

4:30PM

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Dont Rhine

Alexandra Juhasz

Alexandra Juhasz  
with Dont Rhine



# \*DR. ALEXANDRA JUHASZ

Photo credit: Leon Mostovoy



Dr. Alexandra Juhasz is Distinguished Professor of Film at Brooklyn College, CUNY. She has been making and thinking about AIDS activist video since the mid-1980s. She is the author of *AIDS TV: Identity, Community and Alternative Video* (Duke, 1995), and a large number of AIDS educational videos including *Living with AIDS: Women and AIDS* (1987, with Jean Carlomusto), *We Care: A Video for Care Providers of People Affected by AIDS* (1990, the Women's AIDS Video Enterprise), and *Video Remains* (2005). Most recently she's been engaging in cross-generational dialogue with AIDS activists

including co-curating the art shows EVERYDAY and its *Day With(out) Art* video program: *Compulsive AIDS Video* (with Jean Carlomusto and High Ryan) for Visual AIDS and *Metanoia: Transformation through AIDS Archives and Activism* (with Katherine Cheairs, Theodore Kerr and Jawanza Williams for the One Foundation and The Center Archives, NYC), co-editing *AIDS and the Distribution of Crises* with Jih-Fei Cheng and Nishant Shahani (Duke 2020), and co-writing *We Are Having this Conversation Now: The Times of AIDS Cultural Production* with Ted Kerr (Duke, forthcoming).

# INTERVIEW

Dont Rhine is a sound artist and popular educator. He co-founded the international sound art collective Ultra-red in 1994. Rhine has contributed to the collective's many sound-based investigations, using sound as both medium and site of inquiry in relation to social justice organizing. He is a long-time harm reduction activist with the needle-

exchange program, L.A. Community Health Project (formerly Clean Needles Now, founded in 1992). Dont teaches part-time in the low-residency visual art program at Vermont College of Fine Arts. He is a founding member of the research collective, School of Echoes, which founded the L.A. Tenants Union in 2015. Dont lives in Hollywood.

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Dont Rhine  
Alexandra Juhasz

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Alex



Dont Rhine Before we begin, just a quick little thing that I'd like to read, and then we can begin our exchange. As has already been mentioned, this is the 35th anniversary of the publication of the diagnosis of HIV. It was actually today, June 5th, 1981, that the CDC published its report: "In the period October 1980 to May 1981, 5 young men, all active homosexuals, were treated for biopsy-confirmed pneumocystis pneumonia, at 3 different hospitals in Los Angeles, California. Two of the patients died. All 5 patients had laboratory-confirmed previous or current CMV infection," and so forth.

I'm going to read just real quick profiles on those 5 young men. Patient 1, a previously healthy 33-year-old man. Patient 2, a previously healthy 30-year-old man. Patient 3, a 30-year-old man was well until January 1981. Patient 4, a 29-year-old man. Patient 5, a previously healthy 36-year-old man. The report goes on: "The diagnosis of pneumocystis pneumonia was confirmed for all 5 patients as a result of biopsies. The patients did not know each other, and had no known common contacts or knowledge of sexual partners who had had similar illnesses." Later in the report it writes: "The fact that these patients were all homosexuals suggests an association between some aspect of a homosexual lifestyle or a disease acquired through sexual contact," and so forth.

Alexandra Juhasz When we chatted for an hour before to prepare, the first thing I asked you was how old you are. I'm 52, and you're 54. But we realized that we didn't know a lot about our shared history because we met in an activist part of the AIDS scene in Los Angeles. I picked up pieces about your history, and we've even collaborated, but I actually don't know that much about you personally.

Checking in before this public conversation, one of the things we realized is that we were both in ACT UP, as very young people. I was in ACT UP New York, when I came to the city from college and joined when it started. I was 22 or 23.

Dont I'm a little older. I first was a part of ACT UP Long Beach. That was around '88. I was 26.

Alex One of the reasons why I wanted to share that, or even why we were talking about it together, was that I engage in a lot of inter-generational dialogue with younger people about HIV/AIDS, and I invite any of you to collaborate with me. That's one of the things I love to do. That's how I met Brian. One of the things that seems to happen when younger people look at older people is that the past gets collapsed into this mush, and there's not a specificity about what it is to be older.

For instance, Brian, in the piece we made together, *Pleasure Riot*, you just assumed that because I was older than you, I had engaged in sexuality before HIV/AIDS. In fact, I was 22 in 1986, and I was very aware of the article Dont cited at the beginning of our talk today when I came to New York City.

So, I think it's very important for us to unpack the "aged," the "elderly" and the "past," and to understand that that group of us who survived and were AIDS activists are mutually differentiated amongst ourselves. I was young, in a room with 30-, 40-, 50-, even 60-year-olds. Knowing about our internal difference should be part of the conversation, our queer sharing of history. We need to open that out to you, so that you don't just make us one body.

Not just in relation to age, of course; a lot of my activism, for those of you who aren't aware of it, was and still is recognizing the experience of women, recognizing the experience of people of color, and the place for us as activists within AIDS activism more generally. That work of ferreting out our individual specificity within the broader AIDS activist movement is very important.

Dont's project did that, with you all: getting us to understand our differences and the specificity of our unique AIDS experience, or whatever you were at that point in history. We're also in this room together.

Naming who we are, our specificity and connection, has always been important for me, socially and politically.

Dont One of the things that we talked about was how we came into ACT UP. Maybe it's useful just to say a few things about how you came into it. You can then use that as the starting point for discussing some of the limits that you saw within ACT UP, limitations that served as the conditions for a lot of the other work that went on at the time.

Alex I was proto in 1981, and then I was radicalized in college between 1982-1986, and I think a number of us must have talked about the radicalization that can occur in college in relation to Dont's prompt. It's one of the great gifts of that space. I was a proto-feminist when I arrived. I became a feminist. I was proto-queer. There was no such thing as "queer" at that time. I was a student of Eve Sedgwick before she went to Duke and fully developed her theories. When I came to college, I was in love with a gay man, James Robert Lamb. This was queer, of course, but we didn't have that word for it. He died of AIDS rather quickly after we moved to NYC. I'm wearing this pin in his memory today.

I came to New York City in 1986 radicalized, and there AIDS was. We were joining, fighting, being in community, naming things, talking out loud, being radical, being enraged, not just because people we knew were dying, which was true of the gay men in my life, but because people in our city were dying. I had been radicalized by my professors about racism in the society, about how class affects human beings in our society in ways that are unconscionable, about how homophobia is divisive and disturbing and dis-enabling, about how the experience of being a woman and why you need to be a feminist is definitive... and I arrive in NYC and it's not theory anymore, it's all there in my city.

There was a community of enraged people to join. I was talking with someone else about this during the break: It's awfully nice if there's a community there to join. It's a lot harder to be alone in your house and having these radical ideas, which is more like the experience we live in now. Perhaps people are radicalizing wherever they are, when they're at home, but where's the community to join in the face of this radicalization?

I was part of a movement that came into being. There was a place for the radical ideas my teachers had helped me find, and there was something to do with it, because it was really messed up in the 80s in New York City, in relation to HIV/AIDS and otherwise. It still is. For those of us in the room who still think of ourselves as AIDS activists, it's not like it isn't the same stuff.

Dont Could you talk about the limits of ACT UP?

Alex I was a proud member of ACT UP. I spent a lot of time and energy in it, but I spent maybe half of my energy as an activist not in ACT UP, and decidedly and carefully so.

ACT UP was primarily a space for gay, white men. It wasn't only a space for gay, white men, and that's really important to always name, but there were a lot of people who were affected by HIV/AIDS in the early stages who would never be in that room, for a number of reasons that many of us are rather capable of expressing and understanding.

If you wanted to think about and engage in activism in relationship to the communities outside of gay white men, who were also really radically hit by AIDS, and were suffering and dying at that time, you had to be working in grassroots community organizations for people of color, or around needle exchange, and so I was carefully not being in ACT UP as well, so that I could do that other sort of work as an activist, again emboldened by a community that had that language to help me understand.



There was a women's group in ACT UP. I was a member of it. There were people of color organizing in ACT UP. There were homeless people in ACT UP. And there was a lot of activism in New York City that wasn't happening in ACT UP. I wrote a piece that people like to think through called "Forgetting ACT UP," and one of the things that I argue in that piece is that whenever we say that ACT UP stands for AIDS activism, or that it holds the place of AIDS activism, we do not name the Brooklyn AIDS Task Force, for example, or the Minority AIDS Task Force, or Housing Works, or any of the other radically enmeshed activist organizations that produced a full-bodied articulation of how to respond to the crisis in its early stages of profound crisis.

I don't want to forget ACT UP. I want to remember that ACT UP was always in conversation with other organizations.

Dont Mine is a common story of the queer boy who, if I had stayed where I grew up, I don't know if I would have survived. Therefore, I left Pennsylvania at the age of 22 and moved to Los Angeles. I always say that I moved to Los Angeles to get as far away as I could from Pennsylvania and remain in the continental United States. Fleeing my life in Pennsylvania was a process, because I continued on in a different seminary. In fact, the seminary I attended here in Los Angeles, Bible Institute of Los Angeles, was originally founded in this very building when this building was a large church. But by the time I attended the seminary it had long since moved out to Whittier.

My radicalization happened through a different set of experiences than your own, Alex. I'm going to be kind of vulnerable with you all here, because there's been a lot of vulnerability in the room, which I appreciate. I'm one of those people who actually had to go through reparative therapy, through the demands of my church. I was called up before the church elders, and

I was asked to go into therapy for the sake of my soul.

I'm not going to be Pollyanna and say that reparative therapy was a pleasant experience. I will say it was clarifying. In the very first session, the therapist sat me down and spoke at me for an hour. He made an audio tape recording of his monologue so that I could listen to it whenever I felt weak.

Out of all the things that he said, there is one comment he made that I remember word for word: "Our job here, Dont, is to help you understand that it is a good and a natural thing for a woman to depend upon the strength of a man."

I knew right away just how fucked up that was. But it was also enormously clarifying. I was sitting there, listening to him, and thinking to myself, that's all you've got? You're giving me some patriarchal, anti-feminist bullshit, when I know I don't even live in that world? I am from a matriarchal family, so to describe gender relations in that way I knew to be completely ridiculous. At that moment, my unconscious began planning my escape route.

The other radicalizing moment for me was being in a Bible study with a group of queers at the seminary in Whittier. We were trying to understand, what did the Bible really say about homosexuality. We realized that the book of Isaiah in the Old Testament explains why God destroyed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah; where we get the word, Sodomite. According to Isaiah, God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah because of inhospitality to the foreigner.

So who is the sodomite? This was a huge radicalizing moment for me, realizing that my oppression is bound up in the oppression of those who experience racist violence, just like my oppression is bound up in the experience of gender violence.

Coming into ACT UP was a part of that process. In November of 1989, six Jesuit priests in El Salvador were assassinated by CIA-trained paramilitaries. That was a kind

of realization for many Americans. I had to ask myself, what am I going to do? How do I respond to the situation? Here in Los Angeles, the coming together of ACT UP and CISPES, the Community in Support of the People of El Salvador, pointed the direction for me: "Money for AIDS, not for war! U.S. out of El Salvador!"

That's how I responded. I got more deeply involved in ACT UP Los Angeles. That was my entry into the gay community, besides the bars I was going to. That was my politicization. That was my school, quite frankly. I didn't go to art school until I was 41 years old. ACT UP was my political education and my art education. The movement was my school. Those people that you're referring to, who were 30, 40, 50 and 60, those were my teachers. I had sex with them. They shamed me when I said something stupid about opera. They were my teachers, and I learned by being shamed. I would say stupid things and then people would go, *oh, you silly little boy*.

Alex Do you want to name this criticism?

Dont The first phase of AIDS activism, from '81 until the formation of direct action groups in San Francisco and Chicago, which actually came into being slightly before the formation of ACT UP in New York, they just didn't have the name ACT UP. That period, from '81 to '86, that phase of AIDS activism was the community support phase, mobilizing affective and sexual networks to start providing services that city governments and the federal government were denying folks.

You and I came into the movement after that first wave of mobilization. After I got involved I learned quite quickly that when people at an ACT UP meeting would say something about like, we need to have a needle exchange, or we need to provide housing, or give people access to... ACT UP members would respond, that's not what our job is here; our job here is not to provide people with services; our job is to shame the government into action so that our

tax dollars are used to provide resources for people.

For many of us, there was a realization that when you're poor, it's not possible to make a distinction between direct action and the need for services. They're the same thing. Your ability to reproduce yourself is dependent upon your ability to transform the way things are. They're not separate.

This became clear when we began organizing needle exchange. Needle exchange started as a committee within ACT UP called Clean Needles Now. Within a year, we split from ACT UP, because of the amount of money we had to raise in order to keep buying syringes was too much of a drain on ACT UP. We became our own organization.

Again, that was a limitation. It's like around this idea of service; you go somewhere else if you're going to provide service. I guess Housing Works went through the same thing in New York.

Alex Yeah, although I was going to say I would love not to get stuck in ACT UP of the past.

Dont Let's don't.

Alex Why don't we move to the present! I will say that I had the same experience in the women's group in ACT UP. Those of you who have studied AIDS history, one of the great ACT UP demonstrations was the Shea Stadium demonstration where people from ACT UP went into Shea Stadium and had placards that would spell things. One was: "Men use condoms or beat it."

Half of the women's group didn't really want to do that: ACT UP's postmodern politics for getting media attention. Half of us wanted to do direct education around safe sex. We were worried about high school students not being educated. High school students don't get educated unless activists change the agenda. There's literally nothing else to do, other than to organize.

You can lament it. We can all lament it, but it doesn't change until we, the queer community, care about the sexual health of



younger people, and say, this is such a big issue for me that I'm going to take time out and join 5 people in this group and figure out how we're going to change it.

Dont No one's going to do it for you, guys.

Alex Yeah, no one's going to do it for you.

That is the hard lesson of activism. When you stop doing it, it goes away; hence, the experience of young people in this room today. When we stop doing it, it goes away. When we stop naming it, it's not said. When we stop talking about it, it's not talked about. When we stop wanting to learn about it, it's not learned about. When we don't educate ourselves, there's no education. That's what activism is. You have to get despondent enough to be moved to work that hard.

Maybe we're not despondent enough. I feel like that's the big activist question, certainly for those of us who have been in long-haul AIDS activism, what does it mean to continue to think about activism when many people are healthy in the face of HIV, or healthy enough? At least many privileged human beings have access to health care. I think that's a really haunting question for our larger queer community, and not one that I have an answer to, but I've certainly talked about with other AIDS activists: how despondent do we need to be to become active?

My friend Jim was an amazing artist. He was in Charles Ludlam's Theater of the Ridiculous company. He wanted to go to Yale Drama School. He would have written plays. He was already really successful, and he died when he was 30 years old.

We have to hold that space for them. I have to honor his work. I have to say, the world is not as good because he didn't get to continue to make the art that he was making. That's so sad, but I don't have to give you my sadness. And the anger is not the same, so I can't give you my anger from the past. That's also not my gift to you. I think partly, when you perform the role that we're asked to perform, just to remember in real time, and lament, the heavy question is, *what's the gift?* Laments? Sorrow? History? Memory? I don't always know, because I've performed this role rather often.

Dont This is helpful for me to think through some of the things that we've heard today, which has been really rich, and again, people really making themselves vulnerable in this room. It's not an easy thing to do.

I've been in the art collective Ultra-red for almost 22 years. Our collective was founded by the artist Marco Larsen and myself. Both of us were a part of the needle exchange.

Alex *It is not our job, as older people, the aged, "the voice of Christmas past," to make you all want to have our sorrow. That's not our gift to you. We have to lament the losses of the people we loved. We have to tell you that they existed. We have to hold a space for them. We have to tell you the world would be better if they hadn't died.*

Needle exchange was founded almost entirely by artists. Marcus Kuiland-Nazario, another co-founder of Clean Needles Now, is going to be part of this event in a couple days.

There were many artists involved in the HIV/AIDS justice movement and needle exchange in particular. Marco Larsen and I were the scruffy sound artists. Everyone else was making awesome performance art and graphic art, but we were making weird sounds. That's how the collective started. Today, Ultra-red is now 12 people, 4 of us here in Los Angeles, 2 people in New York, 3 people in Berlin and 3 people in the U.K. We all tend to be older. Walt Senterfitt works with the County Department of Public Health and is in his 70s. While our youngest member, Sabrina Apicella, based in Berlin, she's in her late 20s, so it's kind of that range.

Here in Los Angeles, we have been thinking a lot about the question of mentorship. We know some things, things that were learned, hard knocks. We also know some things from the knowledge that was gifted to us. Where's a space that the things we know can be passed on, and where some of the things that we think we know need to be challenged? Where's that space?

Ultra-red start this project called School of Echoes. School of Echoes was started in late 2012. We spent much of 2010 and 2011 writing grants. We didn't get a single one. So we decided to launch the project without funding or academic support. School of Echoes has been going on now for over 4 years. It's been an important sort of lab for folks who are in their 20s or 30s to think through popular education and organizing. These same folks are already involved in politics and organizing. But School of Echoes provides a space to think about strategies and tactics, things they didn't learn in school, and often they're not learning in the movements they're a part of. Where do we get to talk about what it means to have a strategic political vision, and what

it means to embody that vision in tactics?

Alex That's what we call politics.

Dont Yeah, that's what we call politics.

Where do we have that conversation?

Where do we learn how to write an agenda for a meeting? Where do we learn to facilitate a meeting? Where do we learn to facilitate consensus?

Alex Thanks to Jennifer, who sent us the consensus.

Dont Yeah, and it was so awesome to see. Thanks, Jennifer. I actually want a copy of that. Where do we learn this, and then where do we test it out and then critique ourselves after we do it? Where does that happen?

Alex See, I think what's exciting to me about the conversation we had before around a sound project you did with women in a half-way house in Claremont as part of a larger show I co-curated with Pato Hebert, *PerpiTube: Repurposing Social Media*, is that we're both working artists. We've made art inside of the AIDS activist movement and inside of other movements. I also work as an academic. I think it's really scary and hard right now to talk about the difference between art-making and politics, and to actually say that they're related, but different functions. I think that becomes very scary.

Dont To say that there is a difference.

Alex We're using strategies and tactics to name something different than art-making. Art-making can be a strategy or tactic towards a set of political goals that a group of people name together and work really hard on, to make a change in the world.

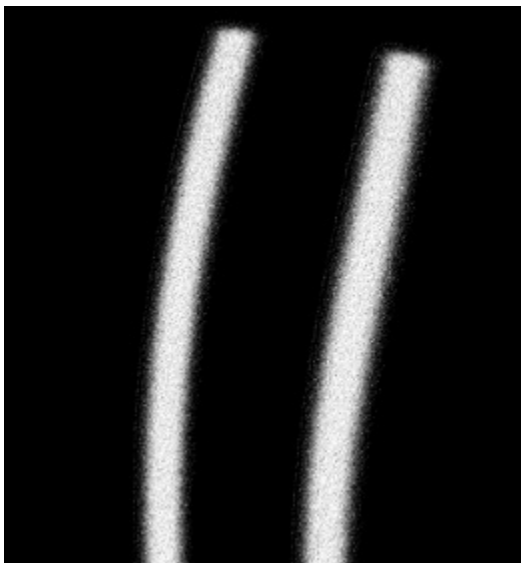
I knew it from feminism, from the Civil Rights movement, that the role of artists in this conversation, artists in the movement, is one function within a larger strategy. I want to name it here, because why wouldn't we?

Dont One of the things that I was hearing a lot today was, and you hear this often in conversations about art and politics, people have enormous facility to talk about their

art practice. But we never talk about our politics. Even when we're making political art, we rarely name our politics. What are our politics? Seriously, what are our politics? It's not a rhetorical question. What are our politics? I think I mentioned this to you on the phone. We've come to an extraordinarily dangerous moment. I'm not talking about Trump. I'm not talking about Hillary. I'm talking about this room.

We're at a dangerous moment. Earlier today I pointed out to Kean O'Brien and some others the imagery used on the back wall of this room. Do you see the printing on the windows? Look at the printing on those windows. The ACE Hotel has collaged images of resistant history onto its wall coverings, including an historical image of a group of punks holding up a sign that says: "Fuck the landlord." The irony of this image used as decorate wallpaper in the ACE Hoel, is that this very building is an anchor for the gentrification of this neighborhood.

We're at a hugely seriously dangerous moment, where queer identities, even HIV/AIDS politics, and gender-nonconforming identities, are in the process of being instrumentalized to justify enormous brutality against working people. It freaks me the fuck out. I find myself unable to go to more and more queer events and spaces, because I know that those spaces and those events are the anchor point of enormous brutality and violence against working people in this city.



*Do I want my culture, my community, my history, my desires, the fact that I want to get fucked, do I want to have that used to brutalize working people? That freaks me out. It really freaks me out.*

Yeah, I think need to have a conversation about what our politics are, and how our strategy emerges from an analysis of crises. We need to be able to name, what is the crisis? Then, we can ask, what's the strategy in relationship to an analysis of that crisis, and then what are the tactics? As artists, we all too often begin with the tactics, and that's our art practice. That's where we name what our professional investment is in this thing called art. The political content of our art merely serves to distinguish our practice professionally. But what is our political practice?

When I hear the dead and struggles that are in the past get instrumentalized as content for someone's artistic practice, then that is gentrification. That's growth through dispossession. That's what that is. What are our politics, really? What is it? What are we about? I'm going off. See, this is the preacher in me. I'm in this building, my preachers are coming at me, they've got to take over. What are our politics?

Alex I don't know if I'm ready to answer that.

Dont OK, do you want to talk about the –

Alex No, because it's a real question.

Dont It is a real question, but maybe too real for here.

Alex I think, as a human being living in 2016, one of the things that's hard for me when I talk about being "Christmas past" is that I also am alive now, and so I can represent the past, and sometimes have to do that, but actually I'm really fully living, breathing and producing work now, in relation to what we're doing now. Not as a voice of "Christmas past", but as a voice of "Tiny Tim" in the present. Today, the Internet really scares me, and its role in not allowing us to be political is something I think a lot about.

Dont Political in the sense that you meant in terms of strategies and tactics?

Alex Yes. I teach about it. I try to make artwork about it. I think it's being Tiny Tim for all of us to say that today it's very hard to imagine these places to be political, when the Internet has saturated the space that we live. I guess I want to say with generosity to younger people that I was lucky enough to want to be political in a time when there was a movement unfolding. It's much harder to want to be political in a world where everything is on the Internet.

Part of what mentors like you and I have to model, is what it looks like, feels like, how you live, forming small coalitions of people that care enough about a particular thing, to do things in the world about it. I think it's harder and harder, the Tiny Tim in me, at 52, but very small, and tired, wonders how you do that in 2016. We all suffer that malaise. I admire the activists in my world who are working on an issue.

Dont Out of the School of Echoes process that I mentioned to you, we eventually launched the L.A. Tenants Union. It has borrowed many of its organizational forms from ACT UP. Its political aesthetics come from ACT UP. That is no accident. Walt and

myself, both from Ultra-red, were also members of ACT UP. So the L.A. Tenants Union has an action committee.

Alex I want to ask you a question.

Dont Yeah, go for it.

Alex How do you think the AIDS crisis plays a role in shaping the queer community you make work in?

Dont I hear Brian's voice in that question.

(referring to NS editor Brian Getnick)

Alex How do you think the AIDS crisis plays a role in shaping the queer community you make work in?

Dont I'll be frank. The whole queer community thing is a bit of a mystery to me. I don't necessarily see it as a radical space, largely because it's often driven by entrepreneurial motivations.

The HIV/AIDS crisis continues, but the crisis is larger than HIV. In the needle exchange work we've seen how displacement and violence against people who are unhoused, who are living on the street, and who are actively using drugs, the violence against them due to displacement, policing and gentrification, all of these things conditions the AIDS crisis. For that reason the L.A. Tenants Union work is a logical continuation of the needle exchange work I've been doing since I was 30 years old.

We encountered the displacement due to gentrification and development in Hollywood from the very beginning when Clean Needles Now started in 1992.

Today, there are many queer folk within the Tenants Union and within the larger anti-gentrification movement. Interestingly, not many gay men; what's up, guys? Come on, what's up? Lots of trans folks, lots of women; what's up? I don't know. Let me ask you, *how do you think the AIDS crisis plays a role in shaping the queer community you make work in*, Alex?

Alex Remember when we were talking about ethics?

Dont Oh, yeah.

Alex As a feminist queer person, I was

thinking about that, when I was young and also now, I wanted everybody to enjoy the full fruit of their sexual and gender expression, in a world where that's not dangerous because of disease or in any other way. I couldn't not think about AIDS, because that's a huge confining restriction for all human beings. I myself am HIV negative, I have sex and think about HIV. I know that HIV is experienced differentially around the world, and in our own cities, and by people who are positive or negative.

AIDS is an entry point to justice, into thinking about justice, and how unjust our lives are, and how we all experience justice and its lack in our own bodies, whether we're HIV positive or not. That's an ethics for me. AIDS is an ethics, I suppose. Queer people are great about this. They're the people who I can come to talk about gender, sexuality, race, class. You're right that it's getting ... It gets distorted.

Dont I'm just cranky.

Alex I know, we have to work hard not to be cranky as we get older, even if we feel cranky.

Dont It's not a theory.

Alex No, that's why I apologized to Marcel Alcalá: is he here? Queer people have led the conversation, and lead the conversation, about how we're not going to be turned into things that sell and consume other things, about inhabiting our bodies with dignity and joy, and enjoying sex, and loving each other and finding alternative communities and celebrating variation, and all the things that we do together. We do it all the time together.

Yes, when I can do that with people, I do that in the name of queerness, happily and lovingly, to this day. I've been making work about this for my whole life, and I'm still doing it. It's like I grew up into it, and it's still here. I'm still doing it.

I really feed on conversations with younger people who are living in our world as queer people. I really enjoy understanding

their experience of HIV/AIDS, and trying to wake people up and shake them a little bit, and to work together.

✱

Brian Thank you both. Questions?

Dont We have 4 hours for questions. That freaked Brian out, didn't it?

Brian We don't have 4 hours, but we do have time now.

Ryan Hi, I'm Ryan. I feel kind of in between the more dramatic inter-generational conversation that's happening today. I don't have a question, I just want to thank you. I want to thank you for being cranky, first of all. While I think it's true, sometimes crankiness can be alienating, I think it's easy to forget how badly younger people want to hear older people who have had more experiences, be cranky and be polemical.

I just appreciate that so much, Dont, you pointing out the extent to which symbolic politics not only has limits, but can be dangerous if taken in isolation from deeper structural issues. I think what's really problematic for younger people today is the extent to which we're encouraged to fuse politics and aesthetics, and not think through their inter-relation carefully enough.

I really do appreciate it, and you were puzzling over what your gift could be today, and frankly, I think your gift, both of you, was to name, in a frank and clear way, what are some bright spots for younger queer generations. We want to hear that, so thank you.

Jennifer Doyle I appreciated the crankiness about the queer community, and I also have a question. I want to connect thinking about queer politics with just politics. Communities are not formed except by exclusion. You don't know a community except in relation to and often against, not us, but them. It's inevitable that communities form, groups form, they're necessary structures, but within every community there are precedents to set for that sense of community, and enormous amounts of violence happen socially, physically,

sexually, to those bodies, that trouble the boundaries and the sense of us and them.

What bothers me personally about this, and actually kind of I'd say alienated me almost completely from what feels like contemporary articulations of community locally, is this sense of queer politics being mapped onto something like a moral high ground. That, I think, might be ... I don't know if that's a generational thing, of recognizing that with that kind of moral high ground and space of judgment, there's a difference between calling out like the landlordism of the neighborhood, and collectively shaming people by standing on moral high ground and enacting judgment on them, and then actually making it impossible to speak out within the group when that's happening, because you're so afraid of that happening to you.

That's a harassment dynamic, and I think that actually kind of has been coding a lot of our experiences, whether that be in the workplace, the arts community, within the academic world. There's an abundance of that over the past few years, and I do not recognize that as progressive, as a feminist.

That's actually one of the places where, within like a group formation or a community, a community formation, you're seeing politics happen, is like the expulsion of someone from that room. Anyway, I thought that you were tapping a pretty big nerve when you said that, obviously, so thank you for that. This is coming from a person who's dealing with workplace harassment dynamics.

Audience You started by talking about how it's important to disaggregate the past in terms of the different people who make it, and I guess throughout today, I felt that so much of this conversation, in the context of this space, is about AIDS as being something behind us. There's a separation entirely between people who experienced it, and people who are not experiencing it at the moment. As somebody who has worked in

Africa and Ghana and South Africa specifically, for a big chunk of my life, it's so not past there. I don't really have a question, I just felt the need to say that.

Alex I made a comment earlier saying more or less the same thing, about disaggregating the present. In this city, AIDS is being suffered disproportionately by communities of color, and particularly by young gay men, and young gay black men, in ways that functionally put a spotlight on everything that's wrong about our culture. An AIDS politics now would continue to be what an AIDS politics always has been a demand for: universal health care, universal access to education, universal access to self-dignity, and goals like fairness and feminism, like autonomy of your body, and a sense of well-being in yourself.

Yeah, AIDS isn't behind us at all, so contemporary AIDS activism is about figuring out words to both show where AIDS is alive, and destroying bodies and communities, but also I think contemporary AIDS activism is about how you have – what we're doing here – how you have conversations in all communities where AIDS is present, in our unique and dignified versions of our own existences. How you balance those has always been a task of AIDS activism. How you balance the extreme destruction with the dignity; when I was a young person, there was extreme destruction occurring to white gay men as well. That's not really the case in the United States right now, but there was extreme destruction occurring in our cities and other places in the past.

How do you balance your own dignity as a human being, who may not have HIV or may be taking meds that makes HIV all but gone, with the knowledge that HIV points its finger to everything that's wrong about our world, and hold both of those conversations? That's really hard. It's always hard. ♦

June 5, 2016

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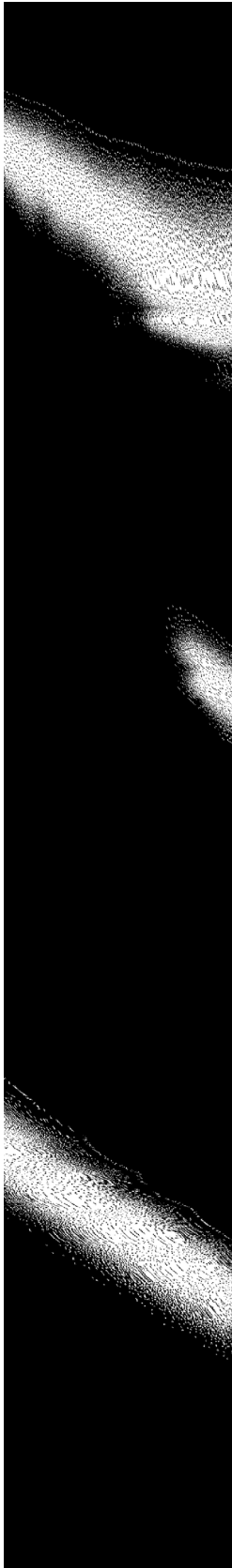
Dont Rhine

Alexandra Juhasz



# USED TO BRUTALIZE WORKING PEOPLE

Dont



“By the summer of 1991 clinic and hospital staff openly charged that the County’s lack of coordinated housing, pharmaceutical delivery, transportation, and other social service programs had resulted in untold numbers of people with AIDS being discharged, often homeless, into the streets around the hospital. In one such case a homeless man with AIDS was released from a non-AIDS ward despite persistent neuropathy, and given a supply of AZT and painkillers along with his medical papers and a slip of paper on which were written the addresses of a downtown skid -row flophouse, the Social Security administration, and his next clinic appointment -a full six weeks away. Fortunately for him, the individual wandered into an ACT UP meeting and benefitted from the group’s outraged intervention the following day with the “noncompliant” Board of Supervisors themselves.” (page 632)

“The Queer Nation Acts Up: Health Care, Politics, and Sexual Diversity in the County of Angels,”  
(British journal of social geography “Society & Space” London: 1992)  
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# Ty Geltmaker

EXCERPTS





