wondered: "In addition to the people we know who are dying, or have died, or will, there are the many people dying who are never spoken of. How could we say that the question of AIDS is not also a question of who gets represented and who does not? [...] Unless we operate in this tension, we don't know what cultural studies can do, can't, can never do; but also, what it has to do, what it alone has a privileged capacity to do." (Hall, cited by Treichler, 1999, 3-4)

Much has changed since Hall's words. Living with HIV no longer necessarily implies transmission or death (at least not in the Western world). However, the question of who gets represented and who does not, as well as that of the usefulness of the work that we, as intellectuals, academics, curators, and cultural workers, do is as pressing as ever. In my work, I aim to operate by acknowledging tensions between the personal and the collective, analysis and activism, theory and practice, and the specific conditions offered by a PhD-in-practice.

There are a number of things that I hope to gain from working the way that I do. Firstly, through working collaboratively, I hope to offer things the time that they deserve. Experience has taught me that working collaboratively often makes it possible to operate more sustainably, allowing me to distance myself from the dynamics of production and rapid consumption that often characterise cultural work. When we started the *AIDS Anarchive* project in 2012, it was difficult to imagine how long the journey would take. The goal of the project to expand existing narratives around the AIDS crisis by paying attention to often overlooked experiences from Spain and Chile was ambitious, and the possibility of leaning on one other has allowed us to work in the longer term. Secondly, by engaging with others as part of the practice component of my PhD, I hope to increase the general sense of usefulness of my work, while reducing the sense of isolation often associated with academic research. Thirdly, by working collaboratively in the context of community of practice composed of individuals, other collectives, and institutions, I aim to continue building networks of past, present, and future HIV/AIDS histories and knowledge. While this HIV crisis continues, this work will also have to continue.

# 0

## Background Initiatives

### *2012-2014, several venues*

The series of exhibitions comprising *AIDS Anarchive* was preceded by a number of research and public programming initiatives. These initiatives were organized both individually and as part of my curatorial collective; some had begun even before I started with my PhD project. Central to these background initiatives, and marking the formal start of the *AIDS Anarchive* project, was the Research Residency that I conducted at the Reina Sofía Museum in Madrid (2012-2013) with colleague Nancy Garín.

A second key background initiative was my appointment as the 2014 International Curator in Residency at Visual AIDS, New York. This two-month residency, which took place before I began my PhD study at Goldsmiths, involved archive and field work as well as a number of public events. The experience was crucial as it confirmed how under-represented the AIDS stories of Spain and Chile are within established histories of HIV/AIDS in the global North.

A third important background initiative was the seminar *Counter-neoliberal Agency*, which was organized as part of the collective and held at the International University of Seville within the programme 'arteypensamiento' [artandthought]. This initiative was a unique opportunity to bring together, for the first time, pioneers of AIDS activism in Spain and Chile to discuss the legacy of their work through the prism of ongoing neoliberal policies.

### ***Overall project assessment***

Without being able to imagine that I would later start doctorate study, these background initiatives began to lay the foundations of my current interest in revisiting the AIDS archive from a theoretical perspective and setting the limits of my PhD project in terms of geography and practice. These initiatives also point to the belief that a doctoral project can only benefit from having prior, meaningful life and practice experience.

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| <p>"Residuos de Espaliu" (2)<br/>Agente: E Espaliu, 1992/1994</p>                     | <p>Jendarte eleaniztun batean bizi garenez, webgune hau ere eleaniztuna da; gehienbat jatorrizko hizkuntzetan biltzen dituzte edukiak, gaztelaniaz, euskaraz eta ingelesez, zati desberdinetan. Atal edo dokumentu-multzo bakoitzaren sarrera moduan, laburpen edo iruzkin labur bat agertzen da, hiru hizkuntzetan, itzulpenaren aurretik interpretazioa bultzatzeko.</p>  | <p>"Silencio = Muerte" (1/2)<br/>Agente: ACT UP Latino Caucus Afiche, 1996/1997</p> | <p>"Silencio = Muerte" (2/2)<br/>Agente: ACT UP Latino Caucus Afiche, 1996/1997</p>  | <p>"Silencio = Muerte" (2/2)<br/>Agente: ACT UP Latino Caucus Afiche, 1996/1997</p>                      | <p>"Stop the Masas"<br/>Agente: AC Afiche, 1992</p>      |
| <p>"Stop the Church: Misogino."<br/>Agente: A TUP Latino Caucus Afiche, 1996/1997</p> | <p>Equipo re ikerketa- eta ekoizpen-plataforma 2010ean sortu zen, eta artxibo eta gorputzaren politiken arteko gurutzegunean aritzen da lanean. Orain arte, toki hauetan egin dituzte proiektuak eta aurkezpenak, bestak beste: UNIA artepensamiento (Sevilla), Arteleku (Donostia), Museo Reina Sofia (Madrid), Fundació Tàpies (Bartzelona), MACBA (Bartzelona), CCBA (Buenos Aires, Argentina), Loop (Bartzelona).</p>   | <p>"Silencio = Muerte" (1/2)<br/>Agente: ACT UP Latino Caucus Afiche, 1996/1997</p> | <p>"Silencio = Muerte" (1/2)<br/>Agente: ACT UP Latino Caucus Afiche, 1996/1997</p>  | <p>"Silencio = Muerte" (2/2)<br/>Agente: ACT UP Latino Caucus Afiche, 1996/1997</p>                      | <p>"Stop the Masas"<br/>Agente: AC Afiche, 1992</p>      |
| <p>"Stop the Church: Misogino."<br/>Agente: A TUP Latino Caucus Afiche, 1996/1997</p> | <p>Church: Misogino" Agente: TUP Latino Caucus Afiche, 1996/1997</p>  | <p>"Silencio = Muerte" (1/2)<br/>Agente: ACT UP Latino Caucus Afiche, 1996/1997</p> | <p>"Silencio = Muerte" (1/2)<br/>Agente: ACT UP Latino Caucus Afiche, 1996/1997</p>  | <p>"Silencio = Muerte" (2/2)<br/>Agente: ACT UP Latino Caucus Afiche, 1996/1997</p>                      | <p>"Stop the Masas"<br/>Agente: AC Afiche, 1992</p>      |
| <p>De Perlas y Cicatrices<br/>Agente: Lemebel Imagen, 1998</p>                        | <p>Church: Misogino" Agente: TUP Latino Caucus Afiche, 1996/1997</p>  | <p>"Silencio = Muerte" (1/2)<br/>Agente: ACT UP Latino Caucus Afiche, 1996/1997</p> | <p>"Silencio = Muerte" (1/2)<br/>Agente: ACT UP Latino Caucus Afiche, 1996/1997</p>  | <p>"Silencio = Muerte" (2/2)<br/>Agente: ACT UP Latino Caucus Afiche, 1996/1997</p>                      | <p>"Stop the Masas"<br/>Agente: AC Afiche, 1992</p>      |





## THE VISUAL AIDS BLOG

MONDAY DECEMBER 15, 2014

## Global Fictions, Local Struggles

by Alex-Fialho



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Guillermo Moscoso, "Geno-Sida". Action realised in front of the cathedral of Concepcion, Chile, April 1, 2009. Photography: Alvaro Pereda. Courtesy of the artist.

1 / 4

*The HIV/AIDS pandemic continues to be a global phenomenon of unprecedented dimensions and yet, besides the outstanding intellectual and artistic achievements of the last three decades in the fields of cultural analysis and art and curatorial work to make sense of the crisis' impact, the focus has predominantly been on North American and Central-European artists and cultural practitioners.*

*But what of the visuals, aural, actions, ideas, lives, which have often been obscured by the hegemony of the North? How could the study of the aesthetic and performative production around AIDS in the "global South" expand our visual and political cultures?*

*Aimar Arriola was the 2014 Visual AIDS Curator in Residence, and his recent collaborative research and curatorial projects address these issues with a focus on selected case studies from Spain and Latin America. Arriola considers these questions in his recent essay **Global Fictions, Local Struggles (or the distribution of three documents from an AIDS counter-archive in progress)** for 'internationale online. Read an excerpt from the essay's introduction below.*

This text looks at some of the aesthetic practices, representations, collective experiences and performative tactics that emerged in response to the HIV/AIDS crisis in various contexts in the so-called 'South', in order to critically revise the widely accepted notion that the 1980s introduced a new global order, one that was stripped of borders and accessible to all. As Chilean writer Lina Meruane wrote in her recent survey of AIDS-related literature in Latin America—the 2012 book *Viral Voyages*—this fiction of increasing freedom "gradually proved to be an affliction."

In *Viral Voyages*, Meruane connects two previously unrelated spheres: Latin American literature and the disciplinary discourse of illness. Based on literary narratives of AIDS, the book traces the representations and the demand for signification that the pandemic unleashed from the 1980s onwards. Drawing on the work of early cultural critics of AIDS such as Susan Sontag, John O'Neill, Cindy Patton and Paula Treichler, as well as theorists like Richard Sennett who analyse financial or globalised capitalism, Meruane devotes the first part of the book to examining the cultural, social and political context that is inseparable from the discursive production around the pandemic. The second part of the book uses literary texts as evidence, based on works of fiction by authors such as Reinaldo Arenas, Severo Sarduy, Mario Bellatin and Pedro Lemebel, and taking them as a means to reflect on themes such as journeys, political repression and exile that recur in the representation of AIDS in Latin America.

Adhering to Meruane's reasoning, we propose to consider AIDS as both a co-narrative and a counter to globalisation. On one hand, we acknowledge AIDS as the subject that best connotes the new globalised reality that appeared in the 1980s. The geographical scope of the virus, its synchronous emergence around the world, and the rhetoric of flows and communication typical of the period, reinforced the idea of the world as a network of interconnected short distances. On the other hand, we also propose to think of AIDS as the great fault in the globalisation paradigm: the fault that can point out the promises of democratic equality that the global world-system failed to live up to.

The text is based on an archival logic; by means of description and commentary, it seeks to distribute and provide access to 'AIDS documents' drawn from an archive under construction. These documents are part of the [Equipo re AIDS Anarchive](#), an ongoing research project and program of activities that revolve around the process of producing a 'counter-archive' or 'anarchive' of AIDS politics that, for the first time, take into account practices that played out outside of the English-speaking and Northern European contexts, and that have so far focused on cases from Chile and Spain. Our aim is to challenge the stability of the dominant Anglo- and Euro-centric narratives around the historiography and visual culture of HIV/AIDS through the description, commentary and distribution of a limited selection of "local" responses to AIDS that confront the hegemony of the North.

### **AIDS As A Global Design**

In our approach to AIDS, we freely apply the now-classic model developed by Walter Dignolo to analyse the links between coloniality and globalisation, considering AIDS as a "global design" that originated from a whole range of "local histories" (Dignolo 2000). In most of the academic and curatorial work produced between the late 1980s and early 1990s around the aesthetic practices, representations and performative tactics that grew around the pandemic, the analysis of the visual culture of HIV/AIDS has almost exclusively focused on the English-speaking/ Eurocentric world. As a result, a few "local histories" have become the norm while many others have been pushed into the background.

The expansion of the neoliberal model lies at the heart of the 'global design' of AIDS. The changes resulting from new technological and communications developments led to a transformation of the forms of expansion inherent to financial capitalism, which demanded the liberalisation of the functions of the State for the benefit of private interests. This dismantling of the welfare state took place gradually in the 1970s and 1980s, in collusion with authoritarian regimes (as in the case of Chile, for example, which is now considered the main laboratory for the implementation of neoliberalism), and at the same time as the emergence of the first known cases of AIDS.

The convergence of the expansion of globalised capital, the various democratic transition processes in dictatorial contexts such as Spain and Chile, and the emergence of the AIDS crisis provoked a double dynamic, a simultaneous opening up and restricting of freedoms. As dictatorships waned in favour of a democratic future and new omens raised 'feathers and skirts', the arrival of AIDS was a step backwards in the certainty of freedom, setting new limits for an entire sector of the population. As Lina Meruane says, "these changes in the culture of capitalism and its new technologies of communication and travel would allow dissident sexualities to articulate a utopian notion of freedom beyond the borders of the repressive, homophobic nation" (Meruane 2014). It was a libertarian fiction or conjecture that thrived in the post-dictatorial contexts of transition in countries



such as Chile and Spain, and that, as the Chilean artist and writer Pedro Lemebel said—this time drawing on cinematic fiction—was precisely what was "gone with the wind of AIDS."

### Transition As Disruption

We first noticed the precise intersection of the visual and performative production around HIV/AIDS with the policies of the dictatorship in Spain, by way of omission rather than attention. This occurred during the project *Social Dangerousness*, co-directed by Beatriz Preciado as part of the 2008–2009 edition of the MACBA Independent Studies Programme (PEI), which addressed the dissident cultural production of the last stage of Franco's regime and the early years of democracy, coinciding with the first cases of HIV/AIDS in Spain (the first case was diagnosed in Catalonia in 1981 by Doctor Caterina Mieras). Our contribution was a collective research project on a group of activists and cultural producers in Andalusia who had been active in the anti-Francoist struggle and the early gay liberation movement. The research did not really manage to come to terms with the impact of the emergence of AIDS in post-dictatorial Spain, and in some sense it reproduced a historical inertia: it failed to examine the initial indifference of the traditional left towards the crisis and the early gay movement.

This oversight came to light unexpectedly, and somewhat sadly, during a filmed conversation with three of the subjects of our research: feminist researcher and activist María José Belbel, and activists and cultural producers Joaquín Vázquez and Miguel Benlloch, co-founders of the cultural production company BNV Producciones. The discussion revolved around how the construction of the official narrative of the transition to democracy had overshadowed other possible narratives, defending civil society's active resistance against the repression of Franco's regime. Suddenly, as they reminisced about the early activities of feminist and gay liberation movements, all three interviewees wistfully acknowledged that they had "not been equal to the task" (the expression is ours) of responding to the early days of the AIDS crisis.

When news of a "gay cancer" started reaching Spain in the early 1980s and the first cases began to be diagnosed, the gay movement was going to "look the other way," fearing further social stigmatisation and the loss of brand new freedoms (Llamas and Vila 1997). The participants of our conversation recognised this, and one of them summed it up in a subsequent e-mail as follows: "Politically, one of my greatest regrets is not having fought during the time when the AIDS pandemic began. I think it was because we had already done a lot of fighting and we had built up a lot of grief." This reference to the political and emotional fatigue involved in living in a dictatorship as a way of explaining the difficulty of organising early responses to AIDS is not exclusive to Spain, and also came up

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Global Fictions, Local Struggles — Visual AIDS

repeatedly in interviews and conversations we had in Chile. The particular forms that AIDS politics took in post-dictatorial contexts should be understood as disruptions—breaks and interruptions—in the standardised and seemingly irrefutable design of globalisation.

The intersection between post-dictatorial politics and the emergence of AIDS also raises certain questions that have not yet been dealt with in the analysis of the visual culture of HIV/AIDS, and that are key to our research: What specific performative and visual production strategies emerged in post-dictatorial Chile and Spain, to mention two examples, when they collided with AIDS? What forms of somatic resistance emerged from the collision between dictatorship and AIDS politics? How are they linked to notions of trauma, memory and affect?

Read the rest of Aimar's essay [here](#), where he uses three case studies to unpack these questions.

## THE VISUAL AIDS BLOG

SATURDAY FEBRUARY 1, 2014

# "I think no one will be shocked if I say that there is a hegemonic AIDS and a peripheral AIDS"

by Visual AIDS-Interview



Aimar Arriola at recent "Equipo re" activities

Working with Residency Unlimited, Visual AIDS is proud to host a curatorial residency program. This March we welcome Aimar Arriola, an independent curator from the Basque Country. In the interview below Arriola talks about collaboration, what it means to counter an archive, and what he is looking forward during his time in New York.

**Visual AIDS: Your background is rich with collaborative projects, including the Decolonizing Knowledge and Aesthetics research group. What does working collaboratively mean to you?**

<https://www.visualaids.org/blog/detail/i-think-no-one-will-be-shocked-if-i-say-that-there-is-a-hegemonic-aids-and>

12/6/2017

"I think no one will be shocked if I say that there is a hegemonic AIDS and a peripheral AIDS" — Visual AIDS

Aimar Arriola: I believe that collaborative work is a good way to hold off the privileges of individual identity, of any identity. Many have theorized that the main factor of neoliberalism –our current context, but also a factor in the emergence of AIDS– is an exacerbated individualism. The most effective way to confront neoliberalism is to break with the logic of identity and build strategic partnerships between different political subjects and institutions. I try to apply this lesson to my own curatorial practice. For instance, three years ago I co-established *Equipo re*, a collaborative research platform built around the interest of its participants to approach the art space through critical action. *Equipo re* is aimed at reconnecting theory and practice, and binding forms of organization and collective knowledge from different fields. This is the very context in which my current line of work on aspects of the cultural production that characterized AIDS politics, outside the Anglo Saxon and Western and Central European contexts, emerged.

**Visual AIDS: In your project description for your time at Visual AIDS you talk about wanting to build a counter archive, or Anarchive of the politics of AIDS. In thinking about this, does this mean you see an archive existing that you are then countering? And if so, what is included in this archive (you are countering)?**

AA: My time at Visual AIDS will be connected to *AIDS Anarchive*, an independent research and production project initiated in 2012 in the context of *Equipo re* (the above mentioned collective). Closer to what has been called "queer archive activism" than to scholarly work, the project, is designed and deployed as a process of producing a "counter-archive" or anarchive of AIDS politics—so far with a focus on certain contexts of Latin America and Southern Europe, but soon expanding to other research geographies. The "archive" we are countering is not an actual archive or an existing physical archival location. Rather, we are referring to the set of discursive, editorial and exhibition productions around AIDS in the last two decades, which have mostly addressed the practices developed in the centers of the West.

In 2012–2013, our project has been developed as a platform for the production of interviews, discussions, seminars, and screenings to collectively address AIDS in the context that witnessed its birth—the neoliberal system, so far with a focus on certain contexts of Latin America and Southern Europe, but soon expanding to other research geographies. We have been invited by Vladimir Cajkovic, last year's Visual AIDS curatorial resident, to give *AIDS Anarchive* its first physical configuration, in the context of his exhibition project, "Kontrollraum [AIDS]" (Germany, 2015).

**Visual AIDS: Like us, you have been working on questions around art and AIDS and representation. But differently from Visual AIDS you have been doing it from a non-US perspective. What is something surprising you think a**

<https://www.visualaids.org/blog/detail/i-think-no-one-will-be-shocked-if-i-say-that-there-is-a-hegemonic-aids-and>

### **New Yorker deep into the AIDS movement would be surprised to learn from your point of view?**

AA: I think no one will be shocked if I say that there is a hegemonic AIDS and a peripheral AIDS. From the vantage point of 2014, we can easily see that the analysis and examination of the visual and aural cultures of AIDS since the late 1980s and early 1990s has been largely limited to an Anglo-Eurocentric, colonial canon. This brings up difficult questions regarding who is and who isn't remembered, memorialized and archived, to which I somehow seek to give an answer. For example, in a recent 25th anniversary collection of scholarly writing on the history of ACT UP (Quarterly Journal of Speech 98, February 2012) Professor Alexandra Juhasz states that "When ACT UP is remembered ["as the pinnacle of postmodern activism"] –again and again and again– other places, people, and forms of AIDS activism are disremembered." With my work I seek to acknowledge the practices and experiences around AIDS that have been obscured by the political and economical hegemony of the global North.

A New Yorker deep into the AIDS movement might be interested to know that, while video as an artistic medium and form of activism appeared in North America and Western Europe during the early gay liberation movements and second-wave feminism of the late 1960s, in Spain and other contexts with post-dictatorial regimes, such as Chile and Brazil, it would take another two decades or more for the critical use of video among artists and activists to gain strength. In fact, in those contexts, the consolidation of video would take place in parallel with the expansion of globalisation and its economic driving force, neoliberal policies; in other words, the very context in which AIDS appeared. This was further elaborated in a recent public program that I co-curated in the Museo Reina Sofía in Madrid, as a closing of my research residency there:

<http://www.museoreinasofia.es/en/activities/video...>

### **Visual AIDS: What do you look forward to in coming to New York?**

AA: I lived in the city for almost a year over a decade ago and have not been back since then, so I hope to reconnect with some people and possibly make new friends. I am also seeking to establish lasting connections with curators, artists, activists and organizations committed to AIDS/queer politics from contexts other than mine.

## Image captions

0.1 *AIDS Archive* online platform [Web page screenshots], retrieved from [www.anarchivosida.org](http://www.anarchivosida.org). This free access platform, developed together with artist and data-activist Nicolas Malevé, gathers materials collected during the initial stages of the project *AIDS Archive*. The website will be updated again soon after a period of technical revision.

0.2 *Video as an AIDS counter-archive*, 11th December 2013, Reina Sofía Museum, Madrid [Web page screenshot], retrieved from <https://www.museoreinasofa.es/en/activities/video-aids-counter-archive> Organized with Nancy Garín as a culmination of year-long research residency at the Reina Sofía Museum, this film and video programme brought together artistic and activist responses to the AIDS crisis in Spain and Latin America. For most of these responses, this programme marked the first time they were presented in a museum context.

0.3 *Agenciamientos contra-neoliberales: coaliciones micropolíticas desde el sida* [Counter-neoliberal Agency: Micro-political coalitions since AIDS], UNIA Universidad Internacional de Andalucía, Seville, Spain, 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> October 2013. Photograph: Equipo re. My collective organized this international seminar to bring together pioneering people doing work on AIDS both in Spain and Chile, as well as participants who establish a dialogue with the AIDS archive from a more contemporary perspective. The image included in the portfolio shows a meeting between local and Chilean representatives of grass-root organizations working towards HIV/AIDS prevention.

0.4 Aimar Arriola and Nancy Garín, 'Global Fictions, Local Struggles,' *L'Internationale Online*, Issue 1 (2014), accessed 21<sup>st</sup> January 2019. [http://www.internationaleonline.org/research/politics\\_of\\_life\\_and\\_death/5\\_global\\_fctions\\_local\\_struggles\\_or\\_the\\_distribution\\_of\\_three\\_documents\\_from\\_an\\_aids\\_counter\\_archive\\_in\\_progress](http://www.internationaleonline.org/research/politics_of_life_and_death/5_global_fctions_local_struggles_or_the_distribution_of_three_documents_from_an_aids_counter_archive_in_progress) Essay commissioned by 'L'Internationale', a confederation of six major European modern and contemporary art institutions and partners. The text included in this portfolio corresponds to an abbreviated version published on *The Visual AIDS Blog*.

0.5 'I Think No-one Will be Shocked If I Say That There is a Hegemonic AIDS and a Peripheral AIDS,' Visual AIDS interview with Aimar Arriola, *The Visual AIDS Blog*, 1<sup>st</sup> February 2014, accessed 21<sup>st</sup> January 2019. <http://visualaids.org/blog/detail/i-think-no-one-will-be-shocked-if-i-say-that-there-is-a-hegemonic-aids-and> Interview conducted by Theodore (ted) Kerr, at the time Program Director at Visual AIDS, ahead of my arrival to the organization as the 2014 International Curator in Residence. Years later, I co-organized with Kerr the public engagement event at The Showroom, London, which is included in this portfolio.

# 1

## ***AIDS Archive Exhibition***

*Spring 2016, Tabakalera – International Centre for Contemporary Culture, San Sebastian, Basque Country, Spain. Curated by Aimar Arriola, Nancy Garín and Linda Valdés.*

The first iteration of the *AIDS Archive* exhibition was presented in the city's 2016 European Capital for Culture programme. The exhibition included the work of over 25 individuals and organizations from Spain and Chile as well as other contexts of Latin America. Inspired by the deconstructive philosophy of science of Donna Haraway, it presented HIV/AIDS as a 'natureculture' and was structured around three sections: Animal, Death, and Health. Each section was curated by a different member of the collective.

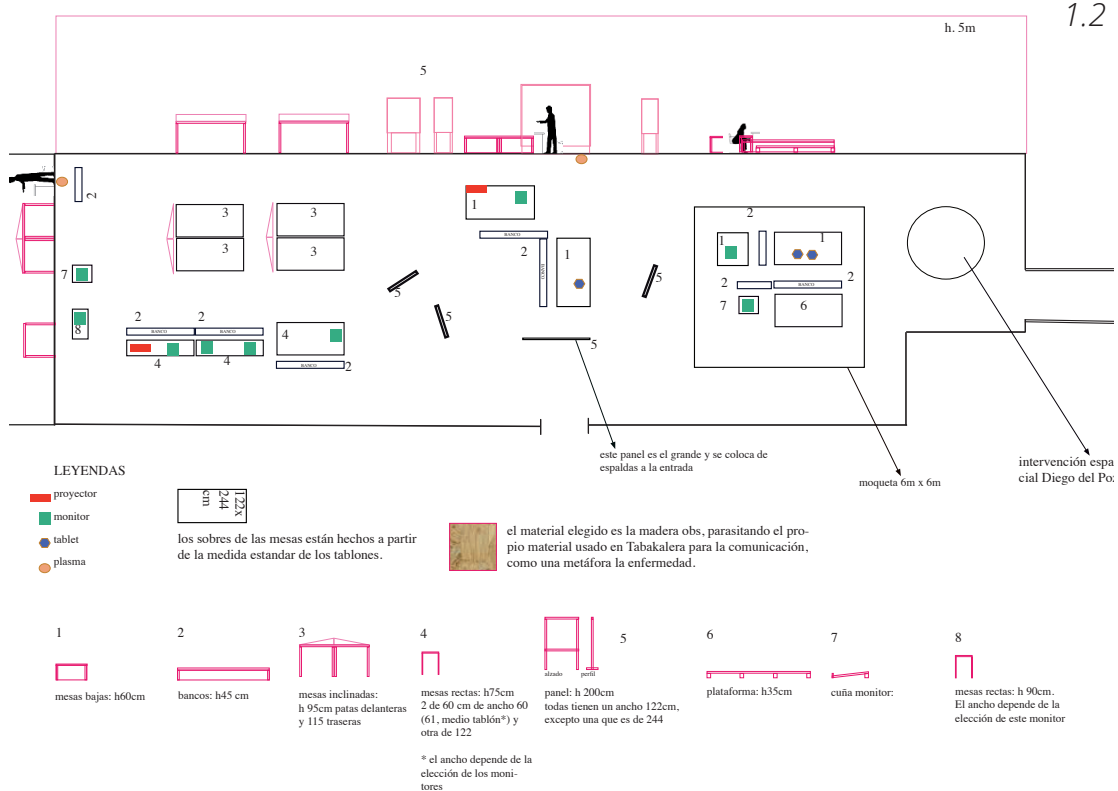
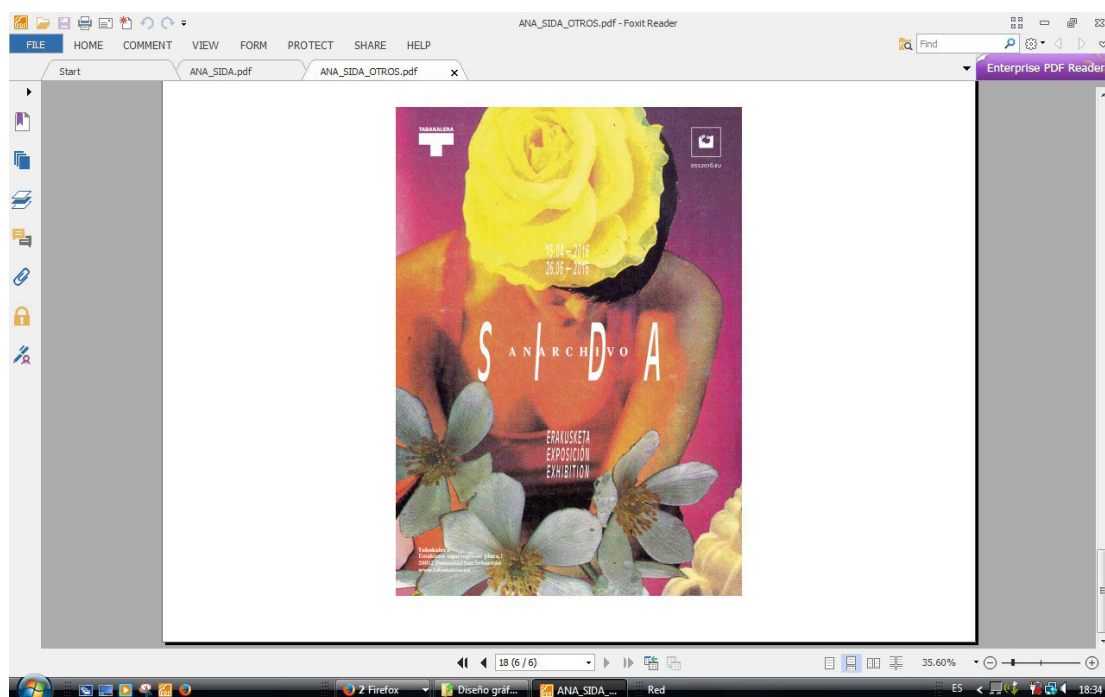
The exhibition was designed by Spanish artist Carme Nogueira. At the time of spatialising the works and documents that made up the exhibition across the length and width of the horizontal and vertical wooden surfaces that formed Nogueira's display, I was unaware of the importance that 'surface' would have in the written component of the PhD project.

The exhibition was reviewed by post-colonial scholar María Iñigo-Clavo for *Afterall Online*. It was the only Spanish exhibition featured in the London-based journal that year. A separate review in English was published in *Concreta*, an art and visual culture journal co-founded by Spanish curator Nuria Enguita (co-curator of the 31 Sao Paulo Biennale).

### ***Overall project assessment***

The main goal of the exhibition in Tabakalera, the first of a series, was to give visibility and material constitution to the 'archive' produced until that moment. Although the exhibition met this goal, the result was perhaps too heterogeneous on a content level and lacked specificity (geographical, chronological). This aspect has been reconsidered in subsequent presentations of the exhibition.













## Eroticising the Archive: AIDS Anarchive at Tabakalera

María Iñigo-Clavo



*Pepe Espaliú, Carrying, 1992. Performance view, Donostia/San Sebastián, 26 September 1992.*

*Photograph: Ricardo Iriarte. Courtesy Arteleku/Diputación Foral de Gipuzkoa*

The onset of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the 1980s undermined the liberalisation of social attitudes to sexuality and gender that followed the collapse of dictatorial regimes in the Iberian Peninsula and many Latin American countries.<sup>1</sup> As my generation was coming of age in late 1980s Spain, HIV/AIDS was said to amount to slow death, marginalisation and shame, and was heavily marked with the stigma of sexual promiscuity. And so, in the midst of an ‘epidemic of signification’, our sexuality was built on panic, disinformation, rumours, blame and mistrust.<sup>2</sup> Intimacy was radically politicised, and fear and silence were made accomplices.

If, as Michel Foucault argued, the power that represses a libidinous act is by nature erotic, the response to the repression ushered in by the HIV/AIDS crisis must also be an erotic one.<sup>3</sup> Such was the premise of a recent exhibition at Tabakalera in Donostia/San Sebastián, Spain, titled ‘Anarchivo sida’ (‘AIDS Anarchive’), which displayed activist pamphlets, videos, performance documentation, books, press clips and online materials documenting the cultural responses to the crisis from the 1980s onwards, which the curatorial collective Equipo re (Aimar Arriola, Nancy Garín and Linda Valdés) has been gathering since 2012.<sup>4</sup> The archive didn’t pretend to be systematic or exhaustive, and neither was its geography: most materials were from Spain and Chile, with additional contributions from Colombia, Brazil and Guatemala. Instead, intimacy, love and eroticism were here harnessed against the scientific and ‘hygienic’ order of the archive. Visitors were greeted by the farewell video that Brazilian artist Rafael França made with his partner in 1991, days before his death. In it, the two are locked in an infinite embrace, documented in close-up shots. Another work by Diego del Pozo, commissioned for the exhibition, explored touch and interaction by inviting viewers to place their arms into velvety casings. Importantly, ‘AIDS Anarchive’ also attempted to look beyond the experience of white, homosexual men by addressing how other communities have responded to the crisis, namely indigenous peoples (e.g. Sexual Dissident Movement MUMS) and feminist and lesbian activist groups (e.g. LSD in Spain and Lesbians in Action in Chile).



Pepe Miralles, *Dinero=Poder=Muerte (Money=Power=Death)*, 1993. Installation view, Antigua Lonja de Contratación de Benissa, Alicante. Courtesy the artist

The exhibition was divided into three sections – ‘Animal’, ‘Death’ and ‘Health’ – each of which was displayed on platforms of increasing height, designed by artist Carme Nogueira, which emphasised the viewer’s bodily relation to the materials on view. In order to access the exhibits, the visitor had to empathise, to some degree, with each of these realms; it became a body that approached, sat down, peaked out. The documents displayed in the ‘Animal’ section showed how alterity is shot through with associations with the animal world: from scientific theories tracing the origins of the pandemic to African monkeys with a view to dehumanise HIV-positive men and women, to the recuperation of such homophobic terms as *mariquita*, *mariposón*, *oso* (which literally translate as ‘ladybug’, ‘butterfly’, ‘bear’). The Chilean collective Yeguas del Apocalipsis (Spanish for The Mares of the Apocalypse) pioneered such political identification with the animal world, as manifested in their representation of butterflies, mares, reptiles, birds, flowers, feathers and animal hides. Their very first action in 1988 was to ride through the University of Santiago de Chile, mounted nude on a white horse.

The second section, titled ‘Death’, focused on the ongoing process of collective mourning that extends from the 1980s until the present.<sup>5</sup> Many of the documents and works displayed in this section considered the repercussions of living with death. In 2005 Chileans Francisco Copello and Claudio Marcone performed a festive and glamorous funeral procession, in anticipation of Copello’s death one year later. That same year, Guillermo Moscoso and Fabian Crovetto convened a gathering to light candles for those who had passed, a common practice in Chile to commemorate the disappeared during the dictatorial repression.

The final section, ‘Health’, displayed materials interrogating given definitions of health and normalcy. Pamphlets by the Chilean activist group CEPSS (Spanish acronym for Education and Prevention for Public Health and AIDS) documented their campaign to change the language framing the epidemic, for example by replacing the term ‘sick bodies’ with ‘people living with HIV’. In the video performance *Tajo* (*Cut*, 1996), Águeda Bañón opens a wound in her shoulder and licks it in a self-healing ritual. In another video, Andrés Senra interviews activist groups such as Radical Gai, LSD and RQTR, which were responsible for the introduction of queer critique in Spain in the 1990s.<sup>6</sup> Radical Gai, for example, campaigned to foreground questions of sexual identity and the HIV/AIDS crisis within leftist social struggles. This also led them to denounce the homophobic policies of leftist liberation struggles in Cuba and Mexico and to critique the colonialist commemorations of the quincentenary of the so-called discovery of Latin America from a queer perspective.

Central to the exhibition was Pepe Espaliú’s performance *Carrying* (1992), in which the artist’s body was

24/6/2017

Afterall • Online • Eroticising the Archive: AIDS Anarchiv at Tabakalera



'No to the psychotherapeutic holocaust', Santiago de Chile, 1990s. Courtesy MUMS Movimiento por la Diversidad Sexual - Chile



Installation view, 'Anarchivo sida', Tabakalera, Donostia/San Sebastián, 2016.

carried through Donostia/San Sebastián by a chain of people. Together with *SIDA DA (AIDS GIVES)*, 1984) by the collective Las Pekinesas (Miguel Benlloch, Tomás Navarro and Rafael Villegas), it was one of the first artworks to address the HIV/AIDS crisis in Spain. *Carrying* played an important role in the exhibition because it rooted it in a local context but also because of its collective methodology, which resonates with Equipo re's own approach. Espaliú's performance originated in a workshop at Arteleku and led to further group discussions through the foundation of the collective The Carrying Society (1992–98). Similarly, 'AIDS Anarchiv' neither began nor ended with the exhibition presented at Tabakalera; the exhibition is part of an ongoing effort to build affective and political networks.<sup>7</sup>

If modern archives manufactured the other from a hygienic distance, 'AIDS Anarchiv' attempted to transgress that distance by mobilising dissident bodies and emotions; fluids, feelings, blood, sexuality, desire and love were all called upon to undo the archive's neutralising effect. The eroticism that the political manipulation of the epidemic in the 1980s and 90s aimed to suppress returned here with a vengeance: to point to the perversity of modernity itself. In the process, the notion of contagion that so

<https://www.afterall.org/online/eroticising-the-archive-aids-anarchiv-at-tabakalera#WU4zD9ThCt8>

marked the politics of fear of the 1980s was repurposed to shed light on the political, affective and aesthetic affinities that traversed national and identity boundaries.




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#### Footnotes

1. These include the Carnation Revolution of 1974 in Portugal, the transition to democracy in Spain following the death of General Francisco Franco in 1975, the end of the military dictatorship known as the National Reorganisation Process in Argentina in 1983, the gradual democratisation of Brazilian institutions between 1974 and 1985, and the end of Pinochet's military dictatorship in 1990. ↑
2. Paula Treichler, 'AIDS, Homophobia, and Biomedical Discourse: An Epidemic of Signification', *October*, vol.43, *AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism*, Winter 1987, pp.31–70. See also Ann Cvetkovich, *Archive of Feeling, Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2003; and Douglas Crimp, *Melancholia and Moralism - Essays on AIDS and Queer Politics*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2002. ↑
3. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction* (1976, trans. Robert Hurley), London: Allen Lane, 1979. See also Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies*, London: Verso, 1997, p.48. ↑
4. See Nancy Garin and Aimar Arriola, 'Global Fictions, Local Struggles (or the distribution of three documents from an AIDS counter-archive in progress)', *L'Internationale Online*, see: [http://www.internationaleonline.org/research/politics\\_of\\_I](http://www.internationaleonline.org/research/politics_of_I) ↑
5. See Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004. ↑
6. Andres Senra is a member of the research group 'Archivo Queer?' housed at Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía (MNCARS). MNCARS also supported Equipo re's research. ↑
7. The exhibition also established an ongoing dialogue with the local context through performances held at Tabakalera and group discussions held at different spaces throughout the city. See: <https://www.tabakalera.eu/en/anarchivo-sida-equipo-re-exhibition> ↑

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#### Comments





Pepe Espaliú, *El nido*, 1993. Cortesía Centro de Arte Pepe Espaliú.

## Gently revealing, caring hard, all touching... Anarchivo Sida at Tabakalera

Laura Vallés

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"*Sida la flecha. Suma y sida. Sida del vaticano... quien va a Sevilla, perdió su sida...*" is a fragment of the audio that tags along with me like a soundtrack on my walkthrough of *Anarchivo Sida* at Tabakalera. The performer-actioner Miguel Benloch, together with Tomás Navarro and Rafael Villegas—aka Las Pekinesas—are the artists featured in a video of the *SIDA DA* performance (1985) held in the epicentre of counterculture in Granada in what is possibly the earliest artistic action documented in Spain on the issue of the AIDS. The video shows three masked people on a stage of Planta Baja passing the microphone from one to the other, punning on the word *sida* (the Spanish word for the illness) a term coined just three years before.<sup>[1]</sup> Like a discourse of distorting mirrors, this parodic exercise in wordplay from the underground anti-Franco resistance of the period serves as the starting point of my visit to the exhibition.<sup>[2]</sup> Curated by Equipo re (Aimar Arriola, Nancy Garín, Linda Valdés) the display shows material compiled over the last three years on a plethora of cultural, visual and performative engagements with the politics of HIV/AIDS from the global south, with a particular focus on cases studies from Spain and Chile.

The practice developed by artist, activist and cultural producer Miguel Benloch, oversteps the boundaries of gender politics, engaging with issues that have more to do with the cultural traditions, definitions and codes of Andalusian and Spanish identity, in ways serving as a hinge that connects some of the positions from which the exhibition's curatorial discourse is narrated. His piece *Miguel de la O* (2004) is a *cutre* reincarnation of the young gypsy woman María de la O. And I'm using "cutre" not in its officially sanctioned meaning which speaks of seediness and shabbiness, but as a knowing nod to *Cutre Chou* (1984-2004): a club for live shows, transvestites and irreverent political agitation that came into being against the backdrop of the activist coalitions in the eighties. In this case embodied by Miguel, the fake protagonist of *María de la O*—the song by Estrellita Castro—is presented beside a poster from the activist collective La Radical Gai which reads *Operación mariquita el 92: gais contra el 92* (1992). "Marica", "mariquita" and "mariquilla" are all diminutive forms of María, but they also designate an "effeminate man with little strength" ever since the still-accepted definition of *marica* was introduced in the dictionary in the eighteenth century. But it is not only the *mariquitas*, also the Spanish word for ladybirds, of La Radical Gai or Benloch's protest images of *La Cerda* (The Sow) that speak to an animal condition. The same can be said for the photos of the early actions by Las Yeguas del Apocalipsis (The Mares of the Apocalypse) in which the duo of artists formed by Pedro Lemebel and Francisco Casas are naked on horseback in the School of Arts and Humanities in Santiago de Chile during the student protests in 1988. Or also in the final performance in the early nineties by the multifaceted Pepe Espaliú *El Nido* (The Nest) in which the artist is on a platform built around a tree, fluttering about like a bird while taking off his clothes and letting them drop.<sup>[3]</sup>

The animal question within AIDS discourses has to do not only with the politics of representation of practices associated with the resistance of the body—which understand it as a critical potential to articulate other ways of narrating—but also with the medical narratives that related the origins of the epidemic with certain species of primates, mainly from Africa.<sup>[4]</sup> The man-animal binomial

evokes the scientific and gender narratives that Donna Haraway revealed in the late eighties in her reading of the *National Geographic* on primates in which she used the figure of Koko the gorilla to advocate the abolition of the boundary qualities imbued in terms such as nature and culture, fostering an oblique and transversal focus in opposition to Western narratives. On the contrary, Jacques Derrida, despite not defining himself as a feminist “mammal” —as Haraway did in an endeavour to revoke the limits that reason bestowed on living organisms—<sup>[5]</sup> worked with the “animal question” from another optic. Derrida challenged the anthropocentric quality that defines philosophy as a discipline and from which the other is defined, based on difference. Xavier Antich argued that “from the introduction of animality as a philosophical problem in Gilles Deleuze until the consideration of non-human animals for the articulation of a theory of social justice, as proposed by Martha C. Nussbaum, thinking over the last four decades has put the debate on the nature of the animal at the centre of reflection on the human being.”<sup>[6]</sup> In the West, this human-centrist position is what allows us to terminate the life of an animal, as it has no consciousness, by representing this otherness that separates it from thinking man. In this line, the video *Temporada de caza* (Hunting Season) by Rita Moreira from 1988 explores the theme of violence, collecting opinions from people in Sao Paulo on the murder of a theatre director who was killed as a result of homophobic violence a year earlier. These stories take on special relevance today, thirty years later, when unfortunately we see how polarity, extremes and hatred have been accentuated in societies that are falling back on fear as one of the core axes of their political and media discourses.

A different kind of violence permeates the work of Agueda Bañón, one of the few women artists engaged with this problematic since the appearance of AIDS in Spain. Her video *El Tajo* (The Slit), from 1996, is a long take in which a face partially out of the frame licks a self-inflicted wound. The blood flows from the body and re-enters it by means of the tongue in an intimate, anonymous circular exploration that seeks to reconcile itself with reality through the spectator’s gaze.

Information as the object of combat is unquestionably central to the exhibition narrative. Equally salient is precariousness as political constitution. According to Judith Butler, precariousness as an ontological condition is predicated on the fact of being mortal and therefore vulnerable by depending one on the other. But it also has to do with the idea of subsistence and fragility produced by the issue of class, censorship and fear. In this regard, the use of printed informative or educational material takes on special interest and accentuates the position of resistance from artistic appropriation. Posters like *El virus que navega en el amor* (The virus that navigates in love) (1991/2016) by Miguel Parra Urrutia, a selection of awareness-raising campaigns by ACT UP Barcelona and ACT UP Latino Caucus in the early nineties, the images of collective parties against the dictatorship at Teatro Esmeralda in Santiago de Chile and the publications by CEPSS, among many other documents, all help to contextualise the multiplicity of formats (re)presented in the exhibition.

Bodies instrumentalised from semiotics, from the politics of representation of life but also of death. Biopolitical bodies that, from ritualisation and resistance, flesh and text, also recall how the pharmaceutical industry contributes to the construction and capitalisation of contemporary sexuality. Health and illness are part of a binomial that serves to measure the body’s functional, productive and capital capacity and to this end they account for another section in the exhibition, together with death and the animal. Without going any further, the documentation of the installation *Dinero=Poder=Muerte* (Money=Power=Death) (1993) by the artist Pepe Miralles reveals the polarised consequences of the only drug for people with HIV that existed at the time (Retrovir), bringing into play financial speculation on health while at once reminding us of what Paul B. Preciado recently said about the announcement of clinical tests for Truvada with seronegative patients from high-risk groups: “In the last twenty years gay sexuality has changed from being a marginal subculture to being one of the spaces most highly coded, regimented and apprehended by the languages of neoliberal capitalism.”<sup>[7]</sup>

Perhaps this is one of the reasons why Aimar, Nancy and Linda decided to narrate the stories of the archive in another way, from a counter-archive optic that takes neoliberal malaise<sup>[8]</sup> as a framework for action and for resistance, only to then introduce velvet in *Suaves se revelan, ásperas cuidan, todas se tocan...* (Gently revealing, caring hard, all touching...) from 2016, an invitation by Diego del Pozo Barriuso to imagine the possible subjectivities of the spaces located in the grey areas of the binomials man-animal, health-illness or life-death, touching on the exhibition’s three main blocks. In this sense, *Anarchivo Sida* positions itself on the side of proximity, of light—entering naturally through the windows of the hall, so rare in the white cube—but also, and especially, the sense of touch, to move away from the formal axis running through the display (the archive) and thus take one remove from the underhanded violence which is the very *raison d’être* behind the construction of grand narratives.

At a time of rereadings of the artistic manifestations that took place in the eighties and introduced postmodernism into Spain, the curatorial gesture advanced by Equipo re is particularly intriguing: it presents a twist that seeks to reactivate the memories of past combats over and above party militancy, while at once representing an early and paradigmatic example of resistance to the consolidation of neoliberalism in the frame of an increasingly globalised South. With the purpose of reinforcing this idea of affective proximity, the collective unfolds a dispositif conceived by the artist Carmen Nogueira which is made up of a chipboard support that underscores the relationships of the documentary recordings with the bodies of the visitors. The different structures proposed by Nogueira invite the spectator to keep changing position —sitting, bending down, touching?— as he/she advances along the walkthrough, disobeying the classic canons of institutional mediation while at once the archive also disobeys its conventional function of law and order, of collection, and turns the spotlight onto a system of networks that afford new modes of reinforced collectivity in the exhibition’s tie-in programme of activities that seeks to activate the intervening bodies.

As Aimar Pérez Galí, the dancer, performer and researcher and one of the agents in the events that overspill the exhibition hall, all combat must pass through the body and it is the body that is cut



across by this chain of affects, experiences and memories.<sup>[9]</sup> In the same way, *Anarchivo Sida* understands that the responsibility for telling a recent story differently entails the creation of one of those chains of attachment and empathy. On this occasion, it is the counter-archive that is cut through and activated by the experiences of the visitors as if it were a living organism. The encounters with the documents, the processes generated by relationships with them, and the exchange of knowledge inside and outside the exhibition hall—in the form of the web,<sup>[10]</sup> of actions, and of responses like, for instance, this text—can help to place affect at the centre of the discourse and foster a dialogue that reminds us that, similarly to what happens with the thirty-plus years of AIDS, to assert a critical attitude to the world one has to learn to skirt around ingrained stories in order to turn them on their heads.

#### Notes:

<sup>[1]</sup> The era of infection by HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) and AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome) started in summer 1981 when the US institute CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) called a press conference to announce five cases of pneumonia for *Pneumocystis carinii* and cases of Kaposi's Sarcoma. In 1982 the new disease was given the name Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) a name which, after discovering that the illness was not exclusive to the gay community, replaced other earlier and dodgier choices like Gay-related Immune Deficiency (GRID) and the 4-H Club (Haitians, haemophiliacs, homosexuals and heroin addicts). The first case of AIDS in Spain was recorded in October 1981.

<sup>[2]</sup> BENLLOCH MIGUEL: *iiiLarga vida al Cutre Chou!!!*, in *Dig me out*. Discursos sobre música popular, el género y etnicidad by María José Belbel and Rosa Reitsamer, accessible online at: [http://www.digmeout.org/de\\_neu/benlloch.htm](http://www.digmeout.org/de_neu/benlloch.htm)

<sup>[3]</sup> Part of the material of his mythic performance *Carrying* from 1992, destroyed in the floods at Arteleku in 2012, can be seen in the video *Azken Bideoa* by Iñaki Garmendia (2002) on view in the exhibition.

<sup>[4]</sup> "About HIV/AIDS, The Virus", World Health Organization, accessible online at: <http://www.who.int/hiv/about/hiv/en/>

<sup>[5]</sup> See Who are Rosi Braidotti and Donna Haraway? Accessible online at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lZYPDg16fvc>

<sup>[6]</sup> ANTICH, XAVIER: "La cuestión animal", *La Vanguardia*, 27/10/2010. Accessible online at: <http://www.lavanguardia.com/cultura/20101027/54059306310/la-cuestion-animal.html>

<sup>[7]</sup> PRECIADO, PAUL B. "Condomes químicos", *El Estado Mental*, 16 June 2015. Accessible online at: <https://elestadomental.com/especiales/cambiar-de-voz/condones-quimicos>

<sup>[8]</sup> *Todo el malestar que se puede soportar...* (2016) is the title of one of the works by Diego del Pozo Barriuso, a drawing-diagram depicting a cartography of the main phenomena of neoliberal malaise.

<sup>[9]</sup> PÉREZ GALÍ, AIMAR: *The Touching Community. Proyecto de creación y escritura*. Accessible online at: <http://www.cce.org.uy/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Dossier-TheTouchingCommunity.pdf>. For more information on the programme of activities, see: <https://www.tabakalera.eu/es/anarchivo-sida-exposicion-equipo-re>

<sup>[10]</sup> See <http://anarchivosida.org>

## Image captions

1.1 *Anarchivo sida*, 15<sup>th</sup> April to 26<sup>th</sup> June 2016, Tabakalera International Center for Contemporary Culture, San Sebastian, Basque Country, preliminary exhibition poster. Designed by Joaquín Gáñez, based on AIDS-related publication from Chile: *Nunca me imaginé* (Concepción, Chile, CEPSS, 1995). The image condensed the starting suggestion of the exhibition that AIDS is a 'natureculture.'

1.2 Carme Nogueira, *Anarchivo sida*, exhibition design proposal. Courtesy of the artist. As a research-based sculptor working from a feminist perspective, Nogueira has long been engaged in rethinking the normative aspects of the exhibition format.

1.3 *Anarchivo sida*, 15<sup>th</sup> April to 26<sup>th</sup> June 2016, Tabakalera International Center for Contemporary Culture, San Sebastian, Basque Country, installation views  
Photographs: ©Tabakalera, 2016. The exhibition displayed the 'archive' on vertical and horizontal surfaces that invited proximity and cited two formal archetypes, namely the work table and the notice board.

1.4 María Iñigo-Clavo, 'Eroticising the Archive: AIDS Anarchive at Tabakalera,' *Afterall Online*, 14<sup>th</sup> September 2016, accessed 21<sup>st</sup> January 2019. [https://www.afterall.org/online/eroticising-the-archive-aids-anarchive-at-tabakalera#.W\\_KhTOKCEUF](https://www.afterall.org/online/eroticising-the-archive-aids-anarchive-at-tabakalera#.W_KhTOKCEUF) Review of the exhibition that focused on the intimate and libidinal character of it as opposed to the presumptions of objectivity and distance characteristic of the archive.

1.5 Laura Vallés Vilchez, 'Gently revealing, caring hard, all touching... Anarchivo Sida at Tabakalera,' *Concreta*, 20<sup>th</sup> July 2016, accessed 21<sup>st</sup> January 2019. <http://www.editorialconcreta.org/Softly-revealing-coarsely-caring> Review of the exhibition that concluded by stressing the dimension of 'living organism'.

# 2

## ***AIDS Anarchive*** **Public Programme and Book**

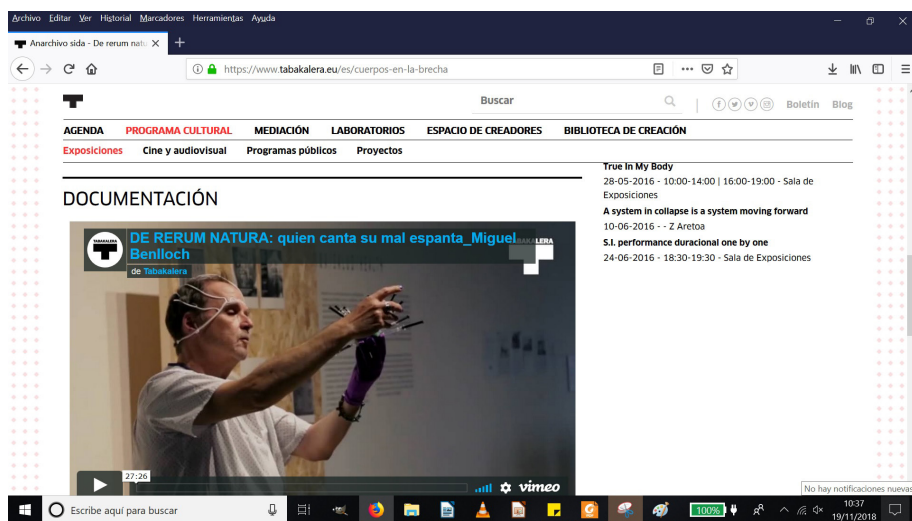
*Spring 2016, Tabakalera – International Centre for Contemporary Culture, San Sebastian, Basque Country, Spain. Organised and edited by Aimar Arriola, Nancy Garín and Linda Valdés.*

The *AIDS Anarchive* exhibition in San Sebastian was accompanied by a public programme of parallel activities. Resulting from the conception of research and curating as sites for the articulation of different positions and fields of knowledge, the programme included workshops aimed at schoolchildren, conversations and debates including local and international speakers, special tours by HIV/AIDS activists, and a performance programme, which was primarily conceived by me. It presented three specially commissioned works, including two works that have informed Chapters 2 and 3 of my written dissertation, namely Aimar Pérez Galí's *A System in Collapse is a System Moving Forward* – the prologue of his fuller choreographic piece *The Touching Community* – and Miguel Benlloch's *DERERUMNATURA*.

The overall public programme was the basis of a resulting publication, simply titled *AIDS Anarchive*. The book – published in Spanish, English, and Basque – included short commissioned texts by the protagonists of the public events reflecting on the process, as well as comprehensive visual documentation of the exhibition. The book has had a dedicated circulation, with particular emphasis on grass-root libraries and documentation centres in Spain and Chile, as well as on artistic and educational institutions around the world.

### ***Overall project assessment***

Both the public programme and the book were funded by the city's programme as the 2016 European Cultural for Culture. In this sense, an unresolved tension between the spectacular dimension of the festival and the more politically engaged approach of the proposal traversed the project. This tension prompted meaningful discussions with everyone involved.











2.2

TABAKALERA

**GORPUTZAK ARRAKALAN**  
**CUERPOS EN LA BRECHA**

**A System in Collapse Is a System Moving Forward**

Aimar Pérez Galí

+

Oscar Dasí

2016/06/10







**E N G L I S H  
T R A N S L A T I O N S**

- 209 — *A Forest, a Tree*. Pablo Berástegui  
 210 — *Making the Forgotten Visible*. Ane Rodríguez Armendar
- 211 — *An Introduction*. Equipo re  
 214 — *About Blank*. Franco Berardi (Bifo)  
 217 — *An Embrace at the AIDS Anarchive*. Julen Zabala  
 218 — *The Registers of Silence*. Sejo Carrascosa
- 220 — *ANIMAL*
- 221 — *The Word Turned Sweatshirt*. Tabakalera Mediation Te:
- 224 — *DEATH*
- 225 — *A Chronicle of Disease and Recovery*. Miguel Benlloch  
 231 — *Dear Jon*. Aimar Pérez Galí  
 234 — *True in my Body*. Jesús Jeleton
- 236 — *HEALTH*
- 237 — *health/knowledge/power*. Josebe Iturrioz  
 239 — *Exhibition Device*. Carme Nogueira  
 241 — *The Expiatory Anarchive*. Harkaitz Cano
- 244 — Biographies

A N  
I N T R O D U C T I O N

Equipo re  
(Aimar Arriola, Nancy Garín, Linda Valdés), 2017

For over three years we have worked on the *Anarchivo sida / AIDS Anarchivo* project as a process to compile, analyse and activate part of the cultural production developed around HIV/AIDS beyond the hegemonic geopolitical framework (USA/Central Europe). The project approaches HIV/AIDS not only as a medical epidemic, but as a change of visual, affective and economic paradigm in complete conjunction with the globalisation process and the consolidation of neoliberalism. In the process we have given particular attention to our own contexts, or to those where we have lived and worked, such as Chile and Spain, including the Basque Country.

*Anarchivo sida* began in 2012-2013 as part of the Research residencies at the Reina Sofía Museum in Madrid; from the very outset it was tackled as a project to create networks where importance was given to long-term collaboration, rather than to the amount of materials consulted and agents contacted. One of the first research stops was precisely San Sebastian, in 2013, as part of the *Marginalia* programme around the personal library of artist Pepe Espaliú (1955-1993) at Arteleku, the city's pioneering and no-longer-existing art centre. The presentation of *Anarchivo sida* in San Sebastian as part of the European Capital of Culture 2016 programme – almost 25 years after Espaliú's workshop at Arteleku in the summer of 1992, birthplace of his famous "Carrying" action – must be simultaneously understood as a continuation of Arteleku's legacy and as the very impossibility of that continuity.

*Anarchivo sida* at Tabakalera was never meant to be an 'archive exhibition', but a process whereby the archive takes shape in the exhibition itself. Having considered the many ways of addressing *Anarchivo sida*,

this time we turned the focus on the nature-culture divide, a fundamental concern today in the field not only of critical thought, but also of politics. We were interested in studying this relationship from three entries offered by the documents themselves: the historical tendency to divide and separate humans from non-human animals; the cultural dimension of death; and health, understood as the convention according to which certain bodies are considered to be normal and others as diseased. The exhibit assembled artistic productions and documents from the mid-1980s until today, from contexts including Chile, Colombia, Brazil, Guatemala, Andalusia, Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia and the Basque Country.

We invited the artist Carme Nogueira to come along on the adventure of devising the 'exhibition', to join us in imagining the possibilities and limitations of embodying the curatorial lines by means of an exhibition device. A slow process of searching for materialities, dimensions and scales to enable approximation to the materials. The decisions taken, the use of original documents and reproductions, the centrality of video, the care taken over the exhibition supports, were all based on the question of how to display an archive. The result is not a closed answer, but one of the myriad possibilities of exploring the question.

However, the impossibility of keeping *Anarchivo sida* within the limits of the exhibition space prompted the decision to create a locally-focussed activation programme running throughout the duration of the exhibition. A programme to boost one of the essential concerns of *Anarchivo sida*: to prevent the project from going down in the annals as a mere exercise in historicism. The activities sought to expand the starting point – HIV/AIDS – towards problems related to the political representation and management of the body which, we believed, required urgent attention. In fact, the programme of activities largely

articulates this publication containing graphic documentation from the exhibition and texts commissioned for the occasion from the protagonists of the activities.

#### T H E P U B L I C A T I O N

It is conceived as if it were a proper activity report: a study of the development and results of *Anarchivo sida* during its presentation in San Sebastian in response to a request by the host institutions that a report be drawn up at the end of the project. This said, our 'report' is far from the conventions of quantitative and qualitative evaluation expressed in a single voice. Instead, we present a soft and collective 'report' where absence of memory is allowed.

The book opens with a re-publication: a text from August 2016 by the Italian philosopher and activist Franco Berardi (Bifo), on fear culture and communication, in which the author links the emergence of AIDS to the expansion of digital technology and the production of subjectiveness in times of Internet. Originally published in the online medium *Internacional Errorista* and accompanied by a selection of *Anarchivo sida* documents in response to an invitation by the editors, here the text functions as a preface pointing towards one of the starting points of our research: the coincidence in time between the appearance of AIDS and consolidation of the neoliberal model.

The publication continues with texts on the programme of activities by its protagonists. The *Names Workshop* stemmed from the consideration that to name and to be named is a political matter. The activity, conceived and developed in collaboration with Tabakalera's Education Department, invited us to revise and claim the right to the names that affect us. For its part, the programme of talks and conversations, *health/knowledge/power*, locally coordinated by the trans feminist

activist Josebe Iturrioz, took as its starting point the change in relationships between medical knowledge and bodies prompted by the first AIDS activism, seeking to address broader subjects such as the environment and nutrition; functional diversity; the legal system and migration. *True in my Body* was the experience brought to us by the artist Jesús Jeleton in response to our invitation to generate an intervention at *Anarchivo sida* based on the idea of 'listening protocols'. In his text, Jesús recalls the experience, which occupied the entire opening hours of the exhibition, with the participation of friends and artists Miren Jaio, Héctor Rey, Susana Talayero and Maia Villot. Lastly, the performance programme *Cuerpos en la brecha* invited us to explore the body from "the divide between discourse and materiality" (Peggy Phelan), based on strategies such as the explicit body, animality as resistance or recourse to touch. In the publication, programme participants Aimar Pérez Galí, Miguel Benlloch and Quimera Rosa 'document' their performances using writing formats like letters, reports or visual essays.

The publication also includes voices close to early AIDS activisms, such as Julen Zabala, a librarian by profession and activist with EHGAM, the first homosexual liberation group in the Basque Country, whose text, one of the first in the book, welcomes the reader by reproducing Julen's own welcoming to the exhibition as the gallery 'host'. Or the voice of Sejo Carracosa, whom we invited to write an embodied reflection on questions of archiving and life based on his guided tour to the exhibition, where he was present as a member of La Radical Gai, one of the first queer groups in Spain. Or the voice of the historic member of ACT UP, New York, Jon Greenberg, who in summer 1992, in the context of the workshop given by artist Pepe Espaliú at Arteleku, offered a talk which we transcribe here. The text was among the starting points for the respective contributions

by Jesús Jeleton and Aimar Pérez Galí mentioned above.

2.4

The book also includes a selection of reviews of the exhibition previously published in *El Estado Mental*, *Concreta* and *Afterall*, by Duen Sacchi, Laura Vallés and María Iñigo Clavo, appearing at the end of the publication as a 'press dossier'. As well as some closing remarks by Carme Nogueira offering key thoughts on the display she designed for the exhibition. The type of intimate, almost tactile, approach which visitors were invited to take towards the exhibition display is translated graphically by Joaquín Gáñez in his design for the publication.

As we were about to finalise the book we realised that we lacked the 'voice' of a visitor. By chance we found out that the writer Harkaitz Cano, a neighbour of Tabakalera, had visited the exhibition, so we asked him to write about it. His text perfectly captures the *Anarchivo* ethos and we use it here as our ending: an exhibition on raw lives can only have a raw form. Raw as the state of things that are not as soft as expected. Or raw like a wound that shows no signs of suppurating.



## Image captions

2.1 Miguel Benlloch, *DERERUMNATURA. Quien canta su mal espanta*, 7<sup>th</sup> May 2016, Tabakalera International Centre for Contemporary Culture, San Sebastian, Basque Country, web page screenshot and photographic documentation of the performance. Photographs: © Tabakalera, 2016. The work was commissioned as part of a wider performance programme inspired by Peggy Phelan's suggestion that, within the performative nothing 'escapes the anxiety raised by the gap between the discursive construct "the body" and the affective experience of embodiment' (Phelan, *Unmarked*, 1993, 171).

2.2 Aimar Pérez Galí and Oscar Dasí, *A System in Collapse is a System Moving Forward*, 10<sup>th</sup> June 2016, Tabakalera International Center for Contemporary Culture, San Sebastian, Basque Country, video documentation of the performance. Video stills: © Tabakalera, 2016. This performance serves as a prologue to Pérez Galí's fuller work *The Touching Community*, discussed as part of Chapter 2 of the written dissertation.

2.3 *AIDS Anarchive*, book handled by the researcher. Photographs: Aimar Arriola. The intimate, almost tactile, approach that visitors were invited to take towards the exhibition display is translated graphically by Joaquín Gáñez in the book's design.

2.4 *AIDS Anarchive*, interior pages, table of contents and introduction by editors in English. Design: Joaquín Gáñez Alcolea.

2.5 *AIDS Anarchive*, book exhibited as part of *Miguel Benlloch: Cuerpo conjugado* (curators: Joaquín Vázquez and Mar Villaespesa), the artist's first retrospective exhibition, 16<sup>th</sup> February to 8<sup>th</sup> April 2018, Sala Atín Aya, ICAS, Seville. Photograph: Aimar Arriola. A copy of the book was exhibited along with other materials representing my collaborations with Benlloch, both individually and as part of the collective. Among my individual collaborations, a limited-edition T-shirt with an original design by Benlloch stands out.

# 3

## ***AIDS Anarchive Exhibition***

*Summer 2017, Conde Duque Cultural Center, Madrid.*

*Curated by Aimar Arriola, Nancy Garín and Linda Valdés.*

A condensed version of the *AIDS Anarchive* exhibition was presented in Madrid in 2017 in the context of the programme *The Future of Revolt: LGBTIQ Memory and Desire*, an initiative of the City of Madrid as part of the celebrations that year of World Pride and the 40th anniversary of the first gay and lesbian liberation movements in Spain. *AIDS Anarchive* was presented as part of a duo exhibition that also included the first comprehensive exhibition in Spain of the legacy of La Radical Gai and LSD, two of the first queer groups active in Madrid in the mid-1990s, curated by former members of the groups.

While World Pride celebrations projected a globalised and corporate vision of sexual dissidence, the two exhibitions sought to attend to local memories of Madrid, of regional areas of Spain, and of the often-overlooked contexts of Latin America, such as Chile.

### ***Overall project assessment***

Organizing this exhibition was frustrating in many ways. Because the exhibition was part of a larger festival, we often did not have the same freedom for decision as on previous occasions. In addition, the general budget of the project was limited, and there were no available funds to develop mediation and public engagement activities, which affected the reach of the project. On a positive note, as Spain is such a centralized country, in which, often, regional projects such as ours do not have enough visibility, this was a good opportunity to share ideas in Madrid. This exhibition was also a good occasion for networking.



**el**  
**Porvenir**  
**de la**  
**Revuelta**  
MEMORIA Y DESEO LGTBIQ

Del 26 de mayo al  
24 de septiembre, 2017



## Anarchivo sida

Producciones culturales en torno a la «crisis del sida»  
en el sur de Europa y América Latina. 1985-2016



## ¿Archivo Queer?

Imaginaros de acción y placer. Madrid 1989-1999



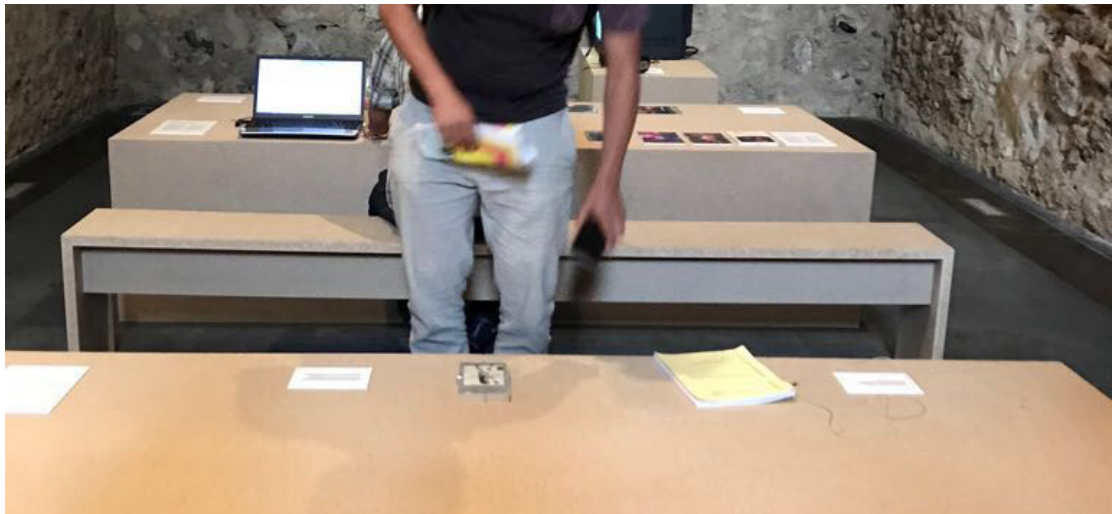
**CONDE  
DUQUE**

[orgullomundial.madrid.es](http://orgullomundial.madrid.es)





3.2





|   |   |
|---|---|
| EXPOSICIÓN  | EXHIBICIÓN                              |
| FECHA<br>Del 26 de mayo al 04 de septiembre                 | DATE<br>From May 26th to September 24th |
| LUGAR PLACE<br>Centro Cultural CONDE DUQUE. Sala de Bóvedas |   |

# ANARCHIVO SIDA

**Anarchivo sida** toma como punto de partida la producción cultural en torno a la «crisis del sida» en el sur de Europa y América Latina, con especial atención a Chile y algunos casos del Estado español. El proyecto aborda el VIH/sida no solo como epidemia médica, sino como cambio de paradigma visual, afectivo y económico en plena convivencia con la consolidación de las políticas neoliberales y del proceso de globalización.

Un archivo que se constituye exposición. Tras tres años de investigación y producción de materiales, *Anarchivo sida* se presenta como exposición. En el diseño de la muestra colabora la artista Carne Nogueira.

Se propone un recorrido por parte de la historia reciente del cuerpo y su gestión política a partir de la clásica articulación naturaleza/cultura y estas tres cuestiones: la salud —entendida como la convención por la cual algunos cuerpos son considerados normales y otros enfermos—, la tendencia histórica a establecer una división drástica entre el humano y el animal, y la dimensión cultural de la muerte.

No se plantea una «exposición de archivo», más bien el archivo se constituye en el mismo hecho de su exposición. Se reúnen producciones de artista y documentos que van desde mediados de la década de los ochenta hasta 2016 procedentes de diversos contextos, como Euskadi, Andalucía, Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia, Chile, Colombia, Brasil o Guatemala.

## Salud

La «salud» es la convención por la cual algunos cuerpos son leídos como normales (naturales) y otros como patológicos. La salud y su contraparte, la «enfermedad», son indicadores del nivel de eficacia funcional o metabólica de un cuerpo y, por extensión, de su capacidad productiva y su derecho de representación.

En el marco inaugurado por las políticas del VIH/sida, «salud» es sinónimo de patentes médicas y rentabilidad financiera.

Gran parte de los materiales convocados en esta sección se produjeron en reacción al «conocimiento» sobre el cuerpo uniformemente constituido por la ciencia y los medios de comunicación a finales de la década de los ochenta y principios de los noventa. Apuntaban a uno de los principales terrenos de batalla de las prácticas críticas en torno al cuerpo a partir del sida: la información como objeto de lucha.

## Animal

La figura del animal es central en las políticas del VIH/sida. Desde los relatos médicos racialmente sesgados de los años ochenta, que situaban el origen de la epidemia en ciertas especies de simios —principalmente en África—, hasta la reciente noticia sobre la posibilidad de neutralizar el virus con la ayuda de los anticuerpos de las llamas del Perú, nuestro imaginario del VIH/sida está atravesado por el animal.

Pero el animal también está presente en el conjunto de respuestas críticas a la gestión política del cuerpo inaugurada por el sida. Esto es así, por ejemplo, en la resignificación que artistas y activistas realizan de las numerosas metáforas de lo animal utilizadas para describir al «otro».

## Muerte

El diccionario define el término *muerte* como el efecto de «cesación de la vida». En el vocabulario médico y jurídico, la expresión *muerte natural* designa el proceso de término de la vida en el que no intervienen fuerzas externas al organismo. Y sin embargo hay poco de «natural» en cómo vivimos la muerte; legislaciones, rituales simbólicos, prácticas materiales y sistemas de creencias determinan nuestra forma de percibir y experimentar la muerte, lo que también afecta al valor que damos a la(s) vida(s).

Animados por la pregunta acerca de cómo la muerte significa, este bloque despliega un conjunto de materiales que recorren las políticas de la vida y la muerte a partir del VIH/sida. Muchos de los materiales aquí reunidos apuntan al cruce entre sida, dictadura y políticas del cuerpo, una cuestión hasta ahora inédita en el análisis de la cultura visual y performativa de las últimas décadas.



Rita Moreira. Temporada de caca (1988). still de vídeo. Cortesía de la artista y Videobrasil, Sao Paulo



Pepa Espalá. Carrerig. Acción realizada en Donostia-San Sebastián el 20 de septiembre de 1992. Fotografía: Ricardo Iriarte. Cortesía de Artelesku/Diputación Foral de Gipuzkoa



Hiesá. Denon kontua da. Plazerra baino ez transmititu! Cartel de campaña de prevención. EHIGAM-Euskal Herriko Gay-Les, Askapen Mugimendua. Cortesía de EHIGAM



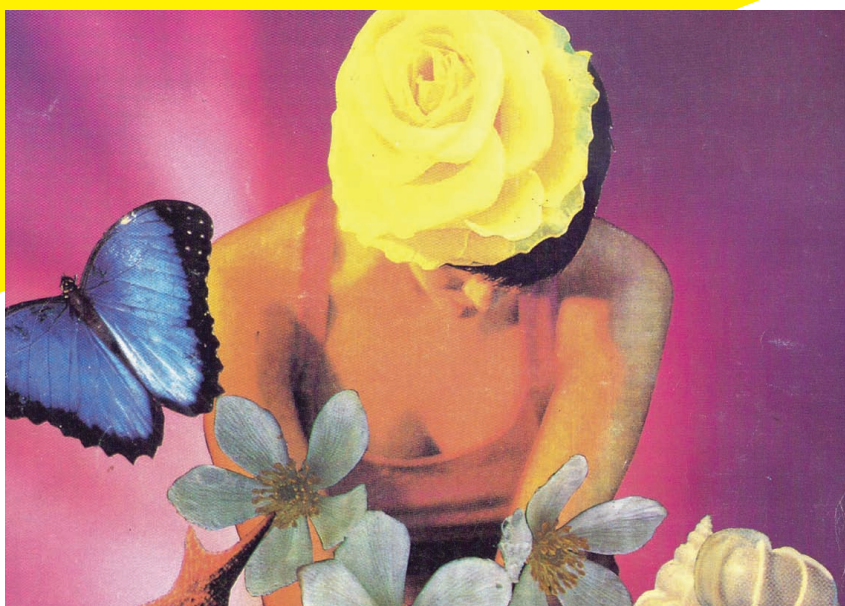
Santiago Echeverry. Afbia (1992). still de vídeo. Cortesía del artista.



Lambda News [portada de revista], n.º 55, julio de 1999. Chile. Cortesía de MUMS Movimiento por la Diversidad Sexual, Chile



¡No al holocausto psicoterapéutico! Fotografía de manifestación, Santiago de Chile (1997). Cortesía del MUMS, Movimiento por la Diversidad Sexual, Chile



Nunca me imaginé. Portada de publicación editada por CEPSS - Centro de Educación y Prevención en Salud Social y SIDA, 1995, Concepción, Chile. Cortesía de Christian Rodriguez

*The AIDS Anarchic takes the artistic production related to the «AIDS crisis» in Southern Europe and Latin America as its point of departure, paying special attention to Chile and certain parts of the Spanish State. The project approaches HIV/AIDS not solely as a medical epidemic but also as a paradigm shift in the visual arts, economics and affect, dovetailing with the consolidation of neoliberal policies and globalization.*

## AIDS ANARCHIC

**Exhibit of an archive in progress.** After three years of research and production, the *AIDS Anarchic* comes together as an exhibit, inviting the spectator to explore the recent history of the body and how it is managed politically. Taking the classic binary of nature/culture as a point of departure, the exhibit approaches these three questions: 1) health, understood as the convention by which some bodies are considered «normal» and others «ill»; 2) the historical tendency to mark a sharp division between the human and the animal; and 3) the cultural dimensions of death.

This is not meant to be an «archive exhibit»; rather, the archive is constituted by the very fact of being exhibited. It brings together artist productions and documents spanning the period of time from the mid-1980s to 2016, drawn from contexts as different as the Basque Country, Andalusia, Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia, Chile, Columbia, Brazil and Guatemala.

### Health

«Health» is a convention by which some bodies are read as normal («natural») and others as pathological. Health and its counterpart, «illness», are indicators of the functional and metabolic efficacy of a body, and by extension its productive capacity and right to representation. In the framework of HIV/AIDS policies, «health» is synonymous with pharmacological patents and financial profits.

Many of the materials brought together in this section were produced as reactions to the uniform «knowledge» about the body presented by science and the media in the late 1980s and early 1990s. They point to one of the principle battle grounds for critical practices in the age of AIDS: information as an element of struggle.

### Animal

The figure of the animal is key to HIV/AIDS politics. From the racially biased medical reports of the 1980s that situated the origin of the epidemic in certain species of apes (principally in Africa) to the recent news claiming that the antibodies produced by Peruvian llamas might help to neutralize the virus, our imaginary of HIV/AIDS is woven through with images of animals.

But the animal is also present, as this exhibit shows, in the critical responses to the political management of the body in the age of AIDS. Artists and activists resignify the many animal metaphors used to describe the «other».

### Death

The dictionary defines the term «death» as the «end of life». In medical and legal language, the term «natural death» refers to the ending of life in which forces external to the organism do not intervene. And yet there is little that is «natural» about how we experience death: legislation, symbolic rituals, material practices and belief systems all determine our ways of perceiving and experiencing death, which also influences the value we attribute to lifelines.

Driven by the question of how death signifies, this section brings together materials from the whole spectrum of politics addressing life and death in the context of HIV/AIDS. Many of the materials suggest an intersection between AIDS, dictatorship and body politics, a question that has not been addressed in the analysis of visual arts and performance in recent decades.

#### EQUIPO RE (AIMAR ARRIOLA, NANCY GARÍN Y LINDA VALDÉS)

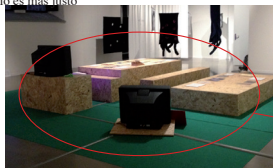
PARTICIPAN PARTICIPANTS: Carme Noguera, ACT UP (Barcelona & Latino Caucus NY), Águeda Bañón, María José Beibel, Rita Moreira, Miguel Benloch, Centro de Educación y Prevención en Salud Social y SIDA-Chile (CEPS), Javier Codesal, Francisco Copello, Diego del Pozo Barriuso, Santiago Echeverry, Euskal Herriko Gay-Les Askapen Mugimendua (EHGAM), Pepe Espallú, Antonio Gagliano, La Radical Gal, Juan Guzmán, Las Pekinesas, Las Yeguas del Apocalipsis (Web Archive D2I), Pepe Miralles, Guillermo Moscoso, MUMS Movimiento por la Diversidad Sexual-Chile, José Osorio, Daniel Palma, Miguel Parra Urrutia, The Carrying Society. ORGANIZADO POR TABAKALERA, CENTRO INTERNACIONAL DE CULTURA CONTEMPORÁNEA CON LA COLABORACIÓN DE DONOSTIA / SAN SEBASTIÁN 2016, CAPITAL EUROPEA DE LA CULTURA Y EL AYUNTAMIENTO DE MADRID EN EL MARCO DEL WORLD PRIDE MADRID 2017



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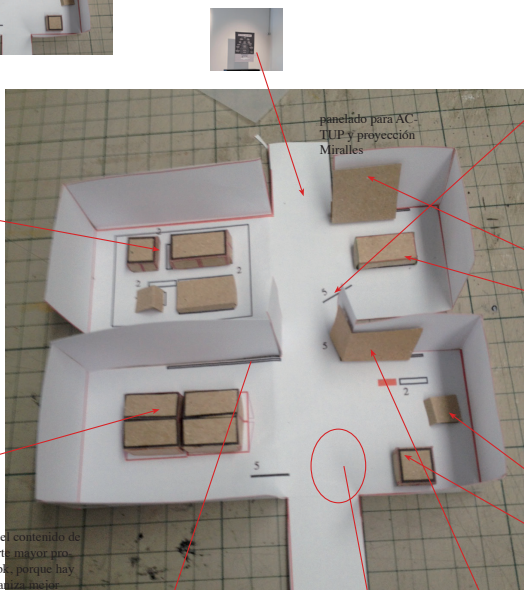


matenemos los elementos, pero construyimos sillas con hueco para las piernas. Propongo dos distribuciones porque el espacio es más justo



en la primera sala, parece que todo el contenido de Salud cabe perfectamente, en la parte mayor propongo conservar la estructura de Tba porque hay espacio suficiente y parece que organiza así el espacio que llevándola a las paredes, como había pensado en el principio.

proponéis una mesa menos??

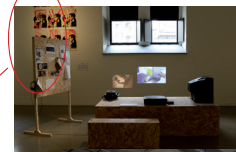


panelado para AC TUP y proyección Miralles

panelado para los carteles, aquí o usando el panelado de la proyección de Ágeda?



los vídeos de salud en este lado. Aquí el panelado será para la proyección de Ágeda. El panelado continua en L para usar ese espacio intermedio como panel de notas



## Image captions

3.1 Joint advertising poster for the exhibitions *Anarchivo sida* and *¿Archivo Queer?*, 27<sup>th</sup> May to 24<sup>th</sup> September 2017, Centro Cultural Conde Duque, Madrid. Design: Carmen Moreno Álvarez. Our exhibition was presented alongside an exhibition devoted to the work of La Radical Gai and LSD, two of the first queer groups in Spain; the latter exhibition had been previously presented at the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven. The joint poster was distributed throughout the city.

3.2 *Anarchivo sida*, 27<sup>th</sup> May to 24<sup>th</sup> September 2017, Centro Cultural Conde Duque Madrid, installation views. Photographs: © Madrid Destino, 2017. This exhibition was a reduced and adapted version of the exhibition presented a year before in Tabakalera, San Sebastian, but it included the same number of sections.

3.3 Exhibition pages, newspaper of the programme *The Future of Revolt: LGTBIQ Memory and Desire* (17<sup>th</sup> April to 31<sup>st</sup> October 2017). Artistic Director of the programme Fefa Vila. The newspaper had a massive circulation and included two full pages dedicated to our project, featuring the curatorial text in Spanish and English and selected images of the exhibition works.

3.4 Carme Nogueira, *Anarchivo sida*, 7<sup>th</sup> May to 24<sup>th</sup> September 2017, Centro Cultural Conde Duque, Madrid, exhibition design proposal. Courtesy: Carme Nogueira. Following the design concept of the previous iteration of the exhibition, the artist employed the same wood material used by the institution in its exterior signage, complicating the division between the outside and the inside of the exhibition.

# 4

## ***Other Stories of HIV/AIDS*** **Public Engagement Event**

*August 25, 2017, The Showroom, London. Organised by Aimar Arriola, Theo Gordon, Theodore (ted) Kerr, Conal McStravick, Jaime Shearn Coan, and Dan Udy.*

As a centre for AIDS activism from the earliest days of the known epidemic and a focal point for ongoing grass-roots agitation over PrEP, London provided the vibrant backdrop for this project-related, public engagement event. Participants and organisers drew on London's rich history of political organisation and its relationship to other HIV/AIDS geographies within and beyond the global North. In doing so, the goal of this event was to have an informal and rich conversation about HIV/AIDS, culture, and history, to explore how these concepts currently impact our communities locally and internationally.

To organise the workshop, I teamed up with 5 other people doing work on HIV/AIDS as artists, writers, and researchers. For me, the importance of organising this event in London—the heart of the global network of influence—was because representation of AIDS from the South (Spain and Latin America above all) is not only missing, but also has the potential to reach the widest audience.

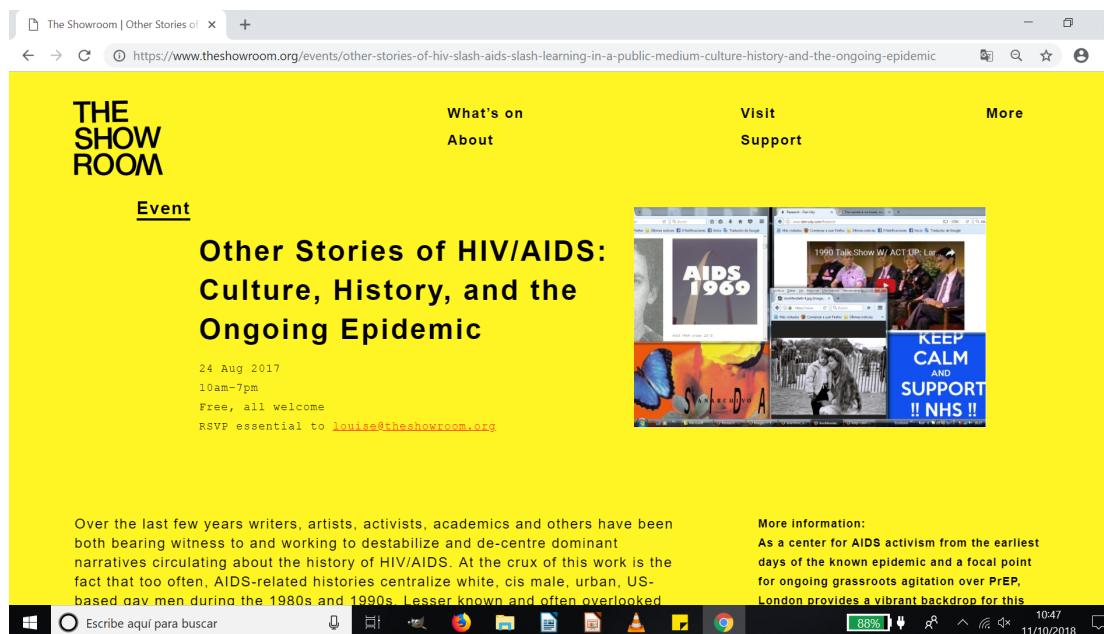
The event was connected to *Communal Knowledge*, The Showroom's own community programme and was supported by a 2017 Public Engagement Grant from Goldsmiths at the University of London.

### ***Overall project assessment***

The event was a success in many ways. However, the homogeneity of the organizing crew was not discussed in a meaningful or sustained way in the planning of the event. As a result, participants largely reflected the organizers and were primarily white, cis-male, under 40, HIV negative, and highly educated. The sameness of the group meant that many voices, tactics, strategies, and ways of relating to HIV were not present in the room, which was counter to the concept of the event.







### Image captions

4.1 Photographs of the event, *Other Stories of HIV/AIDS: Culture, History, and the Ongoing Epidemic*, 24<sup>th</sup> August 2017, The Showroom, London. All photographs: Aimar Arriola. The event began with a communal sharing of goals for the day, followed by presentations of AIDS-related projects that attendees were part of. After the lunch break, small groups were formed based on common themes that emerged in presentations. These small groups then presented back to the larger group. The day ended with ideas to continue the conversation.

4.2 *Other Stories of HIV/AIDS: Culture, History, and the Ongoing Epidemic*, 24<sup>th</sup> August 2017, The Showroom, London [Web page screenshot], retrieved from <https://www.theshowroom.org/events/other-stories-of-hiv-slash-aids-slash-learning-in-a-public-medium-culture-history-and-the-ongoing-epidemic> The goal of this one-day meet up was to bring together people, organizations, and communities currently responding to the ongoing AIDS crisis in the UK and around the world. At the same time, the event responded to *Communal Knowledge*, a programme of collaborative projects targeted at community groups, organizations, schools and individuals set up in 2010 by The Showroom.

# 5

## ***Lo tocante by Aimar Pérez Galí***

*Book and Presentation Events, Autumn 2018, various locations. Published and organised by Aimar Arriola.*

I edited and published the companion book to artist and dancer Aimar Pérez Galí's project *The Touching Community*. Following one of the fundamental principles of Contact improvisation, the dance technique where movement is improvised not only from contact, but also from the search for balance between two bodies of different weights, the book is composed of two distinct 'bodies'. These bodies are a main body composed of written letters by the artist to dancers who died of complications related to HIV from Spain, Chile and other contexts in Latin America, and a 'minor' body, which collects previously unpublished research material.

The book was launched on November 10, 2018 in the Pepe Espaliú Art Centre, in Córdoba, Andalusia, in the framework of a wider programme celebrating the 25th anniversary of artist Pepe Espaliú, who, in 1992, had been the first relevant artist in Spain to have tackled AIDS in his work. The launch of the book consisted of a performance by Aimar Pérez Galí and a subsequent conversation between the two of us, surrounded by original works by Espaliú and in close proximity to the artist's personal library. Aimar Pérez Galí's book *Lo tocante* was designed by former Act Up-Barcelona member and renowned graphic designer Roger Adam.

### ***Overall project assessment***

This project is an example of how separate interests and researches, such as those of Pérez Galí on the impact of AIDS on dance and my own, can be combined to create something greater than its parts. To note a possible limitation of the project, the available funds only allowed us to publish the book in Spanish.







5.4

Aimar Pérez Galí

- Querido Joaquim
- Querido Jordi
- Querido Uwe
- Querido Javier
- Querido Pepo
- Querido Steve
- Querido Antonio
- Querido Lauro
- Querido Tente
- Francisco
- Eldemar
- Pepe
- Rafael
- Félix
- Jon
- Pancho
- Batato
- Luciano
- Jeremy
- Alvaro
- Julio
- Dave
- Rafael
- José
- Jorge
- Rodolfo
- Jesús
- Humberto
- Carlos
- Roberto
- John
- Humberto
- Daniel
- Manuel
- Georges
- José Luis
- Marti
- Sergio
- Sergio
- Victor
- Sergio
- Carlos
- Luiggi



# LO TOCANTE



Aimar Pérez Galí



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BIBLIOGRAFÍA TOCANTE

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 Querida Monique, Querido Pablito,  
 Querido Erwin.

7

EL FULGOR  
 [ Jaime Conde-  
 Salazar ]

18

MANEJAR  
 RIESGOS

## Image captions

5.1 Aimar Pérez Galí reading aloud one of the letters included in the book *Lo tocante*, 10<sup>th</sup> November 2018, Pepe Espaliú Art Centre, Córdoba, Andalusia. Photograph: Aimar Arriola. As noted, the core of the book is formed by letters written by Pérez Galí to dancers who died of complications related to HIV in Spain, Chile, and other Latin American contexts.

5.2 Aimar Pérez Galí and Dani Méndez performing *A System in Collapse is a System Moving Forward*, as part of the launch of the book *Lo tocante*, 10<sup>th</sup> November 2018, Pepe Espaliú Art Centre, Córdoba, Andalusia. Photographs: Aimar Arriola. The soundtrack of the performance was the recording of a previously unpublished lecture by Jon Greenberg, founding member of ACT UP New York, given in the Basque country in 1992. The emphasis of the text was on the capacity of HIV in lowering biological and social barriers.

5.3 First copies of the book *Lo tocante* displayed moments before the launch of the book on 10<sup>th</sup> November 2018, Pepe Espaliú Art Centre, Córdoba, Andalusia. Photograph: Aimar Arriola. The book was designed by Roger Adam, former ACT UP Barcelona member. Adam also later designed the exhibition *AIDS Anarchive* presented at the MACBA, marking the first time that I had worked with a graphic designer in a spatial capacity.

5.4 Book cover of *Lo tocante* (2018) by Aimar Pérez Galí. The book was produced and published through Album, my independent editorial platform initiated in 2011. So far, Album has launched a total of four books.

5.5 Inside pages of the book *Lo tocante*, including the table of contents. Aside from the letters written by the author, the book includes a text by the playwright Jaime Conde Salazar, the transcription in translated version of the aforementioned lecture by Jon Greenberg, a separate text by Pérez Galí contextualizing the research, and an interview with Uruguayan gay activist Diego Sempol.

# 6

## ***AIDS Anarchive Exhibition***

*November 14, 2018 – April 18, 2019, MACBA Study Centre, Barcelona. Curated by Aimar Arriola, Nancy Garín and Linda Valdés.*

This exhibition of the *AIDS Anarchive* focuses on Barcelona in the 1990s, the decade of the largest transmission of HIV in the city, during which Spain completed its process of “political transition”, with a plethora of major events such as the Olympics in Barcelona. Although small, the exhibition marks the first opportunity to work with an institutional collection in the context of the dissertation, opening questions surrounding the representation of cultural responses to HIV/AIDS in Museum Collections of Spain.

Held in the MACBA Study Centre, visitors to the exhibition are welcomed by a selection of books for consultation installed on shelves against a wall-size exhibition, a bright red exhibition title in the background, designed for the occasion by Roger Adam (in an undisclosed reference to ACT UP Barcelona’s graphic style).

### ***Overall project assessment***

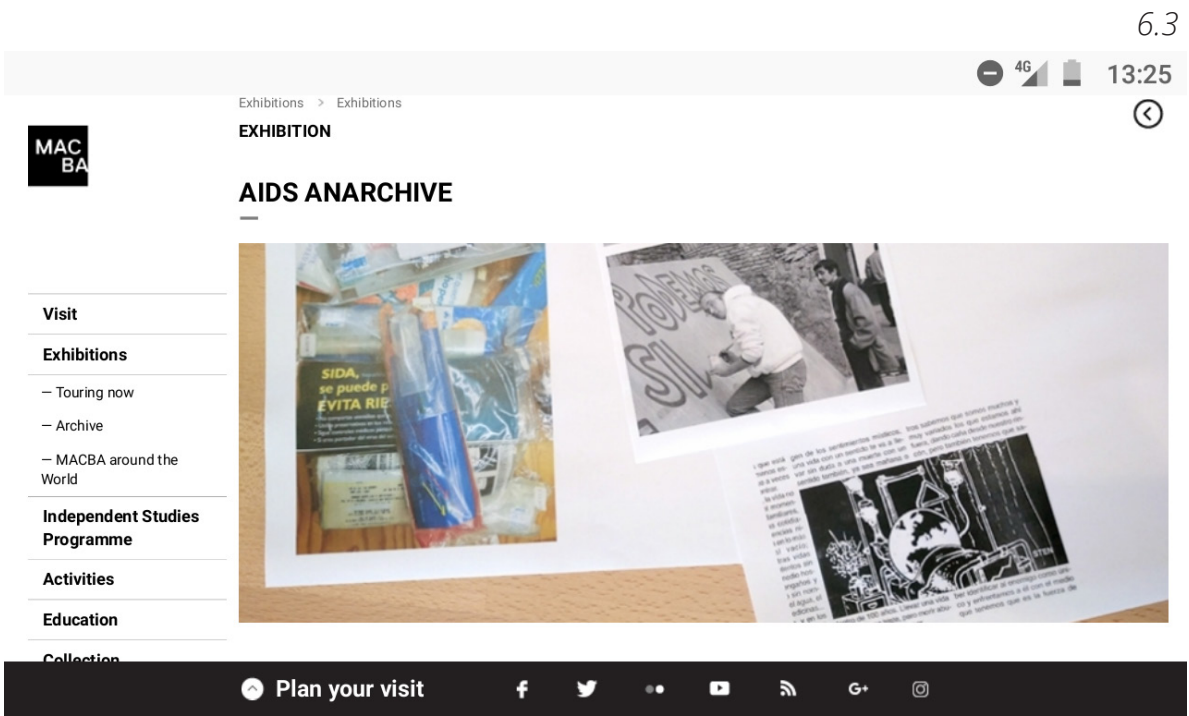
Faced with the chronological and geographical breadth of existing iterations of the exhibition, this presentation at MACBA has a narrower focus on Barcelona and the 1990s, offering the project a more modest, rigorous scale. At the time of submission, the exhibition still runs for a few more months, so a fuller assessment will be conducted at a later date.







6.2



6.3



# ANARXIU S-I-D-A

Under the general name of *AIDS Anarchive*, the Equipo re collective (Aimar Arriola, Linda Valdés and Nancy Garín) has developed a platform for research and production based on the cultural, social and political dimension of the ongoing HIV/AIDS crisis in Spain and Chile, as well as on selected case studies from other Latin American contexts. The project addresses HIV/AIDS not only as a medical epidemic, but as a change of visual, affective and economic paradigm running parallel to the consolidation of neoliberal policies and the globalisation process.

This exhibition gives continuity to the project by taking into account the local context – the city of Barcelona – as its spatial axis and the 1990s as its temporal axis. In the exhibition, this framework will be presented through a double gesture. The first is the tracing of two storylines: the ways of doing in/the public sphere and the pharmacologisation of life, including materials relating to the city of Barcelona in dialogue with other materials relating to the Basque Country, Galicia, Valencia, Chile, Mexico and Guatemala. From the intersection of these two lines the second gesture arises, comprising three case studies: the work of the cultural activist group Act Up-Barcelona; the making of artist Keith Haring's mural *Together We Can Stop AIDS*; and the encounter between heroin and AIDS.

## WAYS OF DOING IN/THE PUBLIC SPHERE

In the 1990s, the AIDS crisis and the activism connected to it provoked a debate about the meaning of 'public', leading to a myriad of interpretations. It was at that time that the 'public sphere' began to be affected by globalisation and the emergence of a new political and socio-economic paradigm: neoliberalism. The privatisation of the public space and

the city not only as a space for consumption, but as a consumable product, lies at the origin of this change.

In Barcelona the tensions of that era are driven by the 1992 Olympic Games, when the urban and social fabric of the city undergoes a process of modernisation that will pave the way for the so-called Barcelona model. In the rest of Spain, the nineties represent the end of the period of democratic transition and the introduction of a 'normalising' framework as a result of the country joining the European Economic Community (EEC). This is a decade of major events and investment in infrastructures; of the 'homologisation' of the country with the rest of the world.

In this context, the urgent need to react in the face of AIDS is behind the fight for visibility and the creation of common spaces for care against a background of concealment and stigmatisation. By bringing together materials from *AIDS Anarchive* and MACBA Study Centre, this first storyline describes a non-homogenous spectrum of meanings and representations of the public sphere after the AIDS crisis.

## THE PHARMACOLOGISATION OF LIFE

While the concept of 'medicalisation' introduced by Michel Foucault and Ivan Illich may be defined as the conquest by modern medicine of those bodies and expressions identified as pathological, the 'pharmacologisation' of life could describe the alliance between medical knowledge and global transnational capital. Under the umbrella of the AIDS crisis, this is a process that resulted in the enrichment of pharmaceutical companies thanks to AZT. While there is no doubt that antiretroviral medications helped improve life under HIV, plenty of voices alerted us against the pharmaceutical industry's openly lucrative aims.

From this perspective, the year 1996 may be seen as pivotal: the moment when the use of combined drugs, otherwise known as Highly Active Antiretroviral Therapy (HAART), marked a turning point in the so-called AIDS pandemic. As HIV/AIDS ceases to be a matter of life or death, this constitutes a point of inflection in the spaces of struggle.

A selection of documents from MACBA Study Centre and *AIDS Anarchive* hints at a cross-section between pharmacology, museum, representation and the activism of social movements around these questions. This storyline will open up a space for study and debate over the political management of health and the body.

## CASE STUDIES

ACT UP-BARCELONA <sup>1</sup>  
**TOGETHER WE CAN STOP AIDS**  
 BY KEITH HARING <sup>2</sup>  
 HEROIN <sup>3</sup>

The first case tells the story of Act Up-Barcelona through public and unpublished documents, together with the interlocation of members of the group, avoiding binary reductions such as north-south, global-local, self-other.

Marking the 30th anniversary of Keith Haring's mural in Barcelona, the second case study reviews the intersections taking place between the politics of urban transformation, cultural politics and the politics of the night, in relation to the AIDS crisis.

The final case study examines the emergence of HIV in Barcelona, which through heroin use found a deadly route of contamination leading to a complex and diffuse network of stigmatisation, neglect, control, invisibilisation and death.

<sup>1</sup> 15 November 2018 – 14 January 2019

<sup>2</sup> 15 January – 4 March 2019

<sup>3</sup> 5 March – 18 April 2019

## COMPLEMENTARY TREATMENTS

STUDY GROUP  
 ON PHARMACOLOGISATION  
 AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE

The exhibition will be accompanied by a study group whose central focus will follow the two storylines of the project: the pharmacologisation of life and the debate about the so-called public sphere, in the present context.

From 7 November 2018 to 8 May 2019

## ACTIVITIES

17 November

**Let's talk about... AIDS**  
 Guided visit to the exhibition

By Equipo re (Aimar Arriola, Nancy Garín and Linda Valdés), curators of the exhibition.

Saturday 17 November, at 6 pm. Exhibition galleries. Free admission with prior registration.

28 November

**30 ANYS +**  
 Screening / Documentary première

On the morning of 27 February 1989, Keith Haring created the mural *Together We Can Stop AIDS* at Plaça Salvador Seguí in the Raval. Directed by Lulu Martorell and Roger la Puente, in collaboration with César Melero. Activity to mark World AIDS Day.

Wednesday 28 November, at 7 pm. Meier Auditorium. Free admission.

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The activities taking place in 2019 may be consulted at [macba.cat](http://macba.cat).

▼ While for the first twenty years the priorities of the HIV/AIDS crisis were prevention and survival, this project is aware that living with HIV depends on who you are and where you live. In Barcelona in 2018, being HIV-positive does not necessarily imply transmission or dying. Yet reality can be quite different in other places. In Chile, for instance, HIV has been declared 'a national emergency' due to a new outbreak of transmissions added to the lack of up-to-date therapies. While this HIV crisis continues, answers will have to be found.

Exhibition organised and produced by MACBA Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona. Curators: Equipo re (Aimar Arriola, Nancy Garín and Linda Valdés). Exhibition design: Roger Adam.

*AIDS Archive* is part of *Our Many Europes*, a programme by the European museum confederation "L'Internationale" and co-funded by the Creative Europe Programme of the European Union. The members of "L'Internationale" (Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerpen; Moderna galerija (MG+msum), Ljubljana; Van Abbemuseum, The Netherlands; MACBA Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona; Muzeum Sztuki Nowoczesnej w Warszawie; SALT Research and Programs Istanbul and Ankara; and Museo Reina Sofía, Madrid) and its partners National College of Art and Design (NCAD), Dublin and Valand Academy (Gothenburg University) are presenting more than 40 public activities (conferences, exhibitions, workshops) from now and until May 2022.

'internationale



Co-funded by the  
 Creative Europe Programme  
 of the European Union



[macba.cat](http://macba.cat)

Plaça dels Àngels, 1  
 08001 Barcelona

Exhibition  
 from 15 November 2018  
 to 18 April 2019

Exhibition open to the public on the ground floor of the MACBA Study Centre. Monday to Friday, from 10 am to 7 pm. Holidays, closed

## Image captions

6.1 *AIDS Anarchive*, 14<sup>th</sup> November 2018 to 18<sup>th</sup> April 2019, MACBA Study Centre, images from the opening night. Photographs: © Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA). The night brought together regular Museum visitors and representatives of local organizations working around HIV/AIDS and other social movements. The event included a commissioned performance by trans artist Diego Genderhacker in memory of the late artist and activist Miguel Benlloch.

6.2 *AIDS Anarchive*, 14<sup>th</sup> November 2018 to 18<sup>th</sup> April 2019, MACBA Study Centre, installation view. Photograph: © Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA).

6.3 Section of the exhibition *AIDS Anarchive* in MACBA's website [web page screenshot], retrieved from <https://www.macba.cat/en/aids-anarchive/1/exhibitions/expo> The image that illustrates the exhibition on the Museum's website synthesizes the three case studies that comprise it, namely the legacy of ACT UP Barcelona, Keith Haring's mural in the city, and the junction between heroin and AIDS.

6.4 *AIDS Anarchive*, 14<sup>th</sup> November 2018 to 18<sup>th</sup> April 2019, MACBA Study Centre, hand sheet of the exhibition, two pages. Includes full curatorial text, the schedule of the initial programme of parallel events, and the institutional credits.

# 7

## ***AIDS Anarchive***

### **Public Engagement Events (Selection)**

*November 14, 2018 – April 18, 2019, MACBA Study Centre, Barcelona. Organised by Aimar Arriola, Nancy Garín and Linda Valdés.*

The exhibition at the MACBA was conceived as a gathering space for public engagement and hosts a vibrant programme of activities including guided tours, film screenings, and discussions, which were organised as part of my curatorial collective. For example, running parallel to the exhibition, we launched a stable study group called 'Complementary treatments'. Formed by open call and meeting every two weeks, the group consists of over twenty people from different areas and of different serostatus, including artists, activists, health professionals, and academic researchers. Given the focus of my dissertation on historical cultural interventions around AIDS, which largely pre-dates the emergence of retrovirals, organising and seeing through the study group has already given me an opportunity to further connect with the realities of living with HIV today.

Both the exhibition and public engagement events at MACBA are presented as part of *Our Many Europes* (2018-2022), a programme organised by the European museum confederation 'L'Internationale' and co-funded by the Creative Europe Programme of the European Union. The programme and its wide-ranging schedule of lectures, exhibitions, and education initiatives are focused on the 1990s, the dawn of contemporary Europe and a decade that witnessed pivotal change take place.

#### ***Overall project assessment***

At the time of submitting my doctoral project, there are months of public engagement events ahead, and it is still early to make a proper assessment. However, the study group 'Complementary treatments' has managed to bring together participants with much more varied identities and backgrounds than those involved in the public engagement event held at The Showroom (Summer 2017), representing wider HIV realities.



Study Group on Pharmacologisation and the Public Sphere

MACBA

ACTIVITIES WORK GROUPS

— 07 Nov. 2018 to 24 Apr. 2019

**STUDY GROUP ON PHARMACOLOGISATION AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE**  
 — WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE EXHIBITION AIDS ANARCHIVE. BY EQUIPO RE

Visit

Exhibitions

Independent Studies Programme

Activities

Education

Collection

Archive and Library

Publications

Press

Friends of MACBA

es el sida  
 un genocidio ?  
 un negocio ?

Sabes si... Prospecciones # 700-738, 1997 [video stills]

Plan your visit

f t .. y r G+ @







7.4

7.4

4G 13:27

MAC BA

ACTIVITIES GUIDED TOURS

**LET'S TALK ABOUT AIDS**  
— GUIDED TOUR

— 17 Nov. 2018  
— 18 h

- Visit
- Exhibitions
- Independent Studies Programme
- Activities
- Education
- Collection
- Archive and Library
- Publications
- Press

General

Plan your visit

f t . . y r G+ @



## Image captions

7.1 Inaugural session of the study group *Complementary treatments* with the guest presence and opening words by Elisabeth Leibovici, 6<sup>th</sup> November 2018, MACBA Study Centre. Source: MACBA Twitter account. The study group focused on questions of pharmacologisation and public sphere and runs in parallel to the *AIDS Anarchive* exhibition at MACBA and meets every fortnight.

7.2 Web section for the study group *Complementary treatments*, MACBA Study Centre [Web page screenshot], retrieved from <https://www.macba.cat/en/study-group-on-pharmacologisation-and-the-public-sphere> The group was composed of twenty researchers, activists, artists, and local health professionals of different seroestatus and backgrounds, convened through a public call launched through the museum's website and grass-root networks.

7.3 Working session of the study group *Complementary treatments*, 12<sup>th</sup> December 2018, MACBA Study Centre. Photograph: Aimar Arriola. The group followed a flexible methodology based on the interests of the participants and around specific topics and questions. The first three sessions involved brainstorming and focused on identifying crossings between individual interests and those of the group.

7.4 Special tour of the exhibition, 17<sup>th</sup> November 2018, MACBA Study Centre. a) Photograph: Aimar Arriola. b) [Web page screenshot], retrieved from <https://www.macba.cat/en/lets-talk-about-aids> MACBA's programme of special tours *Let's talk about* generates discussions on the museum's exhibitions between different agents and artists in the city and the public. On this occasion, we conducted a cross-visit between the exhibition *AIDS Anarchive* and particular Collection works in the museum's permanent display. Other events to come in the following months include film screenings, seminars, and performative activations of aspects of the exhibition.

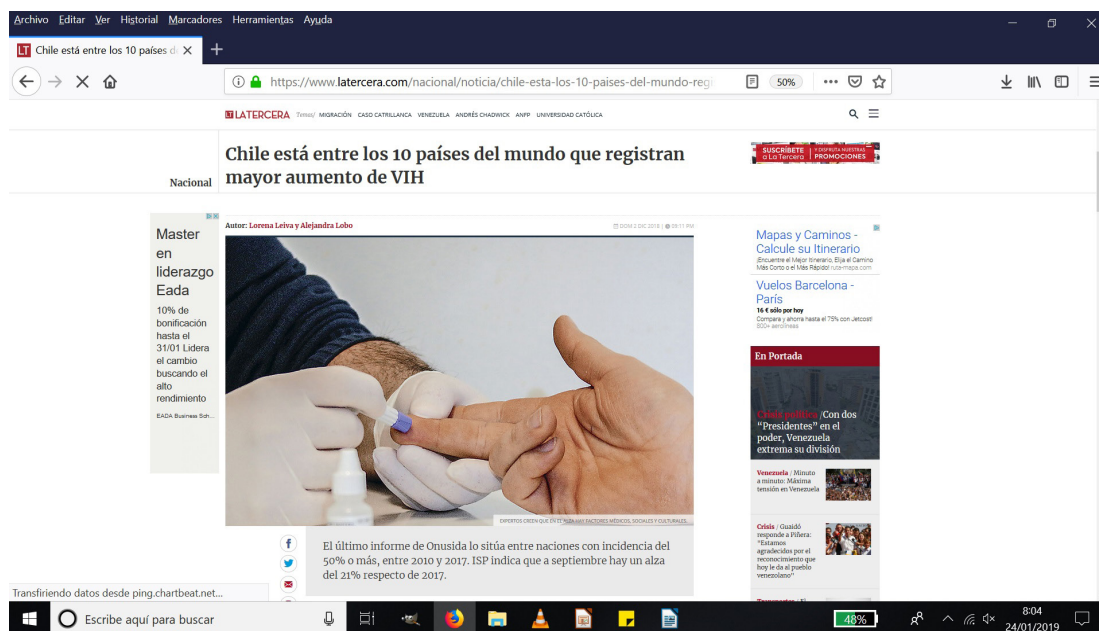


# 8

## Unsuccessful Initiative

In a project that considers cultural responses to the ongoing HIV crisis in Spain and Chile, presenting the exhibition *AIDS Anarchive* in Chile remains a fundamental but unfulfilled goal of the practice. The most appropriate institution for this project is the Salvador Allende Museum of Solidarity (MSSA), which has recently managed to reorient its original mission of preserving the memory of the resistance to the Pinochet dictatorship to more burning issues, from gentrification to sexual dissidence. However, despite the initial interest shown by the Museum's director, with whom we met in Barcelona, the presentation of a specific project and a series of subsequent meetings via Skype, our efforts were unsuccessful. In its formal reply, the museum justified a negative decision by arguing that they had already done a significant number of archival exhibitions. Informally, sources at the museum confirmed that the decision had taken into consideration the arrival of Piñera to the presidency of the country and the conservative turn that public cultural policies are beginning to take.

For the three members of my curatorial collective, to present the exhibition in Chile, in the year in which the country has declared HIV as a 'national emergency' due to the alarming percentage of new transmissions, it was crucial. For my project colleagues, presenting this project would have offered an opportunity to share work in their country of origin. For me, sharing this project would have allowed me to expand conversations with artists and grass-roots groups initiated during my trip to Santiago de Chile in 2015 on a research trip funded by CHASE. As I submit my thesis, we continue to attempt to present the exhibition in Chile in the future.



### Image caption

8.1 Lorena Leiva and Alejandra Lobo, 'Chile está entre los 10 países del mundo que registran mayor aumento de VIH,' *La Tercera*, 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2018 [Web page screenshot], retrieved from <https://www.latercera.com/nacional/noticia/chile-esta-los-10-paises-del-mundo-registran-mayor-aumento-vih/427503/> Recent press report on the alarming increase in new cases of HIV transmission in Chile, illustrated with an image of touching hands.



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