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Global Intimacies

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SPEAKERS
Aimar Arriola, Sofia Lemos, Malik Gaines, Laura Guy

00:03
Sofia Lemos: Good evening folks. My name is Sofia Lemos, I'm the curator of public programmes and research at Nottingham contemporary. And it is my pleasure welcoming you online for a contemporary conversation, unfolding counter narratives and global queer visual cultures, yet to be told in the context of HIV/AIDS. For those of you tuning in for the first time, we often invite artists, thinkers and scholars to collaborate with us on opening up our curatorial research and public programmes and artistic propositions within our current exhibitions. These interventions and inversions of thoughts allow us to dwell on complex questions and eventually invent new methodologies for rewriting the artistic canon and for making art public. This evening's contemporary conversation centres around debates on performance, on documentary image, and critical factors that open up counter narratives to better known histories of HIV/AIDS activism. It places HIV/AIDS activism in dialogue with lesbian, trans and globalised subjectivities, exploring how south-to-south imaginaries, performance and visual arts might help us rethink archives relating to the ongoing epidemic. In a move towards decolonizing AIDS-related histories that centre white, cis male, urban, US based gay men during the 1980s and 90s, this conversation, reimagines the role of documentation and archiving as part of a larger project of queer temporalities and utopian horizons. Our guests this evening, curator, editor and researcher Aimar Arriola, and performance studies scholar and artist Malik Gaines, alongside scholar and curator Laura Guy, look at the cultural responses to HIV/AIDS activism manifested in art and performance, and consider

the important role that exhibition making and curatorial knowledge have in the pursuit of expanded modes of academic inquiry. They'll speak to a mode of address that makes audile the many silenced histories of community, of care, of intimacy in this globalised crisis, and how art can collapse these seemingly disparate, albeit synchronous and polyvocal histories. Playing on longer fragments of grassroots activism and the continuity of embodied knowledge that HIV/AIDS have as a space of thought, Aimar, Malik and Laura, turn to the practices of Latinx, black and brown queer artists and activists and their radical instantiations of queer time and place to question the very foundation of our meeting this evening: Can we speak of global, transnational intimacies that exceed the conditions of traumatic loss, of social death, and archival erasure in times of health crisis? Before introducing our guests, I'd like to share a brief housekeeping note. As you may know, our public programmes of talks, performances, and screenings seeks to create challenging environments where open mindedness and respect for each other's experiences and perspectives can foster awareness. I take this opportunity to show our gratitude to the University of Nottingham and Nottingham Trent University for generously and graciously supporting our events, as well as acknowledging my colleague, Ryan Kearney, who is supporting us this evening. So without further ado, I'd like to thank our guests this evening, Aimar, Malik, Laura, and introduce our chair. Laura is a writer, an editor, a curator based in Glasgow, where she's research excellence academic fellow in art history at Newcastle University, having previously held positions in contemporary art theory and curating at the University of Edinburgh, and critical studies for fine art at Glasgow School of Art and Goldsmiths, University of London. Her research on feminist and queer visual culture has appeared in various magazines and journals, most recently Aperture, women: a cultural review, and Third Text. She has published interviews and essays focusing on many artists working with moving image and photography, including Peggy Ahwesh, Jamie Crewe, Zoe Leonard, Pauline Boudry, Renate Lorenz, Charlotte Prodger, and Rehana Zaman. Over the past decade, she has collaborated with individuals, with community groups and cultural institutions to profile the work of photographers who documented queer lesbian communities in the US and UK, between the 1970s and 1990s, such as Honey Lee Cottrell, Tessa Boffin, Ingrid Pollard, Jill Posener, and Leon Mostovoy, and is in the process of writing

a monograph based on this research. So she's the editor of Phyllis Christopher: Dark Room, forthcoming with Bookworks, and a curator of an accompanying exhibition at BALTIC Centre for contemporary art. With Glyn Davis, she's also co-editor of Queer Print in Europe, a collection of essays due later this year on Bloomsbury. So without further ado, thank you so much for being here this evening. I hope you enjoy our conversation.

05:16
Laura Guy: Thanks Sofia. It's a real privilege to be chairing this discussion between Malik Gaines and Aimar Arriola. Both speakers work at intersections of different disciplines and areas of critical inquiry. Gaines is a New York based writer and artist whose remarkable book, Black performance on the outskirts of the left, was published by NYU press in 2017. It's a book that examines the transformative dimensions of excessive and often ambivalent performances of racial and sexual difference. Arriola is a curator, editor and researcher from the Basque country whose practice often happens at a similar nexus of cultural production and political intervention. Before they start, I'm just going to spend a few minutes circling the terms that describe our meeting today. Global intimacy is a conversation organised by Sofia, and thank you to her and to Ryan Kearney, and the technicians at Nottingham Contemporary for making this discussion possible. Gaines and Arriola will present an aspect of their work for just under half an hour each, after which we will be, or they will be in discussion. So this week, I was reminded that it's almost a year since I flew from Glasgow, Scotland to Madrid, Spain to speak alongside colleagues at the ARCO international Art Fair. The occasion was the fair's curated section, a central exhibition and accompanying programme, focusing on Felix Gonzalez Torres' work, the Cuban born American artist, who's best known perhaps for a body of work that represents a profound meditation on the political contingencies of time, erasure, and loss, defined by a material and deeply personal experience of HIV and AIDS. Rather than present a survey, the exhibition, It's only a matter of time, sought to re signify Torres' work. It mapped lines of intergenerational influence, and overlapping aesthetic and political affinities, between a number of contemporary artists. A series of talks worked outwards from the curators' methodology, often focusing on the ways that institutional

contexts, organised bodies of work, and the work of bodies, and paying attention to the material conditions that produce queer life and art, an attention that Torres' installations and sculptures demands. Established in the early 1980s, seven years after Franco's death in the context of the transition in Spain, ARCO, like many art fairs and festivals organised outside of Western contemporary art's main centres, is tethered to expressions of a kind of cultural internationalism, albeit a liberal one. Also, like other art fairs, its blatant role in the international circulation of artworks as commodities, and obfuscation of more heterogeneous and localised forms of cultural production, made for a profoundly loaded and sometimes contradictory context in which to examine the themes of the day. This was also compounded by mounting anxiety around the unfolding effects of Coronavirus, which served as an uneasy backdrop to our discussions that often centred the ongoing global crisis of HIV/AIDS. Less than three weeks later, newly in lockdown, a friend forwarded me a disturbing image of the supersize commercial events venue where ARCO took place, with the grid of gallery booths replaced by a similar arrangement of hospital beds. By this time, the unintended connection between HIV/AIDS and COVID-19 that we had witnessed at the fair had began to ossify as one of the prevalent tropes framing responses to Coronavirus. As Theodore Kerr, a fellow panellist at the ARCO event would go on to address in POZ magazine at the end of that month, the wish to forge parallels between the two viruses risks a profound oversimplification of the history and current situation of AIDS, alighting, among other things, enormous disparities in political responses to the two separate global health events. At the same time, he wrote then, it gestured to the unique place that AIDS occupies in the collective psyche, as well as the ongoing effects of illness and trauma in the context of the HIV epidemic. These problematic parallels have amplified as the year progressed, and most recently here in the UK where I'm based, in light of the release of Russell T. Davies's, It's A Sin on the telly, a show that through five episodes offers a personal and admittedly partial account of HIV/AIDS, as experienced by a group of young gay men and their extraordinary beautiful friend Jill living together in London, England, over a 10 year period beginning in 1981. The series offers a moving representation of the effects of those early years of the crisis, more nuanced than most that have entered the British mainstream. And it offers a corrective to the absence of HIV/AIDS from Davies' own

previous hit show Queer as Folk, first aired 22 years ago in February 1999. Yet It's A Sin is a narrow telling, exhibiting the same willingness to grasp at acts of heroism, participate in the erasure of political forces, and engage in the kinds of geographic and temporal bias that continue to shape established narratives around HIV/AIDS, and all of this has been magnified in the majority of responses to the programme. And anyway, we're not here to talk about the show. But with this rather anecdotal introduction, I wanted to frame some of the ways that Kerr has elsewhere identified, as his now over a decade long period of AIDS crisis revisitation, has been differently inflected during the past 12 or so months, and yet has continued to reproduce hegemonic structures privileging certain periods, places, and crucially bodies above others. Through their separate bodies of work, and in relation to a range of subjects, Arriola and Gaines both contribute to resisting such structures that organise the past and the present, and the relationship of the past to the present, often, offering up radical potentialities of transhistorical and transnational imaginaries. Their work also reminds me to be wary of perceptions of shared experience and mutual connection. How might a term like global intimacy seduce one into readymade fantasies about the political possibilities of deterritorialization as we navigate this encounter via zoom? Preparing for this talk a copy of the Against Nature journal, which I have here, dropped through my letterbox. Co-edited by Arriola, it was an unexpected moment of connection between two strangers, rare in the status of lockdown. The journal is beautifully produced, tactile, self consciously queer in form, and dedicated for this issue to the theme of migration, and to the subject of transnational rights and activism. When I wrote to Arriola to say that I have a copy, he responds from the Basque Country that he hasn't received this yet, reminding me that economic and geographic inequalities are as present in the international postal system, as they are the platform that we meet on today. And so with this missed connection, I'd like to introduce our two speakers, and I really look forward to hearing them in discussion after their presentations. Malik Gaines is an artist and writer based in New York. He is the author of Black performance on the outskirts at the left, a history of the impossible, and many articles and essays about art and performance. He performs and shows work in collaborations, including the group My Barbarian, which will present a survey of its work at the Whitney Museum in New York in 2021. Gaines is Associate

Professor of performance studies at NYU Tisch School of Art. Aimar Arriola works as a Azkuna Zentroa, Bilbao, where he is doing research and public programming on the notion of queer form. A graduate from MACBA's independent studies programme, Barcelona, Aimar holds a PhD in visual cultures from Goldsmiths, University of London, and has been a research resident at Reina Sofia, Madrid, Visual AIDS, New York, and X Central American biennial. He was a nominee for the 2012 ICI New York independent vision curatorial award. And since then, Aimar has organised exhibitions and events in The Showroom in London, and Tabakalera in San Sebastian, among others. As a member of the collective Equipo re, from 2012 to 2018, Aimar develop the long term, AIDS-revisitation project AIDS Anarchive. He is co editor of The Against Nature journal, a publication and events programme initiated by Council, Paris, that explores the concept of laws against nature. And so if I give over to Malik first, and then to Aimar, thank you both.

15:05
Malik Gaines: Thank you so much Laura. And it's great to see you Aimar, I recall you giving my partner and I a tour around Bilbao some many years ago. And I'm happy to see you again now. And thank you, Nottingham Contemporary, Sofia and Ryan and all the folks there who have helped put this programme together. I have a little bit of a PowerPoint that I will share that allows me to talk through some of the ideas that Laura generously laid out in that opening. And I was just I was thinking about this collection of prompts, I was thinking about the actual term queer, something that is always sort of contested and renegotiated, approached differently from generation to generation. And stands for, you know, could be something very specific and could be just an entire field of relations. And as I've talked about this recently, with some of my friends and students and colleagues, I realised that for me, I orient that term, specifically, around when it came into use around HIV/AIDS, and how that coincided with my own biography. And this, this subject matter very often returns one to the personal. And for me, I think about just generationally, I think of this as one of those cases where generational position actually really matters. As someone who was born in the early 70s, and started having sex with guys, and moved out of my midsize town into a big city and went to college in 1991. And so my sort of sexuality and my sort of intellectual life and critical approach all

circulated around this moment of intense crisis. And it's hard to sort of separate those things for me. In my book, Black performance on the outskirts of the left, I was paying particular attention to the 1960s. And I was thinking about how do we periodize historic concepts like the 60s, something that, you know, announces a kind of radicalism, announces a kind of turmoil, announces a kind of experimentation, and also intense repression. And I wanted to think about time as space like, how do we take a temporal site and think of it as a political site, a kind of location? And in doing so, I thought really specifically about black and queer political performances, but had to struggle with language, like how how would queer have been used as a term in the 60s, it would be very different than how we use it in US academia, for example, now after queer theory. Someone like Reggie Dunigan, who's on the cover of my book, who was a member of The Cockettes performance troupe in the Bay Area, San Francisco Bay Area in California, and who died of AIDS in the 1990s. How would he have described his sexuality, right? How does this presentation get described in terms of gender, and all of these terms were fairly loose, and intentionally so in that moment of experimentation, where they were all in these kind of communal, hippie ecstatic projects together like the Cockettes performance troupe, which was, you know, a large collaborative effort of kind of hippie people on psychedelic drugs and other elements, demonstrating a kind of anti normative ethos in the streets and everywhere else. And in performance. Reggie said famously in a great documentary called The Cockettes about the Cockettes troupe. He says, the world for the most part is shit. With the wars, and the banks, and the corruption, and the lies, and the malls. Forget it. Just give me a torn dress, a hit of acid, and let's go to the beach. That's enough. That's a lot. So thinking about a figure like Reggie. The photo on the cover is actually a photograph from the 90s when Reggie is in sort of 60s drag. And I thought that sort of act of recreation or reenactment, and that kind of political and historical memory was actually really relevant to this project. This photo of Reggie is sort of a, from the height of The Cockettes. activities in 1971, out in public space with the baby of another Cockettes troop member, and this baby was sort of an honorary member of the troop as well. You know, some by ending my study, you know, around, you know, the early 70s, I escaped having to really take on HIV/AIDS in this work. And, but by in dealing with The Cockettes, and specifically in searching for these

photographs later, I would have conversations with people who would say, you know, well, so and so had the negatives, but he died. But he's sent all the copies to so and so but they don't have a email, they have a fax machine. So I'll go over to their house later and see if they have them. And it was really sort of tracing an archive, through this community, which had an incredible rupture in it. Many members of The Cockettes are deceased, some from AIDS, some from other causes. And in fact, you know, many members of black radical organisations that I traced at the time have also died, faced political violence, or any other number of causes. And so not to sort of romanticise dying of AIDS as a kind of, you know, revolutionary death. I did find that interesting, interesting is the wrong word, sort of, you know, telling, the kind of brutality with which a kind of radical life can meet its end. And then, of course, I write extensively about Sylvester, who is the most famous member of The Cockettes troupe. And in this work, I was really interested in how, as in the last photograph, this troupe was producing what maybe later and queer theory got described as anti normativity, a kind of, you know, resistance to the norms that inscribe a kind of heterosexual order of time and space on all operations. And they were out in the street, they were on stage, they were on film, there were at protests, they were in the park, they were in their commune, and they were in their private spaces. And here you see Sylvester listening to a classic Victrola, in a kind of interior setting. And so I was really interested in how queerness operates as something that takes over space, operates in the public, transforms, not only what the kind of exchange is, and the economies of the public, but how a body may appear or become legible in that kind of operation. But also, there was no distinction between public and private, in many cases, the interior, the intimacies of the body, they were all an extension of this kind of anti normative project. Sylvester died in 1988, of AIDS, but before then had a you know, successful and important and memorable disco career, music career, you know, not limited to disco, of course, some really incredible rock and r&b albums. And then culminating in some incredible disco hits, some of which are played on the series, It's A Sin, which I watched a little bit of last night. And that kind of club space, right, that place of liberation at the club signifies, in gay life, and especially, you know, pre social media, pre internet, queer life, gay and queer life. So in this, you know, incredible disco career, Sylvester is this remarkable figures sort of, without a kind of

recognisable gender and engaged in a kind of amplification of a of a community. That's this sort of liberated scene emerging in San Francisco and other areas. And as in the hit song Stars, there's a sense that this kind of anti normative or celebratory exploration of the sexualized self is extraordinary. He says, you know, you are a star, everybody is one. At the same time in the club, everything is a kind of field of relations. The song You make me feel mighty real, of course is Sylvester's, perhaps most well known hit. And I spent a little time in my book sort of, you know, doing a kind of literary study of that song, and thinking about how the idea of being itself, the instantiation of a subject in relationship to an object, that meaning is made in that relation, there is no you or I or me, there's only the feeling of being real, that you and I enact together. And in the disco club, that's a relation bound to physicality, it's bound to dancing, it's bound to sociality on that kind of intimate level. But it's also connected to sex as this song demonstrates, later, Sylvester, you know, goes into kind of some breathy exclamations, that suggests, you know, a kind of physical intimacy on that level. And, you know, these were sexualized scenes, right? And so I wanted to think for this talk a little bit about that orientation that I bring to this question where HIV and AIDS have not been, you know, I'm not an expert on either the sort of epidemic history, nor have I focused on that as a kind of condition for aesthetic production, but it has circulated through everything I've studied from that kind of queer perspective. And so I wanted to think in this context about how queerness in its flexibility and mobility and contestation, you know, in conversations I have, you know, my students or younger people want to take that, want to think about queerness as not tied to specific genitals, specific acts, that make a kind of gender legible, or create a kind of biological basis for what it means to be queer. And I understand that completely. There's no point in saying that gay sex is in and of itself radical, because you put one thing inside of another thing, that obviously is beside the point of what queer can offer for us. However, the condition at this time, where queerness, you know, I came to understand queerness in relationship to queer nation and other kinds of activist organisations responding specifically to the absolute devastation of the AIDS crisis and the sort of, you know, political, governmental collapse of, you know, adequate response, and a society that, you know, is deeply homophobic and violent towards the people who were also being immediately, were, it turned out through sexual

transmission were the most susceptible in that moment of the crisis. So there is something about a kind of outlaw sexuality, a kind of sexuality, inclusive of sexual acts, that a kind of culture at large, violently opposes and condemns. And the sort of AIDS pandemic served, in many ways as a kind of, you know, form of capital punishment to retaliate against anti normative sexualities, either as kind of subjectivities or identities, or even as just a series of acts that people do together in the dance club, or in the street, or in the alley, or in the home, or in the apartment, or wherever else. So for me, queerness because of this, because of the way AIDS and HIV insistently appear, for me, in relationship to this question, queerness does have something to do with this position of a kind of contested outlaw sexuality. We can speak you know, extensively about how this overlaps with the production of blackness or forms of black expression, or the kind of prohibitions or requirements applied to black sexuality in the United States, in the afterlife of slavery and everywhere else. There's a lot to be said around that kind of combination. And I think Sylvester is a really good example of how we might think through those collusions. But from that point, I wanted to sort of turn to another artist who had similar generational perspective who you know, is alive. Right. Ron Athey is sort of a legendary performance artist who came out of that sort of LA club scene, who, you know, I saw him dance at a experimental club called cinematic in the early 90s. And he has just opened a retrospective curated by Amelia Jones, the performance art historian at participant, Inc, nonprofit gallery in Manhattan. And it's a retrospective of 40 years of work, it's really incredibly done. And it sort of takes me through historically, you know, the time between then and now that Athey has traversed. And I always have, I have a series of kind of like personal anecdotes that I always bring into this conversation from, you know, high school to forward, I can save those for our chit chat if they seem apt. So you know, this exhibition collects a number of theatrical costumes, and ephemera, photographs, and artworks that were all part of a these incredible performances, many of which refer back to his childhood in a kind of emphatic religious tradition where he was a kind of living saint. And after leaving that tradition, he brought that attention to sort of ritual and transcendent theatre, to his own performance work. But also, Athey is known for a lot of ritualised acts in his performances that also connect fetish and BDSM cultures and other kinds of queer expressions. And so there is often penetration, there has been, you

know, cutting or other kinds of forms of kind of sacred ritual that is both sort of sexualized, and points to the kind of limits of the body that we see in endurance and those kinds of performance traditions that Ron really helped organise. There's a, you know, a set, there's a collection of ephemera in this exhibition relating to one of the sort of famous cases in the US culture wars that Ron was a part of, he had done a performance, you know, and you know, at the time, surrounded by the AIDS crisis, this was not sort of irrelevant. His work, was central to his work we did a talk in, in my university department earlier this week. And he talked about, you know, these, these details of the time, like, you have to spend all of your time visiting friends in the hospital. But for him, it was important not to just visit the popular friends, because they have other friends visiting, you have to think about who is unpopular, and go to their rooms and sit with them. And so this kind of distribution of labour, that so many people picked up around caring for each other, and around organising politically, circulates around all of this work. And in this case, many viewers might know this, but I'll just recap quickly, he had done a performance at a important Art Centre in the Midwest, the Walker Art Centre, that involved a project that he did and has done repeatedly including at a performance at Participant Inc last week, where the sort of cut is made, and then prints using blood on paper towel are, are made by attendants who then hang them on lines above the performance. And in this case, in 1994, when of course, there was, you know, a legitimate fear around how is AIDS transmitted, but also of course, kind of a lot of hysteria, connected to questions of sexuality around it. As you know, it somehow got out, that as sort of his exaggerated version of the performance was described to the press. And the implication as that this artist had, you know, callously had AIDS infected blood dripping all over the performance space and that it was dangerous to audience members, you know, really not true, not true description. And this was spun into the political scene. This here is a famous segregationist senator, Jesse Helms, who's now deceased, who brought Ron's image into the senate chambers and used it in his campaign, you know, sort of a broad anti queer campaign, but also part of the US rights campaign to defund the arts, there was a question about a grant that had gone to the Walker Art Centre that had some government support, so to dismantle that agency that funds art, and there are other prominent cases around this time dealing with similar content. So here you see Ron, kind of like a

Saint Sebastian, ritually used in this kind of public ceremony. And, you know, Ron, of course, is alive and Jesse Helms isn't. So there is the kind of way that there are, there are a number of different possibilities of ways to imagine living through this kind of crisis. And also attending to what actually happened is very much a part of that. Here's an example of one of those prints where he adapts kind of Minoan Crete, figure from Minoan Crete that has some kind of ceremonial meaning to him. And here's a video in the exhibition of the actual performance that was so disruptive in the first instance. So and finally, I just wanted to flip through some images from one of the art collectives that I work in. This one is called A.R.M. It's an acronym for the first names of the members of the group, Alexandro Segade, Robbie Acklen and Malik Gaines, and we're, you know, it's my partner and collaborator, and I, and another friend and collaborator, who is significantly younger than us, who was born in 1989, at this moment where we were just sort of coming into the world. And we have different relationships to HIV, and different generational perspectives to that. And so much, the projects that we've done, have been really interested in taking up gay historical archives and thinking about them through these bifurcated generational perspectives. This, for example, is a project called Fire Signs in which we, for a residency on Fire Island, a sort of, you know, historically queer vacation Island in New York. We reenacted photographs from another collective of artists, who in the 40s and 50s made a series of photographs together on Fire Island and other historically gay places. They were called PaJaMa, which is an acronym for Paul Cadmus, Jared French, and Margaret French, all of whom are kind of, you know, painters of the WPA is like the period during World War Two, when the government supported a lot of art. And so they're kind of associated with that era, too, all three painters, and to kind of, you know, throuple. And so we just simply reenacted a number of these photographs. And those we've shown, for example, just as photographs is an installation at DD 55 Gallery in Cologne. And, but we've also transformed it into the other projects such as performance poses, where we physically put ourselves through reenacting a number of the dynamics that come up in this intergenerational exchange around a kind of utopian/dystopian queer space. This one, this version of this performance was at the Whitney Museum in New York. And finally, the last project we worked on was called Blood Fountain. And we had thought about how, what would

an AIDS Memorial really look like? There's one here in New York City, that's a very, it's recently dedicated. It's a very austere, white, kind of minimal Plaza, with the kind of, you know, designy, triangular, trellis and engraved, quote, or a sort of large, substantial engraved text by Walt Whitman, that was designed by Jenny Holzer, the artist, in the ground. And, you know, there's a passage in the book by Sarah Schulman who wrote Gentrification of the Mind, which really connects, you know, questions of real estate specifically in New York, for example, how the West Village and Harlem, you know, were cleared out by this crisis, how apartments became available, and how those became you know, engines for gentrifying those neighbourhoods. And she says, Well, what would an AIDS Memorial really look like? It would actually look like a fountain of blood, and so we played with that image to create a kind of blood fountain. So we did this performance on the Highline, which is an elevated you know, park on a former train track on the west side of Manhattan in a you know, deeply gentrified neighbourhood, it crosses the Meatpacking District, which used to be where people would cruise on the back of meat trucks in the dark, the piers that people know from shows like Pose and others that was important queer, and queer of colour, and black queer meeting ground. And this is in the shadow of the Hudson Yards, this giant, you know, boomdog old development in Manhattan. And we wanted to sort of make an anti monument, what would a kind of anti Memorial look like? We came up with this idea of sort of like gargoyles, you know, figures on a kind of fountain, and using a kind of red fluid that we could all share that could circulate through all of our bodies through the armature of our costumes, that could represent that kind of idea of a blood fountain. This, you know, it was complicated, the apparatus was leaking, and there's red fluid everywhere. So this is something that we could even, you know, sharpen more as a performance. But this was a good sort of test run of it. The score that we re-enact is a kind of 45 minute track that constructs and deconstructs a particular pop song from the time it was called Blame it on the rain, and it was by Milli Vanilli, who were a group that, you know, were popular for a couple years, won Grammys, and then it was revealed that they had lip synced and weren't the actual singers of their material. And that was kind of like a famous incident of the late 80s, early 90s, this kind of lip synching group. So for us to kind of react reenact this historical period, that kind of question of lip synching seems like a great

way to approach it. And the song is literally from '89 when Alex and I were in high school and when Robbie was born. So we deconstruct and reconstruct that song with sort of monologues, audio, ambient sound, I recorded a jackhammer that was busy at work in the early AIDS Memorial, for example, and use that as kind of a rhythmic element, and the song comes apart and comes back together with the audio accompaniment, that includes, you know, various kinds of disclosures or refusals to disclose, and a kind of consideration of some of the sort of real estate issues that surround this work. Maybe I could just let the audio play for like a minute. Then I'll turn it over to Aimar. [music plays] All right, so you get a sense of how that part comes together. There's a, there's a kind of choral piece where we ask the question based on, you know, a participant in the group a conversation they had had, where they met someone who, with whom they had had a sexual encounter many years before, before they discovered they're HIV positive. And this person, he and this person had a conversation that kind of went, do you think that I infected you? Do you think that I infected you? And this caught the conclusion that it doesn't matter, it doesn't really matter. So that formed a kind of chorus and another series of actions in this performance. And so this is something we might return to in the future, and, you know, is perhaps the most kind of spectacular and sort of direct journey I've taken into the midst of the ongoing crisis and reality that is HIV/AIDS. You know, importantly, the current state of pharmaceuticalisation was also something we discussed, in this piece quite a bit. And in the US, of course, those of us who have jobs are the ones who have health insurance, and then we can have prep or you know, a preventative medicine prescribed that is very expensive, and it gets covered. And so this is another basis for class disparity in the management of these kinds of health questions. So I can stop my presentation there and pick up any of these topics as we continue with this conversation. Thank you.

46:59
Aimar Arriola: Yeah, I'm ready to go though. I have to say I could spend another full hour listening to Malik. This was a Yeah, reminder, I still need to get hold of a copy of your book, which probably came out while I was completing my PhD, and I had no eyes beyond my literature. So I'll do that soon. And, yeah, so thanks, of course, Malik, Laura, for the splendid

introduction, and Sofia, Ryan, and everyone else at Nottingham Contemporary for putting an event together against all odds. Before we begin, Laura, picking up on your intro, just in case, you want to have more elements to maybe extend the inter notes into a full essay. So that you know that later this month, I mean, later in March, MACBA Barcelona is opening a new sort of the next big sort of survey show of Felix Gonzalez Torres, which will go on until later on in September and on. And for the first time, as far as I know, making a real effort to situate Felix's work within a wider framework of post colonial discourse, and stressing his connections, I mean, the connected histories between Spain and Americas as they are sort of present in his own biography and connecting his work with specifically ideas on ideas from the Martinican writer Edouard Glissant, the notions of opacity I mean, which are so relevant in relation to Felix. So, yeah, if things get better, you might want to come to Barcelona, in Summer to check out the show. So um, I was thinking that in consideration of our audience and those unfamiliar with my work, which will be many as I don't have any sort of major published work, and unless they know me, they don't know what I do. I thought that I was sort of focus my presentation on basically introducing my work on AIDS, my recent work on AIDS, and specifically the project AIDS Anarchive as which, as Laura has, has said, I've been working on as part of my one of the collective endeavours in which I'm also involved, Equipo re for the last seven years. Just to give a sense of the yeah, the scope of the work that I've been doing and the kinds of materials that I've been looking into. So I've been doing cultural work on the ongoing HIV epidemic as a practising curator and an academic, maybe academic is a big word, as a doctoral researcher I will say, as I'm someone who situates maybe, definitely not in academia, maybe around academia. And specifically, I've been researching and telling stories about the cultural production, the visual and performative production surrounding the epidemic, both in Spain, and Chile, specifically in Spain, and Chile, two countries that are part of my own biography, and which are determined by a common, a common trajectory as countries that have gone through rampant dictatorships, and the ways in which that condition manifests in the archive. So, and I've been doing as I said, these work under two overlapping umbrellas, my collaborative independent research project AIDS Anarchive, and a practice led PhD in visual cultures at Goldsmiths, London, which I completed two years

back personally. And to set in play words, I would say that the goal of both projects was one and the same, to expand existing work on AIDS through geography, and language, and culture, and representation. And, of course, the overall context, the work that I've been developing is the so called ongoing AIDS crisis revisitation, which has been described by many, including our dear friend Ted Kerr to describe the current effort of many to reassess the political legacy of AIDS in the AIDS archive through the lens of the present, and at the core of my project is the fact that too often the work being done, the work done in the past and the work still being done within this AIDS crisis revisitation sort of era still privileges experiences from mainly the US and centrally North Europe, ignoring other realities. And as, among other formalizations, the work that I've done with my collective has included seminars, workshops, publications, and you see in this first image, just the collage of a number of screengrabs of events that we've organised in the last few years. Yeah, each time I talk about the the collective, of the collective project, I like to show a picture of the three of us, Nancy, Linda and myself. This is us in the yep, conference presentation, the press conference of one of the exhibitions that we did in San Sebastian, so as I said we've done a number of events, including the stage of three different exhibitions, one in the Basque Country, another one in Madrid, and another one, the third one in in Barcelona. This one is the one that we did in 2019 in MACBA, as part of part of a wider programme of the institution of sort of looking back at the 1990s, and specifically, the year 1992, which was the year in which the countries sort of, the year in which the country entered the European Union and stage a number of macro events, including the Olympics in Barcelona, the celebration of the European Capital of Culture in Madrid, and the expo in Seville, as a way to sort of boost the modernization of Spain after the transition. And we did a project that looked specifically to the history of the HIV crisis and responses to the crisis in the city of Barcelona, including the yeah, the little known little known local experiences such as the Barcelona division of ACT UP, that only worked for a couple of years, that is still remains unresearched, or the visit that Keith Haring did to the city in 1989, and the impromptu mural that he sort of offered to the city and is now in MACBA's collection, oddly enough. Yeah, in in terms of my doctoral work, and in connection to what I just said, it was important for me to conduct the project in London, that is at the, I'll say the heart of the global networks of

influence where the representation of cultural responses to AIDS from Spain and Chile are not only missing, but also have the potential to reach the way this audience. And as a quick gateway to my context of practice and research in in Chile, and the and the particularities of those contexts, I'm going to briefly introduce two figures whose life and work have been important to say the least in my work, the Chilean art and activist duo, Yeguas del Apocalipsis, Mares of the Apocalypse, formed by the anti Pinochet activists and writers, Pedro Lemebel and Francisco Casas. And the activist and cultural worker, Miguel Benlloch, from Spain, whom I will jump in a minute. And I'll do these two point out specific social and historical conditions that call into question the very idea of a crisis in AIDS, highlighting what many different contexts are already suggesting that the AIDS crisis is probably yes, a global rally but not a homogenous one, and also to begin to summon the terms of framework discussion to the global intimacy, and let me say very specific special interested in spending some time discussing the first term global, even the usefulness of it. And among the particular conditions, I will say, that I would like to emphasise, that are emphasised by the work of both Yeguas and Miguel, in connection to those particular contexts, Chile and Spain, I think that three are quite telling and quite illustrative of what I just said that the AIDS crisis is not an homogenous reality. And also three that contribute significantly, and also, I think, to the broadening of the revisitation work currently being conducted and one would be, of course, as I just said, the juncture between AIDS and dictatorial context, that is the political backdrop in which the work of the two develop, also the regional character of overlooked responses to the AIDS crisis, for instance, Andalucia, in Spain, that is the South of Spain, the South of Southern Europe, which is the general context of Miguel's early practice, and also the importance of considering languages other than English as a difference that is played out also in the AIDS archive. So the images that we're seeing on screen, you're hopefully seeing, are from the first action by the Chilean art and activist duo Yeguas del apocalipsis, from 1988. They've been largely, well, they've been the subject of a growing number of academic and curatorial works, and are present in almost every account of Latin American art and activism in the 90s, 80s and 90s. But still, the work of the duo tends to be missing specifically in the narratives around the AIDS crisis, not only in Chile, but beyond. And as I said, what we're seeing on the screen is the first action

of the collective, their signature work, so to say, called the Refoundation de la universidad de Chile, the refoundation of the University of Chile, 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. And let's say that the intention of this work was not specifically to address the AIDS crisis, not at least in an obvious way, rather, it was an attempt to denounce homophobia and political repression in Pinochet's Chile. However, many other works by Yeguas, as well as later individual works by the members of the group are directly related to the AIDS crisis. And I think that considering the work of the collective is very important for the opening of existing artists of the on the ongoing HIV crisis. And one thing I haven't mentioned before is that one was one of the impetus behind my let's say, doctoral work, or the scholarly work on AIDS, is the need to begin rethinking also that position that, let's say the human occupies within known histories of AIDS and from, to do that from a perspective that assumes the interdependence of the human with other realities, organic, prosthetic, manmade and so forth. And in that sense, in relation to these specific images, I was interested in thinking about the particular encounter between the activist and the nonhuman animal in terms of physicality and encounter and even as a context, in ahead of today's discussion, maybe I was thinking of how the attention to the particular encounter relationship between humans and human animals in this images could also invite us to rethink what intimacy is, might be, or even could be, again, just to mention one of the terms opening the discussion today. And perhaps one of the most striking actions of Pedro Lemebel, a member of the group, a later a later word later action, in relation to the AIDS crisis is the one he carried out in the context of the pride celebrations in New York City in 1994, to which he was invited, and in which he dressed as you see, as a haloed Christ with a crown of thorns, that were actually needles, full of supposedly infected blood while carrying a handwritten banner as you see with the English phrase, Chile returns AIDS, referring as he had done on other occasions to HIV as a metaphor for US imperialism that is symbolically carrying AIDS back to its supposed point of origin. And in that this image alone points to the complex transnational relations, present in the AIDS archive, in opposition to ideas of, you know, national demarcation in identity, almost problematizing my own, in a way, my own emphasis on Chile and

Spain as locating devices, a question that I will be happy to discuss with you later. Yeah, secondly, yeah, I'd like also to briefly introduce the practice of the Spanish artist and cultural activist Miguel Benlloch. Contemporary to Yeguas del apocalipsis, probably contemporary to Sylvester I'm not sure, who sadly passed away in 2018, during the course of the writing of my PhD project. Miguel, who I considered a dear friend, was a forerunner of gender and sexual experimentation practices in Spain since the late 1970s, up to his death, including a handful of early works in response to the AIDS crisis and survivor of the AIDS crisis himself. And his work is best known for the use of I would say, the body, and humour, and direct action as vehicles to challenge fixed identities, national, sexual, and other, and here in the image, you can see Miguel wearing his signature red and black polka dot shirt, in a double reference to the traditional flamenco outfit, but also to the insect ladybird, a signifier for gay homosexuals in Spanish language. And yeah, let me show you couple of images of Miguel. This is a screen grab of the recently launched online archive covering his entire practice, it has been sponsored by the Reina Sofia and some other institutions. It's available for you to have a look. Yeah, and I was thinking of, you know, thinking of some of the images that Malik showed us today, I will say that Miguel was also someone who knew a thing or two about self fashioning and about also being present on stage. I met Miguel over a decade ago in the context of the collective research project, social dangerousness co-directed by Paul Preciado, as MACBA's independent studies programme which I was sort of doing at the time, and this specific project looked at the cultural production of Spain in the years of the so called democratic transition, that is the eight years with a focus on those practices of due to their proximity to sexual politics, and to popular culture as well, and to music and to nightlife did not have a place in the more established histories of cultural production in Spain. And in a relevant way, Miguel was one of the starting cases. So, one of the studying case studies suggested to us and our relationship soon transformed from a research interest to friendship, which also I mean, can bring elements for discussion later about how do we, how can we think intimacy also in terms of, you know, our own research objects and subjects and the materials we work with? And what are the intimate relationships we are sort of, you know, have like to sort of forge with with the material we work with basically. And yeah, the one work by Benlloch that I would like

to sort of point out today, with to you is, this one script, this is a big still of, what I understand is the earliest AIDS performance work, sort of tape on video in Spain, this is from 1984. And it's a cabaret performance sort of stage action, by Las Pekinesas, a collective of Miguel, a collective of which Miguel was a member at the time. And the full tape shows an audience, a small audience gathered in a rather intimate space, the basement of a bar, Planta Baja, groundfloor, literally, the epicentre of, we could say counterculture in Granada in southern Spain, since the early 80s. And in front of the, of the audience are three bodies, the members of the collective with a cardboard, Carnival mask, are on stage passing each other a microphone while reciting quite amusing puns with the word Sita is in Spanish, emphasising the phonics and linguistics of malleability of the word Sita again, showing points in the language, again, appears as a difference that is played out in the, in the in the archive of them, the context in which I've been working, and maybe to just end with, with a note of something that already sort of pointed to in regards to one of the terms of frames of discussion today, globalisation or global. Yeah, of course, I could say of, picking Laura's introduction, I could, of course, say something in regards to the many sort of global or transnational alliances that are sort of, that one can encounter in the archives, you know, posts to ideas of national demarcation in identity, I could say, I can certainly say something about this, referring to the last issue of the against nature journal, we're definitely the the question of queer migration in the Latin diaspora, call for understanding of the world in that of a queer we that goes beyond national borders, but I can also refer to this again by sticking to the AIDS Anarchive project, where, as I said, despite my own geopolitical focus of the project, and my own emphasis of on Chile and Spain as mirroring contexts in which at times we have described together as even the South. The practices at stake, and the stories that are narrated and animated in, in our project immediately opened the door to the question of geographies, the geographies of play, in terms of maybe perhaps the planetary thinking of as you'll remember rather than mirroring between three experiences bound by national state dynamics, which while important, again, are insufficient when approaching the topic. And again, this was maybe more evident in particular instances of the project, I have already referred to, as in the work that we did in the city of Barcelona and the presence in Spain of the one of the cofounders of ACT UP, New York,

John Greenberg, and his role in the formation of the local group of ACTUP Barcelona or, again, Keith Haring's visit to the city in February 1989. That is 22 years ago this month, in the very local experiences that this is in the mural that he drew, triggered in the city. So yes, I would say that the AIDS crisis revisitation helps us unlocking away the reliance of particular nation states as locating devices. And so yeah, so perhaps if I were to do the work again, I would frame the project in different terms. But also the same time, I would say that the AIDS archive calls into question the very usefulness of the term global maybe. And someone that has helped me quite a bit to understand this and see this clearly is Chilean writer, Lena Meruane, who teaches at NYU, she teaches Latin American cultures, and who has been, you know, who has informed a project from the beginning in particularly thinking of her book Viral voyages, which was published by Palgrave in English in 2014. I was in survey of AIDS related literature in Latin America. And on that book, on the one hand, Lena recognises and described AIDS, and the AIDS crisis, yes, as a, as a trope that probably best connotates the new globalised reality that appeared in the 1980s with the synchronous emergence of the virus around the world and there were torrents and flows and communications that were typical of the period. But on the other hand, she also proved that AIDS was truly the great fault in the globalisation project, that is the fault that pointed out the promises of democratic equality that the global work system failed to deliver. And that was exemplified, of course, most obviously, in the, and still is, the uneven access to treatment in different parts of the world, then and now, Malik was referring to prep, for instance, and I mean, often when I'm talking to colleagues from other parts of the world, and usually my colleagues in the US or the UK, and, and I tell them that the scholarly on, you know, sort of the post AIDS era or the post prep era is very poor in in Spain, it's just because prep is still in a legal limbo, and it's not even a daily reality in, in the context in which we work in. So yeah. So I guess, thinking it with with maybe I will say that the just to finish with this final idea, maybe the AIDS crisis revisitation is also an opportunity to critically revise, again, the widely accepted notion that the 80s introduced some sort of new global order, and perhaps even reassess the usefulness of terms such as you know global or globalisation. And, yeah, I think I'll leave it here for now.

1:13:56
Laura Guy: Thank you so much, both of you for your presentations. And there's so many resonances between what you've spoken about, just in terms of thinking about political imperatives, methodologies, the roles of, the role of cultural forms, in your work. But I just was wondering, in relation to what you were just saying, Aimar whether I could ask, if I could take Malik back to the work that you were doing in Black performance, and thinking particularly about the sort of way that you characterise the sort of the trans national and internationalism, in the context of sort of processes of decolonization. And just to sort of, I guess, because that sort of offers some of that some of the sort of pre history that complicates I think what Aimar is speaking about in terms of thinking about the 80s as a sort of location for the, the emergence of kind of globalisation.

1:15:20
Malik Gaines: Absolutely. And yeah, and I love that, Aimar. Thank you so much. And I, I really appreciate the prompt to think of AIDS as a figure in that turned to globalisation in the 80s, I'm thinking just, you know, off bouncing off the top of my head, there's a scholar, Anjuli Fatima Raza Kolb, who has a new book out called Epidemic Empire, where she looks at the discourse around terrorism and the way that that has been, you know, consistently through literature talked about in terms of contagion. And so that's maybe another sort of, road Out of this question of how is the global, for example, constituted through these really complicated points of contact? And thank you Laura for that question. The, you know, I, and this sort of reflects, when I was in school, there was an idea of the trans national that I was trying to sort of rest in, to think particularly about the circulation of black performance along political, specific political routes, that necessarily had to exceed the nation like the United States, or even, you know, any particular sovereignty in the Caribbean or in Africa. These very often are punishing and prohibitive structures, you know, I mean, the United States is pretty much a collapsed nation at this point. So, to think of it as this kind of powerful hegemony is, you know, is, it's one way to think about it, but it's also not actually complete at this point, it's a very sort of uneven kind of application of power at this point. But the way the nation just is not enough, right, it either is withdrawn from public life and doesn't provide services, or it is a some kind of

oppressive form. Or it just is, you know, too small to kind of contain the energy. And for figures like Nina Simone who I study in this book, you know, there's an, the United States sort of couldn't hold, couldn't contain the project. And that has a lot to do with, you know, black diasporic kind of frame that circulates around the Atlantic between, you know, for example, prominent figures in African liberation, who were in Paris, between the wars, you know, speaking with each other, and speaking with people from the Caribbean, and people from the States. And there was that kind of cosmopolitan image, and then there's really like the image of the movement of enslaved people and other forms of migration that create a kind of black transnational sphere, that becomes even more important in many ways than any particular national location. And so I was trying to think of that, and I was using the word transnational, I don't know if it really holds up anymore, but I was using it as a way to not say global, you know, because by that point, global to me felt like a part of, you know, neoliberal globalism, right, the idea that we're just one big market, or the way that development and aid and militarism work alongside kind of economic development in various parts of the world, and, you know, treating everyone like a kind of customer, from our students in our universities to like people who need access to water in the global south. And so, globalism, you know, seemed very tied, to me, to this kind of economic idea. And, you know, so none of these models are exactly complete, right, diaspora. There's you know a way that even the kind of idea of diaspora in the black context doesn't account for actually having a location or having a relationship. To a certain kind of territory, it's always a kind of image of movement and fugitivity, and escape and transport, you know. So, you know, we really have to, if we're gonna think about what are, and, and again, though, you know, in the AIDS crisis as an example, and, you know, I say AIDS crisis referring, I guess, to a specific moment, not to say that that is behind us. How specific nationals, you know, nations, how specific governments responded was actually meaningful, right? And It's A Sin, which I was watching last night, there's this moment in the early episodes where no one in England can get any information, and they're like, can you please, on your trip to New York buy a newspaper, that, that tells us something, right. So, you know, these frames are, of course, meaningful, in terms of how law is administered on behalf of or against, you know, various populations. But no one of them really

became sufficient in terms of thinking about this kind of mobility, and travel that exceeds all of those. And of course, you know, that was a figure and, you know, an idea of AIDS that had to do with transmission, you know, like, Where, where did it come from? Did it come from this location? How did it get here? How does it get there? And, you know, in, not, and I'm interested in this conversation that you brought up earlier, that you both brought up earlier, the sort of failures of, all there like, the failed idea to try and understand COVID through this lens, but that is part of our contemporary language, too, you know, how travel, access? How does this variant or that variant named after a certain territory, reach us? So those are all really, you know, kind of questions, not to sort of resolve right now. But I just in answering the way I sort of frame the transnational as a place where these kind of imaginative expressive strategies and a kind of political network that had to do with West African liberation that had to do with US street movements that had to do with intellectuals in Europe, that had to do with the actual roots of travel and migration from early modernity, and transport, that becomes a sort of a platform for trying to do things differently.

1:23:01
Laura Guy: Thank you. And Aimar, did you want to respond? Or would it be helpful if I sort of formed it into, formulated another question? With regard to what Malik was speaking to?

1:23:20
Malik Gaines: I mean, I also would be, [laughs], I mean, I'm really interested in you. I'm really interested in how from a, from Spain from the Basque Country, how a kind of Imperial relationship that was, you know, interrupted by decades of, you know, other kinds of political fascism, for example, how the kind of Imperial relationship affects your understanding Aimar of how you study works in Latin America, and connect those to works in Spain, especially along this axis of the globalisation of AIDS.

1:24:04
Aimar Arriola: Yeah, I mean, how much time do we have? No. No, I mean, this would be a very long conversation, I will say. For me, the discussion so far, confirms what I already knew. When I sort of completed my

doctoral project and somehow was confronted with this reality. In the Bible it's saying that, you know, all these framing sort of devices that we use in you know, the different areas in which we work, in the disciplines in which within which we operate are insufficient. I mean, none of them are generous enough, complex enough, rich enough to actually make justice to the practices and the sort of experiences and the lives and the stories that we want to tell. And that's, that's a problem in a way. Because, I mean, I want someone to tell me, what is the magic sort of secret and the magic received to actually do the work? The, you know, the most sort of, you know, ethic and sort of corresponsive and responsive way, with responsibility in a way. You know, I was recently, I'm gonna encourage you Malik to use anecdotes, I think they're always apt, so that's okay, on my side. Now I was, I've been kind of in insistently sort of approached to maybe give a book form to the project that I developed, which means revisiting, you know, one's own work. And the one thing that kept me sort of preventing me in starting, even starting to do so is the framing question, because I know, there's no way I can, you know, further extend the work by sort of using this mirroring sort of image between two countries like Spain and Chile. Because, you know, the reason we could say is that this is a very asymmetrical mirror in a way, and one of the structural elements that offers or that makes that asymmetry, a very painful asymmetry is the colonial sort of ties between the former Empire and its colonies in a way. And violence is already described in the language. So yeah, I mean, trapped in a situation in which I'm quite, yeah, quite, let's say, critical of the work that I've done so far, and also not very hopeful of, in which other ways could we put the works that we do forward? Being wary of the yeah, the infrastructural and the structural violences that sort of sustain the experiences that we're trying to narrate and sort of give a representation of, so I have no answers to your questions.

1:27:36
Laura Guy: I was really interested when you were both speaking, and sort of thinking about like, forms and materials and strategies that you employ, in your practice to navigate these questions that you're also thinking through in your writing. And Aimar I had a kind of, possibly quite prosaic question about the strategy of distribution that you employ in the against nature journals. So of posting, I think it's 1500 copies for free

to a sort of network of individuals internationally. But I also saw that that might speak Malik to a project that you did with A.R.M., if I've got that, right, that also engaged in a kind of postal art project.

1:28:36
Malik Gaines: Which, which project are you asking about?

1:28:39
Laura Guy: I thought that, I thought that I'd seen on, that A.R.M. had sort of engaged in a kind of poster art project, I guess, like, affinities and these kinds of strategies for thinking through politics of location and affinities. You know, that of, of these sort of networks that we're kind of describing. And, yeah,

1:29:10
Malik Gaines: Yeah, that's, yeah, that's funny. I mean, in one and the performance Poses, there's a series of postcards that form backdrops that are a part of this kind of like idea of communicating across distance. And they're also you know, making a kind of forced symmetry between Manhattan as an island and these various kinds of vacation islands that take on other utopian possibilities. And, and also just addressing across a history through memory, you know, through personal affective signs, which is very much a part of this process and you know, like, in another piece My Barbarian, a sort of collective that I've worked in for a very long time. We did a project for the organisation visual AIDS, which Aimar I think you referred to, which combine two kind of textual sources - one was the work of the legendarily influential queer theorist, Jose Munoz. And we took up a chapter in his book Disidentifications about a AIDS activist Pedro Zamora, who had played a role on the MTV series, The Real World, which was really like one of the first reality shows, and he used his position on that show Real World San Francisco from you know, the very early 90s to do work as an AIDS educator, which was transformative at the time. So Jose Munoz described a form of kind of counter publicity, which uses sort of the language of publicity, to act out against the sort of normative requirements in its own space. And like using that platform of MTV, the way Pedro Zamora used that platform of MTV, as a way to, you know, as a sort of pedagogical tool, but also as a kind of affective symbol for us, you know, and we saw ourselves

as someone who's the same age, you know, close to the same age as Pedro Zamora, thinking across the distance that this crisis has created. But he died shortly after that. And here we are, you know, in our 40s, still dancing around. And so we made a video piece where we reenacted the sort of theoretical texts that Jose Munoz used to describe this kind of counter publicity, and the forms of care, you know, self care as a kind of political act that Jose Munoz helped innovate in that writing. And then we combine that with reenactments of scenes from the real world, which, you know, we did in a very kind of distant staged kind of video production. And that was a commission for visual AIDS who does a programme every year, usually, I think they treat it differently each year, but for a series of years, they did a programme, commissioning short videos, reflecting on some aspect of this history, and that, you know, kind of short video that we made cheaply, you know, out of love, then because of the structure of that organisation and the, you know, global reach of the question, you know, was distributed everywhere, they sent it, or, you know, it got translated into lots of different languages, it was all over the United States, not just in the art centres. It was on the internet, you know, there's screenings everywhere. And so it's another example of a kind of particular space within our culture, then sort of reaching out across a kind of important network that doesn't include the whole globe, but sort of sneaks through the channels that others have opened up already for having this kind of conversation. And, you know, and there's some ambivalence and irony there, we, you know, we sing, we again, it's similar to Blood Fountain in some ways, we recreate some of the kind of like, MTV hits of the time, and sing them in our own way, sort of replacing their lyrics with Jose Munoz's theoretical language. And using that as a way to, you know, show what it means to live. You know, it could you know, we we could not be here also, right. And so, it's, it's, it shocks me now to even think of how like shocking it is that we, that we're still here, given our kind of generational location. And so to see us kind of dancing around in our 40s and our like cutoff jeans and boots and tank tops, freedom rings is something I wish we still had, like, Did you all have these It was like a chain, and then it had like rainbow coloured kind of like aluminium rings on it that were all the different colours of the rainbow? I need to find some freedom rings, someone look it up on the internet. So I, you know, holding on to that distance and remembering that all of that is still present with us. And so that's both a spatial distance and a

temporal distance. I think I just said a bunch of different things together. So I don't know if I answered any particular question, but I wanted to sort of talk about that approach.

1:35:32
Laura Guy: Thank you. And Aimar did you have, yeah, just the key of the sort of strategies of distribution.

1:35:41
Aimar Arriolla: I have issue one with me, which matches my shirt today. And so that's good. Um, yeah, I mean, it's actually quite nice that you look at the colophone and actually looked at the distribution strategies behind the project, because they are kind of a well thought. I mean, meaning that there's an intention behind, I mean, certainly we, we, in the fact that the journal is distributed, for free, to much extent in only on paper and by email, responds to a number of questions, both practical and political. And it will say, and some of those questions, also sometimes overlap. I mean, one being, you know, the internet will exist in in many contexts in which we do want to have an impact, in which, you know, an average user from his house will not be able to access any web page in which, you know, the word sodomy, or the word sex, or the word, homosexuality is actually sort of there. And, yeah, and also, I mean, we did a launch event recently, maybe like a month ago, four weeks ago, and we discussed all these things about, you know, the politics of distribution and the the materiality of writing and, and Linn Tonstad, who has a beautiful short essay, as part of a series of essays on sort of the notion of a queer we, she says something beautiful about, well, her students, sort of the younger generations, you know, she said that she sees that the younger generations are turning away and turning in sort of, you know, the digital and real at the same time, so we don't know what's going to happen. But anyway, she says something beautiful about digitization, taken away a certain degree of serendipity, of chance encounter needed in building up queer communities in a way. And we know when we think about the distribution of the journal, we are trying to build some sort of community, some sort of a new we. And we do think that physicality and enchanting chance encounter and yeah, in a degree of serendipity are needed to actually build up that community. So yeah, there's certainly an intention there in in the decision of how the

journal circulates. Definitely.

1:38:35
Laura Guy: Thank you. Yeah, I guess I was, it was interesting, because I received it in, through Zoe Leonard, in the context, who I'd met in the context of writing, like a few years ago now about that now very well distributed, and much translated poem, I want a dyke for President. And I suppose in that work, I was trying to sort of weigh the kind of possibilities of this sort of trans, now I'm using that word, but this sort of international sort of reading and reenactment of that text that was taking place against the kind of art world sort of privileges of kind of access, and international travel that were kind of allowing that to take place. And I suppose that was why I was sort of thinking about the, you know, that on one hand, it's, there's so much pleasure in receiving the thing and then on the other, thinking about the sort of material conditions that kind of allow me to be a part of this, this group of people, and then maybe just sort of take that question sort of slightly sideways, I was thinking of that there's all of this kind of inter dependence that sort of emerges in both of your work and sometimes those like intimacies are kind of uncomfortable ones. And other times they're sort of full of all of this kind of potential. And one of the things that was really moving was to see the three of you in A.R.M., Malik, and, and then in the way that you talk about meeting Miguel Aimar, and how that sort of speaks to the kind of necessities of intergenerational dialogue in queer, political work and scholarship. And, and I guess this is something that's really close to my heart and to my work. But I wondered if I could just ask you both to sort of reflect on. And I think both of you kind of touched upon that, like, also what frustrates that dialogue. So this sort of like moments of misrecognition, the effects of violence and trauma, of dictatorship, and sort of disparities in access to cultural institutions, and, of course, the sort of rupture of HIV and AIDS that you really spoke to. And Malik I mean, it could go on, sort of censorship. And I think Sarah Schulman sort of addresses this quite in a way that's may be quite confronting for a younger, you know, to me, as someone who belongs to a sort of younger generation, in gentrification of the mind. And but yeah, just to sort of wonder about the the kind of emotional registers of that work that you've sort of both spoken to.

1:41:42

Malik Gaines: Yeah, it's, it's complicated, but I think that kind of, I guess one of the things I was getting at is that the actual intimacies are an important part of queer life. And those are relationships, those are intergenerational conversations, or mentorship, and those are sexual, you know. I mean, I have, this raises a lot of different thoughts for me. I mean, one is I'm not gonna go there, I'm not going to wade into Twitter's scandals, but there is, I mean, I guess there's maybe a generational difference in what kind of sexualizing is appropriate, right, like, Is it okay to touch someone at a bar? The answer would be, of course, in years past, and now, we would be much more careful about consent, you know. And, and so those often can lead to intergenerational disagreement, you know, people who felt like, highly disposable, marginalised, unappreciated, queer people now in positions of power. How do they comport themselves in relationship to these questions? Do they acknowledge their kind of privilege? That's part of something that can come with ageing. You know, Zoe's piece, Zoe Leonard's I want to President is an interesting example of something that is kind of circulated so wide, you know, very, you know, really widely, you know, all over all over the world, I think people have been taking that up. We had Zoe read that in a performance we were doing at the New Museum that was kind of like a political caucus in 2016, using elements of political theatre to talk about democracy in that moment, and that sort of, you know, intense moment of US politics. And we called Zoe and asked her if she would read that. And she did a performance, which I think had been one of the, perhaps the first or one of the first times she had actually read it herself in public as a as a kind of, you know, intervention. And in that same performance, I had memorised the speech that Josephine Baker had given, back to this question of the trans national, where she had returned to the United States, Josephine Baker, of course, you know, the famous US, you know, exile in Paris who was very early, you know, popular performer in the teens in Paris, and who has a sort of extraordinary legacy as a performer, and she made a rare trip back to the United States which had sort of, you know, she was too sort of far ahead of the time to be here, and she made a rare trip for the, our famous, you know, march on Washington for Jobs and Freedom in 1963, where she arrived in her military uniform, like a skirt suit with all of her medals, she had been given by the French government for her work

in the resistance during World War Two where she would like deliver messages on invisible ink on sheet music and stuff like that, right. Sylvester, you know, would know, Sylvester would often claim he was related to people like this. And he was obsessed with Josephine Baker and modelled much of his kind of persona after her and he even got a chance to meet her once. And so she gave a speech at the March on Washington, which I then memorised and gave as a speech. And then later, for a programme where Zoe organised people to give political speeches around I want a president, I then reproduced that speech by Josephine Baker. So again, thinking about the relationship between black exilic life and the kinds of displacements that a kind of queer theoretical and activist framework brought up during that generation. I mean, I guess just, you know, I want a President is itself an act of imagination, if you read that tags, it sort of speculates and conjures all these different kinds of, you know, different kinds of attributes this president could have, who sort of gets it. And, you know, that act of imagination against prohibitive realities is another one of these hinges between kind of a queer and black kind of strategy for performance and for living.

1:46:53
Aimar Arriola: Yeah, no, I was I was, I just realised that I had a last slide that I did not use, that it was gonna be my sort of entry point to intimacy, just because for the last six months I've been involved in this very sort of demanding, passionate and rewarding long written exchange with Amsterdam based US performance artist Sands Murray-Wassink, who is in in the context of a new commission that he's developing with, with if I can't dance, the performance organisation in Amsterdam, and to which I was invited to contribute as part of a process event. And I mean, this long sort history exchange, which is titled feminist legacies, queer intimacies is the process event and will be sort of, we'll see the line next week when it's published, if I can do a website, and so basically the work that Sands is doing with if I can't dance, is, Sands is engaged in what they have described as an 18 month durational performance, which is basically a process of archiving his 25 year practice, just putting some, organising his studio and trying to make some sense of the actual physical spatial mess, where he's sort of living, lives, and works every day, and the project is titled, gift science archive, in reference to a piece

by Carolee Schneemann, who is, of course, Sand's former teacher and a longtime collaborator, and they, they worked quite a bit together for a long time, in a you know, complex, inter generational relationship, in which many, many different sort of elements were at play, admiration, some sort of, you know, a true collaboration. In other instrumentalisation events, we discussed a little bit with Sands you know, the up and downs of intergenerational working away, but it wasn't we discussed intimacy and for Sands, intimacy requires two things, are that intimacy, there's like two prerequisites to intimacy which are, as he says, a smallness and proximity in a way and you know, which is what we cannot have in the current sort of situation anyways. And so I was you know, I've been in our prep sort of meetings have been quite reluctant to say anything about COVID-19. Basically, because I don't know what to say, in in this same lunch event, of the against nature journal issue one, Linn said something quite graphic about her own struggles of, with actually trying to do any work during lockdown, and even the the first sort of months after lockdown, and which was quite helpful to me to understand why I've been so paralysed and why I have been unable to do any sort of thinking about what it means to have intimacy, what it means to be intimate in sort of the current condition. And, and basically, she says that one of the, the one thing that she struggled the most with, in the time of the pandemic was hearing herself think, because all the sort of bodily practices that allows for thinking and writing and being creative, and I guess, being sexual, even, almost all of them, all of them have been taken away, necessarily, we could say. So, you know, the question that she brought onto the table was, how can we create new, temporal, new temporal space for our body in which, you know, that allows for thinking but also allows for smallness and intimacy? And, yeah, and how can we do you know, how can we be creative, encounter others, be spontaneous, and spective? How can we have sex when we need to, you know all the things all the, all we can do is to arrange a meeting on on, you know, Zoom, at a certain time and, you know, stay in front of the computer on a certain sort of modality or fully bodily pressing, which is usually stiff, and rigid? And, yeah, so the conversations with Sands in the last few sort of weeks have been quite sort of helpful in thinking of some of the elements that I knew we were going to be discussing today. And we discussed Ron Athey quite a bit as well with Sands, so I was super glad that you showed those images, and I'm jealous, also, that I won't

be able, I guess, to see the show in New York, then, you know, because number one, I mean, he needs so much more recognition credit that he deserves, than he gets, you know, Sands, who understands himself as part of a more feminist sort of genealogy and has not, has not been that good in sort of working with other gay male, queer sort of male artist. You know, he sort of recognises Ron as the only male artist with whom he can relate to or, you know, even transcend? You know, I, on that, on Ron, maybe I'm going a bit off topic. But since you know, Malik, I'm going to ask you as a performance studies folk. So we, we talked a little bit about Rebecca Schneider's book, The Body Explicit, this is from 1999 or something. And, you know, something, like we both think that Rebecca has a point in the book when she described the process under which the naked body, the radical body, sort of the explicit body on stage, you know, in a white cube, in the exhibition space, very present, understood as a static and performative strategy, and understood as a, let's say, avant garde canon, as soon as that strategy was you know, passed on to the hands of other subject positions, other corporalities were suddenly deemed branded as inadequate within the modern art space, and Sands and I we both felt that, you know, this somehow explains or in part explains, why Ron's work had hasn't had a more prominent place in in a yeah, let's say the established art system. And I'm going to also ask you, going even more off topic. I'm curious to know if you have any thoughts of why, Andre Lepecki, in his sort of chapter long discussion of Julie Tolentino's sort of revisitation, of reenactment of Ron's self obliteration, he omits the fact that Ron is HIV positive, and in fact, almost any single reference to the AIDS crisis, which I was very struck the first time I read the book, and I'm still kind of looking for a convincing sort of explanation, if you have anything to do on that.

1:55:14
Malik Gaines: Thank you. My dear colleague and chair, Andre Lepecki, I don't know exactly the answer to that question. But you know, I could speculate that maybe, and I don't know. And we would have to ask him that last question you asked, but I could speculate in my own work. Where are the points where I wish not to over determine a kind of personal biographical detail as the kind of entire frame? Like or where do we know that HIV/AIDS is a structure of subjection, even without having to say this person is positive, this person is negative, which

maybe can feel like when making some arguments that can be filled, that could feel like a either reductive or assigning, you know, too much attention to the actual operations of their body? That's, that's one possible answer to that question. The big things about raw and you know, that's a constant question, if in black studies, and, you know, when do we call upon blackness to perform as something you look at and observe? And when do we try to speak of things in different ways? You know, and the same goes with attention to queer subjects. But yeah, that's a that's an interesting question. The question about Ron's work, you know, what I love about now is that my students don't care what the art world used to say, you know, like, what the art world from 1968 to 1989 used to say about things, like they're I don't need that frame, like this euro modernist, you know, avant gardist structure is out with the idea of progress and the human. Like, that's like the, it's like the, it's clearly a kind of, like, racially, and it's a structure of power. That isn't the only way that anyone ever made art. So why would that be that sort of determining lens, you know? How, you know, obviously, I don't know if she told me this herself, or someone else told me this once. But I always have in my mind that RoseLee Goldberg, who's the curator of Performa, in New York, literally doesn't like tattoos. So you can, you know, thread that through the question of like, what is the kind of body and how does it relate to a kind of minimalist understanding of performance art that complied with sort of, you know, white cube priorities. And if you start with Fluxus, and then you go through, you know, some feminist actions, maybe include some of Carolee Schneemann's most ruly performances, then you can have a kind of clean sort of lineage that goes from sculpture to the body, that takes up all the same kind of, you know, modernist avant gardist trajectories. And Ron, of course, is operating outside of that. There was a, you know, there's, it's a really interesting distinction that I think needs more attention. I think there's a moment when, there was a moment in the 80s when experimental theatre and performance art and work like Ron's and work that we might associate with the art world, all were a little closer together. And there was a moment then where they got kind of separated out from each other. I think, Felix Gonzalez Torres spoke against work like Ron Athey's. As as, you know, he obviously was pursuing a much more you know, beautiful and elegant form of minimalism, right. I, you might argue with that distinction, but I would say that that's, you know, the way we come

to understand his work very often in museum contexts, those strategies of reduction and isolation, and not a kind of excessive representation that includes bodily fluids, you know. So, and, and, you know, Ron's work is theatre in a certain way, but also has this kind of ritual presence that you can't deny is really in the room with you, that we may be associate more with performance art if we're going to use those kinds of disciplinary distinctions. So yeah, that's a really interesting question. And, you know, I'm heartened that rather than trying to revise all of these categories, that there seems more flexibility now toward abolishing some of these categories as the only way we're allowed to speak about work. You know, art history, I think, is a little further behind. But certainly in performance studies, we've come a long way, because of the kind of interdisciplinary nature, and the other kind of like inside performance studies thing in our own department at NYU, which is sort of the, you know, sort of founding department of performance studies, founded by Richard Schechner, who was, you know, came from theatre in the 60s, and really bringing anthropology and theatre studies together, paying attention to ritual and everyday life. And, you know, then a kind of really theoretical and scholarly side that's sort of characterised by one of the other founders, Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett. And it's, you know, law in our department that there was always a kind of rift between those who think it's okay to get naked and those who don't. And Schechner was like, yeah, take your clothes off roll on the floor, and Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett was like, let's have rigorous scholarship, please. And in my department, those positions kind of got taken up by Jose Munoz and Barbara Browning, Barbara Browning being like, yeah, you know, take your clothes off if you need to, and Jose Munoz being like, let's please keep our clothes on. And so that's just the kind of funny tension in a kind of interdisciplinary department that touches on those kinds of distinctions that you brought up Aimar.

2:01:49
Laura Guy: Thanks, it's really interesting to hear you reflect on that. And I think particularly I, I immediately thought of Athey when I saw the documentation of that fountain. And then was like trying to think through these sort of different aesthetics of kind of cultural response to HIV/AIDS, which I've sort of, I suppose understand sometimes as being also inflated by kind of differences between like East Coast and West Coast

practices. And then, but then to see the images that you showed Aimar sort of completely shifts of thinking Athey's work in relation to these performances that are happening in Chile sort of just completely un-anchors, my kind of art, you know, an art historical understanding, which is like really lodged in a sort of US or sort of transatlantic tradition. And I guess, we're sort of coming to the point where we need to finish up. I feel like, there's so many other things that I'd sort of wanted to ask, but I know that you need to get on. So yeah, I just wanted to thank you both for your time and generosity and the presentations. And I know, they'll there'll be sort of so much resonance in terms of hearing about your work and the context in the UK, but also, it's a nice effect of this moment that they'll also be available elsewhere. And, yeah, thanks very much.

Colophon

Curator: Sofia Lemos
Assistant Curator: Ryan Kearney
Technician: Catherine Masters