

# JUMP CUT

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### Cable access queer: revisiting *Toronto Living with AIDS* (1990-1991)

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AIDS activists changed the world. They organized, strategized, and put their bodies on the line to change their medical, social, and political circumstances. Importantly, AIDS activists in North America did all this with early consumer-grade video technologies in hand. From the committed documentary to the experimental short, AIDS activists engaged in change-making at the level of culture through moving images in new ways and on a scale not possible during previous social movements.[1] [\[open endnotes in new window\]](#) Due to the parallel development of increasingly affordable consumer grade video technologies alongside the rapidly expanding AIDS crisis, scholars, activists, and media makers have an expansive decentralized archive from which to consult, study, and make new meaning. The importance of revisiting and maintaining this archive, as film scholar Roger Hallas notes, is not merely to preserve the past for the sake of history, but to attend to the stories that emerge from AIDS activist cultural archives and their revelatory potential for historical consciousness in the present.[2]

We live at a moment of great interest and reinvestment in the history of AIDS activism in the U.S. and Canada. These histories are undergoing a storytelling process through which certain accounts begin to take canonical form. While this process of canonization makes AIDS activist histories more available to those who did not experience them firsthand, this process also leads to the occlusion of complex, lesser known, and marginalized aspects of the histories at stake.[3] AIDS activist histories in the U.S. are being solidified through autobiographies, memoirs, oral history projects, massive art retrospectives such as the 2015-2017 touring exhibition "Art AIDS America," and recently-produced historical dramas, television movies, and activist documentaries, most notably the Oscar-nominated films *How to Survive a Plague* (2012) and *Dallas Buyers Club* (2013).

The alternative media work of Canadian AIDS activists is largely absent from these more well-known U.S. history projects. Furthermore, scholarship on alternative media practices in Canada largely occludes or only briefly mentions the history of AIDS activist media and the contribution of AIDS activist media makers.[4] This paper remedies this oversight by providing a complementary analysis of Canadian-made AIDS activist videos from the *Toronto Living With AIDS* (*TLWA*) cable access project, thereby facilitating future possibilities for comparative scholarly work examining the histories of AIDS activist media globally, and across the U.S.-Canadian border in particular.

*TLWA* was a cable access television series distributed on Rogers and MacLean-Hunter cable networks in Toronto from 1990-1991. It was produced under the leadership of white gay Toronto video artists Michael Balsler (1952-2002) and John Greyson. The two worked out of the same artist-run centre, Trinity Square Video, and they were associated with the artist-run video distribution centre Vtape, whose board Greyson presides over as President in 2020.[5] Inspired by the Gay Men's Health Crisis' *Living with AIDS* cable access television series in New York City (1988-1994), *TLWA* also followed up two of Greyson's previous AIDS activist video curation projects: the compilation tape *Angry Initiatives*, *Defiant Strategies* produced for U.S.-based Deep Dish TV in 1988 and the three volume international English-language compilation he produced in collaboration with U.S. curator Bill Horrigan, *Video Against AIDS* (1989).[6] Greyson and Balsler's approach to *TLWA* very much mirrored the politics and aesthetics of public access cable television in the U.S. at the time, an antecedent to so-called community television in Canada. Critic and curator Tom Folland notes that unlike in the U.S., private Canadian broadcast corporations that oversaw community television stations had final decision-making power over the content they broadcast—with station managers acting as both gatekeepers of style and censors of content they personally disliked or deemed in bad taste. Folland cites this notable difference between the two countries as the reason why community television thrived relatively unencumbered in the U.S. in the 1980s and 1990s while it struggled to take hold in Canada even after the National Film Board's huge investment in community-led alternative media making through its innovative *Challenge for Change/Société nouvelle* (1967-1980) program.[7] This significant difference in how community television is regulated in Canada would lead to an adversarial and acrimonious relationship between *TLWA*'s coordinator Michael Balsler and Rogers Cable's station manager Ed Nasello.

Interestingly, the *TLWA* series was funded not by municipal, provincial, or federal arts councils, but

by grants from the City of Toronto Board of Health, Health & Welfare Canada (now simply called Health Canada), and the Ontario Ministry of Health.[8] Two pilot episodes, *The Great AZT Debate* and *The World is Sick (sic)*, were produced by Balser and Greyson in 1989 with seed money from the City of Toronto Board of Health. These two videos began the *Toronto Living With AIDS* cable broadcast and were paired with a variety of other AIDS activist video tapes coming out of the United States. Combined, these U.S. and Canadian tapes provided months of weekly broadcast material in the Spring of 1990 during which time Balser and Greyson coordinated their efforts to secure further funding to produce more Canadian-made tapes. They circulated a call for proposals, assembled a selection committee to evaluate proposals, and in the end settled on ten artists to fund out of fifty proposals.[9]

Eventually not ten, but another twelve thirty-minute videos were created under the *TLWA* banner by a diverse array of video artists working in collaboration with community organizations in Toronto in the latter half of 1990. With funding from federal and provincial health ministries, each artist was commissioned \$5,000 to create their 30-minute videos and was encouraged to seek other financial and in-kind support from arts councils and AIDS service organizations alike.[10] Kaspar Saxena and Debbie Douglas, both contributors to the series, noted that while these commissions were integral in getting these tapes started, the videos mostly remained a labour of love requiring far greater production budgets and were primarily funded through in-kind labour, donated time, and shared equipment.[11] Adjusted for inflation, this commission would be equivalent to just over \$8,500 in 2020.[12]

Videos in the series ranged in form and content, from the committed documentary to the experimental short, and from the playfully erotic to the didactically pedagogical. While differing in form and content, all the tapes in the series took seriously the medium of television as having the potential to teach and impart critical information about HIV/AIDS as much as it had the potential to entertain the imagined audiences viewing the series on their cable-connected televisions at home. The potential of pedagogical televisual entertainment about HIV/AIDS, as communications scholar Malynnnda Johnson notes, is that it can be a particularly useful intervention for young people in the absence of comprehensive sex education curricula, or any sex education at all as the case often continues to be.[13]

Unfortunately, it was a loving, but not explicit communal shower scene in Richard Fung's *Fighting Chance* that first raised the possibility of censorship from Rogers Cable. Kaspar Saxena and Ian Rashid's erotic, yet again far from explicit, educational video on AIDS in the Toronto South Asian community entitled *Bolo! Bolo!* (1991) further angered Ed Nasello, the Rogers Cable station manager at the time. In a letter sent to *TLWA*'s coordinator, Nasello claimed that Balser had made an "error in judging the public's taste" by including a video with "men French kissing and the caressing of thighs" in the series, specifically referencing *Bolo! Bolo!* as the offending tape.[14] While the series formally ended as a result of this censorship, some of the original tapes continued to be shown at film festivals and organizations kept their tapes in circulation for educational and outreach purposes. The second season of *TLWA* was intended to focus exclusively on women and HIV, a likely result of the growing number of women testing positive in Canada.[15] The growing attention to women and HIV was also bolstered by the World Health Organization's declaration that the theme of World AIDS Day in 1990 as "Women and AIDS." [16] Unfortunately, after Rogers Cable refused to air the series any longer continued federal funding was also denied. The proposed second season of *TLWA* was reduced to a much humbler single thirty-minute video instead, the Darien Taylor-directed and Michael Balser-produced 1992 portrait-style international documentary *Voices of Positive Women*. [17]

*TLWA* represents the largest and most organized community-based effort to create audiovisual work about the AIDS crisis in Canada. Although other community cable stations in Canada broadcast some HIV/AIDS-focused content created by gay community cable programs like Gayblevision in Vancouver, Thunder Gay Magazine in Thunder Bay, and the Gay Media Collective in Winnipeg, none of these projects were specifically organized around HIV/AIDS and produced a limited quantity of HIV/AIDS programming primarily in the form of newscasts. Also, unlike individual artist responses to the epidemic of which there are many, the series was uniquely funded with public money from health agencies and distributed on community cable television stations, making it a fascinating political, cultural, and social phenomenon. Indeed, the censorship of the series demonstrates the deep disjuncture between Canadian public health policy that funded the series as an urgently needed form of educational programming and Canadian cultural policy that broadly defines and limits obscenity from public distribution.

One cannot fully understand the impact of the decision by Rogers Cable station manager to censor the decidedly queer *TLWA* series without putting into relief the decades of censorship of queer content in Canada that precedes it: two obscenity trials involving the Toronto gay liberation newspaper *The Body Politic* in the 1970s and 1980s; decades of materials seized by Canada Customs while in route to LGBT bookstores like Little Sister's in Vancouver and Glad Day in Toronto; ongoing censorship battles over sexual content with the British Columbia Film Classification Office, the Ontario Film Review Board, and its predecessor the Ontario Censor Board throughout the 1980s and 1990s; The Wimmin's Fire Brigade's multiple bombings of the adult video store chain Red Hot Video

in 1982; The Fraser Committee on Pornography report from 1987; the tabling of the Conservative's anti-pornography and obscenity legislation Bill C-54 in 1987; and the controversy swelling around Vancouver lesbian arts collective Kiss and Tell's explicit photo exhibition of lesbian BDSM first mounted in 1990.[18] Together, these conflicts over sexuality and its cultural representations, including the censorship of the *TLWA* series, would come to be called the culture wars in Canada with parallel developments in the U.S..[19]

The censorship battles would of course continue after the cancelling of *TLWA* as well, most notably with the *R v Butler* decision in 1992 that vaguely defines obscene materials and "community standards" in the Criminal Code, the 1993 London Ontario gay pornography and prostitution scandal chronicled in John Greyson's 1995 CBC television documentary *After the Bath*, and the Supreme Court's underwhelming decision in *Little Sister's v Canada* that was captured in detail in Aerlyn Weissman's documentary *Little Sister's vs. Big Brother* (2002).[20] All these examples of queer censorship signify the necessity of understanding the impact of *TLWA*'s censorship by Rogers Cable as part of a historic and ongoing assault on queer sexual representations in Canada, even when said materials were intended for educational purposes to prevent the transmission of a deadly virus ravaging queer and/or racialized communities. Such censorship demonstrates that not only was queer sexuality itself "distasteful" in the eyes of state and corporate bureaucrats, but that queer lives were in fact expendable. Furthermore, scholar and film critic Cindy Patton notes that the erotic depictions of racialized gay men in particular were at the centre of the *TLWA* censorship controversy, unsurprisingly bringing together xenophobia, racism, and homophobia.[21]

Library and Archives Canada's 2017 "Canadian National Heritage and Digitization Strategy" outlines the urgent need for systematic digitization and preservation of audiovisual cultural heritage like *TLWA* at a time when 20th century histories are literally disappearing before our eyes.[22] Indeed, much of *TLWA* had been lost to history until I began digging around in various archives when I began working at the AIDS Activist History Project in 2018. Sadly, most of the tapes in the series have been completely out of circulation for decades and the few that remained in distribution through Vtape lost their original connection to the series, therefore seeming to stand alone as opposed to appearing in concert with the rest of the contributions to *TLWA*. Like the few tapes that remained in circulation uncoupled from their shared origins as part of *TLWA*, the little scholarship that has touched upon a few tapes in the series fails to explore with any depth their connection to the broader *TLWA* series if they even mention it at all.[23] This paper is part of a larger project to recover, preserve, digitize, historicize, and analyse the *TLWA* series and its impact in Toronto and Canada more broadly. Through examining the tapes included in the series below, this paper introduces contemporary scholars, media makers, and activists to the unique history of Canadian AIDS activist video practices and the conditions under which the *TLWA* series was made both possible and unpalatable for imagined publics.

#### The lives and afterlives of the *TLWA* tapes

*TLWA* tapes were written and produced in the context of socially conservative austerity governments in power across Canada (Mulroney), the UK (Thatcher), and the U.S. (Reagan and Bush), from the outset of the epidemic in the early 1980s to the early 1990s when *TLWA* was broadcast on community cable television. During this period AIDS-related deaths continued to climb at devastating rates while political leaders and health agencies dragged their feet acknowledging the existence of the epidemic, let alone implementing provincial and federal AIDS treatment and prevention strategies. The promised effective treatments from researchers and pharmaceutical companies on the horizon did not materialize until six years after *TLWA* was broadcast, and well over a decade after the first recorded case of AIDS in Canada in 1982. Various HIV quarantine laws had been discussed and proposed provincially across Canada, including the 1990 proposal by Ontario's then Chief Medical Officer of Health Richard Schabas to classify HIV as a virulent disease and therefore legitimizing the use of quarantine on sexually active HIV-positive people.[24] The first criminal prosecutions for HIV exposure began in 1989, paving the way for Canada's present-day sordid reputation for being a world leader in criminal prosecutions for HIV non-disclosure per capita.[25]

Despite the bleak picture painted here, where there is oppression, there is also resistance—including cultural resistance projects like *TLWA*. Greyson participated in the newly formed activist group AIDS ACTION NOW! (AAN!) in 1988, Toronto's answer to New York city's AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP), a similar U.S. activist group founded just a year prior. In 1989 AIDS activists from all over the world, led by members of ACT UP/NYC, AAN!, and the Montreal-based Réaction-SIDA helped take over the opening ceremony of the Montreal V International AIDS Conference and led demonstrations all week long.[26] This watershed moment in AIDS activism, along with feminist health movement of the 1970s, helped solidify the now taken for granted axiom that people living with a disease are experts of their own experience and must be given the opportunity to take an active role in shaping both their own treatment and the broader fight against the disease.[27] In fact, it is this moment of storming the stage at the opening of the Montreal AIDS conference that begins Greyson's *The World is Sick (sic)* (1989), the first pilot episode in the *TLWA* series. On June 28, 1990, in the midst of *TLWA*'s production cycle, the Canadian government would finally release its

first national AIDS strategy after years of intense pressure from AIDS activists across the country.  
[28]

It is in this urgent and everchanging socio-political context that all of the tapes contributed to the *TLWA* series must be analyzed. While I have done my utmost to provide clear context, the following textual analyses of the *TLWA* tapes assumes a reader with some basic knowledge of the AIDS crisis in Canada and is not intended as an introductory text—such resources are readily available for consultation online and in print. Analysis of the tapes is organized in groupings based on the video's genre or intended audience. First discussed are the journalistic documentary tapes in the series, followed by the closely related non-fiction tapes that take on the television talk show format. Next discussed are the tapes that provide unique insight into the daily lives of people living with HIV/AIDS and the challenges they face. Lastly, the education and outreach tapes that were produced with specific ethno-cultural communities in mind will be discussed, the largest grouping of tapes by far.

The documentary tapes

Greyson's pilot tape for the *TLWA* series entitled *The World is Sick (sic)* is a deliciously camp documentary focused on the historic activist interventions at the Montreal V International AIDS Conference hosted at the Palais des Congrès in 1989. Revered queer performance artist David Roche in middle-aged woman news reporter drag regularly pops up against green-screen projected footage of activists from AIDS ACTION NOW!, Réaction SIDA, and ACT UP New York City storming the convention centre. At one point she is even taken hostage by AIDS activists for her dismissive coverage of their protests and, as Greyson has described, she quickly succumbs to Stockholm Syndrome and becomes an advocate for their cause.[29] The result is an irreverent humorous running commentary on the failures of the conservative Mulroney government to address the AIDS crisis directly with much needed funding, research, and education, while also poking fun at television news conventions and disappointing coverage of activist events.

This documentary captures a number of important moments in the history of HIV/AIDS activism in Canada while also prioritizing the voices of grassroots activists from across the globe who travelled to Montreal for the conference. Talking head interviews with activists from the global south, people living with AIDS, and sex workers are interspersed between footage of activists seizing the opening ceremony stage to open the conference on behalf of people living with AIDS in Canada, the reading aloud of the *Montreal Manifesto* demanding the now accepted axiom that patients must have a central say in their treatment and care, and the planning of street demonstrations at the activist centre set up by Réaction SIDA.[30] Interestingly enough, the kind of sex worker activism captured by Greyson at the 1989 International AIDS Conference would also be inadvertently captured by Egyptian-Canadian filmmaker Tahani Rached in her National Film Board funded documentary *Médecins de Coeur* (1993) where she shadows Montreal doctor Réjean Thomas while he attends the Amsterdam VIII International AIDS Conference in 1992. It was at this conference that sex workers, including Canadian sex worker activists, launched the Global Network of Sex Work Projects, and their protests at the conference serve as a momentary backdrop in Rached's film.[31] George Stamos' 2016 documentary *Our Bodies Our Business* deals directly with the sex worker protests at the Montreal V International AIDS Conference by remixing archival footage from various people who documented the conference to create a beautiful collage of the vibrant and at times delightfully outrageous sex worker activism that took place in Montreal. Stamos' *Our Bodies Our Business* is a playful supplement to *The World Is Sick (sic)* and gives greater voice to sex workers who are entirely absent from the *TLWA* series save a few scenes in Greyson's Montreal AIDS conference documentary.[32]

The spirit of Greyson's video also captures the growing ethos of what would become the global decentralized independent media movement a decade later when video production and editing would become even more widely accessible to average citizens. Indeed, *The World is Sick (sic)* presages many of the do-it-yourself activist documentaries that come out of the anti-/alter-globalization movement following the 1999 World Trade Organization protests in Seattle. The raucously funny hybrid documentary-spy thriller *Crowd Bites Wolf* (2000) that covers the 2000 World Bank Protests in Prague comes to mind most obviously. At this historical moment post-Seattle, "become the media" grew to be a central rallying cry for activists tired of being ignored or maligned by mainstream news reporting. A direct link, both aesthetically and politically, between Greyson's earlier work assembling *Angry Initiatives, Defiant Strategies* between 1988-1989 for the activist-oriented public access Deep Dish Television in New York City and *The World Is Sick (sic)* is evident.[33] Furthermore, the *TLWA* series itself follows the same logic as Deep Dish Television and its cousin Paper Tiger Television, democratizing the media by creating the conditions for the production of audiovisual content by underrepresented communities, in this case by those most at risk for contracting or already living with HIV/AIDS.

Colman Jones' *The Cause of AIDS: Fact & Speculation* most resembles traditional investigative longform journalism that Canadians would have already been seeing regularly broadcast on television through series like the CBC's *The Fifth Estate* (1975-present) and a few years after *TLWA*

on *The Passionate Eye* (1992-present). While initially Jones' project began as a single half-hour episode for *TLWA*, Jones' continued his investigation resulting in a four-hour miniseries in itself. Jones' would go on to make another edit of all four tapes condensed down into a one-hour tape entitled *Lest We Forget: Syphilis in the AIDS Era* (1995). This *TLWA* contribution presents an overview of the debates about what causes AIDS, whether the syndrome is really caused by a new infectious agent like HIV or a series of co-factors like untreated latent syphilis and/or other bacterial and viral infections. The tapes include traditional talking head interviews with doctors and researchers alongside footage of their offices or laboratories adding to the credence of their claims. While some of these interviewees are certifiable denialists, people who claim HIV infection is benign and has nothing to do with AIDS, others are HIV skeptics who take a critical approach to examining medical evidence about HIV. The latter would include AIDS activists like Michael Callen and Dr. Joseph Sonnabend, two of the three co-authors of the foundational safer sex document *How to Have Sex in an Epidemic: One Approach* (1983). Callen and Sonnabend would continue to question the hypothesis that HIV was the sole infectious agent responsible for the onset of AIDS in a reasoned and cautious way that always centered on the health and well-being of people living with AIDS. Callen in particular was critical of one of the first seemingly useful drugs to treat HIV called AZT (azidothymidine) that in retrospect has been deemed lethally toxic, particularly at the dosage levels first prescribed to patients with HIV/AIDS.[34]

Unfortunately, Jones' tapes continue to be taken up by denialists who dangerously refuse to deal with the reality that HIV is far from benign and that there is a general consensus in the scientific community that HIV causes AIDS. Equally unfortunate, however, is the inability to differentiate the reasoned questioning of Western medical epistemologies taken up by Jones, Callen, and others, from the dangerous denialism that continues today with Canadian Brent Leung's AIDS conspiracy theory documentary *House of Numbers* from 2009.[35] Even after *TLWA* concluded Greyson saw the importance of this openness to critically challenging the medical establishment by including Michael Callen as "Miss HIV" in his 1993 AIDS musical *Zero Patience* and giving airtime to Callen's controversial multifactorial thesis. While from today's vantage point it might be easy to dismiss skeptics and denialists alike, it was the radical approach to challenging the expertise of Western medical science that propelled much of the AIDS activist movement forward. Skeptics rightfully questioned drug trial protocols, unconvincing scientific evidence, and demanded patients play a central role in understanding and deciding their own treatment options. This history, evidenced in Jones' *TLWA* contribution, should not be completely dismissed alongside denialist claims, but included in its own right as part of a complex collective AIDS activist history. [Image 40, 41]

The talk shows

***The Great AZT Debate*** opens with a *TLWA* series intro reel with scenes of Toronto's skyline played against footage of activists marching in the streets while the letters T, L, W, A, and eventually the series full title appear on screen. As the second of two pilot episodes, this series introduction reel was likely created specifically for this tape, but was not taken up across the rest of the tapes in the series. After the series intro, the tape begins like a game show, complete with a host, giant spinning wheel, and a Vanna White-like character. The tape quickly transitions from game show formalities into a roundtable talk show format with intertitles about the history and development of AZT to facilitate the shift. Following this, *TLWA* series producer Michael Balsler appears on screen before the talk show's set discussing his experience taking a high dose of AZT and how sick it made him. The camera then pans to a group of four men, Wayne Boone, Rob Flack, Colman Jones, and Tim McCaskell, sitting in armchairs discussing the merits and consequences of AZT for people living with HIV/AIDS.

Wayne Boone, a gay doctor and member of the HIV Primary Care Physicians Group, was previously involved in anti-censorship activism at Glad Day Books in the 1980s.[36] At the time of this tape's production he was running a family practice primarily serving gay men. Dr. Boone also spoke at AIDS ACTION NOW!'s first press conference on January 26, 1988 blasting the healthcare system as inadequate and uncoordinated in the absence of a national AIDS strategy.[37] His contribution to the conversation on this tape largely concerns the ethical question of how and when to provide a drug to patients that ask for it despite having concerns about AZT's toxicity. Colman Jones, AIDS activist, journalist, and *TLWA* contributor also shares concerns about the effectiveness and toxicity of AZT. Jones describes how the overemphasis on AZT as a treatment for people living with AIDS has taken some of the pressure off the government and private sector to develop safer and more effective medications to treat AIDS. Rob Flack (1957-1993) an artist and HIV-positive gay man describes his decision to not take AZT after he was diagnosed and encouraged to take it by his primary care physician despite still being healthy. Only months later does he try it in combination with other naturopathic treatments, but still he notes side effects of sluggishness and depression. Tim McCaskell, an HIV-positive gay man and activist with AIDS ACTION NOW! who played a central role in storming the stage at the 1989 AIDS conference in Montreal, explains in detail his decision not to take AZT. This is in spite of the fact that McCaskell recognizes that the drug does provide an important glimmer of hope as a life-prolonging treatment for people living with AIDS. McCaskell goes on to describe the mass confusion among people living with AIDS as whether or not to take AZT, noting that solely relying on a T-cell count is a bad indicator as to when AZT should be taken.

The video then moves to an interior direct-address interview with Calgary-born Ross Laycock (1959-1991), a gay artist living in the U.S. and the partner/muse of the revered Cuban-American artist Felix Gonzalez-Torres (1957-1996).[38] Laycock, with Kaposi Sarcoma lesions visible on his face, describes his relatively positive experience with AZT, but encourages viewers to take control of their health and do everything to increase their overall wellness in addition to taking prescribed drugs. The direct address then turns into an almost poetic reading of acronyms Laycock associates with the disease, from television station call signs and university abbreviations, to opportunistic infections and the drugs that treat them. This reading is paired with rudimentary computer-generated text on screen spelling out various acronyms, quickly busying the screen to demonstrate how difficult it is to understand and keep track of the latest treatment information. The video then returns to the show's on-set host who reminds viewers that "The more control you take over your own life and health, the closer you come to winning on The Great AZT Debate!"

Marc Bérubé & Steve Walker's *AIDS: A Family Affair* opens and closes with somber melodramatic classical music and a dramatically lit close up shot of two pairs of hands reaching out and grasping one another. This opening sets the earnest tone that is maintained throughout the tape by the show's host Steve Walker. After a short montage of clips from interviewees featured throughout the tape, the video switches to a short direct address by the host Steve Walker who provides a framework for the group interviews with families, caregivers, and partners of PLWAs, both alive and deceased, as well a few PLWAs themselves, that follow. Walker makes emphatically clear that HIV/AIDS is an issue that not only affects people with the virus, but also their family of origin, partners, and friends. Furthermore, Walker notes that gay people have been hit hardest by the epidemic in Canada and often face struggles with their families of origin because of the disease in addition to their sexuality. The interviewees from the tape are lauded as heroes, fiercely fighting stigma, government neglect, medical mistreatment, all while caring for one another.

The visual aesthetics of the tape match that of other low-budget interview talk show conventions where guests sit across from the interviewer with a dabbling of potted office plants adding a homey texture to otherwise sparsely decorated set. At one point we even see the face of a man surreptitiously poking out from behind a poorly hung black curtain behind the show's host, but clearly there was no time or budget for a second take. The content of the interviews takes precedent over so-called "broadcast quality" aesthetics, but the tape still makes a strong commitment to talk show conventions in order to engage audiences in a familiar format about a topic often sensationalized in televisual media at the time.

Walker's group interviews with families of PLWAs are touching. The Bender family discusses how they care for and support their son/brother who is living with AIDS. The family is an on-screen demonstration of the care and compassion that should be exhibited by all parents and siblings, but they acknowledge this is not the case for many young gay men living with the disease. This is echoed by caregivers who provide support services and palliative care for PLWAs, support that families of origin all too often refuse to give to their gay sons/brothers. Interestingly, the same on-screen strategy would be adopted in *Philadelphia* (1993), one of the first wide release Hollywood films to make HIV/AIDS its focus, where straight audience are instructed in the proper ways to support and care for their gay sons/brothers through the film's narrative.[39] A lesbian support counselor from the AIDS Committee of Toronto goes even further than the families interviewed to describe the AIDS crisis as a Holocaust, noting the traumatic experience of losing multiple friends in a short period of time with little sympathy and support for the dead and those that care for them. This genocide metaphor is repeated by host Steve Walker in the show's closing monolog, but is curiously absent from most cultural production about HIV/AIDS in Canada.[40]

This tape makes its viewers witness to the tragedy of the AIDS crisis while also providing instructive examples of how to care for PLWAs whether they are members of your family of origin, lovers, friends, or acquaintances. The tape humanizes PLWAs, showing how they can and should be loved and cared for by partners and families despite the double stigma of the disease and their sexual identities. While the somber opening and direct address by the show's host may seem overly earnest and dour, taken in historical context it cuts through the rampant homophobia and serophobia amplified in televisual media at the time.

#### The PLWA tapes

Michael Smith's 1990 one-man show with occasional musical accompaniments was performed as part of the QueerCulture Festival organized by Buddies in Bad Times before Buddies became the anchored Toronto institution it is today. *Person Livid With AIDS: A Day in the Life of a Gay Man Living with AIDS* (PLWA), which had a three day run at the Factory Studio Café at Bathurst and Adelaide (a precursor to today's Factory Theatre), was also captured on a grainy video tape that resurfaced through the efforts of British Columbia-based sex worker activist Andy Sorfleet. The tape was found in the estate of deceased Toronto lesbian activist Chris Bearchell (1953-2007) who had retired to the Gulf Islands of British Columbia.[41] While the production would be restaged in early 1991 as a fundraiser for AIDS ACTION NOW! and Gays & Lesbians of the First Nations,[42] this performance documentation, along with an accompanying publicity poster and 'zine, is primarily

what remains of Smith's original play. Whether or not a thirty-minute cut of the performance documentation was ever made for airing on *TLWA* is unclear as Smith was quite ill during the series' production and died in February 5, 1991 just weeks before the series was cancelled.[43]

Smith, a British transplant, was a well-known queer Toronto anarchist whose activist work extended well beyond HIV/AIDS activism. He was organizing with AIDS ACTION NOW! (AAN!) since its emergence in the late 1980s and was instrumental in laying the groundwork for what would later become the Prisoners' AIDS Support Action Network (PASAN) as a member of AAN!'s prisoner subcommittee. Smith was remembered in memorial in AIDS ACTION NOW!'s newsletter as a defender of not only gay rights and rights of people living with HIV/AIDS, but also of women's rights, Indigenous people's rights, and animal rights. He is also remembered fondly in the oral histories recorded by the AIDS Activist History Project as a member of the anarchist urban homestead collective Cathedral B and a member of the radical faeries, an international queer anti-establishment counterculture that embraces spiritualism over the commercialism and misogyny of mainstream gay culture.[44]

It's worth noting a number of aspects of the production to situate it within a broader genealogy of cultural resistance. Most obvious is the instructive nature of *PLWA*, fitting into the long tradition of Brechtian theatre that aims to educate its audience.[45] Smith instructs his audience in safer sex practices and offers a testimonial snapshot into what a day in the life of a person living with AIDS might look like. From demonstrating the quotidian yet irksome tasks of scheduling multiple doctor's appointments a day and swallowing pills every few hours, to the emotional devastation wrought by stigma, government neglect, and the spectre of an early death. Smith also goes further, exhibiting an intersectional HIV/AIDS politics that acknowledges and analyzes Smith's own privileges in society as a white gay man with AIDS from a middle-class family while also foregrounding the concerns of women, Indigenous people, drug users, poor people, homeless and unhoused people, and prisoners affected by HIV/AIDS. This demonstration of intersectional politics foreshadows the coming political schisms that would fracture AIDS activist organizations in the United States, and to a lesser degree in Canada, in the early 1990s.[46]

Aspects of Smith's production can also be understood as therapeutic. While drama therapy now occupies a place within the walls of research institutes and universities, activist cultural interventions precede the academic interest by decades. Smith's vignette where he delivers an angry diatribe to a mannequin onto which he projects the personhood of then Minister of National Health and Welfare Perrin Beatty, concludes with an emphatic "Fuck off asshole!" and a long scream. This cathartic release, accompanied by a complete disrobing in order to "unleash the naked truth," is met with whoops and clapping from the audience. This cathartic release shared between Smith and the audience in the imagined verbal take down of a callous politician makes obvious that those occupying the theatre's seats are likely friends and fellow activists equally fed up with government inaction on HIV/AIDS.

Smith's performance of self for others is also of interest in *PLWA*. Following the theoretical work of the late performance studies scholar José Muñoz on the ethics of self and working on the self for others, Smith's production provides a striking example on what a performance of self for others could look like in the Canadian context.[47] While Muñoz's work focuses on the public performance of self by AIDS activist and reality TV personality Pedro Zamora from *The Real World: San Francisco* (1994), Smith's performance of self runs parallel. In *PLWA* Smith performs as himself, taking different parts of his lived experience and stitching them together into a digestible hour and a half production. Smith's performance of self is a testimony to his lived experience and activism at the height of the AIDS crisis, sacrificing his privacy to demonstrate his reality and his intersectional political response to a broader public. A public that was not only reached through this live theatrical experience, but also through a thirty-minute condensed version that was purportedly produced for *TLWA*[48]. Smith would also do a number of additional abbreviated performances while touring the United States with the Emma Goldman Gypsy Players, a precursor to the radical faerie theatre troupe the Eggplant Faerie Players that still exists today.[49] This group would later script their own version of *PLWA* in the United States based on the life story of a close friend of Smith's named SPREE who was inspired by Smith's work.[50]

***The Medicine Show*** is more easily classifiable as a video art tape than the rest of the *TLWA* contributions and in fact is the only tape to acknowledge additional funding secured from the Canada Council for the Arts in its closing credits. The video utilizes narrative storytelling, mock interviews, and staged theatrical vignettes to create a satirical portrait of a day in the life of an HIV-positive gay man named Gregory performed by co-author of the tape Gregory Wight (1960-1990). Wight's co-author James MacSwain would go on to become a renowned figure in the Halifax arts community, teaching at NSCAD, and producing another short video on HIV/AIDS entitled *The Executor* (1996) in collaboration with video artist James Shedden. Newfoundland-born Wight and MacSwain met in Halifax as part of the emerging gay arts scene and before Wight left for greater opportunities in Toronto. MacSwain would join Wight shortly after learning of his HIV-positive diagnosis in order to support him as part of an extended care team made up of friends.[51]

*The Medicine Show* begins with a well-dressed street fair huckster selling all sorts of lotions and potions from his wagon to a gullible crowd of onlookers. The scene is set with a monolog from the huckster promising to fix everyone's aches, pains, and illnesses while a crowd cheers along enthusiastically. The huckster is the satirical embodiment of companies producing and marketing anti-retroviral drugs like AZT, but alternative medicines are also skewered. Theatrical interludes featuring the huckster appear throughout the video to punctuate the video's critique of the conflicting information about and pressure to take either or both western and alternative medicines to treat HIV/AIDS.

Huckster aside, the video primarily revolves around the life of Gregory, a recently diagnosed HIV-positive gay man in Toronto. The video follows Gregory as he tries to navigate a world where his friends, community organizers, and doctors encourage him to take various medical treatments, from swallowing large doses of AZT to carrying around a satchel of healing crystals. The lampooning of alternative therapies exemplifies the desperation for some sense of control over one's life and health in the days before effective treatments, a desperation most vividly displayed a short time later in the 1993 American documentary *Silverlake Life: The View from Here* where a couple on the cusp of death from AIDS-related illnesses undergo intensive Reiki treatments.

Interspersed between direct address monologs where Gregory reflects on his treatment options are various staged interviews with friends and co-workers whose well-meaning dialogues demonstrate the pressures on the main character to choose certain treatment options. Much like Michael Smith's *PLWA*, Gregory outlines all the treatment steps he must take on daily basis in front of a table full of pill bottles, how the drugs affect him, and how often he has to get blood transfusions or go to doctor for tests. The task of weighing treatment options as well as actually taking the treatments is clearly onerous, and in Gregory's closing direct address he notes that this all comes on top of trying to live his life and maintain a job. Again, like Smith's *PLWA*, *The Medicine Show* imagines an audience that will understand the satire and jokes throughout the tape, making it part of an in-group conversation amongst the HIV/AIDS affected queer community.

#### The education & outreach tapes

While most of the tapes in the *TLWA* series went out of circulation a few years after their broadcast debut, nearly all of the culturally specific outreach tapes remained in circulation save the Indigenous tape *Nibo' Apinewin*. These tapes would go on to be programmed in queer film festivals, utilized in community screenings and education projects, and purchased by the National AIDS Clearinghouse in Ottawa, a project of the Public Health Agency of Canada.[52] That these tapes were being funded through Canadian health agencies and then purchased by other Canadian health agencies for screening and distribution only illuminates how absurd the censorship controversy at Rogers Cable was at the time. This grouping of tapes would be described by social workers today as culturally and linguistically competent, non-profit lingo for tapes that were designed for and by specific ethno-cultural communities by using the vernacular and cultural cues of the communities these tapes were intended to reach.

Debbie Douglas and Gabriella Micallef's (1960-2011) *anOther Love Story: Women and AIDS* begins with an opening scene that mirrors Lizzie Borden's *Working Girls* (1986). In both productions a lesbian interracial couple is waking up in bed in the early morning with one eventually rushing to get up and out the door. In *anOther Love Story*, the young woman rushing out the door is headed to a doctor's appointment to do get her HIV test while in *Working Girls* (1986) the main character cycles off to work at a brothel. The heavily scripted dramatic narrative built around the couple's relationship in *anOther Love Story* structures the video that illustrates the issues facing women, lesbians and racialized women in particular, in regards to HIV/AIDS. The storyline primarily revolves around a conflict between the two lovers in the video's opening sequence when one of them withdraws from the relationship after being encouraged to take an HIV test by her doctor. The tension resolves when one of the other women in the social world of the couple comes out as HIV-positive to the serophobic half of the couple after which she seeks counselling and safer sex information from none other than Douglas Stewart who in real life would go on to become the Executive Director of the Black Coalition for AIDS Prevention (Black CAP). The video concludes by showing the inhabitants of *anOther Love Story*'s world attending a safer sex workshop during which intertitles with facts about women and HIV in Canada flash on screen. The parting shot portrays the initial inter-racial couple back together again, playful pulling at the corners of a dental damn as they passionately embrace.

Of particular note, *anOther Love Story* was the first tape co-authored by a Black woman video maker to address HIV/AIDS among African, Caribbean, and Black (ACB) women. The ensemble cast of lesbians, most of whom are racialized, in *anOther Love Story* exist in a world primarily populated with people like them. Their social worlds, the bar, the pool hall, one another's living rooms, even the television that is turned on throughout the video features a cast of activists conveying information about HIV/AIDS in racialized communities. While clearly within the realm of magical realism, this tape is also a worldmaking project where women, racialized and lesbian, can access unbiased judgement free information and services that they need to stay educated, healthy, and able to

support one another without the very real-world consequences of racism, xenophobia, and heterosexism. *anOther Love Story* also serves as an antecedent to Québec filmmaker Anne Goldens 1991 documentary *Les Autres/Women and AIDS* that, while a non-fiction documentary work, features many of the same episodic vignettes that appear in the fictional world created by Douglas and Micallef.

*anOther Love Story* is still in distribution and continues to be screened to this day due to its groundbreaking narrative representation of ACB women and lesbians. It was featured at an encore screening in Montreal for the 10th edition of Massimadi in 2019 as well as part of a MediaQueer organized program at InsideOut Ottawa and RIDM both in 2018. Debbie Douglas would go on to become the Executive Director of Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI) where she continues her activism while her partner and collaborator Gabriella would pass away from lung cancer in 2011.

The work of the Black Coalition for AIDS Prevention (Black CAP) in Toronto has been traced in numerous oral history transcripts recorded at the AIDS Activist History Project. Douglas Stewart and Dionne Falconer, the first two Executive Directors of the organization, tell the origin and history of Black CAP's emergence from the AIDS Committee of Toronto and the Toronto African, Caribbean, and Black (ACB) organizing milieu connected to ZAMI in the late 1980s. *The Colour of Immunity* was an early prevention video created by Glace Lawrence and Black CAP (with original music from David Findlay) for the *TLWA* series. According to Lawrence, this video was the first HIV/AIDS-themed video produced exclusively for and by ACB communities in Canada.

Lawrence recounts getting involved in this video project as a member of Trinity Square Video (TSV), the artist run centre Michael Balsler and John Greyson were launching the *TLWA* series from. Although she noted her memory was a bit fuzzy when interviewed, her presence at TSV and the fact that she completed her first film in 1989 made her a natural fit for the project. In discussing the video's life beyond the *TLWA* series and how Black CAP used the tape, she recalls,

"Initially when it was made there were a few public screenings. One of them was at Harbourfront Centre, and at the Ontario Black History Society. I suspect that the latter was due to the fact that I used to work at the Society. Then it was used in HIV prevention workshops at Black CAP. It was geared to the 'MTV' audience. They wanted content that would engage youth of the MTV generation."<sup>[53]</sup>

Elaborating, Glace notes that while *The Colour of Immunity* was explicitly youth oriented, there was indeed another production that Black CAP was involved with after her video. She recalls, "*Survivors* (1992), was more family oriented. It was financed through Black CAP via private funding and director/producer Alfons Adetuyi helped develop the proposal. Prior to that time, there weren't any Canadian-based productions that focused on the Black and Caribbean experience locally."<sup>[54]</sup>

*The Colour of Immunity* mixes scenes of Black CAP outreach workers strolling through the Caribana street festival and Regent Park's Blocko in safer sex t-shirts handing out condoms, street-based interviews with ACB Torontonians, and scripted vignettes where a young ACB heterosexual couple discuss safer sex and negotiate condom use in direct unpretentious language. Occasional voiceovers provide basic facts and figures regarding HIV/AIDS in Canada, routes of transmission, myths about who the epidemic affects, prevention strategies, and the importance of condom usage in particular. It is of note that the voiceovers and these vignettes offer empowering and instructive safer sex information particularly targeted to heterosexual ACB women.

While the recently outgoing Executive Director at Black CAP Shannon Ryan was unaware of *The Colour of Immunity*'s existence or that it was still in distribution at Vtape, Black CAP continues to use video to help promote its work, tell its own story, and fight the ongoing AIDS epidemic. Black CAP's twenty-minute twentieth anniversary video produced by Toronto documentarian Alison Duke *Black CAP Then and Now* (2015) reflects on twenty years of activism and services provided under the Black CAP banner. Since distribution models have significantly changed since *The Colour of Immunity* premiered on cable broadcast through the *TLWA* series, *Black CAP Then and Now* is in distribution for free on YouTube.

Non-Indigenous ally Ted Myerscough co-authored a crucial and ground-breaking Indigenous-focused contribution to the *TLWA* series with Anishnawbe Health entitled *Nibo' Apinewin*. The tape was shot on-reserve in Neyaashiingmiing, formerly called Cape Corcoran, and was one of many health-focused Indigenous educational tapes Myerscough worked on with Anishnawbe Health.<sup>[55]</sup> The tape's Ojibwe language title appears on screen using the Latin alphabet and translates into English as "Deadly Disease". This is followed shortly thereafter by the title written in Cree syllabics, although the tape's dialog carries on exclusively in English. The tape would go on to be distributed as a trusted resource through The Assembly of First Nations,<sup>[56]</sup> as well as featured in ImagineNATIVE screenings and distribution catalogues throughout the 1990s.<sup>[57]</sup> Anishnawbe Health would also go on to produce a complementary full-colour educational poster with the same title and shares the core themes of the video. The poster also doubles as an advertisement for the distribution of the video directly from Anishnawbe Health.<sup>[58]</sup>

This tape situates HIV/AIDS within the cultural and historic context of settler-colonialism, genocide, and Indigenous people's glaring health deficits within the Canadian state. The tape heavily features Ojibwe elder Verna Johnston who provides the basic facts of HIV/AIDS through direct address to the camera supplemented by on-screen intertitles spelling out the acronyms AIDS and HIV. Unlike other tapes in the *TLWA* series targeting ethno-cultural communities, *Nibo' Apinewin* foregrounds heterosexual Indigenous women and their babies as well as Indigenous people who use injection drugs to the exclusion of gay men and two-spirit people within Indigenous communities. The tape's preoccupation is that all Indigenous people are at risk, not just white settlers and gay men, and that Indigenous people need to learn how to protect themselves. In light of today's continuing HIV/AIDS crisis within Indigenous communities in Canada, particularly in the prairies where HIV is spread most commonly through shared needles and heterosexual sex, the message of this tape unfortunately continues to be devastatingly relevant.[59]

The tape is also instructive in its demand for Indigenous people to be cared for within community, allowing space for traditional medicines and healing practices in addition to western medical treatments. Numerous interviewees express concern about the necessity to leave the reserve for treatment, into medical facilities far from home and ignorant of Indigenous customs and healing practices that emphasize collective intra-community care. The result often leads to HIV-positive Indigenous people dying alone in the absence of family and community supports.

This ground-breaking tape was released the same year as *Keewaywin: AIDS in the First Nations*, an Indigenous HIV-focused tape created by Thunder Bay Gay Magazine producer Doug Broman and the AIDS Committee of Thunder Bay that also screened on community cable television. The tape was shot on-reserve at Lake Helen Reserve just outside Thunder Bay and features Toronto-born Cree elder Vern Harper as the tape's narrator and strikingly handsome Manitoba-born Cree actor Billy Merasty as the tape's protagonist. Unlike *Nibo' Apinewin's* more chaste heterosexual approach to HIV/AIDS, this tape was made to tackle homophobia and HIV/AIDS together by encouraging Indigenous people to embrace their gay and 2-spirit brothers who have moved off-reserve and to show compassion to those of them who were returning to their communities of origin with HIV and/or AIDS.

*TLWA's Nibo' Apinewin* also influenced another group to make Indigenous-focused HIV/AIDS education and outreach tape for cable broadcast. The Winnipeg Gay Media Collective (1980-1993) produced a similarly titled tape in collaboration with the Nichiwakan Native Gay Society, *Nipoo Aspinewin* (1991).[60] This tape was distributed on Manitoba community cable channels through the program *Coming Out!* in the same manner as the *TLWA*-produced tapes were broadcast in Toronto. This Winnipeg-made tape is markedly different from *Nibo' Apinewin* however, in that the entire tape's dialog is delivered by Billy Merasty in Swampy Cree as opposed to English. In this tape Merasty discusses the basics of HIV/AIDS through direct address to the camera and then turns to safer sex practices and native resources, demonstrating the use of a condom by rolling it down his index finger. Merasty would go on to become a prolific film and television actor and in 2010 was awarded the Manitoba Order of the Buffalo Hunt, the highest honour bestowed by the Provincial Government of the province at the time.[61] The afterlife of this tape is less clear, but its appearance just one year after the *TLWA*-produced tape with the same name speaks to the important use of video to do popular education and reach Indigenous communities with content made by and for them as the HIV/AIDS epidemic continued to grow unabated.

Richard Fung who authored *Fighting Chance* for *TLWA* was perhaps the only video artist involved in the series besides Greyson who had previous experience working in community television.[62] Fung's video contribution builds off his previous documentary work profiling the gay Asian community of Toronto in his first documentary *Orientations* (1985). As Fung notes in the opening sequence of *Fighting Chance*, *Orientations* did not include content about HIV/AIDS in the gay Asian community because at that time he did not know anyone who was out as HIV-positive. This caveat becomes the driving force behind the talking head documentary about queer Asian PLWAs in North America he contributed to *TLWA*.

In *Fighting Chance* Fung interviews a number of out HIV-positive gay Asian men in the U.S. and Canada about their challenges living with the virus. While the video appears to be ambitiously shot in five cities, Toronto, Vancouver, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Boston, all the American interviews were shot in San Francisco alone while Fung was visiting the city as a guest lecturer at a local university.[63] These straightforward talking head interviews introduce viewers to gay Asian men surviving and thriving with the virus, thereby humanizing them. The interviews also take place exclusively outside amongst nature, making them intentionally public, vibrant, and teeming with life. This outdoor strategy mimics British video maker Stuart Marshall's influential early AIDS tape *Bright Eyes* (1984) where he ends his video with American PLWA Michael Callen directly addressing the camera in an extended scene while sitting in the middle of a luscious green gardenscape.

The interviews are punctuated by three interior-shot ritualized vignettes with poetic voiceover: a man ceremoniously folding and burning decorative papers, a communal shower scene where men wash each other, and a naked man slowly picking petals from a daisy. These scenes, argues Thomas

Waugh, are not as fixed to the specific urban locations that are attached to each interviewee making it readable and relevant outside of these cities.[64] Also included amongst the non-interview footage in the tape are scenes from demonstrations at the VI International Conference on AIDS that also took place in San Francisco in 1990 one year after the tumultuous V International Conference on AIDS in Montreal in 1989—again documented in Greyson's *TLWA* pilot tape *The World is Sick (sic)*. These demonstrations captured by Fung's roving camera illuminate a particular historic moment in the HIV/AIDS activist movement that, in the words of one interviewee, for the first time actively included Asian and Pacific Islander communities.

As noted previously, Fung's inclusion of the communal shower scene where two men gently scrub another man's back raised the ire of Rogers Cable station manager Ed Nasello. One could only imagine the difficulty faced by *TLWA* had they tried to broadcast Fung's other 1990 HIV/AIDS tape, a GMHC/AIDS Committee of Toronto jointly commissioned safer sex public service announcement entitled *Steam Clean*. This three and a half minute video features a cruise scene unfolding between two Asian men in the same Toronto bathhouse where Fung shot the offending communal shower scene in *Fighting Chance*—except this time the intimacy between men would be explicit and feature close-up shots of condoms and lubricant in action.[65] Fung would go on to continue making tapes about sexuality, Asian identity, and HIV, most notably his much celebrated autobiographical short *Sea in the Blood* (2000).

Kaspar Saxena and Ian Rashid's *Bolo! Bolo!* is the tape in the *TLWA* series that has garnered the most attention from scholars and critics including Thomas Waugh, Kim Tomczak, Tom Folland, Cindy Patton, and even Michael Balser himself.[66] This attention primarily focuses on the tape's censorship by Rogers cable that, as mentioned previously, effectively ended the *TLWA* series. Having discussed the impact of both the tape's and series' censorship previously, the discussion of *Bolo! Bolo!* here will focus on the tape itself in order to centre the tape's content and message over the censorship battle that largely overshadowed it.

Originally titled *Silence x Silence = Death2*, *Bolo! Bolo!* was intended to be the first of a two tapes.[67] The first tape, generally following documentary conventions, would be targeted at straight South Asians in need of culturally relevant HIV/AIDS education. The second tape targeted at gay and lesbian South Asians was going to be experimental and structured as a visual poem. With the censorship controversy, the second tape with would never be made. Structurally, *Bolo! Bolo!* most resembles Black CAP's *The Colour of Immunity* where culturally specific music and street festival scenes segue between interviews and narrative vignettes where safer sex and condom use is played out before our eyes. The content of the tape, however, more closely mirrors Fung's *Fighting Chance* where racialized gay men are foregrounded, and not heterosexual couples and women as they are in *The Colour of Immunity*.

The video features discussion among members of the recently formed Alliance for South Asian AIDS Prevention (ASAAP), a project that came out of KHUSH: South Asian Lesbian and Gay Association. Discussions focus on the challenges of immigration, racism, xenophobia, and inherited cultural taboos about sex, sexuality, and the family. Renowned Bengali-Canadian intellectual Himani Bannerji adds an authorial voice to the debates, with clips from a one-on-one interview between her and Ian Rashid intercut between group discussions among ASAP members. Bannerji is complemented by one-on-one interview clips of both her daughter Kaushalya who at the time was the Summer Coordinator at ASAP and prolific queer Indian-Canadian photographer Sunil Gupta. Ian Rashid, co-author of the video, also appears on screen, most notably as one of the two men portrayed in intimate vignettes as well as alongside Anthony Mohamed in the now infamous "men French kissing" scene that closes out the tape. Anthony Mohamed, who would become the first full-time coordinator at ASAP in 1990, also appears in an intimate cruising scene with an older white man played by AAN!'s Tim McCaskell.[68] This scene was noted as particularly important to include on the tape because, as Saxena noted, young South Asian men were often cruised by older more experienced white men and were not always knowledgeable or empowered enough to ask for safer sex.[69]

The shift in meaning between the first broadcast of the *TLWA* tapes, including the people and events they documented from 1989-1990, and the digital video files that are now available for research at Vtape after being salvaged from recovered submasters, is stark. The afterlife of the *TLWA* tapes is a testament to the power of collaboration, community, solidarity, and collective struggle in the face of HIV/AIDS's destruction and the Canadian Government's callousness, but these tapes also remain haunted by staggering loss. Jean Carlomusto and Gregg Bordowitz discuss what looking at video tapes of activist demonstrations years after they were shot feels like in Bordowitz's short *Fast Trip, Long Drop* (1993). In an editing suite Carlomusto and Bordowitz discuss the changing meaning of activist video tapes as time passes and more and more of their friends and comrades depicted in the videos they created have died.

The *TLWA* tapes are filled with members of Toronto's vibrant queer, feminist, and anti-racist activist scene and cultural milieu. Here we get a dynamic sense of the collective character of HIV/AIDS activism in Toronto, but watching the video from today's vantage point can also be particularly

painful for many who were closely connected with people from this milieu who are no longer with us. Contributors like Gregory Wight, Michael Smith, and Lloyd Wong, who never completed his tape entitled *An Other Country* for *TLWA* but worked as a crew member for a few tapes in the series, all died after a series of debilitating bouts of AIDS-related illnesses shortly after *TLWA* was broadcast. Series coordinator Michael Balsler and *TLWA* contributor Gabriella Micallef would survive the 1990s only to pass away in the 2000s from AIDS-related illness and cancer respectively. Undoubtedly scores more have died who appear on these tapes, but remain either unnamed or untraceable. These absences haunt meters upon meters of recovered magnetic tape and time continues to alter the meaning made of these moving images from the recent past. Yet these videos endure as a testament to the resilience and creativity of queer, racialized, and/or HIV-positive people in the face of structured abandonment by the very governments that are supposedly there to defend and care for their citizens. Much like the way photographs functioned during the Holocaust as a technology of cultural memory, the videotapes of activist cultural interventions like *TLWA* serve as a vivid rejoinder against forgetting how the battles against HIV/AIDS were fought.[70] Not just to not forget, but to remember that our queerest gift, creativity, can be wielded to fierce and fabulous ends as the epidemic continues to expand even today.

Coda: *Toronto Living With AIDS 2.0*

With the epidemic well into its fourth decade with no cure in sight, ongoing and emerging HIV/AIDS-related issues in Canada continue to command our attention. The criminalization of non-disclosure, the marketing and use of pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) for HIV prevention, the undetectable = untransmittable consensus statement, international trade agreements and intellectual property patents that make life-saving medications unaffordable globally, continued controversies over comprehensive sex education for young people, the exclusion of HIV-positive immigrants from Canada, the continued criminalization of sex work, the opioid epidemic, HIV/AIDS and hepatitis in prisons, the mental health and wellbeing of long-term survivors, and the disproportionate burden of seroconversion amongst racialized and Indigenous communities all continue to necessitate a scholarly and activist response.

Canadian documentarian Alison Duke's recent collaborative work with the HIV/AIDS Legal Network leads as one of very few examples. By pairing an artist with a community organization much as *TLWA* had done previously, she produced two documentaries: *Consent: HIV Non-Disclosure and Sexual Assault Law* (2015) and *Positive Women: Exposing Injustice* (2012). While Duke's two documentaries on women, HIV, and HIV non-disclosure make excellent teaching tools, I long for what Duke's work might look like if she was freed from the conventions of documentary filmmaking and the immediate goals of a nonprofit organization. What might Duke's contribution to a series like a *TLWA* reboot look like that instead utilizes the conventions of a heavily scripted narrative melodrama like *anOther Love Story* or a talk show like the *Great AZT Debate*? And how might a *TLWA* reboot be distributed differently today with the ongoing miniaturization of video and the ubiquitous expansion of private for-profit online video platforms that regularly censor queer content?[71]

Unfortunately, if we are to wait for government health agencies that today myopically fund interventions targeted at "priority populations" with quantitative, measurable, behaviour change outcomes, or arts agencies that continue to shy away from funding artist run centres to commission new work, we will never see *TLWA 2.0*. It may have been a fluke that Michael Balsler secured funding for *TLWA* at a time when the AIDS bureaucracy in Canada was still professionalizing and opportunities for new approaches to dealing with the crisis could still be heard. Now, thirty years after *TLWA*'s first season, it has never been more urgent to relaunch such a series and tell new stories about living with HIV/AIDS in the 21st century—and for government health and arts agencies to pony up.

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### Videography

*After the Bath*, John Greyson, 1995, 45:00 minutes, Canada, color, English.

*AIDS: A Family Affair*, ,1990, 30:00 minutes, Canada, color, English

*Angry Initiatives, Defiant Strategies*, John Greyson,1988, 58:00 minutes, United States, color, English

*An Other Country*, Lloyd Wong, 1990—never completed

*AnOther Love Story: Women and AIDS*, Debbie Douglas and Gabrielle Micallef, 1990, 30:00 minutes, Canada, color, English

*Black CAP Then and Now*, Alison Duke, 2015, 20:00 minutes, Canada, color, English

*Bolo! Bolo!*, Kaspar Saxena and Ian Rashid, 1990, 30:00 minutes, Canada, color, English

*Bright Eyes*, Stuart Marshal, 1984, 79:00 minutes, United Kingdom, color, English

*The Cause of AIDS: Fact & Speculation*, Colman Jones, 1990, 240:00 minutes, Canada, color, English

*The Colour of Immunity*, Glace Lawrence, 1990, 30:00 minutes, Canada, color, English

*Consent: HIV Non-Disclosure and Sexual Assault Law*, Alison Duke, 2015, 28:00 minutes, Canada, color, English.

*Crowd Bites Wolf*, Guerillavision Collective, 2001, 23:00 minutes, United Kingdom, color, English

*Dallas Buyers Club*, Jean-Marc Vallée, 2013, 117:00 minutes, United States, color, English

*The Executor*, James MacSwain and James Shedden, 1996, 9:50 minutes, Canada, color, English

*Fast Trip, Long Drop*, Gregg Bordowitz, 1993, 54:04 minutes, United States, color, English.

*Fighting Chance*, Richard Fung, 1990, 30:00 minutes, Canada, color, English

*The Great AZT Debate*, John Greyson, 1989, 30:00 minutes, Canada, color, English

*House of Numbers: Anatomy of an Epidemic*, Brent Leung, 2009, 90:00 minutes, Canada, color, English.

*How to Survive a Plague*, David France, 2012, 109:00 minutes, United States, color, English

*Keewaywin: AIDS in the First Nations*, Doug Broman and the AIDS Committee of Thunderbay, 1990, 30:00 minutes, Canada, color, English.

*Les Autres/Women and AIDS*, Anne Golden, 1991, 31:00 minutes, Canada, color, French.

*Lest We Forget: Syphilis in the AIDS Era*, Colman Jones, 1995, 58:30 minutes, Canada, color, English.

*Little Sister's vs. Big Brother*, Aerlyn Weissman, 2002, 71:00 minutes, Canada, color, English.

*Living with AIDS*, Gay Men's Health Crisis, 1985-1990s, television series, United States, color, English.

*The Medicine Show*, Gregory Wight and James MacSwain, 1990, 30:00 minutes, Canada, color, English.

*Médecins de Coeur*, Tahani Rached, 1993, 112:00 minutes, Canada, color, French.

*Nibo' Apinewin*, Ted Myerscough, 1990, 30:00 minutes, Canada, color, English.

*Nipoo Aspiniwin*, Winnipeg Gay Media Collective and Nichiwakan Native Gay Society, 1991, 24:41 minutes, Canada, color, Swamp Cree.

*Orientations*, Richard Fung, 1985, 56:00 minutes, Canada, color, English.

*Our Bodies Our Business*, George Stamos, 2016, 24:30 minutes, Canada, color, English.

*Person Livid With AIDS: A Day in the Life of a Gay Man Living with AIDS*, Michael Smith, 1990, 99:46 minutes, Canada, color, English.

*Philadelphia*, Jonathan Demme, 1993, 126:00 minutes, United States, color, English.

*Positive Women: Exposing Injustice*, Alison Duke, 2012, 45:00 minutes, Canada, color, English and French.

*The Real World: San Francisco*, Mary-Ellis Bunim and Jonathan Murray, 1994, television series, United States, color, English.

*Sea in the Blood*, Richard Fung, 2000, 26:00 minutes, Canada, color, English

*Silverlake Life: The View from Here*, Peter Friedman and Tom Joslin, 1993, 99:00 minutes, United States, color, English.

*Steam Clean*, Richard Fung, 1990, 3:30 minutes, Canada, color, English

*Survivors*, Alfons Adetuyi, 1992, 48:00 minutes, Canada, color, English

*Toronto Living With AIDS*, Michael Balsler, 1990-91, television series, Canada, color, English.

*Video Against AIDS Vol 1-3*, John Greyson and Bill Horrigan, 1989, 342:00 minutes, Canada and United States, color, English.

*Voices of Positive Women*, Michael Balsler and Darien Taylor, 1992, 28:00 minutes, Canada, color, English.

*Working Girls*, Lizzie Borden, 1986, 90:00 minutes, United States, color, English.

*The World Is Sick (sic)*, John Greyson, 1989, 30:00 minutes, Canada, color, English.

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## Notes

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11. Interview with Kaspar Saxena, 11 November 2019; Interview with Debbie Douglas, 25 February 2020.
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